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POST-WAR WRITINGS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

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ABSTRACT

Proposed paper would like to shed some light on 'hard problem' of mind and consciousness as reflected in post-war writings of Literature in English. When mind is aware and perceptive to all that is around; it is considered to be 'conscious'. State of **consciousness** is not only about awareness; it is also about what goes on within inner recesses of man's mind. Philosophers, psychologists and people from other fields have tried to find answers about this 'hard problem' that has puzzled man since he started questioning about what makes one mind different from another.

The two great wars and intervening years left their mark on lives of people. Economic depression wrought havoc in personal life of man. Age old traditional and cultural values, literary forms of writing and all that was once valued by societies, started falling apart. Writers broke away from stereo-type writing. While writers like D. H. Lawrence and E. M. Forster talked about hollowness of complex, over-intellectual and materialistic modern life, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Plath expressed psychological depths of mind through their **Stream of Consciousness** writings. Yeats enriched poetic world with his poems that talked about sterile modern life. **Trench poets** talked about horrors of war and shell-shock. World Wars shattered the myth of progressive humanity. Modern technology and researches in other fields could not stop **depression** that engulfed humanity on seeing mangled and burnt bodies across the surface of the earth.

The paper stresses upon positive values of simple, traditional and cultural lifestyle for generating peace in minds through examples taken from rich works of literature in English.

Keywords : Consciousness, Stream of Consciousness , Psychology , Psychological , Historical Consciousness, Mythological Consciousness, Romantic Consciousness, Post War Consciousness, Personal Consciousness

Isolated and Alienated Spirit of Man in Post-War Writings

Many have tried to define **consciousness**, and have done explicitly so. But it is not easy to give shape to something that has no solid form to it. **Consciousness** is constantly changing from one second to the next. Different factors leave their impression on human mind and these factors are what mold thoughts and words that flow out of a writer's pen. Each person perceives things in different manner. **Consciousness** defines

**psychology** of human mind. Seasons, day and night, environment, time, wars, peace, natural calamities, languages, cultures, topography and much more is there to give different hues to what is called by one name.

Early English literature was more involved with matters of daily life, religious matter and fear from natural sources like sea and storms. Literature of later period reflected more upon pastoral life. Then came literature that dealt with stories of bravery, chivalry, romance and courtship through great pieces like those of King Arthur and his men around the round table, Charlemagne and Robin Hood. While Chaucer spoke through the mouth of common man, Spenser idolized the Queen in his *Faerie Queene*. Individual or **Personal Consciousness** can be seen in Spenser's *Epithalamion*, his marriage hymn. Chaucer's was social consciousness that studied human faces, human behavior, their dress code and language as he sat at the harbor where there was constant inflow of strangers from other parts of the world. **Historical Consciousness** is reflected through great plays of Shakespeare. Milton talks about **Mythological Consciousness** in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, and same is discussed in Marlow's *Dr. Faustus*. Romantics went after natural beauty and imaginative power of mind. Gothic literature too had found its path and created terrifying pictures of hunted castles and ghosts. Victorians were engrossed with problems of industrial revolution. Dickens came out with autobiographical works and Thackeray satirized society in *Vanity Fair*. Discoveries in science and other fields of social sciences fuelled the imagination of people like H.G. Wells who came up with fine masterpieces like *The Time Machine* and *The Invisible Man*.

Writers, poets and dramatists wrote what they saw around them, times they lived through and writings they went through. It is not as if only romances were heritage of one community, one country or one literary period. Romances have been written down, and are being written even today. **Romantic Consciousness** remains the same but there are different parameters by which these writings are segregated from one age to the next. The same holds true for other literary genres.

One understands **Post-War Consciousness** by keeping past writings in mind. Modernists gave wonderful **Stream of Consciousness** writings. Free flow of thoughts can be seen in works of Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, William Faulkner and James Joyce. Period after World War 1 was Modern literary period and Post-World War 11 period is taken to be the Post-Modern period of English Writing. There are no visible lines drawn through the literary periods as authors like Samuel Beckett and Hardy wrote both for the Moderns and Post-Moderns.

Joyce is remarkable with **Stream of Consciousness** writing technique in his novels like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. Joyce makes use of obscure words and does away with conventional style of writing. Joyce makes free use of Greek characters for his English novel, *Ulysses*. While Joyce's works resound with his love for Dublin and Irish people, T. S. Elliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* comes up isolation theme and desolated mind of man that is incapable of forming firm decisions.

Character is understood through his thought process in Woolf's writings. *Mrs Dalloway* is a novel about one day events that links past and present through interior monologue and soliloquies. While Joyce's writing becomes chaotic at times, Woolf's narrative is explicit and quite coherent. But both writers remarkably explore workings of inner minds of their characters.

Wars had taught mankind to distrust those considered to be great speakers. Trench writers did write about this when they wrote about the difference that existed between men in trenches and those who gave orders. Black humor dominated writings of this era. Irony was resorted to in order to escape painful reality of the situation. Soldiers returning from wars often face paranoia. Writings often came up with true cases of shell shock. *Mrs Dalloway* talks about one such victim, Septimus, Woolf fully understood her character. Such characters often end up harming themselves.

Plath penned down what crossed her disturbed state of mind. Her **psychological** writings talk about her disturbed mental make-up of mind. She had lost her father at a very early stage of life. Her love for him never faded but made her lose interest in the present. She found an unfaithful life partner and things culminated in her suicidal death when she was just thirty.

Modern writers normally used urban settings for their writings. Pastoral stage was almost absent from these writings. With loss of pastoral stage, one loses simple lifestyle of the characters as well. Characters and situations become more sterile and complicated. Unique identity of people is also lost amidst crowds that jostle hurriedly down the streets. But writers like Baudelaire still find something more written on the expressive faces of people who inhabit the cities. They find that there is more to consciousness in such places. City for poets like Eliot is more exciting at times. It does not matter that it is estranged too.

Modern and postmodern writers and their writings talk about depression in great degrees. Here is Nietzsche's voice that says that God does not exist any longer. Religion in post war scene is shaken up. What philosophers actually meant was that the underlying spirit that unified humanity, no longer existed during these times. Society was fragmented and each soul was isolated in its own world.

Theatre of Absurd came up during 1950s. European writers came up with existentialist literature where life had no meaning, human beings had become loners. Emphasis shifted from external matters to internal struggles that went on in the minds. Martin Esslin gave the term to absurdist plays in 1962. For the absurdist, man was nothing more than a puppet in the chain of his puppeteer. He had nothing to look forward to in this life.

Albert Camus wrote his views about man's psychological state of mind in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. This great masterpiece is solution to many questions that arise in Post-Modern man's mind. Camus tries to pave for happy state of mind. For this he gives example of Greek mythological hero, Sisyphus. What is stressed through this essay is that man needs to keep his mind and body occupied in order to keep away depressing thoughts. Dickens too had propagated the same thing. Albert Camus says that man continues to strive for something or the other even when lot of research has been carried out in many fields. He talks about paradoxes of life. Man waits for new tomorrow. New tomorrow brings him closer to his demise.

Samuel Beckett is famous for his *Waiting for Godot* (1953). For absurdist writers, life and life beyond, were both absurd. The plays are normally light and comical in the end because if life has no meaning, then why try to understand its complicated issues. Some come up with characters like Nell in *Endgame* of Beckett who says "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness ... it's the most comical thing in the world."

Tom Stoppard wrote *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. This tragicomedy is existentialist in nature. It emphasizes on the fact that man himself is responsible for his own destiny. Like Prince of Denmark, Hamlet, these two characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* too go in search of life's meaningfulness. But like Hamlet, they never get to know the truth because of uncertainties that keep cropping up in their minds. At times these characters don't even remember their own identities. Anti-heroes are strewn over absurd writings. Language used by characters alienates characters from the audience. Like modern man, there is lack of emotional depth to be found in the characters.

Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* stresses upon question of real and illusion in his 20<sup>th</sup> C play. Luigi tries to stress upon the fact that people who are always in search of some sort truth or the other, fail to see what is in front of them. When people go to a theatre, the play becomes real to them and actual life is pushed to the back of their minds. The six characters already exist, yet they say that they are incomplete because the author did not fully write about them. They don't know where they came from. This is the same with humanity that is always in search of its true origin.

According to Jean-Paul-Sartre who philosophized on Ontology, Consciousness can make and annihilate worlds at its will. He was talking about the Supreme Being who originated into form out of its own consciousness. Descartes was feeling uneasy, and wanted to know whether he really existed. He is famous for his words, "I think; therefore I am". Two different people from different ages discuss about existence. Consciousness of each, stresses upon questions and answers that are nearer to their hearts. Same questions keep coming up again and again but with different kind of yearning for an answer. Man today has ceased to delve into philosophical questions. He is simply satisfied that "Somebody" is there to make things right for him,

for others even this "Somebody" does not matter as life has to be lived with all its woes and sorrows till death separates body from soul.

Beat Generation Writers were part of American culture. They too rejected standard writing practices and did not delve into philosophical questions of god's existence. Sexually liberated lifestyle and drug abuse was their way of segregating themselves from the masses. Jack Kerouac is well known for his *On the Road* and William S. Burrough's gave to the world *Naked Lunch*. Examples of obscene writings were what were given by Beat Generation writers. They propagated spontaneous creative writings. These writers wanted to do away with formal teaching styles of academics. Theirs was hippy culture that attracted the younger generation with its loud blaring music. Gay writing, bisexual writing and writing about group sex is what was given by writers of this generation. Here there was romance in its pitiable form.

Harold Pinter's play *The Homecoming (1964)* is direct attack on family morals. There is total contrast of thinking from that of Victorians and writers like Jane Austen. Another play *The Birthday Party* has been given the title of "comedy of menace". Both the plays come with shocking stories as contrasted to their names. Harold Pinter's language is not to be relied upon. What he writes and what he means, the meanings are poles apart.

Magic Realism came up in later works of writers who believed in mixing myths with real life situations. The literature comes up with wonders of new technology in these writings. Magical world is not created by the writers; it already exists for them in the present world. They simply tap this world and take out its magical elements in order to mention them in their books. Supernatural mixes with the natural to create a new kind of reality. Narrator makes himself absent from the writing and lets it flow its natural course. Everything seems real to the reader. No explanations are offered regarding the strange occurrences. This makes every superficial thing real. Writers like Salman Rushdie are able to criticize and say things under the guise of magical realism which would otherwise not be possible to say in normal circumstances.

Postmodern writings come with intertextuality. No one text is considered to be complete in itself. Parallel texts are searched for source to the text in question. This kind of literature has been criticized for being un-original in context. Pastiche represents the modern society that is a blend of all traditions and cultures. Literature produced under writers who belong to mixed communities will definitely be colored by what is in the minds of such writers.

Writers talk about factual world like the one in Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Feelings of desperation and helplessness can be seen in such works. Medical science that is supposed to give new life to sick, instead is used as way of subjugating man for its own petty purpose. Mankind is persecuted to further political gains in novels like *1984* of George Orwell. Barbaric tendencies of urban culture can be traced through postmodern writings. Joseph Heller gave *Catch-22* where the soldiers feared their own men more than those on the opposite side. This novel also touches upon the theme of paranoia. Novels falling under postmodern literature come with personal horror as felt during World War 11.

Metafiction of postmodern style of writing does away with author's dominant role in his writings. There are other narrative voices to take the story forward. Historiographic Metafiction turns facts of history to suit purpose of writing. John Fowles novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is fine example of this kind of writing. The book is often seen from feminist point of view.

*Look Back in Anger* comes under the category of realist writing. John Osborne did not give escapist drama to his audience. Aim was to give something that was natural in real life; something to connect with.

Detective fiction genre became prominent with writers like Agatha Christie. Titled "Queen of Crime", Agatha Christie gave finest murder mysteries to her readers. She also wrote several plays. Along with detective novels, one also finds spy fiction to be popular during these times. Ian Fleming gave to the world the famous character of James Bond 007.

Kailyard School came up with Scottish fiction. Ideal society is mentioned in *Peter Pan*. J. M. Barrie uses folklore and the fantastic to woo his readers. C. S Lewis is famous for his *The Chronicles of Narnia*. J.R.R. Tolkien is the author of *The Lord of the Rings*. There is no lack of ideas for literary genres of postmodern literature. Movies like *Harry Potter* continue to enthrall the young generation with its magical world. Film adaptations have made world of words come nearer to the fantasy seeking minds of readers who have little time to spare for the books.

Postmodern fiction is not one kind of writing. Language is polyglot; the themes are mixture of different religions, heritages, cultures and traditions. Experimental writings were given to readers and these writings had to be sorted out for what was required by the reader from the maze.

Though postcolonial literature comes with traces of postmodernism; yet there is a difference between the two. Postcolonial literature normally has thread of subjugation running through it. It basically deals with personal experiences that a person or community has to suffer under the hands of foreign yoke. Postmodern literature deals mainly with aesthetics and is not political like postcolonial.

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