

If we just take a look around, from ‘casual’ violence happening in front of mute spectators to ethnic cleansing taking place in our neighbouring countries. From men raping and then killing a five year old child, to a beggar dying of hunger; simply because he could not collect enough money to buy food. From an entire community being cast aside because of the stigma attached to their names to powerful men taking undue advantage of their power and reach; one can see burning examples around oneself. What leads to this? Why am I fixating on it ?

Empathy, can be defined as, “*the ability to understand and share the feelings of*



ordinary people to carry it out. And what you find is that, generally speaking, people offered rationalizations like, “I just drive the trains” or, “If I didn’t do it, I’d lose my job.” That’s not the sort

## Lack of Empathy : Is it really the root of all evil ?

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*another.*” It is a key element of Emotional Intelligence, the link between self and others. It is what sets us apart in this world, the ability to experience someone else’s pain. Lack of which, I believe, can almost every time lead to problems. Experience tells the author that lack of empathy can, more often than not, lead to violence, cruelty and oppression. But is it always the case? It certainly doesn’t seem like it.

It’s hard to explain mass acts of genocide as the result of an entire country losing its empathy towards a certain group. Take the Holocaust, for example, this required a huge infrastructure of

of thing a person with no empathy says — it’s the sort of thing that a person who is struggling with an action says. These people were not lacking empathy; they were just suppressing it in some way and offering rationalizations for themselves. Calling it a necessity. The so-called, good Germans.

Take a look at the on-going genocide taking place in Nobel Peace Prize awardee, Aung San Suu Kyi’s Myanmar. Where thousands upon thousands of Rohingya Muslims are either being slaughtered by Rakhine Buddhists and the army or, are left with no options but to flee from their



homeland and face an uncertain, cruel future. Such is the gravity of the situation in our neighborhood country that the situation has drawn global condemnation. Over a dozen Nobel laureates have even written to the UN Security Council demanding action to stop the “human tragedy amounting to ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” in northern Rakhine. According to the UN, the authorities are denying at least 130,000 men, women and children access to humanitarian aid — food, nutrition and health care. Thirty thousand are likely displaced in the blackout zone. An estimated 3,000 children suffer from severe acute malnutrition. And these are just estimates.<sup>1</sup> Without urgent aid, these people will most likely die.

Reason for this maddening bloodlust? Pure and simple hatred of one human being towards another. Labeling them as a faction of degenerates and criminals; someone who have come from a foreign land and thus, must either be pushed out or, be eliminated from their homeland. In short, de-humanizing someone, in order to make it easier to eradicate them.

In this case, it is not coming out of a person who is struggling with an action or, someone struggling to put food on the table. What justifies the mute-spectator like behaviour of

countries like India in this case? When, she has always been a shining example of an all-accepting host. Do we call it a momentary lapse of empathy? It is happening due to mass propaganda, and generalization of an entire section of population and pure detestation. Simply put, a necessary evil.

One can also look inside the deep, dark alleys of their own cities and towns. Sweat shops, small factories and *kaar-khane*, the local garage or your friendly neighbourhood grocery store, they are all over the place. More often than not, these become one of those places where children lose their childhood; working endless hours when they should be attending schools and playing games. Making the bangle you wear, or that branded t-shirt you love so much. Or, one can just take any random tea shop or eatery. Almost every street in India has one, and most likely, you will always find a *chotu* over there; cleaning the utensils or wiping the tables. More often than not, we simply choose to ignore this believing that they do it because their parents cannot feed them and thus, they have to start earning a living from such a tender age. Sometimes I do it too.

Does this mean I lack the feeling of empathy as well? Or, perhaps I also tend to label it as something which is a necessary evil or, simply a necessity? Making this gross violation of child rights seem like a normal, acceptable and palatable thing to you and me.

I do not boast any expertise in psychology nor do I have a host of degrees to talk about it. But, as someone who sees and feels such atrocities taking place almost on a daily basis, it just makes one wonder. What makes a person feel ‘sorry’ for another human being? At what point do we depart from our conscience and start seeing the person in front of us as mere objects in order for us to see their hardship as something

inevitable or just, hack that person to death? Why, how and when do we become so blinded by hatred, prejudice and ignorance that we simply cannot see that the thing which I am sticking a knife into or shooting a bullet at, that thing is a living, breathing, loving, may be even a God-fearing human being ?

Whilst I ponder upon these questions, I cannot stop myself from imagining that while a person with low levels of empathy can go on killing people without any feeling of remorse, another person, on the other hand, who has low empathy yet somehow carves out a lifestyle for themselves where it doesn't impact on other people and it doesn't interfere with their everyday life. Let's take someone who's very gifted at physics and they're focused on doing physics. They might not be interacting very much with other people but they are interacting with the world of objects. They might have low empathy but it's not interfering. They have found a perfect fit between their mind and the lifestyle that they have.

This raises the question, is empathy even that important? Does it even matter or, do we simply weigh the option of violence and oppression as a conscious decision and a necessary evil. Or, even a necessity. Making killings easy, making injustice seem normal in some cases and not so much in some? Does it all just depend on how we see things and decide to act upon it rather than how we feel about it?

The answer is yes. Empathy is still important. I like to believe that it is extremely important. But, what lacks in us is the urge to do something about it. To simply act if we see injustice. More often than not, we rush to justify gross violations of human rights as a necessity or a necessary evil. Labeling it as something they 'deserve', as something which have to go through anyway. Or, like most of the time, as something which we can't spare our time and efforts for. Empathy is important, more so in this day and age. That's what makes us humans and sets us apart in this whole wide world. Justifying my lack of action or even the lack of feeling a person's pain as I lack of empathy in me or simply as a lifestyle choice simply cannot be an option in this day and age. It never has been, it never will be. But the truth remains, empathy has got nothing to do with evil. We do those evils which we are able to justify to ourselves. Nothing less, nothing more. How, you ask ? Just look around you, you will find the answer.

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