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MULTI DIMENTIONAL THEMES IN THE NOVELS OF JULIAN BARNES

*(With Reference to Metroland Flaubert's Parrot, Before She Met Me Staring
at the Sun, A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters)*

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Abstract:

Julian Barnes as the contemporary British novelist of the era. He has proved himself to be one of the leading novelists of England and has been a prolific writer. He has produced ample literature and can produce more in future as he is a living writer.

LIFE AND WORKS :

Julian Barnes was born in Leicester, England's East midland, on January 19, 1946 in the family of a teacher. His father, Albert taught French at st. Clement Danes from 1937 onwards till his retirement in 1971. His mother, Keye, also taught French. His elder brother, Jonathan is now a Professor of Philosophy in Geneva.

He married Pat Kavanagh in 1979, and now lives with her in North London. Pat Kavanagh is a well known literary agent, and his marriage with her seems to be out of professional interest. However, he dedicated to her four of his novels. Besides, he has written under the pseudonym of Dan Kavanagh, four Duffy Novels. It seems that the pseudonym. Don Kavanagh, was derived from Pat Kavanagh, as there is apparent similarity between the two names. In a sense, their marriage was not fruitful as they are childless.

Julian Barnes was brought up in the family affectionately. During his childhood he sought education at city of London School which entailed an hour and a quarter each way by the train. He was in the contact with the other boys. He would play rugby and cricket.

His family was orthodox. So, during his school days he had to live almost exclusively within the family unit. He and his brother, Jonathan, developed a 'phobic reaction' to this orthodoxy. Julian Barnes comments about this,

“After my brother went to university he virtually never came home again”. (Swanson. 1996:17)

His family belongs to typical middle class of London suburb. His life was devoid of sensational event. He inherited the culture of middle class family. For three generations, his family has been in the tradition of schoolmasters. The schoolmasterly attitude has been developed in all his personal and family details which were unsensational. Even in his speech he has been a quite prowling English drawl.

In his childhood his family moved to Northland in the North Western which is London suburb, while he was educated in city of school in London during 1957-1964. For that he commuted by train almost everyday. After his schooling, he joined Magdalene College, Oxford from which he graduated with honors in modern languages in 1968. He won a scholarship to study modern languages at Magdalene College, Oxford.

Thus, his family gave him education enough to enter the academic world culture of an Englishman and made him capable of smooth worldly dealings. The education proved to be the firm ground from where

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he has projected himself. During this period he has sought help from several persons with whom he has never been graceless. Nevertheless, he has not allowed them to over claim their help and obligation in launching him.

Julian Barnes has a brilliant career. While reading for graduation he served as an English teacher at a catholic school in Rennes in France during 1966 and 1967. After graduation, he appeared for civil service examination and was offered the government job of tax inspector that he declined. After graduation he studied Law and became barrister but he has never practiced law in the court. He explains it :

I took all the exams but I was getting more pleasure out of doing a round up of four novels for provincial paper than I was out of preparing what I might say defending some criminal. (Mosely, 1997:03)

It seems that he was attracted towards literary work in this phase. He joined in this phase the editorial staff of the Oxford English Dictionary that gave him opportunity to work as a lexicographer and enter the literary world. While working as a lexicographer between 1969 and 1972 he happened to meet several writers of his generation like Graig Raine, the poet, and Martin Amis, the novelist. He also shouldered the responsibility of reviewing books for the Times Literary Supplement in 1973.

Thus, he began his career as a journalist and he became the literary editor of the New Statesman, and New Review in 1979. In the same year he became deputy literary editor for the Sunday Times. In 1975, he began to write a column in the New Review using pseudonym of Edward Pygge. He had also been television critic of New Statesman and The Observer and written a restaurant column for the Tatler using as his pseudonym 'Basil Seal', the name of one of Evelyn Waugh's characters. As he was busy in freelance writing, Julian Barnes resigned from all these activities on his 40th birthday. This is not quite true, as he still writes reviews for various journals, including The New York Review of Books, and has been The New Yorker's London correspondent since 1990, writing about politics mostly, but also about the fatwa against Salman Rushdie.

As a novelist of ideas, he was also criticized for keeping the structure loose. Mr. Barnes has always been seen focusing on the form of the novel which is probably regarded as his aim of novel writing. According to him, a novelist should have an unmoving ambition and faith in the novel as a work be regarded as a source of inspiration to experiment different techniques in his novels.

Though he was labeled as Francophile, he has been English in analyzing scrupulously and skeptically his own country so that he may have less disappointment when something terrible happens. He loves beef-eating, English science, English uprightness and pragmatism and that is being English in the real sense. He has led the active life of 27 years in the field of writing and published ten mainstream novels, four crime novels under pseudonym of Dan Kavanagh, two collections of short stories, and a book of essays. Besides, he has been a TV critic and produced Television movies. He has also produced cinemas on three of his novels. Barnes is also a well known review and article writer who has commented on various subjects.

Mr. Barnes, who is a soggy story teller, has a scholarly attitude which pervades through all his works. As a keen Observer of the life around him, he never writes about the fields unless he thoroughly ventures them. The scope of Mr. Barnes' knowledge can be seen in his works as various branches of knowledge like History, Psychology, Philosophy and Science and they are seen to be handled with great skill in his novels. Common element in Barnes work is a sustained interest in serious ideas and willingness to engage them in his fictions, to call a work "a novel of ideas" is sometimes to imply a deadening book, a distinguished treatise, a forum for disembodied figures little more than authorial puppets to exchange the author's thoughts with each other for the reader's benefit. Julian Barnes never writes a book answering this description yet he does write novels of ideas. As a modern liberal thinker aware of complexity, he writes books richer in the exploration of serious ideas than in the delivery of finality and doctrinaire answers.

As a contemporary novelist, Julian Barnes has shown tremendous interest in handling various subjects from simple suburban life to overthrow of regime. Throughout his career he has had professional attitude with which he made no compromise.

Personally, Julian Barnes is a man of company and man of friends. He is a source of support and assistance both moral & financial to his family members and relatives. Though he is childless, he has proved to be a warm and good hearted uncle to his nieces in London.

Being a moralist, he thinks that a job of a novelist is to understand a wide variety of people & put them in situations where there isn't any necessarily an easy answer. At the same time he is of the view that any life has both sides good & ugly.

He has been writing novels in the postmodern vein canvassing his stories in multinational settings. However, France has been his favorite obsession as he owns a house in France & Gustav Flaubert of Madame Bovary, his favorite author.

France is Julian Barnes's obsession that haunts him in all of his works. He admits publicly that he

loves provincial France. Because of this, he is labeled as Francophile. His attitude to France is interesting as he has accepted France as his 'another country'. He explains his attraction for France as a country to romanticise and idealise against England, his motherland. He analyses England with coldness but he doesn't analyse France with the same attitude. He loves to spend a lot of time in France though he has no house of his own to live there. He loved France and author Gustav Flaubert, the writer of the classic novel, *Madame Bovary*.

Julian Barnes loves good quality in everything. He is very meticulous in dealing with messiness of life. His life seems to be highly academic but based on practical view.

As mentioned earlier, Julian Barnes is a living writer whose ten novels have been published until now. Julian Barnes wrote 10 mainstream novels. *Metroland* (1980), *Before She Met Me* (1982) *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) *Staring at the Sun* (1986). *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (1989). *Talking It Over* (1991). *The Porcupine* (1992) *England, England* (1998) *Love Etc.* (2000) *Arthur & George* (2005).

In addition, to these ten mainstream novels, he has also written four detective novels centered around the central character. Duffy, however, for these novels Mr. Barnes has taken the pseudonym Dan Kavanagh.

There are Duffy (1980) *Fiddle City* (1981), *Putting the Boot In* (1985).

He has also written two collections of short stories entitled *Cross Channel* (1990) and *The Lemon Table* (2004).

In addition, there are three collections of essays based on his life in London.

They are *Letters from London*. (1990-95) *Something to Declare* (2002) *The Pedant in the Kitchen* (2003)

AWARDS AND PRIZES :

As a writer Julian Barnes has won number of awards in his career like Somerset Maugham Award for *Metroland* in 1981, Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize for *Flaubert's Parrot* in 1985 and Austrian State Prize for European Literature in 2004.

Besides, he has also won the French Awards like Prix Medicis Award for *Flaubert's Parrot* in 1986, Gutenberg Prize in 1987, and Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des lettres in 1988.

His versatility can be seen in his winning of the awards like Prix Femina Etranger Award for *Talking It Over* in 1992 and in 1995, he won Officer de l'Ordre des Arts et des lettres Award. He has also won the Italian Awards like Premio Grinzane Cavour for *Flaubert's Parrot* in 1988.

In this way, Mr. Barnes has been felicitated in his own country and abroad. His greatness can also be proved in his successful attempt to receive the awards and prizes like Shakespeare Prize (Germany) in 1993, Commonwealth Writer's Prize (Eurosia Region, Best Book) for *Arthur and George* in 2006 and E.M. Forster Award (American Academy of Arts and Letters) in 1986.

He has received the prestigious Man Booker Prize for his novel 'The sense of and Ending' 19th Oct. 2011 and three of his novels were short-listed for it, this may be regarded as a proof of his writing genius.

THEMES IN THE NOVEL METROLAND

So far as the themes in *Metroland* are concerned, the bourgeois is the central theme of the novel which is supported by the other themes like love, sex and marriage.

Christopher Lloyd, the protagonist, is seen to enjoy the lifestyle of typical middleclass, ironically this type of lifestyle he has hated to live during his adolescence.

When Christopher Lloyd, the narrator and main character of Barnes' first novel, *Metroland*, finally reaches "adulthood", he finds himself enjoying the very same "bourgeois" things that he had formerly sneered at as an adolescent : marriage, home, parenthood, career, mowing lawns and playing golf. (Sesto : 13)

It is noted that Christopher Lloyd is seen to dislike Sunday mornings, when the seemingly endless peeling of church bells and the heavy clanking of railroad cars from nearby East wick terminal would rip-saw through his drowsy early-morning reveries. By the time, he reaches thirty; however, these very same Sunday morning sounds and activities create a comforting senses of well-being for him. He is seen to mow his lawn every Saturday afternoon also.

As an adolescent, he falls in love with Annick, a French girl, in Paris. Like any middle class person, he feels guilty after losing his virginity before marriage. His marriage with Marion makes him to enjoy the life style of his elders.

The central theme - bourgeois mediocrity is supported by the theme of love. Christopher Lloyd

falls in love with Annick, a French girl during his stay in Paris. Not only does he sleep with her and lose his long preserved virginity but he also learns something about honesty and authenticity as opposed to bookishness. Christopher's affair with Annick comes to an end when he meets Marion, an English girl. The love affair between Christopher and Marion results into their marriage. Annick and Marion are straightforward girls, as a result Annick leaves Christopher when he discloses how much time he has been spending with Marion.

The theme of sex is associated with the theme of love and marriage. Young Christopher and Toni, during their adolescence are seen to discuss sex. Their motto is to rebel against the bourgeois mediocrity. Living in France and having a French lover, he loses his virginity. Christopher and Annick have constant experiences of sex until he meets Marion. He couldn't have similar experience with Marion as they marry.

The novel is about an ordinary young man who thinks himself to be an extra ordinary artist. Christopher Lloyd grows into an adult and marries Marion and lives ordinary life. The married life discloses bourgeois mentality of Christopher; he suffers when Marion tells him that she herself had engaged in a brief extra-marital affair. In this way, the theme of marriage supports the central theme.

THEMES BEFORE SHE MET ME

There are various themes which can be interpreted in *Before She Met Me*. Jealousy is the central theme which is supported by the other themes like sex, adultery and cuckoldry. The theme of jealousy can be seen throughout the novel as Graham Hendrick becomes the victim of jealousy to kill a lover of his wife and then commits suicide. Graham is a normal lecturer in History who marries Ann Mears, a young and attractive woman. Ann, though she sells clothes for living, has been a third grade actress in third grade films. When Graham watches one of the films in which Ann has a bed scene with her co actor, Graham is seen lost in illusionary world of Ann's past sexual life. He is obsessed with the idea of Ann having sexual relations with her co actors on the screen and off the screen haunts him. Moreover, he asks Ann about the respecting affairs after watching her films. Considering her past can not be brought back or remoulded, Ann answers his queries positively. In a newspaper column on jealousy, Barnes has this to say about jealousy of the past : Retro-jealousy, unlike its more familiar siblings, habitually broadens out into a wider obsession. That previous affair, that earlier lover turn out to be mere nominees for wider areas of baffled resentment : a kind of foolish rage against the immutability of the past, and a metaphysical whinge that things can actually happen despite your absence. (Observer, 1983 : 22)

It is out of this jealousy that Graham kills Jack Lupton, his novelist friend, with whom Ann has an affair, whom Graham has seen patting the bottom of Ann in a party. After killing Jack he ends his own life too. The love triangle has the shades of Shakespeare's *Othello*. While she is married to Graham Ann is innocent of adultery like Desdemona of *Othello*. Graham's jealousy is aroused by views Ann's sex scene. Jack is the Cassio figure in the novel.

Barbara is also a victim of Jealousy as she is an aggressive woman who thinks that things are under control until Graham exposes his decision to leave her. She is hurt and makes an enormous tragedy of his leaving by including many demands on him financially and a canny campaign to turn his daughter against him. Persuasion of Graham to take Alice to see a little known film is a well planned tactic of Barbara to initiate jealousy in Graham.

The theme of jealousy moves parallel with the theme of sex in *Before She Met Me*. In fact the jealousy of Graham is the outcome of sexual relations of his wife in the past. The sex in the novel is stale, mechanical, spontaneous as well as disgusting. The relation between Graham and Barbara, his first wife, is on the verge of breaking due to the unexcited, stale and mechanical sexual life they have lived for fifteen years. Neither of them has an urge or thirst to meet the other at night.

Ann, Graham's second wife, is a third grade actress of some obscure films. She has had affairs with her co-stars in the past. When Graham comes to know about this, he has the illusionary visuals of the sexual events of Ann's past. The sex which Ann has done with her costars in sometimes spontaneous as well as disgusting as she is in her early twenties. The disgusting side of sex is given in Buck's confession as : I'd get me down there and start eating her out; I mean, it was carryout lunch counter as far as I was concerned. Then I'd sorta slide down a bit further, and I'd feel her suirm, and that current went rant through her body. Then I'd eat some more, then slide back to her ass. I'd chew it some and diddle my tongue around, and then when she was all wound up, I'd jest plunge my tongue right in, and when I did that she'd explode. (95)

The themes of adultery and cuckoldry are also the supportive themes to the central theme that is jealousy. But the adultery and cuckoldry in *Before She Met Me* is more associated to the past to influence the present. Ann has acted in number of films as a part time actress. Most of her roles have sex scenes on the screen and interestingly she enjoys sexual relations with good looking actors. This adulterous morally

corrupt past has nothing to do with her present as she has been loyal to her husband since they are married. But Graham can not control himself in watching her films and roaming mentally in an illusionary world of Ann's infidelities. The only relation he witnesses is between Ann and Jack Lupton. In a party he finds Jack trying to kiss Ann after patting her bottoms. This is the only present proof of Ann's adultery otherwise she has told Jack to end their affair. Bruce Sesto, a learned critic, mentions similar view as :

In *Before She Met Me*, illusion gradually becomes the constitutive force of Graham's reality, as the boundaries between art and life shift and eventually dissolve in his mind, allowing his wife's screen image to assume an increasingly dominant role in his emotional and perceptual experience. Soon lurid scenarios of sexual promiscuity involving his wife and her male leads take shape in his mind; his imagination, inflamed by suspicion, becomes a battlefield of film images and reality. (Sesto, 2001 : 27)

In *Before She Met Me*, Graham Hendrick both embodies and diverges from the paradigms of cuckold. Usually the cuckold is an elderly man whose loss of sexual potency does not deter him from marrying a young woman or sometimes he is the man of honour, the husband who is admired for his attitude and action in the face of his wife's infidelity. At times Graham resembles the cuckold, especially in his feeling of inadequacy when he is making love to Ann, who, while not totally unsatisfied with Graham as a lover, has had enough prior sexual experience to intimidate him. According to Millington and Sinclair, both paradigms of the betrayed husband embody gender stereotypes which reflect the organizing principle of patriarchal societies : the husband's need to enter into a monogamous relationship with a woman in order to control her sexuality which the husband perceives as a threat to his masculinity and by extension to the orderliness of his society :

The anxiety which Graham feels about his relation with Ann appears to derive firstly from his feeling of being a cuckold or anticipating that danger, and secondly from fear of her sexuality. This second area has its roots in her strong, independent past : she has known other men before Graham and therefore may have points of comparison by which to judge Graham, and she has experience that will allow her to take the initiative in their sexual relations. (Millington, 1992 : 19)

THEMES IN THE NOVEL FLAUBERT'S PARROT

Flaubert's Parrot contends with three stories, first about Flaubert, second about Ellen and the third about Braithwaite. All these stories have been bound together by incorporating a central theme that is quest for truth. Braithwaite, a retired British physician, finds a stuffed parrot during a trip to France's Normandy coast at The Hotel-Dieu in a museum. Surprisingly, while touring Flaubert's house in the neighbouring village of Croisset, Braithwaite discovers another stuffed parrot. Out of curiosity, he questions the curator about the parrot he had seen at The Hotel-Dieu, he is told that the parrot in the house is authentic one. Here truth, he is seen criss-crossing the French countryside, writing letters, reading documents, and interviewing Flaubert authorities. Presumably, by identifying the real parrot, Braithwaite believes that he will be able to gain greater insight into Flaubert's life and art. His journey ends almost exactly where it began – back in Rouen, in the upper chamber of the city's museum. He is permitted to examine three other stuffed parrots. After the painstaking attempt to authenticate one of the two original birds he had seen, this is precisely the conclusion Braithwaite arrives at : perhaps one of the stuffed parrots locked away in this top floor is the authentic one. A noted critic Bruse Sesto mentions similar view as :

As the novel unfolds and Braithwaite continues his investigation, Barnes' eponymous parrot begins to take on a multiplicity of meanings, referring by turns to felicitous beloved bird, a kind of architectural structure, a restaurant named after a parrot, language (parrots being the birds which imitate human speech without knowing the meaning of what they imitate), and finally the pursuit of truth itself (for just as there are many parrots by the end of the novel, so are there many ways of apprehending the truth or, better still, many truths to be apprehended) : (Sesto, 2001 : 37)

The central theme, quest for truth, is subordinated to another theme that is fidelity. In the novel, the protagonist Braithwaite is obsessed with the parrot and his wife, Ellen's infidelity. It is his pain and evasiveness regarding Ellen's betrayals force him to take interest in Flaubert. The story of Ellen is a running, usually completely implicit counterpoint to the story of Flaubert.

The idea of fidelity further links Flaubert's Parrot with other Barnes fiction upto 1984. In its permutation of infidelity, or adultery, this fidelity means more than not committing adultery. Braithwaite demonstrates a great deal of fidelity to Gustave Flaubert who demonstrated fidelity to his art. In this novel

the most important examination of fidelity has to do with fidelity to fact or truth.

THEMES IN THE NOVEL STARING AT THE SUN

Staring at the Sun is a story of a brave woman, Jean Serjeant, whose life is that of an ordinary woman but in reality she dares to face her dramatic life courageously. So, courage is the central theme which is supported by the theme of sex in the novel. It seems that Mr. Barnes has made an intentional effort to write a novel on courage. In an interview he expresses his view as :

I began to think about a book on courage in war, in facing life alone and in front of the big questions that bother us all. (Bruckner, 1987 : 3)

In Staring at the Sun, the courage or lack of courage figure prominently in the novel and take up several forms. Military courage and the lack of it are epitomized by Prosser who is judged as brave by Jean during her teenage but on the other hand his RAF ground crew and his widow consider 'windy'. Uncle Leslie is despised by his family for having run away from the war, being a bit of spir. On his deathbed he confesses : 'I was always a bit windy ... Always running away. Always running. I was never brave'. (129)

The courage shown by the protagonist, Jean Serjeant, is really admirable as she dares to leave her husband after twenty years of marriage when she is pregnant and brings up her child on her own. When she meets Gregory's, girlfriend, she goes to bed with her. It is the courage that can be seen in the way Jean seems to stare at death at the end of the book while Gregory, her son, is crying. The courage can be sensed in Sun-Up Prosser's intention to rise his plane vertically to stare at the sun. He ends up committing suicide in his aero plane staring at death and sun. Uncle Leslie also courageously faces cancer and death. According to Mr. Barnes, the courage is of different types, he explains :

We do not tend to think of courage as a male virtue, as something that happens in war, something that consists of standing and fighting. But there are 85,000 other sorts of courage, some of which come into the book – banal forms of courage – to live alone, for example, social courage. Then, the sort of sexual courage that we see in the relationship of the two women, Jean and Rachel. (Patrick, 1987 : 21)

The theme of courage is supported by the theme of love and sex in Staring at the Sun. The concept of love has not been romanticized in the novel. During her childhood, Jean comes across Uncle Leslie and there creates a bond of friendship and mutual trust. They are seen playing the tricks like screaming loudly and shoelace game. The relationship is purely based on love between the two innocent lives. Prosser enters in Jean's life when she is in her teens. Her relation with Prosser is also that of two friends not more than that. It is the entry of Michael that brings shivers in Jean's heart. She easily gets attracted to get married. The relation ends after twenty years as Jean finds Michael dull and boring.

There is another type of love that is a mother's love for her child. Jean gives birth to Gregory when she is forty years old and both of them live together for sixty more years. During this time span, she tries to protect Gregory as a caring mother. Being a courageous woman, she dares to face every challenge in their lives. Gregory is afraid of death but Jean is always ready to convince him that he is safe and secure. When Gregory is sixty years old, a century old Jean is seen to answer every type of riddles to Gregory. Besides this, young Gregory has an affair with Rachel, he loves her like any teenage romantic lover.

Like the previous novels of Julian Barnes, the theme of marriage has also been introduced in this novel. Mr. Barnes seems to be very sensitive and honest to describe this theme. In Metroland, the protagonist doesn't believe in the system of marriage at first, but later on he gets involved like any middle class person. Before She Met Me is a bold attempt of the writer to picturise the dark side of marriage.

In Staring at the Sun, Jean Serjeant gets married to Michael but later on she finds it less romantic and adventurous. She does her duties as a married woman but that is more for an adjustment than a spontaneous activity which comes from the bottom of the heart. As a result when she is pregnant, after twenty years, she decides to leave her husband. In this way, Jean herself lives her life with her child, Gregory.

The theme of sex can also be seen in Staring at the Sun. The sex is not dominant as compared to the sex in Metroland and Before She Met Me. The sex in Staring at the Sun is controlled and not spontaneous. Jean Serjeant enjoys sex with Michael, her boyfriend with whom she gets married. The narrator describes the event as :

He climbed into bed, kissed her on the cheek, rolled on top of her, pulled up her winceyette nightdress and tugged at the pyjama cord he'd only just tied. Sex-hyphen, she suddenly remembered. (58)

It seems that she loses interest in Michael. So her relation with him becomes just a formality. It is probably the reason why she decides to end her relation. They do not enjoy sex anymore, it becomes a mechanical activity. A proof of being married and being together. After leaving Michael, she meets Rachel, a girlfriend of her son. She very frankly discusses sex and lesbianism with her. Once they share a bed at Rachel's flat. It is described as:

Jean went to the bathroom, cleaned her teeth, washed, climbed into bed and turned out the light. She lay facing away from the middle of the bed. She heard Rachel's steps, then the weight of a body landing close. Thump Like Uncle Leslie in the sloping meadow behind the dogleg fourteenth. (126)

THEMES IN THE NOVEL A HISTORY OF THE WORLD IN 10 ½ CHAPTERS

A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters has a major theme-history as the novel is an attempt to focus on an aspect of history. In the ten chapters the history of different world famous events have been narrated using variations in the technique. In the novel, history has been clearer; moreover it is wider. A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters is a wholeheartedly postmodernist work, with the radical skepticism about knowledge, truth, and referentiality that implies. The ten chapters demonstrate some of the shifty qualities of history. The woodworms story of Noah suggests that history is the story told by the winners which means our sacred history is but one story among many, one point of view among many, points of view.

In 'The Survivor', Kath Ferris is the only survivor of a nuclear disaster, and the conversations she seems to be having with a doctor are figments of her imagination. The doctor is just as sure that Kath is delusional, that the nuclear disaster was averted, that she is suffering psychosomatic illnesses. Kath's illness is the outcome of the historical event. Salman Rushdie, a noted, comments in review as :

A history characterizes it as the novel as footnote to history, as subversion of the given, as brilliant, elaborate doodle around the margins of what we know we think about what we think we know. This is fiction as critique. (Rushdie, 1991 : 241)

A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters is what the title suggests that is a fictional history of the world or the gospel. It is not the history, but a history which means there are only histories. These histories are largely fictional, planned and executed as a whole piece. One chapter about Theodore Gericault's 1819, painting usually called 'The Raft of the Medusa' while one is based on facts about the ill-fated ships the Titanic and St. Louis. Though most of the book has historical events, it is an imaginative creation.

The theme of history is supported by the theme of love. The half chapter in the novel is mostly about love, a face-to-camera sort of confession of Barnes's own love and a celebration. While there is considerable debunking of popular myths that love makes people happy, for instance, his endorsement of love is very powerful. The love that is mentioned in 'Parenthesis' is a demanding love for human beings. It should have the virtuous qualities like truth, sacrifice and commitment. The love is based on trust and belief among the human beings. It also preaches that we must believe in objective truth – no matter how strongly the evidence may be against it. Salman Rushdie, a noted novelist, expresses his opinionion regarding the theme of history and love as :

Barnes's view of history (Voices echoing in the dark, etc. : near meaninglessness upon which we try to impose meanings) is, finally, what lets this book down : it's just too thin to support the whole fabric : but his view of love almost saves the day. (Rushdie : 242)

The argument Barnes makes in 'Parenthesis' is very influencing. The concept of love is placed in a section called 'Parenthesis' which is accorded half chapter status and it is not the end of the book as it is followed by chapters nine and ten. This technical deviation is an intentional effort to intensify the significance of the half chapter. The narrator gives an account of love as :

Love makes you happy? No. love makes the person you love happy? No. Love makes everything all right? Indeed no. I used to believe all this, of course. Who hasn't (who doesn't still, somewhere below decks in the psyche)? It's in all our books, our films, it's the sunset of a thousand stories. What would love be for if it didn't solve everything? (231)

Mr. Barnes tries to expose the chemistry of love between a couple. If a couple love each other but they are not happy means one of them doesn't really love other. It is the love that makes him happy and her

too. Love and truth are vitally connected. It is due to the love one can see the truth. History is also truth as it takes place in the past but it is also true that we believe in the history told by the historians. On the other hand, love is what one does or feels. It is anti-mechanical, anti-materialist so bad love is still good love. It is love which is bounding of heart, clarity of vision and moral clarity.

It can be noted that the love is not restricted only to the body of a woman, if it is, then it is not love but lust.

The love, on the other hand, is a spiritual element that is related to heart. It is love that is a source to shape one's life. A villain may be transformed into a gentle person due to the power of love. The narrator describes it as :

We must be precise about love. Ah, you want descriptions, perhaps? What are her legs like, her breasts, her lips, what colour is that hair? (Well, sorry) No, being precise about love means attending to the heart, its pulses, its certainties, its truth, its power and its imperfections. After death the heart becomes a pyramid (it has always been one of the wonders of the world); but even in life the heart was never heart-shaped. (244)

In this way, the theme of love is at the centre of the novel, though a history is its main theme. The half chapter 'Parenthesis' is the blurb of the novel.

CONCLUSION :

Thus, the themes in his novels reflect the problems of the contemporary urban society. The globalisation has influenced the standard of living in general; it also has affected the emotional world of the human beings. The themes of the novels of Julian Barnes are varied. He is 'chameleon' of the British novel. However, some of his themes are recurrent. The recurrent themes are love, death, art, and the value of life.

Moreover In his novels, love is instable. It leads to triangular and adultery. It is dynamic instead of the static symmetry of marriage.and The theme of obsession leading to self-discovery and personal suffering seems to recur in his novels.

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