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Disintegration of Persona and Attainment of Self in Krishna in R K Narayan's "The English Teacher": A Psychoanalytical Study in Relation to Carl Jung's Theory of Analytical Psychology

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Abstract:

The present paper attempts to analyse the disintegration of 'persona' and attainment of self in Krishna, the protagonist of the novel 'The English Teacher' by R.K Narayan. Carl Jung used the term 'persona' to refer to the feigned individuality with which we move in the society and conceal the actual self. This paper will explore the implication of Carl Jung's concept of persona and its disintegration in the journey of Krishna towards self-attainment. Krishna is a part of the education system which he detests and lives a dull and insipid life as a lecturer in English at Albert Mission College, Malgudi. The arrival of his wife and daughter at his place brought temporary peace, joy and domestic bliss in his life. Grief and misery got hold of his life as he lost his beloved wife Susila following a prolonged illness. His battle for inner peace and harmony led him to drop his 'persona' as he could not bear the artificiality in his professional life. He resigned from his job and decided to teach in a school of his choice. Finally, he reconciled to his circumstances and compromised on what he could not change and accepted 'the law of life'. The paper traces the parallel development of dissolution of persona and his realization of the ultimate truth. His reconciliation with life and strength to discard the persona go hand-in-hand.

Keywords: persona, unconscious, repressed individuality, conscious, disintegration, peace, harmony, self-attainment.

Carl Gustav Jung, Swiss psychoanalyst coined the term 'persona' which is derived from Latin and originally meant the mask worn by Etruscan mimes. The masks were worn by the actors to depict the roles played by them. Carl Jung applied the term to refer to our public or social face, which we show to the world. It is the artificial face which we put up to fit into

the accepted social norms and behaviour and thereby hide our real self. Most of our life is lived with this fake individuality. A person does not show his true nature or individuality to the outside world and behaves as his social environment and professional etiquettes demand. Its role is significant in adapting to the social world as the society expects certain manners and behaviour from people living in it. We behave as the society demands to impress others and conceal which is not acceptable. If the persona we carry is not flexible and is contrary to the real individuality or true self, we get into a state of conflict.

“When we analyse the persona we strip off the mask, and discover that what seemed to be individual is at bottom collective; in other words, that the persona was only a mask of collective psyche. Fundamentally persona is nothing real: it is a compromise between individual and society as what a man should appear to be.” (Jung 7: 157)

While going on with this persona, the real individuality i.e. the unconscious self is always there which the person feels time to time. The real individuality cannot be repressed so much so that its existence is lost. It keeps on coming to the fore, interferes with the conscious mind and the reactions of the conscious mind accelerate the process of individual development. Gradually, the influence of unconscious over the conscious mind leads to process of disintegration of 'persona'.

The protagonist of the novel 'The English Teacher' by R.K. Narayan undergoes a journey at the spiritual and psychological level which brings his subdued personality to the fore in a way that he found complacency and bliss that he was always aspiring for. Circumstances of Krishna's life act as the catalyst for the comprehensive change that occurred in him. Deep down in his heart he always aware of the persona, the social face he was carrying and felt that he was compromising with life and was not living life as he really wished to. This forced and feigned life, from the very beginning of the novel was well into the process of degeneration, a state in which our artificial or strained self is swept away and one has the potential to grow. The tragedy of the death of his wife gave the spark to infuse this transformation. The novel illustrates Krishna's psychological and philosophical journey to show how his personality development unfolds.

“But as the influence of the collective unconscious increases the conscious mind loses its power of leadership. Imperceptibly it becomes the led, while an unconscious and impersonal process gradually takes control. Thus, without noticing it, the conscious

personality is pushed about like a figure on a chessboard by an invisible player. It is this player who decides the game of fate, not the conscious mind and its plans". (Jung 7: 161)

The very beginning of the novel 'The English Teacher ' speaks of Krishna's discomfort in his present role of an English teacher. He remains perturbed and distressed while performing his professional duties. He finds his routine dull and devoid of any significance. He was totally dissatisfied with the education system which encouraged mugging up and examinations and missed the real essence of education. He felt suffocated in that environment and could never find happiness and joy in teaching a foreign language to unwilling students. He was disappointed to see that education which should focus on the comprehensive development of the personality of students, had made them miserable with fear and burden of examinations.

"...my duty in the interval had been admonishing, cajoling and browbeating a few hundred boys of Albert Mission College so that they might mug up Shakespeare and Milton and secure high marks and save me adverse remarks from my chiefs at the end of the year. For this pain the authorities kindly paid me a hundred rupees on the first of every month". (Narayan 2)

He often felt vexed and irritated with the extra strictness given to spelling and grammar of the language by his chief Brown. Mr Brown took serious note of a student who misspelt the word 'honour'. Krishna said to his colleague "Mr. Gajapathy, there are blacker sins in this world than a dropped vowel." Krishna could never digest the undue importance given to English language and felt aghast and insulted to see the disinterest of foreigners in Indian languages. He was sure that Mr Brown could never speak a single sentence in any of the two hundred Indian languages inspite of living thirty years in India.

The thoughts from Krishna's unconscious self occasionally troubled his conscious self and were repressed by him. At this point he was in a confused state of mind. He considered this rebellion as his weakness and indiscipline and tried to repress these momentary spurts. He checked and controlled himself and tried hard to adjust with the profession he has chosen. He resolved to discipline himself by following a regular routine, going for a walk in the morning and doing exercise. Although he felt satisfied with this effort, but somewhere deep in his heart he was worried about such resolutions and their subsequent failures in the past.

"There is always some element of pretence about the persona, for it is a kind of shop window in which we like to display our best wares."(Stevens 63)

Krishna's dissatisfaction from the unconscious self -spurts at times and makes him aware of this artificiality in his profession. While taking a class where he was going to teach the Shakespearean tragedy 'King Lear' he managed to pass time as he came unprepared and delves into self-introspection. His conscience makes an honest acceptance of fake idealism of the relation between the teacher and the taught. He questioned his own performance against the ideal image of a teacher held by people.

"I felt like breaking out into a confession! "My dear fellows, don't trust me so much. I am merely trying to mark time because I couldn't come sufficiently prepared, because all morning I have..."But I caught myself lecturing: "This is the very heart of the tragedy and I would like you to follow this portion with greatest attention...."
(Narayan 13)

Krishna could sense the distinction between his conscious self and real self. But he manages to carry on this persona and frequently taught himself the lesson of patience and discipline. Krishna's discomfort in his persona went into oblivion temporarily as he got busy in moving out of the hostel and settling with his beloved wife Susila and little daughter. He arranged a house on rent and enjoyed marital bliss and domestic peace with his wife and daughter. Krishna's irritation with his college life lessened as he got peace and comfort as a compensation from his family. He was enjoying the commonest pleasures of domestic life and was thrilled to buy a house of his own.

Krishna's life with his wife, Susila, as portrayed by the novelist is the most blessed part of his journey. His wife was his ravishing beloved, a true and loyal companion, a dedicated homemaker and a shrewd financial manager. The bliss and joy of his homely life acted as an anchorage in the turmoil of his professional life. Krishna's love for Susila was pure, spiritual and sacred. Ironically, the marital bliss and domestic peace in the life of Krishna was short-lived. Krishna's life turned upside down when Susila died following a prolonged illness and left Krishna agonized and miserable. Her death devastated his very being and left him in deep shock. Some of Krishna's feelings on the day of cremation were-

"I am blind, dumb, and dazed... the sun is beating down mercilessly, but I don't feel it. I feel nothing, and see nothing. All sensations are blurred and vague...Flames appear over the wall. It leaves a curiously dull pain at heart. There are no more surprises and shocks in life, so that I watch the flame without agitation. For me the greatest reality is this and nothing else. Nothing else will worry or interest me life hereafter."(Narayan 138- 140)

Braving the greatest upheaval of his life, he decided to set his priorities and stepped on a new journey in search of peace and harmony which intensified the process of disintegration of the persona. This tragic incident in his life changed his outlook to view life and inwardly, he was also gaining strength to make bold decisions and live life as it satisfied his inner being. Krishna concentrated only on bringing up his daughter in newly acquired twin role of mother and father. He also decided not to change the house cherishing his past memories. His college life was disrupted more than ever. Being depressed and despondent, he doesn't feel energetic enough to exert discipline in his class. Now he didn't have the least interest in his work and he even lost the energy to react and oppose angrily. His reactions and opposition to the system were turning into a peaceful reflection.

"but I was too weary to exert myself. I was past stage of exertion. A terrible fatigue and inertia had come over me these days "(Narayan154)

Tossing in the sea of misery, he found two anchors, the gentleman and the headmaster who comforted his professional and personal life. He felt a new lease of life in the company of gentleman who tried to connect him to the spirit of his wife Susila. The gentleman acted as a medium in their communication. Krishna had a series of sittings with him to practice this method of psychic development. Krishna did practice in concentrating his mind and after initial disappointments had success and was able to feel Susila's presence by his side.

In his college, Krishna became more outspoken and articulated in his views about the education system. When he was asked to take special period of history of English literature, Krishna is unnerved to see the undue importance given to history of English literature. He feels that literature could survive without compiling its history, he asserts his views because he is tired of keeping his views to himself. He feels suffocated in being reticent about his feelings. He accepts taking special classes on the condition that he will speak openly to students about the futility of this kind of education system. His dissatisfaction with the kind of teaching he had been doing, has grown over the years.

"Why do they make so much of the history of literature?" I see more clearly now between fatuities and serious work.....I will tell them what is sense and what is nonsense."(Narayan 226)

Fighting the adverse circumstances, Krishna had to combat suicidal thoughts which occasionally overpowered him. He was undergoing tremendous strain and phases of frustration. Imagining his death gave him solace and comfort. But he had to live for the sake of his child which he felt was his sole responsibility now.

Krishna's subsequent meetings with the gentleman proved fruitful and set the stage for his psychic development. He felt a new power arise in him as he focused on self-development. While communicating with the spirit of his wife through the medium, the gentleman, he was made to realize that grief was the barrier in psychic development and attainment of self.

"Yes, for the purpose of your complete communion with me or with anyone a degree of concentration is necessary.....At other moments when you are despondent, woe-begone and hopelessly in grief and think of me, I can hardly come to you, because the grief creates a barrier, and this should be avoided for both our sakes. The most important thing is to get the mind ready and receptive."(Narayan 233)

In the following months Krishna concentrated his whole being towards self - development. He was excited to tread on this path and discover new experiences and there was gradual change in him and noticed cheerfulness growing in him. The positivity which was growing within him not only made him calm and peaceful but also strengthened his mind and soul. He was set to reconcile with life. He compromised on many things and also agreed to send his daughter with his mother. He understood the 'law of life'.

"There is no escape from loneliness and separation. Wife, child, brothers, parents, friends. We come together only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement. They move away from us as we move from away from them. The law of life cannot be avoided. No sense in battling against it..." Thus I reconciled myself to this separation with less struggle than before."(Narayan 267)

He understood the futility of battling against this ultimate truth. He was determined to live his life without any artificiality and pretensions. He wanted to be his real self and did what pleased him. He found happiness and solace in being near children in the headmaster's school. The sense of loneliness that engrossed him for a long time, was now leaving him replacing feelings of deep joy and contentment.

Krishna's realization of the ultimate truth resulted into his reconciliation with life, compromise with the circumstances. This made a parallel development in his mental strength to discard the artificiality from his life and he listened to his unconscious with a firm and determined mind. Thus, there was a parallel growth of his reconciliation with life and disintegration of persona.

"My mind was made up. I was in search of a harmonious existence and everything that disturbed that harmony was to be rigorously excluded, even my college work."(269)

After gaining strength his unconscious mind came to the fore and steered his life. He took a bold decision to change the course of his life and smoothen the path of bringing peace and harmony in his life. He thought of sending in his resignation letter to his chief, Brown and teach children in headmaster's school. He was determined and was not to be convinced by anyone. In term of money it was a loss to him as he was to receive about one fourth of the salary he got in the college. He went straight to his chief, Brown and explained what he always tried to repress.

"I mug up and repeat and they mug up and repeat in examinations. This hardly seems to be work, Mr Brown. It is a fraud I am practicing for a consideration a hundred rupees a month.... It doesn't please my innermost self...."

Krishna was now single-minded and undaunted to do what pleased him. He was determined to not to yield to any kind of persuasion. The fake identity he was carrying for so long had reached the final stage of dissolution. Search for peace and harmony led him to drop his persona. He was sure that he would be happy in the world of children where his job will be to shape their mind and character by engaging them in creative work. This decision of his life, this bold move of his real-self further facilitated his progress on the path of self-

development. Peace and harmony in his life helped him in concentration of mind, which ultimately made him feel the presence of his wife Susila around him.

Thus, there was parallel development of Krishna's breaking apart of persona and rise of unconscious mind, the real self. Disintegration of persona and attainment of self-went hand in hand. In the growth of Krishna's journey towards self-attainment, these two aspects were complementary. Search for peace and harmony stimulated by his tragic circumstances, accelerated the process of disintegration of persona. The dissolution of persona brought him in a situation where his mind became receptive to the infinite and everlasting joy that the Almighty blesses human beings with.

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