

Unrelenting Globalisation and Impending Decline in Prosocial Behaviour: A Conceptual Note



Psychology

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V. Mohanasundaram

Ph D Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, PSG College of Art and Science, Coimbatore – 14

ABSTRACT

Diagonally opposite views on prosocial behaviour have been the content of many a literature on prosocial behaviour in general and altruism in particular. Majority of the social psychologists have long been assumed that the prosocial actions that benefit others are egoistic. After the entry of Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis, this has been challenged and proved by a series of studies that empathic emotion evokes pure altruistic motivation with an ultimate goal of benefiting others and not the self. At the same time, the weight-age given to the economic aspects (income, wealth, and their distribution pattern in a society/country) in the context of emergence of empathy itself has not yet been adequately addressed. Over the years, the relative influence of external factors on the altruistic feeling has been discussed by bringing out not any concluding or final statements but providing enough space to understand the human nature. Now it has been increasingly realized that in the materialistic world, now we are in, may be having lesser number of persons with prosocial behaviour than in the past. This throws a real challenge of conceptualising the term 'prosocial behaviour' in the changing context which keeps economic well being as the only goal before the nations / humankind.

Introduction

Social life has its own complexities as well as niceties. As the civilization evolved over centuries, the community living has seen many a changes both in the components and constructs of what is called as "Social life". The ancient Tamil literature (for that matter even Latin, Greek Literature) gives ample evidence to a 'modern' society that existed even before five thousand years. The on the basis of a social thought process the whole period can be grouped in the three: Age of faith, Age of relationship and Age of realization.

Age of Faith

Two thousand years prior to the last 400 years, saw an "Age of Faith" where in the so called community or society was governed by systems/institutions that can be broadly described as "Feudal". The society took faith in religion and spirituality for its life dependency as well as salvation in the next world. 'Fear of God' was the guiding principle and 'cuddling together' was the survival mechanism.

Age of Relationship

When States/Nations were formed, the concept of private property came into existence. When private property became the norm of the day, self-interest became the order of the day. When self-interest became the rule, both the ruler and ruled aimed at maximization of material gains/welfare, so naturally conflicts emerged leading to bringing in rules and regulations. The society became an open ground, a market for goods and services so as to maximize income and wealth moving beyond the geographical divisions and borders. Trade-internal and external – flourished, colonies came into existence, imperialism ruled the roost. In this age what has fuelled the expansion of material wealth was the overtaking of print communication by electronic communication. Hence, the society became a play ground for a plethora of experiments and experiences, for which the price paid was very heavy: some argued it as fall of human values; a few put it as degradation of culture; very few thought positively that the trend will lead to an Age of Realisation.

Age of Realisation

After looking into the Tragedy of Commons (Hardin, 1968) and the tragedy inflicted on the so called 'private' property (though literally no one can claim ownership of nature), in the name of economic growth and development, a realization has come that society and its coherence is more valuable than anything. Those who realized, though few, sympathise with the world at large and have empathy, and think that prosocial behavior will emerge vigorously, as collectivism to save the humanity and the earth. The theories and theorems (Arrow, Sen (1994), Elinor Ostrom (2009)) are helping generating positive engagement than resignation.

This line of thinking moves closely with the concept of prosocial behavior as described in Social Psychology: Prosocial behavior is defined as doing some thing that is good for other people or for society as a whole. Prosocial behavior includes behavior that respects others or allows society to operate (Baumeister and Bushman, 2008).

Forms of Prosocial Behaviour

The important forms of prosocial behaviour are

- Obeying rules
- Conforming to socially accepted standards of proper behaviour
- Cooperating with others

And all the three stand on two pillars: Fairness and Justice. The significance of it is that people behave better when they think the rules are fair. In the process, they never antagonise people intend them instead to help others to the maximum possible extent.

Beyond this generalization, a large number of Social Psychologists focused on the following aspects

- i. Motives for Prosocial Behaviour
- ii. Determinants of helping behavior
- iii. External and Internal influence on helping behavior

Motives for Prosocial Behaviour

Baron et al (2010) listed and explained three motives (which of course, contrast with each other) and a theory.

- a) Empathy – Altruism: It feels good to help others
- b) Negative – State Relief: Sometimes, helping reduces one's unpleasant feelings
- c) Empathic Joy: Helping as an Accomplishment
- d) Kin Selection Theory

Further, studies were done on the conditions or situations in which spontaneity was found in helping others. And the identification of personal characteristics that distinguished those help others from those who are indifferent to the suffering of others. Another two theories to be added are

- e) Reciprocal Altruism Theory
- f) Competitive Altruism Approach

A brief description of the motives for proposed behaviour is done here in the form a chart to focus the attention.

Figure 1 Different View Points on Prosocial Behaviour

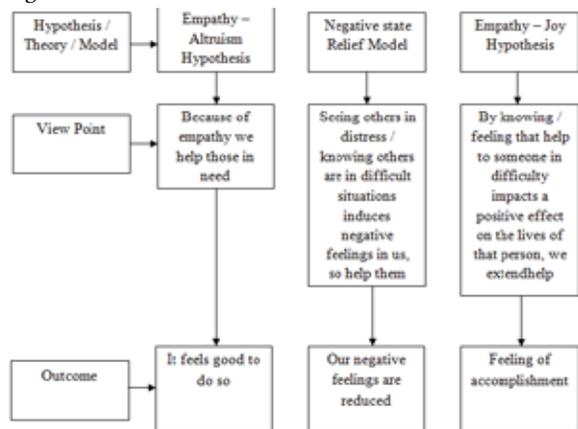
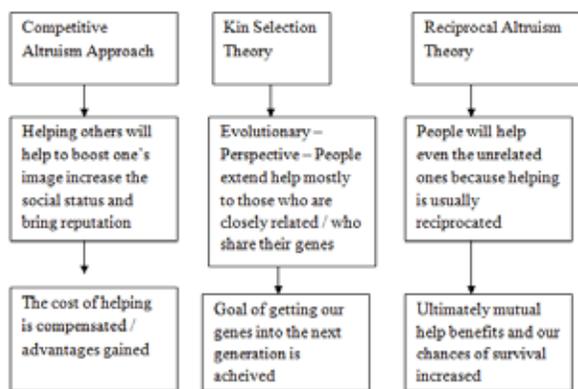


Figure 1 Different View Points on Prosocial Behaviour (Continued)



Altruism

Altruism is a behaviour intended to help another, without regard for benefit to oneself (Moghaddam, 1998). It is generally defined as any form of voluntary act intended to favour another without expectation of rewards (Smith & Mackie, 2000). In the fields of Social Psychology, Positive Psychology and Applied Psychology the terms 'altruism', 'helping behaviour' and 'prosocial behaviour' are used synonymously. At the same time, as pointed out by Carol Brown (2006), prosocial behaviours is that which is valued positively by society and aims to improve a situation whereas altruism is more personal because there is a desire to benefit another individual derived from perspective taking or empathy. In the present work also the same understanding has been continued.

Over the years, researchers continue to work on altruism and its many facets, in the broad framework of prosocial behaviour, bringing out findings that give mixed results on the prevalence of altruism, mostly positive in nature and content. In spite of that a skepticism prevails towards prosocial behaviour, among researchers who see the modern societies of both West and East (no more traditional) becoming more and more competitive, individualistic [see the figure broadly (strictly broadly) arrived at] along with crime and dirty business (both in public and in private organisations) which ultimately represent an exploitative tendency among the people and institutions. In short, many doubt if altruism exists. Nevertheless, in the present thesis work a more positive approach has been adopted so as to facilitate a focused work on set objectives and to test the hypotheses framed.

Concepts and constructs

A plethora of opinions are expressed on the issue whether a

“true” altruism exists at all. A number of models, which are used by psychologists to predict and understand altruism in humans, are available in the literature. The prominent among them are (described in detail by Gintis et. al. 2003)

- Standard Individual Selection
- Kin Selection
- Reciprocal Altruism
- Multilevel Selection
- Gene-Culture co evolutionary
- Canonical model

Pro Social Behaviour over Generations

By linking social patterns, economic gains and political ideologies, over the years, an exercise has been done to bring out the mentality of the people in the form of various characteristics. This is only an outline and not an authentic point.

Table 1 Generation and their Characteristic Features

Sl. No	Characteristic Features	Traditional Generation	Modern Generation	Internet Generation
1	Model of Governance/ Governing Institutions	Tribal / Regional	Vertical / National	Horizontal / Global Network
2	Consciousness	Theological	Ideological	Psychological
3	Media	Scripts	Print	Internet
4	Nature of Human beings	Idealistic	Utilitarian / Detached / Rational	Materialistic
5	Social Space	Closely-net / Exclusiveness / Resistance	Open / Wider Inclusiveness	Global Village / Shrinking Privacy
6	Prosocial behaviour / Altruism	Ethical / Sympathy / Belief system ('Karma' Theory)	Empathy / Heroic	Bystander effect. Specialization / Specialists will take care
7	Quality of life will be achieved	By being close to nature	Industrial Revolution / Cohesiveness and Responsibility	With individual opportunity

To Sum up

Experimental research has revealed forms of human behaviour involving interaction among unrelated individuals that cannot be explained in terms of self-interest. Empirical evidences support a strong reciprocity as a schema for explaining important forms of altruism in humans. Apart from behavioural experiments, same behaviours (altruistic) are regularly observed in everyday life.

At another level, in connection with educational system, it has been argued that from primary school (children) to middle school to higher education (adolescents) they (students) are introduced and instructed to adopt scientific method so that they can gather knowledge accurately and learn about the real world around them. At the level of higher education they are given instructions to follow objective observation to investigate phenomena and discover truths. Dispassionate neutrality is put at the premium. As the achievements are measured or evaluated in quantifiable terms, and in the process the intrinsic value has been left out. The outcome is that a generation is left to the maoneuvre of material world devoid of sympathy, empathy, altruism and other forms of prosocial behaviour.

Yet another level, the direction the material prosperity (modern market economy ably assisted by internet era) has plunged the world into economic crisis, food insecurity, energy shortage and more shockingly climate change (which has the potential

of planetary collapse). The focal point of global concern is 'sustainability'. The political scientists (like Robert Putnam, 1995) pointed out that in United States and in European Countries people are participating less in community and voluntary organizations. So, one side the space for exploitation of all kinds and forms (Geo-Politics) is widening and on the other the space for 'helping' Mother Earth (Bio-Politics) in general and humanity in particular, is shrinking. This trend has been considered as not conducive for the betterment of polity and humanity.

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