

ANALYZING THE PHENOMENON OF NONCOMMITTAL RESISTANCE IN INVISIBLE PEOPLE BY RABBANI

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the lukewarm resistance against pervasive social injustice in Rabbani's Invisible People. Characters in these short stories may release their reactions sporadically but they fail to fight against the coercive hegemonies which continue to eat into their vitals of life. The sociopolitical structures, ideological state apparatuses and repressive state agencies address and handle these fictional characters so successfully that their quick move from bad to worse conditions of life seems inevitable. Thus the processes of interpellation and routinization go hand in hand to wreck their diagnostic aesthetics which could prove instrumental for the better future. Althusser whose theory of ideology is used as a theoretical framework for the present study says that the hegemonic and ideological interpellation tames the social beings shrewdly and successfully. Lack of commitment, pessimistic outlook, apathy, mistaken actions and erroneous reactions and absence of joining hands with each other against the cruel make them vulnerable before the oppressor. Keeping this pathetic situation in mind, Rabbani himself comes forward, like Seamus Heaney and James Joyce, to provide a voice to these suppressed souls.

Keywords: Noncommittal Resistance; Invisible People; Raza Rabbani; Stasis

1. Introduction and Background

Althusser's essay Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses revolutionized the theory of ideology; he sidestepped the previous definition of ideology i.e. false consciousness and gave it a new sense that is material in character (2001). He traces its presence in the practices of social institutions which are devised to justify the currency of the present ruling ideologies. Belsey (1980) says "ideology exists in commonplaces and truism as well as philosophical and religious systems" and "discourse, images and myths" (p. 57). Whatever is said and done in a social world is all ideological. Materialist philosophers like Althusser and others rightly call the society a social formation as it is formed and shaped by the reproduction of the relations of production (Adorno, 1980). There are various operations and functions of ideology to keep the social life go on in a particular orbit. The social agencies address all the individuals of all the classes in such a way that everyone feels distinguished, honoured and elevated (Dickson, 1978). Interpellation is the key term that accounts for the entire ideological phenomenon. It is a speech that accosts and besieges every social being through the suitable mode of address. The moment the addressee turns his/her gaze towards the speaker, he/she is ideologized (Althusser, 2001). When the concrete human beings are ideologically interpellated, they feel themselves as the source of meanings, action and autonomy. In fact, it is a mistake on their part.

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The ideological address snares the humans in such a way that their autonomy is gone and they become the metaphor not of a grammatical subject in a sentence rather they are turned into the subjected beings to the exploitative poetics of the social formation. Interpellation escorts them to the 'jail' from which escape is usually not possible (Belsey, 1980). Ideology in a capitalistic society lays stress on the individualization of a social being. Consequently, humans are divided into two groups: the exploiter and the exploited. The stubborn individual, on the basis of his tough and hard posture, succeeds in reaping the crop of his coercive efforts and the weak one is exposed to sheer exploitation. Usually, he is alone and helpless before the onslaught of the predator. In this situation his reactions miss the target, sensibility grows pessimistic and thoughts fail to join hands with the fellow beings of the same chip (Speirs, 1987).

Pakistan is that unfortunate land that has been the site of various forms of exploitation of the weak. Civil and military governments have been intermittently ruling the country but the conditions of the lower classes of the society continued to worsen with the passage of time. The population of the country was again and again deceived and looted in the name of democracy and religion through the use of media (Azim et al, 2017). In the period of seventy years of independence the powerful elements of the society remained successful in keeping the lower classes oppressed. No coherent and systematic campaign was started by the proletariats to dismantle the exploitative hegemonies (Afzal-Khan, 2005). Different fiction writers have aestheticized this dilemma in their short stories and novels. Shaila Abdullah's *Beyond the Cayenne Wall: Collection of Short Stories* (2005) deals with issues of marriage and the life after marriage for a Pakistani woman. The beauty of women is contrasted with horrible life that they have to spend in a male dominated society. Tannu is asked to dedicate her newly born baby to a shrine. Dhool is a young woman who lives among wolves like males and struggles a lot to keep them at bay. Mansi has to make a lot of efforts to bring her widowed mother to America. Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009) is a collection of short stories that foregrounds the hardships of life that the lower classes have to bear. There are crowds of servants and maids who work in the houses of the rich people. They are all exploited one by one but they do not exercise their minds to pool their forces to challenge their colonizers. There is a statusquo in their conditions of life; there is nothing that can be called rebellion there.

Raza Rabbani is a new entry in the world of story writers in English in Pakistan. He is new but his long political career in the country provided him with a lot of experiences on the life of the voiceless lower classes. He seems to share the sensibility of James Joyce and Seamus Heaney in a sense. Like them, he feels that there is no cogent and significant challenge from the colonized to the coercive and exploitative classes. Each and every type of oppression is applied to the downtrodden souls of the society but no institution comes to their succor. What the wretched sufferers of the land maximum can do is to crumble under the hostile pressure that comes to them when they plan to challenge the ruling hegemonies. These short stories also tell us about the different ideological tactics that the capitalistic mindset employs to paralyze the resistance power of the proletariats.

2. Research Methodology

Althusser's theory of ideology has its own irresistible thrust and it has solid reasons behind it. It takes an antithetical break with that of Marx. Instead of formulating it as a 'false consciousness', it embodies the signs and practices of the actual realities of the real social formation. Althusser says that ideology is the actual driving force of the social beings. It operates through two important modes: Ideological State apparatuses and repressive State Apparatuses. ISAs stands for socializing agencies in society; family, education, church, media, fine art, traditions, moralities etc. train and tame social beings through the daily practices in a specific orientation. The ruling structures are justified and naturalized through these social institutions which ultimately lead to the impotency, voicelessness and spinelessness of the weak. Interpellation is a tool in the kit of ideology of a society to legitimize the unnatural poetics of the elite. As the shepherd drives the entire flock of sheep through his special addresses and labels sent to the object, in the same way, the masses are tamed through interpellation. The theory of interpellation satisfies the ego of every social being by giving him a different name and identity. All the ISAs console the addressee but subjectively; they take their bad circumstances as the will of God.

The ISAs are sufficient enough to blindfold the social humans but sometimes the use of RSAs becomes necessary to keep the reactive and rebellious elements in check. All the institutions under RSAs work as terror to the ideologized and a safeguard for the exploiters. Both types of state apparatus work in complete harmony with each other. Resultantly, the interpellated figures lose their critical sense and it is the biggest tragedy of a human. When the automatized masses live out their lives in routine mode, they are decreased to the level of voiceless and defeatist mankind. If they show the reaction against the exploitative hegemonies, it is lukewarm and insufficient. This type of abortive reaction further weakens them in their critical faculties. Most of the stories in *Invisible People* by Rabbani harbor the theme of stoppedness and inertia and noncommittal behavior. And the data for this study is limited to *A Dead Man Walks*, *Imprisoned Law*, *Brewing*, *The Flower of Dust*, *Innocent Lost* and *Camelot was not to Be*.

3. Data Analysis and Discussion

Ireland and Pakistan share a lot of negatives. Twentieth century Ireland and the present day Pakistan both are defeatist societies. Owing to hollow religiosity, political immaturity, cultural immobility, ritualistic life, surface piety, individualistic struggle, collusion of exploitative forces and chronic social injustice people in both the societies are attitudinally and behaviorally paralyzed and complacent. While making commentary on Dubliners, Bulson (2006) says, "Everyone in Dublin seems to be caught up in an endless web of despair. Even when they want to escape, Joyce's Dubliners are unable to" (p. 33). Same is the case with Rabbani's *Invisible People*. Most of the characters are spineless, paralyzed, noncommittal and impulsive before the exploitative social structures.

A Dead Man Walks is a representative story of Rabbani. The very title accounts for the imaginative paralysis and social stoppedness of the characters. They breathe like the living organisms but exist in the barren land where only the dead people can walk. They are spineless in a sense: their routinized and ritualistic life hangs on the phenomenon of automatization. They move 'to freedom from a small jail to the large prison before the grave'. Siddiqui (2017), a

Pakistani cultural critic, who gives his analytical deliberations on various aspects of the Pakistani society, says:

There is only one problem of the Pakistanis: they do not know how to think. Instead of going for the sociopolitical causes of their problems, they take refuge in the lap of religion, fate and complacency. Their behaviors are just flat. These souls are stripped of critical attitudes and creative imagination.

(personal communication)

This critique is quite befitting to the stories of Rabbani. It is also relevant to the characters of the short fiction under analysis. The life of Hussain, the central character of the narrative *A Dead Man Walks*, is a long journey that goes from bad to worse with the progress of the narrative. His hard times continue to multiply; his vigour and strength dwindle speedily; his victimization at the hands of existing sociopolitical circumstances aggravates; but he shows no signs of rebellion against the exploitative system. Alternative point of view that is the essential luggage of a wise man is alien to him. He seems to be tamed, interpellated and ideologized to the dangerous extent; by characteristics he is the metaphor of a degenerate human material. To support his mother, wife and five children, Hussain works as a security guard with a rich household. His salary is meager and the duties burdensome. One day his young master wounds a boy in 'shack'. The elder master summons Hussain in the evening and asks the later to be ready to go the police station as he has wounded a boy there. When Hussain begins to clarify his innocence and fix the young master as the real culprit, the elder master orders the security guard to comply with his orders. He 'realized just how helpless a victim of State and elite conspiracy can be'. Hussain's protest against the huge cruelty and exploitation is just insignificant. To free himself from a sense of responsibility to resist the cruel, he puts the responsibility on the state. He further states: 'I have been unable to vent my feelings and experiences to anyone'. This state of mind reminds us of the stopped up central character in *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock* by Eliot. Prufrock asks himself "Do I dare and, do I dare" (2011, p. 18) to express the love feelings before the beloved.

A series of humiliation, disrespect and exploitation besiege Hussain and other fellows of the narrative but there is not even a single display of potent resistance there. Various artistic techniques are adopted by the writer of the short stories under analysis to deal with theme of death in life. One of them is called drawing parallels. Life in jail and life in society is juxtaposed in *A Dead Man Walks*. Hussain in the society is helpless and heavily oppressed (Abbasi, 2017). He is forced by the ruling hegemonies to serve the elite. He has to dance to the tunes of his employers to support his family and keep the string of his breathing intact. His life outside jail is trapped by the sociopolitical authorities and the jail strangulates him. The physical structures of the jail symbolize the social institutions and hegemonic networking that wraps and squeezes the oppressed. The 'giant iron gate eleven feet wide and ten feet high' of the jail is the physicalized form of the social practices that prepare the weak and the voiceless to be a sacrifice on the altar of the ruling elite. The big gate keeps a small gate called 'wicket'. This gate operates like social institutions that train and force a person to submit to the ideology of the ruling class. Hussain is asked to work with a broom the moment he enters the big gate of the jail. In the jail there are muqaddams or old prisoners who drive him to the abject and mean works in the jail as there were police stations officers and his employers. Hussain is given room which is quite close to the

latrine. Smell spreads all around and he is unable to sleep. In fact, this smell is paralleled to the suffocating life of the society where ‘everything hangs around the neck’ of the weak.

While deliberating over Dubliners, Leonard says “they begin in the middle of something and stop unexpectedly with what may or may not be a new beginning” (2004, p.87). Same situation exists in *A Dead Man Walks*. Having killed his sister in the name of honour, a young man enters the jail and day and night broadcast his ‘heroism’ and announces with pride ‘The whole jail respects me’. No voice comes from the society or jail to challenge these current traditions of ignorance. In fact, the ruling ideology through its institutions has trained them to remain as they are. Fiaz is a political worker in the jail. He tries to tell the prisoners that there are two types of laws in the society: one for the rich and the other for the weak. Someone calls his lecture a stupidity and all around there is a twinge of laughter. ‘Come, let’s listen to Chatni sing’ is the demand of the public. Chatni sings in a sorrowful voice a sorrowful song. Life is temporary and we are soon to die is the theme of the song. When the song ends, everyone is in tears and silence is all around. They weep but do not rebel. The reader is reminded of the lady Lyubov in *The Cherry Orchard* by Chekov who always turns her face away when Lopakhin tries to bring them to realities of life (2010). All this shows that the jailed and the societal life is just automatized and routinized.

Riaz, the young son of Hussain, is also devoid of strong reaction and rebellion; he has no courage to see the dead face of his father. Legs tremble, hands are shaky, eyes are filled with tears, and lips are unable to verbalize. He loses control and turns his face ‘to the other side, as if reality would disappear’. The collective reaction of the people on the dead body of Hussain is: ‘Ash Hadu An La Ilaha Illa Allah’. Here religion, in the real sense, works to lull the exploited, usurped and bullied social beings to automatized sleep.

Bond argues that the individuals who remain indulged in meaningless activities for a long time, they are handed over to various forms of madness and insanity (Bond, 1992). The same theme of insanity and paralysis prevails in *Imprisoned Law* at individual, collective and institutional level. The narrator of the above story very tactfully arranges a chain of events that revolves around the life of a lonely melancholic old woman. Her young son who worked at a fruit shop did not allow a policeman grab some fruit. Resultantly, he was carried by the local police on the fake charge of buying a stolen bicycle. His old mother has been going to the police station and the local courts for years to get back her son but all in vain. The narrator along with his friend Asif is at a restaurant to have chopped stirred fried meat when the forlorn old woman comes there. She gazes into the air and then her eyes are focused on the narrator. She tells him the whole story of her lost son and addresses thus: ‘Are you a magistrate? I have been robbed’. The narrator says, ‘may be we can help her’. But Asif, the representation of the stopped up society, at once tells his friend that there is no use to help that woman as everyone at the courts knows that ‘the poor woman has lost her mind’. Brecht, the political playwright of the previous century, says that naivety is instrumental to raise artless questions to a change in the outlook of the society (1984). Asif forcefully tries to convince the narrator that she is genuinely mad and hence not fit for their attention. Asif stands for the attention diverter of the narrator. Same situation is spotted at the beginning of the story under analysis. A police van in chase of a big jeep ran over an old man crossing the road. The local people make a protest and the police arrive to disperse the crowd. Here again the social beings are misled. If there is some action, it is not appropriately directed. Mohalle walas make protest when the poor old man is crushed. But it is

only irrelevant to their real problems. Their emotional demonstration is to keep them away from the exact directions and to automatize their life. Impotency, apathy, insensitivity and meaninglessness are the main features behind attitudinal paralysis of the people. Question arises why they do not use the occasion to pave the way for pooling their forces across the society to rise against the cruel and barren system that has failed to yield something fruitful.

Freire (2000) says that the capitalistic societies prepare a network of strategies to keep the dynamic sense of the people buried. One of them is to produce the phenomenon of common sense. It is always political; it trains the masses to sidestep all those elements by calling it a routine work. It is the genesis of common sense. The old woman knocks at every door of the society to seek justice. She tries her utmost to awaken humanity and the sense of fellow being among all the people around her but fails. She has been addressing individuals like Asif, Ahmad and the narrator to be critical in their behaviour and thinking. She runs to every prison van that reaches the courts and her searching eyes fall on each prisoner who comes out. She has spent every penny to get her son back. The court touts have been looting and befooling her for a long time. Now she puts on the black coat of lawyers to get access to her lost son. 'She has become familiar every nook and corner of the katchery'. Her physical and mental health is deteriorating day by day and 'she contracted a kind of madness'. She is also constantly losing her eyesight. When she feels the unbounded apathy of the people around her, she says: 'you all are the same'. She ultimately joins the company of a mystic who comes to the scene chanting the verses of Bullay Shah. She moves to the world of obliviousness where the conscious self does not pinch the humans. Many questions have been raised for the reader. Can we call it a vibrant society that does not provide justice to the grieved? Can we live a meaningful life in a hollow and monotonous society? Why the people do not try to change the mechanical society that has sapped their bond of humanity and fellow feeling? Is it not shameful to notice that the hugely wronged lady ultimately goes to the court of God to seek justice? Isn't the role of institutions, individuals and the society condemnable?

The Flower of Dust is the other story of Rabbani that presents spineless characters who dare not challenge the cruel sociopolitical situations of life. They adopt various techniques to implement their escapist poetics. An ex-factory worker who has been a 'turner of profits for the textile magnates' is helplessly lying in a government hospital that practically is for the rich people only. Due to the worse working conditions of the factory, his lungs have failed and he is 'struggling to catch his breath'. He has been living among the bitter realities of life but still his conscious is not critical. Belsey (1980) says that ideology hides half of the truths of social realities; it means it smoothes over its gaps in such a way that we are never able to detect it. Our labourer there thinks that his boss 'must' come for him. Yes, sometimes he shows the symptoms of diagnostic thinking. For example, when he sees his helplessness in the hospital with fully opened eyes, he speaks thus: 'are my children also destined to be chattels?'. But very quickly his 'mumbling dies down'. To run away from the heat of critical consciousness, he 'looks to Allah for justice'. Instead of looking into the structures of the bitter sociopolitical circumstances of life, he runs to the romantics past when he first met and married Sakina, the mother of his children.

Brecht introduced the political theatre that is supposed to challenge the ruling hegemonies of the time. While commenting upon the apathetic attitude of the people, he opines

that the problem with the automatized societies is that they fear to think about the alternative (1984). Same situation is with the Pakistani society aestheticized by Rabbani in *Invisible People*. Life for Ahmad and his proletariat family is just inferno in the story *Brewing*. Harsh conditions of life are so cruel that the subsistence level seems impossible; even then the patterns of his thinking and behaving are immature and unrealistic. His wife and two daughters work as house maids to provide food to the house. Now it is becoming difficult for these women to buy even the basic necessities of life like ‘onions and tomatoes’. This situation hangs heavily for Ahmad and his family but they do not come out of their orbit to genuinely challenge the vicious social structures. When the affairs of life press him, he resorts to sweating and coughing. His family eats meal once in a day. He hides his ‘ailments to save on the doctor’s fees and medicines’. The insufficient house budget continues to poison up his mind and memories.

Characters in Rabbani’s short stories, says Yaseen (2017), seek ad-hoc solution for their problems which ultimately leads to their further exploitation and destruction. Instead of making a rebellion against the fleecing social ideologies by starting a social campaign, he moves from one futile strategy to the other one. He orders his teenage son Jaan to quit his studies and join hands with the females of the house to earn bread. He sends his son to be servant in an elite house. Again the direction of his thinking and action is wrong. The character of the son is also weak like that of the father. Instead of evolving a successful policy to overcome the hardships of life, he weeps over his distancing from the school. The reader can sympathize but cannot admire these two figures who afford no heroics. When Jaan runs away from the place of his job, the father gives him a lecture. He says:

You know, in your grandfather’s day he never looked his master in the eye. Whether talking or being spoken to, he kept his eyes being fixed on his feet....Your running away from the house was an act of rebellion and defiance’.

Artz points out that revolution demands a specific historical phase of a society and a particular mode of agitation and reaction (2003). The slogans and trumpeting for revolution is a common phenomenon in the societies that remain under exploitative ideologies for a long time. Revolution is often mocked there. Same is the case with *Brewing*. One day Jaan runs to the street where the labourers are chanting slogans on the first May. He is lost there.

Characters in Rabbani’s *Invisible People* lack the required resistance against their exploitation is the main argument of the present study. Various textual evidences have been offered in this regard. The story *Innocent Lost* accounts for the cause of their inability to react and respond to coercion imposed on them. Gramsci (2012) holds the hegemonic ideologies are bestial and successful to such an extent that they deprive the colonized of their reactive spirit. Their consciousness is fettered, their bodies are put in hostage and their natural defiance turns rusty. The central character of this short story, a poor village woman of early thirties, recalls her childhood days when she was not allowed to go to school and play with the children of upper class. She was even told that ‘to ask for these things is blasphemy’. She is kidnapped by a village rogue and sold to a prostitution house. The female who has been desirous to have the rights of an autonomous human being has been ‘thrown to the wolves’. She has formed a conviction that ‘self-respect and morality were just some fantastic tale made up by the elite’. Her family is equally cruel to her. They will not accept her, if she succeeds in escaping from the prostitution

house; 'they will cast aspersions on my character'. She feels that the 'ties with her village, family and childhood have finally been clipped'. Her verbal protest is against God whom she considers responsible for 'this cruel state of affairs'. Patterson (2003) says that recourse to God in desperation is politically a way to avoid a bold and dynamic encounter with the exploiter. "Death isn't just an event" says Tyson "that marks the end of a life. It can be a pervasive destructive presence during the course of life, as well" (2001, p.52). Life of the central female character of the short fiction under examination is a series of events that start from childhood and culminate at her entry to the body selling house. Coercion and oppression speed up and aggravate with the space of time but no one comes to her succor.

Decker (2004) says that ideology tends to legitimize a phenomenon that is in fact manmade and faulty. The process for naturalizing the hegemonies saps the very reactive and dynamic powers of individuals in regressive societies. There are reasons behind the defeatist attitude of Nudho in *Camelot was not to Be*. She is tempted to get divorce from the old husband but the 'fear of the unknown kept her away'. Her heart beats with the doctor but she was unable 'to move beyond the realm of dreams and fantasies'. She finalizes her plan, after a lot of delay, to have the first rendezvous with doctor but when the time draws closer, she is exposed to 'suspicion and indecisiveness'. Her fear of being weak leads her to think that the cruel world would 'play with her youth and beauty and destroy her dignity'. She made a lame excuse to cancel her appointment with the newly found lover. She died silently transfixed with hopelessness and depression. She seems to be bold but in fact it is the mockery of boldness that she pursued in the course of her married life. She failed to rebel positively against the threatening circumstances, exploitative relations and the colonialist ruling ideologies.

1.3 Conclusion

The present study that was conducted on the thematic level of the text *Invisible People* was not on a larger scale but it produced meaningful results. First, the characters of the fiction do not enjoy any type of commitment in life. They exist in the society just for passing a tasteless life. Hussain in *A Dead Man Walks* is driven from pillar to post by the exploitative elite and ruling ideologies. Short of rebellion, he is there just for compliance. Second, characters lack in critical thinking and diagnostic attitude to life. They have neither significant reaction nor systematic response to the oppressive forces of the society. And when they react, it happens once in a blue moon, their reaction is in the wrong direction. Instead of going to meet her lover, Nudho in *Camelot was not to Be* goes to the valley of death. Third, under the capitalist ideology social beings blindly practice the poetics of individualism to such an extent that they never try to unite the masses against a small group of hegemonic individuals. A crazy woman in *Imprisoned Law* and Ahmed in *Brewing* are insulted, dehumanized and oppressed by the coercive social structures but they never make a plan to go to the masses to start a campaign against them. Fourth, the interpellation process of the dominant ideologies has so successfully tamed the characters that they have turned fatalistic. Grown habitual of the hard times of life, they think that miseries and hardships are the part of life. The heroine of *Innocent Lost* believes that it is blasphemous on the part of a poor girl to have a desire to meet and study with the children of the upper classes. Most of the characters of the short stories under investigation resemble the characters in *Dubliners* by Joyce; they even fail to verbalize their predicament. They are casual,

noncommittal and paralyzed in their attitude and behaviours against the coercive sociopolitical structures.

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