

Empathy: A Rule of Social Relations

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*'My experience gave me a right to feel suspicious in regard to
all so-called "unselfish" instincts, in regard to the whole of
"neighbourly love" which is ever ready and waiting with deeds
or with advice' (Nietzsche 2005: 17-18).*

Abstract: *In the social science circle, it is widely claimed that modernity and the liberal ideology have brought a high degree of individualism, social differentiation, fragmentation and atomization in societies across the globe. The neo-liberal social order makes life highly competitive and insecure and creates new social hierarchies while promoting fetishized consumption, a false sense of consumption-based happiness while adding wind to the process of atomization. The inevitable casualty of this is the erosion of the collective social spirit based on fellow-feeling and attrition of compassion or empathy for the fellow members. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Claude Levi-Strauss and many other social scientists have lamented this turn of events and given a call for rediscovering "pity" or "empathy" in social life and social management. Many social scientists are now echoing this need of the hour while drawing support for their discourses from the Buddhist philosophy and streams of modern Western philosophy. Broadly, the discussions on empathy or compassion as a social rule encompasses the question of morality and humanism in social praxis. This paper is an attempt to understand how empathy is conceived by some philosophers and social scientists and how it works in different shades in the life of the modern middleclass people in the urban Indian context.*

Keywords: Empathy, anti-empathy, middleclass, urban, elderly, conjugal life, care crisis.

Introduction

Claude Levi-Strauss, in his *Structural Anthropology* (1963), called upon social scientists in general and anthropologists in particular, to look for the unconscious, universal, hidden *a priori* universal rules of social life, which he called social structure. All theorists of social sciences, structuralist or post-structuralist, have tried, in their own ways, to unravel the hidden principles of social life, the rules of social relations. Sigmund Freud, for example, discovered the natural “libido”, management of which creates a space for individual-society dialectics, as the hidden rule of social relations whereas Jacques Rousseau identified “pity” or “empathy”, which he perceives as a universal natural quality in man (and woman, of course), as one of the fundamental principles on which human relations and the relation between human beings and other creatures (or even the natural and physical environment) rest (Rousseau 1755; 1763).

One of the core questions that faces us is whether human life could be conceived in terms one of these “exclusive” rules or we take life and social relations as the field of interplay of these two and many other hidden rules of social relations. It is quite possible, drawing from our everyday life experiences in modern context, to construe that one side of human nature becomes prominent in one situation while the other finds expression in the context of another time and space. Thus one person, who looks cruel and bereft of empathy in one context is found to be full of emotion and empathy on another count; a person who is polygamous today may turn a *sanyasi* tomorrow; a dreaded criminal today turning a sage tomorrow – a Rishi Ratnakar story; an otherwise loner like Nietzsche could have love and empathetic relations with lovers, friends and family members (see Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 2005). Thus, these apparently conflicting qualities may coexist in one human being in some kind of reconciliation or unity. The human relations are complex, diverse and dynamic, and so are peoples’ interests and responses to the specific social situations; everything is in the process of being and becoming. The point, therefore, is to explore how these universal structural rules, especially empathy, compassion or “pity”, work in defining social relations in diverse social situations in our everyday social life, especially when there is a growing shift towards individualism and atomization in the neo-liberal “risk society”.

In this paper (1) I would touch upon the philosophical foundation of empathy as a structural rule and (2) explore how empathy works in common peoples' cognition and action in defining the shape of social relations and (3) examine whether human beings should banish empathy of all forms to achieve the greater goals of life, as Nietzsche would have prescribed. The prime objective is to find out whether empathy for others could be unqualified, as a genuine natural and universal human quality, or it operates only in a limited sense as a strategy to management of relations (and, therefore, driven by interest and power) and whether it is used as a veil to hide calculations and selfish interests and thereby turning the praxis of empathy "a myth". I would draw from our everyday life experiences to illustrate how empathy works, alongside love, emotive attachments and goal-oriented rationality in different shades and levels.

Empathy: the philosophical roots

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), the French philosopher and one of the early architects of the idea of compassion, viewed that compassionate feeling and action are among the least harmful manifestations of the dangerous natural human desire to extend the self and to show signs of power and activity. It is one of the passions that concerns us with others and motivates us to act on their behalf. In *Emile* (1763) Rousseau held that although compassion can be indiscriminating, it is not supposed to overpower reason. In *Emile*, Rousseau shows how compassion can modify and be modified by reason for the individual's good and the good of others. Thus, empathy and reason are not antithetical as they can exist in unity and work in coherence.

In the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau points to two fundamental human qualities: one, compassion as a natural impulse, that is, the "natural repugnance to see any sensitive being suffer, principally those like ourselves," and two, the "interest in our own well-being and preservation, out of which "all the rules of natural right appear to ... flow" (Rousseau 1755, III: 126, 15). Compassion, according to Rousseau, motivates people to do good to others and refrain from doing harm to others. He argued: "it is in this Natural feeling, rather than in subtle arguments, that we must seek the cause of the repugnance every man would feel in doing evil"

(Rousseau 1755, III: 156, 38). Compassion, thus, makes “sensitivity to suffering” a sign of purity. In Rousseau’s perception it is through the discourse on compassion, that “we are to come to see as never before the preponderance of suffering in social life, and so to learn to be ashamed of our past lack of response to it” (Orwin 1997: 301).

In *Emile*, Rousseau argues that pity, prompts a transformation of interest in our own well-being. One experiences compassion in its fullest sense only when one identifies with the sufferer, or suffers “in him” (1763, IV: 506, 223). Rousseau went on to argue that empathy, like other passions, emanates from self-love. “Self-love” is “anterior to every other passion,” and all other passions are “in a sense only modifications” of it (1763, IV: 491; 213). Rousseau argues that both the passions that induce us to exploit others and those that incline us to assist them are manifestations of self-love. What distinguishes one passion from another is not the extent to which each depends on self-love but the extent to which each tends to achieve the goal of self-love; the way in which each causes us to see and act toward other human beings (1763, IV: 491, 506; 213, 223). Rousseau praises compassion, then, not because it opposes self-love but because it is among those modifications of self-love that are good for us and for others.

Rousseau is never the uncritical champion of empathy; he considers it to be one of the many universal human qualities, which stems from self-love and which can be modified by reason for both self-interest and for the larger collective interest. Rousseau definitely does not endorse all forms of expression or unqualified empathy; for example, he does not appreciate those who praise a theatre for inspiring pity, nor the theatre goers who are “proud of their tears,” (Rousseau 1960: 289–90). Rousseau concedes that compassion as such is weak because, at times, it can be overwhelmed by the narrow self-love it is supposed to combat and because the relief of ills is quite unnecessary to its satisfaction. The “sterile pity” of theatre goers, which is “soon stifled by the passions” is a case in point (Rousseau 1960: 268). Rousseau is also aware that compassion can be easily attached to undeserving objects in the pursuit of self-interest, which he definitely disapproves.

Therefore, the four important points, which, I think, are fundamental to Rousseau's discourse on empathy are as follows.

First, empathy is a universal human quality since we as human beings nurse abhorrence for fellow human beings' sufferings; thus, whatever we do for the good of others, for removing others' pain, which may include even research and discoveries, are driven by empathy; empathy also drives us to rise above an isolated, selfish approach to life and be a part of collective action or social movements for addressing social problems and for establishing a better society. Since we live in an iniquitous social arrangement some suffer more while some others, the privileged, suffer less; empathy could act as a binding force, a source of motivation for unity.

Second, Rousseau does not endorse all forms of empathy; the exaggerated, impulsive and fake (hypocritical) expression of empathy designed as means to a selfish end, as the politicians often do to draw the sympathy of the people, or theatre goers (of the film watchers) shedding tears alongside the character-in-pain are the ones he would have despised.

Third, empathy is not antithetical to reason; rather, they work in coherence and moderate each other in human (individual or collective) thinking and action. On this, as we will see in the next section, the German philosopher Nietzsche, had a different and opposite view. We will examine, later in this paper, how reason (or self-interest) combines empathy in framing the rules of social relations in everyday life.

Finally, in Rousseau's perception, empathy, or reason for that matter, is rooted self-love, it is an integral part of human being's efforts to make life aesthetically rich; a source motivation to preserve creative and critical agency and to be a part of collective self.

It is definitely not Rousseau alone who has discussed about empathy and explored empathy as a principle of praxis in different social fields. Some Western scholars credit Gautam Buddha for his early empathetic discourses. Drawing from Buddhist philosophy and from European philosophy social scientists in recent times have rediscovered the value of empathy in different ways. For example, Martha Nussbaum, a liberal economist, looks to

compassion to revitalize our commitment to equality and to nurture global citizenship (2001, 401– 54). Amitai Etzioni, a communitarian, calls for an ethic of “caring and sharing” to balance liberal democratic individualism (2002: 56). Virginia Held, a radical feminist, puts emphasis on care to fundamentally transform societies that until now have been founded on self-interest and contract (1993: 203–4, 223); empathy, for her, could be a principle which, if followed, could ignite gender sensitivity and promote gender partnership. Gertrude Himmelfarb, a neoconservative, calls upon citizens to exercise compassion as social virtue to create a decent and free society (2004, 25–41; 92). Richard Rorty, a postmodernist, views the capacity of the strong “to be moved to action by sad and sentimental stories” as a more dependable and defensible support for the powerless than the outmoded idea of human rights (1993: 20). Cutting across different positions we would agree that compassion is a common assault on that liberalism which founds itself on rational self-interest, a neo-liberalism that fails to move people to refrain from exploiting their fellows, let alone to care about and help them (Alford 1993: 277). At a time when the advance of neo-liberalism and aggressive global capitalism appears unstoppable and we get to see heartless competition and eclipse of basic human values it would not be a bad idea if empathy is reinstated as a new universal principle of human relations, especially in redefining the relations between the powerful and powerless and between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. Empathy or readiness to feel for others cannot remove inequality but readiness to feel for those who are suffering and are in pain would not only restore a degree of humanness but also help devising concrete actions for making the society humane.

Life in anti-empathy: Nietzsche and beyond

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the noted German philosopher, understands compassion as “suffering with others”, which, he thinks, we should not be doing since that could derail us from accomplishing the larger projects of life. Any big project in life that could make life meaningful and fulfilling requires selfish engagement, something that the great scientists do – deep engagement forgetting the mundane world around, which of course, falls in the goal-oriented rational tradition of Western

philosophy. Nietzsche seems to be critical of all compassion but at times also seems to praise “our compassion”, in contrast with “your compassion” (BGE¹ 225, cited in Ozen 2021: 245), which may give occasion for a rare and peculiar insight into “co-suffering” with others, and which, in turn, results in overcoming compassion entirely. Nietzsche interprets this unique experience as the way to achieve greatness, and therefore calls it “the ultimate test” or the “real proof of strength” (EH² “Why I Am so Wise”, cited in Ozen 2021: 246).

Nietzsche, in Ozen’s reading, considers all forms of compassion to be deterrents to accomplishing the bigger projects of life in the form of new discoveries and new wisdom, which could go a long way to serve the humanity. He, however, supports only that form of compassion which he terms Nietzschean, translated as “our compassion”, which helps achieve greatness and which helps overcome all other forms of compassion (Ozen 2021: 246).

Nietzsche declares in his *1883 Notebook*, which he kept while writing *Zarathustra* (1883–1885) that “an abyss called ‘compassion’ is my danger”, adding, in the same place, “The danger for super humans is compassion. Let us avoid giving them compassion!” (Nietzsche KSA³ 10.442, cited in Ozen 2021: 246).

For Nietzsche, thus, albeit empathy for the suffering lot could be a natural human quality it absolutely essential to put it in check if someone wants to achieve something big in life, e.g., a landmark discovery, which could, in turn, ameliorate the common sufferings of mankind. To be too emotive could hinder the grand creative project of one’s life.

But Nietzsche definitely does not endorse the actions of the mean, heartless, selfish people, whom we see around us in our everyday life; like a powerful politician using all his manipulative power (manipulation of laws, police administration and the use of antisocial elements) to grab property of the legitimate yet powerless property owners or a heartless son, successful in professional career in USA, refuses to take the responsibility of his ailing mother or father, who lives alone in her/his residence in a metropolis like Kolkata or in any other Indian metropolis. In the Salt Lake area, where I live, I have been witness to cases like this. It is not that the successful careerist man or the childless politician, I am referring to, needs that much of property, yet an insatiable greed drives

him to be a perpetual property grabber and be selfish in career. The politician of the ruling party, I have in mind, controls the syndicate net that is active in the New Town, Rajarhat area. The media often carries report of many heartless acts of this politician who, with all manipulative power at hand, and with the hooligans and police under his command, grabs property of the hapless widows and widowers or the NRIs, who cannot make an arrangement to protect their property. The media reports like a promoter torturing a widow, living alone in the house, to grab her property; or a man settled in USA leaves her old mother at the airport while returning to USA along with his wife; or the daughter and the son-in-law torturing a widow to dispossess her of her property; or a woman left in an old-age-home against her consent by her "busy" careerist son and daughter-in-law; or a widow in her own house being ill-treated by her own family members; or a man deserted in his own house by his son, who is on a careerist mission, and so on, which are so common in a heartless "modern" world, speak of lifeworld bereft of empathy. These inhuman souls are definitely not on any big mission of life and are definitely not driven by "our compassion" or Nietzschean.

However, leaving the fact here would be a one-sided depiction of these characters; these characters in reference could be "empathetic" towards their wives and children, towards the other members who constitute the core of their social life or the interest group; they are, thus, un-empathetic to "others" in order to be compassionate to their selfishly defined "us", often constituted of the core members of the nuclear family. It is like the city-citizen game (to use the phraseology of Michel Foucault" who argued that the "citizens" in ancient Greek city states used to disenfranchise the non-citizens (the property less slaves, who were not allowed to live in cities) for their own benefit (Foucault 2009: 129, 145, 167-68). The other illustrations of city-citizen game would be the upper-caste Hindus disenfranchising the dalits and coercing the latter to offer their services and labour for their own benefit; the upper caste do this with vested interests to sustain the privileged position of their own members. Empathy and anti-empathy thus work in unity of the opposites, one of the three dialectical laws, identified by Engles in *Anti-Duhring* (1947).

The print media often carry reports of heartless atrocities against the elderly in Kolkata, which help draw home the point that people could indeed be in selfish mode and bereft of compassion; here are a few media reports in this light.

On 16 July 2015, Prangobindo Das (78) and Renuka Das (75), both retired professors, were murdered in their flat in Indralok Abasan in Paikpara, North Kolkata. The only daughter of the couple was living in the US. The investigating police officer claimed that the motive behind the murder was to loot the belongings of the couple; they were killed because the assailant(s) were known to them. The maid, who was absconding, might have done the murder in connivance with her known criminals (*Ganasakti* 17 July 2015: 1).

On 26 February 2014, a group of miscreants looted money and ornaments of 70-year-old Padma Bhattacharya, on gun point, from her residence at B 3/2 Northern Park, Bansdroni, South Kolkata, at around 12 noon. The promoter husband of the lady had gone out for some work. Their only daughter, married, lives in another part of the city. On the same day, around the same time a 93-year-old woman, Shanta Bhattacharya, was strangled in Ultadanga and her belongings, money and ornaments, were robbed (*Ananda Bazar Patrika* 27 February 2014). Back in 2012, 68-year-old Phoolrenu Choudhury, who was living alone in her house in South Kolkata, was brutally killed by robbers, while her belongings were looted (Ghosh 2015: 1). Ghosh (2015) further reports that in two years, 2012-2014, as many as 666 senior citizens were kidnapped in Bengal, most of them were women. *Ganasakti* (21 June 2016) reports that one Mr. Malin Kumar Datta, 69, was found dead in his flat in the second floor of Manoprobha housing complex at Santoshpur Avenue of Kolkata. The police recovered his dead body. Mr Datta was living alone in his flat and had acute asthma.

On 25 June 2016, 75-year-old Widow Madhabi Jana was beaten to death by her daughter-in-law and 20-year old grandson in her own house at Baranagar. Madhabi Jana was the mother of a son and three daughters, two of whom are married out. She was living in the house constructed by her late husband, with her son, daughter-in-law and grandson. She had a long history of ill-treatment at the hands of her daughter-in-law and grandson and

was taking food in the house of one of her married daughters, who lives close by. Mrs. Jana recently gave away a part of her 5 cottah land to one of her daughters. Angry at this, her daughter-in-law and grandson put pressure on her to give them the remaining part of her land, which she declined. Following an altercation, the daughter-in-law and grandson beat her to death (Ganasakti 26 June 2016: 2).

Gangopadhyay (2013) reports two incidents of extreme form of ill treatment of the elderly by their own family members. An 81-year-old widow, who served as a police officer, now retired, used to live in her own house with her son, who was a government employee, and daughter-in-law. In the absence of her son, the daughter-in-law used to abuse her verbally. Apprehending further trouble, she refrained from lodging a complaint with the police. But some of her friends came forward and had an informal talk with the local police officer. The police called the daughter-in-law and threatened her of action if she does not amend her behaviour. After this, the situation improved for the elderly lady. In another case reported by Gangopadhyay (2013), the son of an elderly lady who lives in the US came and persuaded his mother to hand over their South Kolkata house to a promoter and promised to take her with him to US. On the day of departure, the son left for USA leaving his mother at the airport.

Empathy in the world of our everyday life experiences

Life without empathy and compassion is only half-truth; the general rule, however, is that empathy or compassion finds expression in the everyday life of the people in organization of the social relations and actions. In this section I will narrate some of my everyday life experiences to demonstrate how empathy works on the ground; the idea is to explore the shades and nuances of how people (including us) practise empathy in their everyday life activities.

1. I studied the elderly women and men living in Salt Lake area and in old age homes in South Kolkata in 2013-2016 for my PhD, which was completed in 2018. I was interest-driven and, at the same time, driven by a “natural” empathy as I saw my own grandfather and grandmother

in the elderly whom I studied and interacted with; I was also moved by a preconceived idea that the elderly in general are lonely and have multiple sufferings. During the entire period of fieldwork, I was overtaken by a “romantic” feeling of sharing their sufferings and was driven by the will to do something for them, at least to give them sessions of compassionate company. The genuineness of my feelings for the elderly drove me to spend extra times with them and get into private interactions and mutual sharing of views and experiences of different kinds. I kept contacts with them over phone and through occasional visits months after my fieldwork was over. The news of death of some of the elderly with whom I had developed some proximity troubled me. Of course, I was driven by my personal wellbeing; I wanted to build a solid rapport in the field and collect authentic data and wanted to complete my fieldwork within the planned time. It is quite possible that I was strategic in my approach to my “objects”, and surely, I have taken much more than what I have given them in return. I kept my contacts and visited some of the elderly in their homes and in the old-age homes occasionally but the contacts faded over time. I live with a sense of regret that I have not reciprocated their kind help and gestures but I, at the same time, realise that my fast moving life and the demands of new relations and commitments would not allow me to preserve the same degree of compassion for the elderly, who helped immensely in my career building and who were generous in expressing their share of empathy for me.

2. In 2019, I studied the changing conjugal relationship of four middleclass couples in Kolkata through the lenses of the four women of different age groups – 60s, 50s, 40s and early 30s. The youngest of the informants was in married life for a couple of years while the oldest was married for more than 30 years. All of them were living in conjugal families, away from their larger kin. All of them have experienced or experiencing elements of patriarchy and complained of unfreedom in their life, although none had serious antipathy for their husbands. The husbands, for them, are largely unconscious in their praxis of patriarchy,

yet they are normal, caring, sensitive individuals. For them, as one of the women said: 'If I compromise, if I make adjustments, if I sacrifice my dreams, if I dedicate my life for the wellbeing of the husband and the child, there is no problem'. Another woman said: "If I make a perfect balance between my professional life and the role of the home-maker there is no problem; basically it is all about adherence to the traditional perception of conjugal relation; no husband tolerates radical changes". Although the husbands are all highly educated and "progressive" and although they share the family responsibilities well, they do not do much to lay the conjugal relationship on the principle of equality and partnership. All the women indicated to a gradual transformation in the conjugal relation, which could be summed as a gradual evolution "from libido to care and empathy". Although the conjugal relation of the newly married couples is/was centred around satisfaction of the mutual libidinal demands over the years, as the couple had a child (all were one-child families), and as they entered their professional life, a sense of responsibility, mutual care, mutual emotional and other forms of dependence took the centre-stage, pushing the libidinal demands at the back seat. The mutual empathy overpowered the differences, occasional fights and the wear and tear as they discovered friendship and care that sustained their relationship. In other words, the conjugal relations progressed towards friendship although within the overall frame of iniquitous gender relations.

In my study on the elderly couples in Kolkata (Roy 2019) I have seen the aged couple, who live alone in their own house or in an old age home, rediscover their love and affection for each other in their late life. After retirement, when their child/children are dispersed to distant places, they sit face to face, spend a lot of time together to reflect back and forth on their relationship and rediscover their love and mutual affection. In an otherwise leisurely yet lonely life, when the larger social bonds are weakening, they discover their true friends in each other and enjoy every bit of each other's company. They express their love even in fake and silly arguments, in cracking jokes/

mischiefs, in occasional tours to hill stations or sea-side, in their moments of celebration, in breakfast tea, in watching tele serials or movies and in their relentless worries for each other; they rediscover empathy in their shared worries for their children and grandchildren, about their health, in their moments of illness and in their worries about their own future; the scary thought lonely life after the death of one of the spouses engulfs them.

3. In our everyday life, wherever we go, we confront the suffering people of different kinds; we notice the unhappiness in our underpaid maids, the drivers, the petty traders by the road side who are not doing well in business, the struggling first generation learners who work as labour to run their family (many of my students are like that), the women representing underprivileged classes who are under pressure to withdraw from college and marry (as I see among some of my students), the colleagues struggling to cope with stresses of different order and so on. Every now and then the media would bring us the disturbing stories about rape and killing, about suicide of the young boys and girls, about the hapless parents appealing for financial help for the treatment of complicated ailments of their child/ children, a young boy or a girl making an appeal for an organ or bone marrow, we see an accident victim lying unconscious by the roadside and no speeding car stopping to take him/her to hospital, and so on. In our social circle we can see our friends, brilliant in studies and well qualified, plummeting in depression without a hope of getting a decent job in the neo-liberal corrupt and unkind "risk society" (to use the phraseology of Ulrich Beck) while the relatively unqualified are employed through manipulation. What do you do in such cases? We understand that most such everyday life visuals are rooted in the iniquitous heartless social order that works on the Darwinian principle of "survival of the fittest"; that the individual initiatives will always be inadequate to address these problems that constitute our everyday, yet we reinvigorate empathy in us and be ready for some kind private or collective initiative. Perhaps this empathy in us, however strong or weak in presence, sustains the

“humane” elements in us and keeps alive the will to power and transformation. The reinvigorated empathy and compassion in us could work as the drive for initiatives to break free from the selfish atomized approach to life and be a part of collective self that untiringly strives a better society.

Conclusion

Empathy a universal natural human quality, however weak may be in its presence in us, constitutes one of the rules of social relations. The idea of anti-empathy, even the Nietzsche’s version which is laid on a rationalist principle, also admits of a different form of empathy. One of the key realization out of the present exercise is that empathy and anti-empathy construe two sides of our life which operate on one of the dialectical principles, namely, “the unity of the opposites”. The practice of empathy in our everyday life has different layers and levels - from what we learn from the epic self-sacrifice of Raja Harishchandra to the heartless childless political leader who appropriate property in the name of his wife and close kin. One can strategically use it, suppress it, or defer it but cannot banish from life and relations completely. Positions on empathy and anti-empathy in the life of one particular individual could also be transcendental, and circular at times, as one particular human being could be empathetic in one situation and be bereft of empathy on another situation. Suppression of empathy could result into regrets or morose in a human being. We can draw encouragement from the fact that the philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, economists and political scientists are trying to rediscover the essence of empathy or compassion in research and action, in politics and in policy framing when morality and other human values are in serious crisis in modern and post-modern times.

Notes

1. BGE refers to Nietzsche’s book *Beyond Good and Evil* (2002)
2. EH stand for Nietzsche’s book *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* (German: *Ecce homo: Wie man wird, was man ist*) is the last original book written by philosopher Friedrich

- Nietzsche before his death in 1900. It was written in 1888 and was not published until 1908.
3. KSA refers to Nietzsche's book *Samtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe (in German)*. Published by Walter de Gruyter & Co. in 1980.
 4. Harishchandra is a legendary Indian king finds mention in Aitareya Brahmana, Mahabharata, the Markandeya Purana, and the Devi-Bhagavata Purana. The most famous of the stories involving him is the one mentioned in Markandeya Purana. According to this legend, Harishchandra gave away his kingdom, sold his family and agreed to be a slave – all to fulfill a promise he had made to the sage Vishwamitra.

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