Original Article

The Portrayal of the Character of Stephen Dedalus as a Rebel Archetype : A Re-Reading of James Joyce's a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

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Abstract - The main aim of this paper is to shed light on two contradictory views on constructing identity in James Joyce's renowned novel A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man. First, the turbulence in Ireland in 1960 created complex perceptions and pressure on Irish history, societal norms, cultural background, church and politics. It narrows down one person's mind and makes an individual's behavior rigid which does not allow them to think about love, sympathy and compassion. Stephen Dedalus, the fictional character, is the spokesman of James Joyce, through whom he criticizes the nets of Irish society. He says this trap limits individuals, never letting their wings free to fly above the sky and build their own identity. Secondly, the paper focuses on Stephen Dedalus's growing sense of sensibility, perception and behavior from childhood to adulthood which makes him different from the contemporary trend of Ireland. This growing sense helps him to expand psychologically through which he breaks the rigid traditional concept of identity, goes beyond far from Ireland and builds his own identity. Stephen Dedalus is a modern character, an archetypal rebel who yearns for freedom and his journey starts through art which helps to develop his own identity rather than traditional values.

Keywords - Catholic church, Identity, Modernism, Politics, Rebel.

1. Introduction

This tremendous innovative work of James Joyce depicts the artistic development of the protagonist from his infancy to youth and his ultimate decision to leave Ireland to become a writer. The novel is a bildungsroman which shows a character's growth from creature to creator. It shows the creator, Stephen's rebellious nature against the religious and political power of the whole of Ireland during 1914. In Greek mythology, Dedalus makes his own wings and flies high to escape himself from that labyrinth trap, like Stephen must grow wings to fly above the tribulation of his life. Dedalus gets mature and gradually understands his position in life, the trap in which he is stuck and his desire to fly above the chaotic situation of Ireland, which forms a kind of rebellion against family, religion, church and society. He struggles against the traditional way of thinking, and his struggle continues against his own cultural heritage throughout his life.

Irish politics became a major part of the life of Stephen Dedalus. Stephen idolizes Parnell as a great Irish political leader from his childhood. Stephen's family occasionally engaged in a political debate on Parnell after every Christmas dinner. He grew respect for Parnell from his aunt Dante when he was at Clongowe School. Later, when Dante denounces Parnell as an evil man, Stephen gets confused. He started following the path of his aunt as he had not yet developed his own political views. The political journey of a young boy starts through blind inspiration from his own aunt. He gave up his favourite political hero just because of the thought that his aunts' opinion was superior to him. In Rebellion: Types of rebellion, Wagner states that history always witnessed rebellion as a weapon to go against society. It occurs when societal norms heavily pressure people, and they feel too oppressed and find no other way except stand out against the situation. Stephen's opinion, voiced against society, religion, and nationalism, usually brings mixed feelings and results because of the duality in Stephen's thoughts. Stephen finally determines and realizes the necessity to rebel against society, break the rigid norm, and make a completely new one in which he can freely express all his opinions.

Stephen Dedalus finally decided to leave Ireland to free himself from that labyrinth and fly above that and make his dream come true, freeing him from shackles and bondages. Stephens' day-to-day troubles get reduced when he involves himself in his writing, and this writing helps him to release from his dead-end life when he goes far away from his homeland. Stephen has the serenity to understand that he cannot change the fate of Ireland and what is happening there. The only path to his salvation is to escape. In his childhood, he could not form his own opinion about the

country's politics; later, he found it necessary to express his contempt for the country and politics.

As a rebel artist figure, Stephen faces peer pressure but boldly refuses it because of his growing knowledge and social awareness. While at Clongowe, the traditionalist damn Lord Byron as a heretic, and Stephen responds that Byron is far superior to Tennyson. The enraged classmates attack Stephen, and he disputes with them. Dedalus gets pressure from his classmate that he has to admit Byron is not good, but he denies it. They put pressure on Stephen repeatedly, but he remains stiff in his decision avoiding all pressure he rejects to admit Byron is inferior. Stephen takes a major step in his life which helps him build the ideas that free him from society's overpowering thoughts. This rebel separates him from his other classmates. Stephen later indulges in arguments with his peers and challenges them on more important facts. While Stephen was in University, his nationalist friend Davin asked him why he did not want to learn Irish and dropped out of the Irish class after the first lesson though he is an Irish born in Ireland. After hearing this question about his heritage, Stephen expresses his rebellious nature as he says that a person born in a country like Ireland, covered by the net, does not allow a person to fly high. Stephen must reject that nation and its net. If everyone forces him to adhere to his nationality religion, he must remain impartial and try to fly above those nets.

Stephen rebelled against his family, nationality, religion, society and language. He feels the need to cut the net off Ireland to fly and fulfilling his dream of becoming a writer. He observes Ireland's culture, politics, and religion destroy the qualities of love, sympathy, warm relations and art. He finds the Irish people disloyal as he says they have always betrayed their leaders. He finds that the conscience of his race still not awaken. They are uniformly corrupt and brutal. During that time, he leaves Ireland in the hope of the reincarnation of the conscience of the race.

Stephen perpetually breaks the chain of society, not born to specify himself in the cage of society. His chain-breaking incidents are found in several examples scattered in this novel. As the novel begins, we see baby Stephen is asked to apologize for an unknown offence that everybody, even he has no clear idea about it. It is only clear that he has profaned some rules, which will be punished unless he does not apologize. He is not innocent but hardly understands his fault because his thought process is entirely different from society's thoughts. Whatever he does goes extreme and makes a form of rebellion. He guesses there are three possible reasons for his offence, first his childish desire to marry a protestant girl Eileen. Second is his oedipal desire to unite with his mother, and third is his adulthood relationship with a prostitute. All his actions are against religion which makes him anti-social. His rebellion against society can be found throughout the novel. Society always tries to apologize

to Stephen, but he never does. His never-ending fight helps him lead to the path of art.

Stephen's rebellious archetype nature can be seen in the Pandy bat episode. Father Dolan refused to accept Stephen's genuine inability to write in class and punished him unjustly, which made him unendurable pain. Instead of taking this punishment, he revolt against it and gains support from his classmates. The rector also helps him and gives him sympathy against this unjust treatment. After this victory, he treated a hero's welcome by his cheering peers. He feels happy and free. His raised voice against this unfair authority gives him a new identity, an archetype rebel.

We can see Stephen's growing sense of resentment towards his family, especially his father. He was supportive till his family was running extraordinarily low on money. Still, when his father, Simon, boasts that he is better in every aspect than his son, he loses all sentimental bonds and is broken from that moment. Later, Stephen shows disrespect towards his father as he says his father is a failure in all aspects. He failed in almost everything he tried. Stephen also grows a detachment from his uncle Charles who sees him as a useless body with nothing to do except glorify Ireland, which is already faded. He is like Ireland, who sucked energy from everything. As Wagner said, rebellion against society often becomes rebellion against the family. Family is habituated to societal norms. When their child does something against society, they can not easily fit themselves in their child's path, so rebellion goes against them. As a result, Stephen did not get any support from his family. He leaves all his childhood learning and goes farther away from his root learning.

Throughout the novel, Stephen struggles against his beliefs, the conflict between childhood learning and a growing sense of adulthood. As a child, Stephen took his parents' advice as the supreme law; when he matured, he started questioning his childhood learning. A youth in his adulthood wrestles with the question running through his mind. In the book, Stephen constantly questions his identity which he is, his religion, his purpose in life and how he wants to see himself.

The director of Belvedere College invites him to become a priest. But Stephen declines the offer. The vocation to the priesthood is highly respectable in the eyes of his society, his family and his friends. Stephen's rejection of the invitation to the priesthood is his way of rebelling against the Catholic Church and its religious practices. Hence, the rebellious Stephen declares he will not serve any sacred duty in which he does not believe anymore, whether it is home, fatherland or church. Stephen has no more interest in religion; it loses all its glory in his life. He remains impartial to it. His family members want to see him indulge in religious works. His uncle Charles tells him to visit the church, but he remains

indifferent towards it and often makes excuses. On the one hand, he sees a prostitute girl who is anti-religious work regarded as a sin.

On the other hand, he was a religious leader in his College. A religious college leader doing this work is seen as unethical in the eyes of the church. So it was impossible to purify his sin religiously. He started to think of himself as a hypocrite even though he refused to reform his Easter duty to please his mother. The only path of salvation for him was to surrender himself to the way of art. Art became his religion, and he was the priest of that religion. It was evident in his mind what to support and what to rebel against it.

Stephen's life takes a huge turn when he sees a beautiful girl standing far away from him and gazing at an object in an absent mind over the water. He feels contented by the girl's beauty and overcome by the moments created at that time. That is his moment of epiphany when his sexual desire mixed with a spiritual feeling. He sees the whores with whom he indulged in that beautiful girl as a spiritual figure. From that moment, Stephen surrenders himself and his life to art to capture all the beautiful things in his writing rather than seeking women for physical pleasure. The moment on that beach gives a new light on his life. He finds a new way to satisfy his sexual gratification by observing, capturing and writing about beautiful girls and their sensuous movements in his words. That was not the only shining moment that helped Stephen commit his life to write. In a state of conflict with religion, he separates himself from society. Stephen took the help of writing to ease his conscience. Writing makes him feel light, and the grief of his sin also lightened without confessing it in a religious way. Writing becomes a purification process for Stephen's soul, reducing the burden of his sins.

Stephen was disgusted with the idea of nationalism for more than one reason. He feels that the way Irish people liberate their nation is wrong. First, he says to his friend Davin that the native people accept the foreign language and forget their mother tongue, allowing foreigners to rule over them. According to him, Ireland is the old sow that eats her furrow. He thinks Irish people are responsible for their miserable situation. They surrender their freedom to the Britishers, allowing them to rule and conquer their land and force a foreign language on them. Stephen finds that Irish people are unaware of their situation. They do not have the consciousness to change their position, so there is no point in fighting for freedom. He keeps himself aloof from the temptation of Irish nationalism and flees to foreign soil. He sees the concept of Irish nationalism as a trap, like the church, so he rejects the nation's call. He embraces voluntary exile to free himself from the uncreated conscience of Ireland; his rebellion continues through his writing regarding nationalism from a foreign land. His love for the country comes out through rebellion in his writing.

Stephen is presented as a rebel figure throughout the novel. He revolts against all notions of Irish society, which hold a thousand years back, cultural, religious, and political ideas. He cuts the traps of society to establish his own identity because this year-old concept limits the nineteenth individuals. So, throughout the paper, it can be seen that Joyce, in the novel A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man presents Stephen as a rebel archetype.

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