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Celebration of Redemptive Power of Suffering in Patrick White's *Happy Valley*

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Literature is an art which nurses for emotional and spiritual wellbeing of a man. It does not cease with just describing life but does enrich the vital competencies that drive life. It irrigates life when it turns desert. Literature unfolds the reality of human life as it documents the thinking patterns, social norms, pulse, and sentiments of the society. Only literature can afford to read an insightful understanding of different facets of man's life, hence its ability to alter one's attitude to life. Indubiously, literature is a comment of life through the medium of language as it comes from the hands of a writer who is a product of the society. Influenced by the operations of the society, the writer influences the society with his high profile ideas and thoughts.

Patrick White, a seminal Australian writer and Nobel Prize awardee has authentically exercised greater influence on the global society of the present time with his novels of didactic nature. Widely celebrated as one of the prominent English novelists of the twentieth century, he has twelve novels, two short story collections, eight plays and a few works of non-fiction to his credit. William Walsh has rightly observed:

Patrick White is a strong/ individual, richly gifted, original and highly significant writer whose powers are remarkable and whose achievement is large. His art is dense, poetic, and image-ridden. It is always a substantial and genuine thing. At its finest it is one which goes beyond an art of mere appearances to one of mysterious actuality. (42)

White deserves study as he has definite agenda pointed to sensitising society to social harmony. He defines the noble cause of art, "Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes the human being and makes him its instrument... It is something necessary for him to sacrifice happiness and everything that makes life worth living for the ordinary human being" (Driesen 73). White is committed in his writings to purify the 'unconscious' to help man to escape the cocoon of emptiness, which is possible only with suffering. The author himself records, "I always like to write three versions of a book. The first is agony and no one would understand it. With the second you get the shape, it's more or less all right.... The third gives some enlightenment out of that suffering...." (Driesen 72). Suffering, salvation and atonement find greater space in his novels. Man's meaningful progress can be ensured on the wheels of suffering, the purer the suffering the greater the progress. Suffering can be overt or covert. White, delving deep into the psyche of his characters, studies the inner urges, aspirations, drives and pulses of them, thus the complete qualities. The journey of suffering culminates in spiritual growth which in turn leads one to achieve Pure Being, a divine sense of Oneness with the world of creations. Thus appreciably White has a unifying vision of life, which commands our regardful attention to the author.

White's novels are engaged in search for lost time-honoured and transcendent values through suffering. This search for throws the characters to tension between their seek of higher perceptions and the mundane and earthly reality they inhabit, hence the struggle and suffering. White believes that man is fundamentally a spiritual being. He is the spiritual centre of the universe. By nature he is more spiritual than rational. But this original human identity is ruptured to result in defective perception of himself and reality, which is seriously examined in the novels of White. He censures the fragility of human existence and stresses upon the need to achieve well-integrated personality which prompts the balance between the

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promptings of the rational intellect and the power of the unconscious.

White strongly believes that religion embalms the wounds caused by the received ideas in man's life and God plays a definite role in the life of the individual. Only this religious experience will help a man audit himself and his life to have an understanding of his relationship with the Unknown to embrace holy perfection and totality in life. For him religion is nothing but the belief in the active presence of the transcendental order. One should align his life to match the beat of the order to experience the spiritual, harmonious and meaningful journey of human life. But contemporary life is dictated by gross materialism, extreme rationalism and mechanisation, hence the fading human relationship. Life is nothing but one's relationship with others. Man cannot build his life out of vacuum. Human relationship is the nucleus of man's life. Worshipping human relationship is to make your life worth worshipping. One should be conscious that human life is metaphysical. Rational faculty is not competent enough to provide solution to man's ultimate problems. What is required more is spiritual wisdom, not abstract rationalism. Law of suffering preaches one the knowledge of God which enables man to perceive truth, hence suffering an exemplary and redemptive force. Suffering will be a nightmare when we do not realise the divinity in it. Suffering is a blessing in disguise and the way to enlightenment. What one achieves inwardly will change the outer reality. Oscar Wilde also impresses authentically that suffering is a part of the Divine Idea. It is the suffering which helps in the purification of the self. White demonstrates that pain has the means of realisation of inner peace, light and bliss in infinite measure. Patrick White's novel *Happy Valley* upholds the idea that suffering is the spiritual healer; it promotes the individual's own spiritual progress. Thinly populated Happy Valley is located in New South Wales at the foot of the snowy mountains. Not in concord with the name of Happy Valley, majority of the people there are saddened with frustration, disappointment and boredom. The pen-picture of the isolated town goes as:

Happy Valley became that peculiarly tenacious scab on the body of the brown earth. You waited for it to come away leaving a patch of pinkness underneath. You waited and it did not happen, and because of this you felt there was something in its nature particularly perverse. (138)

Oliver Halliday, a doctor has found Happy Valley as the home of pain. Everyone there has painful story of loss, loneliness and escapism. The characters like Dr. Oliver Halliday, Alys Browne and Sidney Furlow long to uproot themselves from the trap of the sickening town. Dr. Halliday feels caged in loveless marriage with an older woman and is eager to move to Queensland, but is distracted by a blossoming friendship. But Happy Valley has proved a place from where no one can have easy exit. In course of time, the characters learn and accept to live life of sorrow. The essence of the novel *Happy Valley* is impregnated in the novelist's coating of the words of Mahatma Gandhi in the epigraph:

It is impossible to do away with the law of suffering which is the one indispensable condition of our being. Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering

undergone . . . the purer the suffering the greater is the progress. (Brissenden 16)

Suffering as an indispensable condition of the being, culminates in progress. Halliday suffers by alienation from his family and by separation from Alys, his lady love and his suffering, in fact, lubricates his life to give him a fresh insight into his life. He goes beyond the physical phenomenon of life. He is illuminated with metaphysical understanding of life to experience moral progress. This transformation has prepared him to be happy to accept suffering as he has understood its redemptive value.

In the beginning of life, Oliver is more beastly, lacking compassion. He sees human beings in the reduced state of animal beings. He has developed an affair with Alys, a music teacher who is a source of illumination. Oliver is more conscious of his isolation which perhaps has made him understand of Alys beyond what she is. He is convinced that Alys and Rodney, his son, deserve to be treated with regard and respect. In the journey of his life of dilemma, he deeply realises that he has been reduced to "a kind of machine for doing" (123). Realisation culminates in Enlightenment. One who knows himself is enlightened. He begins to see everything with new matured perspectives dictated by human values.

Dr. Halliday understands his transformed status of being instrument rather than machine. He is inclined to demonstrate superhuman mercy to suffering humanity. He has developed newer and value-oriented understanding of every relation with others. Affinity with his family and the people of Happy Valley has filled him to escape the sense of escapism. His hatred for Hilda, his wife has turned into pity. Compassion overcomes all the negatives in him. His encounter with the dead body of Ernest Moriarty while attempt to escape to America from Happy Valley has filled him more with the responsibility as a doctor. He plays a providential role of commissioning his hand to help the sufferers. His wife Hilda symbolizing suffering humanity and Oliver representing Salvation Army develop genuine love and affection, that is, spiritual partnership between them. Facing the murdered

Ernest Moriarty has dawned upon him the meaning of destruction in all its futility and pain. Every experience of pain and suffering drives him to the insightful wisdom of the core of life, "there is nothing that can destroy, no pain that is final" (298). Human life is dignified by nature. Dr. Halliday finds indefatigable strength in love and compassion. Life devoid of compassion and love is not life, but death.

Patrick White's novel *Happy Valley* drives home the eternal truth that universal love is the only reality that can be achieved only by suffering and pain. Successful life is not possible without painful story. In other words, every successful life has a painful story and every painful story has a successful ending. Suffering is not a curse, but a blessing because it effects transformation and sublimation. As the spiritual redemptive force, suffering makes one transcend from oneself to be others-oriented, which is the means to realise the ultimate reality. Suffering is the vehicle for one to achieve the sublime vision of life in equanimity. Suffering is not an argument against life but to accept and affirm life while being aware of the terrible burden of existence. It never dries up Soul but makes it more fertile. Upholding the supernatural values of suffering, Patrick White's *Happy Valley* is comfortably a celebration of suffering.

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