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THE ISSUE OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN RESEARCH ETHICS WITH REFERENCE TO ROBIN COOK'S *FEVER*

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Gender studies in literature pertains to the interdisciplinary study of gender identity and gender representation along with the gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is not always about women being suppressed by men, but also of men being suppressed by men in the patriarchal society. There is always a collision between gender and class, equality and power. Robin Cook is a prolific writer whose motive is to bring an awareness to the public regarding the consequences of the technological advancement in the field of medicine. Cook in his novel, *Fever* portrays the red tapism and the lust for power and money along with the nonchalance of the authorities in dealing with the problems of a common man. Organisational politics victimises a sincere research scientist. The gender discrimination is exercised on the research subordinate.

Charles Martel, a research scientist has time and again raised the need for a moral and an ethical approach to research as well as medicine; owing to this, he was discriminated by many because he simply did not agree with the more profitable method. Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative provides a way for the humans to evaluate their actions morally and to make moral judgments. By nature, morality is universal, impartial and rational. Human beings are valuable only because they have rationality and freedom. Thus, all the actions of the human beings must be moral, i.e. in such a way that it does not affect the freedom of any other person at any given time or treat other persons as mere means to achieve our ends. The Categorical Imperative is universal and impartial, universal because all human beings in virtue of being rational would act in the same way and impartial because their actions are not guided by their own biases or individual preferences but because they respect the dignity and autonomy of other human beings and do not put their own personal needs or goals above the respect that others deserve.

Characters in the novel *Fever* defy their morality and ethical responsibility to achieve their own needs. *Fever* deals with the theme of medical research and medical ethics. All the characters in the novel either stand to lose something or to gain something. Charles, is dealt the second blow in his life when he is informed that his daughter, Michelle is suffering from an aggressive form of leukemia and has little time left; it was the same disease to which he lost his wife as well. Her only hope is chemotherapy, which Charles knows would be ineffective, apart from giving her immense pain; as he had witnessed the first time with his wife, Elizabeth. Hence he resented the orthodox medical treatment of chemotherapy for Michelle knowing that it would do no good to her. His concept of the cure for cancer is the immunological approach rather than the chemotherapy. He aims to discover the cure by unearthing the chemical communication between the cells of the body, of which immune system is a direct descendent. Charles feels helpless as he is rendered futile in saving his daughter's life. While his personal life has become topsy-turvy, he has been assigned by the board of directors to work on the project of Dr. Brighton, who was carrying out a study on the Canceran drug, which has a promising future for the company. In order to avoid the outbreak of a scandal and to save the reputation of

the institution, Charles is bought on board. Charles was chosen as Dr. Brighton was accused of fabricating the results of the study of the drug. Since the project received a major part of the funding for the organization, the board of directors were very obstinate that the study be shown in a good light in the media as the company holding the patent rights for the drug wanted to launch it in the market as soon as possible. Dr. Ibanez voices out his concern that:

Dr. Brighton should not have done what he did, but the moral issue does not bother me as much as the potential damage to the institute and to the drug Canceran. That would change this from a minor affair to a major catastrophe . . . Dr. Brighton was not motivated by any evil intent. He believed in Canceran and wanted to speed up its availability to the public. His fraud was the result of youthful impatience, which we've all been guilty of in one degree or another. Unfortunately, in this case his enthusiasm got out of hand with the result being we've lost a very talented young man, a phenomenal money raiser. (*Fever 55-56*)

As Dr. Morrison told, "It was also decided that the only way to salvage the project was for the institute to publicly support the drug by appointing its most prestigious scientist to complete the tests. And I am happy to say, Charles Martel, that you were chosen." (*Fever 42*).

Charles is unwilling mostly because of his lack of interest in the drug and its efficiency and also because he wanted to work on his project overtime in the hope that he can find a cure in time to save his daughter from withering away, just like her mother had. But the managerial and the administrative politics get the better of him when he is given the ultimatum of either shelving his own research and work on the Canceran drug, whose research was funded by the National Cancer Institute as well as the American Cancer Society; or losing his job at Weinburger and delaying his research even further.

Dr. Morrison and Dr. Carlos Ibanez at Weinburger Institute are profit driven people, who give more importance to money rather than research. They force Charles into accepting the Canceran project and threaten him with his job. Their opinion on finding a cure for cancer through immunology is that it is an outdated procedure with little or no importance in the medical field and considered it a whimsical fancy of Charles, in which they had indulged for years. Moreover, it did not bring in any grants for the institution as well. So they saw it an opportunity to convince Charles to do something for the institution in return. Even when Charles told them that he is on the verge of finding a cure for cancer, Dr. Morrison said, "A cure for cancer," said Morrison, not bothering to smooth the sarcastic edge to his voice...." Wouldn't that be nice. We'd all be very proud. But . . . it will have to wait until the Canceran study is done. Lesley Pharmaceuticals, who hold the patent, is eager to get the production rolling..." (*Fever 46*). Dr. Morrison even takes all the lab books of Charles research so that he would start concentrating on the Canceran study. They reveal their insensitivity to Charles' situation as they single-mindedly expose their demand of completing the Canceran study at any cost, to keep the funds flowing. As Charles starts working on the study, he discovers that the variables of the toxicity of the drug has been fiddled with and given a wrong representation, as the lab rats that were given a small diluted dose of the drug were found dead the next day. When Charles went to report it, Dr. Morrison and Dr. Ibanez were ardent that the study be conducted in a good manner and completed successfully, irrespective of the consequences, as the media had its attention on this promising cure for cancer. Thus, they bypassed their moral and ethical conscience in order to earn more money for the institution. Charles became a victim to the organizational politics and was discriminated by his boss just because of his moral standards. Ultimately had to lose his job, as he was unwilling to let go of his moral and ethical standards.

Amidst this chaos, Charles retires to the playhouse of his daughter Michelle, on the lakeside for peace of mind and to his dismay finds the odor of Benzene, a hazardous chemical that is also a cancer causing agent. His curiosity leads him to locate the source of the chemical and traces it to the company called Recycle Ltd., a processing unit for rubber and plastics.

Charles visit to the company reveals to him that the company dumps the 'spent' benzene and other toxic chemicals directly into the river. Charles' discovery of the mixing of benzene and other hazardous toxins in the river by Recycled Ltd. increased his anger. It was beyond his understanding as to how people could play with the lives of the innocent people. Charles' demand to close the factory in order to save the lives of people was not welcomed by the local residents who were ready to fight against him as the company was the source

of livelihood to many in the town. Furthermore, his attempt to file a legal complaint against the company sent him scurrying from pillar to post, but in vain. All Charles got was the scorn and wrath of the people. Charles' effort of filing a complaint against the company introduces him to the red tapism of the system and also the nonchalance of the concerned authorities. Stuck by crisis from all the sides, Charles becomes more frustrated for not having control over any situation of his own life. But the greatest irony of the situation was that both Recycled Ltd. and the Weinburger Institute were owned by the same parent company. In short, the company that funded the research for finding a cure for cancer was also causing cancer by dumping benzene and other highly toxic materials into the river that formed the lifeline of the community.

Dr. Wiley and Dr. Keitzman who treated Michelle were of the opinion that since Charles was too informed about the disease, he might hinder in the treatment process. The fact that the orthodox chemotherapy would not be effective for Michelle's case was a common knowledge for Charles as well as the doctors. But when Michelle did not show any difference even with the strong doses of chemotherapy, Dr. Keitzman took it upon himself to increase the dosages and lessen the time duration between the doses. Thus, he started experimenting upon Michelle, which infuriated Charles to no bounds, as it was medically and ethically wrong to do so. Dr. Keitzman admits that ". . . But Michelle is not a usual case. I wanted to try. . . Increasing the chemotherapy, even if it is an unusual approach, is the only hope for a remission and a remission has to be obtained quickly if Michelle is going to survive this acute episode." (*Fever* 165).

Instead the doctors spoke to Cathy and persuaded her to get the temporary custody of the child in order to continue the treatment, having stated that he is undergoing a nervous breakdown and might snap at any time; so that Charles could not take her out of the course of medical treatment; in order to facilitate their 'experimental' treatment. Dr. Keitzman justified his treatment method to Cathryn by saying that it was her only chance at remission. Thus the hospital authorities kept Cathryn in dark, making her believe that what they were doing for Michelle was the best possible treatment for her chance at life. At one point, it came down to satisfying their ego and displaying their power over Charles instead of thinking the best possible course for Michelle. Dr. Keitzman knew that trying out new drugs without the permission of the parents and experimenting on the child was morally and ethically wrong, but it turned into a game of knowledge and power between him and Charles, which he was not ready to lose at any cost.

Owing to his errant behavior, Charles is fired from his job, as his own assistant, Ellen becomes the informer for the higher-ups. Thus disaster strikes at once for Charles as he not only loses his job, but also the custody over his own child. It is then that Charles decides to take matters into his own hands and brings Michelle back from the hospital, and shifts all his equipments from the office to his own home. He starts his treatment and hopes to cure his daughter while he is being searched by the cops for kidnapping and grand theft. Cathryn meanwhile comes to know of the whereabouts of her daughter and gets relieved to find that Charles is still sane and rooted to reality. Charles explains to Cathryn of the course of treatment that he has devised and how he plans to use himself for experimenting and then transferring the antigenic cells from his body to Michelle to put her into remission. The police and the media gathered outside to arrest the 'mad' Scientist and to rescue Michelle so that her treatment could continue as soon as possible. However, Charles had deftly secured the house and was joined by his wife and sons Chuck and Jean Paul. Interestingly, the local cops had the extended support of the employees of the Recycle Ltd. and the people from the Weinburger Institute offered to support them by sending in their security guards to secure the expensive equipments. It was so done because of their vested interest. However, Charles was able to hold his ground and successfully complete his experiment. With Charles and Michelle being treated in the same hospital, it was discovered that Michelle's body accepted the new cells and started reacting with the cancer cells. It was a matter of time before all the cancerous cells were purged from the body.

Charles had become a celebrity of sorts and all the charges had to be dropped against him. Dr. Morrison and the administrator of the Weinburger Institute had come to negotiate with Charles in the hope that he would not leak out the details of the Canceran study and bring down the reputation of the institute. Finally, Charles and his family shifted to Berkley for a better future. Instead of being disheartened by the discrimination faced by Charles at various levels, he remained true to his morality and faith that paid him off in

the end. Thus he emerges victorious from the battle between the unethical powerful boss and the ethical subordinate.

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