

## **PLURALITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN RANI MANICKA'S "TOUCHING EARTH"**

**ABDUL GAFFUR B<sup>1</sup> AND ARUNACHALAM M<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli-620017.

<sup>2</sup>Research Advisor, Department of English, Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli-620017.

**ABSTRACT :** The paper deals with the consciousness of the characters: extensively the relation within, from Rani Manicka's novel "Touching Earth. The characters migrate from one place and try to adopt themselves with the other strange materialistic world. The semi autonomous attempts they make to seek their identity very often results in twofold consciousness. Every character revolves around a spider temple (a temple for sinners) and the sins and the repentance is taken into account. The characters commit sins voluntarily but they call it reluctant. The same characters when they deserve the returns for the sins they call it penalty. The Confrontation of temptations and the truth in the minds of the characters and oscillation of their consciousness from the entrapment of drug and prostitution to the repentance of their sins are investigated. The semi permanency of the consciousness and the split in their personality results in the plurality of consciousness in them.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Consciousness is a typical abstract world where every human prevails with two minds and two hearts and the resettlement between the two is called the conscience. This article tries to throw light on the dark or the shadow world pertaining deep inside every individual, especially it is an attempt to disclose the identity; a parallel identity or a parallel consciousness in an alternative world that exists in every heart.

Rani Manicka in her novel 'Touching Earth' introduces her large cast of characters from different geographical and cultural backgrounds. The characters portray themselves by giving a short note about their childhood history, admiring and worshipping their innocence despite their corrupted mind or consciousness. The author gives freedom for all the character to assert their internal world regardless of the existing world; she makes use of monologues through which the characters explain their inner consciousness.

Monologism denies the existing world outside and uses the character merely as an object of consciousness and brings out the spiritual world. Manicka has made an attempt through the characters to show the migration of human mind from one consciousness to another. During this migration the existing world becomes mute and the characters become

deaf and the existing world makes no differences. The second consciousness dominates and illuminates the existing world. Every character is autonomous and free to express their ideas and feelings.

The voices of the characters in the novel 'Touching Earth' are from the single consciousness of the author herself. Every consciousness of different character is but of Manicka's self interpretation of material greedy world and the innocent spiritual world within her. The contradiction within the single character shows that Manicka had tried to create two persons, two consciousnesses or two worlds in one. The accumulation of several characters' individual will on a single situation is the best example for the existence of alternate world in them.

In this novel, the world presented by the author is chaotic and all reality is materialized. The alternative world is dealt between a Bali twins, Elizabeth, Bruce, Ricky and the devil goddess. Every character in the story actively struggle with their situation and their conscience and the reader is free to understand the character's decision between their awareness and the consequences of their sins.

Ibu a mother- ill from her childhood gives birth to a twin girls and she died when the girls are at their teenage. There is a grandmother to look after the sisters but she is a witch so the father of the girls the puppeteer by profession decided to send the girls to Malaysia to work in a restaurant belongs to one of his family friend. The girls unwillingly were sent to a strange new country. There in the restaurant the girls get the friendship of Ricky a rich Sicilian. Among the twin sister Ricky seduced the younger Zeenath and took her with him to his spider temple. The spider temple is a place built by Ricky for the spider goddess, he had promised to build a place where he would gather all the ill souls who commit unforgivable sins so that the goddess would prey on those unfaithful souls and get enormous power and in exchange Ricky would get a voluptuous life from the spider goddess. In this novel there are a handful of characters that fell in the ill hands of the spider goddess, including Ricky. They are Zeenath, Maggie, Nenek, Nutan and Elizabeth.

Nenek the oldest character of the novel, the grandmother of the Balinese twins, she married a puppeteer who is 14 years younger than her and had a daughter Ibu. After years have passed, her daughter fell so ill and when she (Ibu) fell in love with the same puppeteer, not knowing he is her father, Nenek is very ready to arrange their marriage. Nenek considered that she has committed a big sin by marrying the puppeteer who is 14 years younger so as atonement she let her daughter marry him. But the same Nenek, refused her husband the puppeteer when he planned to send the twins (the granddaughter of Nenek) to Malaysia to work in a restaurant. This shows that Nenek is conscious to marry her daughter to the same man she married for the sake of her sins and when time comes for her granddaughters her conscious switched from repentance to the future expectations.

Zeenath the younger sister is caught in the web of the spider goddess. Zeenath was accidentally raped by Ricky to make her a sinful soul to the spider temple, Zeenath remains stainless of sin, deciding that a sin imposed over her can never be blamed or cursed. But

Ricky insisted Zeenath for prostitution and drug, soon she became the prey of her own temptations. Later Zeenath was warned by her sister Nutan about the wrong path she has been travelling. Zeenath could easily understand her sister besides she likes the pleasure of being so independent and outlaw.

When Zeenath came know that Ricky is cheating her she could do nothing except going to the spider temple. Though she is aware of her sins she cannot stop herself from committing the sin but when the sin is committed she feels shame and painful. So Zeenath is aware o the sin and she is also ready to face the consequences of it. This shows the two consciousness in her: the fallible and the remorse.

Maggie is a roommate of Nutan in Malaysia. Often Nutan discovers Maggie's absence and one day she found that Maggie has a connection with the spider temple and she is so close to Anis an artist. Anis has a secret wish to quench his thirst of lust with Maggie, for this the spider temple became a suitable place. Moreover Ricky also deceived her with drugs. The supply of drug has made Maggie deaf for Nutan's admonitions. Later Nutan also became a victim of the drug, Maggie warned her about the fatalities of using drug but Nutan was not in any concern. To show the end part of the drug, Maggie benefitted many physical pains and tortures and finally she suicided by jumping out of her window. Maggie's suicide is not an unconscious desire for revenge or frustration but a conscious idea to wash her sins from her soul in this material world and she prepares herself to another world. Maggie decided not to choose the path of her mother in this world but the world had the very eye as it had for her mother. Finally when Maggie fell in the trap of Ricky, she herself selects to go with the existing world and later she commits suicide.

#### **“GREAT DIALOGUE” IN *TOUCHING EARTH*”**

In Manicka's *Touching Earth*, the characters are treated as “ideologically authoritative” and independent. The characters, with no particular emphasis on gender and race, are perceived as the authors of a fully weighted “ideological conception” of their own and not as the mute inactive object of Manicka's finalizing artistic vision. In this way, in the consciousness of the reader, the direct and fully weighted signifying power of the characters' words destroys the monologic qualities of the novel and, as Bakhtin (1929/1984) affirms, the characters, “call forth an unmediated response— as if they were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of their own individual world” (p. 5).

In the polyphonic novel, the plot plays a secondary role, and this is why the world presented in Manicka's *Touching Earth* may sometimes seem chaotic when, at different moments, diverse characters come to have their say often with no sequence or logical order. It is only in the light of Manicka's fundamental artistic task, the representation of real life, that the cautious reader will understand the profound organic cohesion, consistency, and wholesomeness of Manicka's *Touching Earth*.

*Touching Earth* is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness of the author which absorbs all other consciousnesses as “objects” into itself, but is, on the contrary, constructed as a whole which is formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, each having space to utter its words and consequently share its worlds. In this way none of these

consciousnesses entirely becomes an object for another; each of them is an autonomous individual free to express its ideology and worldview, to live its miserable life, worshipping at the “Spider Temple.” They communicate and interact with one another mostly in pairs—the Balinese twin, Ricky and the devil (Spider Goddess), and Elizabeth and Bruce. One needs to notice that in a polyphonic novel, the reader participates in an active dialogical exchange and needs to be responsive to the entire event (Morris, 1994).<sup>2</sup> From the very beginning of the novel, the reader’s active participation is demanded by each character. As the storyline develops, when any character is revealing his or her life story, many times, they check the presence and accompaniment of the reader. Constantly, they address the reader directly and ask him or her to judge the situation. The reader needs to be alert and conscious at any given moment to interpret meaning. Nutan, addressing the reader, aims to introduce her grandmother to the reader, “now, how do I describe Nenek to you?” (2004, p. 15). While, later Zeenat also addresses the reader as an actual personage in the novel (2004, p. 27).

Maggie’s mother she married a Malaysian money lender but when he cannot repay his debt his debtor asked for his wife instead. Her husband simple left Maggie’s mother and in went nowhere, from then Maggie’s mother picked the path shown by her husband and became a prostitute. Once a visitor of her mother came to Maggie’s room when she was 9 years old and her frustrated mother short him dead and went to prison.

Nutan is the eldest of the twins, she advised her sister Zeenath and her roommate Maggie not to give way for the temptations. She tried to reminisce the goodness in them. But later the arms of the evils were stronger and it easily broke Nutan’s integrity. Soon Nutan was also the one to get used with the drugs. The innocent beauty of Nutans started to grow in the opposite direction towards corruption, addiction and prostitution. Despite the predestined end of Maggie, Nutan eagerly went into the world of drug and prostitution. Nutan only after the death of her twin sister Zeenat, realized and gave importance to her inner consciousness and decided to hear from her inside. Nutan when tries to kill herself by cutting her wrist Anise the artist returns home and finds her dying. When he tried to save her Nutan claimed that she is not dying but she is feeding the spirits with her blood in return as gratitude that all her sins were washed away when she scarifies herself.

Francesca marries Ricky and finds him not a suitable husband on their honeymoon to Bali. Though Francesca is aware of Ricky and the spiritual temple, on the course of rescuing him from the cruel hands of fate she decides to marry Ricky. Francesca came to know about her husband Ricky and his attempts to seduce the twins. Many times Francesca was obsessed that her husband was betraying her without shame. On a fine occasion she decides that Ricky is not hers and she tried to leave him and go with her fathers. But soon after some weeks Francesca encountered Ricky’s betrayal is soaring betrayal and treachery she once again she wanted to give another chance to Ricky and she lived with him unto the last of his breath besides his disloyalty.

Ricky the maker of the spider temple, he has a direct encounter with a devil goddess and it promises him a good fortune in exchange of sinful souls to its temple. Ricky was a unsuccessful son of a rich father and when his father drowned in debt and died, Ricky was a

miserable boy of 12. He then went to a hill top to die and jumped out of the cliff. He landed in the shallow water without any injury fortunately but he found a broken statue. The statue that night in his dream promised him for a fortune if he brings the sinful soul to its temple. From then Ricky started to search for weaker minds and he seduced them into the trap of sins. He loved Maggie, Zeenath and Francesca and he deceived all for a fortunate life. But Ricky cannot live with his family; This is the outcome of his sin which stood as a wall between him and his family. Ricky tried to live in an alternate world where he could pacify and purify of his sins to live and lead his family.

Anis the artist finds his father a gay and leaves his home to live an angry and desperate life of an artist. Through his paintings he took revenge of the world. As an artist he turned towards beautiful women to draw them naked to show their inner beauty. He tried to scale their internal world of self or the soul with his brush. As he did so, he cannot stand out of the seductions. For the cause of lust he tried Maggie, cheated her with drug and had his lust quenched. Days later he realized his mistake and decided to marry Maggie but again the drive of lust attracted him towards Zeenath this time. After Maggie's death Anis's fascination turned towards Zeenath.

Elizabeth – a mistress to a rich old Arabian. She is living a restricted and fortified life amidst the servants of the old Arabian. She believes that living a sinless life as a mistress is a sin and has a secret covenant for Bruce a dancer. She is ready to bare the sins to live with Bruce. She started to live with Bruce secretly. Elizabeth had a thought that the secret life with Bruce soothes her remorseful soul. She believes that the life as a mistress is a sin and a life as a wife to a loved one is a sin.

## **CONCLUSION**

The representation of the characters real life and the logical claim of innermind cannot be easily understood by the readers, unless they travel parallel with the two worlds. (material and spiritual) The reader's active participation is essential to understand the consciousness of each character. When a character reveals its own story many times in the novel, they representation every time has the alternate decisions and verdicts. So the reader has to constantly exist in their (characters) world to judge the situation. The reader has to remain conscious to interpret the meaning.

The consciousness of the characters can be seen only through idleness. Isolated characters are not alone but they are really intertwined with the consciousness. Every monologism or the soliloquy of the characters can be taken as a substantial indication of the travel taking place between the two consciousness in them. Whenever the character feels the inner temptation or desire against their morality or conscience, the migration between the consciousnesses will begin.

When a character in the story speaks, it is not simply expressing the story of the circumstances alone, but it utters the ideological position in the whole world. The character makes the reader think that they are not simply an individual, but they are the significant part of the entire world. When the Bali twins Nutan and Zeenath moved to Malaysia, the culture,

the people, the adulterated morality all made them sick and they gradually become accustomed to it. But whenever their conscience wakes them rising a stream of consciousness they actively struggled between their consciousness.

The spider temple stands as bridge between the real or contemporary consciousness and the ethical or spiritual conscience. The characters who are related with either Ricky or the temple, they all seek the need for the temptations and they travelled a long path in the sins but at the same time every character is remorseful by finding the consequences of their sins. Though they retaliate from their sins they cannot repent or apologies and turn to normal. They themselves think that it is too late for them to turn back and they either continue further in their sins and wait for the fate to prize them or they themselves finish their lives thinking that sacrificing their body and life in this world would buy them the time to escape from the fruit of sins.

All the characters in this novel have two simultaneous consciousnesses, one drives them in the wrong path seeking pleasures from the materialistic world and the other drives them through the path to solace their stained soul. This paper thus seeks to identify the characters relationship between the two consciousnesses from within and it can be called the plurality of consciousness.

## REFERENCES

1. Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (C. Emerson, & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
2. Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (C. Emerson, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1929).
3. Bakhtin, M. M. (1990). Author and hero in aesthetic activity (V. Liapunov, Trans.). In L. V. M. Holquist & M. M. Bakhtin (Eds.), *Art and answerability: Early philosophical essays*
4. (pp. 4-256). Austin: University of Texas Press.
5. Emerson, C. (1983). The outer word and inner speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the internalization of language. *Critical Inquiry*, 10, 245-264.
6. Gardiner, M. (1992). *The dialogics of critique: MM Bakhtin and the theory of ideology*. London, England: Routledge.
7. Hermans, H. J. M., & Kempen, H. J. G. (1993). *The dialogical self: Meaning as movement*. London, England: Academic Press.
8. Manicka, R. (2004). *Touching earth*. London, England: Sceptre. Morris, P. (1994). *The Bakhtin reader*. London, England: Routledge.

9. Patterson, D. (1985). Mikhail Bakhtin and the dialogical dimensions of the novel. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 44, 131-139.
10. Rowan, J. (1990). *Subpersonalities: The people inside us*. London, England: Routledge.
11. Shevtsova, M. (1992). Dialogism in the novel and Bakhtin's theory of culture. *New Literary History*, 23, 747-763.
12. Todorov, T. (1984). *Mikhail Bakhtin the dialogical principle*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press.