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Self Signifies the Coherent Whole- Jungian Interpretation of Patrick White's *The Tree of Man*

Dr Shuchi Agrawal

Associate Professor

Amity Institute of English Studies

and Research, Amity University,

Noida, India

Abstract

The 'Self' for Jung is not just 'me' but 'god'. It is the coherent whole which connects with the universe. It is the whole which connects both consciousness and unconsciousness. Self is a process of individuation where all aspects are brought together as one. Thus 're-birth' is returning to the Wholeness of birth before we split ourselves into many parts. The same principle can be traced in 'nirvana' and ecstatic harmony. It is also identical with the concept of 'Over-Soul' given by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Carl Jung discovered the concept of collective unconscious as the universal basis of the experience of our soul because every soul has an urge to live life creatively. He also brought the concept of the archetype into scientific discourse. The Tree in the novel is a symbol of inexhaustible growth of spirituality. The tree is connected to man's desire of oneness with nature which is undying, perennial, ceaseless and everlasting. Stan Parker has the longing for spirituality which is in constant clash of Amy Parker's longing for materialism. Rose-bushes of Amy Parker get overshadowed by the giantess and largeness of the tree.

Keywords- *Oneness, Self, Universe, Collective Unconscious*

“So he would write a poem of life, of all life,

Of what he did not know, but knew.” (*The Tree of Man*)

“Wholeness is not achieved by cutting off a portion of one's being, but by integration of the contraries.” (Carl Jung).

Introduction

Patrick White is the only novelist from Australia to have won the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973 for “an authentic voice that carries across the world”. He also bagged the gold medal of the Australian Literary Society in 1941. It was only in

the mid-fifties that his reputation became firmly established first in America and Britain, and then, more slowly, in Australia itself. Due to a vast panorama of life which is not at all regional rather universal, Patrick White's Novels are embedded with the issues of human isolation, alienation, predicament of 20th century modern man entrapped in tragic perversions of personality. The panorama of Australian Literature in general and Patrick White's writing in particular was recognized later not only in Australia but also in outside countries. With the prize money, he developed Patrick White Literary Award to promote Australian Literature. Though his later novels are written in the typical setting of Australia yet the impact of Joyce's stream of consciousness technique, Carl Jung's psychology and Greek mythology can easily be witnessed in his writings. The readers can visualize a tension between White's love-hate relationship with Australia through his works. It would be difficult to affirm his identity as a typical Australian writer as there is an ongoing oscillation between two worlds- European and Australian as a 'real' and 'symbolic' world.

His visionary mode of novel writing is best exemplified in *The Tree of Man*. In this novel, White has conferred a visionary quality on the lives and struggles of ordinary people who carve out a new colony to live in Australian wilderness. They face Nature's fury in its extremities-incessant rains, floods, droughts, fires-to be able to emerge out of them with a stronger will to survive and make out some meaning of their lives. In this novel, the writer depicts the human limitations and confusions about reality and idealism, materialism and spiritualism, reality and illusion, sanity and madness. *The Tree of Man* depicts the life of a farmer, Stan Parker whose mother wanted her to be the teacher and the preacher so that he could narrate the gospel truths to the public but because of his spiritual interest which could evolve only in the company of nature, he preferred to be a farmer. He with his wife, Amy Parker settles down at Durilgai, a place in New South Wales full of entangled bushes and wilderness. The couple start their livelihood without having any neighbour around them. They cleared the land and settled down. The husband planted the trees which were the epitome of his inexhaustible quest for growth though wife was planting the rose-bushes, replica of her own inner delicate passion and emotions.

The novel depicts the clash between wife's materialism and husband's spiritualism. It is a saga of not every individual caught in Australian wilderness but a cosmic tale of confusion, disorder and conflict which lead to human predicament. The novel is not a regional novel though embedded with so many Australian phrases, idioms and proverbs but having the approach of universal phenomena of human misery and predicament.

Stan Parker, the protagonist in the novel communicates with nature more than his family consisting of his wife, Amy Parker and children, Ray and Thelma. If his wife is all for materialism, an aspirant for all materialistic pursuits, contrarily, Stan is all for spiritual bliss which he explores in

Nature. He is a character of meta-communication, discovers his 'self' in Nature. According to Carl Jung's concept of 'collective unconscious' it influences and surrounds the unconscious of a human mind not as a personal unconscious as depicted by Freudian psychoanalysis but this collective unconscious impacts and affects many individuals to find and create meaning in their lives. However many critics find the concept of 'collective unconscious' as unscientific as it has its basis on myth and archetypal symbols.

Carl Jung discovered the concept of collective unconscious as the universal basis of the experience of our soul because every soul has an urge to live life creatively. He also brought the concept of the archetype into scientific discourse. The Tree in the novel is a symbol of inexhaustible growth of spirituality. The tree is connected to man's desire of oneness with nature which is undying, perennial, ceaseless and everlasting. Stan Parker has the longing for spirituality which is in constant clash of Amy Parker's longing for materialism. Rose-bushes of Amy Parker get overshadowed by the giantess and largeness of the tree.

Jung says:

But the very fact this process is unconscious gives us the reason why man has thought of everything the psyche in his attempts to explain myths. He simply didn't know that the psyche contains all the images that have ever given rise to myths, and our unconscious is an acting and suffering subject with an inner drama which primitive man rediscovers, by means of analogy, in the processes of nature both great and small. (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 9)

Stan in the novel has melancholic longing for permanence while Amy wants motion in life. While moving in the cart, he does not waste his time in looking at the beautiful wife bloomed with soft and delicate emotions. He paid all his attention to the gust of the wind and the nature. This uncared and unacknowledged experience led Amy to hate the wind: "She had begun to hate the wind, and the distance, and the road, because her importance tended to dwindle." (The Tree of Man 27)

This cold behaviour of her husband makes her restless and hungry of Stan's love. The husband goes to the war and wife commits adultery with a salesman, Leo. Still they are together when he comes back. They grow old and nourish their children, Ray and Thelma who bring nothing but disappointment to the couple.

The novel celebrates cultural primitiveness. It recreates the past when civilization is at the upsurge at Durilgai. On finding from his mother that they have a land as property, Stan Parker starts travelling to this unknown and alien place to discover his innate love for nature. "The man was a young man. Life had not yet operated on his face. He was good to look at....all around, the bush was disappearing." (TTM 10)

The novel depicts the journey of a man from material anguish to spiritual pursuits. When initially, we meet Stan, he seems to be a man having interest in materialism, having love for his wife whom he meets in a ball and decides to marry her. If Amy had greed for bread, he had greed for this lady. “She was imprinted on him.” (TTM 32) Just after their marriage, the couple discovers each other in bodies. “The woman Amy Fibbens was absorbed in the man Stan Parker, whom she had married. And the man, the man consumed the woman. That was the difference. (TTM 33)

Other people also came to live in those parts. Parkers get a good company of O’Dowds, Quigleys still Amy Parker felt a sense of alienation. She wanted to fill the emptiness of her life with children but could not conceive in the initial years of her marriage. There was a complete void, a vacuum in her life which she reflects through meta communication:

I am ignorant of almost everything, I am ignorant of the sensations in my body, and of the meaning of almost everything; I cannot really believe in God. Then she recoiled also at the thought of the man with whom she lived in a house, whose strength was no substitute for her ignorance and weakness, and whose passion was disastrous. (TTM 57)

She also feels the patriarchal attitude of her husband who wants a male child. Even the sex of the unborn child had been decided by someone else. She felt herself powerless. After having each sexual relationship with her husband, Amy Parker tries to recover her identity as White comments:

But the woman got up. She was recovering her identity. The woman, Amy Parker, went and leaned against the window frame, which received the shape of her body. All shapes, sounds, seemed to fit together in the quiet night...(TTM 113)

When the children started growing gradually, bonding between parents was also growing. Now from being a couple, their attention was more focused on parenting. They started dreaming about the future of Ray as Amy says in a dream voice:

I would like Ray to be something in the government, or a famous surgeon, or something like that in dark clothes. And we would read about him in the newspaper. (TTM 126)

But the over-obsessed parenting was creating a gulf between Stan and Amy. Amy was getting greedy for love. She found her life devoid of love. When her husband at this time was enjoying his intimacy with nature beyond the family obligations, Amy was looking forward to receive the love of Stan but “He retreated from her once again.” (127). Her personal misery also possessed her. Her sadness was for herself. She got enchanted by the world of Madeline riding on a horse, enjoying her freedom.

Mr and Mrs Parker feel a vacuum in their relationship. Stan sees the natural world as a revelation of divinity. He finds more affinity with nature than with living individuals around him. He feels a special bond with nature. His vision does not include any deity or supernatural person but the omnipresent divinity in all things. He wants to have a growth in his self by the development of his soul. His transformation can be attained only when he belongs to coming to his own self leaving all the collective norms.

Carl Jung developed the concept of individuation. The process of individuation implies that the development of soul belongs to coming-to-one's self. This process requires diverging from collective norms and supporting the development of full potential of the personality. In Jungian theory, the self represents one of the multitude archetypes. Self signifies the coherent whole which unifies both the conscious and unconscious mind of a person. According to him, the Self is realized as the product of individuation which is defined as the process of integrating one's personality.

Stan has chosen settling on the soil, after his nostalgia of permanence and the field of motion between the swelling of trying his hand at this and that but he had not continued to do it for long as he knew that it was not intended until he approached the land, his and longing for permanence, nevertheless, finds a place to rest upon. From that time on, Stan's life is attached to the place, which he has cleared and also he has created thus by the intervention of the man, the land becomes a place; the place supports the family; the family encourages a community. Neighbours spring up after them but still the place remains a natural landscape. But the land Stan cleared is finally engulfed by the expansion of the city: it becomes the suburb of Sydney out of the need of industrialization.

Water and fire offers us a chance to peep into man's nature. Two forms of water-the storm and the flood mean differently to Stan and other Durilgai people. Stan opens his soul during the storms whereas the flood provides a wide arena for his neighbours to play on with their inner nature exposed more or less. The same thing goes with the fire scenes. Stan remains his taciturnity and almost nonexistent to others but to rescue Madeline, he opens up his soul which is full of sparkles of thoughts. Stan enjoys an ecstatic communion with the Earth Mother, even though he is virtually obliterated in the course of his worship. Whenever the Mother appears to him it is always in tyrannical outbursts of flood, fire or storm. The element landscape has a disruptive influence on his life, yet its anarchic power fulfils a dark need, a longing to be overwhelmed by an archetypal force. By nature, Stan is incapable and unwilling to communicate with others. He is not even open to his wife and children. We can clearly see his embarrassment when he goes to Sydney to talk about Ray's guilt with Thelma. He is short of sentences. He feels awkward and uneasy among people in the society especially when the moment comes of being asked to share his thoughts by talking and communicating with others. There are two reasons for Stan's inarticulateness- one may be his

incapability- what he thinks or feels is so abstract that it is beyond his ability to express. His conscience is either too subconscious to be felt or something that can only be subtly sensed, but cannot be put into words. In this sense, even then if he does speak out what he is thinking or feeling, we are certain that due to the different levels of understanding ability between him and the people whom he is conversing with, his language hardly strikes a sympathetic chord among his neighbours and his family. The other reason may be his unwillingness which is not valid as his soul is intact to others, even to his wife, Amy. He is not a neurotic like other characters in White's works. He is nevertheless a person living on the fringe of society. His aloneness in soul arises equitably from his incompatibility with the society.

Stan identifies himself with the permanence whereas Amy identifies herself with materialism. This ongoing tension and conflict in their pursuits also give a shaping force to the development of the action of the novel. In his old age, he realizes one fine day:

I should tell her something of this perhaps, he said, but how to mention and what to mention, so he could not. He realized that it was some time since they had spoken together. Except to ask for things and recount incidents, they had not really entered into each other. (296)

Stan's frustration in the society is compensated by his closeness to Nature. Nature to Stan is not just a way to release his frustration or his repression in the society, but a symbol of mystery and poetry though his affinity with nature cannot compensate his coldness as per his wife but his closeness to nature is a necessity when Patrick White builds this character. White's conception of character does not rest on the assumption that identity is manufactured in a mechanical society rather he has thrown his character into the natural elements to see what remains after all the socially given components- love, marriage, children, etc have been peeled down- the pure essence or pure absence. Stan tends to seek a core of selfhood, a resort to the natural elements. His life does not rest upon the external possession as in the case of Amy we see.

Stan's psychic essence reflects in wilderness. He chooses the wilderness to be the ideal place to settle both his body and soul that is unsettled elsewhere, a sign that he belongs to Nature. This integration with nature is not shown in the earlier period of the settlement rather the contrast of his unease in human society and relaxation in Nature is revealed in his return trip from Sydney. After the war, a kind of remoteness develops between Stan and others. He grows more solitary and separate from people. His neighbours find him queer and tend to avoid him. He feels uneasy with his sullen young son, Ray, a whining lumpish boy indulging a vein of cruelty or his self-obsessed daughter, Thelma; he eludes the possessiveness of his wife. But he is perfectly attuned to and delighted in the natural world.

He would sit with his hands on the still wheel, till their dried-up skin has disintegrated in the light of the sand and grey leaf, so that his body was no longer surprised at the mystery of stillness, of which he was a part (145)

Nature enables Stan to release what represses him and realize partially or momentarily his purification and his vision. Three scenes-two storms and a fire help us better understand this point. The first storm happens not long after Stan settles his home with his wife. At this juncture of time, he is in a state of immaturity, not quite sure about his life. The storm opens Stan's yet hesitating heart, which, he would rather not confess to his wife. But from the second storm, we can find a Stan with much more confidence and comprehension in life. At this time, he had stood the test of flood and been a father of two but his personal life is empty when he and Amy are so estranged from one another. But these storms help with their mysterious powers to disclose and open up Stan's soul. He fulfils the virtues of humility, gratefulness which White regards helpful to man's achievement towards a higher order of existence. Another scene through which Stan visualises and reaches the depth of his mind is the fire. He worships the fire precisely because it promises to rend up the socially constructed part of him. In his middle-aged life, Stan's social role is not a successful one for both himself and his wife as both of them are retreating to their enigmatic selves. Amy's nudge sends Stan into his visionary world: the mysterious poetry represented by fire and the burning house which opens itself to him with the implied promise that it contains possibilities, sensual and otherwise, which he has been unable to realize in his life so far with Amy. Thus sloughing off his socially constructed everyday persona, he steps into a "houseful of poetry".

Fire burns down the house owned by the upper class in the mundane world and the ruined house is full of richness to Stan, because Stan's own ordinariness in the reality is destroyed by the fire. Inside the house, objects have become part of the symbolic landscape, and Stan must struggle to separate the actual from the poetic nature of his mission. His problem is to advance not only temporally and physically into the house but also into his 'Self'; into the interior space. The fire has burnt the solid Victorian furniture; it has shovelled up the 'prettiness' of the upper bourgeois life, it has exposed the secrets of the rich. All objects are now without reflections- they do not give back to the viewer evidence of his place in the world. Madeline, the girl, he is rescuing is the embodiment of his poetry, says that the ordinary world in fire is "puffed up". Madeline becomes the poetic vision of Stan whose poetic reverberation were still locked with himself receive an openness by the mouth of this lady who is trapped into house on fire.

In addition, for a moment in the midst of the fire, the immense distance between classes and all the earthly existence is negated. They are allowed to meet not as a socialite and a farmer, not even as human beings, but as the poetic symbols. The fleshly beauty of Madeline is discarded while her

inner beauty is appreciated by Stan himself. Stan also emerges from fire if not purified into a final shape, at least refined. But this is not just the objective of Patrick White to depict Stan and Madeline from two antagonistic classes struggling towards a legendary world of purified wholeness in such a sterile social order. Both of them return and restore to their former and familiar lives. After experiencing this “extraordinariness”, they are simply dumped back into their ordinary roles.

Stan returns to his prosaic world wherein he is irrevocably married not to “richness” but to “reality”. Yet the symbolism in the fire scene points not to Madeline but to Stan. The objectives in the burning house are charged with emotion and significance which have their origins in Stan’s consciousness and the sense of spirituality contained in the fire has resided in his mind. Thus in literary terms an Australian common man has broken the web and the prison house of realism which is obviously the purpose of Patrick White to write *The Tree of Man*.

For a long span of time, Stan feels something puzzling and missing in life partly due to the failures and frustrations in reality like his arid relationship with Amy and the large gap between him and his children, but more in relation to spiritual belief than this. His quest of revelation seems suspended but questions of life, death and spiritual retelling are always latent in his heart. As he moves towards his death, we find him at the centre of a series of circles of trees, cabbages, with the sun. He is surrounded by natural objects rejecting the evangelist’s concept of a deity that can offer salvation, but points to his gob of spittle as his concept of God. Through him “it was clear that One and no other figure, is the answer to all sums.” (477) It is obvious that Stan eventually finds his “god within”, which is the unity of all things- the intangible reality represented by the “One”. But outwardly it can be anything you believe, even the gob of spittle, a fallen leaf: “I believe in this leaf, he laughed, stabbing at it with his stick.” (476) The death of the “One” is a kind of beginning of a new life...a new beginning.. the young grandson of Stan will share the same belief of his grandfather now which will go on and on. He will now write the poem of life which would emerge over the poem of death. “He could not believe in death. Or only in passing through a dark hall, in which it is an old overcoat that puts its empty arms around him. Then death is faintly credible because it is still smelling of life.” (480)

And this poem will not belong to an individual rather it will be a poem of life, all life. Thus in the end of the novel, there is no end. The boy is walking through them with his head drooping as he increased in his stature. Thus the end is the beginning.

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