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Psychosocial Analysis in Richard Wright's Savage Holiday

P. Gold Anna Vashni¹, Dr. V. Rejulin Jerin Kumar²

¹Reg.no.20213094012018, PhD Research Scholar, Centre for Postgraduate Studies and Research in English, Muslim Arts College, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India- 627012.

²Assistant Professor/ Supervisor, Centre for Postgraduate Studies and Research in English, Muslim Arts College, Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India- 627012.

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Abstract

Psychosocial analysis determines the relationship between the persons fear and how that relates with the social setting. Psychosocial problems minimises the mental and physical wellness and their functions. In the novel Richard Wright's *Savage Holiday* an extreme exclusion and helpless state induce a person to be affected mentally and push to an unbalanced stability. Each character in this novel are affected psychologically due to loneliness, social disruption, work environment and social status. All these factors develop psychological problems and lead to show their own aggression towards others. The main objective of this paper is to make the readers understand how the social circumstances affect the life of each character and arouse traumas and conflicts in the story.

Keywords: Exclusion, unbalanced, aggression, trauma.

INTRODUCTION

Richard Wright is an African American writer born on 1908 in Mississippi. He has written many novels, short stories, poems and non-fiction. Most of his works are centres on the theme of racism, especially the sufferings of Africans Americans during late 19th to mid 20th century. His notable works are Uncle Tom's Children, Native Son, Black Boy and The Outsider.

Wright records the psychological complexities faced by the protagonist and other characters in the American society through his novel *Savage Holiday*. In this novel the characters are made to be travelled in four spheres of life. They are psychologically analysed under personal, family, institutional and social sectors in this paper.

When the novel begins Richard Wright introduces the central character named Erskine Fowler. Erskine Fowler is a New York insurance agent. He is sitting as a person one among the crowd in the gathering. The gathering is nothing but his own farewell ceremony. It may look weird because Fowler is only forty - three years old. Everyone seems to be enjoying the function by singing, dancing and taking group photos but Fowler's eyes are filled with tears. He feels himself as an old fashioned man as he is not useful to the company where he has spent his entire life and time. He knows more about Longevity Life, the insurance company where he works, than he knows about himself. He loves his company so much. Fowler couldn't tolerate the injustice done against him because his retirement is not a normal retirement but a forced retirement by his superiors.

Fowler is an unlucky man. He has no family. He lives his life in isolation. He has no idea of spending his holidays in a right way. He does not know whether he is going to spend his time in watching movies or reading books or visiting his favourite bowling alley. It is not a new experience for him because he has been brought up in this manner. When he was three years old, his father died and he was raised up by his mother. Even now hates her for her behaviour. Whenever he thinks about his mother, he gets the image of her laughing with many men. He receives no affection from his mother. When Fowler falls sick, his mother did not spent time with him and went out with random men. Fowler feels ashamed of his mother. Due to these circumstances, neighbours throw scornful words at her and deny their children to play with Fowler. All these events develop hatred for his mother in the mind of Fowler. Even he does not bother about the death of his mother. He feels sad for losing his mother but does not shed even single tears for her loss. In *Unspeakable Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Culture*, Rashkin says that, "The child haunted by a phantom becomes a living tomb or repository in which an unspeakable drama, experienced as traumatic by someone else, lies buried yet alive, exerting its disruptive influence in a potentially infinite number of ways on the existence of the child or on the child grown to adulthood"(122). Thus, the past event forms a traumatic disorder in the mind of Fowler.

Fowler could sense some connections with his neighbourhood child Tony. Tony is a five year old child. Both Fowler and Tony spend their time together because both of them share same personal experience. Tony's mother is a war widow named Mabel. She works in a night club. She often brings men to home and spends her time with them. Thus, Tony is also tied in a loveless relationship with his mother just like young Fowler. He has no playmates to play along with him. He usually asks Fowler to have a talk with him. When one day Fowler takes Tony to the nearby drug store, on the way Tony keeps on complaining about his mother. Thus, the activities of Mabel forms a constant hatred in the minds of Tony.

The life of Mabel is different from that of Fowler and Tony. Mabel lost her husband at a very young age. She has no one to support financially, therefore she works in a night club and maintains a relationship with many men. Eventhough she has connections with many men she does not share any of her personal problems with them. Mabel lives her life extremely in a helpless situation. According to her, she loves her son Tony. She lives her life only for the sake of him in order to feed him and to provide a better future for her son. She is not an accepted human in the society. Even her apartment women look at her strangely and no one comes forward with talk to her. Her abandoned situation makes her condition worse. She was affected psychologically. No one could predict her behaviour. She behaves strangely, even after the death of Tony she communicates with other men casually through the telephone. It makes others think if she really has concern over her child or she is acting for the sake of others' eyes. Even the day before Tony's funeral, Mabel goes to the beauty parlour to get her hair done. Such things arises the suspicion that how can a mother give importance to those things after losing her one and only son. Mabel does not know how to overcome the situation. She is in a puzzled state which makes others to think Mabel as a loose woman who does not cares about the death of her son.

On the other hand, Mabel can be looked as a strong woman because she does not let her personal problems to interfere in the work place. She is friendly with others even after the death of her son. But Fowler couldn't manage his problems in the work place to interfere in his personal life. The stress that causes in the Insurance Company totally shatters the life of Fowler. A bloody incident happens on the next day of his farewell ceremony. It's the early morning, Fowler wakes up by the sound of Tony beating his drums. Stressed Fowler undresses himself and goes to take bath. Meanwhile, the paper boy throws the Sunday's newspaper at floor of the hallway. After the paper boy left, Fowler hides his naked body and tries to take the newspaper. As papers are scattered, Fowler tries to gather it but the wind starts to blow and the door slams shut leaving naked Fowler out. Fowler feels ashamed of his condition and rushes to hide himself in balcony. Tony stands there shocked seeing the naked Fowler. When Tony moves backwards to the edge of balcony he falls down from the balcony. Thus, Fowler unintentionaly commits a murder. One disaster after the next disaster affects Fowler mentally. "Suddenly he was afraid to enter his apartment. He dreaded being alone now. When supported by the presence of the others, everything had seemed natural, his not telling had had a normal aspect. But the moment he was alone and face to face with himself, he felt that he ought to tell. But how could he? He stood brooding, biting his lips" (Wright 71-72). Fowler feels an unknown fear and guilt in him. He plans to escape from the situation rather than admitting his fault which makes him to commit one murder after the another. "He was feeling a terror that he had felt a long, long time ago, feeling it but not understanding it. He felt alone, abandoned in the world – abandoned and guilty" (76).

In Suprithy Paliwal's Social Psychology the author defines that, "Social psychology deals with immediate everyday social problems. It cannot find solutions for all these problems, but in many ways it contributes useful guidance towards possible ways of understanding and working with these problems" (21). Common people experience anxiety due to societal problems and oppressive environment. Just like that each characters in this novel is also bound with anxiety in relation with their society. When Fowler, Tony and Mabel were chased by the series of problems they get no proper support and they try to escape from the situation which make the matter even worse. Fowler plans to keep Mabel under his control. In between the events Fowler also gets anonymous calls which traumatises him more. In order to earn the trust of Mabel, he offers every help she needs after the death of Tony. He even proposes Mabel for marrying him. Later, Fowler begins to interfere in all the personal matters of Mabel. Fowler hates Mabel talking and laughing with other men. All his concern centres on his social image. He has a good image among the people therefore he hesitates to marry a woman like Mabel but he also have no other option so he tries to control her. Mabel does not obey him. Therefore, Fowler thinks to end his relationship with Mabel. Fowler writes a letter about it and asks her to forget and forgive him.

After reading the letter Mabel meets Fowler and scolds him for playing with her feeling. Mabel begins to suspect him and asks if he has any connection with the death of Tony. Fowler asks her if she is the one calling him and blackmailing him now and then. She accepts it and starts to accuse Fowler for the death of Tony. Fowler gets irritated and slaps Mabel. She states that she does not want to marry him and gets herself ready to report everything in police station. Fowler tries to stop her but Mabel is fast enough to push him and run away from him. Therefore, he snatches her brutally, opens the drawer, takes out a long butcher knife, plunges it into her stomach and kills her. Then he himself goes and surrenders in the police station. Thus, the psychological disorder affects Fowlers behaviour, emotion and cognition due to the stress in his workplace and social relationships which turn him abnormal and make him commit bloody incidents. There are so many psychological scars and thorny paths in every one's life therefore violence is not a solution to it. It is the responsibility of each one to educate and develop strong mental strength among others. Social disintegration, loneliness, worst past life experiences are the results of violence. In order to overcome these problems, awareness should be bought to strengthen up the mental health of the people in the society.

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