



EXPLORING EYSENCK'S THEORY OF PERSONALITY IN JENNIFER JOHNSTON'S *THE GINGERBREAD WOMAN*

Ms. E. Subhasini

Ph.D Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English, Vellalar College for Women (Autonomous), Thindal, Erode -638012.

ABSTRACT

Jennifer Johnston is an award winning Irish writer, who has imprinted identity through her literary works. The most striking feature of Johnston's novel is her characterization. Her characters reflect inner feeling and emotions of contemporary people, who are struggling to cope up with their day- to - day problems. This paper explores the inner struggle of Johnston's characters in the novel *The Gingerbread Woman* and also attempt to throw the light of Eysenck's three dimensions of personality on Johnston's characters. Johnston presents both Clara and Laurence as the representatives of the present day society who face their problems in different ways.

KEYWORDS : Extraversion, Introversion, Neuroticism, Personality, Psychoticism.

INTRODUCTION

As King (2017) states "Personality is like a charioteer with two headstrong horses, each wanting to go in different directions," (p.10) in life, we meet different kinds of people, not all the people we meet are perfect specimens of human personality. Personality is a combination of certain pattern of traits that influence the behavior, thought and emotion of an individual. Eysenck's personality theory is based on the combination of traits or attributes. According to Eysenck, personality is mainly focused on temperaments which are largely controlled by genetic influences. Even though he recognizes the influence of environmental and situational factors, he advocates that it has only minimal effect. He proposes three dimensions of personality. They are Psychoticism (P), Extraversion (E) and Neuroticism (N). It is also known as PEN model of personality.

Johnston is a prolific writer who is well versed in creating troublesome characters with different personalities. Her characters involve in the complexities of life especially burdened with the traumatic past. *The Gingerbread woman* is an exploration of an unlikely friendship between two broken souls. Johnston presents two characters who are two dimensions of personality. Clara Barry is an English lecturer in Modern Irish Literature in New York. Without knowing the true face of her partner, she is in the relationship with James K'vin, a married man with three kids. After discovering his betrayal, she left him and came back to her homeland Dublin. For trusting a wrong person, she suffers a huge blow in her life. She is infected by hysterectomy. At present she lives in Dalkey as a post operative patient who lost her womb in a surgery.

Laurence McGrane is a Northern Ireland Maths teacher, who runs away from his home after losing his wife Caitlin and child Moya in a bomb blast. He is suffering in his own battlefield in order to come terms with the death of his beloved ones. Throughout the novel, he is called as Lar. Both Clara and Laurence are struggling to face the reality of their life. These two unknown personalities meet at the hill of Killiney as strangers, but this unexpected friendship brings light to their hopeless life.

EXTRAVERSION

According to Eysenck, individuals with high levels of extraversion engage in more social activities. The extraversion dimension is widely seen as a continuum ranging from extroverts to introverts. They exhibit the qualities of assertiveness, sociable, impulsive, fond of excitement, active, carefree and dominant. The introverts are quite opposite to them. They tend to be less sociable, quiet, mostly prefer well ordered life and also uncomfortable with strangers. Johnston illuminates Eysenck's extraversion dimension in both Clara and Laurence. Johnston portrays Clara as an extrovert, who is active, carefree and thrill seeking woman who wants to share her betrayal story to the world through her novel. She finds

solace for her wounded soul in nature and music. On the other hand, Laurence is an introvert, who wants to keep everything within himself. He is running away from his homeland and his troubled past. He believes that he had left all his bad memories in North Ireland but it still chases him. His inner conflict made him to distance himself from others. He is quite uncomfortable with strangers.

In their first meeting, Laurence is frightened to see Clara standing at the edge of Killiney Hill. As vertigo, he can't go and save her but he called her down. In fact, Clara is just admiring the beauty of the sun. She is surprised to know the impression of Laurence on her. She wants to achieve something in life before her death. This unexpected meeting is the start of their oddly friendship. They meet second time in the club, where they introduce each other. She reveals that she had lost the purpose of being a woman, but not elaborately. As a carefree person, she invites Laurence to her home to watch television. At the request of Clara, he narrates his life with his wife Caitlin and child Moya, but he didn't reveal the real cause of their death. In order to prevent him from self-destruction, she offers him to stay in her house until he heals from his internal pain.

NEUROTICISM

Neuroticism is the highest degree of emotional instability. To Eysenck, this type of personality is formed due to stress and traumatic experience. Neurotic individuals experience various mood swings and negative emotions such as anger, guilt, anxiety, depression, fear and less tolerance. Both Clara and Laurence are engaged in their own inner conflicts and filled with anger, guilt and depression. This neuroticism is seen in the character of Clara while she is talking about her mother. Mrs. Barry, Clara's mother makes jams and biscuits for her children and grandchildren even in her old age. But there will be no children for Clara to indulge. As her daily routine, she sits at the top of Killiney Hill and sees the mothers with the toddlers playing in the grass. It reminds her how she turned into a barren woman. She doesn't want to remember the well-trodden road which destroyed her life. It is something terrible to remember the scars of the past, even if they are the moments of excitement. James K'vin has not only left the scars on her body, but also on her mind and soul. In order to escape from being so depressed, she decides to write her journey to New York as a novel. She is moulding the cruel reality into fiction by walking over the memory lane of betrayal. Clara takes writing as a way to come out of her despair.

On the other hand, Lar shuns his parents when they try to comfort him. Instead of facing the problems, he escapes to Dublin. But his past still chases even in his dreams. He struggles to wake up from his dreams as if someone is holding his eyes and dragging to the scenes of explosion. He is packed with grief, guilty, rage, loneliness, frustration and apathy. He is guilty to breathe after losing his beloved. Images of explosion

are often tormenting him. The life with Caitlin is being telecasted to him as the episodes of dream. He is the epitome of sadness when he meets Clara. He starts to unwrap his pain of losing his wife and child. There is a little change in his behavior after being acquainted with Clara. Caitlin's voice is slowly becoming muddy in his head. Child is not only the trigger point of Clara's broken psyche but also for Lar's psyche.

Laurence began to shake; his whole body was struck with what seemed to be an ague. He couldn't move, couldn't put one foot in front of the other, he could only stand trembling, his arms wrapped tightly across his chest in an effort not to fall apart. The woman with the pram looked in his direction for a moment and then turned and went on her way up the hill, the children chattering beside her. (Johnston, 2001, p. 9)

Both Clara and Laurence are emotionally instable due to the drastic experience in the past, but they try to find a way to overcome it.

PSYCHOTICISM

Eysenck defines Psychoticism as the behavior of psychosis exhibited by the normal individual under certain circumstances. Psychoticism is characterized by antisocial traits such as impulsiveness, taking risks, insensitive, cold, confused and disturbed thoughts. It is very difficult to understand the reality as they lose the grip on reality by hallucination and delusions. Johnston presents the psychosis behavior of Clara and Laurence in this novel. As an individual, Laurence is a silent person. After being tormented by the death of his family, he exhibits psychosis behavior under circumstances. One day while walking on the bridge, Clara shows a hawk flying in the sky and waiting to catch its prey. On witnessing this scene, Lar remembers the death of his wife and child in the bomb blast. He visualizes how they were attacked by their predator behind the rocks. He is guilty of sending them alone to collect Caitlin's paintings from Belfast for the exhibition. He wants to yell, even attack Clara for enjoying the sight of the hawk. But he controls his emotions and diverts them in running away from there without hurting Clara.

He opened his mouth to say something, but found he couldn't. He wanted to scream at her, perhaps even to attack her with his clenched fists, thumping and thumping, making her cry out and bleed. Instead he turned and slithered down from the road to the edge of the stream, jumped across it, trailing one foot into a swirling pool as he went and then set off at speed across the valley, bounding and stumbling from tussock to tussock, dodging the whinbushes and the bog holes as he went. Pansy turned and raced after him. (pp. 107-108)

Clara shows impulsiveness whenever she touches the heavy plated golden watch gifted by James. She wants to smash the watch into pieces by the hammer and send it to him for cheating on her. She is dumbfounded how foolish she was in New York to believe a man of lies and fell in his trap.

I still feel the weight of his expensive gold watch clasped around my wrist. I sometimes wonder why I didn't smash it into bits with a hammer and send him the pieces in a Jiffy bag, preferably without stamps on it, so that he would have had to pay to spill the shards of glass and metal out onto his breakfast table. (p.140)

Due to their horrible past, Clara and Lar exhibit psychosis behavior at certain situation. But they control their disturbed thoughts without making any mistakes which they will regret later.

CONCLUSION

Johnston represents Clara and Lar as the examples of modern society who are struggling to redefine their identity after

experiencing tragic events. Clara, whom seems to be a strong character in the novel, also has inner fear of her past. But she wishes for the opportunity to let go of the past. She finds writing as a way to face the world and to be herself. Johnston depicts Laurence as a weak soul who is oscillating between dreadful memories and downhearted present. The transformation in the character of Laurence is evident after meeting Clara. He sets forth his new journey towards North Ireland.

Through these characters, Johnston stamps her ideology on Eysenck's PEN theory and opens a broad view for the readers to accept their destiny and move on in their life, instead of dwelling on the past.

REFERENCES

1. King, L. M. (2017). *The Measure of a Man*. Pickle Partners Publishing.
2. Johnston, J. (2014). *The Gingerbread Woman*. Headline Publishing.
3. Mcleod, S. (1970, January 1). *Theories of personality*. Simply Psychology. Retrieved June 2, 2022, from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/personality-theories.html>
4. Waude, A. (2017, June 14). *Hans Eysenck's pen model of personality*. Psychologist World. Retrieved June 2, 2022, from <https://www.psychologistworld.com/personality/pen-model-personality-eysenck>