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SOCIOLOGICAL DYSTOPIA IN PHILIP K. DICK'S *A SCANNER DARKLY*: A STUDY

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Abstract:

The Sociological dystopia highlights contemporary social trends, the habitat, the advancement of science and technology and its impact on the society. Dick portrays the social affairs, degradation of values and the addiction especially to drugs and consequent hallucinations which results into alternate lives. He attempts to throw light on the dire need of social reforms as he perceives the society on the verge of extinction in terms of ethics and values. The sociological upheavals and its impact on the livelihood of people have been depicted in A Scanner Darkly as a Sociological Dystopia. The novel is discussed with the emphasis on social disorder and authors attempts to awaken human beings into the reality.

Keywords: *Sociological dystopia, social affairs, degradation of values, drugs, etc.*

A Scanner Darkly is a Science fiction novel by American writer Philip K. Dick, published in 1977. The semi-autobiographical story is set in a dystopian Orange Country, California. It comprises an extensive portrayal of drug culture and drug use both recreational and abusive. The novel is one of the best-known works and made a film of the same name, in 2006 directed by Richard Linklater.

Sociological Dystopia is understood in terms of oppressive societal control through rigid, autocratic or technological forms of government. It projects gloomy vision of the future, as it portrays a society as an illusion of an ideal world. It highlights contemporary social affairs, degradation of values, addiction to drugs, alternate lives and the advancement of science and technology and its impact on the society. The society is usually governed by the upper class which prepares propaganda to force people respect the administration. People are doomed in constant horror, as they are kept under continuous inspection. They live in a degraded state and are compelled to follow similar outlooks.

The novel is semi-autobiographical, as it is based on the author's personal experiences of the drug culture in the 1970s. Dick's fourth wife, Nancy, left him alone and in order to cope up with isolation, he accommodated drug addicted unknown people in his house. He too got addicted to drugs and stopped writing completely. Donna Hawthorne's character in the novel is inspired by one of Dick's female companions in his house, but they never felt affection for each other. However, Dick attempts to fulfill the vacuum through Donna in the present novel. He dedicates this novel to the street companions in his house, as they suffered unbearable deadly pains due to addiction to drugs. Dick

participated in a recovery program which made him reveal rehabilitation centers' mask of harvesting drugs.

He used similar idea in the present novel through New-Path clinics. Dick's another wife Tessa claimed herself as the co-author of the novel and he too offered her half of the rights of income generated through the novel.

The novel is set in dystopian orange country California of 1994 which portrays extensive use of drug culture. Bob Arctor is the protagonist of the novel who is a member of household of drug users. He lives parallel life as Agent Fred who serves police and has been assigned the task to secretly observe Bob's household activities. He hides his real identity from police as well as others in his drug culture. He pretends to be a drug user as a requirement of the job while serving for the police.

However, he is addicted to Substance D which is referred to as a source of slow death. Substance D is a powerful psychoactive drug which is derived from a small blue flowering plant called *Mors Ontologica*. Another conflict in the novel is Arctor's love for Donna Hawthorne who pretends to be a drug dealer. Bob wants to find out the drug dealers operating at higher level by developing relationship with Donna. His constant use of drugs leads to malfunctioning of his brain. His supervisors conduct numerous tests and declare him incapable for the job of a narcotics agent.

Donna leads Bob to rehabilitation center where he experiences recovery from the adverse effects of the drugs. Later, it is revealed that Donna works as an undercover agent for Federals. She has been assigned to observe the activities of rehabilitation center and find out its funding source. Bob is selected for entering another secret organization. He is renamed as 'Bruce' at the rehabilitation center and is forced to participate in violent games aimed to break the will power of other patients. The novel ends with Bruce working at the rehabilitation farms. He suffers a serious neurocognitive deficiency after overcoming the symptoms of drugs. He is considered as a body without life. However, he still identifies blue flowers concealed in corn crops as the source of the drug called Substance D.

The novel exposes corruption involved in rehabilitation centers and manipulation of governance by the authorities. It highlights the continuous surveillance over the masses which create insecurity among them. The novel projects alternate lives and chaos in the minds of the characters. It validates the prominent feature of sociological dystopia that shows physical or emotional suffering of the characters. The novel opens with physical suffering of Jerry Fabin and his dog – Max who undergo unbearable pain caused by bugs. Jerry's concern about his dog shows his empathy towards animals. The bugs or aphids symbolize Jerry's inferiority complex developed in childhood due to his comparison to elder brother by the parents. Jerry's hallucination hikes to such an extent that he abolishes even the sunlight and friends in his house. His friend Charles Freck too suffers hallucination of bugs as a result of Jerry's influence on him. Charles tries to overcome the horrible situation, but he fantasizes more terrible visions. It is seen through an advertisement about medication that appears with a tag line of death: "bottles of slow death, cans of slow death, jars and bathtubs and vats and bowls of slow death, millions of caps and tabs and hits of slow death, slow death mixed with speed and junk and barbiturates and psychedelics, everything" (Dick, *ASD*, 4).

Here, Substance D is referred to as death for it is a dangerous drug used in every legal medication. Charles too is a heavy drug addict who is in search of its stock. His fear of police denotes significance of identity where he regards the governance as a form of fascist monopoly. Charles finds it difficult to overcome the conflicts of his past and present. He encounters Donna Hawthorne who is considered as Bob Arctor's beloved. However, she denies to identify Charles and threatens to kill him with a knife. She represents a woman who has been a victim of physical molestation that makes her offensive and overpowered with fear of men. She appears as drug dealer, but, in reality, she works as an undercover agent for federals. She reveals that Jerry's brain is permanently damaged due to contamination and overuse of drugs.

Charles too is a drug addict who attempts to get the drugs from Donna. He shares horrible experiences at Jerry's house that made him realize his torment. However, Charles recalls one of the past incidences where Jerry saved a boy from an accident. He draws attention to Jerry's better intuition that has been damaged due to the drugs. Kimberly Hawkins is another example of the physical as well as emotional suffering. She is one of the past acquaintances of Bob Arctor who presently lives with a drug addict - Dan Mancher. Bob recalls his past life in the slum area of Cromwell village where his children used to play. He finds Kimberly in wounded condition and comes to know that Dan is responsible for her misery. Dan treats Kimberly merely as a source of money and threatens to kill her.

However, she does not file any serious charge against him. It makes Bob hysterical over the futility of Kimberly's life.

The physical and emotional suffering being one of the major features of sociological dystopia keeps haunting the protagonist. Bob's counterpart Fred, who is a police undercover agent, undergoes several painful tests. His agony increases when his senior officer, Mr. Hank introduces his friend Barris, who works as the informer against him. Barris claims that Bob is involved in production of Substance D along with foreign nations. He reveals that due to addiction, Bob has become a dangerous person and he may kill him over the disclosure of his identity. The protagonist's suffering tolls future misery once Fred's test results destroy all the hope for revival from the circumstances. The psychologists declare that a person usually receives information from left brain, as it is dominant over right brain. However, in Fred's condition neither of the brains is dominant. Both of his brains provide opposite information about the same object that creates conflict in real perception.

The protagonist's physical and emotional suffering reaches to its peak when he comes to know that he was appointed for the mission and all the surveillance trap was set for Barris. He is annoyed as the trap eventually becomes responsible for his downfall. Donna finds Fred in a miserable condition and realizes that he is left with no time. He is unable to perceive any purpose of his life. He considers himself to be more pathetic than anybody else and feels that he has lost everything. Donna tries to convince him by saying that he is a good person and life has not been over for him. Though, he is comforted with her words, the darkness starts swallowing him from inside. He prays for the end of his agony in her loving company. However, she finally leads him to New-Path Clinic and bids good bye to him. She thinks that "justice, honesty and loyalty are not properties of this world" (Dick, *ASD*, 188). Suddenly, she meets an accident which she thinks was bound to happen as the reality outweighed her.

The protagonist continues to struggle with the circumstances. He is bored to observe the repeated and meaningless recordings. He is suggested to observe the recordings with random selection process that may make his mind selective in listening. He starts hating his own counterpart, as he has to engage with him for endless nothing. He holds Bob responsible for his worse condition: It shows, he thought, that I was right. That remark was a slip. Arctor blew it. But what it meant he did not yet know. But "we" will, he said to himself, find out (Dick, *ASD*, 159).

Here 'we' validates that Fred and Bob are not different persons, but a uniform single person who has been assigned the dual roles. It makes him struggle due to the dual existence. Fred is addicted to drugs to such an extent that he keeps consuming it on regular basis, where it is the occasional demand of his job. It damages his brain's perception. He observes Bob saying, "God is dead" (Dick, *ASD*, 160). However, Luckman's humorous reply brings life to the negative tone, "I didn't know. He was sick" (Dick, *ASD*, 160). Fred again notices the "deja vu" condition with Bob, as he finds him repeating his dialogues: "To himself Fred said, about three pounds." "About three pounds", Arctor said (Dick, *ASD*, 160). These expressions reveal the chaos in the mind of the protagonist. His struggle to overcome the difficulties is worsened with the time.

People lead dehumanized and fearful lives in a sociological dystopia. It scares and provokes the world. Charles's fear and hallucination at Jerry's house overpowers him with irrational thoughts.

The fear in *A Scanner Darkly* is also seen in the incidence of the sudden breakdown of Bob's car when he travels back home along with Barris and Luckman. All of them are scared when the vehicle goes out of control. They are annoyed with the incidence, as they could not find out any specific reason behind the mishap. Bob considers the drugs to be responsible for their misery. He experiences the illusion of horrible parallel reality around him. He experiences dog's excreta in and around his car that makes him shrug with fear. Surprisingly, Barris and Luckman do not perceive anything weird around them. It validates that the protagonist's brain is damaged due to the overuse of drugs. Bob's fear increases with the strange crying voices that are audible only to him.

Somehow, he manages to overcome the hallucination and react rationally. His immediate recovery surprises Barris who smiles at him mockingly. Bob's fear as a narcotics agent is reflected through the hallucination of drugs. He is scared of his addiction and the continuous horror that haunts him than the actual death. It makes him realize the horrible effects of drugs on people.

There is a lack of individual freedom and oppressive societal control that creates restlessness in a sociological dystopia. Mr. Hank, Fred's superior, reveals horrible incidences like the molestation of a teenage girl by her brothers and distribution of cocaine to new born babies for preventing them from crying. It makes Fred feel dejected and crazy. He is confused about his real identity and ultimate end

of life. He feels that the scramble suit is an obstacle for emotions between him and his counterpart - Bob Arctor. He blames the circumstances and his profession which deprives him of emotions. He remains unaware of his emotions towards Donna, whereas his counterpart Bob has greater affection for her. It is an evident sign of his parallel lives. He is neutral to everything, but he becomes naturally responsive as Bob. The economy of passions is responsible for changes in Fred's responses. He is assigned to observe his counterpart that creates conflicts in his parallel lives.

The constant horror is doomed over the people of sociological dystopia. Fred is shocked to hear about the charges against him, although he did everything as a demand of his job. Hank reveals that he has realized Bob Arctor as nothing but Fred's counterpart. Fred finds it unbelievable, as it makes no sense to him. Hank makes Fred accept the relationship with Donna and makes further arrangements for their meet.

Sociological dystopia dooms people to live in a degraded state and they are kept under continuous inspection. Here, Bob, disguised as Fred, vacates his own house along with his friends in order to allow the police officials plant all types of surveillance devices in his house. It is the plight of the protagonist that he is made to observe his own house, actions and himself.

Sociological dystopia makes critical statement about the current trends and societal types. The narcotics agents in the present novel derive additional income as drug dealers pretending it to be the need of their profession. They become rich dealers as well as exploiters of the market and their enemies, as they use their official position illegally. The drug culture in the novel appears very dark. Similarly, Bob's life too becomes gloomy, as he is barely saved in a car accident. On the other hand, he is assured of security with surveillance devices planted in his house. He feels more confident to observe himself and others through the investigation.

The unreliable vision of protagonist's actions continues through Fred's observation of Bob's strange behavior. Fred observes his counterpart reciting something aloud in German, as if he is giving commands to certain machines. Fred considers Bob as a crazy person, but could not blame him. He finds him getting worse with the circumstances.

He is irritated to observe the meaningless conversation between Bob and Luckman. He craves for the end of his absurd life. He feels frustrated once he receives a call for re-examination, as he is annoyed with it. Bob is involved in a discussion about the life of narks. His expression "How could a guy pose as a nark?" (Dick, *ASD*, 157), surprises both Luckman and Barris.

Hence, Bob Arctor in *A Scanner Darkly* sustains another parallel life of a police official Fred who ironically is assigned to supervise his own counterpart. Fred gets another identity as Bruce at the rehabilitation center where he undergoes horrible experiences. The novel reflects Dick's personal experiences of the drug culture where he points out the corruption in rehabilitation center that works as a hub for production of drugs. However, the author never loses hold on reality that awakens the inhabitants in time. The dreadful vision of the author makes human beings rational and helps to retain sanity. Thus, the novel validates the prominent features of sociological dystopia.

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