

1-30-2020

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Recommended Citation

Malek, Lopamudra (2020) "Impact of Second World War in Endo Shusako's Literary Work: Sea and Poison," *Journal of Strategic and Global Studies*: Vol. 3 : No. 1 , Article 6.

DOI: 10.7454/jsgs.v3i1.1029

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/jsgs/vol3/iss1/6>

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Impact of Second World War in Endo Shusako's Literary Work: *Sea and Poison*

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ABSTRACT

Shusaku ENDO, a famous Japanese novelist was born in a critical juncture, when the First World War had ended keeping its sad legacy. Born in Tokyo in 1923, Shusaku ENDO had been raised by his mother and an aunt in Kobe. His mother was a single parent at that era. Some literary works of Endo Shusaku were based on Second World war where nationalism has been merged with his mental hitches and created an obvious consistency indeed. Endo's novel 'Sea and Poison' is based on a true incident that occurred during the Second World War when some Japanese doctors have vivisected two American soldiers of the Second World War. Rest of the world has forgotten this incident as time passed by, but Endo could not. The most important and catchy part of this novel is Endo has not conferred this brutality forthrightly throughout the story but with his expertise, he has effectively created the dreadfulness of that situation and succeeded exceptionally. The methodology has been applied here is thoroughly literature-based study.

Keywords: Sea, Christianity, Japanese, Vivisection, World War II, Sin, and Morality.

1. Introduction

This article explores the life and work of the Japanese writer Endo Shusaku (1923–96), with particular attention to his *Umi to Dokuyaku (Sea and Poison)*. The novel explores human morality in the context of Japan's encounter with the humanity and reality at the time of war. Though the main dictum of this novel was regarding vivisection but Endo has discussed and portrayed socially and mentally wounded after-war Japan, through this piece of work. Endo's silence also speaks a bundle. Each of the characters here were portrayed so delicately and consciously that while these characters remained silent, the sea has conveyed their words through various sounds metaphorically. Endo was one of Japan's foremost fashionable and courageous fiction writers of his era. Endo was never an adherent. Apart from his *Sea and Poison*, his short stories and novels were widely and significantly acclaimed in both Japan and other countries only for their uniqueness. As a Catholic novelist, Endo was frequently referred to as the 'Japanese Graham Greene.' Endo was anxious with the inner battles of faith

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as well as the outer fights against discrimination which Japan experienced after the Second World War (Endo, Essay – eNotes, 02.10.2017).

It has been mentioned earlier that Endo was terribly affected by the two World Wars of his own timeline, which has its scars left on his soul. The core character of this novel was an efficient doctor namely Suguro who has an inbuilt numbness within himself and that specific chillness of his hand was deliberately discussed and compared with the chillness of death which was occurred by these wars. The noble cause of those doctors who did that vivisection for the sake of the prosperity of medical science have their own viewpoint, but concurrently Endo has aroused several questions for us to rethink about confining priority of human race. What should be a right step for a common man? Should common people be more obliged to their personal sense of morality or should they support their collective prosperity? These are some basic questions for a civilized world. Here it is important to remind that Endo was a great fan of Franz Kafka and Kafka also raised so many questions to the society. Kafka mentioned one critical point to the society in his *Metamorphosis* that everything is permitted does not mean that nothing is forbidden (Kafka, New York, 2004).

Those who have an abrupt idea on Japanese society, it is well known to them that Japan has its particular sense of social obligation and responsibility which is called *Giri* (Davies, 2002: 95). This word does not have an English equivalent word either. But at the time of war, Japanese common people have put in side their sense of social obligation and the sense of conscientious entirely. Rather than that, Endo also questioned about the fine line between morality and sin and tried to prove through his pen that war is the sturdiest facet which has the accepted ascendancy to eliminate this fine line unconditionally. Suguro was an affectionate common man at the beginning of his life but the viciousness of war made him insensitive and at the time of that brutal incident, nothing touched him anymore. But after the completion of that vivisection, the main character Suguro left his hospital and was living in an unfamiliar village like a prisoner of his own. As if, Suguro was trying to obscure himself from his own conscience. In conclusion that makes people prisoner of its own inbuilt cognizant and never sets human free for the rest of his life.

2. Research Methodology

The research methodology applied here is fully based on literature review of narratives found and followed qualitative method. For this research some relevant books, important articles and some published texts has been exercised. Literature analysis is the key of this research.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Short Biographical Sketch of Endo Shusaku

Shusaku Endo was born in Tokyo in 1923. His mother got divorced and had started living with her aunt who was a roman catholic and she convinced Endo's mother to be baptized as well (Endo, Essay-e Notes, 02.10.2017). Embracing Baptism, mother took Endo to the Church and where he was also converted to Roman Catholicism at the age of eleven even without asking Endo's tacit consent or preference. As like the other children of divorced parents, he also has a complicated childhood and his unconscious and sudden encounter with baptism has made his childhood thornier. Amid an Asian citizen and already predetermined with Shintoism and Buddhism inbuilt in his blood, it was difficult for him to accept the third one 'Christianity' in tandem. This confusion has probably opened his inner eye as an author to observe every single situation thoroughly. Practically, such situation has created stereotype mental state in him. It has been said by him several times that the western suit does not befit his Japanese figure. With the facilitation of this line, Endo had uttered enormous unexpressed silence concealed in him. He had nurtured whatever he faced in his silence and finally put them in words in his literary works (Malek, Outlook Japan, 2019: 18). Endo had an extraordinary sense of observation which reflected in his works meticulously. He had not spared his disease even though it was equally painful to him like the Baptism. Being baptized at the age of eleven he completed his schooling and after that he majored in French literature from Tokyo's Keio University. He has graduated BA in 1949, before furthering his studies in French Catholic literature at the University of Lyon in France between 1950 and 1953. A major theme running through his books, which have been translated into many languages, including English, French, Russian and Swedish, is failure, and the reason of this failure of Japanese soil was difficult to nurture the growth and maintenances of Christianity. Before his death in 1996, Endo was the recipient of a number of outstanding Japanese literary awards: the Akutagawa Prize, Mainichi Cultural Prize, Shincho Prize, and Tanizaki Prize.

Astonishingly unlike the other Japanese authors, he has a lack of suicidal tendency which has proven his uniqueness and authenticity towards life.

3.2 Analysis of Shusaku's Literary Works

Endo's literary works were always highly acclaimed and finely analyzed in many languages, especially in English. While discussing about Endo's literary works, the work *Ryugaku*, written in 1965, the translated version of it is *Foreign Studies* contains three stories. Each was about the Japanese Christians who were living in Europe (Mark, 1989: 27). These tales focus on the vulnerability and rigidity of the characters to mend their Japanese individualism in western culture, and their own inner conflicts over their belief in a religion which is determinedly intrinsic in Europe. The characters experienced crevice and a catastrophe over distinctiveness concerning the disaccord between their Christian faiths, their Japanese individuality and further more- their sufferings out of Japan.

It could be noticed that Endo's fictions were more profound inspection of the moral deeds of those individual who could not achieve salvation, but in his matured write ups, he believed in bestowing forgiveness and shown matured understanding for those who fight with their beliefs, just like Endo did with himself throughout his life. This has been found in his novel *Deep River* also. 'And You, Too,' the longest story of the three, is about a Japanese professor of French literature lived in France and studied the works of the Marquis de Sade who was possibly Endo himself (Williams, 1989: 14).

In *Deep River*, Endō has concluded and found his path of ultimate spiritual deliverance through salvation. In this novel he has reached his goal and found all the answers he was searing for. This novel was the ultimate one which reflects his changed and utmost positive sight towards life. Those critics who use to describe Endo as a confused and pessimistic one, Endo has shown his utmost optimistic inspection towards the religion and found a new religious aspect called humanity, through this piece of work. In this novel, four people came to India for different reasons but they were related in a same loop and that knot was their sense of personal compulsion. The coexistence of the known and bizarre was the basic of this story (Endo, 1994: 28) Endo taught us from all the way through in his own way that adore and compassion can reunite the whole world with the religion namely humanity (Malek, Outlook Japan, 2019: 27).

Stained Glass Elegies includes eleven short stories collected and translated from *Aika* in 1965 and *Juichi no irogarasu* in 1979 (Endo, 1985: 10). Critic and translator Van C. Gessel observed that Endo's short stories in the *Stained Glass Elegies* collection which portraits various patterns of lives which were supposed to gulp the burden of guilt and mercilessness of their ethics. Endo considered the freedom of life all over this story. In his story - *My Belongings*, the character Suguro's relation with his wife was messy. He never loved his wife, but could never flee and leave her alone which reminds us of his sense of liability that Endo faced always. Endo also did not like many things throughout his life timeline but he never absconds those (Endo, Essay- e Notes, 02.10.2017).

3.3 *War in Shusaku's Sea and Poison:*

Endo has elaborated the mental agony of a common man and general human beings who were not implicated in the war directly but the war has unnecessarily involved them in it. The central character 'Suguro' was a common man having basic moral values and norms. This common man has been suddenly involved with a team who has vivisected two American prisoners. The character of 'Suguro' was not of an ambitious category. But 'Suguro' has become a part of that terrible incident. Through this novel, Endo has drawn a portrait of the war which has transformed a common man to a devil who does not care if anyone survives or dies. The war has trained human race to be so dull and numb that others sufferings did not make any repercussion to any human kind. The fine line between morality and sin was omitted by the war. The basic theme is, common people, who has been tremendously affected by the war that they has lost their sense of morality. Humanity was like a myth in those war days. Furthermore, in this novel, the writer Endo Shusaku has depicted the scenario of social, economic and job- oriented never ending political culture at the time of war. Although he has never mentioned distinctly, but a touch was given abruptly all over the story, that even in the time of war; human race merely forget their social class consciousness, personal rigidity and grieves and nepotism. The novel reminds us the famous saying that everything is fair in love and war.

The story unfolds in many layers. The uniqueness of this story remains uninterrupted through its diversity in descriptions. Endo tried to justify each character from the view point of them (the characters). He was the author of this story but throughout the story - he stood as an outsider who was describing the story and as well as observing and hearing each of the character's viewpoint and their justification ready in hand for being disloyal to humanity. The

story is all about a man named Suguro who was an efficient doctor. A common man came to him for treatment of tuberculosis. The common man felt that the doctor has extra-ordinary expertise in tuberculosis treatment but the patient felt that something was fatally wrong with this doctor - Suguro. His efficiency was assorted with terrific chillness and silence. The common man was confused having highly capable doctor in such a pastel surrounding with a different dialect (べん). In due courses, this common man went to Fukuoka and his inquisitiveness helped him out to uncover the truth deeply hidden in the husky air of Fukuoka. Some doctors (12 in number) and the team have serenely vivisected two American prisoners of war and this Suguro was one of these twelve doctors. Here the story reveals interesting psyche during Second World War. All the other characters of this novel unveil with their own stories adjoining the vivisection. Added with Suguro; Dr. Hashimoto, Odasan, Dr. Kando, Dr. Susugi, Dr. Hiroshi Asai and Shibata, Mitsu Abe, Mr. Ueda, Mr. Soga, Mrs. Hilda, Mr. Tabe and Mrs. Tabe and the narrator of the story and his wife alike (Gallagher, 1992: 24).

Here, while revealing and unfolding the layers of the story, Endo have depicted the sea metaphorically. It could be visible throughout the story that with the changes in human colors and behaviors, the colors and sounds of the sea changes. Here, sea is the consciousness of human soul which has many layers inside it and reveals it only when needed.

Endo has suffered a lot throughout his life but he was never exceedingly rude to life; though he has his own perspective and that was unusual but till to the end of his works, Endo never shown his flipside to life. He has always shown his positivity toward life in his own way. Analyzing the colors of sea, Osugi san's sudden death has made the colors of the sea more vigilant and it was filled with the nasty odor of politics of position grabbing in every work place. Here Endo has portrayed that while human race have malicious mind and while cruel thoughts are being practiced, that nasty odor comes from the sea. Actually human have a weird mindset that the soul and consciousness is a small and insignificant part of life but in contrary it is as big as a sea which spread that nasty odor everywhere and every human soul inhales that malicious odor and unknowingly and unsuspectingly becomes a part of that peccadillo (Gallagher, 1992: 52).

Endo has the uniqueness to portray each character so consciously but his style is to be carefully careless with each personality. The nature of this pattern of characterization is reflected in Nurse Oda's personality. The temperament of the character of Nurse Oda was not

highly significant apparently; Endo has depicted the pragmatism of human behavior through Oda's voice. Oda used to wear a hypothetical *Noh* (classical Japanese dance theatre) mask on her face in order to hide all her own personal sentiments like pain, opinion and conscious beside her mask. While doing this vivisection, she was doing it as part of it but there was no repercussion inside her. As if she has absorbed all her senses with her reclusion. But in a contrary, though she was introvert with her viewpoints, but we could find at the end of the novel that she was affectionate towards Dr. Hashimoto and finally has taken off her self-pleasing and people –pleasing mask. Here, through taking the self-pleasing and people-pleasing mask off, Endo has drown the concealed sensitivity of human soul which finally wishes to be its own positive self ; no matter how ugly or how beautiful it would be. Actually, it does not matter what form it has. To love someone is itself positivity. And not only nurse, we all put a mask on our face to be nice and please others but only life has that guts to put that off at least once in a lifetime and that is the exactness and truth of life. Endo understood that very well. Endo has revealed that (海) sea is like a corridor of human's inner sensitivity. If someone listens vigilantly, there was variation in sounds coming from the sea. Some were loud and husky, some were cruel and pathetic. Odasan's assertion of love was a positive and infrequent sound in the sea. This positivism brings back human race towards life ignoring other sufferings of life (Gallagher, 1992: 52).

Endo depicted that war was that disease in human body which has no cure at all, beside some palliatives. (私) I was the narrator of the story with tuberculosis. Endo has used some sort of metaphors while discussing about war this disease and he analyzed that this disease was not for a single person or community- but it was in human body and actually it was a disease in the body of the whole world and that was nothing but war. Here Endo Used I as a metaphor of the world itself. People may try and choose to vivisect countless times but could not find any conclusion ultimately; unless the seas have transformed the odor to fine fragrances (Gallagher, 1992: 147).

Mr. Tabe, another insignificant character, was a sick relative of Osugi needed operation and with an unsuccessful operation he was also an insignificant voice inside this novel. The significance could be found in the sheering sounds coming from the sea after his death with enormous depressive tunes. It could be seen throughout the novel that adjunct tuning between life and death is the imperative necessity of existence.

The character of Dr. Kando was a partner in crime with the other eleven, who has an eager intention to concrete his position in the Fukuoka hospital. A height of his enthusiasm regarding so called position has been seen through his continuous connection with the American armies. Being in a noble profession; he was more interested in politics than rendering sympathetic services to the hospital. Dr. Shibata was also a part of this brutal vivisection and has the same type of keenness regarding post no matter how hideous and dreadful they look like. Both of them were never trustworthy. This sort of unfaithful person of a country is the heaviest stone to move slightest and according to Endo, being unfaithful was the basic constituent of that nasty odor coming from sea (Gallagher, 1992: 34).

As author discussed earlier that Endo has his personal particular positive viewpoint about life and hence portraying ugly and unfaithful characters he has not forgotten to portray some characters praying for others. These praying characters have penetrated the diversity of the war. At the time of war, it is true that there were bounty of people from noble professions, ready to vivisect without giving a second thought on it, but simultaneously few people were there who had prayed for others. This number is very few and rare but there was a number at least. It was not a zero at all. These human harmonies changed the color and the sound of the sea. The sound could be mild; color could be faded enough but it has gone beyond power within it. It was white in color and finally resembles with the color of peace for the human race (Gallagher, 1992: 52).

When it came about Obasan and Mitsu Abe - they were sensible and sympathetic character in this novel. In the situation of war; when everyone was planning to set up something politically or socially or by any means- these unfortunate ladies have drown a motherly affection towards Suguro and love for human race in utmost consideration. Here we find change in the color of sea. It becomes whiter with motherly love and unconditional sacrifices and affections. Though, about the old lady, rest of the people and patients in the hospital were rarely interested about her presence or absence. More or less everyone was expressing the same gesture with separate actions that this old lady was going to die anyhow. She may die inside or outside the hospital but her death is predicated. Suguro's fondness for the old lady changes this depressing story to a pleasant one. The characterization of Ms. Hilda in this novel was potentially an interesting one who was the wife of a doctor in Fukuoka hospital. Ms. Hilda brought cookies and cakes for the patients and washed the patients' unwashed clothes and then ironed and returned those back to them. She was the most vive rant white

color of the sea who had never forgotten her ethics and morality and as a human being, Endo made her perform at her best (Gallagher, 1992: 44).

Endo has placed two contradictory characters together- Toda and Suguro unusually consciously. These two contradictory characters could be compared with the 'shur' and 'oshur' concept of Hinduism. Toda was daring, ambitious, self-pleasing and least bothered whereas Suguro has no ambition, with zero level of calculation with his life and even in those days, have some conscience and loyalty left. Toda was vaguely interested about conscience, morality, and ethics. They were working relatively in a same level but Endo has illustrated the conflict between the priority factors. When this specific question has aroused that what is more important 'your loyalty towards your organization or loyalty towards your own-built ethics', Endo has portrays the dilemma of human soul through arising this question in a beautiful way. Suguro was neither ambitious nor calculative whereas Toda had stepped every single step with utmost computation. Toda was over confident whereas Suguro was not. Toda undoubtedly supported that vivisection. In case of the old lady, Toda felt that it was a better option for her to be used as a human resource which would be considerate for the medical science's further progress and just for an instance, if they would not use her body for further experiment, she had no other option rather than being died in the war outside the hospital. The character Toda has his own spiky and sharp viewpoint which is less affectionate to someone marginalized. Endo was a great fan of Franz Kafka. Here we can find the same question of Kafka which he aroused in his famous literary work *Metamorphosis* that everything permitted that does not necessarily mean that nothing is forbidden. Endo has tried to draw the fine line between consent and forbidden (Gallagher, 1992: 72).

Going with the story, it would be seen that the whole thing is a war amid morality and immorality. Suguro has in-built humanism in him but the war outside kept on wounding his sense of morality and endorsed evilness in place of goodness. At one point of the novel, Suguro has uttered that he actually does not care whether it was good spirit or bad. The numbness of Suguro was created by the war. Was this the same Suguro who felt tremendously bad for someone who was not a relative even? Precisely that Suguro was brutally murdered in the hand of war, immorality and sin. Death of someone's cognizant proves the death of that person. In the novel there was a line written that 'みんな死んで行く 時代やせ。' - means everybody's destination was identified as death and war was the time when every person were nothing but supposed to die. How did not matter,

where also didn't matter, but death matters. Alike Toda, a nurse also has participated in this vivisection session but she was not even interested to think about that yet. The thought process is similar to them who were participating in the war. The truth was they all will die ; those who were indirectly related to the war and those who were not related to the war in any means- all of them will eventually die and in these circumstances -death of people resembles death of integrity (Gallagher,1992: 33).

As a common progressive person, Suguro also has his own dreams to go to abroad, has someone to love but in reality after the death of his conscious by vivisectioning ; he left everything, went to a remote village where he has no prospect ahead. Additionally chillness of Suguro's hands was signifiers of death. Endo's depiction of metamorphic approach was excellent here. These chilled hands were proving of that decisive tediousness. Along with the changes in Suguro's accepted wisdom, the color of the sea has been changing according to that. According to Toda, it could be said that doctors were not saints. We should not expect them to act like angels forever .They also has the right to want to proceed and prosper professionally. If they had done something for the sake of medical science - that will never be a sin at all. However, the thing is –it is factual that doctors are not saints but that does not mean that doctors will act like demons. Endo has depicted the demarcation between saints and demons which were confined by self-consciousness (Gallagher, 1992: 147).

Suguro also had this conscious hidden inside him but eventually he lost his conscious as the war continues. He has felt his morally and different opinion; just he could not give them words. Here comes another thing and that is the crucial tiredness. Suguro has been so tired with his life, surroundings, with the war that he lost all his interest to pamper his conscious anymore. This critical fatigue was not allowing him to rethink and differentiate among sin and prosperity. Endo portrayed that Suguro was so tired that the news of Japan's winning or defeating had no meaning and worth to him either (Gallagher, 1992: 20).

4. Conclusion

'Sea and Poison' written by Japanese author Endo Shusaku and English translation done by Michael Gallagher might be considered as the distressing narrative of war time Japan and an effort of collective moral interruption on integration in totality and individual ethical position questioned in particular. The incident took place called vivisection was an unfortunate act. At the time of war and no war this particular act was nothing but practice sin. This story is all

about not forgetting the fine line between moral and committing sin whatever the situation is. Human race is supposed to act like human, sensibly. If we act brutally, we should never be proud for being human. Through the character of Suguro, an unsophisticated medical intern from the country side, subjugated into compliance in the crime by his colleague, but after the completion of that sin, Suguro could not face his own at all and started living at a place which was far away from his well accustomed society. This negative gesture was the fundamental of the basic principal that human race have an inbuilt sense of ethics and morality inside him or her and that don't allow people to commit sin and stay happy. Endo has drawn this positive side of human race undoubtedly metaphorical. It is difficult and complex to understand but Endo concluded with positivity. Especially Hilda's humanity was the background score behind the scenes and the positive sounds came from sea. Endo presents here a distinctly modern world, where individuals subsist in a state of disjointed but in actual they all are connected with the world through basic morals. Endo had proved Kafka's thought here. It could be seen throughout the novel that the signs coming from the sea changes according to the changes of thoughts of Suguro and as the depression went higher and higher, the sea turn out to be more weird. To die naturally or accidentally is something close to natural death but to kill someone forcefully in order to achieve something - is a crime. It could not be compared with natural death by any means. Endo has aroused another question here that if the God remains same of the victims how could the same God allow them to kill each other? The God should be indistinguishable for all. The people who died naturally and those who had been murdered are the same in Almighty's judgment. Truly the novel "Sea and Poison" is a novel of guilt and divine penalty. Man's right-doing and wrong-doing bring divine punishment and heaven's vengeance through his deeds.

In *Sea and Poison*, Endo has elaborated the mental agony of a common man who was regrettably got involved in war. The central character of this book 'Suguro' was a common man with basic moral values, a soft and kind heart which could be easily melted seeing others suffering. This common man has got involved with a team who has vivisected two American prisoners. Unknowingly 'Suguro' became a part of that terrible incident. Endo has drawn the picture of war which has transformed a common man to a devil who did not care if anyone survives or dies. The war has trained human race to be so dull and numb that others sufferings didn't make any repercussion to anyone's life (Gallagher, 1992: 73).

The changes in the color of ocean are the divine signs which change its color and sounds according to the amount of guilt inside the human soul. Suguro's inner contemplation and the coming signs from the sea were affecting simultaneously throughout the novel. The word 'Poison' resembles here the depravity and ruthlessness of brain and soul. Suguro was a believer of humanism and practiced humanism but encircled nastiness has overlapped his cordiality and the whole thing came in the form of guilt. The uprightness of human race became atypical after a point of time where sin and badness faced actual realities and the presence of human perception lied underneath; which could not be overlooked. Endo was among the war generation that witnessed the brutal militarism within and outside Japan, who were left to suffer with his nation's defeat at the hands of others. In actual Endo was extremely affected by the war and in his literary works it is always found that the war lays in layers, in subconscious and indirect.

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