

The Theme of “Self-exploration and quest for belongingness” In Nancy Huston’s *Fault Lines*

Dr. Sandhya Tiwari

Associate Professor, English
Sreenidhi Institute of Science and Technology (SNIST)
Yamnampet, Ghatkesa

ABSTRACT

The life of the children belonging to the families caught in the web of self-exploration, nostalgia, the audacity of modernity, etc. is adversely influenced. In this paper, Nancy Huston’s *Fault Lines* is explored to study these aspects substantiating the aforementioned repercussions there upon in general the family, and specifically the children. It is analyzed through this study how the life of the individual is reduced to a distorted- self, because of the unfulfilled desires and untapped emotions.

KEYWORDS

Nostalgia; Self-exploration; Identity.

Nancy Huston's eleventh novel received much critical acclaim. *Fault Lines* narrators are children of four different generations of the same family tracing their history traveling back in time, from California to New York, from Haifa to Toronto and Munich. Though the central theme of the novel *Fault Lines*, is Nazi atrocity, on rereading the text one can find a subtle portrayal is the variations in the attitude of the same-aged children belonging to a different generation. The engrossing structure of the novel makes it all the more appealing, where once you identify and understand the characters the plot stands out.

The children, the narrators of the novel starting with the contemporary 6-year-old boy, Sol, to the narrative of his father, Randall, when he was 6, followed by Randall's mother, Sadie, and then Sadie's mother, Erra reveal their innermost thoughts in the form of observations, which in turn are tuned because of their

maturity and psyche. With this clever structure, as well as a wickedly critical and smart view of world politics, Huston helps us see first-hand how history gets erased and reinvented and hints at the way how our perception of history changes with the influence of the present.

Huston draws the character of Sol, an arrogant boy from California, with biting specificity and detail, in the process exposing the dark side of American self-conceit, narcissism, and undue child adulation. Through the character of Sol, she unfolds the adverse impact of technology on the young child. Sol learns about everything, from murder to molestation, seduction to resurrection almost all things. His curious exploration and the knowledge about things that are forbidden for children make him feel he is all-powerful and all-knowing. Sol's parents have childproofed the house by covering the electrical sockets and putting soft corners on all the furniture, but as soon as Sol is

alone, he enthusiastically seeks out images of pornography and torture on the Internet.

Nancy's award-winning novel is a subtle comment on how the life of an individual is shaped, and apart from the experience, the predominant factor in society. Though the human beings at large muse over the technological advancement and the comforts thereon as a result of that, very rarely the bleak side is thought of. However careful the parents are not able to ascertain the vicious impact of technology-aided modernity on their children. More so because of the trend of the nuclear family, the young minds exposed to the panorama of eternal truths are the scapegoats of technically advanced modern society. Unable to comprehend or more apt to buy miscomprehension the child starts to believe he has outgrown childhood and is a whiz kid.

The exposure due to technologically advanced society mars the innocence of the child where he assumes himself to be the omnipotent. In playschool, I have to hold back so no one will guess the truth about my super intelligence my super plans my superpowers (FL31)

Huston spares us neither the outrageous vulgarity of the hypocritical environment in which Sol's parents raise him nor its appalling effect on his personality. Sol is convinced he is some sort of messiah, born with a congenital birthmark that bestowed on him all the superpowers. Mother believes he is destined for great things and at the same time without exposing Sol to the real life of a child where he has to learn things the way other boys do like self-care, protection from electrical appliances, etc. is stunting his growth by overprotecting him. The pretentious and mal-nurtured boy is falling into the trap of being a megalomaniac.

The second narrator Randall is inquisitive about why women do not show their full body when the child grows, why they show it to the husband, and what is

the age of the child when women think the child who once was a suckling baby has grown up so on and so forth. But the questions in the mind of Randall are justifiable on the grounds of child curiosity, whereas Sol's attitude was altogether that of a spoilt, brazen child bereft of innocence. He learns about the devastating effects of the war between the Jews and Palestinians, during the family's one-year stay in Haifa.

The third narrator Saddle is happiest only "when she can hold forth against evil". Kristina, her mother the last narrator was so absorbed (obsessed) with singing, has little time for her daughter, Sadie, a tormented child who buries herself in books. As an adult, Sadie drags her family around the world in her obsession to know the truth about the Nazi Lebensborn - "fountain of life" - programs designed to create a master race of Aryan children for the Third Reich.

Fault Lines in the reverse chronological order beginning in 2004 and going back to 1982, 1962, and 1944, shows the gradual corrosion of childhood innocence. And this can be attributed mainly to the pretentious parenthood, though unconscious. An eloquent spokesperson of multiculturalism and hybrid existence Rushdie equates love with a happy blend of differences:

I wanted to cling to the image of love as the blending of spirits, as *mélange*, as the triumph of the impure, mongrel, conjoining best of us over what there is in us of the solitary, the isolated, the austere, the dogmatic, the pure; of love as democracy, as the victory of the no-man-is-an-island, two's-company Many over the clean, mean apartheid Ones. (MLS 289)

Salman Rushdie in the *Moor's Last Sigh* (MLS), which was written by him at a time when he was forced into hiding after the world-famous 'Rushdie affair', reveals his intense desire to be heard. In the character of Moraes or the Moor, Rushdie depicts his

own need for self-expression. Likewise, Huston's characters in this novel resonate with the same yearning to be heard, to be loved, to be understood, etc.

When the narrators have dwelt in the chronological order it is Kristina the first narrator, who is at the threshold of being the creator of the disconnected and discontented life spreading through four generations. Kristina's unaccepted and unprincipled way of life leaves the lovelorn daughter heartbroken. Adoring arrogance the mother neglects the child, yet asserts she loves the daughter the most. After having borne a love child, Kristina is again in an affair with Peter, who she believes would promote and make her popular as a singer. Immediately after marrying Peter, she wants to rechristen herself as Erra. Peter tells people to know the singer Kriswy and to make that name popular he devoted two years of his life. In spite of undemonstrative disagreement from Peter, she swivels around repeating the name Erra.

Love defines the way of life, transcending divisions of religion and race. Love triumphs in their way of life as is evident in the marriage of a mother of a love child with her second lover. Betrayal of love for the sake of illusory freedom and the material rewards mars the life of the young Saddle. As remarked by Salman Rushdie in his novel *Shalimar the Clown*, Love betrayed turns into anger and revenge.

All that remained between them [Boonyi and Shalimar], perhaps, was hatred, but this yearning hatred-at-a-distance was surely also one of love's many faces, yes, its ugliest face. (STC 263)

The mother leads an appalling loathsome life yet the daughter is trying to make order out of chaos as a child. Saddle never wanted to show even the gravest of emotions like fear in front of her mother and grandparents. We can live without religion and meditation, but we cannot survive

without human affection. –H.H. the Dalai Lama

Suppressing her emotions Saddle learned to remain quiet out of fear of rejection from grandparents, who wanted her to be bold often which connotes depriving the child of the minimum affection and a few comforting words and out of fear of losing the "luxury" of staying with the mother. She wanted to impress her mother to allow her to stay and that she will not be a trouble for her mother.

The blocks are long and I'm afraid of getting lost, I'm afraid of dogs, I'm afraid of being kidnapped by a bunch of hoods but I want to prove to Mommy that I'm a big girl and wouldn't be a burden on her if she let me come to live with her so I swallow the fear each time it rises...(FL186)

Kristina madly in pursuit of fame sets a bad example for her daughter. Smoking and drinking at odd late hours sleep late into the morning, and ignoring the daily chores till they become urgent needing immediate attention. Saddle in turn becomes a more responsible and matures a girl. The nightmare where her mother slips tiny babies into brown envelopes on which she writes the names in red ink and drops them in someone else's mailbox upsets her. Saddle unfortunately was exposed to the extreme lifestyle patterns, grandparents' over-strict, and their mother a very liberal free thinker, grows into a responsible child who serves the bed tea to her parents.

Kristina, herself having led an unhappy childhood, attempts to be a loving and caring mother. Her unintelligent handling of happenings in life results in turmoil. She was impressed by Joanne, the boy who was adopted, to believe that the inmates of the family are callous. Their hatred is racist driven and they rather want to put an end to the German race. In no time she even starts stealing things on the impetus given by the same boy. She appears to be carried away by the fantasies

of leading free – life and gets influenced by him. The boy asks her to steal the jewellery and accompany him so that they can live free forever. He also suggests to her that she can sing and become popular.

Conclusion:

Although there are several competing centers of attention identifiable with the thematic concerns in the novel - the Nazi atrocity, the impact of war,

exploitation based on the caste system and class system, upbringing, human craving for love and affection, etc. constitute more or less the focal point of thematic significance since they provide the premises underlying the fictional structure. The caste system, though seemingly related to the Indian milieu or the Hindu community, has a universal dimension, which needs to be recognized.

WORKS CITED

- Divakaruni, Chitra Banerji. *Dark Like the River*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1987
- Divakaruni, Chitra Banerji. *The Mistress of Spices*. London: Doubleday, 1997, 1998; New York: Anchor Books, 1997.
- www.google.com/dalailama
- Huston, Nancy. *Fault Lines*. 2007. Atlantic Books.
- Huston, Nancy. *Mark of an Angel*. 1999.
- Huston, Nancy. *Instruments of Darkness*.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1999; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, 2000; London: Flamingo, 1999.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. Harper Collins Publishers: India, 2004. Houghton Mifflin Company: USA, 2003.
- Rushdie, Salman. *The Moor's Last Sigh* (MLS). London: Vintage, 2006.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Shalimar the Clown* (STC). London: Jonathan Cape, 2005.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight Children*.