



Theorising Fiction as Spiritual Space

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Abstract: This research regarding to Theorising Fiction as Spiritual Space. Data mainly used in this research paper from secondary sources. In this research paper the researcher talk about spiritual space. As stated, a work of fiction originates in the creative imagination of the author who uses it as the site of unfolding of plot through interaction of characters. It is an outcome of the writer’s need to convey his or her socio-cultural, philosophical and spiritual vision to the readers.

Keywords: Theorising Fiction, Spiritual Space, philosophical and spiritual, socio- cultural.

Introduction: Fiction is the expression of one’s creative imagination. It may also be viewed as a space imaginatively created by the author via lending it a sense of locale/ setting and also peopling it with life-like characters. Fictional space is seemingly true as it represents reality; nevertheless fiction writers deliberately create legitimate “untruths” as they seek to demonstrate meaningful insights into human condition. Hence, fiction can be termed as falsehood in the absolute sense but true in universal sense: “The author of the fiction invites the reader to engage in a kind of make believe” (Currie 385-386). In order to articulate a lived reality/ experience, a fiction writer frequently manipulates facts, changes dates, invents characters and employs dialogue/ interaction to create different worlds to examine the nature of truth. Fiction communicates a writer’s ideas in clear and straightforward manner. According to M. H. Abrams, “Fiction is any literary narrative whether in prose or verse, which is invented” instead of being an account of factual events (94). Fiction may also be viewed as “a literary work whose content is produced by imagination and is not necessarily based on fact” and “something untrue that is intentionally represented as true by the narrator” (*The Free Dictionary*).

As stated, a work of fiction originates in the creative imagination of the author who uses it as the site of unfolding of plot through interaction of characters. It is an outcome of the writer’s need to convey his or her socio-cultural, philosophical and spiritual vision to the readers. A fictional writer uses factual material to offer markedly distinct view of human experience—one that has significance beyond the moment. Thus, fictional space becomes a mirror to reflect the personality, tastes and beliefs of its writer who by way of using various narrative tools such as plot, character, tone, atmosphere, etc. moulds a particular experience of his/her into an aesthetic form. In *Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth argues that a fictiona work embodies a “value system which gives it its meaning” (112). He further observes that the “author’s voice” which establishes this value system is “never really silenced” (60). A writer’s vision, perception impels him/her to create a fictional space. S/he offers various glimpses of the reality/experience, thereby relating it through fictional narrative artistically.

The fictional space has been employed in multifarious ways by the writers the world over. For instance, for writers such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf, fictional space becomes psychological space as it deals with



the inner life of the characters. These writers give us a penetrating insight into the psychological complexities of their characters. Whereas writers like Jane Austin, Henry James, and Evelyn Waugh have used the fictional space to recreate a socio-cultural world with its traditions, customs, values and morality. The fictional works such as:

H. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* evidence the writer's use of fiction as social space where the theme of the effect of social and economic condition has been brought out through the portrayal of characters in convincing social setting of the work. Fictional space has successfully been used in such works as Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, Sinclair Lewis' *It Can Happen Here*, George Orwell's *1984*, Plato's *The Republic*, Thomas More's *Utopia* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, to offer the writer's commentary on political events, systems and theories. (*The Jungle and John Steinbeck's*, 148).

Likewise fiction can also be used as spiritual space wherein the central character may be represented as a mystic-protagonist whose spiritual aspirations and their eventual realization becomes the focal point of the whole narrative and spirituality becomes intrinsic to the whole structural, narrative and thematic design of the text. Nevertheless, at this juncture, it becomes imperative to understand what the term 'spirituality' actually signifies and how it is being employed and examined in this thesis. In common parlance, spirituality is associated with the experience of/ seeking for the sacred/ divine. But spirituality can also be applied to a sudden illumination or experience of god or to anything that lifts a man up from a baser level, comforts one's soul and makes him feel connected to the world (human as well as phenomenal/natural) around him.

M. Burkhardt views spirituality as an encompassing term and religion just a manifestation of it. According to her, "Spirituality is that which gives meaning to one's life and draws one to transcend oneself. Spirituality is broader concept than religion although that is one expression of spirituality. Other expressions include prayer, meditation, interaction with others or nature, and relationship with god or a higher power." She further says that it is "the essence of life, principle of a person, the experience of the radical truth of things, a belief that relates a person to the world, giving meaning to existence, and a relationship or sense of connection" (71-72). In this way, spirituality implies making a sense of one's living. Peter Van Ness in his anthology on *Spirituality and the Secular Quest*, defines spirituality as:

Facing outward, human existence is spiritual insofar as one engages reality as a maximally inclusive whole, and makes the cosmos an intentional object of thought and feeling. Facing inward, life has a spiritual dimension to the extent that it is apprehended as a project of people's most enduring and vital selves.... In other words, the spiritual dimension of life is the embodied task of realizing one's truest self in the context of reality apprehended as a cosmic totality. (*Eleven Minutes. Trans. Margaret Iull Costa*).

Thus, spirituality is not just devotion to matters of spirit as opposed to tangible but something that



perceives life as having higher dimensions as opposed to material and sensual. It refers to the way “individuals seek and express meaning and purpose, and the way they experience their connection to the moment, the self, to others, to nature and the significant or sacred” (qtd. in Bergman 5). Ursula King sums up various aspects of concept of spirituality thus:

Spirituality can be understood as primarily a deeply personal, and also solitary, experience of God and the Spirit. But spirituality can also be experienced through many different human relationships, and it can be lived and expressed in new community and thus relate in a new way to the traditional experience of the Church. From an institutional perspective spirituality can be seen as demarcated by the boundaries of tradition - it then appears like a *fortress*. solid, reassuring, almost unchanging - something to be proud of and hold on to. But others prefer the image of spirituality as a *journey*, something to be explored, a great adventure into the unknown, a process of growth, transformation and change. (Thwing, Charles F. “Religion and Literature.”).

The select writers undertaken for analysis in the dissertation have woven the concept of spirituality in the fabric of their fictional work with thrust on the protagonists who transcend themselves and the whole focus of these writers remain on the their freedom and quest for meaning. Spirituality becomes the leitmotif in select novels undertaken for analyses here as the portrayal of the spiritual quest of the mystic-protagonist serves as the narrative and thematic mainstay of each text. In fact, they have created a space that can be considered as a broader spiritual framework wherein “social life is enacted ... language is exchanged” (Davis).

Thus, fictional space accommodates all aspects of mystic-protagonist’s life—his real life situations, outer and inner conflicts, spiritual yearnings, experience of the mundane and the divine, his physical environment, and social influences of the society in which he lives. It encompasses the journey of the protagonist towards ultimate realization of the self. In the process, however, the fictional space is enlivened by the spiritual experience of the protagonist. Every writer creates and uses fictional space with a specific purpose as s/he has a vision, impression or perception to convey to the reader with the help of various narrative strategies. The fictional space is so devised that it can represent a protagonist who is embodiment of the writer’s philosophic/spiritual vision. The protagonist becomes a medium to embody the writer’s convictions. The novelist utilizes fiction as spiritual space via foregrounding everything related to the protagonist and thereby offers an alternative (at times even corrective) vision of life.

The writers under discussion are concerned with profound and complex questions pertaining to life, death, divine love, man’s place in whole design of universe, and essence of being. They have employed mysticism/ spirituality as a narrative mode to portray their characters in order to bring out their spiritual aspirations/ accomplishments. The whole pursuit of spirituality, in fact, becomes a narrative process that helps the author progress in his quest for personal meaning at deeper level. Such narratives constitute ideal setting for the expression of truth that lies deeper in the psyche of the author. It **plays** vital role in expressing values, ethos espoused by the writer. The fictional narrative thus provides a



space for the author to express his innermost thoughts/ideas to generate new meanings.

It is the narrative that is used as a space by the writer to portray a world that is peopled with characters who have mystical orientation and seek to realize truth by embarking on their journey in search of knowledge and perfection. The mystic-protagonists “show us independent spiritual life, [the] fruition of the Absolute, enjoyed with a fullness to which others cannot attain. They are the heroic examples of the life of spirit; as the great artists, the great discoverers, are the heroic examples of the life of beauty and the life of truth.” (Underhill 37). This fictional space gets charged spiritually because of the author’s commitment to express his own spiritual and philosophical inclination, his pursuit of knowledge of the Absolute and his commitment to express his perception of an alternative universe of existence.

The novelist himself being a quester remains in search of truth. S/he has a religious bent of mind but often finds issues with its rituals, ceremonies and conventional practices. S/he feels bound by the traditional religion and thus is compelled to break free of these constraints to find his/her own way to realize the truth. This inner urge seeks expression in the form of a narrative which is redolent with spirituality.

The novelists of the select texts under consideration here view spirituality as an experience of the absolute. Their protagonists are questers/seekers. According to Marie Laure Ryan, “narratives may highlight the importance of our sense of embodiment for the experience of space by featuring a protagonist whose body grows or shrinks out of human proportions” (7). Likewise, each protagonist examined here becomes embodiment of the spiritual design in which his significance and place have been examined. In fact, each mystic-protagonist is firmly rooted in spirituality and is made to hunger for something which is ignored consciously/unconsciously by the other people. The author takes us into the consciousness of the character who is seeking for the realization of the self, or attain the knowledge of the absolute. Thus, the text becomes spiritually charged as the writer explores the consciousness of the protagonist, the complexities of his quest for the absolute with its alternating moments of fulfillment and void, negation and acceptance of the meanderings of human existence. The fictional artist in fact introduces us to the core of human condition as having probed constancies and vicissitudes of spiritual life s/he represents and thus enlivens them via using fiction as spiritual space.

Conclusion: On the basis of forgoing analysis, it can be averred that Hermann Hesse, Raja Rao, Richard Bach, Paulo Coelho and Sujatha Vijayaraghavan have remarkably employed fiction as spiritual space via portraying protagonists as mystics and seekers of truth in the novels viz., *Siddhartha*, *The Serpent and the Rope*, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, *The Alchemist* and *The Silent One* respectively that have been analyzed in this dissertation. The fictional space comprises the locale, the world (socio-cultural setup) peopled by various characters grappling with their lives on day-to-day basis; nevertheless mystic-protagonists are a cut above the rest as the entire narrative is woven around them. They have different perception and understanding of life, which they question relentlessly before developing holistic insight into it. In fact, the mystic-protagonists



serve as the epicentre of all the narratives and are unswerving in their commitment to negotiate deeper existential, philosophical and spiritual issues. As seekers of truth, they have their fair share of psychological anguish, inner turmoil, and spiritual conflicts before they achieve self-realization. The profound spiritual experience lays bare the consciousness of each mystic-protagonist having perennial urge to merge with the Absolute.

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