

## Reflecting Postmodern Aspects in Haruki Murakami's Fiction

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### Abstract

Postmodernism is wide range of concept and phenomenon. It is not possible to define it in singular definition. But generally it is believed that Postmodernism is the effacement of some boundaries between high culture and popular culture. Postmodern literature is a mixture of intertextuality, multiculturalism, metafiction, magic realism and hyperreality. Idea of Postmodernism is originated in the sociological thought. Many sociologists thought that human beings have begun to move towards a new and peculiar kind of society. It promotes local, small things and plurality and unfinished narratives of the things. It refuses stable and foundation of the single universal reality. Postmodern writers celebrate multiplicity in meaning or complete lack of meaning in a single literary work. **Haruki Murakami** is well known and much celebrated postmodernist novelist in Japanese literature. In his novels, he has depicted characters with namelessness and searching for their identity. He is major voice in Postmodern Japanese literature. His novels portray postmodernist aspects such as alienation, loss of self and loneliness.

**Keywords:** Postmodern Literature, Narrative Techniques, Death of Metanarrative, Multiplicity in Meaning, etc

### [I]

Postmodernism is wide range of concept and phenomenon. It is not possible to define it in single definition. But generally it is believed that Postmodernism is the effacement of some boundaries between high culture and popular culture. Postmodern literature is a mixture of intertextuality, multiculturalism, metafiction, magic realism and hyperreality. This paper deals with the postmodern aspects in Haruki Murakami's fiction.

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sociological thought. Many sociologists thought that human beings have begun to move towards a new and peculiar kind of society. **Fredric Jameson** defined postmodernism in his book as:

Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete And nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which "culture" has become a veritable "second nature" (Jameson: 1997, P. ix).

It is characterized by different aspects such as skepticism, irony, fragmentation,

parody and mixing of *high* and *low* culture illusion. Postmodern writers reject the idea of singleness or objectivity in their work. Postmodernism is the death of metanarrative as **Lyotard** refers to in his description of *The Postmodern Condition* as '*incredulity toward metanarrative*' (Lyotard: 1984, P.xxiv).

Postmodernism is a philosophical concept and it prefers to local than universal idea. It celebrates fragmentation and dehumanization. As Patricia Waugh said:

Fragmentation and dehumanization are part of a 'postmodern' assault on the bondage of thought to regulative ideals such as 'unity' and 'truth' ( Waugh, 1992, p.192).

Postmodernism denies any idea of universality and general notion. It believes in differences and uncertainty of meaning in any literary work. Postmodern literature is a mixture of intertextuality, multiculturalism, metafiction, magic realism and hyperreality. Postmodernist often celebrate to employ *metafiction* to undermine the author's *univocation*. Postmodern writers celebrate multiplicity in meaning or complete lack of meaning in a single literary work. In postmodern work portrays the every character's quest for knowledge and understanding. But it results ultimately in confusion and lack of clear understanding of the event. It leads to the search for alternative narrative. In order to neutralize and pacify people as a group, it gives them false sense of belonging.

The other phase of Postmodernism is postmodernity. It can be defined as

historical and social condition and personal response to the postmodern society. Marxist thinkers have identified it with the late capitalism. It is associated with the changes in institution and creation of social and political innovation. In industrialized core, postmodernity is increasing focus on civil right and equal opportunity.

Postmodern writers from different country have contributed to the plethora of postmodern issues in their fictional works. But the literature from the countries from east like Japan is quite neglected from the academicians in India and abroad. The research studies in Japanese literature and translation studies are very rare. Literature reflects the social, political, cultural and economical condition of society. It was influenced by cultural contact with China and Chinese literature. Many genres of Japanese Literature made debut during Edo period. It was time for the emergence of urban middle class, increased rate of literacy and development of libraries. It is founded on the aesthetics of fragment and captures in anti-mimetic manner. There is difficulty in understanding of the contemporary world in its state of incompleteness of the surrounding universe. Kenzaburō Ōe considered that "*pure*" literature must have a certain social responsibility and should essentially be a didactic model, an attitude which has, to some extent, prevented the development of postmodern literature in Japan (Strecher:1998b, p.372). The development of postmodern Japanese literature was occasioned by the gradual disappearance of influential models:

Junichirō Tanizaki in 1965, Yukio Mishima in 1970, Naoya Shiga in 1971 and Yasunari Kawabata in 1972. The Japanese generation of the 1980s, whose representatives include Haruki Murakami, faced the necessity to start new way into the novelistic space. It is possible in either approaching new themes or to explore new territories. Postmodernism appears as a result of the phenomena generated by the society of information. It is seen as the cultural logic of late capitalism. There is split in the unity of personality and gives rise to new identity crisis. It emphasizes and moves from centrality to marginality. It results into the continuous de-structuring of the idea. Postmodernism entails change and integrative vision of the world. It is also momentarily marked by uncertainty. In a context history is threatened by the loss of meaning. At the same time it must also reconsider with new self-image and new project of reconstruction. Postmodern literature is characterized not only by a paradoxical reclusion in the area of silence, but also by complementary displacement into unidentified regions of the fantastic. Haruki Murakami also becomes postmodern by reshaping the concept of freedom. He argues that nothing is true and natural for human nature. But it all represents an ideal and an intellectual construct.

### [III]

**Haruki Murakami** is has depicted characters with namelessness and searching for identity in his fictional world. His novels portrayed themes such as alienation, loss of self and loneliness, meaninglessness and fragmentation. In the

postmodern world every human being had lost his identity in society. The atmosphere of fragmentation and lack of fulfillment is created through the postmodern plurality. Murakami has shown that every individual has lost his relationship with his own family. He is afraid of confrontation and searching reality in a simulated world. In simulation there is no reality, it is only illusion of the reality. He is a contemporary man who endeavors to survive the alienation of his own era. His fiction mainly focuses on the self form of the human being. It is hard to get self definition in his fictional world. He has not written about any specific group but for the ordinary man. As **Strecher** said, Murakami wants to write his fiction in a way that helps him “*understand the major events of his generation’s past*” in *reconstructed format that is easier for him to digest*” (2002, p.xi). He seems to be contrary to the writers who put stress on the realism and actuality. Murakami rejects the metanarrative in fiction and expresses his own individuality. Through which he placed himself and his fiction in the roles of detached from outer fiction. One of his narrative techniques is *first-person pronoun*. He uses irony as a device to criticize various issues such as Japan’s relationship with the western world. After spending most of the 1970s, he feels to create something new in fiction. He first tried to create reality which is not as it looks but in his own way of writing. He has shown his readers to create their own history and separates from the official history. The study of Murakami reflects the influence of the western culture on

Japanese literature and culture. His works are significant for the intercultural communication. His main characters in fiction showed as independent from society. They are trying to create individual identity. It comes from the negotiation of mind between 'I' and 'other'. Many of his novels have themes invoking classical music. Postmodern era has affected the mentality of human being for it believes in fragmentation rather than in universal idea. It has caused loss of sense, isolation from society and loss of connectivity with people around them. All the way, it deals with the contemporary Japanese identity through unconventional devices and pessimism. In his fiction Murakami portrays the Western subject matter. Murakami's books present a complex, paradoxical existence. Many beautiful scenes from his novels still retain the present world. His novels more specifically deal with dreams and hallucination than real form of experience. He himself not accepts as a part of Japanese system. He doesn't deal with Japanese literary circle or society. He lives totally separate from Japanese society and rebels against them.

Murakami's most important postmodern novels are *Norwegian Wood* and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Murakami achieved recognition with the publication of *Norwegian Wood*. It deals with young love, sexuality, human grief, loss and nostalgia. This novel's titled after the Beatles' song of the same name. It has compared with J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in The Rye* due to the melancholic protagonist and their skepticism for the

rituals in the society. In present novel different postmodern aspects are reflected. It developed binary opposition in between the characters from the novel. Here, Naoko is completely contrast with another woman character Midori. On the surface levels, it looks a story of Toru Watanabe and his remembrance of school days. He has promised to remember:

'Eighteen years have gone by, and still I can bring back every detail of that day in the meadow. Washed clean of summer's dust by days of gentle rain, the mountains wore a deep, brilliant green. The October breeze set white fronds of head-high grasses swaying. One long streak of cloud hung pasted across a dome of frozen blue. It almost hurt to look at that far-off sky. A puff of wind swept across the meadow and through her hair before it slipped into the woods to rustle branches and back snatches of distant barking- a hazy sound that seemed to reach us from the doorway to another world. We heard no other sounds. We met no other people. We saw only two bright red birds leap started from the centre of the meadow and dart into the woods. As we ambled along, Naoko spoke to me of wells' (Murakami: 2003, p. 2).

But after the death of his friend Kizuki, both Naoko and Watanabe get into the struggle of understanding each other. This novel looks different from other writer's fiction. As many other writers might write about *bildungsroman* centered novel. Murakami talks about death and

loss of human being. His inner and private moments come in different terms. From the beginning, he continuously carry the memory of all happened in the whole of his life. This novel is a parody of the Japanese tradition and culture. It foregrounds Toru, narrator, whose reality of life is broken around him. Human identity and stable meaning violently disturb and *time* becomes complicated in changing time. In novel, it becomes complicated to determine difference between hero and villain. The other aspect of postmodernism, hyperreality becomes predominates in Murakami's novel. The protagonist tried to negotiate with heavenly things in order to come with his self recognition. In his narrative of story, the crisis of subject invariably related with the urban landscape. It constantly shifts from one place to another. This resulting in his continues fragmentation and reconstruction of the self identity in new place. In such way human beings desperation for relationship isolates from the society sets back by his indifference and tedium of life. The narrator struggles through daily monotonous life which seems his struggle for the self identity in society. In the end of the novel Watanabe still dreams about the girl in his memory. He deliberately tries to find out stable identity in fragmented world.

His second important novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is a study of postmodern intertextuality. Postmodernist narrative technique such as pastiche reflected in present novel. It suggests that all stories of Murakami ultimately appear to be related to each other despite of their

dissimilarity. Intertextuality also suggests that stories of novel contain specter of the unspeakable. But these seem disregarded for the foregrounding and progress of new version. In his narrative of the story the sense of meaninglessness and loss of identity exemplified with jobless protagonist Toru. In the start of the novel he lives mundane life and revolves around the housekeeping and work. Here he first questions about his existence for the first time in society. He says that:

We can invest enormous time and energy in serious efforts to know another person, but in the end, how close can we come to that person's essence? We convince ourselves that we know the other person well, but do we really know anything important about anyone?  
(Murakami: 2003, p. 24).

Toru asks this question in relation to his wife Kumiko, who has become increasingly estranged from him. Murakami has been aware about the social problems since the beginning of his career. As he is a well known writer in Japanese literature. In his creation it gives the impression of the influence of American cultural colonization and Chinese military influence on the Japan. This dual binding western influence is developed through the present novel. But it rejects the Japanese idea that its citizens as the victims of the World War II. Instead it examines the massacre at Nomanham. It happened because in World War II Japanese military blindly attacked Chinese soldiers. They massacred Japanese for revenge. It has some powerful scenes of history, power

and scenes of antic comedy of that time. Murakami tried to depict a chaotic, fragmented and unknown world through his present novel. It contains surprisingly few references from the American culture in contrast to his earlier novels. The title and name of characters from the novel itself have postmodern feeling. Murakami have combined a historical sense with fantastical postmodern utopianism first time in his writing. Postmodern aspect human beings search for the real identity. As Toru's search for his missing wife Kumiko ultimately becomes a search of his real self. In his search of life partner, he tried to reacquaint with his core of the self that he has failed in his subconscious mind. This book also filled with another postmodern aspect such as irony. Toru lives with millions of tendency from the cooking to the ironing of his cloths. But he hasn't real identity in society and in his own family. It looks like:

“A well without water. A bird that can't fly. An alley with an exit. And”  
(Murakami: 2003, p. 66)

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Murakami purposely leaves the ending of this sentence ambiguous. He leaves it for the reader to finish the sentence and a man without a clear identity. Just as with the other examples he lists, it looks unnatural and abnormal. Toru's inability to connect with people in genuine way leads no reality for him. This removes us from the true identity and it becomes harder to exist in postmodern status. Here, Murakami described the postmodern identity crisis in life of Toru. The interaction with other helps individual to find meaningful existence in postmodern world. Murakami intentionally wrote this novel to bring together contemporary social issues and ideas. These things are illustrated as questions for postmodern society, which are still unanswered.

Thus, Haruki Murakami has reflected the postmodern aspects in his fiction. He has underscored all the postmodern element such as meaninglessness, loss of self, isolation from society and anxieties of human being in postmodern world.

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