



The Psychoanalytic study of traumatic psyches of Tomas of “*The Unbearable lightness of being*” and Blanche Du Bois of “*A Streetcar named Desire*”

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Abstract— T. S. Eliot in his most acclaimed work ‘*The Hollow Men*’ very rightly mentioned that “This is the way the world ends, Not with the bang but with the whimper”, the slow and gradual crumbling of the universe is what the characters covered within the ambit of this paper experiences. The two characters i.e. Tomas from Milan Kundera’s chef d’ oeuvre, ‘*The Unbearable lightness of being*’ and Blanche Du Bois from Tennessee Williams masterpiece ‘*A streetcar named Desire*’ have one thing in common that both of them were challenging the existing normative behavioral pattern and was trying to make things seem content in the disillusioned universe. Both Tomas and Blanche can be seen as portraying the image of the disillusioned modern men/women lost in the realm of something in between the unstable private or personal and the hostile Public realms. Amidst the upheavals and turmoil Kundera’s protagonist was searching for the meaning of the ‘self’ and on the other side Blanche was assertive towards her feminine sensibility. This research work will attempt a psychoanalytic study of the progression of the characters and will attempt an analysis that how their assertive ‘self’ suffered a tragic end. This paper will further discuss the ‘Oedipus’ like fate of Tomas arising due to his ill judgments and the development of Masculinity complex in Blanche Du Bois while highlighting the interplay of Animus leading to her tragic fate.



Keywords— Self, Oedipus, Animus, public v/s private, Trauma, modern men/women, existence

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the multiple discourses within the literary arena ‘self’ has occupied a major center position. The conceiving up of notion of ‘self’ determines the course of action that particular being will take and this is what Milan Kundera through his characters in ‘*The Unbearable being of Lightness*’ and Tennessee Williams in his characterization of Blanche Du Bois is trying to represent. The plight of modern men is significantly evident in characterization of Tomas and Blanche where both of them has taken the path of fragmentation, a path which is invigorating, liberating indicative of escape from the oppressive clutch of the conventional fixed system of beliefs. The two characters i.e. Tomas from Milan Kundera’s chef d’ oeuvre ‘*The Unbearable being of*

lightness’ and Blanche Du Bois from Tennessee Williams masterpiece ‘*A streetcar named Desire*’ have one thing in common that both of them were challenging the existing normative behavioral pattern and was trying to make things seem content in the disillusioned universe.

Milan Kundera’s magnum opus “*The Unbearable lightness of being*” can be seen as the author’s quest to explore the nature of complex dichotomous relationships that shapes human existence. It traces the underlying internal conflicts caused due to the constant anxiety of making things seem content in the disillusioned universe. Milan Kundera has created a set of characters portraying the image of the disillusioned modern men lost in the realm of something in between the unstable private or personal and the hostile Public realms. Kundera in his

masterpiece "The Unbearable lightness of being" highlights the existential crisis of the characters due to the lack of balanced personal life and the contemporary political scenario, where the totalitarian conformist communist regime was at peak. The grand narrative of Kundera's masterpiece is both discursive and philosophical; one can witness a tonal shift in the tones of character or the underlying thematic tone shift of the novel from the light "Diderotan" tone of the exploration of ethical dilemma of defining something as right or wrong to the more submissive and devoted "Tolstoyan" tone serving dual purpose of expressing resentment against the authority and the presentation of moral or philosophical beliefs. Kundera through the metaphorical depiction of Sophocles' Oedipus is highlighting the plight of characters amidst unstable dynamic scenario.

On the other hand earlier decades of twentieth century is often known for its development of new consciousness and progressiveness. The progressive era witnessed the rise of progressive consciousness amongst the feminine sensibility or the rise of the image of new women. The new women were no more docile, fragile, demure rather she was the transformation of the stereotypical image of femininity of the late Victorian era. According to the noted critic Sarah Jane Deutsche the women of the new era is often represented as "women with short hair and short skirts ... kicking up their legs and kicking off a century of social restrictions." The women of 1920s were the prototype of "flappers" flouting the conventional normative order of behaviorism. Tennessee Williams through his chef d' oeuvre "A Streetcar named Desire" is representing the image of new women via the character of Blanche Du Bois. This paper will highlight that how within the ambit of conventional patriarchal society Blanche Du Bois was representing the image of neo-feminine sensibility and how her asserting femininity as well as sexuality doesn't seem to work well with the authoritarian regime of the patriarchal masculine social order hence developing the traumatic psyche. This paper will discuss the development of Masculinity complex in Blanche Du Bois and the interplay of Animus leading to her tragic fate.

This research work will attempt a psychoanalytic study of the progression of the characters and will attempt an analysis that how their assertive 'self' suffered a tragic end. This paper will further discuss the 'Oedipus' like fate of Tomas arising due to his ill judgments and the development of Masculinity complex in Blanche Du Bois while highlighting the interplay of Animus leading to her tragic fate. Further it will through the study of 'self' will argue that how it has abandoned the search for 'reality' and 'center' and had opted for the path of fragmentation

i.e. invigorating, liberating indicative of escape from the oppressive clutch of the conventional fixed system of beliefs.

The 'spectres' of Oedipus: The journey of self-deception to self-realization

Milan Kundera through inter-textual theatrical representation of Sophocles' 'Oedipus' is trying to showcase the tragic events that unfolds in the novel. The very first intertextual reference of 'Oedipus' was when Tomas compared Tereza with "child put in a pitch- daubed bulrush basket and sent downstream"(Kundera 10), later Tomas argued that "How many ancient myths begin with the rescue of an abandoned child! If Polybus hadn't taken in the young Oedipus, Sophocles wouldn't have written his most beautiful tragedy!"(Kundera 10), readers can get the allusion from above excerpt about the tragedy that is going to unfold in the life of Tomas. Tereza's entry into Tomas's life created a very ambiguous situation, his life was oscillating between the two extremes of "lightness" and "heaviness", her love has created a very threatening situation for Tomas. Tomas by accepting Tereza's love got trapped into the realm of heaviness caused due to the conformist relationship based on fidelity. The heaviness of the trap frustrated Tomas, and he wrote his famous Oedipus article against the totalitarian communist regime in which he wrote that "Oedipus did not know he was sleeping with his own mother, yet when he realized what had happened, he did not feel innocent....he put out his eyes and wandered blind away from Thebes" (Kundera 171), later Tomas condemned the communist regime for their shouting in their defense of inner purity. Tomas commented on the Czech communist regime that there is lack of sensitivity, self-realization and introspection amongst the authorities and argued that authoritarians should learn from Oedipus, acknowledge their guilt and try to resolve things. This article led to the major turn of events in due course of development of novel, Tomas became the victim of constant surveillance. Hanah Pichova, one of the noted critic claimed that the Oedipus article is the major tragic flaw in Tomas's judgment as its ramifications can be seen in course of events that happened after the publication of article i.e. interrogation of Tomas by police, Tereza's fall due to seduction and Tomas's awkward meeting with his son Simon. Sophocles' Oedipus is the metaphorical theatrical prop that helped in staging Tomas's interrogation by secret police and his entrapping in the traps laid by the verbal interrogation. Secondly, it functioned as the stage prop in the pre-mediated seduction of Tereza and Tereza also went with that engineer to take sexual revenge from Tomas but the presence of Sophocles' Oedipus continuously reminded Tereza of Tomas hence creating a very

confusing situation for her, Hanah Pichova puts this as a conflict between "hazardous terrain" and "intimate world of Tomas's thought". The third and final interplay of Oedipal prop was when Tomas met his son Simon, Simon himself can be seen as alluding to the figure of Oedipus as he was also abandoned by his father as his father thought that he is the bridge that links him to his mundane past. Tomas was earlier said to retract the Oedipus article now Simon is compelling him to sign in favor of article, Simon's praise for Oedipus article is definitely a result of misreading of Oedipus metaphor. Kundera believe that Oedipus is a dangerous metaphor causing downfall of Tomas, but for Simon it has the power to assassinate and interrogate the hegemonic authorities.

The tonal shift in the narrative from Diderotan to Tolstoyan narration establishes the parallel between Kundera's magnum opus "The Unbearable lightness of being" and Sophocles' 'Oedipus'. Kundera's protagonist Tomas has the same fate as that of Sophocles' Oedipus, Oedipus established himself as the king of Thebes after defeating Sphinx and in the same manner the earlier image of Tomas was like a king or God or some authority. Like God he has the power to slit open human body; he commands both his patients and his mistresses and everyone submits to his authority. Tomas often commands his mistresses as well as his wife to "strip" and both obey him without questioning. Oedipus had the error of judgment while reading the oracular prophecy and misinterpretation led to his fall, Tomas's tragic flaw was his writing of the Oedipal article questioning the totalitarian communist regime, and Tereza's insecurity acted as the precursor to the tragic development. Tomas's writing of article without thinking of the political ramifications trapped him, and ultimately he lost his job as surgeon thus losing the God like position and submitted himself fully to Tereza. He broke all his liaisons with the past and completely devoted himself to Tereza. This was his moment of self-realization; he tied himself to the "heaviness" from which he eventually gets liberated after his death.

The co-mingling of Neo-femininity with "Masculinity complex": The transition from assertive neo-feminine 'self' to deceptive masculine 'self':

The noted psychoanalyst Clara Thompson in her seminal work "Cultural Pressures in the Psychology of Women" argued that the behavioral pattern or the personality of any women is primarily observed to be developed by the socio-cultural factors that are mainly formed by the authoritarian members of patriarchal society. Clara further argued that though the new women got some say in the socio-economic setup via the medium of education, jobs etc.

"this is essentially a patriarchal culture and although many values are changing and these changes in the whole are working to the advantage of women, the patriarchal situation still presents limitations to a woman's free development of her interests. Also, the newer situations have their hazards in that they usually throw women into unequal competition with men. By unequal, the reference is not to biologic inequality, but an inequality resulting from prejudice and the greater advantages offered the male" (Thompson, 233). This sort of situation leads to the development of the masculinity complex within the psyches of women and they start aspiring for the exclusive rights that the men enjoy. Blanche Du Bois has seemed to develop this masculinity complex, being from the American South she had the chance to get proper education and since her childhood her privileged social, economic status inculcated the notion of freedom and intellectuality. Her intellectual responsiveness as the out-product of her up-bringing made her freedom seeker that eventually developed into the complex leading to the search of complete freedom in social, economic and sexual realm thus leading to the collision with the masculine patriarchal society. Also, Blanche's character can be seen embodying the character of Animus, the animus is the unconscious masculine element in the feminine sensibility. The behavioral pattern of Blanche depicts that she desires love and pity, a sort of care and projection which she believes she will get from her sister's household. Blanche also embodies that universal characterization of women being dependent on men, who is also aware of her dwindling physical appeal, scared of her longing extinction. She developed the habit of drinking in order to make her world lusterless, desires and attempts to forget her meaningless and lonely existence and when she encounters the real world, "she retreats into the all-out fantasy of madness" (Donhue, 1964:83). The Animus is one of the ambiguous figures of the psyche; the animus plays both positive as well as negative role in women's life. According to Carl Jung the animus within the feminine psyche can only be discerned through the presence of a partner of the opposite sex. The unconscious suppressed and repressed desires of Blanche overpowered her and she started relying on strangers for the gratification of those needs. The presence of the desiring femininity also leads to the development of masculinity complex. The traumatic psyche of Blanche gets developed due to her unconscious projection of her animus onto strange men. As a consequence of this projection she remained under the control of her animus further destroying her life. She lost the balance between conscious and sub-conscious thus failing to distinguish between the world of men and the animus image that she has developed. She developed the

unstable personality. Tennessee Williams very intelligently characterized Blanche Du Bois character as the victim of fate as it can be said that it was her "fate to fail to recognize the need to come to terms with her animus until it is too late"(Mojgan,151). Jungian psychoanalysis believes that the "the unpleasant power complex of the female animus is encountered only when a woman does not allow her feeling to express itself naturally" (Walker, 54).

Tennessee Williams framed the story to depict the uniqueness in the behavioral pattern of his protagonist Blanche as in New Orleans, Blanche confronted one of the most terrible situation; "Her expression is one of shocked disbelief. Her appearance is incongruous to this setting" (Williams, 15). The other women character in the play like Stella seems conforming to the patriarchal order but Blanche was ahead of her time, she was the embodiment of new women in the old order thus she does not conform to the demands of the patriarchal social order. Her inherent ego or "masculinity complex" often seems to prevent her from accepting the various grounds of discriminations between men and women. Blanche does not consider Stanley someone above human or like king rather she calls "something- sub-human- something not quite to the stage of humanity, yet!"(Williams,72). Blanche considers Stanley epitomizing the manhood or masculine sensibility of traditional old social order lacking the potentiality for accepting the feminine sensibility and strength of new women. At Stella's house, the co-mingling of neo-feminine sensibility and masculinity complex became evident as she asserts her femininity as well anticipates similar kind of liberty and freedom that Stanley enjoys. She consumes alcoholic drinks, wants to assert her dominance over the people around her, similarly she has expressed the desire to play poker like Stanley and his friends. As mentioned earlier Stella without any resistance conforms to the patriarchal social norms hence Blanche was shocked by her sister's attitude towards her bleak. Blanche believed that the Stella's condition is even worse than her, "only she is not being sensible about it. She wants to find a way for both herself and Stella out of this situation. She tells Stella; "I'm going to do something. Get hold of myself and make myself a new life!" (Williams, 73). Stanley was the representation of the rigid masculine patriarchal orders hence Stella became the means to assert his masculinity whereas "Blanche is a threat in the way of asserting his masculinity" (Vaughn, 61).

CONCLUSION

Milan Kundera employed the metaphoric image of Sophocles' Oedipus as a trope to highlight the intricacies

of human existence amidst the personal conflicts as well as the conflict in public life due to the rising conformism. It acted as the prop to depict the journey from self-deception to self-realization. Whereas Blanche Du Bois was definitely the woman ahead of the time, her behavioral pattern, her assertion of feminine sensibility echoes the neo-feminine sensibility. Together-with that her zeal to transcend the gender normative boundary depicts Williams's craftsmanship in creating the character that represents the transformed image of womanhood. But the climactic scene of the play depicts the anxiety of male chauvinistic repressive social order, who in order to assert their hegemony employed rape as tool to emasculate the masculinity complex of the desiring femininity. Later Blanche's madness seems to be echoing the voice of madwomen in the attic whose sensibility and identity is being suppressed, repressed and oppressed by the fearing male sensibility. Thus it became evident from the above analysis that how they have abandoned the search for 'reality' and 'center' and had opted for the path of fragmentation i.e. invigorating, liberating indicative of escape from the oppressive clutch of the conventional fixed system of beliefs. But the most unfortunate thing that one can witness from the above discussion is that both of their aspirations has been castrated by the socio-political discourses thus forming an 'uncanny', disillusioned tragic self.

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