

THE LOGIC OF ATTEMPTED SUICIDE AND  
ITS LINKAGE WITH HUMAN EMOTIONS

Padmasiri de Silva

Attempted suicide is a "non-fatal act of self-injury undertaken with conscious self-destructive intent". While the sample of 25 cases of attempted suicide examined out of an over all target of 100 cases pointed towards the seriousness of the intention to commit suicide rather than merely threaten some one, the cross currents which have a bearing on driving them to attempt suicide are more complex and number of variables were evident. This study which is basically concerned with "Family response patterns to attempted suicide" is focussed on the interpersonal relations in the family setting, as other people become objects of both love and hatred. While the family gives the individual a sense of anchorage and belonging, it also generates intense conflicts and stress.

Thus while factors like poverty, unemployment, disappointed love, marital conflict, examination failures, alcoholism, family disputes etc may be strong pre-disposing factors, the "straw that breaks the camel's back" is the breakdown of family relations and the closure on the individual to search for alternative paths to deal with stress and conflict, than attempt suicide. My own analysis is concerned with the emotional dimensions of the psycho-social context which have a bearing on attempted suicide. It includes a criticism of the "frustration-aggression" theory of suicide and emphasize the centrality of hostile relations along with emotions, hopelessness

(a facet of what may be called "depression"), anger and shame. Shame as a cross-cultural factor in the Sri Lankan context is considered as an important revelation of the study. Shame emerges out of a social context, of status concepts, lively gossip (though with a bitter flavour), the fear of being "talked about" and exposure. The study of emotions in relation to attempted suicide brings out useful insights regarding personal, familial and social factors which have a bearing on attempted suicide.