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CASTE SYSTEM AND THE ROLE OF INTOXICANTS IN THE NOVEL *BRAVE NEW WORLD*

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ABSTRACT



Alcohol seems to be a part and parcel of every culture, in a very subtle way though. Every society and religion has laid their own ethics regarding the consumption of the same. None of them propagate a total abstinence from intoxication and is in favour of its controlled use. Drugs and alcohol as a matter of fact gives the consumers an induced happiness and a lift from the reality.

The work by Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* gives us a novel picture about how the authority conditions its people to like the drug "soma". This is to maintain the caste system in an imaginary place called World State where human beings are manufactured in Hatcheries into different classes with specific mental capacities.

This project will try to explore how this idea can be applied to the actual Caste System in the world especially the Indian Caste system, from where the author seems to have drawn most of his inspirations. The role of "soma" which is symbolic of all the intoxicants, in the society will also be enquired on the grounds of how differently it operates on the different levels of people in the society.

Keywords: Intoxication, Caste Hierarchy, Soma, Injustice, Alcohol Culture.

INTRODUCTION

Human being and his tendencies for alcohol and drug consumption is a matter of curiosity since the beginning of civilizations. The cultural and societal aspects of intoxication are worth analysis rather than the individualistic approach to it. As, there arises a question whether, the craving for intoxication is a natural instinct within man or if it is incorporated in him by an external agency.

Every civilization and every religion has their own approach to intoxication and puts forth a set of norms and ethics regarding its consumption. Alcohol seems to be a part of the rituals of many religions and favors the delightful aspect of the same. Certain other religions keep a completely negative attitude towards alcohol; however they do not forbid other methods like tobacco smoking;

which points to the fact that they do permit intoxication in a way or the other. "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (Timothy5, 23) says the Bible. The use of incense and fumigation is traditional in rituals in major religions and it help to sharpen the concentration of the mass of people who are attending. The role of such substances used to capture the attention of a group of people and the role it plays to unquestionably instill the ideals of the religions in the minds of people is also worth analysis.

The theme of alcohol and intoxication is an oft seen picture in literatures across the globe. From doctrines that warn people about the usage, the literature created out of intoxication, the confession on addiction to the elaborate description about ones

psychedelic experiences; the list is heading to areas we never thought even existed.

World is witnessing yet another era of psychedelic culture from the World Wars onwards. Groups like the Hippies and the Beat Generation has given a new outlook towards drug consumption for creative pursuits. The devastating effect of wars on people's psyche and the post-war trauma was probably been projected differently into substance addiction and thereby into creativity.

"The Pranksters never talked about synchronicity by name, but they were more and more attuned to the principle. Obviously, according to this principle, man does not have free will. There is no use in his indulging in a lifelong competition to change the structure of the little environment he seems to be trapped in. But one could see the larger pattern and move with it - Go with the flow! - and accept it and rise above one's immediate environment and even alter it by accepting the larger pattern and growing with it." (Wolfe, 56)

The passage from the most noted novel by Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* justifies the idea of counting on to substance abuse to alter the one's perception and to escape from the barricades of reality which is unacceptably terrific.

Brave New World written by Aldous Huxley in 1932 is a dystopian novel which deals with the idea of alcohol and its operation in various class hierarchies quite differently. The novel takes place in an imaginary country called The World state where human beings are born in hatcheries under the supervision of the state. People are manufactured into different class divisions namely, the Alphas, Betas, Gammas and the Epsilons; Alphas being the most intelligent and Epsilons being the least.

The Alphas undertake the intellectual pursuits of the State; the Deltas are the skilled workers supporting the Alphas. Gammas are the semi-skilled workers, Deltas, the low skilled workers and Epsilons are the sewage workers of the State.

The hierarchy into which people are divided in the World State can be rightly equated to the concept of Varnas in the Indian Mythology, where people are divided into Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishyas and Shudras. Like in the World State, here

Brahmins are the intellectuals and Shudras, the untouchables.

A psychedelic drug called "soma" is referred in the text at many instances which alludes to "somasara" in the Indian Mythology which is known as the drinks of the Gods. In the text, the drug is a hallucinogen which can give ten hours of highs and is distributed to the people by the government. This project will explore into the details of how "soma" operates in different levels of class hierarchy in the World State which in turn is a dystopian prototype of today's world itself.

ALCOHOL CULTURE; AND ITS EFFECTS ON DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CLASS HIERARCHY

The drug "soma" mentioned in the text has a different role to play in the World State unlike the common understanding that alcohol is a social ice breaker. Here, "soma" comes into play right at the beginning, when the human beings are created in the Hatchery run by government are conditioned through Hypnopedia or sleep teaching to like the "soma" rationed to them. The people, irrespective of the class they belong to, are demanded to be happy and the surrealistic and calming drug will execute the idea effectively. "Swallowing half an hour before closing time, that second dose of soma had raised a quite impenetrable wall between the actual universe and their minds." (Huxley, 24)

The drug will help them to escape from the weird facts of reality and help them recover from the bouts of dissatisfaction caused by the social set up they are trapped in. "Soma" is designed such that the citizenry is essentially enslaved by the drug so as to control the population and prevent the chances of rebellion.

The State claims that the drug does not cause any brain damage or lead to addiction. But it is noted that there are characters in the novel like Linda who breathed her last because of the same. She counted on "soma" as the reality that bound her was obnoxious. She was abandoned in a "Savage Reservation" by her boy-friend and had to bring up her child John all alone. John on the other hand who saw his mother's deterioration never took "soma", even for fun.

The government's administration of "soma" as noted in the novel is highly political. It operated

differently in different levels of class hierarchies. The Alphas who were supposed to engage in intellectual pursuits were not allowed to read literature or engage in creative activities. Here, the societal norms were thrust upon people and the individualistic values and or aptitude had no room in World State. People existed only to serve their purpose in the community. So, for the Alphas, "soma" acted as an agent that will cement the gap between, who they actually are and what are they demanded to act as.

"I don't understand anything," she said with decision, determined to preserve her incomprehension intact. "Nothing. Least of all," she continued in another tone "why you don't take soma when you have these dreadful ideas of yours. You'd forget all about them. And instead of feeling miserable, you'd be jolly. So jolly," (Huxley, 59), says a character Lenina who is an Alpha. She seems quite content with the help of the drug and has no qualms about her life. She believes that the drug can perfect everything and bring the State-intended happiness and joy.

There is yet another Alpha, Bernard who is skeptical about how the drug works in people. He stays away from the drug in the beginning of the novel and tries to understand who he really is without the fumes of "soma" in his head. Very soon he leaves his ways and submits to the drug, as the situation demands that he can never be sane in a place like the World State without the help of Soma.

In the Indian context, P.V Kane, in his book *History Of Dharmasastra Vol 2, part 2*, notes that the modes of intoxication was different for each varnas. The upper castes were forbidden from drinking "sura", which was a type of alcohol meant for the shudras. Instead, they were allowed to take "soma", yet another drink which was also known as the drink of the Gods (Kane, *History of Dharmassatra*). Here again it can be observed that, the culture of intoxication is ingrained into the people by the authority themselves with a certain motif to stabilize the caste system by entrapping the people within their respective castes into which they were happened to be born, denying all chances of social mobility. Alcohol in this case acts as a subtle executioner of the hidden motifs of the authority.

We can see yet another method of action the drug manifest in the lower class Epsilons in the text. The Epsilons who are produced in big batches as identical beings are intentionally made dwarf and stupid, by cutting the supply of oxygen from reaching the brain. "The lower the caste" says Mr. Foster, "the shorter the oxygen" (Huxley, 11).

"Soma" helped the government to bind the lower castes under their control. The drug made them insensitive about the injustice of their existence and the gulf they had between the Alphas and Betas. The State deliberately seized the reality from them and gave them tablets for ecstasy and thus made sure that they will never question the system and will never wish for a social upheaval.

The character John who is the savage in the World State poses severe criticism against the Epsilon's "soma" consumption as he is well aware of the fact that freedom is possible only through the abstinence from "soma".

"Don't you want to be free and men? Don't you even understand what manhood and freedom are?" Rage was making him fluent; the words came easily, in a rush. "Don't you?" he repeated, but got no answer to his question. "Very well then," he went on grimly. "I'll teach you; I'll make you be free whether you want to or not." And pushing open a window that looked on to the inner court of the Hospital, he began to throw the little pill-boxes of soma tablets in handfuls out into the area." (Huxley, 174)

The Khaki mob was petrified by John's action and was agitated forcing the police to supply the "soma" rations immediately to calm them down.

CONCLUSION

The novel *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley presents a new insight about the role of how Alcohol and other drugs operate in different levels of class hierarchy. It is noted that the drug mentioned in the novel, "soma" which is a hallucinogen distributed by the government of the imaginary world, called the World State helps to maintain the class order. The perfect maintenance of the Class order will prevent the chances of rebellion ensuring discipline. This will in turn help the government to establish 'happiness' among the people; the sort of 'happiness' as defined by the

government."Because our world is not the same as Othello's world. You can't make flivvers without steel-and you can't make tragedies without social instability. The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get". (Huxley, 201)

The Alphas and the Betas are made to serve the intellectual pursuits of the State, denying them of all possibilities of literary or artistic pursuits. For these upper castes, "soma" acts as a repressor of all their individualistic aptitudes and cravings and marks their boundaries. All the Alphas seem to be perfectly conditioned to like the system and their position in the hierarchy except the character Bernard who is an Alpha plus. He seems to be skeptical about the drug and abstains from it in the beginning of the novel but towards the end the circumstances demand him to take refuge in "soma" like the others.

While, the Khaki mob or the lower Epsilons who are made to do the odd tasks in the World State are deprived from undertaking any intellectual pursuits reserved for the higher castes. Neither, they enjoy the privileges of the Alphas. They are also provided with proper ration of "soma" to fight with inevitable frustration and to remain content in whichever condition they are. The dependency of the Epsilons is higher as seen towards the end of the

novel where their "soma" distribution is disturbed. The mob appears terrified and about to attack and is comforted when the supply is reassured.

The project has presented an insight into how the authority has implemented alcohol addiction in the population in order to establish the caste system and to affirm it in the psyche of the people. The novel taken to prove the hypothesis, *Brave New World* perfectly depict the Caste system in a Dystopia called the World State and has perfectly described the role played by intoxicants to cement the frustration of people belonging to different classes. The analysis helped in exploring the connection between the alcohol and drug culture in the society and the role played by the authority to inculcate the same.

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