

## Module-6

### Reality, Neurotic and Moral Anxiety

Having discussed reality, possibility and value assumptions we shall try to establish relationship among assumptions and the anxiety that is experienced by human beings in demanding situations. We had talked about reality, possibility and value assumptions while discussing about adequate frame of reference. While examining it with respect to anxiety we shall talk about the reality anxiety, the neurotic anxiety and the moral anxiety.

Reality anxiety basically refers to the fact that there are genuine dangers or threats that actually exist in the external world, you are able to perceive it, you are apprehensive about the outcomes and this apprehension makes you anxious. Say, you have to come to the classroom at certain specified time and make a presentation. This makes you anxious. You could be little apprehensive about your performance and this is the real source of worry. This is referred to as performance anxiety. Whether you talk about a topic, whether you sing or dance, whatever the situation is, the moment you realize that your behavioural manifestation is being watched and evaluated you might have certain degree of anxiety. The source of anxiety could be transitory as this or temporally relatively long. Say, you anticipate falling short of the desired CPI but still appear from one exam to the other. You know the consequences and still try your best to survive in the system.

In the *Vana Parva in Mahabharata* you come across the *Yaksha* episode, where Yudhishtira replies to the *Yaksha Prashnas* (questions). *Yaksha* asked what the greatest wonder in the world was to which *Yudhishtira* replied that people die and everyone knows this; still people do all sort of things to survive. They wish to live forever; you know you are trying to get something that nobody can achieve yet you try for it. For *Yudhishtira* this was the greatest wonder.

Similarly, reality anxiety leads you to a greater extent of realization that there are many things in this world that are a source of anxiety for you but you know that also aware that they are inevitable anxieties. I cannot opt to be a professor but also prefer to disengage myself from talking to students in the class because every day I am being evaluated by a group of students for 50 minutes. The two options are in opposition to each other. Most of the musicians, if not all, cannot say that they are the world's best player of some musical instrument but will be playing only in a studio, one can record it and play it for the rest of the world but they will not go for a live concert. You cannot claim to be an exceptional student but will not appear for exams as you the best. There are many things that are inevitable in life and you cannot avoid them; and the things that you cannot avoid you tend to master them as far as possible. It could be a professional requirements where you have to politely greet people saying "nice meeting you", "please come", "hope to see you soon" etc. You are not at all pleased but you have to say so. Every time when you are put in such discomfort you do not have a choice but to show what is professionally required. Reality anxiety simply ensures that certain inevitable incidents may be invoking discomfort and anxiety in you, either of a smaller or a bigger magnitude, but you have to adjust to it.

By and large most of us are good at managing real life anxiety. Problem comes in certain spheres of life. When you land up in a profession where your personality type mismatches with the requirements of the profession the real life anxiety might be a great source of discomfort for you. Say you are an introvert and have take up the position of a front desk manager. Being a front desk manager everybody coming to your firm has to interact to you first, every phone call knocks you first, and this is how work is for you. As an introvert you do not find all this pleasing as it does not match your temperament. If you are to lead a life of mismatch this could invoke greater sense of discomfort in you. You might have come across people who perform otherwise noble jobs with unprofessional approach.

Look at news reports or talk to people who had experienced apathy of the person(s) who did not handle the situation professionally. You had taken a patient to the hospital and the patient continued lying on the stretcher for long as the doctor did not attend him/ her. You requested the doctors to help the patient as he was suffering from acute pain but the doctors were insensitive and did not attend you. There has been news of child delivery in the corridors of hospital, on the pavement just outside the hospital, and what not. You have to take a patient to the hospital and the concerned official negotiates rate and other things with you rather than being sensitive to the emergency nature of the situation; you take the patient on a cycle rickshaw and attendants refuse to help the patient get into the hospital; you are related to a rape victim and do not find the policeman handling the case with due insensitivity. News reports of a couple of such recent episodes can be seen in the image given below. You can find a large number of cases where people have not done justice to the profession they have opted for and the primary reason for this could be that their personality type does not match the job requirements.

<p><b>Denied entry in emergency ward, woman delivers baby near hospital elevator</b></p> <p>Friday November 18, 2011: Denied admission in the emergency ward, a woman delivered a baby outside the elevator of a district hospital in Noida on Thursday, her husband said. Karuna, a resident of Sector 8 in Noida, gave birth to a boy while she was being taken to the out-pat...</p> <p><b>Baby dies after woman is forced to deliver on footpath</b></p> <p>Tuesday October 11, 2011: A 22-year-old woman was forced to deliver a baby on a street in Mumbai in the dead of night after a hospital denied her admission. Owing to lack of any medical care, the baby could not survive for more than a few hours. The incident happened outside t...</p> <p><b>Denied admission, woman delivers baby outside hospital</b></p> <p>Tuesday July 12, 2011:</p> 	<p>India   Updated Feb 27, 2012 at 05:32pm IST</p> <p><b>Noida: Police fails to protect rape victim's identity</b></p> <p>CNN-IBN</p> <div data-bbox="882 1341 1114 1525">  <p>Click to play video</p> </div> <p><b>Noida:</b> A major blunder was made by the police in the Noida rape case after they gave away the personal details of a 17-year-old rape victim in a live press conference.</p> <p>It is in clear violation of the law that prohibits the disclosure of such information in order to protect the victim's identity.</p> <p>The Superintendent of Police of Noida made the comment during a press conference on Sunday. He later defended himself and claimed that he didn't reveal the identity of the class tenth rape victim and instead blamed the mistake on a lower rank officer.</p>
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Now think of this problem from another perspective. We know that there are certain hardcore realities that need to be handled much more carefully. You cannot say that now that 50,000 policemen's and 100,000 doctors' personality type does not meet their profession and therefore they have to make a shift in their profession. This is just not possible. Now that you

are able to see the mismatch between the profession and the personality type and also realized the inability of the system to shift professions of the concerned persons, the psychology of adjustment tells that you should be very much aware of the degree of mismatch between the two and try to achieve an amicable balance between them. When faced with the source of discomfort, you should bravely say to yourself that life does not give me an option of quitting, life demands this type of adjustment and hence I will try my best to adjust.

We come to Moral anxiety now. Value assumption and moral anxiety has a relationship. Moral anxiety arises from the real or contemplated actions and conflict when the moral sense of the individual can lead to certain sense of guilt. We have already discussed that people who share the same culture differ when it comes to the degree of compliance to any given norm. So, my degree of compliance might be less or more as compared to you. Moral anxiety comes out of the fact that you as an individual know what the social expectation and moral code of conduct is and based on the individual benchmark that you have set, you will derive a sense of guilt, out of doing something or out of not doing something. This experience yields a sense of unrest and you want to overcome it.

There are certain things that you value. Once you realize that you are falling short of what you value it will put you under great degree of discomfort and that discomfort will not allow you to repeat the act in the future. If you value time and want to be punctual all the time, then being late by seconds will also invoke anxiety in you. There are many things which invoke moral anxiety in us and we try our best not to tamper them.

Long back a case was reported to a clinic. A man in his late 40s visited the clinic. His entire source of anxiety was that he wanted to be punished by his mother. He lived in a flat with his wife, daughter, mother and a maid who worked as a domestic help. Once when his wife and daughter were not at home, he entered the maid's room late in the night with some

obnoxious desire. Once in the room, he realized that probably his mother was at the door. He walked out thinking that mother will certainly ask him some uncomfortable questions but the mother has been silent since then. Years after this episode, this thought kept haunting him and after 12 years it reached to the extent that he needed psychological help. He desires to be punished by his mother; he wants to apologize. This case reflects how moral anxiety operates.

Famous Urdu poet Shahryar wrote—

*tamam umra ka hisab mangtee hai jindagee*

*ye mera dil kahe to kya, ye khud se sharamsar hai*

‘My life demands account of all the deeds and my inner-self is in dilemma...’

This is a beautiful illustration as I can confront others but if my own self faces my outer self I cannot even defend myself. I can defend myself if you are examining me but if my inner self examines me, I am defenceless. Moral anxiety is something like this. Therefore, the attempt that has to be made in terms of adjustment processes that once I know the set of rules that I value, I should not try and fiddle with them. If I violate it once, irrespective of the extent of violation, there is a beauty in simply accepting that I was wrong. This gives a great degree of relief; the experience is much better than proving that I was not at all wrong.

When you engage in verbal arguments, you do not pay much attention to the words coming out but later when you rethink the whole situation, you realize that you misunderstood the other person and you should not have said what you said. The psychology of adjustment recommends way of handling such moral anxiety. You can show a very brave face by going to the person and apologizing for your actions. The sense of contentment you feel in this case is heightened. The unrest generated comes to naught the moment you bravely accept your mistake. The other case may be when the other person is wrong and he does not

apologize to you. Again when you show the grandiose and say that in your perception that you are not at the wrong end. You convince yourself that the argument took place between two of us because of certain degree of miscommunication and difference in our understanding. You do not mind it because the action is not important; perhaps the interpretation was not matching. The moment you try to pacify others non-commitment to this type of motive you realize, not to full but to a great extent, that your moral anxiety touches a state of equilibrium. The process of adjustment does not allow you to get derailed.

During his years at South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi had a debate with his wife and it is said that he asked Kasturba to choose between her jewellery and her husband. This was when Gandhi was seeking generous contribution for Tolstoy farm. Kasturba asked why he was doing this to her on a foreign land and instantly Gandhi apologized. What is important in this episode is that even in the state of extreme emotional reaction, there was a degree of flexibility. If you show a tendency to reflect on your behaviour you could identify the source of discomfort relatively easily and hence try to come forward with a balanced reaction. This is when you stop putting yourself under trouble by not putting your psychological adjustment at stake.

Now we come to neurotic anxiety. Freudian theory talks about id and how it is governed by pleasure principle. Neurotic anxiety is considered to be an outcome of the threat caused by the id which tends to break through the control structure of the ego. Ego has the responsibility of striking the balance between id and superego. You cannot under satisfy or over satisfy any of them. It has to be proportionally satisfied. This is the biggest task. We all are capable of striking the balance between id and super ego. Neurotic anxiety comes when you realize that your impulses arising out of your id are about to break through the ego control mechanisms thereby resulting into a behaviour that can invite punishment.

It is also important to realize that there can be tips that could help you maintain some degree of psychological balance which is pleasing for you as an individual and which also has a greater degree of social acceptance. If you know the fault in an altercation was not yours and the opposite party is not saying sorry, feel sorry for them and stay happy. You achieve a degree of relief. When you realize that your id is somewhere creating disturbance for your ego and you know that you can break any day, you can visualize a safeguard mechanism like a pressure cooker valve. If the pressure cannot be released then only the valve will explode and the pressure cooker will be ok. There could be a safe directional explosion even in the case of human reaction.

Say, you do not like me or the subject matter being taught. You come to me and say very politely that you have been coming to the lectures since the beginning but somewhere feel that this is not very useful. What is the use of going through all this stuff about psychology when you know that you are going to graduate as an engineer? Something which was source of rejection for me, you put it in such a manner that your respect is shown as well as the source of discomfort has been released. This way most of the instructors will not be offended. The same thing if said in negatively loaded words could affect both the parties differently. So, you do not use such language. You say that all this is common sense; one would like something which runs parallel to your knowledge of engineering education. This is a directional explosion, a safe explosion. So, when you have neurotic anxiety and when you are contemplating an explosion it is always recommended that instead of blowing up the whole pressure cooker go for a directional valve explosion. You are in a business meeting and completely disagree with your boss but cannot rudely confront his view point. The better way of having a safe explosion is you say, "Boss, just a thought..." and you express yourself politely. Your decency as an individual and your communication skill as a professional are appreciated by others.

It is important to note that as human beings we find the 'self' playing a central role and interacting with the realities of life and the norms of the society. Hence, exploring and understanding the self is very crucial.