**Poker: Greed**

**Fascinations Of Poker:**

There are multifarious types of poker played throughout the world in different styles and with different set of rules. But, here I will be talking about Texas Hold'em Poker- the well known gambling card game that has its stiff stature because of its roots which are drained into the epic battle between 'luck' and 'skill'. It is a perfect combination of 'Agon' and 'Alea' as discussed by 'Caillois' in 'Man, Play and Games'. I have seen people play a variety of card games, involving both luck and skills. But, most of them are not played with as much fervour or intimacy as Poker. So, why does Poker stand out from the rest? Yes, that brings us to the main aspect of Poker- 'Greed'.

**Greed:**

Unless and until you have some entity that is on a thin line which you have to protect, seriousness doesn't build up in a game. I have seen my friends play Poker with Chips/monopoly money instead of the real currency. This particular game ends up either with everybody just giving up on the game or just playing a golden round: the one who wins the last round wins it all. Some economic entity that belongs to you gives rise to seriousness. Seriousness leads to developing knowledge and a set of skills. This gradually leads to profit/loss back-and-forth. And the resulting checkpoint is the greed for more profit. Greed to have a level of power which is better than the rest is the base-line for the gamers to engage into the game and come back for more. So, it is important to understand what greed is, what things in Poker help bring it out and how it can be inculcated in other games too.

Mystikan in the Urban Dictionary defines greed as : "The desire to own or control resources more than others". These resources can be directly chopped down to the term 'capital'. Capital cannot be limited to just the monetary power of a person. There are different parts and classification of capital. Capital mainly is of 3 types as follows:

1) *Economical:*

Economical capital can basically be defined as a common entity that defines a person's power of economic resources. It can be in the form of money(cash), chips, rewards, assets, property, possessions etc. Economic balance provides a sense of power/safety/confidence, an ideal position from where the game doesn't seem to play you, but you play the game. The greed for economical power keeps pushing a person forward into the dangerous territories, his risk-assessment ability gradually mitigates.

2) *Social:*

All the resources which emerge from the maintenance of a network of relationships of mutual appreciation or existence for a particular time-period, fall under the social capital. A person has to maintain(or initially build) his social status, his image of proficiency among the varied entities involved in the network.

3) *Cultural:*

The resources acquired by the person in terms of his knowledge, education and skills are included under the cultural capital. It is the most important of them all as the social and economical capitals' are wholly dependent on it. A person achieves a higher social-status in the durable network he is a part of through the economical power which in-turn is dependent on his skills and knowledge that he develops over time.

The centroid equivalent of these capitals' brings out the greed aspect in a person. If the person wins, he receives all the capitals. This encourages him to go for more than he usually needs, thus proliferating greed. On the contrary, if he loses, the capital he gained all through the game mitigates to a certain point. This puts him in a state of inferiority and urges him to opt for more in order to achieve balance. Thus, if a person becomes intimate in this game, the greed aspect is inevitable. Now, we ought to understand which points in Poker help unfold the greed aspect.

1) *Keeping the mystery alive, without fully killing the possibilities:*

Poker conceals the possibilities initially and gradually unfolds the cards. It is very difficult to maintain the mystery and the winning possibility at the same time. There is a thin line: go more towards one side, player becomes skeptical of his wins and on the other, player starts losing his interest and fervour in the game. Maintaining this thin line, helps in urging the person to play more just to check out the possibilities. His constant calculations about the winning probabilities and the greed to earn the capital, forces him to choose greed and go forward with the game. The regret to fold from a potential-win game restrains him form quitting the game.

2) *A good game always has two discrete pathways to win:*

The game doesn't block a player's win with just one path to success. Even if the player doesn't have the luck aspect, he can still go through with his skills. For example, if the player receives cards in random order and there is no possibility to win, he can still use his skills to play a bluff that would make the other players quit the game. It all depends on how you make a proper use of your luck and the skills. A person develops skills through observation and practice. Once he wins with those skills, he becomes greedy for more, for now he knows their appropriate use. So, more than one possibility to win encourages a person to ignore the risk and go for more.

3) *Levels of winning:*

Poker has a sequence of different possibilities of wins rather than just a single one. For example, a flush sequence beats straight, a four-of-a-kind beats flush, etc. Thus, when a person having a straight sequence loses to flush, his urge and greed to gain his power and capital back two-folds. Also, the conscience of multiple levels of winning makes the person go beyond his comfort zone. It helps him calculate the next winning strategy and gain some cultural capital in terms of knowledge about the other people sitting at the table. This increases the sense of confidence in him for the next game and gradually hones his skills.

4) *Sense of Power:*

As you win through the game, a sense of power keeps developing in the background. This is directly related to the capital earned. If you win a game, your economical and social power increases. If you lose a particular game, your cultural power increases, which might help you develop strategies for the next big thing. Overall, as the power increases, your greed to gain more of it superimposes with it too. A sense of power gives rise to confidence and protection, which ultimately leads to greed build-up and you becoming more and more comfortable in your game. Thus, a player has to be alerted frequently with his sense of power along each step of the game. He has to be made aware of the situation of his capital so that his involvement surges on a regular interval.

There are many other faces to greed which can go a lot more deeper. But, limiting the discussion to the boundaries stated above, I would like to end it with a famous line spoken by Gordon Gekko: "Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge has marked the upward surge of mankind." So, the real question is: 'Greed: Good or Bad?'.

**-Kunal Patil**