Q1 Does modern science lend support to Buddhist ideas about the human predicament?

Ans: Yes it does. Modern science was found to supplement and verify Buddhist ideas on human predicament. The Buddhist conception of the human predicament is summed up in the first two of the four Noble Truths, taught by Buddha shortly after he attained enlightenment; ie: Life, and all its experiences, are ultimately unsatisfying. This is the truth of dukkha, often interpreted as life is suffering.

The cause of this unsatisfactoriness is attachment and craving. By ending attachment and craving, life's inherent unsatisfactoriness will also end. Attachment and craving may be ended by following the Noble Eightfold path (a prescription of right outlook and behaviors). Essentially by seeing the world objectively, eg by the practice of meditation.

Superficially, Buddha's diagnosis may seem overly pessimistic. Many things in life bring satisfaction and pleasure. But even in the midst of an idyllic experience, or lifestyle, we are painfully aware of nature's inherent impermanence; the shiny new sports car will eventually rust; the young, healthy body will eventually grow old, sick and die… (Conversely, impermanence means that unpleasant experiences will eventually cease, maybe for the better.)

According to the theory of natural selection we are continually driven to survive in order to pass our genes on to the next generation. This manifests itself, in accord with Buddhist teaching, as almost constantly feeling unsatisfied and craving the next meal, sexual partner etc.

Evolution has granted us instincts that were useful in our pre-civilization days but may be harmful now. Eg the craving for high energy foods may cause us to gorge on junk food and lead to associated health problems; the fight or flight response that once saved us from predators may now be triggered by such mundane events as the daily commute, leading to stress and other mental problems. Buddhist practice can be seen as a means to subvert the effects of natural selection and adopt an outlook and lifestyle more suited to modern life.

Q2:- Does modern science lend support to Buddhist ideas about the human mind?

Ans:- According to the Buddhist conception of the human predicament, our life is unsatisfactory and the reasons of our constant unsatisfaction are craving for impermanent goals and attachment to impermanent things. These statements are told by Buddha as the first and second of the four Nobel Truths.

The Buddhist ideas are in fact supported by modern science, especially from an evolutionary psychology point of view.

It is known that pleasure (dopamine) evaporates quickly and evolutionary psychology may have the answer why. Natural selection has an important job: making sure that all living souls inherit their genes, therefore survive in the wild. To motivate them do so natural selection figured out how to keep them unsatisfied.

The three principles of designs of natural selection are the following:

1, Deliver some pleasure after the “animal” reaches important goals.

2, Make the pleasure evaporate shortly thereafter.

3, Make the “animal” focus more on the pleasure that is to come than on its ensuing evaporation.

As a result, pleasure may shift to anticipation (as explained by Robert Wright’s donut example and monkey vs. dopamine spike experiment), and unfulfilled anticipation causes dopamine lack, so “animals” crave more.

The main thing to understand here is that natural selection does not care about our or other animals’ happiness, it only cares about motivation and keeping us unsatisfied to reach its own goal: reproduction. The main problem to understand here is that however natural selection does its work just fine, it can not prepare organisms for environments not designed by natural selection. Therefore, in the world of mankind, our feelings can not be trusted in the sense natural selection created them.