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Human suffering was one of the main points of departure for the religious quest in several traditions. Why should man, a seeker of good and of ultimate happiness, actually find himself in constant suffering? Even today it remains the main human focus of religions. What do religions provide as solutions to this problem of human suffering? This is the theme we have chosen for this issue of the Journal of *Dharma*.

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Besides being a deep metaphysical problem, suffering has also psychological, social and cultural implications. It is a central theme in numerous works of art, down the centuries. Man has tried to depict his tragic condition in marble and paint, as well as in immortal works of tragic drama and poetry. But in these he has also expressed his capacity to survive the greatest tragedies of nature and to retain his personal life and dignity. The earliest signs of human artistic creativity appear in the burial places, where he has depicted in unmistakable symbols his belief in the immortal survival of the departed.

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But from a common sense point of view, suffering is, apparently, a problem which has no solution. Some Existentialist philosophers seem to emphasize the view that life is absurd and man a useless quest. Freud condemned all religious efforts to solve the problem of suffering as mere wishful thinking: "Earthquakes, floods and fires do not differentiate between the good and devout men, and the sinner and unbeliever.... It happens often enough that the violent, the crafty and the unprincipled seize the desirable good of the earth for themselves, while the pious go empty away." This pessimistic, cynical view of suffering is further strengthened by the fact that a good deal of poverty and misery in the world today is man-made, produced by the unbridled ambition of men who want to secure their own well-being at the expense of those who are too weak to fight for their rightful share of goods.

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But world religions that have always attempted to find solutions for the fundamental problems of human life started from this common sense view and each in its own way sought to find the meaning behind the apparent meaninglessness of human life. Siddhartha Gautama Buddha started with the common sense view that life is all suffering and that the few pleasures which we find in life serve only to make more acute the suffering that follows

them. But he realized that this suffering is not insoluble or inescapable since it is part of a chain of factors that surround man, and that man's authentic reality lies beyond them, in emptiness and silence that is called *Nirvana*. Vardhamana Mahavira and the Jain tradition took a positive view of this life and its multifarious aspects of suffering, and proposed a process of synthesis that would bring together the various positive aspects and values that will slowly and gradually develop in an individual's life into infinite knowledge and power and happiness.

Hinduism had a long struggle with the problem of suffering and its causes, and discovered that the principle of solution lay in the transcendence of the self which faced the complexities of matter as a challenge to work out its own liberation through the goals of wealth, pleasure and righteous organization of life. In the tension between spirit and matter, its solution to the problem moved in two directions: Since the spirit is reality *par excellence* and, in fact, absolute, on the one hand, it tended to discount evil and suffering as unreal and transitory over against the permanence and immutability of the self. On the other hand, through *karma* theory, it placed the responsibility for suffering completely on the individual and his past actions which left their seed in the subtle condition of matter which later produced its results in another life in a chain of beginningless *samsāra*. The whole life struggle insists in trying to escape from this bondage of *samsāra*.

The Hebrews found the origin of evil and suffering in man's violation, through pride and rebellion, of the command given to him by God, who, therefore, justly punished him. But it found the positive value of suffering in two considerations: First, punishing God is also a loving father, who knows best how to turn this suffering to the good of his children who are being punished. This is the attitude of Job in the Old Testament, the model of suffering and patience in his apparently, undeserved calamities. Along with this was a second thought that a person through his suffering was paying not only for his own misdeeds but, vicariously, also for his fellowmen. The suffering Servant of the Lord in the book of Isaiah is an example of this attitude to suffering. Christians and Muslims followed up and developed these lines of Hebrew thought. According to Muslim tradition, human suffering is part of the loving design of God for turning the sinner back to the path of faith and obedience. In Christianity, Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, identified himself with the suffering

humanity and died on the Cross offering himself as a sacrificial victim for the salvation of mankind.

These various attempts at solving the riddle of suffering have not exhausted the possibilities. The problem still remains, and evil and suffering are facts. A good part of human suffering is deliberately inflicted by human beings on their fellowmen. On the other hand, it is not in affluence and the intoxicating experience of worldly pleasures, but in privation and suffering, that man discovers his own naked existence and arrives at self-consciousness and the realization of his own reality that transcends the limitations of time and space.

Suffering is a mystery and will remain a mystery for the finite mind of man. All that is possible is to approach it from different perspectives and points of view. This is what is aimed at in this issue of the Journal. Robert Neville approaches the fact of human suffering, which is first and foremost a psychological phenomenon, under the form of guilt from a Christian point of view. John Bowker, who has written a comprehensive book on *Problems of Suffering in the Religions of the World*, gives here further elucidation of the theology of suffering. Mahmoud M. Ayoub, who has done a long and scholarly research on the problem of suffering in the Muslim tradition, has given a lucid presentation of the redemptive value of suffering in Islam. Coming to the East, Frank J. Kenney discusses the conception of suffering in the Sāmkhya-Yoga schools of thought. Both B.K. Matilal and R.P. Sharma discuss the concept of suffering in Buddhism, but from two different perspectives. R.K. Tripathi takes an overall look at the approaches to suffering today. We are glad to present in the survey section an interesting discussion by Yvonne Korshak on Western art in its depiction of suffering at different stages in history.

We have made no attempt to synthesize these different contributions to any unified view. They speak for themselves. Their net result, we hope, is that of a limit language, that man's life of suffering is not useless nor meaningless, that it points beyond itself to a region of light, glory and fulfilment, existent already here in the immortal self of man, to be realized fully in the future in the authentic condition of man.

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