

The Criterion

September 2012

ISSN 0976-8165

Vol. III. Issue. III

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed and Indexed Open Access Journal

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Sunil Doiphode's *Illusion*: Interpretation of the Novel in the light of Schizophrenia

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Sunil Doiphode, an eminent modern Marathi writer, is no way different in his attitude towards the treatment of occult from the dramatist William Shakespeare.

Sunil is a writer of illusion and supernatural phenomena. He seems to follow the conventions of Shakespearian supernatural treatment. He springs forth the emotions of dead man walking and trying to avenge their murderers in a radical new way. He, through his works, propagates the spreading Schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is a mental illness that disrupts a person's thinking, feeling, mood and ability to relate to others. It can affect any age, race, religion or income. Its number is recorded very high in U.S.A. as compared to other countries of the world. "Approx. 2.2 million Americans have Schizophrenia in any given year. That's 8 persons out of every 1,000" (4). Though its recovery is possible, its statistical average replaces qualitative human beings. The naked truth is that it is rarely cured though can be treated. A sudden break to the medication leads to a relapse.

Sunil discusses the spreading Schizophrenia through the novel 'Illusion.' Although this theme has been tackled by many of the writers like Patricia, Susannee Kaysen, Ellen Hopkins, etc. yet his art derives out the shriek at the pitiable condition of the helpless sufferers. He emerges out as a tragic and realistic writer. His works generate pessimism in course of time due to consistent misery in the protagonist's life. He portrays the real in reel life and his works show that sometimes life is more dramatic than fiction. His art projects his tragic and supernatural vision of modern life and society.

Horace Walpole has vividly pointed out, "This world is a comedy to those that think, Tragedy to those that feel" (53).

So does the writer. Sunil feels the pain and provides a picturesque form to his expressions.

In this paper, I propose to discuss Sunil Doiphode as a realistic writer who pens down the facts and figures of the society. The novel *Illusion* is based on a true story and talks about the treatment of schizophrenia, and the tense circumstances that often lead to this disease.

The novel is originally in Marathi. It has been translated into English by Girish Khatri and Mughda Apte. It is a true story of a shocking unending mystery of a family. The novel centers on Vijay, who, in the end becomes the victim of hallucination. He suffers badly at the hands of destiny. His character confirms his being a puppet stung to the strings of fate.

The novel *Illusion* portrays clearly the horrors of mental sickness that is called exorcism in rural areas. It shows how people fall prey to the continuous depriving social circumstances. It shows the mass exodus of sanity from the minds of the victims. In an object way, the novelist sees the hand of every social and individual activity for creating tragic events.

In the book *Diagnosis*, it is clearly stated that, "Treating the symptoms of Schizophrenia required hospitalization to keep us safe until our symptoms are under control" (4). The funds play an important role in this case. A poor and a deprived person is unable to go for the treatment. The lack of funds results in further deterioration of the situation. In the novel, poverty results in the inability to provide proper hospitalization and the history of Shalini is reproduced in Vijay, Priya and his mother to show how the torturous incidents and stress lead to tragic and

terrible psychological consequences.

The novel opens at Rakesh's wedding party. All of the college friends are enjoying a kind of a re-union party. They are waiting for Vijay, the main character of the novel, and Priya, his best friend. Priya comes first and is eager to meet Vijay. When Vijay comes with his mother and sister, all friends comment on Priya. Most of the friends believe that they are in love. Vijay also wants to tell Priya something. He gets a chance and murmurs in her ear, "Let's meet tomorrow the same place at 6 in the evening, and I have to tell you something very important" (7). The eagerness in his voice mesmerizes her. All the guests are enjoying the party when Shalini's sudden shriek shatters the hilarious occasion. Vijay's sister Shalini is suffering from a mental illness. Her condition for the last few years has given a rude shock to Vijay's father. His helplessness in curing his daughter has dragged him to the porch of the pub. Now, Vijay is the only hope for his family. Vijay's mental make-up is revealed through his optimistic and philosophic nature. The party ends and all retreat.

The following day seems to be the best day for Priya. She weaves her dreams that Vijay will propose her after such a long time. She reaches Ashok Park one hour before to hear the important three words of her life from the most lovable person. Her dreams turn out to be dreams forever. Vijay comes but his acceptance of love for Nayana shatters Priya's small beautiful nest. He loves Nayana, his Boss's daughter and his colleague. She can feel his immense love for Nayana. She is shattered like a dry leaf. She accepts the truth. Her submission towards her destiny is revealed when she says, "It is wrong to expect Vijay to love you just because you were in intense love with him" (35).

The novel goes into a flashback to the college days of Vijay, Priya and Rakesh. Vijay and Rakesh were good friends. Priya, a new admission in HSC gradually made friends with them. Their friendship flourished. They did group study at Priya's house as Vijay's and Rakesh's house conditions were not appropriate for studies. Vijay and Priya were good at studies but Rakesh was not. Their HSC result came out and acted as a dividing line between the friends. Rakesh started avoiding Vijay and Priya as his score was lower. Vijay got admitted to an engineering college and Priya got admission in a medical college. The distance did not affect their relationship. They were quite in touch. There were some differences between Vijay and Rakesh that were later sorted out. Vijay always spoke as a philosopher. Priya adorned his philosophic nature. But as luck would have it, the following day to Rakesh's wedding party, everything has been made clear by Vijay. After knowing the truth, Priya starts maintaining distance from Vijay. She decides not to confess her love before him and abandons him.

But the destiny has planned something else for them. She comes to know of Vijay's termination and rushes to his house. She comes to know that Vijay has declared her love for his boss's daughter Nayana at an official party and the very next day he receives his termination letter. The story leaves Priya a little confused. She wants to unveil the truth. She goes to Nayana's house and is stunned to hear her side of the story. Nayana empathetically clarifies that she has never been in love with Vijay. He is a liar. Priya gets further confused.

It is Priya who helps Vijay in the treatment of Shalini. She also searches for a job for Vijay and finally succeeds. Vijay's mother takes care of Shalini, Vijay and his father. Her misery is enhanced by the mental illness of Vijay. Even her begging in front of the God falls on deaf ears. She is forced to face the trial of life. Vijay's hallucination increases. He starts getting aggressive. He sometimes even scolds Nayana.

Priya and Rakesh ask his mother to convince him for psychological treatment. Vijay normalizes after taking medicine. He gets an opportunity to go out for fifteen days on an official

trip where he wants to be accompanied by Priya. She is not able to accompany Vijay since she already has some other engagements. Vijay returns after 15 days and denies all sanity in him. He is a new changed man engrossed in illusion. As he enters the room, he finds Nayana sitting in the chair; soon he starts yelling at her, though she is not actually there. When his mother calms him down and enquires about how the trip was, he replies, "It was excellent as priya joined me the next day, we enjoyed a lot" (198).

The mother is literally shocked. Priya has met with an accident just the next day of his departure and till now she is in comma. His mother drags him to Priya's house to prove that he is not in his senses. She discovers his negligence in taking medicine and so, he is again living in illusion. The hard labour, physical and mental unrest experienced by mother till the time is really heart-rending, but still her patience and her love for Vijay do not let her break down. She tries to bring her son back from illusion. Vijay comes to know that Priya has been sent to her granny to recover. He decides to go to her place. His mother wants to accompany him but she cannot because of her responsibilities at home. A long time of 4 days passes but he does not come back. Later, the mother receives the dead body of her son. The news of Vijay's death acts as a constructive force towards the doom of both Priya and the mother. Priya is completely shattered and leaves her father's house. She continues to live at Vijay's house. She is determined to serve Vijay's family till her death. Vijay's mother has still not come out of the trauma.

Priya is in conflict within herself. She has illusions. She too is no more a normal sane human being. Her flights of imaginations fly high, mingled with the world of hallucination. She is engulfed in her thought process in which she keeps on talking to Vijay but the mother finds no body there. Seeing all this serial madness, the mother's brain also surrenders and her name too is soon added to the list of the sick. As she follows Priya going out, as if she is with Vijay, mother observes two shadows on the ground. One is of Priya and another is of Vijay. This very incident gives a blow to the readers. It's a sudden rise of terror and pity towards the family. In the end, Sunil portrays the scene fantastically:

"She bent down, Shalini got on her back to play, there were three shadows: Priya, mother, and Shalini"(232).

Sunil states the misery of the four characters of the novel *Illusion*. He offers a delineation of the tragedy of the family. The story follows facts, unfolds the game of the society, spotlights the plight of the people connected to the victims. It plunges deep into the conscience of the victims and studies the influence of the social storm on the psyche. The novel is an excellent document recording the upheaval of the troubled days of the society.

The study of the novel reflects Sunil's artistic genius in tackling the social issue of spreading Schizophrenia and holds society somehow responsible for such consequences. A schizophrenic needs cooperation and support from the society which is seldom given in some cases. The tragic dimension of victims reveals their submission to the fate and social negligence towards the liberation from the shackles of an oppressive mindset.

A debate has been going on among the psychiatrists regarding the path that we, society, should take in the direction of the betterment of the mentally ill people and freeing them from the bondages of hallucination.

Should 'mentally sick' people be chained or locked in a room, or left all alone free to go their own way?

The answer is not at all easy but it cannot be denied that they can enjoy freedom to live and experience life on their own terms, necessarily under the supervision of the relatives.

The difficulty perhaps lay in the fact that these people are dissociated from the society.

The so-called educated people expertise themselves in remaining detached from this part of society. They find it dangerous to make conscious efforts to cultivate the co-operative attitude towards these people. In the fast growing pace of development, people embark on their journey of self-discovery through their relationship with people and analyze their feelings and impressions with almost scientific precision. This journey needs capable elevators.

Mentally sick people emerge as an infertile landscape in which no seed can bear any fruit. Society should take a step forward towards the creation of a good fortune for such people who suffer in the narrow confines of hallucination.

Thus, the paper is an attempt to examine the incidents leading to Schizophrenia in the characters of the novel. It also tries to explore the rate of participation of society in further creating the mental illness. Thus, detachment from this particular segment of society confirms a society ridden with orthodox and conservative ideologies.

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