

REALISATION THROUGH SUFFERING IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF PATRICK WHITE: VOSS, THE EYE OF THE STORM AND RIDERS IN THE CHARIOT

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ABSTRACT

Patrick White, the grand old master of Australian literature, is a novelist, a short story writer and a playwright whose writing is endowed with comprehensively tackled big themes. He was a genuinely aristocratic writer who views all intellectual activity in Australia with a sardonic eye, and the inner hollowness of Australian life is felt intensely in his fiction.

According to Patrick White, the purpose of any work of art must not be simply pleasure giving, it must preach something to the individual. He himself defined the purpose of art as: "Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes the human being and makes him its instrument . . . It is something necessary for him to sacrifice happiness and everything that makes life worth living for the ordinary human being". His vision is closely akin to the deep-seated nature of the spiritual yearnings of human beings and the need for recognition of the psychic potential of the human spirit of which the conscious rational processes are only a fraction of the totality. He was particularly sensitive to the precarious nature of human identity and his work continues to challenge our perception of ourselves and our reality. An individual construct himself, his subjectivity, through the operation of language on memory and received ideas. When these received ideas are under challenge, personal identity necessarily remains fragile. White demonstrates this fragility through his exploration of the relationships of the fictional protagonist.

Everything he has produced bears the impression of an authentically creative imagination; and nowhere is this creative power more apparent than in his treatment of the Australian scene. He has achieved in his novels a vision of life which is both distinctively individual and generally relevant, a vision which illuminates in a fresh, sometimes strange, but always revealing manner the familiar universe, and which at the same time adds a quickening and transforming element to our experience of it.

This paper entitled "Realisation through suffering in the select novels of Patrick White: Voss, The Eye of the Storm and Riders in the Chariot" is a study of White's novels in which the protagonists achieve the vision of

realisation by undergoing suffering. The suffering they undergo enables them to realise their strong self and opens up new avenues of positive hope for humanity.

Keywords: Patrick White, Realisation through suffering

INTRODUCTION

Patrick White is the most prominent, literary guru of the Australian literary circle, and his arrival marked the most important stage in the growth and development of Australian literature. White himself had stated, "I always like to write three versions of a book. The first is agony and no one would understand it. With the second you get the shape, it's more or less all right . . . The third gives some enlightenment out of that suffering . . ." (Driesen 72). Patrick White depicts in his novels, man in his struggle to escape that emptiness which surrounds and envelops him. To him suffering, salvation and atonement are leading concerns and, he argues throughout his works that, "the purer the suffering, the greater the progress". The novels taken for study explore the sufferings of the central characters, not merely the sufferings but also the kind of vision or realisation achieved through that suffering. He further makes clear through the select novels that, pain leads to spiritual growth.

Suffering as a Gimmick of Realisation

Suffering is an experience that God is having in and through human beings. It is the result of the limited consciousness. When unlimited consciousness operates, one can see the result in the form of joy and delight. The human in the individual sees suffering as something horrible and undivine, but the divine in one sees it as God's experience in the process of cosmic evolution. The higher the experience, the clearer it becomes to the human mind, that all the incidents that have taken place on earth are the experiences of God in and through each human being.

Suffering is in the human mind and in the earth - consciousness. If the individual who goes beyond the earth - consciousness, offers him to the part and parcel of His cosmic Will on earth he becomes aware that there is no such thing as suffering. Then human sees only an experience, a divine cosmic experience which God himself is having in and through him. The human beings cherish suffering, unconsciously or consciously. As long as one cherishes suffering, suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character and character produces hope. If one undergoes suffering then his system will be purified.

Voss

The novel Voss is recognised as the crowning achievement of White in re-creating the land, the settlers and the aborigines, and in presenting a separate Australian identity. This novel can rightly be termed as a study of Man and depicts the alienation of the individual from society and the nature of 'reality' perceived behind appearance, in a much more complex way. It is a 'human epic' which portrays the power of Man in all his naked glory and, the study of a human being with a strong desire to be 'God' and lead 'ordinary' mortals to salvation, but in the process the human being is destroyed by Nature and other men. Here pride is humbled by external sufferings and realisation of the real spirit is obtained.

Voss mainly revolves around the protagonist Voss and, deals with the life of Australian aborigines and as well as their emerging life, society and culture, and strives to explore the vital wholeness that can be found in human relationship by undergoing suffering. It is White's most demanding and most impressive novel is about an exploration in general and as much an exploration in particular. It is the tragic story of a terrible journey and it clearly portrays throughout, the individual's struggle to find 'self', his search for a deeper understanding and a realisation of his potential. The hero of this novel remains exploring in an Australian environment, a mind, a way of thinking, which is foreign territory to most Australians.

The protagonist Voss, in his mad ambition to ascend to become God, is busy cutting himself off from all that is merely human, or rather, personal and that is his pride in imagining himself as God, he is blind to the reality. As the novel progresses, he was left in a desert for exploration of the land and there, the desert becomes the place of salvation. The desert defeats Voss's claim to be God and awakens in him a knowledge of the true God who is not merely a projection of Voss's image of himself but something totally another from the world, cruel to the extent that He is absent from the world, but kind enough that, He releases Voss at last from self - seeking.

The desert which Voss went in exile for exploration is the key to his success of achieving the vision of realisation of God. The journey is set as both physical and a spiritual one, not only an expedition into the interior of the continent, but a quest into the inner being of his own self. At first, he is shown as arrogant, complacent, and is determined to follow his own ideas. He concedes rarely to the opinion of his fellow expeditioners, and is always guided by his "pure - will". Voss along with his explorers cross draught plagued desert, and then water - logged lands until they retreat to a cave where they lie for weeks waiting for the rain to stop. As the expedition progresses, the travelling party splits in two and nearly all members eventually perish. In course of the journey his pride is humbled by being one with suffering in all directions and when caught by native aborigines he lends his hand in a friendly way, but mistook by one of the native settlers, is killed. Though Voss is killed, he attains the realisation of vision of God being human. Traditionally, desert is a place of suffering and hardship and in Voss it is a place where deep truths are revealed. For Voss, a journey through the landscape results in a journey to the core of his true inner self. For Voss, enlightenment comes only when his pride is humbled and suffering blunts the ego.

Whether one is illuminated or consumed is according to White determined not by God, but by the quality of one's own life and that is what White clearly recreates in Voss. After great anguish, Voss dies. But, his soul is reborn in others as he expands into a legend. Voss does not change in himself; rather, he changes his notions about himself, due to the sufferings he undergone and in the end successfully thrives in achieving his vision of realisation of God in the suffering of others.

The Eye of the Storm

The novel The Eye of the Storm presents the dialectical struggle between the two sides of the self, in the protagonist's life, which forms the fundamental rhythm of existence where, White had striven to promote the creation of what human wholeness is. This novel embodies the fundamental urges and passions like vanity, love, courage, filial ingratitude, justice and inequity, hatred and kindness shared by people of all cultures and times.

The Eye of the Storm deals with White's favorite theme of human relationship and gives a vivid picture of life within the family. Mrs. Elizabeth Hunter, the protagonist, dominates the novel. She is the centre and the spring of the novel and the novel opens by showing her as a bed-ridden and practically blind, dying in her magnificent house in Sydney. The novel progresses backward from there and her children Basil and Dorothy had no care or love for their mother. Instead, they were led by greed. Material gain is the essence and source that inspires their behavior. All the major human relationships in the novel appear to be governed by an obsession with material gains and sensual pleasures.

In the novel, Mrs. Hunter kills the very love and life of her husband Alfred and her children, Basil and Dorothy. Neither she was true to her husband, nor was she lovable to her children. Similarly, they too have no love for her. She is an utter failure in the way she brought up her children. When she was bed-ridden there was none to care her and even when her children visited her, she knows the purpose of their visit. She is the embodiment of both vice and virtue and she is both, a torturer and a healer. Mrs. Hunter is the victim of her own valuating ambitions and White uses the storm, as suffering, to form the integral part of the novel's strength and meaning, its design and vision. The "self" and "pride" of Mrs. Hunter is shunned away when she was allowed to face the terrible storm in the 'Warmings Island'. It is that physical/natural disaster which brings in her, the peace for her restless soul. By being hurled into the still centre of the storm that tore and hammered her, she realises universal parity of existence.

Suffering, either physically or mentally, helps her to surrender her ego and, she achieves the realisation of spiritual vision through the suffering that she had undergone. Her early defeat is transformed by a spiritual triumph, she became conscious of the changeless divine presence and her self is refreshed and redeemed by encountering the Other. That moment of oneness joins her to creation; in both thought and feeling, she identifies with the surrounding wreckage. Later, in her death bed she refers to that state of pure living bliss she was now and then allowed to enter. That consciousness relaxes her will and lets her blind woman's inner eye take charge. She could achieve that vision of the realisation of the Other not by intuition but by real suffering, which in the end helps to rest her soul in peace.

Surrendering ego, Mrs. Hunter has transcended judgment and division and has merged with the world spirit and achieved the exalted state. She no longer needs to impose herself. But by the silencing of the will, she strengthens and sharpens the will. As Voss realises his vision of reality through his sufferings in the desert, Mrs. Hunter achieves the realisation, through the suffering she had undergone in the storm.

Riders in the Chariot

Riders in the Chariot is White's most comprehensive achievement, which digs deep and gives the imagination a vision of transcendent love with, more impact on the inward eye. It symbolises an identity of humanity and divinity and all the four central characters can rightly be called as the sides of the soul of a giant Everyman, which is seen in this select novel as a divine quaternary.

The four main protagonists of this novel: Miss. Hare, Mrs. Godbold, Mordecai Himmelfarb and Alf Dubbo symbolises the soul of everyman and makes clear the idea that God driven

world without God is at its most desolate. It reveals the idea that suffering through religious experience is used as a tool, for man's struggle to transcend the dreary, everyday life.

Riders in the Chariot is the story of the lives of four loosely connected people whose common link is the mystic experience of the chariot and traces their lives towards the point where they realise they share the same vision. All the four main characters are outsiders with deeply different lives made more difficult because they are religious visionaries. All the four experience the same vision of four horses drawing a chariot into a shining future. By taking part in the sorrows and the sufferings of the others and by actively indulging themselves in helping others all the four characters achieve the vision of realisation.

CONCLUSION

If the individual is able to co-operate with the rebellious indwelling soul then he may attain real life. Transformation is achieved not by the soul alone, but by the soul in co-operation with the conscious mind of the individual and that is clearly represented in the select three novels. In weakness lies the strength. In suffering lies realisation. White makes clear through all these three novels that, pain leads to spiritual growth. These novels traces not only the obvious necessity of realisation achieved through suffering, but also points out equally discernible difficulties. In the select novels, there is a successful portrayal of the vision, which the protagonist yearned for, but, they can attain it only by using suffering as a means. "Suffering" in all his novels bring in the positive result of quenching the spiritual quest.

All the three select novels makes clear, that realisation through suffering is the only apt answer to the gimmicks life play on us. The protagonists of these novels, through their sufferings not only transcend themselves into the vision of realisation of their quest, but also, put self-transcendence within everybody's reach.

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