

Complexities of Ethics and Morals in Ian McEwan's Select Novels

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Abstract— The course of study analyses MacEwan's novels, *Sweet Tooth* and *The Children Act* in terms of ethical and moral values. Ian McEwan's of literary theories and studies likes- the ethics and moral of writing, reading, understanding, interpreting and judging. Postmodern critics have an assumption that literature is profoundly ethical and moral activity, which includes materials, methods, aims, punishments and rewards. The art of literature is available because it studies values and morals by engaging readers/ spectators in process of analysing the evolution- particularly by selfevaluation. Literature has been often refined by critics and readers as they have a few moral responsibilities. Today's millennial world is too fragmented to keep this world a monolithic structure where happiness and peace could prevail. Moral and Ethical values are pushed to be in the background prioritising 'survival of the fittest' in the meanest sense. The dream of constructing a morally and ethically strong society and culturally healthy and wealthy families seems to remain a distant dream. Postmodernist novels, in general, attempt to explore and exhibit the corroding nature of this despicable human community. MacEwan, being the ideal dreamer of an ideal society picturises through his novels the process and product of the said disintegration on the verge of collapse.

Keywords— *Sweet Tooth*, *The Children Act*, Love, Ethical, Moral, Betrayal and Religion.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sweet Tooth and *The Children Act* explores responsibilities of a country, writer, politics, teacher, court, family, hospital and its ethical and moral dilemma. *The Children Act* investigates the ethical and moral ideology in the institutions like court, hospital, church, social and private sectors.

Ian McEwan has a pressure to create links between morality and the novels, who has suggested two edges of life-knife; one is good another one is evil or destruction of the cultural expression. After 1970s his novels move with special characteristics – feminism, science, rationalism, moral perspective and fragmentation. *Sweet Tooth* and *The Children Act*, display a complex development in women's characters and their roles from feminist perspectives. Significantly the novel *Sweet Tooth* deals with a subject of war of culture, morality literature, and intelligence. By the title 'Sweet Tooth' - McEwan has tackled a number of ethical and moral issues like – communism, anti- communism, scratch of art funding and culture war between well settled countries – America, UK and Russia. In 1970s and 1980s most of the countries cut or stopped their funds and never encouraged their journalists, artists and writers.

McEwan has clearly showed the ethical and moral responsibilities of fiction as well as the characters. Serena is a spy and an agent of 'Sweet Tooth'; her primary duty is to report about Haley's writing progress. But Serena has seduced Haley's life and career; she has forgotten her ethical and moral responsibilities of an agent. Both Serena and Haley become emotionally good lovers but Serena in her position is supposed to keep the secret from Haley that she is an agent. In the critical situation Serena faces ethical and moral dilemma; if she reveals the secret, the organization or 'Sweet Tooth' will fire her. If she wants to protect her true love for Haley, she has to choose one either be a good agent or be a good lover. In this case Serena has violated her moral and ethical subjects and principles– Being a serious and well intellectual agent she should abide by the rules and principles of an organisation but she has broken the ethical and moral responsibilities of a good and intellectual agent, she forgets her duty and falls in love with young writer; even though in the perception of Serena as an individual, her action is right but in the perception of organization her action is erroneous. By the perception of ethics and moral, her love is not true because she has often betrayed her lover Haley in the name of organization. Through using ethical and moral approach McEwan clearly depicts the dilemma of 1970's British – the strikes, the IRA terror, the drug culture, and the general sense of decline and fall.

II. THE BINARIES ETHICAL AND MORAL

Ian McEwan has raised a few ethical and moral questions through the character of Serena Frome, Jeremy, Tony Canning and Haley. Serena Frome has undergone a similar intuition and affair by her first lover and mentor/teacher Tony Canning, a man of more than thirty years her senior; both people taste affections and pleasant distractions. Tony Canning has a beautiful wife who is an art dealer; she has absolutely sacrificed her life for her husband but her husband was disloyal and so she divorces him. However, in the critical situations both character Serena Frome and Tony Canning forget the moral and ethical responsibilities of student/teacher culture. A teacher should teach and guide a student in the prosperous and healthy way but in contrast both forget their duties and responsibilities spoil their life and student/teacher relationship.

During the final days of her undergraduation, she is recruited by M15, and securing the position is guided by Tony Canning. Comparing to other characters of Ian McEwan, she is not sexually inexperienced, but she is innocent, and also she has no interest in the public combat like political, social and cultural events; she has her own provincial life, university studies, dating with her boy friend and speed reading on her favourite novels. But, after the affair with Tony Canning she started to read historical books, newspapers and discuss issues in the open forum. By discussing current issues and subjects, she develops her thought-process and understands that one's personal life is inseparable from society. Finally she has transformed from innocent childhood to adulthood in the arenas of personal, inner, physical and psychological.

The M15 operation is obviously inspired by the activities of the Information Research Department of the British Foreign Office; their primary aim is to shape the public ideas in terms of anti-communism by using their concepts and writings or subjects. The movement, anti-communism is already attacked by writers and thinkers such as Bryan Magee, Bertrand Russell, Robert Conquest and George Orwell. The operation is coded as 'Sweet Tooth'. Serena Frome is also one of the members, her duty and task is to monitor and report about the thinkers and writers who are funded and stipended by the agencies.

Moreover, she fails morally and professionally when she violates the basic principles and rules of the M15 and becomes emotionally involved with the subject of her mission; she is disloyal to her profession and ruined younger writers' future. Serena does not face any serious trouble or crisis and cruel realities of human existence such as violence, crime, and death but instead she has faced moral and ethical questions in the stages of undergraduate students and agency of Intelligence Service.

Next novel, *The Children Act* (2014); children come into this world trusting the elder care. What Wordsworth says is true: The child is father of the man (Wordsworth, *My Heart Leaps Up or The Rainbow*, 7, 1802); protecting them, feeding them literally and intellectually, sustaining their curiosity and most of all, not blunting their life through the interventions of established institutions. The established institutions, be it, government, art or religion fence them in every way possible to the extent of making them 'the listening robots', rather frightened robots. McEwan, a conscious social reformer, with the genuine intentions of making the world a livable and lovable place, after exploring the weakness of grown-ups, take up the issues that confront future citizens, the children by the crushing hands of 'the powers'. The New -Atheist underscores how even budding lives are shown no concern, in the name of religion and religious practices.

Any practice is man-made and man-established. This very concept implies that when found wrong or destructive, can be changed or reformed. After all life is more precious, more beautiful and more worth living. Likewise Acts, though passed in parliaments with people's referendum or accepted as codes in the religious forums, they can be amended if it involves life of the people. This is the basic tenet of human life which has to be the undercurrent of all institutions, be it religion or government. What starts are good for the community in course of time becomes rocky because of the eco-centric heads. Man evolves, ecology changes and the world changes but the man- made Acts and practices shackle society to its good old times. This denied worth of life pains the good souls and good writers and they come forward to awaken the people from pain and darkness. McEwan is one such a soul who exposes that pain behind the rocky establishments through his novels.

The Children Act examines the ethical dilemma of Fiona Maye's lifelong guilt, religious beliefs of Jews and Muslims, Jamaican and Scottish parent's religious ideas, Jehovah's Witness, atheism, and Jacks personal anguish. The novel of anti-religion and satire on superstitious beliefs in religion; *The Children Act* consists of five chapters or parts; the novel opens with June weather, on Sunday evening at London. First part of the paper deals with Fiona Maye's life- guilt, the protagonist, a high court judge. Fiona Maye is controlled by her past memories and family turmoil, holds scotch and water. She is continuously crushed by the court duties and family unhappiness.

The novel progresses from light to complex; she recollects her husband had made a shocking declaration and placed an impossible burden on her, that he needs sexual pleasure with an outside girl:

It was hardly a question, but he answered it calmly. 'I need it. I'm fifty –nine. This is my last shot. I've yet to hear evidence for an afterlife'. (TCA 02)

The dilemma played a vital role in the mind of the protagonist in making a choice in allowing her husband to other women or satisfying her husband in terms of a wife. Ian McEwan creates a female protagonist with mass potentials and intellectual mind with the practical wisdom. Being a childless and special judge of a family division, her family life becomes questionable. But she has always loved him, was always affectionate, loyal, attentive and nursed him tenderly when he broke his leg and wrist when he was involved in a race against with old school friends.

Next part analyses the choice between selecting education for two young girls (social values of Jews and Muslims) but the court is being asked to choose the education of young girls.

These are valuable judgments on which reasonable people may differ. Since judges are also people, this means that some degree of diversity in their application of values is inevitable. (TCA 14)

Fiona Maye focuses on the child welfare in terms of welfare and happiness well being must embrace the philosophical concept of the good life. Being a judge she listed the following aspects; a child growing with goals, economic and moral freedom, virtue, compassion and altruism, satisfying work through engagement with demanding tasks, a flourishing network of personal relationship, earning the esteem of others, above all by love.

The third part of the novel examines the most controversial ideas on religious beliefs. Ian McEwan wants to demolish the superstitious and fictitious ingredient of religions. He uses the photographs of twin as a symbol of religious dilemma. The Jamaican and Scottish parents have beautiful infants of twins but the twins has joined at the pelvis and sharing a single torso, legs not in proper shape and they resemble like many pointed starfish. Most pitiable condition is their spinal cords are fused and their eyes are closed. Matthew and Mark are considered their apolistic names, a typical situation happens in London paediatric intensive –care bed, doctors looking for permission to separate the twins in order to save one infant from the court. Doctors urge the euthanasia to Matthew. Again the moral dilemma deconstructive of the entire religious notions, disturb the parents who loved their babies more than the devout catholic belief and they refused to sanction euthanasia, 'god gave life and only god could take it away' (TCA 26).

The judge is compelled by the dilemma of life, love, death, race, and religious nature of supernatural ideas. She has registered a moral equation: it is better to save one child than leaving two children dead. She has followed the doctrine of necessity, finally the parents appeal has been dismissed and the court of appeal has been agreed. She believes and gives significance to the practical value of wisdom and circumstances. Next Ian McEwan gives minute details of the postmodern political and social savagery while Fiona Maye is laying in her bed listening through closed eyes to the radio news; Suicide bombers in crowded public places in Pakistan and Iraq, shelling of apartment blocks in Syria, and body parts flung across marketplaces, people wail out of shock and grief. Moreover the radio news begins with the shipping forecast, the national anthem, and the world service.

Ian McEwan's latest novels explore an uncanny genius for plucking a resonant subject from the pages of lifestyle journalism and teasing it out into full scenes and then pressing them hard for their larger, enduring and twisted meaning. Unlike his other novels, *The Children Act* deals with the midlife crisis and not about two young virgins. McEwan has put his characters in a circumstance about which reader has a lifetime's worth assumptions. Ian McEwan has used woman as a social weapon to destroy the social, family and political injustice. Fiona Maye is a wise judge, in one sense she could be called as the pillar of the social establishment. She has given more importance to reason and enlightenment than superstitious beliefs. She can be compared to a superwoman – her sacrifices, her wounds, her intellectual dimensions, rationalities, practical knowledge and her world of doctrines make her as a free autonomous being. Fiona Maye also befriends with Adam a young man, she tries her hand with a little – legal and moral jazz. Fiona Maye has the quality of virtues: wounded healers, flawed arbiters. She makes the readers feel the frequent agony fleeting ecstasy of various institutional authorities, by analysing two characters – Fiona and Jack who are advantaged, free aged, cultivated and also childless.

By analysing the above novels, however, ethics does provide good tools for thinking about moral and ethical issues. Like the phrase ' Good people as well as good actions' –ethics is not only about the morality of particular courses of events and actions, but ethics also about the goodness of individuals and it means to live a good life. It mainly focuses rigorously about moral principles and problems. According to critics and philosopher, the term ethics should come from several aspects like, religion, human conscience and intuition, the example of good human beings, a rational moral cost – benefit analysis of actions and their effects; political power and a desire for the best people in each unique situation.

The novel *The Children Act* must be analysed in the perspective of a rational moral cost- benefit analysis of actions and their effects.

In the postmodernist era, McEwan has often used a very different and unique of model storytelling and narration. These stories often frame a character's lifetime, tragic fate, and achievements. The writers weave either a detailed and complex moral and ethical accounting or a single emotional hit. Postmodernist writers are not content to show a single moral event, although that is often the catalyst for the bigger pictures. Ian McEwan depicts an entire moral universe that tells the readers whether human life has meaning or not.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Man continues to remain a man because of dilemma. Every individual is unique by his signature traits; every group is unique by controversial practices; every culture is unique by a combination of contradicting values. The whole world revolves around the differences that make life on the world more complicated and struggle-filled. One man's food is another man's poison and this forms the foundation of all dilemmas, specified and unspecified. Without dilemma, life will be too blissful to live. There are myths to confirm this concept but in reality, everyman in the name of individuality, causes confusions leading to dilemma and the consequent conflicts.

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