



Madness And The Myth Of Self In Russian Short Stories By Gogol, Dostoevsky And Chekov

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the theoretical notions of madness and fragmented self in selected Russian short stories with postmodern perspective. Different metanarratives and discourses affect the characters thereby contributing to the psychological confusion in synchronizing their self-concept with those considered as normal by the society. Through a close reading of the personas of the protagonists in the selected texts, it has been found that the selected Russian short stories exhibit identity conflicts and the myth of the rational being in all the protagonists. However, their quest to understand the 'self' also poses a situation where stable and fixed identities prove to be a myth and characters survive in an abysmal state of non-identity. Ultimately in the quest for self-actualization the protagonists struggle to achieve a balance between the notions of socially defined sane self and the culturally misfit/irrational being, and thus challenge the status quo of conventional norms of personality and behavior.

Key words: Postmodernism, madness, fragmented self, persona, close reading

Introduction

This study aims to analyze the notion of madness and distorted perceptions of self on individual as well as social basis in the selected texts. However, the significant aspect of this study is the fact that the normal understanding of the ideals of "sanity" get challenged in the texts by the personas created of the protagonists, thereby shattering the idea of normalcy and accepted behavior in society. The study also explores the multiple socio-cultural discourses and power structures that shape up human identity in a social setting and hence define people as who they are or rather as who they are not.

Russian Literature in 19th century features some exceptional work in fiction. The uniqueness of themes and matchless portrayal of characters are hallmarks of their work. The characters of short stories are depicted as having constructed their world which is totally different from the surroundings. They are often confronted with the questions of objective reality and fixed identity as a result of which they find themselves confused and

disturbed and misplaced in society (Kelly, 2001). These characters not only replicate the bleakness of modernity but also show a potential shift from their age, and it can be said that they are standing at the crossroads of modernity and postmodernity (Hutcheon, 2003). The notions of intelligence and rationality, industry and development, nationalism and fixed identities, and individual freedom are being challenged and skeptic attitude towards the idea of linear progress has been generated (Best & Kellner, 1991).

The works of Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Anton Chekhov incorporate the characteristics of postmodernism and deal with the psychological conflicts of the individuals in a society governed by particular discourses that shape their personalities. The fictional characters are often indulged in irrational behaviors and challenge the established so called truth values in life. The significance of the development of these characters however lies in the reminder of the fact that in challenging the irrational/insane personalities of the protagonists the society itself gets challenged with its status quo to define sanity and rational behavior in life. This study tends to explore this challenge not of the society to the self but of the “insane self” to the society in order to gain freedom and self-actualization.

Furthermore, the major protagonists are in psychological conflict with the society, they construct their own realities and consider them perfect. They do not contend themselves with the mundane life and accepted ways of social life and aspire to live in their self-constructed worlds. Another aspect of these stories is absence of rationality and intelligence; as the characters prefer frenzy feeling and absurdity over rationality. Personal freedom and individual liberty which had pioneered in modernism witnessed a relative decline in these stories and individual becomes a subject to social discourses and their subjective freedom thus becomes an illusion.

Madness and the Notion of Fragmented Self

Postmodern philosophy typically advocates the fragmentation of self and defines identity as a continuous process of personality development instead of being a fixed social product. Identity is not something fixed and stable, it is a process that will never lead to completion. Identity not only is subject to constant change, it can also never be coherent. (Bertens, 2001, p. 162). Nonetheless it also challenges the idea of insanity as something socially fixed as abnormal in an individual. The postmodern individual believes in the social construction of truth where it may vary from person to person. The non-totalizing view of reality provides a fluid aspect of social changes. This belief rejects the ideas of sharp demarcation between male and female, black or white, or good or bad but it points out the ‘grey areas’ in between the established binary oppositions. Berger & Luckman (1967) believe that reality is a kind of collective fiction which is created and maintained by social institutions and individuals. This notion has its roots in Hans Vaihinger’s philosophy of “as if” (Vaihinger & Ogden, 2009) which claims that social realities are constructed for a specific time for a specific purpose, thus they dissolve or change their meaning after sometime. Pavel’s (1981, 2006) ontological view of reality describes social construction of reality as “sub-universes” which are symbolically based on social beliefs through interactions and

cultural machinery. Thus personal realities are mutually consented/shared and allow social groups to interact and coexist in a society. McHale (1987) observes that all realities are not similar in social perception but they vary in their value to every individual, for instance, some realities occupy a central place in individual's life while other are pushed to peripheries. The subject is thus a power construction in itself; it is the social system of norms, values and ideologies that decide what is accepted as right and what is considered as wrong. Power, in different forms, be it political, religious or cultural, decides and dictates what social role/ position a person can take in society, what profession s/he can adopt, what sort of dressing is appropriate, what form of language is to be used but the ironical part of this power dynamics is the individual's desire and will to have power in society.

Power selects certain types of behavior, certain arrangements of the body and bodies, certain emotional states, and identifies them as the fundamental constituting parts of what is called individuality. The individual is not just the point of application of power—our definitions of ourselves as, for example, sick or well, mad or sane, homosexual or heterosexual, male or female, turns us into a manifestation of social and political processes that are both the routines of administration, and the result of the quest for knowledge of social researchers. (Fuery and Mansfield 2000, p. 174)

Power decides the subjects' identity; various political and religious forces administer different behavioral patterns. The individual is defined by the political/ ideological processes prevalent in society. Even the social roles that subjects take up in society, are the products of power dynamics that operate and control the social system. Hermans, Kempen & Loon (1992, p. 30) state that "the dialogical self has the character of a decentralized, polyphonic narrative with a multiplicity of I positions." Since the self is made of several smaller selves, it is always subjected to a position of decentralization, and consequently, the different selves keep swaying between these different identity positions. The human identity can thus be never stable or centered; instead it is more like a lifelong process of interchange between different subject positions and transition from one to another.

Thus, the subject is always split/ decentered/ fragmented, and can never be fully a whole because it is in a continuous state of flux between different social identities/positions, each of which requires certain socially expected behavior patterns. The subject identity is therefore, constructed and represented the way socio-cultural norms/traditions allow it to be. It is also discursively associated with attributes assigned to its different roles and differentiated from those of others. A 'woman' is equated with 'fragility' as opposed to 'strength'. Such equivalences and differences create a form of behavioral expectation from women in general and restrict their roles in society. The subject identity is therefore, not fixed but essentially unstable as it flows between different roles and social positions. So, the "process" called identity is a trial to achieve coherence between different social and personal identities. There is no specific whole as "self" or "I", rather a combination of

different “selves”, which the individual is always trying to align together in the struggle to fit in his/her social/ideological /cultural setting (Burke & Stets, 2009).

When it comes to notion of insanity, madness is a blend of fragmentation of the self and its conflictual tendencies with the social. As Poe (1953) suggests that ‘madness’ is said to be the result of one’s sufferings, it is said to be the most dark and deep trait one person may have. It is considered as most controversial dilemma of any society, which is always concealed. It can be the height of complexes or the effect of world’s culture. Madness is a dimension, beyond the understanding, how a person can share two separate personalities in a soul, one which calm and so normal, so tamed to the world and the other bewildered, aggressive, as if a beast disguised. So unable to decide who is mad? Either the person infuriated is the normal one or the one living a disguised life. Madness last resort is the mental asylums, though madmen living out there may be the most normal ones.

For Hutchings (2006), madness has always remained a prominent theme of modernist Russian literature. The obsession of the writers with madness depicts the then prevalent socio-cultural discourses. Their writings depict the madness, insanity of the madmen fighting the cause of anger at deepest levels of human consciousness, about problems of suffering, imagination, history, sex, social and world order, evil, retribution, death. The Russian literature depicts self-deprivation and depression; the writers lead the character that brings out the reality of life as how bitter is the truth to adjust and adopt with. The writings revealed the main root cause, i.e. lack of freedom, social injustice, unfairness, not catering every aspect of the society. The feudal; the feudalism would never end the class difference (Brintlinger&Vinitsky, 2015).

Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature and the selected short stories are critically analyzed from post modern perspective via a closer reading of the text (Kusch, 2016). A close reading of the selected text here essentially draws upon the persona of the characters of Poprishchin, The Ridiculous Man and Kovrin and analyzes, through their social position/actions, the psychological confusion between the self and the society. Furthermore the study is based on the framework of relevant theories of postmodern “Identity Theory” (Burke & Stets, 2009) and the theory of the “fragmented self” (Foucault, 1980). Through selected events/actions in language of the text, the study critically examines how the different personas of the protagonists in Russian short stories not only get challenged by the social norms of sanity and normal behavior but more importantly challenge the society itself and thus create their place in an abnormal world.

Memoirs of a Madman by Nikolai Gogol

The story is about a common clerk Aksenty Ivanovich Poprishchin who is apparently living a meaningless life with an ordinary job. He is found obsessed with changing his social status

to marry his director's daughter Sophie, with whom he is madly in love. When Poprishchin finds it impossible to realize his dreams he begins to imagine himself as an extraordinary person who possesses unusual skills and power, and the world around him including his colleagues and acquaintances does not understand him - In fact he is being envied by everyone. In his fantasy, he imagines that he can understand dogs' language and begins to read their imaginary letters. In the second part of the story Poprishchin reaches to the heights of his imagination and he begins to think that he is the new king of Spain. He receives the harsh treatment in the asylum for his strange behavior and towards the end Poprishchin finds himself in a miserable and painful condition where his future seems bleak.

The central character is the narrator himself and readers enter the story through his memoirs. The title of story itself refers to the idea that the story is about a 'madman'. The term 'madman' makes the first impression in readers' mind about the central character that he is not normal and is 'mad' or 'insane'. While the other key term "memoirs" refers to personal notes or diary of the said man. The complete title Memoirs of a Madman creates an environment for the reader to assume that the text contains the memoirs which are not written by a normal or sane mind. Which means that these memoirs can be equated with mumble jumbles or random ramblings of a mad man. However, when the readers proceed to text they do not find the memoirs as totally irrational mumbling of a crazy person but they are exposed to a world of bitter realities and a very harsh critique offered by the narrator. This makes it necessary for us to examine both sides of the coin for which I have presented the social and general meaning of three common terminologies i.e mad or madness, sanity and rationality, which helps understand the general impression created by the title and its ironic connection with the rest of the text.

Oxford Dictionary (8thed) defines mad person who has "a mind that does not work normally" or a "mentally ill" person, while it defines sanity as "the state of having a normal healthy mind". Merriam-Webster defines "madness" as "a state of severe mental illness" or "behavior or thinking that is very foolish or dangerous" or "unsoundness of mind or lack of the ability to understand that prevents one from having the mental capacity required by law to enter into a particular relationship, status, or transaction or that releases one from criminal or civil responsibility". While Sanity refers to "the quality or state of being sane; soundness or health of mind." These definitions base concept of madness or sanity on two main grounds: Medical and Social. In Poprishchin's case there are two interpretations of his acts, as he sees dogs speak and write letters and later assumes himself king of Spain, it can be asserted that he has mental illness which lies under the criteria of medical madness. However, the second definition of madness which refers to 'abnormality' or 'foolish behavior or thinking' which is purely determined by social and legal interpretations, does not put Poprishchin in the zones of madness. But it can be asserted that his different view of the world, challenges the established order of things for which he is penalized. Although in legal terms insanity refers to unsound minds which endanger social order and peace yet in Poprishchin's case he does not commit any social crime but he is sent to asylum due to

his claim of kingship. He is deemed unfit to live with his imaginations without any legal grounds

These discrepancies which lie in the definitions of madness and their social interpretations cast doubts over the fix meaning of madness or a madman. Poprishchin can be labelled as mentally deranged person who needs medical treatment but the social treatment which he receives makes him appear as a criminal which he is not. As Greenfield (2013) notes “There is, obviously nothing mad in this, just an understandable irritation with the unfairness of unfair social arrangements”. It can be said that the title of the text is therefore, ironical in nature and Gogol has tried to scrutinize the social interpretations of madness as his protagonist despite being labelled as mad, is able to convey bits of truths and realities.

The tussle between his individuality and social identity is reflected throughout the story. The first instance where he is given social identity lies in the following utterance by the department-chief, “Look here, my friend; there is something wrong with your head. You often rush about as though you were possessed”. The department-chief who is Poprishchin’s immediate boss signals towards his possible madness. He is being made aware that his unusual behaviors which include making of ‘confused abstracts’ of documents and missing ‘capital letters’ and ‘docket-number’ are not normal and there is ‘something wrong’ with his head. This is the first reference after the title which shows how the society labels him as a madman. The department-chief takes him as a medical patient as he points out that his ‘head’ which means his brain is not functioning properly. The following clause further reinforces the idea that his behavior is not normal like other employees. Interestingly this sentence reflects the infusion of premodern and modernist concepts of insanity. Before the entrance of psychology as a health science, the common reason of insanity was considered as witchcraft or sorcery and with the rise of philosophy of reason and science it became a subject of medical science (Dervisch, 2005). Poprishchin responds to this branding by calling him a ‘long-legged scoundrel’, and an envious man who envies him because he sits in director’s room. This is how he rationalizes department-chief’s perception about him and safeguards his self-image.

On a very similar note, Poprishchin recalls the office accountant and uses words like ‘a terrible man’ for him because he does not give him advance. According to Poprishchin the accountant would not allow any advance despite his begs and beseechs. Quite ironically this strict regulations are confined to his office alone and at home even he gets beaten by his own cook. Poprishchin’s pointing towards this ironic situation provides him a chance to show his dissatisfaction with his office and colleagues. He tries to assert that problem lies in the surrounding system and not with his ‘head’.

The latter half of the story deals with Poprishchin’s increased obsession with his imaginary world. He imagines himself to be the King of Spain and this revelation brings new identity to him. He starts seeing everything with a new perspective altogether and there are only a few instances in the text where he jumps into the social reality from his

imaginary reality. "To-day is a day of splendid triumph. Spain has a king; he has been found, and I am he." For Poprishchin this 'sudden realization' is a blessing which complimented his previous behavior of perceiving himself as an exceptional human being who is different from other individuals. Yet in the following paragraph he expresses his fear of the possibility that he could be imprisoned in the asylum for this very act. "It was fortunate that it occurred to no one to shut me up in the asylum" The assumption of the being a king provides Poprishchin a chance to upset the imposed social identities of the world around him. As a king he feels himself more empowered and free of social chains. Although it can be argued that this is psychological disorder yet it tells much about the traditions of modernist era which enchains individuals through various discourses and in reaction the individuals assert the psychological resistance.

The reference of asylum can have a symbolic meaning in the text; For Poprishchin the social abandonment and non-acceptability can be similar to an asylum where he is considered as a mad and irrational person whose talks are taken as random ramblings and behavior is considered insane. However, as a king Poprishchin feels himself more secure and controlled who can take control of the course of actions in his life. It can be noted that this confidence provides him a challenging attitude where he is considering those mad who do not understand him. He comments on Mawra's reaction when she knew about this revelation by saying, "The stupid thing had never seen the king of Spain before!" He considered her a lady with low intellect to absorb such a 'lofty subject'. Later on when he is transported to an asylum he believes he has arrived in Spanish court where the beatings of asylum is perceived by him as Spanish royal customs. This shows how Poprishchin continues to challenge the established norms and customs of the modernist era and adheres to his own form of reality and blurs the boundaries between sanity and insanity and undermines the reason and rationality through his divergent rationality.

The Dream of a Ridiculous Man by Fyodor Dostoevsky

The Dream of a Ridiculous Man depicts a story of a similar character to Gogol's Poprishchin, who constructs his own imaginary world. The ridiculous man presents himself as he is seen by his companions and neighbors, a madman who was some time ago thought to be simply ridiculous. He states, in any case, that he wouldn't bother being the subject of mocking nor despise the individuals who scorn him; unexpectedly, he feels sorry for them. Because he believes he alone possess the ultimate truth. After this presentation, the narrator backtracks so as to depict why he was constantly viewed as ridiculous, how a fantasy changed his life, and why he is currently viewed as a madman by his associates.

The story as it stated above is narrated by a person who is considered 'mad' by society. This story incorporates explanations of some of the most important elements of postmodern thought. The central character of the story challenges all the established norms of modernism which see human identity and reality as fixed and unchangeable. His madness is a kind of revolt against the common definition of sanity which is based on rationality. Through his irrational behaviors, he subverts all the prevalent norms of

rationality and presents an alternative form of reality, which although is self-constructed but where the elements of peace, harmony and coexistence are available in abundance.

The madness of the protagonist is constructed in various ways in the text. The story starts with 'I am a ridiculous man. They call me mad now', and he considers himself a ridiculous person who is socially isolated because of his irrational behavior. Despite feeling disgusted of the idea that he is socially secluded because of his irrational behavior, he adheres to the idea that he alone knows the truth which is hidden from the rational minds and thus he takes pride in his madness. This shows that madness is discursively constructed in a paradoxical manner which goes parallel in the whole story. At time, in his madness he sees himself as an indifferent person who has no feelings of sympathy and humanity and on other times, he feels himself drowned in the curse of the consciousness. This abrupt shift of moods and feeling project the madness of the protagonist which challenges the social concept of sanity.

Dostoevsky's stories echo the similar voices of the characters who prefer to live in their own constructed worlds. In *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* the protagonist tries to challenge the established social beliefs of morality and progress through his 'absurd thoughts'. He believes that he has known the secret of an ideal life which is invisible to the rational eyes. His pride in his madness and absurdity challenges the whole concept of rationality and sanity. In his dream he builds his own world where there is no reflection of contemporary social trends of lies, deceits and exploitation. The writer here contrasts two different worlds, one that has surrounded him which is real but impure and the other which is the protagonist's world which is imaginative yet pure. The readers are made to think which one is the 'real world' and which one is artificial. Dostoevsky has infused the religious symbolism in the text without referring to the religious preaching which shows the subjective interpretation of religion where morality and social coexistence is given preference over sermons and religious offerings. Thus, this amalgamation of real and unreal challenges the contemporary beliefs of fixity and objective of metanarratives.

The text of the story seems to be the playground of various realities and ideologies. Dostoevsky has portrayed the central character as a creator of an ideal world which not only criticizes his social context but also idealizes his own world as the ultimate reality. The postmodern thought of plural realities comes in conflict in the story where in presence of multiple realities there is non-conformity and ambiguity. The narrator's ideal world although seems to be perfect but it can be challenged due to its non-existence while the social reality around him is factual but negated by the writer on moral basis. For him the world has digressed from ultimate reality and people have taken abode in faulty metanarratives which are unable to provide promised resurrection.

The first conflictual reality arises on the identity of the protagonist who is considered socially as a 'ridiculous' man. His behaviors are actions are translated as absurd, which becomes a primary reason of his social isolation. The narrator expresses how he is viewed by the world around him since his early schooldays. He is seen as a person of

strange behavior by his peers and fellows. His is often considered as an object of amusement and labelled as ridiculous man. The protagonist on contrary views himself as a person with rare talent. He considers he has found the alchemy to ultimate truth which is unconceived by the world around him. He thus takes pride in his strange behavior. For him this is more than a real behavior. The conflict in views of the social and personal identity somehow contributes in the postmodern thought where the existence of multiple realities creates an ambiguous situation. The promulgated truths and realities become contested and no ultimate claims could be made.

Flax (1987) identifies that in a postmodern world the issue of identity is troubling the postmodern individual. The effect of multiple yet equally powerful discourses on individual split them in multiple identities and self becomes a center of multiple discourses without a complete adherence to any particular discourse. In this particular situation, the concept of self becomes an illusion and everything in an individual is attributed to the social context and power discourses. Dostoevsky's characters are often depicted as victim of social discourses, who are torn between their instinctive self and social self. Their agony often reflects in their description of their selves. The protagonist of *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* is object of such a split where he is considered absurd, mad and ridiculous by society. There are various social discourses that manifest his self, including academia, social circles and family which limit his identical roles. The school education gives him the impression that he is an irrational human being. He is mocked by his peers for his unconventional ideas and behaviors.

His moral values and instinctive drives also face a split. In an ordinary event when he denies help to a poor girl drives him crazy later on. The apathy which was owned and enjoyed by him in the beginning is replaced with extreme sensitivity and he tries to attempt a suicide. In another instance he takes pride in knowing the ultimate reality which is unseen to world becomes a source of guilt later on. He believes he is a source of scourge which has polluted his ideal world.

The story also reveals identity as an interaction of inner self with outer world. The protagonist keeps his inner thoughts to himself without letting them out. The fear of being exposed always accompanies him. This makes him feel that his identity is a gifted one which cannot be understood by society around him. Interestingly this creates a deadlock between him and society where both do not want to peep inside to each other and make a superficial guess about each other. The society ridicules him and in return he ridicules the society. His identity thus remains unfixed and pendulums between his own view of himself and social view about him. Therefore, self remains a myth in the text of the story.

Foucault (1980) raises the question on the affability of the power discourses that have evolved historically. He considers every discourse is socially constructed, and dominates groups of the society support and promulgates their discourse by means of knowledge. The power of knowledge is multidimensional in nature which can provides an easy lens for the society to view and judge individuals and groups. Then it is the society the

question of sanity and insanity of individual without any ultimate ordain but on the basis of their knowledge and adherence to it. Based on this concept the question of sanity and insanity/madness, rationality or irrationality all jumbles in a postmodern society. The interpretations of these social labels become a matter of too subjective to make any definite claim. The story reflects the similar aspect of a postmodern society where definition of madness and sanity is quite contrasting for society and the protagonist. He has been victimized by society by ridiculing him as a madman. "I was ridiculed by everyone and always." Yet his reaction and self-perception is quite contrary to social perception. He presents himself as a rational being and questions the rationality of the society which has forgotten peace, love and harmony with the evolution of materialism. Dostoevsky here portrays his character who not only questions the ethics of modernism which encourages capitalistic thoughts over humanity and modernity but also challenges it by presenting an alternate course of action. He tries to deconstruct the modernist thought of progress and enlightenment which is hollow at its being. While rationality has no final version and is a matter of subjective interpretation. The protagonist's positive self-image, as an only rational being who can see beyond the power discourses reflect the postmodern philosophical tradition where individual tries to liberate himself from imposed identities. His liberation efforts can be seen in his dream where he flies to another world and imagines a life of his own choice. The utopian life has all the characteristics which contradict the social reality prevalent around the protagonist in his non-imaginary life. He fabricates his own reality in his dream and tries to abode in that. However, in later part of the dream his fear of power discourses engulfs his fantasy and he feels that his ideal world has been infected once again. The social power discourses have a deeper effect on his imagination and he feels sudden disappointment over the shattering of his dream. The power discourse here can be modernist materialism which according to the author has begot greed, lie, cheat and crime in society. The people of ideal world has been poisoned by these evils and they have forgotten to love and care for each other.

The Black Monk by Anton Chekhov

In the story The Black Monk, Kovrin a main character of the story, sees a black monk in his imagination who not only talks to him but also helps him manifest a new identity. This act of Kovrin makes him seem crazy for his family and other social relations. Although he is an educated man, who has a University degree in Philosophy but his over absorption in philosophical knowledge draws curtains between him and other people around him. For him only the Black Monk knows his exceptional abilities which no one else can see or accept. This makes him leave his wife and father-in-law and shift to Moscow to begin a new life. However, he ends up living a life full of guilt and remorse which ends with a miserable death.

The title of the story reflects the central subject of the story which is a Black Monk who is a more a fabrication of protagonist's mind than his real physical existence. If we analyze the title semantically, it has two key words i.e black, monk. The term 'black' is used as an adjective which refers not only to the color of that monk but also his characters.

Usually black color is associated with darkness, horror, bleakness, pessimism and in some cases with ignorance. Whereas 'monk' refers to a religious person who abandons worldly life in pursuit of spiritual life, as defined by Oxford dictionary (8thed) 'a member of a religious group of men who often live apart from other people in a monastery and who do not marry or have personal possessions.' It is interesting to note that Chekhov has paradoxically joined two terms which have contrasting features. Together it gives the impression of a religious philosophy which has lost its true color and fervor in a postmodernist era which has revived every metanarrative without complete adherence to any particular narrative. The title can also be interpreted with Kovrin's perspective as the black monk symbolizes his darkened imaginations which are unacceptable to the society and he has to keep them aloof from his family members. Later in the story this dark imagination deprives him of his family life and ultimately his life at the end.

Kovrin's interaction with the black monk gives him an image of an insane person whose mind does not work in a normal way. As discussed before (in part 2 and part 3) that insanity or madness is more a social interpretation than a strict medical or legal condition. In this particular case Kovrin faces similar labelling like other two aforementioned protagonists and he is considered as an insane person which results in his social isolation.

There is no one here . . . no one! Andryusha, you are ill!...."You are ill!" she sobbed, trembling all over. "Forgive me, my precious, my dear one, but I have noticed for a long time that your mind is clouded in some way. . . . You are mentally ill, Andryusha. . . . (p. 19).

The above passage shows how insanity or madness is imposed over Kovrin, he is being told about 'illness' which gives a new identity to him. Uses of the clauses like 'you are ill', 'she sobbed', 'your mind is clouded', and 'you are mentally ill' shows the complete process of interpellation where Kovrin is made realize that he does not belong to the community of sane people and this is the matter of concern for the society. Tania's weeping further reinforces the interpellation process and Kovrin is being made a subject of the discourse of sanity and rationality.

Although his hallucination can be regarded as a mental disorder yet his interaction with the black Monk symbolically signifies some important elements of postmodern thought. The first element is the revival of old narratives and myths which is the essential part of a postmodern society. Kovrin fabricates his imaginary monk from an old legend:

A thousand years ago a monk, dressed in black, wandered about the desert, somewhere in Syria or Arabia. . . . Some miles from where he was, some fisherman saw another black monk, who was moving slowly over the surface of a lake. This second monk was a mirage(p. 6).

Kovrin revives an old myth against all modernist rational progress and traditions. The scientific reason which fashioned modernist society shows no acceptance towards such imaginary myths whereas Kovrin as a postmodern individual stands firm over his

form of reality as he expresses, "there must be truth in the legend." On contrary his hallucinations are considered as signs of insanity by his family members and he is treated as psychic patient.

Kovrin, confidently, challenges the concept of sanity and insanity. Very much like Dostoevsky's protagonist, Kovrin equates insanity with exceptionality, for him all the genius men in the past did not live the normal social life or experienced mundane life affairs. "And are you sure that the men of genius, whom all men trust, did not see phantoms, too? The learned say now that genius is allied to madness. My friend, healthy and normal people are only the common herd."

On contrary he sees conventional behavior as a kind of disorder which most of the people suffer in their lives. They enjoy no innovations or novelty which make them obedient social beings without healthy minds. Kovrin, however, like Dostoevsky's ridiculous man does not claim the possession of ultimate truth. He very much like a postmodern individual is confused about adhering to an ultimate truth. When monk asks him (p-14) about eternal truth, Kovrin finds himself without an answer and the monk disappears the very next moment.

He considers his hallucinations as sense of relief, contrary to the social belief of a sign of madness, "But I am all right, and I am doing no harm to any one; so there is no harm in my hallucinations," he thought; and he felt happy again." This is what makes him a postmodern character who perceives reality according to his subjective perceptions and challenges the social narratives of reality. He seeks pleasure in his hallucinations contrary to the social belief of insanity which collates madness with sorrow, guilt and remorse as depicted in Tanya and his father's reaction against Kovrin's behavior, which is highlighted above. The following passage shows how Kovrin challenges the traditional concept of insanity through his sensuous joy in his hallucinations:

He went back to the house, light-hearted and happy. The little the monk had said to him had flattered, not his vanity, but his whole soul, his whole being. To be one of the chosen, to serve eternal truth, to stand in the ranks of those who could make mankind worthy of the kingdom of God some thousands of years sooner--that is, to free men from some thousands of years of unnecessary struggle, sin, and suffering; to sacrifice to the idea everything--youth, strength, health; to be ready to die for the common weal--what an exalted, what a happy lot! He recalled his past--pure, chaste, laborious; he remembered what he had learned himself and what he had taught to others, and decided that there was no exaggeration in the monk's words (p. 14).

This passage shows how his insanity is a source of bliss for him and it is equated with exceptionability. Kovrin does not want to overcome this insanity and keep on insisting that this is a bliss and abhors the treatment which he receives by the family. However, despite his strong resistance against social labelling, Kovrin somehow succumbs to the process of interpellation as it's evident in his conversation with the monk.

“But I know that when you go away I shall be worried by the question of your reality. You are a phantom, a hallucination. So I am mentally deranged, not normal?” Here Kovrin reflects the effect of interpellation by questioning the reality of his own imagination and sanity. He depicts how he has been isolated from the community of normal minds. It is interesting to note that he reproduces the social binaries which are attributed with insanity like normalcy is compared with mental illness. Which means all those who suffer from mental disorder are not normal human being. This refers to the above-discussed concepts of sanity and insanity where social perceptions of insanity are stronger than legal and medical conditions. This conflict which arises in his mind gives way to another major issue of postmodern characters which is identity crisis. Kovrin starts suspecting his self-perceptions and thoughts and questions all of his reasons, ‘If I know I am mentally affected, can I trust myself?’ The effect of dominant discourses is evidently clear here as they have created a split in his personality where his view of self becomes a myth.

Another justification which Kovrin puts forward for his mirage is believing himself as a man of extraordinary abilities. He gives historical references that every great man in past had undergone unnatural experiences like himself. Through the mouth of the black Monk he calls himself a genius and blessed person who is different from the rest of the people, which is why he is witnessing such things. "Yes, you are one of those few who are justly called the chosen of God." Here Kovrin rationalizes the concept of madness and insanity by comparing it with genius and divine blessing. Foucault (1980) as a postmodernist acknowledges such interpretation of madness as the concept of madness is ideological rather physical where social discourses tag someone mad or insane whereas the individual perception can be quite contrary to that and he may possess extraordinary skills. Thus the metanarrative of modernist rationality is challenged in this instance.

The Self as a playground of different social discourses without a rigid or fixed identity is a chief element of postmodern thought. The characters in the story are reflection of different discourses. Kovrin is seen as haunted by philosophical notions where he sees everything in his philosophical perspective and relies on knowledge in his daily affairs of life. He sees black monk as ‘other him’ who provides him reassurance about his extraordinary abilities His whole conception of ‘self’ seems to have based on the fabrics of knowledge and his rationales and judgments are based on the philosophical learning. Therefore, his sense of himself is chiefly constituted by academic discourses where he cannot see his other aspects of his life. In the battle of sanity and insanity with society, Kovrin finds himself helpless to realize the true self of him and he ends up living in isolation.

Conclusion

The protagonists of the selected Russian stories show how the evolution of new trends in modernist society paved way for identity conflicts which furthered in post-world war eras due to rapid globalization which ultimately makes ‘self’ as a myth in this age of multiple realities and identities. It has also been found in all three stories that characters suffer from the issue of identity conflict. The chief reason behind this identity conflict have been the

social isolation that every individual faces. The social discourses of rationality and insanity contribute chiefly in their identity conflicts which make them have a different opinion of themselves. However, the patterns of identity conflict remain different all three protagonists, it ranges from complete transformation into some other character, or challenging social perception through hallucinations. All of them face social isolation, resulting to which they rely heavily on their imagination which help them reinforce their subjective view of the self.

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