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The Virtually Unknown in “The Male Ghost” by K.R. Meera

Abstract

Ghosts and ghost stories are always put into question, whether the ghost is real or an intuition. People come forward with lot of explanations for this. It is natural that a widowed lady who lives in solitude always speaks of evidences for the presence of her dead husband. The scientific explanation that we can give to it is that, by the death of her husband a void was created and her unconscious mind is always trying to fill in that void. For this the brain finds out imaginary models to replace it. So the person imagines the virtually unknown figures of the dead person. This paper focuses on reading the short story The Male Ghost as a magic of intuition, whereby the character in the story acquires a purgation of her repressed emotions. The woman is all alone in the house where her ex-lover who had cheated upon her

was brutally murdered. She wants to take revenge for all his misdeeds. She evokes his ghost figure through imagination and comes out victorious healing herself of her mental illness.

Key words: intuition, catharsis, purgation

The prolific multi-award-winning writer and journalist, K. R Meera is well known for her short stories, novels and essays. She has received meritorious awards including the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, the Vayalar Award and the Odakkuzhal Award. Her contemporary classic *Hangwoman* was so successful to credit her with the achievement of the Kendra Sahitya Academy Award. She is a feminist writer who ventures into the life and psyche of her female protagonists to bring out their internal conflicts and the ways in which they come out successful in their fight with the patriarchal force.

One of her latest Malayalam short stories, *The Male Ghost*, portrays a night in the life of a woman that she spends in the bungalow where her ex-lover was brutally murdered. There she confronts the ghost of her ex-lover and becomes successful in defeating it. The girl in the story was sincerely in love with this murdered man. He was everything to her. Once he took her to a houseboat, where they shared their love. But after spending time with her, he sends two of his political friends to sleep with her. She wakes up after two days and finds herself in a hospital room, shattered and becoming mean in front of others. Later she goes abroad and years after, gets to know from one of her friends that he was brutally murdered by his political opponents. She figures out his death from the newspapers and sets forth all alone.

This article tries to read the story from a psychological point of view. Supernatural elements always create curiosity within the reader. The first question that comes to our mind is whether there is something supernatural or is it simply an intuition. The noted psychologist Carl Jung explains such experiences as a “phenomenon of solitude” (JSP 70), which means it is a kind of compensatory hallucination common to people who spend more time alone, and

their mind tries to reproduce the company that is lacking in their real life. Theory of intuition also gives a similar explanation of it. According to the theory, “our brain is highly sophisticated in that it can make assumptions about the true nature of input even when that input is incomplete”(Bruce Hood). Thus using these techniques she is undergoing a kind of catharsis and thus being able to come out from the memories of her ex-lover and lead a peaceful life.

As the title suggests, the whole story pictures a gothic atmosphere, and the reader expects a ghostly figure to appear at any point of the story. Or, we can also infer like, the girl was so adamant to meet the ghost that she tries to find elements of horror in everything that surrounds her. “She went alone to the bungalow where her ex-lover was brutally murdered. Some journeys must be made alone.”(P.13) This opening lines hint into her intention to meet the ghost, which she was sure to be in vain in the presence of a companion. At times she could hear the howling of dogs and such unnatural voices around. She wanted to make herself believe that she will be successful in her mission. Here we have chance of doubting the presence of the ghost. Is it real or a created one? Premonitions and visions are sharp when one is left in solitude. This story line strongly supports to make evidences for the ghost to be a created one, where she imagines all the incidents to find a vent to her suppressed emotions of anger and hatred towards the man who cheated her in love. “After her breakup, she was as if locked in prism ark. No one or nothing touched her and she felt suffocated. It is to break this prison of aloofness, she comes to that bungalow. She chooses the bedroom where he spent his last night and puts on the night dress that she brought to wear on their last union.”(13,14)

She removes the holy thread that the watchman’s wife gives her to make sure that nothing would be an impediment to her confrontation with the ghost. “And then she tried to evoke the ghost of her lover in her imagination. To her, lust and fear was alike. She could feel

it only by making it grow through her imagination” (P.14). This evidently shows that the ghost is a created one. She is trying to experience a catharsis by evoking the ghost of her ex-lover. “At last the ghost appeared. First in her life, she saw a male ghost...no bones or flesh, without hair, sharp teeth, blood dripping tongue. A body full of blisters and the neck cut at one end that would fall down at any time”(16). This is the clear evidence that the ghost is her imagination, because, later from the story, we can understand that it is the same figure of the man’s dead body she figured out from the news papers.

Bruce Hood says that the human brain is systemic in such a way that it can sense the meaning of the world around from the multitudes of information that comes in. This information usually tends to be ambiguous. Therefore, in order to organize it into meaningful patterns, the brain makes assumptions. This pattern building “is highly sophisticated that it can make assumptions about the true nature of the input even when that input is incomplete” (The Intuitive Magician). In the story, the woman was in deep love with the dead man. When he cheated and left, the void that he made in her was not replaced. Thus there was an unconscious search in filling that emptiness. She was in such a mental depression that she was not influenced by anyone or anything that surrounded her. Later she got a solution to it by his death. She started filling the void with a supernatural model. She started imagining the presence of his unseen gaze everywhere she went.

The foregrounding of such a belief in supernatural is due to the influence of a general belief that the nonphysical can transfer over to the physical world. To her, the man was a manifestation of evil, even when he was alive. It is because he had done such a thing to her that no other man will ever do to his lover. Hence, she could imagine his ghost also to an extremely evil one.

Another example of intuitive theory underpinning adult supernatural beliefs can be found in examining the common assumption that we can detect someone staring at us from

behind even though we cannot see them. “Whoever comes to her life, she could feel his unseen eyes watching upon her” (21).

This intuition is a kind of unconscious therapy that she is applying upon her unhealthy mind. It is done by catharsis. Catharsis is the purification and purgation of emotions- particularly pity and fear. In psychology, according to Sigmund Freud, it is a cathartic method of treatment using hypnosis for persons suffering from intensive hysteria. The woman confronts the ghost of her imagination and unleashes all her repressed feelings of anger and hatred. She feels herself victorious in defeating the evil spirit and thus becomes cured from her mental illness.

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