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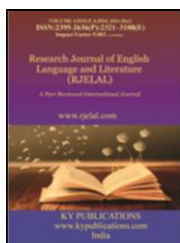
Intellectuals in Pursuit of Utopian Self

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ABSTRACT



Intellectuals in every part of the world, in their pursuit for their ideal self and identity, have given rise to the creation of pieces of art through which they can indicate their obsessions of any kind, the prominent of which has been the question of self and identity. Human being, unlike the past and at the contemporary time in particular, has always faced the problematic definition of self and the philosophy of life and existence and has been in pursuit of his true self which has become blurred and ambivalent. This paper has had a kind of analytical view of the works of intellectuals specialized in every genre at the disposal of the researcher with the special orientation of their true and ideal self and identity. On this line, a survey of some intellectuals and modern dramatists' works of the west and the east has been stated to show that they both have a lost thing in their works, each illustrating it through his own spectacles. A trace of the works indicates that they are all in search of their true utopian self and the diversity of attitudes signifies the ambiguity of self in their works.

Key Words: Intellectuals, Utopia, Pursuit. Self

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No matter where they live, the intellectuals through their power of reasoning and understanding feel and call for the immediate requirements of humanity. On this line, they pave the way for the public and crystallize the obsessions in their works of any genre type. The intellectuals place and role in society, their tasks and obligations, the status they ascribe to themselves and that society ascribes to them, their streams of thoughts and attitudes depicted in their works have always been called into question from criticism viewpoint to reveal what they have been getting at and what they want to reveal. For example, it might even be said, Pace Carlyle, that the intellectual has been our most important modern person, interpreting events for expanding democratic publics and even shaping those events themselves. Collini asserts, moreover,

that less has been said about what intellectuals have had to say about the major issues of their day than on what they have had to say about intellectuals themselves and the intellectual's vocation and intention. This may be due to the fact that, in many ways, the vocation of critic and reviewer emerged in tandem with the rise of literature itself as a subject of public consumption, entertainment, instruction, and manifestation.

Comparative literature has made this reality accessible to come up with the differences and commonalities of intellectuals in every part of the globe. Comparison and contrast of different aspects and concepts has received a major portion of literature studies. It covers a large number of areas such as two works with one theme, two different literatures over one concept or a point. A good

example can be the comparison of crime in Morrison's *Beloved* and that of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. On the aggregate, they endeavor to develop a utopian definition of laws with respect to crime. Following this framework, this study is going to survey the concepts of utopia in the works of some contemporary intellectuals as the manifestation of their ideals and wishes revealing the concept of the intellectuals' search for the ideal self in exchange for the ambiguous self. The objective will be twofold. The major portion of the study will mainly focus on contemporary west novelists and dramatists' idealization of their feelings and thoughts as the search for self which to them sounds ambiguous. The minor final part will try to detect any congruity, if any, in consistent with the concepts of utopia as an indication of the concept of the ambiguity of self in the works of west and that of east, here in this study Iranian. In closer look, this final comparative literature study will try to find out what ideas as utopia or dystopia are in common among the intellectuals, the commonalities which are reflection of the search for the real self. The pursuit of self which is the most ambiguous and passive concept of the century has obsessed the intellectuals' mind in their efforts to crystallize their idealization in the form of utopia or dystopia. "Utopia" is a multi – facet term which could best be clarified in contrast with its counterpart dystopia. The two concepts in the works of elite have attracted the eye view of critics in each era. An initial survey could start with Plato's republic, Thomas Moore's *Utopia*, Machiavelli's *The Prince* and then penetrate Edward Bellamy's 1888 *Socialist Utopia* looking backward or Aldous Huxley's *Island* (1961d) or Orwell's 1984 or *Animal Farm*.

The definition of Utopia is "no place". Utopia is an ideal society in which the social, political and economic evils afflicting humankind have been wiped out, and utopian thinking is "the capacity to imagine a future that departs significantly from what we know to be a general condition in the present" (Friedman, 2000, p. 462).

The creation of dystopia has been a reaction to this idea. Dystopia, or anti-utopia, is defined as completely and utterly horrible world. Worlds that can be detected in the works of Alan Moore's *V for*

Vendetta, Lawry's *the Giver* and many others. Utopian or dystopian thinking and interpretation varies from one intellectual to another drastically. As an example, "Utopia", Moore's pioneer piece of art, has lent itself to an astonishingly large number of divergent interpretations. A group of critics who are totally distant in time from each other take Moore's demand for communism as well as his other innovations quite seriously. Among these are the German 19 century socialist Karl Kautsky (1885), the British historian A.L. Morton (1952), and the German analyst Thomas Mather (1982). In complete antagonism to these "Literalists", there is a second group who pleads for different "metaphorical" reading of Moore's *Work*. They regard it not as a blue print for political reform but as a mere image of what an ideal society might look like. In more recent times, these two have been supplemented by two important articles of T.S. Dorsch (1967) and Merritt Abrash (1977-78) who try to turn utopia into a strongly ironical world depicting an unpleasant state of society which is not very far from the dystopia of Wells, Huxley, or Orwell. For some, including C.S. Lewis (1954; 169-Berglar 1978;195), utopia is taken as a synonym for Wordsworth's famous romantic dictum; "a spontaneous overflow of intellectuals' high spirits". Some others such as German historian Hermann Oncken (1922) and Gerhard Ritter (1940) take utopia literally too, but in a completely different sense from what Marxists view it. They consider it as a first model for British imperialism.

In each era, intellectuals (novelists, poets, to name some) have depicted their frame of thought in their writings. Each attempts to make a realistic portrait of a utopia – like world of his own. In *Andromeda*, throughout the novel, Ivan Yefremov's attention is focused on the social and cultural aspects of the society. Many of the characters in their writings demonstrate one of the most basic problems of human being life or at least in its simplest form their own ideal world, way of life, their expectation of anything in any way around them, and their realization of their true selves. For example, Huxley's commentary and social criticism was very deep and this cautionary tale is perhaps more applicable today than it has ever been seen

(as evidenced in Bush's reference to brave new world in his speech concerning government funding of stem cell research). The crystallization of these is seen in the forms of technology, culture, society, politics, self, or even their personal yearnings. As Shariaati (2008) asserts human being has managed to handle all areas except for the question of self which is defined as humanistic crisis of this century. Throughout the centuries human being has clarified and defined, all the unknown but what remains ambiguous at the contemporary time is the question of "the passive self". Throughout the novel *Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne develops the Christianity and projects on the reader the ideals and ways of life the puritans face. Old major, the leading character in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, teaches the others the song of the beasts of England. This song teaches them "utopia", the "great" life without man and with no more bad leaders. Some like *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood reveals the opposite position, dystopia, through describing a world where unreal events in the novel could never actually take place in our reality. But in contrast, in closer penetration, in this novel some startling similarity to the non-existent women's rights somewhere in this real world even today can be traced. This and many other novels target at a point or uncover something which originates from some problems of this world within which human being could come up with a true definition of self, his existence and the question of being. For example, Morat Gurgeh in the *Players of Games* feels useless inside the culture and decides to travel outside of it so as to feel like he is really doing anything of value and he can find his true self. It can be concluded that utopian or dystopian thinking of the intellectual is a reflection of their efforts to define the world, on the one hand and their own selves in that world on the other. The world (the container) creates, assigns the meaning for the self (the contained). Diverse types of utopian and dystopian thinking including economic, political, religious and finally scientific and technological ones have shaped, changed, modified, and given the definition of self a new meaning to which human being never in the past has assigned this definition to the self, the philosophy of life, the objective of

existence. For example, a sample for economic type of utopia can be detected in Robert A. Heinlein's *The Moon is a harsh Mistress* and Eric Frank Russell's book *The Great Explosion*. In the works of dramatists like Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett, John Rustin, Henry Ibsen, and novelists like James Joyce at the contemporary time instead of taking refuge to social, political, and economical aspects of human life as a way of finding their true self within that milieu, have specifically dealt with the question of self which is ambiguous as the great obsession of humanity. These ideas are crying out in major works of Beckett and Pinter: *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *The Caretaker*, and *The Birthday Party* within them through the themes of menace and absurdity the question of disambiguating the ambiguous self has been being dealt. Some like Einstein in *The World I see* come to nonentity in which find no meaning for the real self of human being. In the era of technology human being's privacy has been violated on the one hand, and on the other hand man is doing his best to improve the technology as the only way of human salvation and as the means of giving meaning to his true self. In Iran literature and among intellectuals this mode of utopian/dystopian thinking as a way of creating a world within which human being can find his true self and can achieve true salvation has somehow followed the same procedure but its manifestations are different.

Before 'Mashrotte' and before 1942 different orientations could be realized. In the works of Fathali Aakhondzade, Taghizade, and Mirza Malekomkhan these views are obvious. From poetry view point, this orientation in the poems of Malekshoara Bahar is more evident. Ancient Iran as utopia was supported by king Reza. The advent of Hitler who developed racism gave rise to this school of thought. Therefore, the desire for ancient Iran as a symbol of power and civilization became more and more manifested and idealized. In the second era, from 1940-1960 a kind of communist-orientated utopia was crying out in the Works of Iranian intellectuals. This utopian viewpoint become sporadic in the works of many poets and writers including Siavash Khosravi, Akhavan Saleh, Nima Youshij, Jalal Al-Ahmad, Ahmad Shamlo, Reza Baraheni, Korosh Golsorkhi. Depression and

helplessness after Coup de`dat 1957 paved the way for a kind of dystopia whose manifestations could be detected in the poems of Akhvan Saleth. This created an atmosphere of disgust towards the government, nationalism, and even the hatred of people and self. Meanwhile even they plead for some foreign forces as savior. This fact is self-explanatory in *Winter* of Akhvan Saleth: do it is said another tomorrow, wait some other may appear, there is no more Kaveh, there is a wish for another Eskandar. Within the years 1965-1975, some still take refuge in communism as utopia but loses lots of proponents. Another group seeks for utopia in other things and takes to flight to false nationalism and turn to totally enthusiastic nationalists or west-orientated elite. Nikpei, Reza Ghotbi pioneered this group. After the collapse of these two views, some flashback to religion as the only left horizon proved itself among many writers as the best utopia for freedom and a happy life. Jalal Al-Ahmad's *Service and Betray* highlights this sort of utopia. As can be seen, political utopia has been dominating all other aspects of life and the majority of the intellectuals have dealt with this as facilitator of other worlds in their minds. Some turn to nature for the sake of relief. At the contemporary time new ideas of globalization, democracy, humanism, peace and welfare of people have created a new kind of utopia for many intellectuals within which they can get closer to their true self of which they are aspirant. They presupposed to find their true self in this concept but in reality it may, in no time, prove the opposite and turn to other things which is indicative of their efforts to find their true self which to them sounds ambiguous. They try to project their way of thinking and yearnings on new ideals and worlds as a way of getting closer to their self. As the concept of the self has been the most passive of all for the modern man than it has ever been through the last centuries, this everlasting and prevailing efforts asserts that the self is ambiguous, otherwise, they would have put an end this identity crisis long time ago.

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