

A DECLINE IN CONSCIENCE IN LITERATURE

A decline in conscience in literature; Drifting from Modernism to Postmodernism

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical paper is aimed at examining the effects of postmodernism in literature. The totality of human mind and conscience towards humanity, which was the underlying philosophy of modern literature has been scattered by the advent of postmodernism in 1980's. Started as a religious movement after Nazi holocaust, postmodernism took all spheres of society in its drift including literature. The postmodernism is combining hollowness and emptiness in the acquisition of knowledge. The traditional beauty of knowledge based on logic, reason and rationality are declining with the progression of postmodernism in literature. The paper by comparing the modern and postmodern literature is trying to build an argument that there is a need for literary revolt against Postmodernism to bring back the beauty of logic, rationality, and purpose in literature.

Key Words:Conscience, Literature, Postmodernism, Modernism

INTRODUCTION

Since the primitive time man is wondering all around in its environment for the sake of relationships with itself and with society. The man is searching the way of communication, the meanings of social orders and social norms. The obligations of law in society which need respect for the requirements of other humans within the society and how to act in acceptable manner, all these questions need a common ground to answer human puzzles. Since man moved from caves and forests and has started settling on social grounds, various ways are adopted to explain human's desires. The basics questions which are underlying human existence, what are we? How to live, act and communicate? How we can fulfill our desires to live? How we can develop relationships? What are our duties towards society and other humans? To answer these fundamental questions man has developed certain ways in the form of philosophy, moral philosophy, social philosophy and many more. But all these disciplines failed to answer the fundamentals of human quest (Cates, 1998). In this view we claim that the man remains unanswered and unknown to his own questions.

The literature is something which is made by humans, expressed by humans in their own native language and clearly explains to humans about their existence (Cates, 1998). The literature answers the fundamental questions of human existence by bringing in the morality and humanity in mankind. In this way literature brings order to the society.

In the words of Nelson Algren "Literature is made upon any occasion that a challenge is put to the legal apparatus by a conscience in touch with humanity" (Ward, 2007). Further this claim is strengthened by Robert Louis Stevenson "The difficulty of literature is not to write, but to write what you mean; not to affect your reader, but to affect him precisely as you wish."

The literature and linguistic expressions are seen as an "abstract idea" which are derived from society and are essential for survival of human beings (Johnstone, 2000). Literature is commonly defined as a way to express human feelings and desires either in written or spoken form (Wellek & Warren, 1956). It can be a creative narration of writer either in scientific or technical world or it can be a piece of poetry, fiction, drama or nonfiction (Showalter, 1985). But the underlying purpose of literature is same which is to describe the fundamentals of society. Further the literature is an expression of people either in communication, in education and in beliefs of people. It is the representation of firmly grounded social, moral and cultural ways of living. It is something beyond tradition and it gives way of living by incorporating desires of humans (Carroll, 2004). The literature has universal groundings as it guides humans to follow the legal and moral order of society by directing the human desires towards welfare of society (Polkinghorne, 1988).

It means literature is a way of social life. It gives order to society. The order is given by explaining the basic questions of every human being and it gives them conscience and a sense of humanity (Sypher, 1979). This is the underlying philosophy of modern literature which is aimed at bringing people closer to each other and ultimately balances the society (Frank, 1945). On the other hand postmodernism incorporates the concept of self in literature; it supersedes the collectiveness of society and as a result favors satisfactions of personal goals (Gregson, 2004).

Research Question

Based on above discussion the paper raises the question that,

Is the conscience in literature is declining from modernism to postmodernism?

Literature Review

Conscience

According to Velleman (1999) conscience is a moral attachment to self, which then connects self to society the people tend to communicate with each other by listening to their conscience and behave morally in a social framework. It means conscience is in direct relationship to literature in a particular society and answers the fundamental human questions (Smagorinsky, 1990). Further according to (Blasi, 1980) the element of conscience in literature serves two important functions,

- 1- It entails how human beings can be brought up to follow a common social order and legal framework of a society by giving meaning to literature.
- 2- It is a description of moral ethics in literature, as it describes life of human beings how to live in society which is made up on common goals and needs cooperation from its member.

In this view we claim that the element of conscience in literature is essential to answer the human questions in a moral and socially acceptable way.

Modern literature and conscience

The modern literature and linguistic expressions are seen as an “abstract ideas” which are derived from society and are essential for survival of human beings (Johnstone, 2000). Further according to Saussure (1969) literature is a prerequisite of human survival, as it expresses the conscious self of human beings and helps the people to interact with each other in a socially acceptable manner. In this view modern literature encompasses fundamentals of society in its literary expressions and brings order to society. From this we claim that modern literature in its

objective and rational sense provides conscience and meanings to people desires and interactions (Kochanska & Thompson, 1997).

Modern literature with conscience: Some Examples

According to Nuria Villanova's article, "The Emerging Literature of the Peruvian Educated Underclass", how literature evolves in a society and gives conscience to people in society (Vilanova, 1998),

"You will leave your village tonight,

The mountains are blue, the sea green as an eucalyptus,

And the world that you will have now it will not be

[The one you used to know.]"

Here the literary expression of a social change is depicted, "It has the effect of conveying a sense of determinism, implying that this journey is dictated by an inevitable and irreversible social process which is uprooting the rural population from its native environment and changing the character of Peruvian society" (Vilanova, 1998). The particular society is shifting from primitive life to urban life and literature is convincing people that you have to change yourselves. There will be new laws; new social norms, new obligations and you have to go through these changes. This journey will provide you the survival, it will give you the voice of humanity and you will lead to success.

The literature incorporates the changes by defining changes in literary sense and paves the way for legal and social change (Cathcart, 1975; Vilanova, 1998). So here we are of the same opinion as Nelson Algren that, "the literature is made upon any occasion that a challenge is put to the legal apparatus by a conscience in touch with humanity (Rovit & Waldhorn, 2006). Referring again to Nuria Villanova's article, "The Emerging Literature of the Peruvian Educated Underclass", which is inspired from massive migration, advanced urbanization and a shift from rural to urban life, society has been changed and this change is incorporated by literature (Vilanova, 1998),

"The Reinforcement by the smile of the eucalyptus, a tree commonly found in the Andes Suggests the breaking down of the traditional gulf between Peru's two main regions and points at the increasing interaction that characterizes present-day reality" (Vilanova, 1998). Here the main elements of social change are migration, reforms in education" gives a new line of literary thinking this new thinking give rise to new literature which is again in touch with new social order. In this line we claim that whenever there is a social jolt, a shift from tradition to new

ways of social life, there come new literature, which represents true, social, moral, political and legal framework to society (Vilanova, 1998).

The society in its social frame work is bound to literature of its people who gives meanings to social norms, so literature provides conscience, humanity and legality to all social acts (Kumar, 2005; Velleman, 1999). The journey of mankind from darkness to renaissance and then tremendous growth in all sectors of life is traced in literature (e.g. Socrates, Aristotle, Rene Descartes, Freud etc). They are the people who paved the way for social development by giving people conscience through literature and provided them with a voice of morality and a sense of humanity. They did so by laying a firm literature (in philosophical terms) which is directly expression of social orders. It provided a common language of literature which brought political, social and scientific development of human beings (Nierlich, 2005).

The humans come to this earth with preempted desires and to explore the world around them. There is an inborn tendency of humans that they should come to know about their surroundings. Their thrust of exploration is then filled by literary writings of society; this literature then gives them “conscience”, a sense of humanity, a thinking of social norms and fulfilling legal obligations (Gates, 1992). According to Jung, the mental makeup of human beings that directs them to act sensibly and in accordance to morality is what we name “conscience”. “Conscience,” he said, “is a demand that asserts itself in spite of the subject or at any rate causes him considerable difficulties” (Jung et al., 1956).

The literature provides people with a sense of conscience a feeling of morality and humanity. The evidence provided above which is a literature of Peru’s social transition from rural to urban life (Vilanova, 1998) and how it convinced people to follow new norms is a clear evidence of literature bringing conscience in people.

To support this argument of modern literature that it provides society and its people with consciences is further strengthened by Munif in his novel “Cities of Salt”, the paper is referring some lines from Munif’s novel to strengthen the argument of conscience in modern literature,

The emir's son caught a fever that no one could cure, so [Dr] al-Mahmilji took over his treatment and did splendidly. The emir himself watched the doctor's every move attentively, as if trying to learn or understand every detail .The emir stared at the medical instruments, so Mahmilji showed him the stethoscope, thermometer and blood pressure gauge. The emir held the stethoscope gingerly, then put it to his ears with the doctor's help, and looked amazed when he heard the strong, regular heartbeats. . . When the boy's temperature went down and he was back to normal on the third day, the doctor began to enjoy a great deal of respect and inarticulate awe (p. 525).

The novel is written in Arabian context and in this work writer is giving conscience to its readers that new technology has come and you have to be ready to face it. Otherwise you will be engulfed by this.

The emir crept nearer, as a child who knows what fire is a creep nearer to it. Patiently, carefully, he placed his hand where Hassan Rezaie indicated and did as he was told. When the box emitted loud music he started and drew his hand away, and when the music rose to fill the tent he retreated slightly and looked into the men's silent faces. 'The world around us is a strange one, full of secrets', said the emir. 'Almighty God "teacheth man that which he knew not" (p.435).

Here again writer is trying to build conscience in traditional people that technology has many positive aspects of life. For progress you have to come up with this new technology in your hand.

LITERATURE WITHOUT CONSCIENCE

So far we have provided the evidence that modern literature has provided conscience and humanity to people. It is the requirement of legal transition of society and gives people what they want to know. Now the question literature without conscience, it is something like without any meaning. It will not provide people with the answers they are searching.

There is no other way of developing literature. As when we will exclude two elements from it,

- 1- Conscience
- 2- Humanity

Its purpose will fade and it will be meaningless. As previously defined, the literature and linguistic expressions are seen as an "abstract idea" which are derived from society and are essential for survival of human beings (Johnstone, 2000). So the literature is an expression of people, in communication, in education and in beliefs of people in a society. It is the representation of firmly grounded social, moral and cultural ways of living (Frank, 1945). It is something beyond tradition and it gives way of living by incorporating all the desires of humans. Literature is universal in its groundings when it speaks to humans in its literary forms and affects the human thinking (Johnstone, 2000, Polkinghorne, 1988). People tend to express themselves by communicating with each other. Further the roots of this communication are rooted in the society and social orders are based on literature. In order to express them in social context at any given time there is a need of something literary grounded in social context. This social expression in the form of literature is representation of one's own identity, feelings, and social conditions (Johnstone, 2000)

Role of Literature in establishing Societies

From primitive societies to till to date modern scientific societies need some common expressions of communication, some common elements of moral understandings, some scared social laws and emotional bounds with each other, all these are rooted in a single common thing, which is termed literature (Johnstone, 2000; Maine, 1876). So we can say literature is something that has moral obligations, these moral and legal obligations are derived from society. These moral and legal values are important for survival of humanity on earth. Literature provides a common ground on which people exchange their beliefs and are bounded in a social and legal context. In a society social actors (human beings) exchange with each other ideas that are expressed in a common understood language; the words which human beings tend to exchange with each other are meaningful as they are derived from the literature of particular society (Bradshaw, 1997; Johnstone, 2000). People recognize each other as individuals, however, because each person has a unique set of linguistic resources on which to draw, and each person makes unique, creative use of these resources. Literature provides people with unique set of ideas that are translated in legal and social laws.

From this discussion it is quite evident literature has to be in the society. It must incorporate social as well as moral domains in it. It is the only way it can provide legal conscience and humanity to individuals. So literature without social context and without conscience is something without any goal to serve the society.

Postmodernist Literature without Conscience

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is the breakdown of inquires based on theories and literature into some kind of contextual relativism which has taken out the glamour of morality, humanity and conscience (Fish, 1996; Rosenau & Rosenau, 1992). According to Hassan (1971), the rejection of norms in the name of reality, hollowness, anarchy, and fulfillment of inner desires without any explanation and result is what we name "Post Modernism". In this view the post modern literature revolves around one's own self, its own conscience and is directed to one's own desires (Hassan, 1982). It gives answers to the person who is proposing it and has nothing to do with reason and logic. As a result the self conscience and ability to answer broad questions is lost in postmodernism (Tölölyan, 1990). Further according to Gregson (2004) the characteristic of modern literature, which in its own voice has combined the voices of intellect, institutions and history, has no place in postmodernism. In the same view Tololyan (1990) claims postmodernism is something without intellect, history and has totally ignored institutions.

Critique of Postmodern literature

Herman (1991), Marin-Minguillon (1991) and Tololyan (1990) have distinguished modern and postmodern literature as,

The departure from “Aesthetics” and dominance of Totality of “Culture” over masses is a journey that leads us towards Postmodernism (Tölölyan, 1990). Postmodernism has destroyed the beauty of modernism by valuing mass culture over social values and destroyed the literature by adding hollowness in it. The same view is opined by Herman (1991), modernism is

- 1- “An emancipator cultural movement to which postmodernism” is a parasite that has engulfed modernism
- 2- “ A germ of Liberation whose outworn husk took the radical energies of postmodernism to strip away at last”

The underlying philosophy of postmodernism which allows personal subjectivity in search for truth is the reason postmodernism has changed every, demise of society (c.f. Herman, 1991; Marin-Minguillon, 1990). It is allowing the observer that what he is observing is true, that’s all. We have modernism which is bringing people together by claiming totality of society, and then we have experience of past, reality and social norms in the form of literature (Herman, 1991).The literary revolt against modernism in the form of postmodernism is bringing an end to rational logic and bringing subjectivity in the name of realism (Marin-Minguillon, 1990).

The modernism in literature is aimed at informing people about truth through finding unseen objects and was delivering society with conscience of mind and logic. While the postmodernism in literature is hype, a hype of media, symbols and useless information jargon which is leading people to hollowness and giving them empty knowledge without any sense of humanity and conscience (Marin-Minguillon, 1990). Nothing is implicit, hidden and beyond man’s control, anyone can see, feel and find truth at his own, this is postmodernism (c.f. Herman, 1991; Lyotard, 1984; Marin-Minguillon, 1990). The legitimacy and validity of knowledge has lost its groundings in postmodernism as it has excluded history and use of logic from knowledge (Lyotard, 1984).The postmodernism has no logical epistemology on which it can build empire of knowledge it is favoring hype of false reality and realism to build knowledge (c.f. Herman, 1991; Lyotard, 1984; Marin-Minguillon, 1990).

According to Knox and Marston (2004) modernism is a tool to bring logic, reason, history and science all together to take humans towards humanity with conscience while postmodernism has jolted modernism by bringing hollowness. Postmodernism is a complicated term, or set of ideas, that emerged in academic studies in the mid of 1980’s of last century, but it’s not clear exactly when postmodernism begins. It’s also hard to define, because it is a term which appears

in many different disciplines, such as art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology

To academician postmodernism is hard to define precisely, as it started as a religious movement after Nazi Holocaust it may be a social revolt, a scientific revolt, a revolt against traditions of scientific inquiry, but it has faded all the domains of society (Arentsen et al n.d.; Burrell, 1994). From arts, literature, music, films, society, lifestyle, values everything has been changed by postmodernism.

In a table below the distinguishing characteristics of modernism and postmodernisms are given, this table has been adapted from the Arnout Lagendijk (n.d)

Postmodernism	Modernism
(Inter)subjectivity, discourses	Objectivity, facts
Identification, experience	Rationalization
Relativism	Absolutism
Deconstruction (what becomes)	Discover, representation (what is)
Practices, interactions, strategies	Structure, systems
Hybrid	Categories
Heterotopias	Utopia

Source: Adapted from Lecture by Arnout Lagendijk (n.d)

This table on one hand comprehends the differences of two, and on the other hand it is portraying how exclusion of Utopia changed the society. The one society which in search of Utopia adopted humanity and morality and people were conscious of social and cultural values. And on the other hand postmodernism has taken all the morality of society. It shackled the structure and systems of society as a result of relativism loss of conscience in literature started (Lyotard, 1984).

Comparison of Modern and Postmodern Literature:

In the view of critiques postmodernism is taking people nowhere, it has blocked the ways of knowledge (cf. (Hoffmann, 2005; Lyotard, 1984; Rosenau & Rosenau, 1992; Tölölyan, 1990). It is bringing decline of societies and claiming personal truth which is of no use (c.f. Herman, 1991; Marin-Minguillon, 1990). This is the critical point which is depriving postmodern literature without conscience and humanity,

To further support the assumption that postmodernism is hollow and empty in its epistemology the paper is referring to present century's hosteller Harry Potter as a case to describe postmodern literature,

"Harry longed to bite the man... He reared high from the floor and struck once, twice, three times, plunging his fangs deeply into the man's flesh, feeling his ribs splinter beneath his jaws, feeling the warm gush of blood ... The man was yelling in pain... then he fell silent.... He slumped backward against the wall... Blood was splattering onto the floor.... His forehead hurt terribly."(Rowling, 2003)

"Sectumsempra! Bellowed Harry is waving his hand wildly. Blood spurted from Malfoy's face and chest as though he had been slashed with an invisible sword".

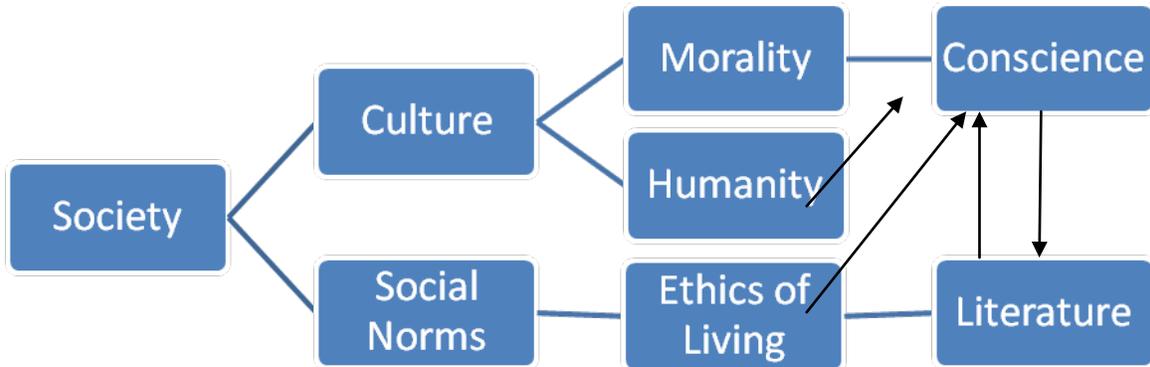
Harry Potter is the series for children and in it we can easily trace the elements of non conscience as it is providing the readers with hollow knowledge and by focusing on bloodshed has refuted humanity and morality. There is no history in this series, no link with the events everything is going on and on without any goal to achieve. It is because the writer does not know in postmodernism where to go, they are just moving forward without any consequences (Hoffmann, 2005).

According to Hoffmann (2005), the time period of 1980s in American literature witnessed a decline of unity and understanding of morality; it started from ambiguity and ends in some kind of mysterious story. The work of Morrison (1988) "Beloved"; "Paradise" by Morrison (1999); "Infinite Jest" by Wallace (1996), "Middlesex" by Eugenides (2007) and "Corrections" by Franzen (2002) are further making our case stronger. All these literary writing has no message to convey to readers, they are just injecting in conscience of soul. They are not ready to tell readers about morality and humanity by infusing conscience in readers (Hoffmann, 2005).

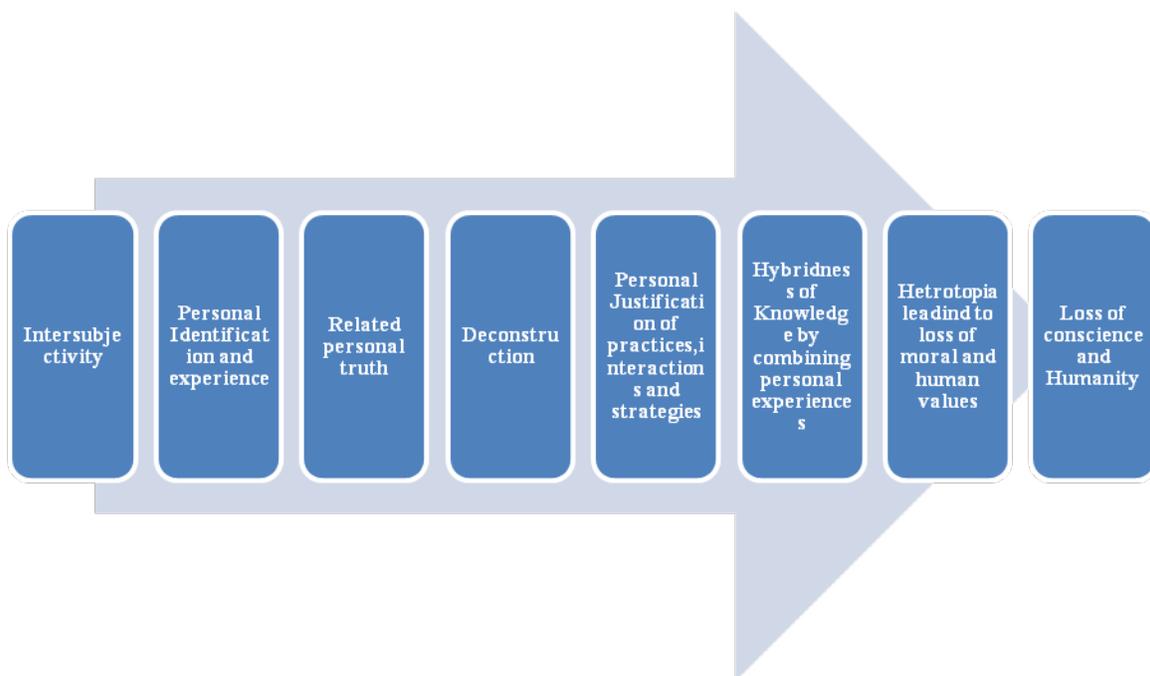
DISCUSSION

This conscience is the turning point and point of departure from modernism to postmodernism. Modern literature tries to convince its people about morality, humanity and it equipped them with conscience. On the other hand postmodern literature revolted against these basic concepts of modernism and now it is leading to hollowness of mankind by effecting society, social norms, culture, morality, humanity and conscience. To strengthen this argument papers compared the modern literature (c.f. Cities of Salt) and postmodern literature (c.f. Harry Potter), the two separate pieces of literature provides two separate messages to readers. On the one hand modern literature prepares people for change in society and tries to draw attention of people towards development of society. On the other hand postmodern literature favors destruction of society. These differences are further developed in the form of model below, first the is proposing a conceptual model of conscience and literature then on the basis

of conscience the paper is comparing modern and postmodern literature in the form of a model,



By applying this model to the characteristics of Postmodernism, given by Lagendijk (2004) the paper is proposing a conceptual model of decline in conscience in postmodern literature,



Concluding remarks

The literature speaks to people by giving them meanings and fulfilling their queries. The literature has a role to play in morality and humanity by bringing conscience in people. The advent of postmodernism took away the conscience from literature and literature of today is something meaningless, mysterious and without any direction to move further. It is revolving around its own self and also confusing the reader what to do? This emptiness of postmodern literature is hurting the all spheres of society, there is a need for reviewing it in a positive manner and bring a literary revolt to bring back rationality, logic and purpose.

Limitations

- 1- Because of limitation of space the paper has not discussed the advent of modern literature and its historical groundings
- 2- Further the paper has not critically evaluated the critique of modern literature

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