J.B. Priestley: Naturalism is guided by heredity and environment

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Abstract
In most of the writings of Priestley the background of Yorkshire is reflected. His new theory of time is very famous and it can be found in several of his fictitious stories. He has tried to link past, present and future in his time theory. In his writings we can see that there is multiple time perspective. It seems that the time is changing but the values are also not fixed. The values of humanity also keep on changing according to the passage of time. Priestley believes that if the reputation of a family is destroyed by any member then it does not mean that it cannot be restored. The new awareness and environment can reshape the past and the lost virtues of a family can be regained. Thus time acts as a wheel and the wheel is never stagnant. The real phenomenon which governs the wheel of time is change. If I say change it means that the values or virtues are never fixed it also keeps on changing.

Keywords: new theory of time, fictitious stories, past, present, future, multiple time perspective, time, wheel, values, virtues

Introduction
The characters of “Dangerous Corner” prove that time always give a second chance to heal. In “Eden End” the author is more thoughtful regarding a family. Priestley considered a family as a local government body. If the local government functions are not corrupt then it means that the whole nation is honest. This is one of the reasons that Priestley focuses on individuals of a clan. In “Time and Conways”, “Johnson over Jordon” we can find the concept of time and family which the author advocates. Time has provided a very rich dimension to “Eden End”. The author has nicely used the tools like dramatic irony in this text. Readers can find a sense of realism in this drama. Characters are portrayed in a very realistic manner where it has been shown that they are on the verge of losing their innocence. Among all the British novelists and playwrights Priestley’s approach towards writing is very different. He tries to describe the English personality through his characters. Priestley has remarked about himself as a storyteller who tried to help to popularize the long novels. The Good Companions is a good example of this remark. During 1929 it was the best seller in England and it has near about two lakh and fifty thousand words in it. It was published late in United States in 1930 and here also the book was very much in demand. J. B. Priestley is a kind of writer who is applicable everywhere. His approach towards life is very real and thus it is universally accepted. He writes about oneness of all living beings especially human beings. It has been stated earlier that J. B. Priestley was born in 1894 and it was the same year when The Local Government Act came into effect in Britain. It was the act of the parliament of United Kingdom. The motive behind this Act was to reform the local government which was not in apple pie order. It is important to mention here this Act because it is connected to Priestley’s life. We can find several political references in the writings of Priestley. The author believed in circle of humanism which means that it is the responsibility of the current generation to look after the old generation. This cycle is never broken and it is one of the reasons that this world will keep on moving with the movement of the age. Human race and civilization will never end until and unless this cycle and trust is broken. There are so many scholars and critics who consider Priestley as an optimist person who always wrote to upgrade the society.
Literature Review

Not only about time but we can find a better understanding among the characters of Priestley. Late nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of a literary movement which is known as naturalism. It functions on the theories of Emile Zola who was a French author. Priestley was also a writer who believed on the theories of naturalism. He got influenced by the concept of naturalism and it is evident in the writings like the play “An Inspector Calls” which was performed for the very first time in 1945. It is also considered as a detective thriller falling under the genres of morality play. There can be a dichotomy that Priestley followed the dictate of naturalism then how can his play like “An Inspector Call” can be kept in the genres of morality play. At one side there is the theory like naturalism and at the other side there is the genre like morality play. Both of them are not related to each other but there are some parallels which can be drawn. To understand this we need to understand the concept of naturalism. According to Wikipedia—“Literary Naturalism traces back most directly to Émile Zola's “The Novel” (1880), which details Zola's concept of a naturalistic novel, which traces philosophically to Auguste Comte's positivism but also to physiologist Claude Bernard and historian Hippolyte Taine. Comte had proposed a scientific method that went beyond empiricism, beyond the passive and detached observation of phenomena. The application of this method called for a scientist to conduct controlled experiments that would either prove or disprove hypotheses regarding those phenomena. Zola took this scientific method and argued that naturalism in literature should be like controlled experiments in which the characters function as the phenomena. Naturalism began as a branch of literary realism and realism had favored fact, logic, and impersonality over the imaginative, symbolic, and supernatural. Frank Norris, an American journalist and novelist, whose work was predominantly in the naturalist genre, placed realism, romanticism, and naturalism in a dialectic, in which realism and romanticism were opposing forces, and naturalism was a mixture of the two. Norris's idea of naturalism differs from Zola's in that it does not mention materialistic determinism or any other philosophic idea [1].

Thus it becomes clear that the theory of naturalism work on the principle of heredity and environment. Applying this concept to the writings of Priestley we find that he also believe in the structure of society that a man should help other man. We can say that he is a true socialist. Is there any connection between a true socialist and a true naturalist? This analysis can help us to idealize that the concept of naturalism affected scholars of late nineteenth century. Naturalism is guided by heredity and environment. Society is a part of environment and heredity causes differences in the strata of a society. Thus it becomes clear that both the concepts are inter related to each other. A true socialist knowingly or unknowingly follow the dictates of naturalism. There are differences among individuals in a society or we can also say that a society cannot be imagined without individual differences. Albert Soergel is one of the finest author of German literature was much influenced by both these movements of Naturalism and Socialism and it is interesting to note that he has joined both these movements together in Germany. Both these concepts are intellectual twins if not identical then fraternal. In the plays like An Inspector Calls we can find a central mystery. Almost all the characters in this play can be found as evil doers and Priestley has made a point here that if society neglects its vulnerable members then the society itself is guilty. Today the time has come to change this kind of society. Priestley believed that English audiences were actually being cheated because theatre started focusing on money. The state also focused on patronizing other forms of art and opened museum as well as galleries. Theatres received less attention from the state. Priestley as a writer was very far ahead from other contemporary writers. In his theatre novels we can find multiple themes like memory and loss, human connectivity and community and many more. Modernist writers always considered time as a powerful device to decide the approach of the society. They looked time as a vehicle of development. During the interwar years philosophical and scientific discourses were affected by scientific theories like Einstein’s theory of Relativity. According to this theory time, distance and space are related to each other. By such theories old belief system of the society was challenged and thus it acted as a seismic system of change. Others like F.W.Taylor also investigated time and motion studies. As a result new society based on scientific innovation was created in which writers like Priestley played a key role. It gave rise to a new culture which challenged the existing religious and political ideology. As a result the social strata began to redefine itself.

Priestley also supported this demand of time because he understood the changing society. He has also written time plays in which he has used flash forward and other techniques. By doing so he was not alone but he was supported by writers like Clive Barker. He has pinpointed the cultural significance of nonlinear time theories where present, past and future was merged together. It has also been said that time is predestined but a question arises that if time is predestined how can we be responsible for our own deeds or action. Thus there is a type of dichotomy between the sense of being and becoming. Sense of being can be understood as an uncontrolled passion whereas sense of becoming can be understood as a controlled and rational approach which can be termed as planned action. It clearly means that the sense of being is unplanned. This opposition is dramatic in nature and Priestley was the most important figure who challenged the established notion of time. He admired the ability of J.W. Dunne who worked on demystifying the notions of time. During the interwar years many writers were haunted about the changing time. It is reflected in Priestley’s “Dangerous Corner”. Here Priestley uses the time as like a device which is going to make the narrative technique easy not only to understand but also to unfold the story in a timeline. Time is reconstructed and replayed and tries to mix up with the narrative technique. This device has been re used by the author in An Inspector Calls. Here Eva Smith is found dead and the inspector Google is trying to synchronize the past actions of the Birling family. The entire action is reconstructed only to find out the relationship of dead Eva with other family members. It is done only to find out the cause of the death as well as the culprit. In Act three the Birling family finds that inspector Google does not work for the police department and at a time all the investigations done on this case lose its validity and accuracy. Later we can find various interesting features as the story keeps the reader busy in itself. At first we are kept in dilemma that it
is similar to a spy story but later we understand a sense of realism hidden in such works. Thus we can see that there are so many various elements in the writings of Priestley. The present chapter deals with the age of Priestley and influences on him. It is also right that Priestley was also moved a lot by Romanticism however in his age Romantic writers were not in use and their works were not often quoted because the society moved towards modernism. Imagination was still there but it was not preferred like Romantic writers and at that time it is interesting to find that the writings of Priestley were not so famous like Shakespeare in Elizabethan age. There was still some good Literature which was followed by the readers. It was a time when readers were in search of quality as the taste of readers changed with the advancement of time. At this time the war time broadcasts by Priestley was highly important and nearly sixteen millions listeners followed him in Britain. He always wrote for the establishment of peace and harmony in the society. This is one of the reasons that in the campaign for nuclear disarmament he stood first. He had a very farfetched vision. At the city of Bradford Priestley’s statue stands firm at the national museum. Ralph Waldo Emerson explores in Nature (1836) that- “To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eyes of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood [2],”

Albert Einstein has proved the “Relativity Theory of Time” [3] but it seems that Priestley has propounded relativity theory of plays where plays are interrelated to each other. They are related to the time which they present. And in this way Priestley looks like a magician rather than a dramatist. When he planned to work on the nature of time he was very serious about it and people around him thought that how can a person make time as his subject matter? The answer to this question lies in a fact that he was born in 1894 and during those years Einstein and Freud were the centre of attraction for the whole world. There is a similarity of thinking between Arthur Conan Doyle and Priestley because both of them thought that the mystery of life can be solved if latest scientific theory will be applied on them. This is one of the reasons that Priestley has said about himself- “I have been on the whole a very lucky man. I have helped to bring up a flourishing healthy family, who always seem glad to see me. My work has gone all over the world. I have been able to write just what I wanted to write and have been handsomely rewarded for it. If I have refused various honors, it is chiefly because my name has been able to stand alone, without any fancy handles to it”[4].

Conclusion

Therefore from the above discussion conflict emerged that whose comes first Naturalism or Heredity or Environment. But as far as the anthropological perspective is concerned J B Priestley’s works shows the existence of heredity and environment rather than naturalism which one is supported by the theory of relativity of Einstein.

References