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Exploring Psychic Dimensions in *Dimension*

Human psychology, in varying proportions, has always been an inherent part of literature across the world. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that psychoanalysis has been widely used in the study of literature throughout the ages. It is the high compatibility and the ability that it provides to understand the text with more clarity brings it together with literature. It is pertinent to note that literature depicts the human psyche and its conflicts whereas psychoanalysis examines it. It can be said that the analysis of literature from a psychoanalytical perspective broadens one's understanding about the complexities of the human mind. Keeping in view all such points and the limitation imposed by the diminutive framework of short stories Horneyan theory aptly assists in understanding the characters in this genre in a better way.

This paper attempts to understand psychologically complex characters presented in the story *Dimension* written by Alice Munro. Third wave psychoanalytical theory given by Karen Horney, has been used as a tool for the required purpose.

Keywords-Psychoanalysis, Karen Horney, Alice Munro.

Exploration of the inordinately complex human psyche has been attempted by various psychologists consequently providing ample opportunities for study. Psychoanalysis, one of the most influential theories of the 20th century, was fully developed by Sigmund Freud. He introduced into the area of irrationality the rational method of scientific inquiry and proved beyond doubt that being scientific is not identical with choosing a rational phenomenon but depends upon the method applied in the study of empirical phenomena irrespective of their being rational or irrational (Wolman 199).

Based on its development it is divided into three parts, namely, First Wave, Second Wave and Third Wave. The first wave starts with Freudian school, which is also known as classical psychoanalysis. It lays greater emphasis on childhood experiences and the unconscious mind. The two driving forces namely, Eros and Thanatos are considered the chief forces behind all the actions of man in this theory.

After Freud, his legacy was carried forward by his disciples in their own way. Karen Horney, one of the brilliant students in his school, tried to revise Freud's phallogocentric view following the classical framework. Later, due to various theoretical contradictions she was compelled to drift apart, which brought a new phase in the history of psychoanalysis. A sociologically oriented psychoanalysis developed in America and was termed as Third Force Psychology.

In her theory, society and the ambience play a crucial role in the development of a person. This quality makes her theories aptly fit with numerous literary works from a wide range of periods and cultures illuminating a wide variety of literary issues (Paris 3). Contrary to Freudian theory, characters are not analyzed by their biological characteristics, but rather by their sociological situation.

The cornerstone of all her theory is that a 'Man is ruled not by the pleasure principle alone but by two guiding principles: Safety and Satisfaction' (New Ways 50). According to Horney, these two are the most important factors in one's life than the pleasure principle propounded by Freud. She explained Freudian theory in a new light that everyone has fundamental needs like food, rest and sex. All these three not just one drive must be satisfied for a sound persona. They all have their own importance in one's life and cannot be put aside under one heading. (Freud regarded sex as the only thing under the heading of pleasure principle). She also claimed that though food and sex are primary needs yet they can be renounced if in any state of danger.

In the study of literature Horneyan theory provides ample justification, especially for the short narratives that give less clues of the past life of the character. B.J.Paris has also suggested Horneyan theory or Third force theory as a powerful tool for critical, biographical and cultural analysis of characters in his book *Imagined Human Being*. It also motivated the present study.

The Canadian short story writer and the Nobel laureate Alice Munro has drawn her characters very much near to life. Their joys, sorrows, fears, inhibitions and anxieties all have been painted through perfect shades by the writer. The present story by Munro has a female

character in the lead role. Dimension is a story of a middle aged woman named Doree. This story emphasizes on how her past resulted in her altered present. To fulfill the task the author has employed flashback technique throughout the story.

Doree, the protagonist, saw numerous ups and downs in her initial stage. She was just 16 years old when her mother suffered from “an embolism”. She was rushed to the hospital for treatment. It was at this location that brought a sudden twist to her life. She met Lloyd and their relationship grew day by day. His belonging to the same community also added to their liking.

After a long illness Doree’s mother succumbed to the disease leaving her all alone in the world. The roughness of her relatives and the tough circumstances left her with no option. She hastily decided to go to Lloyd’s place, as he was the only hope left for her. It was not just for shelter, but the attraction towards him that compelled her to do so. Lloyd had an impressive personality, he was, “Stocky and broad shouldered and authoritative enough” (TMH 02). She was shy, submissive, and timid, diametrically opposite to Lloyd. Her decision to shift to his place seemed appropriate in every sense as he promised her safety and satisfaction. They got married without any delay. She got a family and that brought her solace and satisfaction.

As the time went by, their relationship grew cold. He started treating her like a slave and detested the society they lived in. They shifted to some far off place. Their family increased with the coming of three children, namely Sasha, Barbara Ann and Dimitri. Familial responsibility led to the development of neuroticism in Lloyd’s character. Doree tried her level best to cope with such a tough situation. She never retaliated towards him similar to any other

female characters of Munro. She never disclosed about his neurotic behavior in front of anyone, not even in front of her best friend, Maggie. But Lloyd's condition worsened and anxiety about the well being of the children made him mad. He never believed anyone. His mind was always occupied with the false conception that Doree was not treating his children in an appropriate manner. His condition grew worse each day. Consequently, one day in such a fit he killed all three of them.

Dimitri still in his crib, lying sideways. Barbara Ann on the floor beside her bed, as if she'd got out or been pulled out. Shasha by the kitchen door- he had tried to get away. He was the only one with the bruises on his throat. The pillows had done for others (TMH 15).

Such a horrifying scene made Doree insane. She lost everything. He killed them all in the fit of his anger and blamed Doree for the act. Doree was instantly admitted to the asylum. She was given shots and medication. Although she got back to her senses yet was always in need of her counselor Mrs.Sands to guide her in tough situations.

It was the recommendation of Mrs. Sands that she should keep her mind occupied, leaving no space for a bout of depression. Therefore, she got the job of chambermaid in order to stabilize her mind. She worked hard yet was totally shattered and self alienated among all. Horney's theory provides the key to understanding how the narrator's self withers and how her contact with the outside world recedes, leaving the core of her integrity impaired (Gupta 32). The cleaning job that she opted for symbolized her urge to cleanse her mind. It was a method to deal with her memories of the past.

She scrubbed bathrooms and stripped and made beds and vacuumed rugs and wiped mirrors. She liked the work—it occupied her thoughts to a certain extent and tired her out so that she could sleep at night. (TMH 01)

Doree's frail physicality always provoked her colleagues and they always insisted her to take any other job that suits her age. She never paid heed to their comments as she was always lost in her inner world and had no time left to think about other's perspectives. She was totally detached and lonely in the gathering, as if she had nothing to talk about her life. In such a condition her profession gave her mental refuge. A relief from psychic turbulence as it made her engaged and no time was left for the past.

She did everything to stay away from the world created by Lloyd but as the story unfolds, it shows that Lloyd still held command over her psychologically. He is in a mental asylum and regularly writes letters to her. It acts like a trap from which she cannot exit. Also something coerced her to visit him regularly. She worked hard to understand the illegible letters written by Lloyd. They were written in a highly complicated handwriting and language revealing complexity of his mind and persona.

There was everlasting storm, and I would knock my head against cement in the hope of getting rid of it. Stopping my agony and my life. So punishments were meted. I got hosed down and tied up and drugs introduced in my bloodstream. I am not complaining either, because I had to learn there is no profit in that. Nor is it different from the so-called real world, in which people drink and carry on and commit crimes to eliminate their thoughts which are painful (TMH 23).

Am I a monster? The world says so and if it is said so then I agree. But then I say, the world does not have any real meaning for me. I am myself and have no chance to be any other self. I could say that I was crazy then but what does that mean? Crazy. Sane. I am I (TMH 23).

Doree was unable to break the shackles that were placed by Lloyd. She finds it difficult to disconnect from her past. She dreamt of her family when they were all together. Her psychologist also insisted that she should stay away from his letter as they were infectious and were causing psychic disturbance to her.

At last, an incident changed her entire life. It thus happened that while she was on the way to meet Lloyd her bus met with an accident. A young boy who was unconscious was lying on the side of the road. As the bus slowed down, she abruptly jumped out without any call from someone and started giving him aid.

Doree crouched down beside him. She laid a hand on his chest. It was still. She bent her ear close...her fingers on his smooth neck found a pulse. She pinches the nostrils, takes a deep breath, seals his mouth with her lips and breathes (TMH 30).

This last scene acts like a catalyst for transforming her character. As if by performing that life saving act she finally got back her own life. She felt her breath and that made her realize that she too was a living being. But this self actualization journey took half of her life. She saved the life of the boy by breathing into his mouth and removing the blockage that had suffocated her. This could be understood better if contrasted with the earlier scene where after seeing her children, she was literally choked and was unable to breath.

For some time Doree kept stifling directly whatever she could grab into her mouth.

After the dirt and grass, it was sheets or towels or her own clothing. As if she was trying to stifle the scene in her head (TMH 16).

The death of all her children shattered her entire existence. She too died on that very day. Children were her last hope that gave her solace that too was taken away by the cruel act of Lloyd, the same man whom she gave such an important place in her life after her mother's death. The last act liberated her burdened soul that was till now in utter confusion, captured in the illusionary world created by Lloyd. She decides to move on in her life and find her true identity. The final conversation between the driver and Doree where he asks her to get back to the bus in order to reach London (the place where Lloyd was admitted for mental recovery) and she refuses very well indicates her new physical and mental journey.

He had to bend to hear her. She spoke dismissively, without raising her head, as if she was the one whose breath was precious.

“You sure?” he said.

Sure.

“You don't have to get to London?”

No (TMH 31).

She got back not just the breath, but also her voice. She felt liberated and free to make decisions for her own life.

According to Karen Horney, the environment creates a deep impact in one's mind. Under the light of this theory, it was the ambience that made Doree what she was. A healthy human development is a process of self-realization and unhealthy is self-alienation. Therefore, if a

man's basic needs are fulfilled he will turn into a healthy being with the clarity and depth of his own feelings, thoughts, wishes, interests; the ability to tap his own resources, the strength of his will power; the special capacities or gifts he may have; the faculty to express himself, and to relate himself to others with his spontaneous feelings. All this will in time enable him to find his set of values and his aims in life (NHG 17).

Horney called Fear and Anxiety as the root cause of unhealthy development. The methods to cope with such interpersonal conflicts are moving away, moving against and moving towards the people. These are the defense mechanisms applied by the people to handle fear and anxiety in different states. A healthy person adopts these strategies in a balanced manner. He moves in all the given directions according to the need of the situation. This can only be possible when a person's basic needs are well met as it is the only foundation of healthy development. An unhealthy person sticks to one of them in all situations. His ultimate aim is to get away from the anxious feeling, the 'basic anxiety' (NHG 18).

Doree is a perfect example of the self-realization journey that Horney talks about. In her initial stage she moved towards the people by showing complaint tendencies. At that time she needed to be liked, wanted, desired, loved, to feel accepted, welcomed, approved of, appreciated; to be needed, to be of importance to others, especially to one particular person; to be helped, protected, taken care of, guided (ONC 51).

She moved away, when she lost everything and was kept in an asylum. She moved away when came out of the asylum. All free from desires and passions, and had a stoic indifference

to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (NHG 277). The last incident given in the story altered her entire life. It now appeared that she was able to see a ray of hope in her darkened life. It was a step taken towards self-actualization.

One can see all three stages in her life that ultimately lead her towards self-realization. Apart from that the end signals her as an emergent independent self. At last she was able to achieve her moment of inspiration that helped her to establish a new identity. Munro has shown Doree as a self alienated character who at the end of the story shows signs of self assertion leading her to land in perhaps the best chapter of her life.

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