



Cultural Ambivalence in Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*

Rishiram Adhikari

Balmiki Vidyapith, Nepal Sanskrit University, Nepal

Email: research339@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study analyzes Haruki Murakami's novel *Norwegian Wood* from the perspective of cultural ambivalence. Toru, the main character of the novel, neither totally follows western culture nor rejects it. He adopts western culture in order to modernize and also continues Japanese culture for the sake of preserving cultural identities. In the same manner Naoko, Reliko and Midori Kobayashi also face the problem in their lives and are being victimized by the situation of cultural ambivalence. The main concern of the study is to analyze the situation of Japanese youth during World War II. The study followed a qualitative research design and analyzed novel texts based on textual analysis. Closed reading of the text is the main tool of data collection and only secondary sources of data were used in this study, gathered from library research. Books, articles, journals and Google based information were the main sources of secondary data. Conclusion has been drawn on the basis of the interpretation and analysis of the collected data. From the interpretation of the text, it is found that characters of the novel have been facing the problem of identity crisis in their lives due to the cultural hegemony of America after World War II. In World War II, Japan was defeated by the American troop and felt humiliation in the defeated situation, that also affected its culture.

Keyword: cultural ambivalence, culture, Japanese culture, murakami, norwegian wood

Introduction

Norwegian Wood is one of the masterpieces of literary writings of Haruki Murakami, one of the prominent Japanese novelist and short story writers. He focuses on the situation of 1960 of Japanese society. During the time young generation of Japan had been facing the problem of cultural crisis because American troop and Business Company expanded cultural influence in major cities in of Japan and young generation of the Japan was confused about their traditional culture and worried on the cultural envision of America. They were weak and fragile, due to the Second World War and confused about their traditional culture. The novel highlights the situation of cultural ambivalence in the context of World War II through highlighting the relationship of the young people.

The first part of the novel analyzes the love relationship between of Tour and Naoko. They talk about the song that brings us back to the year of 1968, when Toru Watanabe was eighteen years old. At that time, he established a relationship with a girl whose favorite song was related to the song sung by Naoko. Tour and Naoko's love relationship is guided by the nostalgic memory. The subject matter

of the novel primarily shows the confusion faced by youths of Japan in rapidly changing world of the late 1960s, along with the nostalgia and sexuality of the characters. The issue to changing time creates huddles in the memory of the protagonist. After meeting Turo by Naoko, girlfriend of his best friend, Kizuki, the three characters faced the same problems of cultural ambivalence. In the next section, Toru talks about a curiosity of life that based on traditional Japanese culture. She memorizes the spirit of her dying father who is waiting for the care of his children. Her friend also memorizes the same story related to his ancestors. In this condition, she and her friend are both silently hunted by the sense of spiritualism which is different from modern science. The confusing situation created in the life of characters that reflected in the following lines of the novel as:

Toru's all-male private dormitory with its motley denizens; the buzz in the coffee shops and eateries serving omelet, spaghetti and pizza near the university grounds; his scornful view of the left-wing radicals leading the student movement and his equally dim opinion of the right-wing sympathizers performing their senseless rituals; his predilection for mostly western music and literature. (11)

Above lines indicate the changing food habit of the character. In the one hand, Toru loves to eat pizza and in the other hand he memorizes the traditional ritual performance. There they prowl the bars for girls, with whom they spend night in a hotel. Christopher Santis is shocked because young people of the nation are committing suicide as, "Inexplicable, shocking suicides of young people happen throughout the novel."(5). Characters of the novel show inhuman behavior because they lose their existence in their life that Cornel West mentions:

Among the eight prominent characters of the novel half commits suicide. The reason behind their suicide is not well explained. This study tries to figure out the post second world war Japanese society and its inclination towards western culture. To be more precise, this research focuses on ambivalent nature of Japanese people towards western and eastern values. (3)

The above lines highlight the love, friendship, death of the characters that eventually encourage characters escape from difficulties and danger. In the novel, characters have different perspectives to read the death because they are losing the brightness of life. Murakami has rebelled against the cultural tradition that his parents were representing. Japanese people adopt the western culture in the name of modernization after World War II. Western culture rejects the Japanese literature, art and music world outside Japan. Turo records jazz from Hollywood movies brings confusion and inferiority to his mind that Michael, Paige highlights the situation as, "Beyond the confine of a single culture is the main idea of Murakami. No matter how much Murakami is blamed to be blind worshiper of American culture; he appears more ambivalent in his interview with *bomb*" (4). American culture creates problems in Japan not only day to life but also history, art and culture. Marakami projects the magic realism in the novel that led the charters into situation of confusion because magic realism brings new insight among the characters, and they want to escape from the reality of life. Cultural ambivalence crates diversity has been found Murakami's writings with magic realism. He is well-versed in the art of mixing realism and fantasy. The complex characteristics of reality are captured by Murakami through adopting innovative writing techniques.

Research method and theoretical tools

A qualitative research design is used for this study and analyzed the data on the basis of interpretive paradigm. Data was collected only from secondary sources and the data were collected through library research. Books, articles, journals and Google based information were the main sources of secondary data. Cultural study is the main theoretical tool of this study. Bill Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffins, Homi K. Bhabha and Frantz Fanon are the main critics of post-colonial studies who bring various aspects of post-colonial culture and its effects that are facing by the people living in post-colonial world. Ashcroft, the Griffiths and Tiffins define postcolonial issues as hybridization that focus on language and culture as, "Hybridization of colonial languages and cultures in which imperialist importations are superimposed on indigenous traditions ..." (Abrams 245). Homi K. Bhabha takes it as ambivalence projects that neither follows traditional culture nor adopts new that lead into the situation of hybridity, identity crisis. Bhabha writes, "What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originality and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences (2). Cultural differences are only possible in cosmopolitan cities because there is mixed of the western and traditional cultures.

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The novel highlights the cultural ambivalence in the novel through characterization that Toru Watanabe highlighted on soft music and its melody that is different from traditional Japanese culture as, "Once the plane was on the ground, soft music began to flow from the ceiling speakers" (1). It shows how western culture is popular among the youth of Japan during the late 1960s. He notes about the situation of North Sea that swallowed the life of people without any reason as, friends who had died or disappeared, feelings I would never know again"(1). They feel some sort of cultural ambivalence due to cultural loss. Loneliness became the main problems of youth in Japan that describes in the novel that main character shows every detail of his life as, "Eighteen years have gone by, and still, I can bring back every detail of that day in the meadow"(2). She seems to be in betweenness because she tries to be hybridized in her life. Hybridization depicts many forms; linguistic, cultural, racial, political or social etc. Toru Watanabe talks about the memoir that paid to attention of past. In this regards he notes, "That would make a lasting impression, certainly never imagined that 18 years later I would recall it in such detail"(2-3). It reflects the situation of identity crisis and the feeling of alienation in the life of the protagonist. Due to cultural change, he does not know his parental origin.

Post colonial discourse is simply related to culture and language; however, it talks about the tension between modern culture and traditional culture, western culture and eastern culture. Toru Watanabe says, "I don't know his name or which room he lived in, never saw him in the dining hall or the bath." (13). It shows post-colonial situation of Japan that is related to the idea of Homi K. Bhabha, Robert Young, and Frantz Fanon who advocate basically colonial experience. It shows the cultural ambivalence that seems in Tokyo as, "My arm was not the one she needed, but the arm of someone else. My warmth was not what she needed, but the warmth of someone else." (35). Cultural ambivalence is projected in the sense of marriage between different cultural groups that novel reflects as, "I mean, suppose we got married. You'd have to work during the day" (7). It portrays the situation of Japanese youth which similar to the idea of Frantz Fanon. Fanon noted that cultural ambivalence is not only limited in cultural festivities and life style it is also concerned with ritual practice like marriage practice and death ritual.

The narratives show the situation of ambivalences that reflect in the mind of character; however, characters try to hide it by imitating new way of life through following new culture. Bhabha illustrates, "Ambivalence at the source of discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the ground of intervention" (112). It is one of the outcomes of colonialism that hegemonies nonwestern culture is inferior to the western culture so each of character wants to leave inferior one and follow superior. Cultural hierarchy is one of the outcomes of colonialism that also reflects in the novel as form of post-colonial issue and mirrors with ambivalence one.

Japanese students are affected by cultural ambivalence in life. They love to enjoy life, but they cannot adopt the new culture which is known as western culture. Modori uses modern musical instruments like Guitar and practice on that because her neighbor also follows the tradition as new one. The lines of the novel highlight the situation of students as, " Midori brought two floor pillows, four cans of beer and a guitar from downstairs; we drank and watched the black smoke rising. She strummed and sang. (97). Japanese youth adopts the western culture; however, they are hunted by the traditional Japanese norms and values that lead them into the situation of ambivalence. Reiko is happy and smiled in taking cigarette because he wants to be modern. He loves to describe the person who is struggling to be a new one who is waiting for a new thing for many years as, "seven years of watching people come and go here: there are people who can open their hearts and people who can't. You're one of the ones who can" (131). It indicates the situation of Reiko who shares everything with her friends like a traditional Japanese girl. She also shares the phenomena that night that he comes to realize that Midori is the most important person in his life. Watanabe says, "How long did this go on? I was so immersed in that torrent of memory (and it was a torrent, like a spring gushing out of the rocks)" (135). Influenced of western tradition of love relationship is reflected in Naoko's life. He pretends to be a civilized one by adopting the western culture in terms of love relationship.

The circumstance of the novel highlights the circumstances of Japan late 1960s when young people are searching their identity and feeling inferior to the west. Reiko and Naoko has made some improvement with her depression and other mental health issues because they are confused on their position and affected by psychological problems. Watanabe describes the situation of Naoko her leg crossed and passed her hand, "Naoko was on the sofa with a book. She had her legs crossed and pressed her hand against her temple as she read" (213). She is culturally hybrid exhibits uncertainty, distrust, psychological dissatisfaction and other negative attitudes etc. Toru agrees to stay with Naoko and Reiko in their apartment for the weekend. Reiko says the three of them will have some heart-to-heart talks and that it will be therapeutic for them all. In this regard, he says, "I was on my way to the literature department library to do some research when I bumped into Midori Kobayashi. She had someone with her, a petite girl with glasses, but when she spotted me, she approached me alone" (220). The situation she faces in her life is overloaded by the dire of being new and different from traditional one, however, her inner instinct urged to repeat traditional norms and value as form of shadow of culture that lead her in the situation of ambivalence. She explains the situation as, "A nurse was circulating from room to room pushing a trolley loaded with meals. Midori's father was given pottage, fruit, boiled, deboned fish and vegetables that had been ground into some kind of jelly" (243). Modori is a nurse who studies medicine but she does not like to totally follow western culture. It shows the situation of Naoko who was confused by her attraction to the girl and deeply hurt by her lies and viciousness. In this regard, Watanabe

highlights the situation of her and notes, "Beautiful day out there" I said, perching on the stool and crossing my legs" (249). Characters lose their cultural spaces and follow the places which are unsure and fall into the situation of in between. In this way, cultural hybridity incorporates with different issues, which are studied in postcolonial theory such as diaspora, migration, dislocation, alienation etc.

Conclusion

Cultural ambivalence is one the main problems faced by the Japanese youth after the time of World War II. In the novel Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* projects the confusing situation of the character. They neither totally escape from traditional Japanese culture nor totally adopt western culture. During the time of 1960, Japanese youth live in the situation of cultural ambivalence. The situation of cultural ambivalence has created in the life of Japanese youth because they neither live with past spiritualism nor present materialism. Toru Watanabe, the protagonist, of the novel lives in the situation of cultural ambivalence and becomes a confusing character. Cultural ambivalence creates a kind of pain that leads him into the confusion and asked him about his identities. Naoko, another character, tries to rejoin with his past culture and reminisces the bygone days, which means he is in crisis. In the meantime, these past memories haunt and feel a nostalgia situation. Thus, Toru Naoko and Reliko belong in between. The novel is a live story that highlights how Japanese youth are facing problem in day-to-day life due to the cultural gap. Cultural ambivalence appears as main obstacle of young generation of Japan that pointed out in the novel by projecting the situation of characters.

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