



Research Paper

The Rigmaroles of Life and Death: A Study on the Politics of Death in Select Literary works.

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ABSTRACT: *The paper attempts to study the role of death in determining ones existence. The existence of man is on the belief that he centres the universe and the enter universe conspires to make his life easy. He limits his life to his self and forgets the role of death-the universal leveller. Much study has gone into understanding the concept of death which still remains a mystery. The paper draws its strength from the writing of Jacque Derrida, Michel Foucault, Achille Mbembe and Gayathri Spivak. Death is an act performed by an individual in the times of his insecurity either as a protest against the norms or voluntary as a resistance to life. The question of whether a man has the right to tale one's life and for that matter other debatable. The paper extends its study on the role of nation or state in matters dealing with capital punishments and suicides.*

Keywords: *Biopolitics, Necropolitics, Resistance, Punishment*

I. INTRODUCTON

'Then as she had already died four or five times, the apartment has remarked available for a drama more serious than her own death'-Jean Genet

Death is a universal leveller, a beautiful and inevitable reality of one's existence. Yet people fear death and they try to run away from death. The joy of living reaches its culmination when one embraces death and gel with the soil. Biologically death suggests the end of all biological functions that sustain life in an organism. Death remains a mystery to the world as there is no evidence or firsthand experience shared by people who have died. People who once lives this world never comes back to tell their tale. Literature and to a great extend Philosophy has exploited the inscrutable nature of death to extend their study on man. Human being so vulnerable to their ephemeral nature is awestruck while dealing with phenomenon beyond their comprehension. The insecurities of man, his yearning for life, passion for the self and the loved ones engulfs him and the strings attached with the world leaves him shattered and broken at the thought of death. Fear, pain, agony, and madness, all the finer emotions interplay on the occasion of death.

Death though a quintessential rebus of one's life, the behaviour associated with expressing grief is culturally bound. Every culture has its own methods and styles in agreeing with death. There are cross cultural variation in the customs and rituals practiced. Some celebrate death whereas some mourns it, for some it is an occasion of communal gathering the list goes on and on.

'Dying is an art like anything else; /And I do it exceptionally well.' Writers like Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf's palette romanticise death to an extend that Death is personified as the handsome Knight who comes on the horse back to sweep you of your feet. Discourses on death have been proliferating in literature from time immemorial. In literature death exists at many levels-narrations, imagery, metaphor and character traits. Aristotle in his Poetics limn about the thought wherein he says that people are fascinated with scenes of death and in fiction they are content to see things they would prefer to avoid in their own lives. Death is a beginning and an end, an entry and an exit; and exit from one form life and an entry into another; either metaphysical (afterlife, or as if world) or cultural (memory).

Jacque Derrida in his work The Death Penalty maintains that death penalty is actually an end but this end is decided by others. 'The death penalty as the sovereign decision of a power, reminds us perhaps, before anything else, a sovereign decision is always other's.'(Derrida,24) Man has invented end number of war machine to take the life of another, in the form of noose, guns, missiles, medical, surgical, anasthetical techniques for administering the capital punishment. He further says: 'By definition, in essence, by vocation, there will never have been any invisibility for legal putting to death'(25) Derrida contents that the sovereignty of life over death is supreme that even many nation states have abolished death penalty. Ironically when one the one hand nation states abolish death penalty on the other they retaining their right on the life of the individual whom they can choose for war to kill or either to be killed. He furthers his argument by maintaining that to kill

is considered as the most effective and decent form of punishment and a mode of victory over the life of others, as in wars though there are punishments more human than death penalty.

Foucault is of the opinion that 'For a long time, one of the characteristic privilege of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death' (Foucault, 135). Michel Foucault in his polemic work *The History of Sexuality –Right of Death and Power over Life* uses the term Biopower- a literal power over other bodies. He describes biopower as an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of population. State takes control over life of its population in many ways. It's a nation's duty to take care of the rights and life of people.

According to Foucault :

'Wars are no longer waged on behalf of a sovereign who must be defended, they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire population are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. It is as managers of life and survival , of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed'(137)

He opines that the state is indebted to ensure, sustain and multiply life than jeopardise it. Meanwhile he states that power execution is a limit, scandal and a contradiction. It's from Foucault's Biopolitics that Achille Mbembe develops his concept of Necropolitics-the politics of death. He says that the sovereign right to kill is not subject to any rule. Mbembe finds a close connection with terror and death. On talking about the logic behind wars he says while killing every other enemy the survivor feels more secure. As Gilroy maintains In certain circumstances death is a rescuer from servitude, a mediator for redemption. Referring to the practice of suicide Gilroy comments that death becomes an agency, a space where freedom and negation operate. Spivak differs in her opinion with the earlier mentioned critics as she believes that death is a form of resistance. It is a form of protest and resistance against the existing norms of the society or the superior power over the life of the marginalised.

Death comes as a solace to Joseph K, in Kafka's *The Trial*, negating his life without any hope. While trying to find meaning to his life Joseph K encounters meaningless death. He faces a crisis in his life when he is charged with a mysterious case which he is made accountable for. Realising it to be a divine challenge, K pursues it with utmost sincerity. Running from one door to the other Joseph K intends to find justification for his unknown guilt and bad conscience. For Joseph K being shot dead is a divine intervention freeing him from the plight of his life. From a Foucauldian perspective, Joseph K was under a strict surveillance of the state. The state had its control on Joseph K life, from the point the charges were pressed against him. Initially imposed from the outside whose sources remain elusive to further investigation, biopower becomes encoded in the modern social practice and human behaviour as well. Finally the human being ends up acquiescing to the subtle regulations and expectation of the social order.

Nineteenth century Literature celebrated the idea of suicide as an aesthetic event. Much drama is associated with the act of dying, self immolation, drinking arsenic, jumping in front of a train, all these remain the modus operandi for the act. The act is often committed by females who have lost their way trying to atone to the sin committed. Be it Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina both takes their life as an act of redemption. In her essay *Death of a discipline* she delineates the idea central to the act of suicide. She says because of certain symbolic and imagined qualities, resentment or internalised hatred is central to the ascendance of a slave's morality. It is through this concept of resentment or resentment the oppressed stage an imaginary revolt against their oppressor by labelling their values of strength and power as evil. Neither Emma nor Anna embrace death as they believe they have sinned but it is their heroic resistance to their position in the society, their voluntary deaths focus more on social and masculine victimisation Tolstoy remain the culprit when he creates a character like Anna full of passion and let that passion destroy her. For her being branded as an adultress triggers the passion for suicide. The idea of martyrdom would have muddled up her mind. Achille Mbembe uses the term being the subject in his *on Necropolitics*. Mbembe presents a reading of politics of death. Starting from Hegel account of death, 'the human being truly becomes a subject-that is, separated from the animal-in the struggle and the work through which he or she confronts death. He states that Politics is therefore death that lives a human life. For the oppressed, death is release from or resistance against terror and bondage.

In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the reader's position is stigmatised by the death of Jose Arcadio. Death is a lonely and isolated condition in the novel. The silence of Rebecca mystifies the death of Jose Arcadio while Amaranta's death is romanticized. Death comes as visitor to Amaranta telling her that she should outlive Rebacca. He suggests that she should make a shroud for her own funeral. The book quotes:

‘At times it pained her to have let that outpouring of misery follow its course, and at times it made her so angry that she would prick needles, but what pained her most and enraged her most and made her most bitter was the fragrant and wormy guava grove that was dragging her towards death.’ (One Hundred Years of Solitude, 126)

Portrayals of death can be heart wrenching, uplifting, sad and inspiring at the same time. Like life, death is also a unique experience for each person. When death is the end of life for the person who dies, for people around them, it is a looking back to their own life. Death is nothing but an uninvited entity, and the sight of death can be cathartic. As life reaches its denouement, death enters as a villain playing its role. Death as a punishment for sins committed voluntarily or forced on has a centuries old tradition. The ubiquitous role of death as a state apparatus over people is generally accepted likewise the power of the strong over the weak pushing them to the verge of suicides is delineated in this study. ‘Every man’s life ends the same way. It is only the details of how he lived and how he died that distinguish man from another’ - Ernest Hemingway.

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