



Think India (Quarterly Journal)

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ONE DAY NATIONAL SEMINAR

ON

DISABILITY, REPRESENTATION AND LITERATURE

held on 03 October 2019 and Organised by P.G. & Research Department
of English

S. T. HINDU COLLEGE, NAGERCOIL-2, Tamilnadu, India



Multiculturalism In Philip Roth's Fictions

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Abstract:

The Jewish-American literature speaks of the dreams and aspirations of the immigrant Jewish people, passionately seeking a homeland of their own. It draws heavily from the immigrant experience and memories. It gives an account of the struggle between fathers and sons and their ideologies due to the modern revolution and describes the lives of the people caught up between past and present, religion and freedom, and about seeking transcendence through humanism and not by God. The present paper tries to analyse the multiculturalism in Philip Roth's fictions.

Keywords:

Jewish literature, Jewish American literature, Philip Roth, Yiddish, Jewishness.

Significantly, from the 1960s, Jewish American Literature has taken a new direction owing to the multicultural pressures. Multiculturalism is one important factor. It created a multicultural perception in life, which ultimately was reflected in Literature in the 70s. The writers who emerged on the scene during this epoch witnessed a mass cultural change. This was one change, which not only influenced life and Literature but also contested the cultural patterns. The challenges that issued forth owing to the encounter of a new cultural factor called hybridity brought in a new kind of dispute in the literary arena. In the end, certain fundamental cultural practices were questioned. This led to a culture conflict. The decades that followed the 70s summarily condensed the precepts of life into an anarchic whole.



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The Jewish-American literature speaks of the dreams and aspirations of the immigrant Jewish people, passionately seeking a homeland of their own. It draws heavily from the immigrant experience and memories. It gives an account of the struggle between fathers and sons and their ideologies due to the modern revolution and describes the lives of the people caught up between past and present, religion and freedom, and about seeking transcendence through humanism and not by God. It speaks about the individual in the face of duality, history, suffering and ultimately transcendence. Further, it deals with the individual suffering and the dualities which include acceptance and rejection of God. It corresponds to Romantic literature as opposed to Classical, and it is spontaneous, self-assertive, egotistical, and undisciplined. It has chronicled and paralleled the Jewish American experience. It depicts the struggles of immigrant life, the stable yet alienated middle-class existence that followed, and finally the unique challenges of cultural acceptance: assimilation and the reawakening of tradition. Jewish American Literature has emerged as enunciating new patterns of existence.

Roth and his contemporaries, particularly his Jewish companions, sought to now attack the core of Jewishness as they understood it. This Jewishness, in the hands of these writers, consists of being raving hysterics, nagging Jewish mothers, and female shrews of every variety. Thus, the popular Jewish writers in the tradition of Roth were accused of being Jewish anti-Semitic, producers of filth and self-hatred and conveyors of the same calumnies which the Jews of the old world endured for so long. Roth is the great chronicler of the second-generation American Jewry. His characters, by and large, are the children of those Jews who worked their tails off to enter the middle class and do not intend on letting their children forget it. Roth writes about the Jews who are financially comfortable yet culturally adrift. Because of their comfort, they can afford to be critical of both their Jewish and American worlds. So instead of feeling more at home in America, they feel even more alienated.

Specifically the novels selected for study help one to identify the modern politics which betrays the human anarchy. To Roth the issue of humanism should not stay isolated but ideologically and contextually found to the text. This is his concern. Roth has intruded upon the



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pages of the novel bringing into context those events of history which not only has impaired the Jewish history but also has terribly scandalized the Jewish consciousness. The Jew is fixed on the cross externally cursed to carry the cross into the annals of Jewish history. For Roth, his fictions are an illustration of a new perceptual thinking which negotiates with the materialist contemporariness. Also the fictions demonstrate configurations of the oppressive doctrines thrust upon by the transnational superstructure. His fictions again plow through the sticky culturality trying to clinch a new dialectic. And that dialectic is humanist enlightenment and even human freedom from the nightmarish faces.

The Jewish community is constituted by the unimpassioned Jewishness. Jews in the community has been pressurized by the non Jewish ethnic society. It becomes very much imperative that a Jew has to place themselves in the position of a foreigner and not as an American. For instance, in *Nemesis*, when Bucky Cantor along with the boys are playing the Jewish community in Newark, a group of Italian boys come and spit saliva at them and tell the Jewish boys that that place was not for Jew children. Hence the Jewish characters in the novels of Philip Roth have to adapt to a few potential strategies in order to forge for themselves an identity.

Marital incompatibility comes as one dominant cultural sign which persists the essential principle of subjugation in Jews. Roth's novel generates landscape culturality as they have been fixed in America's Jewish settings. He stresses the fact that Jews ought not to allow themselves to be exploited by patriarchal structures. On the other hand, Roth highlights the destructive effects of patriarchal cultural on human beings. Through his novels Roth brings out the pathetic condition of the Jews and especially the protagonists. The protagonists of Roth are found to be very weak in their character and they always have a fighting spirit. One would rather tell that Roth's characters are pessimistic than optimistic. They come across various problems which are either created by themselves or by the society or even by the members of their own family.

Dialectic materialism has been personified through the character Hitler and Charles D. Lindbergh. Both of them happen to be the representatives of the cultural anarchy of the Europe and the USA as well. To Roth, the United States of America spectacle is the historic continuation



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of the German spectacle. The holocaust which is purely physical has been reborn in the United States as an ideology called cultural materialism. The holocaust is physical and the cultural materialism is self-violative. It has only created an organized slavery of self as evidenced in the killing of Jews by Hitler. To Roth, the United States of America is a structural continual of Germany which constantly indulges itself in not replacing the Jew but misplacing him.

The protagonists of Roth are sensitive and hyper emotional in character. Philip Roth has unanimously attempted to define the role of the Jew as an inactive, dependent and weak character. The foregoing analysis establishes how Philip Roth, in his novels have rewritten the tradition of the Jewish American society from a Jew point of view thereby questioning patriarchal power structures that has subsume the identity of a Jew. Roth in his writings advocates absolute equality for both Jews and non Jews in America. Focusing on the Jewish American themes, Roth attempts to shift them from object position or margins to the subject position or centre and in this way restore the displaced power of the powerless or muted half of humanity. Roth in his novels stresses mainly on the sufferings of his protagonists. His protagonists are not strong as they are physically or psychologically weak and search for their own identities which they are not able to find till the novels end. Roth's characters are divided into separate personae. They are defined by the role that a phallogocratic society has imposed upon them. And on the other hand, the real self of the characters attempting to liberate itself out of this imposed role and achieve absolute autonomy.

Roth fiction is reactive against the emerging multiculturalilty of the present scenarios. At the same time it also attempts to eliminate the Hegelian perception of the German ideology. One fascinating factor of Roth's fiction is his significant creation of a sarcastic historicist literature which attempts to replace the primary assumptions of humanism. Again his fiction attempts to deconstruct culture through the creation of human relationship, space and time. In one sense, his fiction is a determining force to negotiate the depressing without to human activity. Further Roth's fiction is a play on the solitary experience of the artist with history. His fiction refashions events into components of literary grace. It operates as figure of a free single text which also



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betrays his self. The misplacement ideology creates the fragmentation of self consequently forging a vacuum.

Work Cited

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