



The Influence of Mesosystem on Krishnan in The English Teacher An Ecological Systems Approach

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Abstract

People are constantly shaped by environmental factors such as parents, family, friends, education, employment, culture, religion, economic status, and political ideology. All these will impact one's values, beliefs, attitudes, worldview, thoughts, behaviours, and lifestyle. The micro-environment in particular has the power to transform people positively or negatively as it includes one's parents, friends, educational setting, religious beliefs etc. Krishnan in The English Teacher went through various stages in life such as a happy bachelor, married man, father, and family man. However, he was impacted heavily by the loss of his wife, loss of touch with reality, the need to take care of his daughter, and finding his purpose in life. People and events in his immediate environment shaped his thoughts, values, and actions. His wife's death forced him to move away from his regular life and lose track of his employment, family, and himself. In the end, he was able to gather himself and find a new meaning in his life. He learned that everything in life had no meaning with the help of his religious practices that helped him find his real self. Krishnan is a typical example of people who would be influenced by the interaction between all the factors within the microenvironment. Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem brings out this interplay between two or more factors within the microsystem.

Keywords – R.K.Narayan, The English Teacher, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Ecological Systems Theory, Meso-environment, Krishnan.

Introduction

The English Teacher brings out the importance of the interaction between various factors in the meso-environment and how such interaction makes people vulnerable to change either for good or worse. All the people such as parents, friends, relatives, and all the events that occur in one's life such as marriage, childbirth, education, and religious ceremonies. Krishnan in The English Teacher remained happy and content until the

death of his wife. His life took a turn when he lost his wife to malaria. He was hoping to build a home which turned out to be a disaster for his family as his wife fell sick after returning from the visit. At first, he believed that it was only a normal fever but it was too late before he realized that she wouldn't come back. His wife's death totally confused him and forced him to lose touch with reality. He looked for her in spirit form with the help of some religious rituals. Initially, he communicated with the help of a mediator but later he learned to communicate with his wife on his own. However, in the process, he understood the real purpose of life and accepted the fact that his wife was dead. Everything in his life seemed to be meaningless and insignificant. So, he resigned from his job and started working in a small school for the welfare of poor children.

A Happy Beginning

At the beginning of the novel, everything was perfectly in place. Krishnan wanted to bring his family and be with them, so his wife and daughter joined him. Although he wanted to live with his wife and child, when they arrived, he felt that he had to shoulder extra responsibilities. Life on his own was very easy but he felt uneasiness and loneliness throughout. Sarbani Putatunda comments: "Her arrival, instead of making him ecstatic, nonplusses him. Unused to the responsibility of looking after a family, he starts fretting." (Putatunda 141). He was not very sure what to do with the additional responsibility that came along with his family. However, he started to learn about a family man's responsibilities and the pleasures and discomfort it brought. When his family settled with him, he thought that he had to give them a better house to live. Sarbani Putatunda comments: "The first question that torments him is finding a proper house for his wife and child. At last, Krishna seems to have grown up." (Putatunda 141). Krishna started to think like a responsible adult who has to be the provider and protector of the family. He started to feel that he was back on track with his family. Finding a house was the only thing on his mind as a house is a symbol of a family's settled status.

Krishnan enjoyed his life thoroughly as he and his young wife had enough time together and they used the child as an excuse not to show their affection to one another. He came home early from his work to see his wife but he never accepted that he came to see her. The novelist brings out this playful interaction between them, "I didn't come out to look for you, but just to play with the child..." (The English Teacher 35). Krishnan was completely attracted to his wife Susila as she represented a completely devoted Hindu wife who was not only obedient but also constantly at his service. P. K. Singh comments: "Susila is a replica of a devoted Hindu wife

with whom her family and her domestic duty come first.” (Singh 25). Krishnan was surprised to see how she handled the finance of the house as she always found a way to save money while at the same time making sure that all needs were met. All these qualities made Krishnan fall in love completely with his wife although he never showed it explicitly. He felt relieved in the presence of his wife and daughter because the life he had lived in the hostel didn’t have any fulfillment as it was very monotonous. When he joined his wife and daughter, his life became very vibrant, active, and engaging.

Krishnan and Susila started to enjoy every moment of their lives but that didn’t mean that they didn’t have their disagreements. However, that strife was minor and it was over an old watch that Susila sold to get the finances right. All the minor issues between them only strengthened their bond and love for each other. He wanted to buy a house rather than living in a rented house in order to provide a better living space to his family. His father supported his idea of buying a home and gave him some money. In the meantime, they discovered themselves and enjoyed each other’s company. P. S. Sundaram comments: “More than three years after their marriage Krishnan and Susila are just discovering themselves and are caught in the wonder of their blossoming love.” (Sundaram 42). At one point, Krishnan was completely lost in his wife’s love. He never in his wildest dreams thought that all his joy would cease to exist.

The Loss of Love and the Loss of Self

Krishnan decided to buy a new house and identified one in a new building development society. Although they finalized their house, they were not able to buy it because Susila fell ill after contracting Malaria from the lavatory she used while searching for the house. She was completely shocked and never recovered from it as she was consumed by it. Krishnan didn’t know what to do when she fell ill as he had to care for the child and his wife. He felt abandoned all of a sudden with a huge responsibility although there was an old lady helping with the household work. Krishnan also considered an opportunity to serve Susila and remain close to her. The novelist comments: “But I liked it immensely. It kept me so close to my wife that it produced an immense satisfaction in my mind. Throughout I acted as her nurse. This sickness seemed to bind us together more strongly than ever.” (The English Teacher 81). Krishnan believed that it was a normal fever and that she would get out of it but she died too quickly. Krishnan was not able to accept the fact that all his experiences with his wife just

stopped. The love they shared, the joy they experienced together, and the responsibilities they shouldered together came to a halt all of a sudden.

Krishnan started a life of denial in which he failed to acknowledge the separation as he considered the death of his wife as a temporary physical separation. He believed that he could still communicate with her in the spirit world using some religious rituals. He lost his wife which forced him to lose touch with his employment, daughter, and other social responsibilities. P. S. Sundaram comments: “his wife though physically dead is not dead to him, and he is content to make looking after the child his chief occupation in life.” (Sundaram 44). When he came to his senses, he realized that he had a duty to his daughter as he was her only immediate relative. She was the only reason that held his mental stability, otherwise, he would have considered ending his life. He considered earning money was not an important thing in his life, so he resigned from his job. Nazar Singh Sidhu comments: “This teaching of English just holds him in life, there is no authentic satisfaction. He, therefore, badly needs something where he can forget temporarily the cause of his alienation.” (Sidhu 41). He was badly in need of an escape plan from his routine life that brought him only distress. He was badly in need of talking to his wife through some medium and he found a person who helped people communicate with spirits.

The Impact of Religion

Krishnan was a strong believer and he was aware that there were religious rituals and people who would help him communicate with his wife in the spirit world. By doing so, he unknowingly set out on a journey to find himself. He regained his strength and confidence when he was able to communicate through the mediator. He was relieved and satisfied with the way he was progressing because he started to witness energy and enthusiasm to live and experience life. Harish Raizada comments: “This new and strange type of contact with his dead wife, introduces a fresh charm in his life and his interest in these occult meetings increases more and more.” (Raizada 36). He wanted to live because he was filled with a new spirit and he believed that he was really communicating with his wife. He acknowledged the presence of his wife numerous times but he was bringing out her image from his own mind thus seeing what he wanted to see. He wanted to remain with her in that thought as it gave him a perfect escape space from the mental torment he was undergoing. The novelist comments: “I quietly enjoyed the fact without stirring the slightest thought.” (The English Teacher 133). When people face a crisis

in their lives, they would like to seek an avenue to overcome their pain and suffering. For Krishnan, communicating with his dead wife was completely comfortable and enjoyable.

Krishnan was seeking his wife's spirit but indirectly, he was seeking himself. He was looking for a spiritual transformation and cleansing as he sought to recover himself. In Hindu spirituality, it's always about traveling inwards to find one's real self. Religion and religious rituals would help them achieve this goal if they devote themselves completely to the process.

Ved Prakash Gaur comments: "The aim of human beings is to turn to authentic existence, to attain salvation (moksha) a state which is opposite of fallenness. In the world (samsara) we are in a fallen state, a sinful existence. The revealed truths of the Upanisads invite us to live in Pure Bliss Consciousness and Knowledge." (Gaur 33). Krishnan dedicated himself completely to the process of communicating with his dead wife's spirit. He was trying to liberate himself from his imprisonment but he didn't realize that he was immersing himself in the search process.

Krishnan enjoyed the experience thoroughly because he was reinventing himself in the process. His rational thoughts were taken over by his emotional integrity with his spiritual experience. He lost touch with his daughter, job, and rest of the society and dedicated himself to the love of his wife. He felt liberated as he continued to communicate with his wife in the spirit world. Robert G. Olson comments on this inauthentic state: "In this mode of being we have no deep feelings, only petty fears and neurotic anxieties. We do not attempt to understand what we are doing; our behaviour is determined by habit, custom, or a vague sense of what is required of us by das Man." (Olson 137). Human existence is determined by their environmental factors, especially those that are in their immediate environment. All the customs, beliefs, values, and thoughts would be instilled in people without their knowledge and it happens naturally. The fact that people want to believe in whatever they had been taught suggests that even when they are educated, they wouldn't use their knowledge and rational capacity to understand the world around them. Religion has the ability to make people prisoners of their intelligence but the same could help people regain their senses through sudden revelations.

The Revelation and Liberation

Krishnan pursued his wife in the spirit world for a while and finally came to terms with himself. In one of his visits to the school where his daughter studied, he was able to identify what real joy is. It prompted him to resign from his college teaching position in order to teach children. He finally came out of his bondage and the spirit world as he understood that it was only a temporary relief. He was able to get back to reality by understanding his present state of mind and his mad pursuit of his wife's spirit. When people understand their existential crisis, they would be able to find a better option and decide better. Robert G. Olson comments: "A free and morally responsible agent is primarily one who understands the world in which he lives and who has sufficient mastery over it and over himself to accomplish his chosen goals." (Olson 161). Krishnan was able to overcome his obsession with the spirit world and find his real purpose in life. Although he experienced real joy and satisfaction by engaging in the spirit world he learned to let go of his obsession thus, coming out of his own imprisonment.

Krishnan was continuously shaped by his immediate environmental factors especially, his wife, daughter, and religious beliefs. He was oscillating between hope and despair as he wanted to believe that his wife was present in his environment and his desperate attempt to find her. However, he came to understand that life has to move on because life and death are the natural law and no one could alter this natural cycle. Sarbani Putatunda comments: "Krishna is in search of a spiritual recluse. He realizes that he can never replicate his previous world which has already been dissolved by forces of disorder." (Putatunda 66). He understood that he cannot go back to his earlier state where he was living happily in his limited environment with his wife, daughter, employment, and society. When he understood this reality, he consciously pulled himself out of his spiritual recluse. He wanted to move on for the sake of his daughter, for the sake of his happiness, and for the sake of his own development.

Conclusion

The English Teacher brings out the interaction between two or more factors in the microenvironment which make up the Mesosystem. Analyzing people and their development from this perspective would help understand them better in terms of what motivates their thoughts and behaviours. People search for themselves at various points in their lives through various people and events but they would only be able to find their real selves if they detach themselves from people and events that they think have control over them. Krishnan was able to

come back after various events that kept changing and transforming him throughout his life. In the words of Nancy Ann Watanabe, “In the end, a divine manifestation reveals to Krishna that he has succeeded in resurrecting his marriage to Susila, surmounting barriers separating life from death, the future from the past.” (Watanabe 69). Thus, people are the products of their environment, and their values, beliefs, attitudes, and worldviews would be greatly determined by them. While many give in to the impacts and influence, some make conscious decisions and efforts to get over them and move on with their lives for good. Krishnan at the end of the novel was able to overcome his own limitation and restrictions in order to lead a happy and content life.

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