

Individuals In Postmodern Society And Evolution Of New York In Select Novels Of

Don Delillo.

M. Thendral
Ref.No.05896/ Ph.DK5/Full Time/April-2018
Ph.D. Scholar Department of English
Bishop Heber College,
Affiliated to Bharathidasan University
Trichy – 620 017, mthendral93@gmail.com
Mobile number: 9600669977

Dr. G. Parvathy
Research Supervisor
Assistant Professor of English
Bishop Heber College,
Tiruchirappalli – 17

Abstract

DeLillo is a well-known American novelist of fifteen novels, who is widely regarded by other critics as an important satirist of modern culture. Throughout his novels, he has picturized the chaos underwent by the society i.e. the effects of media, technology and popular culture on the daily lives of contemporary American society. All of his novels move in and around New York City as a setting. The study attempts to examine the development of New York City and individuals in a post-modernistic perspective.

Keyword: *Background, technological innovations, loss of identity, damaging effect*

Introduction

DeLillo's contribution to American Literature are immense. His works have often dealt with contemporary issues faced by an individual as well as by the society. In his novels, he often compares the regression and development of a society with an individual. The role of society as well as the individuals in contributing something new to the society are always interconnected in his novels. In his novels, New York participates in the evolution of an

individual's identity. The City acts as a mere background for his novels for understanding DeLillo's ideas. Moreover, New York appears to play several predominant roles, and the characters and the city depend on one another for their development. In *New York and the Literary Imagination* Edward Margolies asserts that many fin de siècle artists such as Stephen Crane, O. Henry, Theodore Dreiser, and Eugene O' Neill thought of New York as "undiscovered country" (114).

DeLillo, in his novels include real place names, street names, rivers, and hotels in order to give a real picture about that particular place. Sometimes it acts as a referential background and also it helps the reader to track the characters' movement i.e. in *Americana* and in *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo gives the names of the place in which his characters move and most importantly it gives the exact feeling about the particular place.

DeLillo attempts to portray the damaging effects of postmodernism on his contemporaries by comparing the evolution of the city with the individuals. By doing this, he throws light on the term artificiality. It occupies a wide space in the people's life. At the same time, it changed the natural outlook of the society. From his early novel *Americana* to his recent *Zero K*, the character as well as the city underwent a lot of changes. Here the changes may be either positive nor negative.

DeLillo's first novel *Americana* (1971), is narrated by David Bell. His motive is to capture a real documentary film, but he is not interested in capturing the film which is beyond one's reality. He undergoes a lot of trial to capture the originality but he never succeeded in it. To him, New York city itself lost its identity. Within a short period of time, New York underwent a lot of changes, when it steps into the age of postmodernism. Technological innovations in every field flourished. On the other hand, it brings out a drastic change in the society as well in the people's life. After that, an individual perspective of looking into the

world differed from one person to another person. Corporate companies and big shopping malls occupied larger place in New York. Later it brings out a change in culture and mannerism among the people.

In *End Zone* (1972) and *Great Jones Street* (1973), he portrays typical postmodern society. Here the culture of the people and the environment of the society have changed. In these novels, language and media plays vital role, in shaping the life of an individual as well as the society. In *White Noise* (1985), DeLillo examines how technology plays a prominent role in people's life. In this era, many technological gadgets are invented and people begin to treat those technological gadgets as part of their family members. Even the landscape of the society called the Blacksmith was modified. Within a decade, the Blacksmith undergoes a sudden change in culture and the landscape of the society is entirely changed i.e. the city is influenced by technology. In the well-developed society, it is tough for one to know how real the world is.

According to DeLillo, everything is shaped to look natural. But they are not the real. Instead they are shaped to look like real. Indeed, the whole society is also functioning for this hyperreality. Jack Gladney, the protagonist of this novel describes the Blacksmith as "Babette and I and our children live at the end of a quiet street in what was once a wooded area with deep ravines" (14). It is quite clear, if people in a society moves forward for attaining certain growth in their field, side by side the city also attains its growth in order to compete with the people. This statement is clearly explained in DeLillo's novel. At the same time, it acts as a key factor for clear understanding of his novels.

The city New York plays as an iconic image throughout his novels. In *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo's first post 9/11 novel, emphasis on the cityscape brings into focus the cultural expectations of New York. The site of the World Trade Center Towers is still empty eight

years after. Likewise, after that terrible attack, people felt emptiness in their heart. They are not able to recover themselves from that. This terrible incident reappears in the reflections of Eric Packer of *Cosmopolis*, PammyWynant in *Players*, Bill Gray in *Mao II*, and Klara Sax in *Underworld*. Here, The World Trade Center acts as a symbol of American society itself, not only symbol of economic achievement but as monument of art.

In every year, the city and the people come across some new inventions in technology. These technological innovations tend to sculpt the society as well the people. At first, it changes the landscape of the society. Every natural thing is replaced with artificial one and finally it creates commotion among the people. Through this, both the city and the people lost their identity i.e. the New York City has lost its originality by the shopping malls, corporate companies and also many artificial pleasure-seeking worlds such as Disneyworld also emerged. Now the New York City tends to look artificial. People in the postmodern society give more important to technology than to the human beings. They treat technological gadgets as part of their family members. Here, the society in which they are living also looks artificial. Now the city looks fragmented. It looks like both natural and artificial. People who lives in this postmodern society tends to be like both modern and postmodern. They struggled a lot either to accept the philosophy of modernism or postmodernism. And the most important thing is both the people and the city lost its identity. The city is mixed up with ancient and new emerging tradition. And the people in the postmodern society also fed up with searching their self.

Conclusion

The study sheds light on the artificiality of city life, since consumerism and commodities play a vital role in shaping the society and the individual. On the other side, spiritual and moral values are difficult to find among the individual and it is disappeared in

the contemporary society. Like many contemporary postmodern writers, DeLillo wants to create awareness among the people to be aware of with these innovations. As with most postmodern works, however, these novels are both “a celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it”, with images of the city suggesting “new possibility unreal fragmentation” (Bradbury and McFarlane 46, 49). In every year, there are to be some lots of improvement and innovations in technology as well as in people’s lifestyle. But it’s up to people to use those gadgets in a limited manner. In the contemporary society, people get isolated themselves from the natural world by playing video games, spending more time in social media. It seems that they trying to get escape from their daily mundane activities. On other hand, the world slowly moves in to the path of destruction. Artificial things occupied a major place than the real one. People gets slowly adapted to the world of postmodernism and now-a-days they are giving more importance to the artificial things around them than the real. On one side, people used to think of that their growth and status of their life are achieved only because of innovations of technology in every field. The only thing is that it makes people’s life more comfortable and easier. On the other side, they are not being aware of that the world is losing its originality of naturalness.

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