

CROSS-CULTURE AND EROTICISM IN JEET THAYIL'S *NARCOPOLIS*

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Abstract:

The erotic subjects and theories deal with distinctive identities in which sexual and racial factors interconnect with class and gender constructions. This paves way in the production of complex results in terms of oppression, colonial and patriarchal hegemony. The paper aims at the dissection this tri-convergence that rejects the normative representations of lives of the characters in the novel, Narcopolis by Jeet Thayil. Judeo-Christian literature scriptures the acceptance of heterosexuality as the familial and societal norm which is to be followed. The heterosexual systems are dismantled by the characters and govern themselves economically and spiritually in the novel. The marginalization of the protagonist affects her internally and she lives in the society as economically and spiritually dependent character and her cross-dressing represents the disconnection of own cultural heritage.

Key words: *Cross-dress, erotic, heterosexual, oppression, patriarchy, marginalization, hijra, relief, disempowerment, orgasm.*

The Postcolonial Literary Studies and Liberation Theology turned much to expose more about the economical, spiritual and sexual disempowerment in many contemporary novels. Such aspects are discussed in Jeet Thayil's *Narcopolis*. The three areas represent marginalization that converges within the protagonist of the novel. The characters stand astride and divide among the cultural, racial, sexual and spiritual facets.

The novel, *Narcopolis* of Thayil is set in the back and dark streets of Bombay deals with major themes of sexuality and spirituality amidst a backdrop of disenfranchisement, violence and poverty. Thayil's Dimple, the protagonist of the novel, is a prostitute and drug addict. She was sold to a brothel at the age of 9 and castrated to become a 'hijra' which is called a fluid gender category. Hijras behave as females stereotypically in the cultural prototypes such as speech, dress and style. There are also some other hijras behave as men wearing cosmetics, jewellery with lengthy hair and transgress gender representation normatively.

The protagonist of the novel, Dimple lives in a brothel and works part time at Rashid's opium den. The brothel is a house where hijras reside. In due course, Dimple leaves the brothel and lives in the house of Rashid, the opium den's owner. The novel begins with the narration of Dimple about the lives of the men who come to the den. She narrates more about the life of a Chinese man, Mr. Lee who lives in Bombay and eventually becomes a surrogate father to Dimple. Lee is basically from the northeast part of India and possesses the Chinese features.

Dimple does not operate the familial structure set by her society and in fact impersonates it which seems to be challenging it. She is not independent which senses that she is under the authority of Lee, the surrogate male father of her but this surrogacy is akin of fixed challenge. The escape story of Lee from the Communist Regime in China is intertwined with Dimple's personal journey of life as a Hindu eunuch in a brothel and turns a sexual companion of the Muslim opium den owner. She masquerades her life as a

nasrani or Christian and works at a rehab center for drug addicts in the end of the plot.

Dimple's story depicts sexual deviance coupled with deep theological grounding. Her character traverses through sexual journeys with spiritual and ethnic ones in parallel. The novel stands pretense sexually and gender wise regarding the colonial and hegemonic structures of power by challenging the codes of cultural, theological and sexual fixtures.

The character of Dimple is a religious bricoleur like the gay men in Savastano's ethnographic study who attempts to link the moral gap between sexuality and spirituality. Thayil encircles her character between the roles as a Hindu eunuch, Muslim wife, and Christian priest.

Even though she functions as a bricoleur in the novel, she forwards to the circumstances of economic freedom progressively. She also continues to pledges to the system of oppression which binds her and never visualizes her personal space.

Dimple plays the role of a priestly character and the opium den and brothel clients come to confess their sins. Being a castrated biological male prostitute Thayil's narrator, lives as a woman who talks about the nature of sex when Rashid asks her, "What I want to know, do and not the way a woman does [...] I feel pleasure but not, what's the word? Relief?" (124). Both Dimple and Rashid lack in sexual fulfillment and function as a metaphor for extensive economic, racial and sexual disempowerment.

From the novel, Thayil exposes the sexual relegation and highlights it among the characters of Dimple and several others in the book who occupy less privileged treads in the society. Dimple's existence in the novel is created as an object which produces sexual pleasure without physical fulfillment. During day time she makes opium pipes for Rashid providing narcotic pleasures of the customers who afford it and by night she works in the brothel serving giraks or customers. Thayil not only represents the poverty of her character in the novel, but also he shows the other characters with poor situations. Dimple's poverty is entwined much with sexual disempowerment.

Dimple refers the orgasm of both genders she experiences bodily by sex with her customers and Rashid. She adds in her narration that she cannot reach the ultimate orgasm as she cannot ejaculate. Being a prostitute she cannot resist intercourse with her customers. Her physique is a trafficked body which is coerced into sex for economic survival. As a companion of Rashid she does not consent with him for free intercourse due to the economical constraints. Even though she is cross-dressed she regrets more for losing her celibacy. Thayil points the word 'relief' is an unreachable for her as she lacks both physical climax and personal agency.

The 'relief' she lacks is both physical climax and personal agency.

The novel, *Narcopolis* seems complicated between the confrontation of exploitation and violence by religion and globalization of economical trade. The erotic power plays a major role in the novel and its characters are devalued by stripping off their personal feelings. Dimple's body and the body of the other hijras contain a binary gender, physiologically neither male nor female. The society also shattered them towards the binary motion of life religiously and economically. They are not completely mingled with religious society and are either devoted or non-believer. The hijras are not seen as theological or spiritual as they belong to the community of eroticism.

Dimple, a bicoloreur character, can be understood as a transreligious, facing challenges among the boundaries of gender, race and economic structures. A transreligious Epistemology allows the merging of the, "sacred and the lewd in a harmonious relationship is a threat and a challenge to the existing binary (and antagonistic) relations between spirit/flesh, pleasure/ asceticism, sacred/profane, male/female, and masculine/feminine" (Savastano 23).

The novel hence represents the dispositioning of normative codes and displaces the hegemony of colonial and patriarchal ideologies through the characters governed by the contemporary society.

Works cited

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