

# Beware of The 'Familiarity Trap'

**Dr. Prasad Sundararajan\***

*Today's child is more or less incapable of wonder. Children straightaway play with the great inventions of the electronic-electrical-mechanical kinds. The process of becoming familiar with something - familiarity – often results in a tendency to underestimate the significance of a thing. In a recent survey, out of about 5,000 students from reputed institutes and universities less than 50 had even heard of, for instance, 'Jonathan Livingston Seagull'. Not even one has ever seen a copy of 'Upanishads' when they claimed, India is the land of Vedas and Upanishads.*

The proverb, "Familiarity breeds contempt", known in almost all cultures, indicates the nature of 'trap' identified in this article. Developing 'contempt' or at least a 'taking for granted attitude' is the 'trap'.

Sometime in 1965, I witnessed a person being led in a procession with three decorated elephants for passing the BA degree. Now, even a Nobel Prize-winning scientist may go unnoticed. That is a simple example of what I call 'familiarity trap'. It is a paradox, which affects human mind, self, life-work-relationships, growth, and development.

Because of 'familiarity', curiosity about the known is diluted - once familiarity is reinforced, further learning and alertness about the environment is not essential. Moreover, it creates and maintains a sense that whatever known about a thing is 'all that there is to know about the thing'.

Things when too familiar, by education and heavy media presence, the ability to 'wonder' is affected. Whereas, the great geniuses who created all those sciences and technologies were wonder-filled individuals.

Richard Feynmann, wrote:

*I wonder,*

*I wonder that I wonder.*

*I wonder why I wonder.*

*And, I wonder that I wonder why I wonder.*

Through direct experiencing of the reality of the 'familiar' things and phenomena, men of genius created the magnificent range of discoveries and inventions, art and philosophy, poetry and literature, sciences

\* The author is a Professional Trainer on Ethics & Management; Director, Geniuschoice Institute Alandurai, Coimbatore – 641 101. E-mail: [geniusinself@gmail.com](mailto:geniusinself@gmail.com)

and technologies. But, the normal educated-intelligent-employed minds tend to 'breed contempt' about the familiar.

Strangely, a parallel set of creative people are dedicated to converting the available discoveries into techniques of 'anti-ethical' applications - of manipulation and adulteration, subjugation and intimidation, etc of the familiar-plenty of innocent fellow human beings. Weapons of massive destruction of the 'familiar' plenty - the core resources of Earth, water, minerals, plants, fishes, animals, and so on.

### **What is 'Familiarity'?**

A clear perception of the semantic import of the concept familiarity is in itself a meaningful revelation about the nature of 'familiarity trap'.

### **Familiarity\*:**

Something easily recognized, free and easy, comfortable, and unrestrained due to the following reasons:

- having frequently seen or experienced
- due to close or habitual acquaintance
- due to everyday occurrence and being common

### **Familiar\*:**

Excessively informal, impertinent, taking liberties with things which are well known, known from long or close association, recognized by the memory, accustomed with, common, everyday, ordinary, frequent, usual, repeated, routine, mundane, run-of-the-mill, conventional, habitual, etc.

### **Synonymous terms\*:**

casualness, ease, comfortableness, presumptuous, disrespect

[Presumptuous=over-stepping boundaries; the thing has changed, has got more to it, and the individual still continues to behave with it according to the boundaries marked out or recognized in the past].

### **Why this 'Familiarity Trap'?**

**It is a paradox, because, familiarity only facilitates survival - perhaps at all levels.**

For instance, familiarity is of high survival value-as indicated by a preliminary analysis given below:

#### **1. Adaptation process and 'Familiarity Trap':**

Adaptation is a function of intelligence. The term intelligence is even defined as an 'ability to adapt with the environment'. Familiarity is supported by, and facilitated by intelligence, which is a process of knowing something, getting used to something, to be able to interact with something.

#### **2. Learning process and 'Familiarity Trap'**

All learning-development procedures develop 'familiarity'.

The geniuses who observed things and phenomena have created beautiful theories, explanations, and lessons. All the normally required activities for survival, general life, work, and social-economic-religious methodologies, etc have been already developed.

\* Adapted from the Oxford Talking Dictionary

A systematic and well organized learning system itself – comprising thousands of schools, colleges, and Universities - has been evolved. As a result, people can learn everything easily and freely from multiple sources. Now learning also is a taken for granted phenomenon. Learning has lost its greatness, for learned people do not show any considerable difference in their attitudes, values, behaviour, and even in competencies and knowledge.

Knowledge has accumulated to such a vast extent that even managing knowledge has become a learning program. Because of the continuous generation of knowledge, knowledge itself has lost its wonder. People have become just observers of the continuous processions of various knowledge.

As a result, the ‘demand’ or the value of knowledge is lost by familiarity and therefore, people do not seem to pay proper attention to discriminate real core knowledge or wisdom and peripheral level of descriptions and explanations.

### **3. The perceived requirement of ‘ownership and control’ and ‘Familiarity Trap’:**

The ‘familiarity process’ often necessitates things to be taken out of their time-space-setting-locations. Of course, such separation helps easy learning. But it also serves an extra purpose of exercising and retaining control over things and phenomena.

In order to maintain intelligence, which is exclusively a consequence of ‘learning by familiarity’, people are forced to separate things from their time-space-setting-locations

in order to maintain ownership and control. They don’t allow things to change, or they reject change, deny change, and fight against change.

Therefore, individuals have to be extremely careful, and sufficiently courageous, if they want to eradicate the stupidities, or to change conventions, or to introduce new perspectives [all belong to the unfamiliar] in an individual, group, institution, organization, or society.

### **Consequences of ‘Familiarity Trap’**

#### **[1] ‘Familiarity Trap’ Leads to Insensitivity:**

By familiarity, individuals become insensitive. So, the tolerance levels of people increase proportionately. Therefore, at a physical level, people do not recognise sound pollution, environmental depletion, ecological problems, etc.

When things are familiar, there is no need of sensitivities, no need of reviewing the details of ongoing perception or experience and the power of observation and the extent of self-control in keeping attention on things become reduced. For example, drivers taking their vehicles and others’ vehicles for granted leading to accidents.

At an emotional and existential level, dissipation of integrity and ethics in social-religious-political-economic-national-international bodies, corruption, bribery, communal and neighborhood problems, suicide, alcoholism, family problems, increasing crime rates and lack of values and ethics among the youth, and a whole lot of disintegrations.

## **[2] Familiarity Trap 'Blocks' Self-Awareness**

'No one is a prophet in his own country.'

This classic proverb can be applied to interpret the trap of intelligence. Intelligence helps to identify a prophet as a prophet, and at the same time to take him or her for granted.

If the prophet is living in the neighborhood, in a time-space-location setting more or less like everybody else's, familiar, and easily accessible, he would be looked at - even with contempt.

## **[3] 'Familiarity Trap' delimits the power of perception of 'variation':**

The things and phenomena in the environment will vary or change only gradually. A clear example is the variation that happens to the environment and ecology. Motor vehicles are to be periodically checked, as well as during traveling long distances or difficult terrain. The nuts and bolts, and other items might have varied gradually till a critical point.

### **SEE this experiment:**

Take a 20-litre vessel; fill water till about two inches from the brim. Place a live frog in it. Heat the vessel with three medium size candles. After 20 minutes you will see that the frog is almost dead.

Repeat the experiment with a slight variation. Place the vessel on a normal stove and apply full flame - with same quantity of water, and a live frog in it. In two minutes, the frog will have jumped out of the vessel.

Why?

Every minuscule rise in temperature falls within the range of familiarity or 'learning'. The gradual shift is taken within the field of the 'known'. But rapid and greater changes in temperature forced the other frog to react.

By natural processes, the attributes and properties of things get changed. Familiarity prevents a review and facilitates interaction with them in the same old ways, or rejects them if the change is beyond current competencies and mind-sets.

Much more slow and imperceptible will be the changes within the 'internal' environment. And unless you know your changes, you will not know you. Perhaps, till the end of your world. More or less in the same way as the frog in the slow-heated water.

Therefore, there should be an active and alert search to know the 'self' within.

Perhaps, the 'prophet-ness' existing with one's own entity is taken for granted. Perhaps, if the great God was easily visible everywhere, He would have been ousted from this world. Therefore, He remains invisible..!

By familiarity it becomes difficult to identify the details of one's own expressions, behaviour, and experience. As a result, individuals tend to conclude their learning and development at a possible and convenient comfort level.

#### **[4] 'Familiarity Trap' leads to lowering of Work Ethic:**

As on now, the work – of a teacher, clerk, accountant, mechanic, manager, driver, cook, and hundreds of such designated works and other casual jobs – is done in a way almost any normally educated individual can do. Employees do not feel wonder about their work. This lack of wonder has rendered individual, inter-personal, and organizational interactions great complexity.

Very few individuals are competent in creative work. Lack of creativity in work has become a major problem of India – currently rated 43rd in the global index of creativity and innovation.

Every creative expression of man is about the available, from the available, by the available. Science, technology, medicine, art, philosophy, food items, clothes, shelter, articles, metals, and metal-crafts.

All the truths, all possibilities are already there, already existent. New things or perspectives can be originated from the available and familiar only. Creative perspective has to begin 'from the available, the given, the present, the known'. It is a search on the science of the present work.

#### **[5] 'Familiarity Trap': Taking Life for Granted**

Life is actually full of unfamiliar, strange, and unexpected situations, contexts, people, and experiences. The time-space-location setting of one individual can never be the same as that of another. But, people behave and respond to one's own life as if it is very familiar, like that of the other people around.

Due to familiarity, parents do not feel the real wonder and blessing about their children. The great institution of marriage has become a familiar routine procedure. Couples do not feel the continuity of their initial wonder.

Because of familiarity the wonder and blessing of life is not perceived, boredom penetrates every aspect of individual mind-set, behaviour, expressions, actions, and relationships.

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Bored by familiarity - even outer space is familiar now - people are perhaps, craving for a moment of wonder. As a result, only war and terrorism, riots and murders, rapes and panic are a matter of wonder. Realizing this, the media compete to present news and views on riots and conflicts, death and destruction, problems of public figures, war and similar 'sensational items' on the pretext of 'information'.

#### **[6] 'Familiarity Trap': Taking Environment for Granted**

How the environment, the various resources and facilities provided by Nature are

corrupted, disused, misused, depleted and so on needs no clarification; it is amply evident and well-known.

### **[7] 'Familiarity Trap' and the Unfamiliar-God in the Familiar**

God is in the familiar only. God is in the 'details'. In the very familiar details of every day existence, in anybody-can-see kind of details of anybody-can-identify kind of things. There cannot be anything, even a single atom or particle that is something other than God-material. Of course, searching for God, other than in the things available and familiar is unlikely to be of any advantage.

### **Strategies to transcend the 'Familiarity Trap'**

#### **Developing awareness of the extent and areas of familiarity:**

There is the need to be aware about one's ongoing levels and domains of familiarity. There is a need to consider familiarity as a perception-block, a block that stops the creative evolution of self, behaviour, attitudes, activities, relationships, etc.

Be aware about your assumptions, values, attitudes, interests, emotions, competencies, aspirations, needs, desires, preferences, dislikes and likes, etc.

List down items, things, events, situations, states, experiences, signals, ideas, themes, people, etc., which you take for granted. Look, see, listen, feel, think, read, write, dance, and sing. More and more, more and

more of everything you already do, already know, already are familiar with; then you become a master of that art. Master of a science. Master of a potentiality. Master of a presence. That's the way you have reached your current level of walking, talking, writing, and even eating.

#### **Developing Detachment:**

To get out of familiarity means to get detached. Familiarity creates the greatest of blocks for detachment. To look at the familiar thing beyond the parameters of familiarity, it requires the application of detachment.

#### **Applying Creative Potentiality:**

Everybody 'has' creativity, but normally it is not triggered, evolved, and reinforced as an ongoing mind-setting. The creativity for everyone is in 'going beyond the taken-for-granted-ness' about life and all its totality.

Perhaps, a lot of people are lost in some primary school classrooms; somehow became disinterested about their own creative potentiality - having comfortably settled with some familiar and like-minded people with the support of some logic valid in some contexts.

When a thing is under 'taken-for-granted-ness' its details are omitted; no review - creative review - is done. By resolving the familiarity paradox, genuine love for life may be re-discovered. Real universal love. People achieving and enjoying a state of true ethics and integrity.