

Sufferings as Motivation: Understanding the Life of Farmers in Sara, Iloilo

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Abstract: *This study attempts to provide analysis of the Sanson Estate farmers' experiences of suffering using Arthur Schopenhauer's lens. This is premised on the idea that this piece of work, in any way, helps the readers understand the adversities of this peasant group. The researchers argue that the farmers, being the top food producers in the country have suffered from landlessness, poverty, food shortage, and illnesses due to manual labor. These forms of sufferings provide the motivation for the farmers to desire for something that will help them improve their lives. However, in their search for life's happiness, the farmers have experienced pain, boredom, and despair. Using Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy, the researchers showed that the life of Sanson Estate farmers is a life full of challenges, emptiness, disappointments, and frustrated plans. Yet, because of their positive outlook in life, the farmers are able to counter these life's miseries and continue to work for the betterment of their lives and of their families.*

Keywords: Sufferings, Schopenhauer, pain, boredom, despair, landlessness, poverty, food shortage, manual labor

1. Introduction

At first, the researchers attempted to discuss the current social conditions of the Filipino farmers. This is intentionally to show that despite the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) of the government, the farmers suffer from poverty, famine, illnesses due to manual labor, and landlessness. Second, we will briefly discuss Arthur Schopenhauer's concept of life's sufferings namely, pain, boredom, and despair. For Schopenhauer, these life's sufferings stemmed from every human person's desires for happiness. And third, we will appropriate Schopenhauer's concept in understanding the life of the farmers of Sanson Estate in Sara, Iloilo, Philippines. We argue that their experiences of poverty, food shortage, landlessness, and vulnerability to illness due to the nature of their job, the farmers have experienced pain, boredom, and despair. However, despite the challenges of life that these farmers bear every day, their desire for their family's happiness and satisfaction have made them understand life in a more positive perspective.

1.1 Objectives of the study

- 1) Discuss the current social conditions of Filipino farmers.
- 2) Present Schopenhauer's concept of life's suffering namely, pain, boredom, and despair.
- 3) Appropriate Schopenhauer's concept of sufferings in the life of farmers of Sanson Estate.

2. Literature Review

As a son of a farmer and from a poor family, one of the researchers of this paper had seen the hardships that his father was doing for them. His father works in a 120 hectares hacienda owned by a Sanson Estates in Sara, Iloilo. During his elementary days, he had witnessed how his father worked in the farm. He woke up early in the morning and started his work in the farm until sunset. The researcher had seen the difficulty that his father had experienced in tilling the land, planting rice, and applying fertilizers and pesticides in his designated area. All these dirty works were done

under the heat of the sun or even at rain. Because of these, the researcher tried to fathom his father's motivation for work and how he interpreted suffering and pain.

Like his family, it is obvious that the Philippines, is considered as an agricultural country where some farmers and their families suffer from poverty. As a matter of fact, statistics showed that the farmers are ranked as one of the poorest social classes. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, Filipino farmers are consistently posted the second highest impoverished group among the nine basic sectors in the Philippines in 2014 [1]. Likewise, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) noted that sub-sectors engaged in agriculture had the highest incidence of poverty in 2012 [2]. For PIDS, the poverty incidence among Filipino farmers is caused by low family income, deprivation from basic amenities like electricity and sanitary toilets, and deprivation from potable water [2]. Because of these, the problem on poverty contributes to the lowering of self-esteem of the Filipino farmers and becomes a factor of despair.

Another suffering that the Filipino farmers experience is the problem of food shortage in their households. It is considered that the farmers are the ones producing food on our tables yet, in contrast, these farmers and their families are on the top lists of families who suffer from hunger in some agricultural countries, including the Philippines. Malcolm Hall, a researcher from World Bank, argued that the small farmers are considered poor and has lesser food security than the urban poor [3]. In 2012, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) reported that in Gambia, also a known agricultural country in Africa, tens of thousands of Gambian farmers and their families suffered from severe food shortages for the first time in 15 years due to drought. Because of this, as IFRC added, Gambian farmers were forced to sell their assets and livestock or survive on charity and foraging [4]. Because of food shortage that their families were experiencing every day, farmers worked harder and even looked for an extra income by engaging in a more tedious physical labor in order to provide basic needs for the family. This means that

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the farmers have to endure the pain of having more physical activities just to have a meal on their table, daily.

Moreover, heavy physical activities that farmers have to bear lead to severe illnesses, which are additional problems that most of the farmers are suffering. According to Dr. Eufemio T. Rasco Jr., a medical doctor whose studies focus on the Filipino farmers' health conditions, most farmers are exposed to diseases like schistosomiasis, malaria, fungal, and bacterial infections [5]. Dr. Rasco Jr. also noted that farmers are prone to risks of snake bites and severe lower back pain [5]. Aside from physical pain that farmers are experiencing, the fear of having severe illness pains them more. For this reason, the farmers, who are usually the bread winners of their families, acquire severe illnesses. The family worries on the financial implications that may be incurred for the medication of the head of their family. Certainly, it adds to the burden of the family which ultimately leads to another problem.

Landlessness is a perennial problem that contributes to the suffering of the small Filipino farmers in the Philippines. According to Alberto Vargas, a Professor of Land Tenure Centre in the University of Wisconsin-Madison, during the 1980s, out of 5 million farm-based Filipino families, about 3 million did not own lands [6]. Although Comprehensive Agrarian Program (CARP) has been implemented, many small Filipino farmers are still landless. This is because according to Marilyn Elauria, a scholar on Filipino farmers from Colegio de San Juan de Letran-Calamba, the Filipino farmers do not have the capability to buy their own lands vis-a-vis the major factor of unequal distribution of agricultural lands in addition to the fact that many young Filipinos do not consider farming as a profession [7]. The problem of landlessness makes the Filipino farmers and their families illegal settlers on the land they till. It becomes a suffering for these Filipino food producers since they are not given security and tenure in the farm by their landlords; thus, the landlord could easily fire the farmer and eject their house. Because of the fear of rejection and losing his job, the farmer follows whatever the landlord wills and accords to what his boss's conditions though in most times, the farmers are always on the losing side.

The above narrative showed that the Filipino farmers, have experienced pain and suffering in their day-to-day lives. As mentioned earlier, poverty, food shortage, illnesses, landlessness and farming itself become the pain and suffering that the farmers have to bear every day. Yet despite these sufferings, farmers continue to live and do what they are tasked to do. This is because of their desire to provide the needs of their family and to achieve something that will make them happy. In this context, the farmers' desire for their family's food sufficiency, financial stability, health and welfare, education of their children, and land ownership are the reasons why these farmers continue to experience and endure their sufferings.

This is where Arthur Schopenhauer's concepts of *on the sufferings of the world* come in since it provides a theoretical basis in understanding the sufferings of the human persons, in this case, the group of farmers in Sara, Iloilo. Arthur Schopenhauer was a famous German philosopher of his

time. In his work entitled "*On the Sufferings of the World*," written on his seminal work *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Vol. II, translated by E. F. J. Payne, Schopenhauer argued that life is "full of suffering". According to Schopenhauer, in the whole life of man, he always experiences the feelings of disappointments, being cheated, and pained [8]. For Schopenhauer, man's life is a task to be done by every man and a continuous process which always involves work, worry, labor and trouble [8]. As a result, as Schopenhauer argued further, man's happiness and satisfaction can only be realized if his desires are fulfilled; pleasure is achieved; pain is brought to an end; and, worries and troubles are over [8].

Schopenhauer's concept of suffering is relevant in understanding the sufferings of the farmers from Sara, Iloilo. Like other Filipino farmers, the sufferings of these farmers from northern part of Iloilo are rooted from their problems in landlessness, poverty, food shortage, and illnesses due to manual labor, which ultimately lead them to experience pain, boredom, and despair. For Schopenhauer, these experiences of pain, boredom, and despair are the "elements in human existence", happiness of any given life is measured not by its joys and pleasures, but by which one is able to free from these sufferings [9]. For the small Filipino farmers, they can only be free from sufferings, or experience happiness by having provided the basic needs of their families; gaining financial stability; freedom from sickness and poverty; having their children finish their education; and having homes they can call their own.

Given the above discussion on the sufferings of the Filipino farmers, as evidenced by their experiences of landlessness, poverty, food shortage and illnesses due to manual labor, the researcher is convinced that Arthur Schopenhauer's concepts of suffering are necessary and timely in order to understand the farmers' life experiences of pain, boredom, and despair.

2.1 Background of Farmers of Sanson Estate in Sara, Iloilo

In this section the researchers will discuss the sufferings of the Filipino farmer's in Sara, Iloilo. This is necessary in order to understand their situation on how these Sanson Estate farmers suffer from poverty, landlessness, food shortages, and illnesses due to manual labor.

Sanson Estate started with Don Alfredo Araneta Sanson as the owner of the hacienda. Don Alfredo was married to Doña Matilde Jalandoni Montinola and they have four sons namely: Gregorio, George, Federico and Francisco [10]. According to some native stories, the hatred of Don Alfredo against his sons for disrespecting his decisions have made him to subject his hacienda to Voluntary Offer to Sell (VOS) to the local bank. Some stories would tell that Don Alfredo was a good man. In fact, the farmers in Sara have appreciated the kindness and generosity of the 'old man'. Don Alfredo distributed the land to the local farmers in Sara, and he instructed them to go to the Department of Agrarian office to apply for the Certificate of land ownership (CLOA). Also, he allowed the farmworkers to stay in his land for a long period of time without any advance payment or paying rent and permitted them to cultivate the land without paying taxes. However, there was total turn of events

in the life of farmers happened when Don Alfredo was murdered in his own house in Molo, Iloilo City, by allegedly, his own trusted house worker.

On May 14, 1992 the land was covered by Voluntary Offer to Sell (VOS) by the Landowner [11]. According to Municipal Agrarian Reform Officer (MARO), the 427.31 hectares comprise a hacienda touching six villages in Sara, Iloilo are covered by the two landowners Don Alfredo and Federico Sanson [11].

3. Research Methodology

This paper utilized several methods of research. In the preliminary phase, the researcher have made use of hermeneutic and descriptive methods in presenting Schopenhauer's concept of the suffering in his essay entitled "*On the Sufferings of the World*," written on his seminal work *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Vol. II, translated by E. F. J. Payne. In the second phase, actual interviews were conducted to gather data and experiences of farmers from Sara, Iloilo, since there were few written documents or study on their social condition. In the conduct of interview, the researcher gathered the farmer's stories of sufferings particularly on their impressions and actual experiences of boredom, pain and despair. And on the third phase, the researchers employed critical-analytic method in the appropriation of Schopenhauer's concept of the sufferings of the world to the farmers' experiences of pain, boredom, and despair.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Arthur Schopenhauer's Concept of Suffering

This section presents the key concepts of Arthur Schopenhauer on suffering, namely pain, boredom, and despair. Also, it attempts to show that human sufferings are brought by their desires to attain pleasure, happiness and satisfaction in life.

4.1.1 Concept of Pain

Pain is always brought by one's desires for pleasure and happiness. Schopenhauer's concept of pain is closely related to one's exercise of one's will, which is the ability of the human person to make decisions and choices in his life [12]. This means that for Schopenhauer, pain is a kind of suffering caused by one's exercise of his will over the other that brought injury to the person [12]. In pain, one experiences the feelings of bitterness and self-pity. For Schopenhauer, pain is always part and parcel of one's actions and decisions in achieving what is pleasurable. Thus, for Schopenhauer, pain doesn't just exist in person's memory, but it has empirical circumstances to prove that it is being experienced by every human person. Intellect, as Schopenhauer argues, can sustain intellectual efforts for a short period of time only but the will continue without interruption, and it can sustain and support life [13].

Moreover, intellect and will in human being are not to be thought as two separate qualities. Instead, the intellect for Schopenhauer, is an inherent characteristic of the will, it is secondary or, an accidental quality [13]. The human intellect

is said to be the service of the will and originally destined to serve the will alone [14]. Thus, for Schopenhauer, human actions are not just determined by reason alone but by will.

4.1.2 Concept of Boredom

Like pain, boredom, as a form of suffering, is also a by-product of human person's will and intellect. According to Schopenhauer, boredom is a very serious phenomenon that affects many people. It develops not only in the inner state of mind but also has empirical evidence in the world. Schopenhauer describes boredom as simply the feeling of emptiness of life [14]. In human life, as Schopenhauer argues, pain and boredom are the two chief enemies of human happiness [15]. For Schopenhauer, boredom normally arises when we cannot do what we want to do, or have to do something we do not want to do.

4.1.3 Concept of Despair

Similar to pain and boredom, despair is also a form of suffering that develops due to one's desires of happiness and life's pleasure. However, unlike the two forms of suffering previously mentioned, personal despair or discouragement arises due to failure of strength or failure of plans. According to Schopenhauer, hope is the confusion of the desire for a thing with its probability [15]. For Schopenhauer, he who is without hope is also without fear; this is the meaning of the expression desperate. Hope, as Schopenhauer argues, is natural to human life, which leads him to believe on something true on what he desires to be true, and to believe it because he desires for it. However, in most times, human persons are brought to the point of believing that what he does not desire to happen must happen and what he desires to happen never be happen simply because he desires it, then this is the condition called despair.

4.1.4 Sanson Estate farmers experience Landlessness

According to Jex B. Ledesma, the chief caretaker of Sanson Estate in Barangay San, Luis Sara, Iloilo, it was in 1992 when the beneficiaries applied for land registration and acquisition of parcel of farm lots to the Department of Agrarian Reform office. However, Mr. Ledesma and his group was advised by the landowner to consider tilling his land without paying rents and taxes instead of applying under government's agrarian reform program. Moreover, the land owner promised them that he himself will be the one to distribute the land area thus, no need to apply for CARP. These pieces of advice from the land owner convinced the overseer to continue working with Mr. George Sanson and disregarded the plans for availing CARP [17].

According to Harriet Loot, DAR Provincial Agrarian Reform Officer (PARO), the Hacienda of Sanson Estate which comprised a total area of 427.31 hectares was voluntary offered to sell by the landowner in 1992. On August 8, 1994, a memorandum of valuation was issued by the Land Bank of the Philippines. The PARO also stated that the land was officially registered for Collective Certificate of Land Ownership Award (CCLOA) on May 2012 and the writ of installation was issued in July 27, 2012 [18].

The DAR has already awarded and installed 348 agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARDs) of Sanson Estate [18].

However, more than 100 landless Filipino farmers in Sara, Iloilo filed a petition for cancellation of the CLOAS claiming that they were not included in the DAR list of beneficiaries. These farmers who filed a petition for cancellation of CLOAS considered themselves true beneficiaries of Sanson Estate. For these farmers, they are the ones who cultivate the land since Don Alfredo was alive. Moreover, Mr. Ledesma argued that his group of farmworkers was unable to benefit the distribution of land in 2012 because the Municipal Agrarian Reform Officer (MARO) and Barangay Chairman (BARC) allegedly manipulated the list of the DAR beneficiaries.

Let us share some of our experiences during our seven days immersion with the farmers in Sara, Iloilo. Here, we showed the results of our actual interviews and their sufferings. This narrative is necessary to further understand the sufferings of the farmers.

In our Interview with Jonathan “Waray” Gualdarasi, 54-year old and a regular farmworker of Sanson Estate, he shared his experience of being a landless. According to him if one does not have a land of your own (as a farmer) and stay as a laborer of the Sanson Estate one will suffer for a long period of time until death without progress. The cycle of hardship and sacrifices remain constant because the cost of labor is very low. For Jonathan, as a worker and landless farmer his optimism and ultimate goals in life is to escape from suffering and to send his children to school and finish their bachelor’s degree in order to find a good job and a decent income to sustain their daily living.

4.1.5 The sufferings of Sanson Estate farmers due to poverty

According to John Tuala, 43, a regular farmworker of the Sanson Estate, he shared that he has experienced too much suffering in rice farming. John argues that, the work in the farm is not an easy task. Regardless of the weather, he is obliged to be in the field and cultivate the land to make it productive; however, because of poverty he never had any opportunity to go school and the only skills he had is rice farming. Since his childhood and adulthood, he worked as a daily farmworker in the Sanson Estate. The causes of their suffering is lack of budget to sustain their basic needs in farming like, fertilizers, herbicide, insecticide, farm equipment and certified seeds for planting rice. The small Filipino farmers cannot afford to buy or sustain these needs and would result to a lackluster of income and production.

Consequently, John, the small Filipino farmer will have to go to the capitalist to borrow the amount of money to acquire funds for his preparation. In such case, the condition of the capitalist is 10% percent interest during the harvest season. In this case, the small Filipino farmers have no option but to take the offer of the capitalist. During the harvest season, if the small Filipino farmers observes that the crop has poor yield contrary to the expected volume for the harvest, depression and frustration ensues because they would not be able to payback his debt to the capitalist. The 10 percent interest makes things worse. Aside from debt, the small Filipino farmers experience calamities such as, flood and heavy rains. These affect the harvest of the small Filipino farmers and further exacerbate their financial

condition leading to poor harvest and subsequent decrease of profit.

4.1.6 Sanson Estate farmers experience food shortage

Ronilo “TiyoyNilo” Templado, 45, a regular farm worker and a chief mechanic of Sanson Estate, shared that he had experience too much food shortages. Ronilo argues that the small Filipino farmers have nothing to eat because of poverty and landlessness. They wait for almost 3 months of harvest and during the harvest season he could not manually harvest because of the harvester. The tenants of the farm would prefer to use harvester rather than manual labor. The ratio of Harvester is 3 hectares per day while manual labor takes a week to finish the one hectare. Furthermore, according to Ronilo, the food on their table is not enough to sustain his family. They suffer a lot because they don’t have a land of their own and the cost of labor in the farm is very meager.

4.1.7 Sanson Estate farmers suffer illnesses due to manual labor

Restitoto “Toto Risty” Francisco, 61, a regular farm worker of Sanson Estate, shared that he had experience too much physical pain while farming. Restitoto argues that the harmful chemicals such as, pesticide, herbicide and fungicide are the cause of lung problems to the Filipino farmer’s. These harmful chemicals are used by the Filipino farmers to stop the growth of grass using herbicide to kill the insects, and to terminate the snails using fungicide. Furthermore, according to Restitoto, this method of farming using harmful chemicals makes your yield become productive. But it is detrimental to the small Filipino farmers’ health who applied the chemical with the use of a knapsack sprayer. Through the knapsack sprayer it is easy for the Filipino farmers to spray specific areas that are contaminated with harmful insects such as, pests, leaf hoppers, corn borers, black bugs and snails.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Schopenhauer has provided pessimistic view of life that is full of sufferings. Everyone, no matter how rich a person is, the level of intelligence a person has and the prestige that a person has gained, still, that person would encounter sufferings, pain, boredom, and despair. The experiences of poverty, landlessness, food shortage and illnesses due to manual labor among Sanson Estate farmers prove that indeed, they suffer in this world. Hence, because of these social conditions, they desire to free themselves from these misfortunes. In short, they desire happiness in life. Yet, as discussed in the preceding chapter, their actions towards the realization of their desires and expectations make them suffer pain, boredom, and despair.

In pain, the farmers suffer both emotionally and physically. Emotional pain happened when they lose their land over the local elites and unregistered farmers. More so, the manual labor which entails working under unpredicted weather condition, contributes to their physical pain. As discussed, boredom happens if someone is unable to get something which she desires to have in her life. In the farmers’ case, their desire to have entitlement on the land they till for generations, financial stability and enough food for their

families were not achieved because of certain factors that limit them in attaining these desires, thus, they feel that they are powerless. Moreover, farmers' suffering of despair was brought by their unrealized expectations. The CARP and landowners' promises of giving them their land as rightful owners were not fully implemented. For the farmers, having a land of their own gives them the opportunity to uplift their social conditions and thus, they are expecting that they will attain happy lives. Yet, because of the government's indifference and the landowners' injustices, farmers feel disgusted that lead them to despair.

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