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A HORNEYAN ANALYSIS OF ALICE MUNRO'S *DEEP-HOLES*

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ABSTRACT

Alice Munro is a leading Canadian short story writer. Her works emphasize internal actions the most. She seeks to discover and convey the mysteries of the human mind through her characters. The selected narrative, *Deep-Holes*, also does the same. It delineates the impact of conflicts, tensions and disturbed relationship on the psyche of characters. Such psychological problems are well understood through psychoanalysis. Therefore, this paper attempts to analyze the text in the light of psychoanalytical theories propounded by Horney.

**Keywords-** Alice Munro, Short Story, Psychoanalysis, Horney.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature and psychology when studied together can offer a wonderful analysis of the human mind. Psychologists give theories after their observation and analysis, whereas the literary artists convey their understanding of life through artistic presentation. Applying psychoanalytical theories to the literary work can help in uncovering "those recess of human mind that are beyond conscious understanding" (Bande 25).

Abraham Maslow used the term 'Third force psychology' in his seminal text *Towards a Psychology of Being*. It was a revolt against the Behaviorist and the Freudian psychology. Behaviorist or First force psychologist's orientation was on stimulus-response and their research was totally dependent on animals. Second force that is Freudian theory talks about unconscious and sexual motives as they considered them to be the main force behind man's every action.

The third group regarded these earlier theories as dehumanizing. According to them, these theories provided an incomplete understanding of human behavior because they didn't pay much heed to the social and cultural factors.

The third group known as "humanistic psychologists" offered an optimistic and a holistic view of human nature. They gave a new set of values and approaches to understand the human conditions. It focuses on inner needs, fulfillment, the search for identity, and other distinctly human concerns. It is less concerned with doing research on human behavior than with describing its meaning and purpose. ([http://www.intropsych.com/ch01\\_psychology\\_and\\_science/third\\_force.html](http://www.intropsych.com/ch01_psychology_and_science/third_force.html))

The most important notion of the third force psychology is that each and every person in the world has a "real self". This real self is the basis of a healthy personality and a little failure in its achievement results in neurotic self. Karen Horney was the one who introduced this concept as the major term in her theory. She identified the real self as "the 'original' force towards individual growth and fulfillment, with which we may achieve full identification when freed of the crippling shackles of neurosis" (Horney 158).

According to Horney one's real self is very much influenced by the ambience one lives in. Under favorable conditions a person develops healthy and grows his potentialities.

the unique alive forces of his real self: the clarity and depth of his own feelings, thoughts, wishes, interest; the ability to tap his own resources, the strength of his will power; the special capacities or gifts he may have; the faculty to express himself, and to relate himself to others with his spontaneous feelings. All this will in a time enable him to find his set of values and his aims in life (Horney 17).

Under unfavorable conditions a child can suppress his real self to cope up with his environment. This suppression results in distorted personality. In *Neurosis and Human Growth* (1950), Karen Horney gave the concept of "basic anxiety" that is the "feeling of being isolated and helpless in a world conceived as potentially hostile" (Horney 18). She argued that individuals cope with their basic anxieties like, feeling unsafe, unloved, and unvalued by disowning their real feelings and developing elaborate strategies of defense. A child deprived of parental warmth and affection, is very much prone to it. He loses the feeling of belongingness and develops "profound insecurity and vague apprehensions" (Horney 18). He feels himself powerless, insecure and isolated. His growth becomes very much arrested as he cannot adjust to his surroundings due to these conflicts. According to Horney such a child can develop various strategies to cope with his ambience.

According to Horney there are three ways through which an individual tries to establish himself and overcome feelings of isolation and helplessness in the society. They are *move towards people*, *away from people*, and *move against people*. Those who move towards people denotes self-effacing characteristics, away from people shows detached traits and those who move against people are aggressive in tendency. People adopt these strategies according to their individual temperament and social ambience. Seen in the above light, it renders a new meaning to the selected text.

### Analysis

Alice Munro, the Nobel laureate, very well paints psychology of characters through her story. Even the title of her stories contains ambiguous meanings that can be penetrated only by a deep psychological insight. In this story she not only talks about the crevasses that are seen through naked eyes, but also the coveted spaces related to the psyche that cannot be explored. These unnoticed spaces are more dangerous than the visible one. As Sally, the narrator itself points out in the story,

far beneath her shoes was a crater filled with rubble never to be seen, that never had been seen, because there were no eyes to see it at its creation or throughout the long history of its being made and filled and hidden and lost (104).

Munro had very intelligently set the title, revealing her knack of psychoanalyzing things. She writes about human sufferings, repression, conflicts, and inner turmoil. She brings to light the hidden darkness of the human mind in a very revealing manner. The story depicts the disturbed familial relationships and their effect on the psyche of a growing child.

*Deep-Holes* is a story about a son who grows radically and mysteriously estranged from his family. The story begins with the journey of Kent's family. Their vista to Osler Bluff is planned to celebrate Alex's achievement. It is here in the destined place that the board indicating 'Deep-Holes' is seen. It symbolically predicts the emotional as well as the generational gap that was persistent among the family members. Munro is known for crafting such kind of stories in which human emotion plays greater roles. She presents how the fluctuation of emotion results in various psychological crises in the characters.

Kent, the protagonist in the story is the son of Alex and Sally. In the entire story he is depicted as a person who is unable to adjust to his ambience and life. This results in his neurotic growth and is very well understood in the light of Horneyan theory. According to this theory lack of warmth, affection, and love from the family are various reasons that results in one's neurotic behavior. As Paris writes, "the importance Horney

assigns to culture as the determinant of neurosis notwithstanding, she places more responsibility on family" (Paris 115).

One of the main causes of Kent's neurotic development is his familial atmosphere. The protagonist in the story always aspired for his father's attention and love. He made an idealized image of him. Kent always wanted to be the apple of his father's eye, so he did everything to catch his attention. He was very attentive and, "courteous to his father, bringing him the paper that had been rescued from Savanna and carefully refolded, pulling out his chair at dinner time" (100). He always praised his father and called him his hero. On the contrary Alex always showed disregard for Kent and never paid attention to his emotions and feelings. Kent's every word "got on Alex's nerves". Kent regarded him as the savior of his life whereas Alex showed indifference towards him.

Kent always wanted to hold an important position in the eyes of his parents but their negligence shattered his entire world. Alex regarded him as "a sneak and trouble maker and the possessor of dirty mind" (96). Once, while they were in the picnic at Osler Bluff, a major accident happened. While teasing his younger brother, Peter, he fell in a pit. Listening to their cry, Alex and Sally both ran to the spot. On the way Sally predicted, "If any accident happened it would not be to her six-year-old who was brave but not inventive, not a show-off. It would be to Kent" (97). Both Sally and Alex regarded Kent as a trouble maker in the family.

In order to be like his father, Kent started walking on his foot prints. But Alex's rude and harsh behavior shattered his entire notion and contributed in making him a neurotic being. This difference between actual and idealized self made adverse impact on his mental stability and resulted in "basic anxiety" (Bande 26). In order to overcome such a situation he fled away from his family. Years went by but he never made any contact with them. Later on he wrote a letter to his mother, depicting his state of mind and the reason for his departure.

"It seems so ridiculous to me", he said "that a person should be expected to lock themselves into suit of clothes. I mean, like the suit of clothes of an engineer or doctor or geologist and then the skin grows over it, over the clothes, I mean, and that person can't ever get them off (102).

Above lines indicate Kent's changed outlook towards his father who always treated him badly. His father was a geologist and nothing else for him. He was always lost in his ambitions and never played the role of a good father that Kent desired. This moral and emotional dereliction was a great blow to his mental setup. In his initial stage Kent wanted to mold his personality just like him, who was successful, intelligent, and confident. He was a unique personality for him. But later on, this idealized image got shattered and he started detesting him, "one thing I have learned to give up is intellectual pridefulness-"(102).

Kent turned into a beggar, lives in a far off land. He changed his name to 'Jonah' and detached himself completely from the family. He was living with poor people in their ghettos. The basic aim of Kent was to assert his individuality and to take revenge on his family that always wanted to maintain its mannerism and pridefulness.

He *moved towards* these poor people because he was getting love and affection from them. It was this affection of which he was in dire need. His talks were focused on them and any diversion or disturbance in that made him anxious and aggravated. When Sally reprimanded Kent to tell about him and not of "those beggars", he screamed, "These people are my life" (112). It shows his aggression towards them. He told Sally about his views of his past life when he was with his family. Although he was with the family yet he was all alone. There was no one who could understand his feelings. He was just lost in his fake self which was shadow of his father. This selection of job can be linked to his strategy to cope with his mental troubles. Earlier, he wanted to be like his father who was a successful man, but the mental pressures and tension that he got from his filial relationships turned him into an alienated being. This alienation is visible in the lines where he is addressing to his mother, Sally.

My life, my life, my progress, what all could I discover about my stinking self. Purpose of me. My crap.

My spirituality. My intellectuality. There isn't any inside stuff, Sally...(113).

Kent's concept of life depicted at the end of the story depicts his transformation into a stable being. He is happy with his new identity and wants to live his rest of the life in the same manner. He even suggested to

Sally that she should also pursue her true self as, "you know you can only save yourself" (114). This statement made her think of her own identity. Throughout the life she lived in a frame made by Alex. Kent's thought made a great mark in her mind. Now after the death of Alex she re-thinks about her own Self.

The protagonist in the entire narrative is striving to find a substitute for his lost self. Though he has degraded his condition but for him it is a strategy to cope up the mental pressures he is been through and to find his real self.

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