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THIRST OF PROPENSITY TOWARDS PRIMITIVE IN ARUN JOSHI'S *THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS*

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Abstract

Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* deals with the crisis of self, alienation, problem of identity, adjustment and contrast between two opposite forces of civilization and primitive. Joshi has admirable dexterity about meaninglessness of civilized society and fulfillment in primitive world. Joshi has represented the self-centered psyche and inner predicament of modern civilized Indian society through his protagonist Bimal Biswas. Billy suffers his whole life in search of spiritual peace and divinity due to the predicament of his inner conflicts between East and West, Faith and Logic, Science and Nature, and, Civilized and Primitive life. Billy remains in search of his roots and real existence which transforms his inner self into a tribal. Billy has an inbuilt quest towards the primitive life to gain inner satisfaction through spiritual divinity and peace which makes him behave strange. In spite of being the product of civilized society, Billy remains isolated and restless in his own civilized world from where he escapes among the primitives in search of sacred holiness and conciliation. Billy has an inbuilt inner urge towards primitives since his childhood. Billy has a profound propensity for primitive tribesmen with a deep contempt for his civilized hollow society. Arun Joshi has portrait the true picture of spiritually and emotionally deceased civilized society with a solution of fulfillment in primitive world.

Keywords: Crisis of self, Restlessness, Suffering, Loose of faith, Inner conflict and Spiritual divinity.

Introduction

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a study of Billy's inborn and inbuilt propensity towards primitives in search of spiritual divinity and peace. The protagonist of the novel is fed up with the bourgeois money minded civilized society of Delhi. In search of spiritual divinity and peace, he escapes into the primitive world of the Saal forest of Satpure Hills in Madhya Pradesh where he finds his root and

real identity. Joshi has divided the novel into two parts. The first part of the novel contains six chapters which represent the phony society and the second part containing nine chapters explores the life of the tribal world.

Discussion

The protagonist of the novel, Billy Biswas is a Ph.D. in Anthropology and a professor in Delhi University who lives in Delhi with all kind of luxurious

materialistic comfort with an inbuilt inner urge for primitive life. He finds that civilized world has lost the humanity and spiritual values. They are based on logic and reason to fulfillment of their material and sensual pleasure. Billy remains restless and rootless in his civilized society which makes him escape to the primitive world.

"The Strange Case of Billy Biswas" as Professor O.P. Mathur and Professor G. Rai interpret, represents *"the universal myth of the primitive in the heart of man ever alienating him from the superficial and polished banalities of modern civilization."* (Kumar 108)

In the very beginning of the novel, Billy is living in Harlem, a worst slum area of New York. Billy's father sends him America to study in engineering but he completes his Ph.D. in Anthropology due to his deeper interest in tribal and natural landscapes. Though Billy comes *"from the upper-upper crust of Indian society,"* (Joshi 9), he chooses to live among the slums of Harlem. In the very beginning of the novel, Billy shows his keen interest towards the poor, uneducated, devoted, and faithful primitive people. Romi (Romesh) Sahai is the witness narrator of the novel who lives with Billy Biswas in Harlem and becomes his best friend.

Billy lives a princely life since his childhood with all materialistic comforts. Billy is brought up and educated in civilized world where he finds the people emotionally dead. Billy's family originally comes from Bengal. His grandfather was the Prime Minister of a famous princely State is Orissa. Billy's father was a lawyer who practiced law at Allahabad and Delhi. His father also was the Indian Ambassador to a European country and become the Judge of Supreme Court when Billy was in America.

Billy has all material comforts for him but he chooses to live among the slums of Harlem. Billy says Harlem, *"That was the most human place he could find."* (Joshi-9) Billy exhibits his inner urge of humanity which he finds nowhere in civilized society. Siddhartha Sharma rightly remarks; *"In reality, Billy- a misfit in white America and the Delhi society – fits into the world of tribals."* (Siddhartha 41)

The primitive world stands for the humanity, peace, faith and spiritual divinity. Billy says to Romi, *"All I want to do in life is to visit the places they describes, meet the people who live there, find out about the aboriginals of the world."* (Joshi 12) Billy has a deep interest in endemic aboriginals and natural landscape. In his phony society, Billy finds himself restless and rootless as there is no culture, custom, belief or faith. Billy has an unknown primitive force in his inner soul which his Swedish girlfriend Tuula Lindger identifies in him. Tuula explains Billy's inner urge to Romi, *"A great force, urkraft, a... a primitive force."* (Joshi 18) She warns Romi, *"It can explode any time."* (Joshi 18)

She comes to America for her advanced training in psychiatric social work and becomes a good friend of Billy Biswas. They both are interested in primitive world and fed up with sophisticated elite society. The modern civilized world gives him the feeling of artificiality and superficiality which Billy says, *"I know. What got me was the superficiality, the sense of value. I don't think all city societies are as shallow as ours."* (Joshi 128)

M. K. Bhatnagar rightly remarks, *"The novel is a powerful indictment of the modern civilization depicting Billy's fulfillment of his longing to locate his real-self in the primitive civilization and note in the matrix of the westernized culture."* (Bhatnagar 76) Tuula Lindger has a deep study of Billy psychological predicament of his inbuilt urge toward the primitives. She says, *"Billy feels something inside him"*. (Joshi 18)

Billy has for his credit good education, social status, a reputed family, respected job, wealth and above all a loving wife but he feels craving for peace and spiritual divinity in his inner soul. Billy doesn't find his root in civilized phony society where everyone is running blindly behind money and material pleasure. It is uprooted civilized society which makes Billy's propensity strong towards tribal life in search of peace and spiritual sanctity. Billy feels a strange call from the primitive world. Billy observes his inner thirst towards tribal. He says *"it was around his interest in the primitive man that his entire life had been organized."* (Joshi 12)

Billy has a deep urge to go to the primitive world. According to M.H. Abrams, "*A primitive is someone who prefers what is "natural" (in the sense of what exists prior to and independently of man's reasoning and contrivance) to what is "artificial" (in the sense of what man achieves by thought, laws and conventions, and the complex arguments of a civilized society.*" (Nawale 22)

Billy wants to explore his inner-self and his real identity. He gives up his luxurious civilized life to live among the tribal of Satpura Hills. Billy wants to see the diversity of India's different cultures. Billy reveals his inner fascinations about primitive landscapes which he wants "*Travel, travel, travel. A little bit here and there but mostly in Indian. You have no idea what fascinating society exists in Indian.*" (Joshi 12) Billy also reveals his primitive intuition to Tuula. He says to her that we all are aware only one side where we born but "*there is always the other side, the valley beyond the hills, the hills beyond the valley.*" (Joshi 15)

Billy feels his inner attraction towards the primitive life. He is married to a beautiful well educated Bengali girl Meena Chatterjee who remains unable to understand Billy's inner unstable mind. Meena represents the phony civilized world while Billy stands for the primitive force. They have opposite desires which make them queerly even on trivial matters. Their disputed relation turns Billy's interest in Rima Kaul. Billy seduces her fraudulently in order to fulfill his inner hollowness but he never finds peace and feels guilty inside.

Billy has a deep emotional attachment with tribal. Once, Billy goes on a picnic party organized by Meena's friend, there he starts fight with a boy passing comment, "*how all banjaras were thieves and their women no better than whores.*" (Joshi 45) It is his natural propensity towards tribal which makes him furiously angry. He could not tolerate their insult though he didn't have any blood relation with them. This is his deep emotional attachment with tribal which makes him take their favor.

The first part of the novel ends with the strange illusive disappearance of Billy Biswas from his civilized phony society to the primitive world of peace and natural landscape. The second part of the

novel opens after a long period of ten years when Billy reappears against Romi. Billy lives in the Saal forest of Satpura Hills. He keenly observes every object of nature and listen the voice of his inner soul which seems him as unknown call of primitive world. "*Come,*" it said. "*Come to our primitive world that will sooner or later overcome the works of man. Come. We have waited for you.*" (Joshi 88)

Billy too is waiting for all this happen to explore the core of primitive life. He explains his emotional attachment with primitive "*And I, too, was waiting. I was waiting to explore all this.*" (Joshi 88) The novelist explores the craving of his protagonist's soul in the emotionless shallow materialistic world. Billy realizes uprooted, empty, meaningless in urban Indian society where he remains restless in search of his root and real existence. Billy finds his roots in primitive society. Billy realizes among the tribal, "*Something has gone wrong with my life. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of.*" (Joshi 91)

Billy wants spiritual odyssey in his relations which he never finds with Meena, Rima or Tuula Lindger. The tribal woman Belasia gives him emotional fulfillment and becomes his Shakti. Billy reveals his inner urge of fulfillment when he waits for Bilasia. "*It was as though, during that half hour, it was not Bilasia I had been waiting for but my future, my past, indeed the very purpose of my life.*" (Joshi 83)

Billy finds his roots in his reunion with Bilasia. Bilasia represents the simplicity and friendly atmosphere of nature. Billy feels voluptuousness towards her perfect figure. He feels the touch of her full breasts. Billy explains his desire and inner feelings of satisfaction, "*Bilasisa, at that moment. Was the essence of that primitive force that had called me night after night, year after, Year.*" (Joshi 103)

In her company, Billy feels free from the deep mazes of sophisticated civilized society where people are emotionally dead. Billy escapes from the restless predicament of so called phony society which is near to its total destruction. The civilized society shows their degradation of religious and human values as they are running blindly behind

money and material comforts. Tribal have their religious belief which creates a difference between illusion and reality. Billy finds himself misfit in the illusive world of his civilized society from where he escapes in search of reality and root of his life.

Abdul Saleem, rightly remarks, "Billy responds to the call and becomes one of the primitive people to find not only his roots but also identity. Once he is in forest, he is obliged to take the inhabitants as one vast family, of which he is a potent member, God's vehicle. The civilized world calls him a rebel while tribal consider him as their friend as he cares Dhunia's niece Bilasia." (Saleem 75)

Billy hates the uprooted money minded phony society and finds Bilasia his soulmate. Money and material comforts are of no value to Bilasia. "She believed that to survive man need a minimum of goods." (Joshi 126) She believes a man should know the truth of his existence. Billy lives among the tribal and becomes Dhunia's mahaprasad which means best friend on the earth. Billy does many beneficial works for the tribal which they think miracle. Billy save the life of Dhunia's grandson and fleets the tiger away from the village. The tribal accepts Billy their caring king who makes Chandtola glow again. The tribal have blind faith in him which makes Billy divine in himself. It is among the primitives where Billy forgets his restlessness and finds his imaginary heaven. In the end of the novel, Billy realizes his real existence as a primitive.

Joshi explores the real instincts of his protagonist. In the end, he gives a way to come out from their alienation, disbelief, illusion and restlessness through sacrifice and spiritual faith. Joshi explores the deep of his protagonists' psyche from unconscious to conscious state of their mind. The crisis of Billy's inner soul make him realizes guilty on his decision to escape from the civilized world. Even he feels different kind of suffocation in primitive life but having no option to return back in civilized society, Billy decides to remain as a primitive forever.

Sartre is worth quoting, "..... We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up..... and defines himself afterwards." (Saleem 23)

Ultimately Billy meets to his tragic death in the end of the novel. His search for spiritual divinity and peace remains unrealized with his untimely death. Hari Mohan Prasad says, "Billy is like those saints of India who wants to realize unity with the divine through awakening of their senses," (Abraham 30)

Conclusion

In summing up my paper, the research scholar has found that the main protagonist of the novel has a thirst of propensity towards the tribal since his childhood which makes him escape from the civilized world to the tribal world of peace and divinity. He gives up all luxurious comforts of materialistic world in search of spiritual divinity and peace at some extent like Lord Buddha. In conclusion the scholar finds that Billy struggles to get peace and stability but lives a restless life till his death. At some extent, he finds his roots and real existence among tribal but he remains unable to gain complete spiritual divinity and peace. Joshi has given a satisfactory ending to "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas." The protagonist of the novel remains unable to make a balance between two conflicting world of his inner-self. He remains unable to adjust with his own sophisticated civilized society. If Billy becomes enough conscious to create a harmonious bridge between two conflicting world of his inner self, he might be enough able to save his life. Billy's too much propensity toward tribal becomes the real reason of his unnatural tragic death. In, The strange case of Billy Biswas, "Arun Joshi has carried his exploration of the consciousness of hapless rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery." (Bhatt & Alexander 32)

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