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Genealogy of a psyche: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Kikuji Mitani in *Thousand Cranes*

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Abstract:

The hierarchy of Nobel Prize winners was cherished with the presence of a fervent writer in 1968, from the country popularly known as “The Land of Rising Sun.” The world witnessed the divulge of Yasunari Kawabata in that year as the first author to receive Nobel Prize for literature from Japan. In *Thousand Cranes*; Kikuji Mitani, the protagonist voices the deteriorating existence of modern man. Thus the unravelling of the study opens up the vistas to delve deep into the hitherto unexplored arenas of Japanese literature. A psychoanalytic appraisal of Kikuji Mitani is manifested in terms of delineation of the features that are typical to him. The paper explores to deliver the epitomisation of the undeniable and static elements through the events of one’s past. It also puts in question the confrontation of one’s experience before the eternal themes of life, death and psyche that play a judicious amalgam in everyone’s life.

Keywords: Tradition, Psychoanalysis, Kikuji Mitani, Life, Death, Psyche.

Freudian construal of Kikuji Mitani

The opulent tradition of Japanese Tea ceremony marks the commencement of the novel *Thousand Cranes*. The transformation of central character from infancy to the perplexed zone of adulthood is unknown but the wide dome of his mental inconspicuousness is open for various interpretations. The lady named Chikako Kurimoto was the mistress of Kikuji’s dead father who has organised this traditional tea ceremony. The very invitation that he received from Chikako Kurimoto for the ritual dragged him to his boyhood days. His encounter with Kurimoto and the ugly birthmark on her breast jogged to his memory. There instigates the psychological domain of the construction between stark reality and vivid fragments of his memory. A feeling of indignation was spawned in his adulthood as a result

from the bad effects that he acknowledged from the past. The repressed inquisitiveness about the physical and mental life of Kurimoto during his father's time now flashed in Kikuji's mind. The morbid fantasies withdrew him from participating in the tea ceremony but the accident meeting with the enchanting girl at the place altered his perception. The reason for the subdued emotions sprang out of the unpleasant feeling that he possessed towards the ugly birthmark and also to the extra-marital relationship of his father to Kurimoto. The girl carried a handkerchief "bundle wrapped in a kerchief, the thousand -crane pattern in white on a pink crepe background."(*Thousand Cranes*, 5) that signified the Japanese tradition which heaved the attention of Kikuji. His outlook on the tradition was a dilemma between approbation and repudiation. The voyage to the place of ceremony affirms his unconscious state of mind which re-evaluates the suppressed emotions of childhood, even though the novelist explained it as passionless. It is said- "Kikuji never forgot the mark. He could sometimes imagine even that his own destinies were enmeshed in it."(3) The internal struggles of Kikuji's mind have not witnessed its abrupt end with the blooming chapter of the novel rather it has paved the way open to more bizarre aspects of his life.

The arrival of unexpected guests modified and unveiled the curbed emotions in Kikuji to be manufactured to other forms. The introduction of his father's old mistress Mrs.Ota and her daughter during this event flagged his present life. In *Interpretation of Dreams* , Sigmund Freud elaborates, "we learn from the analysis that the very wish which has given rise to the dream, and whose fulfilment the dreams proves to be, has originated in childhood... ." (169) Here Freud attempts to connect the dreams with the innocent impulses of childhood. By applying this to the analysis of Kikuji's childhood, his emotions could be studied properly and another important psychological theory that needs to be evaluated along with this includes 'Oedipus Complex'(emphasis added). The mentality of Kikuji knowingly or unknowingly got delivered through this complex. Mrs. Ota for Kikuji never fulfils the criteria of own mother according to the set standards of Oedipal complex. The manifestation of intimate relationship between them cannot be demoralised in the title of incest as she is not the biological mother of Kikuji. The complex describes the jealousy that a son formulates for his own father for the possession of his mother. Kikuji's parents have already died and this deposits no moral barrier for him. His conversation to Mrs. Ota during their close moments incurs how he juxtaposes himself to his father that symbolises the oedipal mindset. He asked her- "Can't you see the difference between my father and me?"(41) His prying words transcend the ordinariness as it pointed to this -"You think of my father, don't you, and my

father and I become one person?”(41) Mrs Ota exhibits a parallel mindset to Kikuji where her exuberance collaborates with her sympathetic mildness to the act she commits. The mind of Kikuji appears clearer than Mrs. Ota who acts regardless of her own daughter, Fumiko. Her deed of demarcating the father and son in one describes her yearning for love irrespective of person. The relationship between them took an intimate turn as the consequence of two complimentary factors- the nostalgic life of Mrs. Ota and Kikuji’s recollection of his past memories. The unavailability of proper evidence detains the chance of Kikuji committing murder of his own father on the basis of Oedipal mentality.

Kikuji Mitani: The Scrutiny of Life, Death and Psyche

In the poem “Ode to the West Wind”, the great Romantic poet P. B. Shelley quotes, “If winter comes, can spring be far behind.”(52) Here the poet elucidates about the two great truths through the symbol of two seasons spring and winter – “Life and Death.” As it explains both are definitely two inevitable facets of this world; they become undeniable parts in discussion of a character along with psyche.

William Shakespeare once quoted, “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more... .”(Macbeth ,Act 5 scene5, 1024-25) Like these words imply, Kawabata in this novel demonstrates how life of the protagonist experiences a transition from an ordinary one to that which ended up in futility. The life of Kikuji can be described as “a wayfare to the embellished splinters of his life.”(emphasis added) The boyhood days unwrapped many vistas of life where he got accustomed to several mistresses of his father. Each stone and pebble he crossed during that time has generated mutilations in the further thoughts and mind of young Kikuji. The chiselled mind formed out of various imprints is so enigmatic that it is beyond our predictions. The novelist covers the memories of his boyhood days through his words and never familiarises the child as it is. Readers are rather more acquainted with the youthful Kikuji who is seen from the beginning of novel. His life took wide turns and twists with the return of each person that he once passed in childhood. Chikako Kurimoto was the one who stood constantly with him and many a times crossed her limits by utilising the freedom provided to her. All endeavours of his life initiated to vary with the arrival of Mrs. Ota to his life. The intimate relationship pestered many events that made him find his own father in himself. He rather moved forward emotionally in relationship without traces of guilt in him. Even the death of Mrs. Ota doesn’t end anything in his life. He was a man always ready to

depart with what is left in him. His natural advancements to Mrs. Ota's daughter, Fumiko would never surprise the reader much because it was an obvious factor expected at the present scenario of the novel. Her first bump into Kikuji was ensued at the traditional Tea ceremony along with her mother Mrs. Ota. Even when the discourse between Mrs. Ota and Kikuji was happening, it was possible to detect the indirect presence and mention of Fumiko in it. This could be reflected as a premonition about her from the side of Kawabata, to the future accounts of Kikuji's life. The subsequent meetings and desperate conversations between Fumiko and Kikuji after Mrs. Ota's death brought more grounds in their relation. The life of Kikuji reached a different phase with the entry of Fumiko. Life constitutes many elements that afford the idea of living and Kawabata here defends the aspect called "tradition" in this novel. Kikuji realises the prominence of tradition only after the entry of Fumiko. Few utensils were handed over to Fumiko by Mrs. Ota who in turn received from her husband Mr. Ota, which recapped in Kikuji the necessity to accept the tradition. In life, tradition has much significance which was demolished in the quandary between tradition and modernity among the youth. Kawabata has best conveyed in his way to uplift one's tradition as the duty of each generation. Fumiko and Kikuji's relation were in its gradual upsurge when it again faced a twist. The girl's self-realisation turned as a mile stone in the life of Kikuji- she left abruptly from his life. At this point, the real struggle of his life started. Both the novel and life of Kikuji was left at the alienated margins of abruptness. Tracing of his life clogged to that futile point; where the life of Kikuji avows isolation but Kawabata leaving behind several other "Road not Taken"(emphasis added) to be deduced upon by readers. The play of fate and graph of rise and fall builds the established system called "Life" for mankind in this world. What Kawabata lures in this novel through life of Kikuji is the exemplification of "Modern Man's" life (emphasis added). Kikuji render that aspects of modern man whose life is not a settled one. Moreover, they never aspire for a hopeful life with complete meaning and no amount of absurdity in them. Similar conditions are epitomized in Kikuji where his life was neither settled at the beginning nor at the end of the novel. No amount of hope is built or destroyed in the entire storyline which elevates the clarity of above statement. The culminating scene in the novel also reveals the same absurdity with an improper explanation to the absence of character- Fumiko.

Life & Death are the two flanks of the coin where life sprouts and death withers at certain points and the traces they leave are obligatory to be pondered upon. In Kikuji's life also death has much relevance. Death made its principal entry into his life through the death

of his parents significantly his father's. In the childhood, Kikuji witnessed his father's relation with many mistresses other than his mother's. This has created many thoughts in his young mind about these women which later took a distinct phase after the death of his father. This is manifested with the arrival of Mrs.Ota to whom he developed an Oedipal Complex. The one factor that exhilarated it was the death of his father where the father didn't pose a threat as a villain to Kikuji. Moreover, the early death of his father has led to a major lacking in communication. The father-son relationships are manufactured upon trust and mutual communication. This lacking feature has much influence in Kikuji who denied accepting the tradition which was actually the responsibility of the father to convey these. Here the initial death of father has submerged all such needed knowledge to lack in Kikuji. It is important to note that even the story has begun from the point where Chikako Kurimoto has invited Kikuji to attend the tea ceremony in memory of his dead father. The linear narrative of the plot unties through two pertinent deaths. The former one is that of Kikuji's father and latter one is that of Mrs.Ota. On evaluating his father's death, it could be concluded as a transgression from the traditional values to the modern generation. In this novel, death is more accomplished as a symbol that tiled the death of national customs. The beliefs and legacies are best transferred from old cohorts to young ones; here the early death of the people has terminated this process. This led to the influence of west in traditional culture. After father's death, from physical person he got manifested into a spiritual one who is more relevant in the activities of Kikuji. This provides the inference that the death of his father created a bleakness which ended the significance of tradition for Kikuji. Next substantial death was that of Mr.Ota. Her admission and dismissal from the life of Kikuji is hierarchical and hence demands a thorough study. Having studied now the events related to the life, the attention needs to be shifted to her death and the subsequent actions in Kikuji's life. Her death was the play of fate in this novel. The actions in Kikuji's life took a turn towards Fumiko after this. The approach of Kikuji with flowers to mourn her death brought them closer. The major two deaths in novel have indirectly generated an equal emotional situation for Kikuji as well as Fumiko. This factor further developed the relation between them. Kikuji after his father's death has arrived in a state of strange physical alienation which in the later phase Fumiko experiences after Mrs.Ota's death. The uncelebrated commonalities that stirred for unity unfortunately found its unexpected end. The guilt transformed the whole climax of a union. After his father's death Kikuji has lost the connection with heritage but the death of Mrs.Ota brought to his mind the requisite of retaining the tradition. This happened when he detected that the vessels of tea ceremony were not used appropriately. The tea vessels were transferred

from Mr.Ota to Mrs. Ota and now in the hands of Fumiko. But what moved him was the way of using them as the owner changes. He got reminded to preserve the tradition which was used improperly by people. Even the way of using “Shino Jar” as vase by Mrs.Ota didn’t appeal him. The conversion of this “magnum opus” (emphasis added) to such trivial forms shattered his existing notion on them. All these renewed his opposition against customs to mere reception. The amalgamation of tradition and past events made Kikuji recollect all the living memories of his past and his father. This novel also accentuates the conventional pattern of thought by establishing death as a transporter of only misfortunes and unsuccessful ends. In the beginning as well Kikuji was not a successful personage as the plot initiated with the mentioning of his father’s death. Similarly, the rising design of story countersigned the death of an important character like Mrs.Ota. Both the deaths along with the vain relations in life of Kikuji culminated in presenting the fruitlessness in his life at which the novel ends. This novel is akin to the other prominent books of modern era that advocated the hopelessness and pessimistic effects of that time. All the above said statements asserted that idea of death as the one which cuts off the understanding. Hence death evolves at various levels just with the two deaths portrayed in novel.

Psyche or thoughts of inner mind are a bountiful arena of inspection. The physical factors like life and death exposed the outer development of the character Kikuji but for study of psyche it is vital to adapt different strategies. Each character in the novel expresses vivid psyche and they reveal the intricate building structure of the story. The character of Mrs. Ota herself breeds “Catharsis”(emphasis added) or twin emotions. Kawabata has beautifully handled the intense emotions of pity and fear in the character of Mrs.Ota. He has provided instances to demonstrate these emotions in her. From the meeting between Kikuji and Mrs.Ota; she says, ‘I’m frightened, frightened.’ Then it says “she looked around the room and shrank away, and suddenly her strength left her.” (39) This particular statement depicts the inherent fear in her mind which transcends to the reader as well. Similarly, from the description “The fold of the eyelids was emphasized in a strangely morbid way, and the pleading eyes glowed with tears” (37) along with fear, pity is also aroused in reader’s mind. The internal thoughts in Kikuji’s mind at that time were not negligible. His sympathetic approach is clearly visible after witnessing her pitiful situation throws light on his inner character as well. The fickleness in his character finds its outlet at the onset of the novel. The tea ceremony renders a wide platform for many minute interpretations of Kikuji. The quick

fall for Yukiko Inamura's beauty at the ceremony presents a symbol for the love for tradition and also the instabilities in his inner mind.

Kikuji is the only male character rampant in the novel. Kawabata announces the character as surrounded by all women. The psychic ordeal in the life of Kikuji was attached with those women around him. Novel began discussing the relationships between his father and mistresses but with father's death they didn't find its end rather got continued through Kikuji. All marked with the access of Chikako and Mrs. Ota in his life. Both stayed in Kikuji's life due to the positions they held during his father's time. In collaboration they also tried to develop a mother figure before him after his real mother's death. They differed from one another in their motherly manifestation. Chikako Kurimoto appeared more of a devilish figure to his mind. The picture of her ugly birthmark on her breast rushed every time to his mind at various stages of his life. Her first intervention commenced with the attempt to familiarize the Inamura girl, her student to Kikuji. The crooked cheap mentality of Kurimoto strongly believed that association of them into couple would definitely benefit her as she could exert control over Kikuji. The secret affair of his father with these mistresses disturbed Kikuji too much and gradually settled a hatred against Chikako Kurimoto. This stood as a prominent reason for Kikuji to be in the dilemmic state at the invitation of Kurimoto to the tea ceremony. On contrast Mrs. Ota appears with an intimate motherhood that any child can admire. The death of his father eased Kikuji's relationship with Mrs. Ota and it turned to be a sexual relationship. The Oedipal complex overtook all the passions in him. Later the suicidal death of Mrs. Ota conjured a serious mental cessation and incurred himself guilty for her death. The real play of fate ensued after this incident. Kikuji found Mrs. Ota in her daughter and the love for her was established through Fumiko, the repetition of what Mrs. Ota experienced after Kikuji's father's death. The complex mind in him couldn't accept the sudden departure of Mrs. Ota and craved for her presence which he tried to fulfil through Fumiko. The interesting interplay of psyche comes in Kikuji as split self. The split self in him incorporates two different forms; there exists the father-side as well as his own self. He finds his own father in him and feels sensitive towards it. Kawabata quotes in the novel, "The figure of his father became the figure of Kikuji himself." (36) He takes effort to reinforce his self over the father's side which ultimately leads to a mental split in his nature. Throughout the novel a persistent male domination over female is an element to be noted. Even though Kikuji was the only living male protagonist in the story the narrations from past provides an adequate account to his dead father who is also being portrayed as a dominant

person in his life. His numerable relationships justified this statement. Kikuji who succeeds his father also depicts the same overriding behaviour to women in his life. The way of upbringing contributes much to the grown-up behaviour of any individual. The evidence to rationalize this could be gathered from the text; “In the course of time Kikuji too came to treat her lightly. As he turned his childish tantrums on her, the suffocating evulsion of his younger days seemed to fade.” (7) The lines deliberate on Chikako Kurimoto who forms the real epitome of Kikuji’s patriarchal mindset. The relief that he expresses on the ‘sexlessness’ of Kurimoto again establishes the narrow view of his mind. Another aspect to muse upon in Kikuji is the roots of erotic components and sexual fantasies that are revealed through the expression of Kawabata about the women in Kikuji’s life- Chikako Kurimoto, Mrs.Ota and Fumiko. The objects and physical descriptions help readers to draw a distinctive idea about him. The ugly birthmark on Kurimoto’s breast, the significant lipstick marks on the tea vessel of Mrs.Ota, even the symbol of thousand cranes in the kerchief of Inamura girl and the physical attributes of Fumiko like her eyes, neck, lips and the odour. To congregated the psyche of the central character in the novel *Thousand Cranes*; Kawabata has communicated through the depiction of ‘wilderness’ in human mind which scrutinised the inner psyche and delved deep into the intense behaviour of Kikuji Mitani.

William Shakespeare once said, “We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.” (*The Tempest*; Act 4,Scene1, 21) Here he expounds on the fleeting nature of life and transient dominion of spirits. This quote stands apt for Kikuji, the protagonist of the novel as he too lives a life that reminds him of impermanence at every minute. Each character makes their entrances and exits rapidly and at the end Kikuji stands alienated in the shore of this temporariness. Kawabata has successfully interwoven the ethnicity and tradition with the pulses of ordinary life of Japan in *Thousand Cranes*. The rich heritage of Tea ceremony was grandly discussed throughout the novel. Kawabata became a notable figure in our minds by his impression of defending the spirit of conventional Japan and similarly adopting the modern writing style in character, theme and expression. Kikuji became the epitome of that modern youth who neglects the legacy but who gradually realised the necessity of preserving culture. The psychological trauma that he faced along with incidents occurred in life and the consequences of two deaths were well assembled like the accumulation of tiny droplets to the mighty ocean. The novel has travelled across different realms irrespective of moral, social, physical and mental arenas. There novelist also presents the intrigue of past and present. Freudian analysis of the novel initiated the psychological

reading of the character Kikuji and what Kawabata intended to do with this novel was the establishment of soul to soul connection with readers to convey the essence of customs in life.

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