

A Comparison of Arriving Death in Collectivistic versus Individualistic Protagonists in Leo Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" and Khalida Hussain's "Hazarpaya"

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Abstract

Life and Death are two contrastive facts of this universe. Many literary authors have expressed their views and thoughts with diverse protocols of expression including philosophical, logical, rational, deep and shallow levels on the topics related to life and death. However, the metaphysical style employed by some writers of high position for the description of the last days, especially of the ones in old age and suffering from an incurable disease, is entirely different from that of a healthy life. The study compares two literary works: one "Hazarpaya" an afsana from Pakistani author Khalida Hussain living in a collectivistic culture, and the other "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" a novella by Russian author Leo Tolstoy living in an individualistic culture. The study explores the attitudes of incurable persons and their family members in diversely opposite cultures. The protagonists of both literary works realize that they are suffering from incurable diseases and their deaths are imminent since their biological lives are almost over because of their old age and their diseases. The protagonist living in the collectivistic culture and having led an altruistic life remains in a better psychological state than the other.

Keywords: Comparative Literature, Individualism, Collectivism

1. Introduction

Comparison of literary works of different cultures may focus on diverse aspects including gender, norms, philosophy, religion, economy etc. with the main requirement that the literary works are 'comparable' (Budiman & Listyarini, 2017). While comparing two literary works, investigations can be made based on alike themes (Wellek & Warren, 1948), and some aspects of different cultures can be discussed (Virk, 2003). Sinha (2021) views that the comparison of literature from different authors of different nationalities and cultures may create unique models: "harmonious and judicious fusion of originality and influence from diverse models result in creative innovation" (p. 5269). This study compares two literary works on the last days of terminally ill protagonists, one living in an individualistic culture and the other in a collectivistic culture.

"Hazarpaya" is an afsana (an equivalent of 'short story' in English Literature) written by Pakistani author Khalida Hussain. "The Death of Ivan Ilyich", a masterpiece novella written by Russian author Leo Tolstoy, is usually counted as a novella or novelette, whereas Alves (2018) considers it a short story. Life is perceived differently at different stages of human life (Bautista, Escobar, & Miranda, 2018), and thus they are differently portrayed in literary works by literary authors (Jaleha-Jefwa, 2016). The storylines of both literary works focus on the near-death days of the protagonists: Ivan Ilyich of "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" and Mian Gee of "Hazarpaya". "Hazarpaya" is written in a collectivistic culture whereas "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" has been written in an individualistic culture. Love and death are among the major themes in the storyline of "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" (Pachmuss, 1961), though the researchers of this study perceive only 'death' as the main theme. Tolstoy has wonderfully presented 'human death' in "The Death of Ivan

Ilyich” and the story can help us understand death-related phenomena even in the 21st century (Papadimos & Stawicki, 2011). “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” is an excellent literary work and has been massively examined from multiple perspectives (Neimneh, Obeidat, & Bani-Hani, 2016). The story presents extraordinary implications on how to live life to avoid a desolate death among the family members (Beckford, 2022). The story helps us understand life itself than merely a narrative of the protagonist’s death (Beard, 2013).

Tolstoy is a prominent literary figure not only in Russian literature but in all times influential literary works. Khalida Hussain has also massive recognition as a literary figure of Pakistan and the Soth-Asian subcontinent with a strong standing in indigenous literature. A comparison of the literary works on the theme of death by these two authors of two contrastively differing cultures can contribute to the field of comparative literature. Ying (2018) sees comparative literature as a source of widening the scope of knowledge, and a better understanding of the global world and cultures. Both Leo Tolstoy and Khalida Hussain are famous for minutely observing norms, traditions, and living patterns of the people living in their cultures, and afterwards reflecting them in their literary works. Among the literary circles of the Soth-Asian subcontinent, Khalida Hussain is famous for writing stories reflecting real life. She is famous for writing the themes like mysticism, and social, psychological and political afflictions (Kanwal & Ghani, 2017). She was among the literary figures who wrote masterpieces of literature to resist the political and social oppression in her times. Salahuddin (2020) sees Khalida Hussain as a writer who sticks to pure religion than typical ‘Sufism’ of the subcontinent while writing on “the inner conflicts and constant struggle of in a mystical manner” (p. 176).

Story-telling, either factual or fictional, is an important instrument in literature to help people understand life and cope with its challenges, and thus literature occupies a significant place in human civilization. Through literature, humans realize their potential of facing issues (Furman, 2020). Literature often depicts societal values. There are often contrastive differences between individualism and collectivism, both at an individual and societal level. The study highlights the sheer differences between the attitudes of the near ones towards a terminally ill family member in the two diverse cultures. The depiction of the attitude of the family members and close friends and the feelings of the incurably ill persons waiting for their death are also explored.

2. Literature Review

Death is a significant element in many literary works. The interrelationship between death and life and life after death has been a part of both religious beliefs as well as of day-to-day human concerns (Bautista, Escobar, & Miranda, 2018). Skelton (2003) views: “One of the central tasks of literature is to impose a structure on life and death, giving meaning to both” (p. 213). Death is a subject of phenomenological inquiry in literature and in teaching literature (Furman, 2020). Literary authors have presented physical and physiological aspects of death in many works (Termizi, Noor, & Salim, 2017). Some literary authors add “a fantasy of an individual going through the stage of death” (Termizi, Noor, & Salim, 2017, p. 14). Kwaśniewska-Paszta (2022) advocates for “de-tabooization of death in social space” (p. 110). Meier, et al. (2016) find it an area of investigation of what is meant by ‘good death’ in literary works. Rusi and Zaç3ellari (2022) view that a fanciful style of storytelling can make death an attention-grabbing literary device.

Individualism and collectivism, both at an individual and societal level, are important human traits. Though opting for an altruistic or egotistic approach to life are often an individual’s own choice,

societies also play their roles towards these approaches (Darwish & Huber, 2003). Errasti, Vázquez, Villadanos and Morís (2018) opine that “individualism versus collectivism classification generally infers orientation toward individual rights versus collective duties” (p. 377). Often, cultural generalizations are made but these are individuals’ choices to be either individualistic or collectivistic (Lomas, et al., 2022). An individual may decide to either harmonize with cultural values or deviate from them (Fatehi, Priestley, & Taasobshirazi, 2020). Ciochină and Faria (2009) opine that ‘socio-cultural’ factors contribute to an individual’s or a community’s choice of being collectivistic or individualistic. Social bindings are less prioritized in comparison with personal well-being in individualistic cultures.

A few researches are found in the extant literature on the selected texts and alike works. Alves (2018) studied the various dimension of illness in “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” and views that “Tolstoy wishes to give us an understanding of the meaning of human existence” through this literary creation (p. 382). Sinha (2021) advocates exploring the influences or otherwise of foreign authors on indigenous authors from the Indo-Pak subcontinent. Jaleha-Jefwa (2016) sees that themes of death and dying are massively notated in literary works. Daghamin (2017) sees that ‘death’ is associated with curiosity, preparation versus expectations, avoidance, inevitability, and philosophical and religious beliefs. The phenomena related to death have been discussed massively by many researchers, yet some aspects still need to be researched. The authors of the selected literary works have portrayed death quite differently and comprehensively in these texts. The present research explores the portrayal of death and the related phenomena, especially the attitudes of the dying and their near ones, in the selected texts wherein the protagonist of one (Ivan Ilyich) has led a life of individualistic aptitude whereas the other (Mian Gee) has led a life of collectivistic aptitude.

3. Methodology

The present research is qualitative-descriptive. For comparative literature research, qualitative and descriptive research design with a smaller sample is appropriate, while exploring the alikeness of the message conveyed by literary authors (Budiman & Listyarini, 2017).

Theoretical Framework: The theoretical framework is built upon Bass (2021) and Wong and Tomer (2011) with the prime notion that death is a social as well as biological reality of universal nature, both for the dying persons and their near ones, and thus the phenomenon of death needs to be viewed comprehensively in exploratory and descriptive researches. The adapted framework is built upon the following points:

1. Acceptance of arriving death: Acceptance versus avoidance of death have a sheer influence on the dying individuals. Bass (2021) opines that acceptance of upcoming death is a positive personality trait whereas avoidance of death leads to anxiety. Wong, Reker and Gesser (1994) identify three aptitudes towards death: escape, approach, and neutral. They view that escape acceptance makes a person accept death as a reliever of pain, whereas approach acceptance makes a person happily accept death owing to their religion-related afterlife. Thus, escape acceptance is likely for a person living in an individualistic culture whereas approach acceptance is for a person living in a religion-oriented collectivistic culture.

2. Imminent death as a biological reality for the terminally ill: Though death is an unavoidable biological phenomenon which can occur at any stage yet for the terminally ill, death is counted as an imminent occurrence. In collectivistic cultures, a dying individual is considered a significantly

integral part of the family, whereas, in individualistic cultures, the family members are more concerned about their lives (in financial terms, in case of economic dependence on the dying) after the dying one's death.

3. Death as social reality: Death is a part of the human life journey and life experiences among other ventures which a human goes through as a social being. Death is a severe social reality in collectivistic cultures wherein a gap is felt in case of a near one's eternal depart. Whereas, in individualistic cultures, death is an acceptable social reality with an apparent expression that the dying one's decease would not significantly impact the remaining society.

4. Death as an instrument to understand life: Death affects the events one has faced events in their life and vice versa. There are different interpretations of death in different cultures and societies. Collectivistic cultures are mostly influenced by their religions and cultural norms. Thus, individuals' perception of death is influenced by their religious and cultural beliefs. In individualistic cultures, death is more of a biological and physiological phenomenon, and often a dying individual reflects on the occurred events in their life.

5. Influence of demographics on death: Demographic factors e.g. gender, culture, religion, age, and economics influence one's and near ones' attitude towards death. Among these factors, Wong, Reker and Gesser (1994) see 'ageing' as a reducer of anxiety towards death. In collectivistic cultures, an elderly dying is counted as an integral part of the family in contrast to an individualistic culture.

Analytical Framework: In comparative literature research, the settings and pragmatic circumstances of selected literary texts can be investigated (Virk, 2003). The investigation of 'characterization' can also be opted in comparative literature research (Budiman & Listyarini, 2017). In line with the above-narrated 'Theoretical Framework' and notions of Budiman and Listyarini (2017) and Virk (2003), an analytical framework is framed to compare the following aspects of the two selected texts in the present research:

- a) A critical overview of the storylines
- b) The sequence of the storylines
- c) The family background of the protagonists
- d) The marriages of the protagonists with their spouses
- e) The protagonists' attitudes towards domestic affairs
- f) Wives' attitudes towards the dying protagonists
- g) Children's attitudes towards the dying protagonists
- h) The attitudes of people around them during the protagonists' ailment
- i) Psychological changes in old age and during their diseases
- j) The protagonists' surrender to death
- k) The allegorical use of the death

4. Analysis and Discussion

A Critical Overview of the Storylines: The storylines of the selected texts comprise reactions and reflections of the protagonists who perceive their imminent death. They do not wish to avoid death owing to their sufferings and ailments. The protagonist Ivan Ilyich himself has led a life of indifference to the feelings and sufferings of others. Everyone, including Ivan Ilyich himself, knows what is going to occur soon i.e. his death. He and his friends have led shallow lives and

never dared to probe into others' feelings of fear of stepping outside the lines of their propriety. It seems as if the people of society have an aptitude of focusing on only their lives. They have made a tacit feeling of neither saying nor showing what they are. Ivan Ilyich's attitude has been the same throughout his life, though he is "a capable, good-natured, and social man, though strict in the fulfilment of what he considered his duty: and he considered his duty to be what was so considered by those in authority". Tolstoy has created a powerful protagonist in Ivan Ilyich. Through the protagonist, Tolstoy illustrates the meaning and importance of life and death in the stream of human life. Since an insidious illness has overtaken him, Ivan Ilyich passes through states of self-pity and hypocrisy to an awakening of the soul, wherein he achieves peace in meeting his death.

The storyline of "Hazarpaya" is a story of a cancer victim Mian Gee who considers his spreading cancerous tissues as a living being with a thousand feet within his physiological being. He realizes that his disease is incurable. His soulmate wife and his children also know that his death is imminent. Mian Gee is comparatively in a better psychological state as compared to Ivan Ilyich since Mian Gee's near ones are kind and considerate.

There is a close similarity between the ends of both stories. In their last moments, the protagonists are physically unconscious but mentally conscious. They realize the relief death would bring to them and their near ones. The persons standing around Ivan Ilyich are waiting for his last breath, and someone among them says: "It is all over", even before his last breath is over. Ivan Ilyich tried to seek forgiveness from all before his death. He felt pity for his wife and children since he had been trouble for them during his severe ailment. He is not afraid of death, rather he welcomes death as a source of relief: "He searched his former habitual fear of death and did not find it 'Where is it? What death? There was no fear because there was no death either'". Mian Gee is shown as mentally conscious until his body is brought to the graveyard. None of his near ones was wishing him death despite his disease. Even his physician, till the last moment, was encouraging him to struggle against his disease. Yet, like Ivan Ilyich, Mian Gee was also waiting for death as a source of ultimate relief.

The Sequence of the Storylines: The story of 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich' is narrated in reverse order, when Ivan Ilyich has died, his colleagues are pondering whether to attend his funeral and pay condolence to his wife or continue with their routines. They seem completely indifferent over the death of a person they have been calling their friend. Most of them are counting their prospects of promotions and transfers in the wake of Ivan Ilyich's death. None of them inwardly feels any grief over their long-term colleague. They want to escape the situation, though a few near-ones still feel it obligatory to attend the funeral and visit his widow to pay condolence. An impression is developed that Ivan Ilyich has never tried to make true friends. He passed his life as a routine life and all his colleague-friends and other relations were merely a matter of routine, and at his death, they pay in the same coin. Even when two of his colleague-friends visit Ivan Ilyich's house for condolence, they are still thinking about the game they would miss.

The story of 'Hazarpaya' starts when Mian Gee is in the grip of his ailment. He is under regular treatment by a competent medical doctor. Unlike Ivan Ilyich, Mian Gee is not changing his doctors, rather the story reveals his consistent treatment by the same physician who has diagnosed that his deadly disease is incurable. Ivan Ilyich could not realize at the beginning of his ailment what he would face. Whereas Mian Gee is all the time is aware of his incurable disease. Both protagonists become acute observers of the happenings around them and pay attention to even the nonliving things in their surroundings.

The Family Background of the Protagonists: Ivan Ilyich's father was a man of success who had held many prestigious positions in various government departments. He had three sons. The eldest one followed the father and was a success. The youngest son proved a failure. He wasted opportunities, and thus he was a matter of shame for his family. Ivan Ilyich was in the middle one and proved better than the other two. He had a hardworking spirit like his elder brother and enjoyed the good times like his younger brother.

Mian Gee seems to have sustainable financial circumstances since the family does not face worries about his costly medical treatment. While living in a collectivistic culture, his wife and children never mention the expenses of his treatment. Mian Gee seems to spend a retired life. Mian Gee is in better circumstances as compared to Ivan Ilyich whose wife comes to him with a complaining face to add psychological turmoil to his already deteriorating physical being.

The Marriages of the Protagonists with their Spouses: Ivan Ilyich met his wife, for the first time, when he obtained the position of an examining magistrate. Ivan Ilyich perceived her as "well connected" and "a sweet, pretty, and thoroughly correct young woman". Ivan Ilyich deemed her the most suitable lady as his wife. After their marriage, Ivan Ilyich continued with his pleasure life outside the home and thought of his wife as a disturbance to his pleasure and propriety. The ordeal got worsened when she got pregnant since she became an unbearable obstacle to his happiness. After the birth of the first child, Ivan Ilyich decided to live separate from his family to achieve his pursuits and adopted an indifference towards them. He felt his wife's attitude worsened after the birth of their second child. To make his relations cordial with his wife, he managed to live in the countryside for some time, but that also proved in vain. He decided to take drastic measures to amend the situation. He decided to move to St. Petersburg to obtain a salary of 5000 rubles a year. The circumstance proved favourable for him. After securing a better designation and salary, his marital life improved and he got a new house in the area of his new appointment.

A detailed description of Mian Gee's married life is not given in the storyline, but his wife's behaviour towards him depicts that they have spent an enviably happy marital life. Both spouses support each other. Even in the days of his severe illness, he does not want to overburden his wife, who on the other hand is always there to take care of him. She never misbehaves with her husband and never makes him feel that he is a burden. The couple's marital life seems quite opposite to that of Ivan Ilyich and his wife.

The Protagonists' Attitudes towards Domestic Affairs: Ivan Ilyich did not pay attention towards the decoration of the house in earlier years since he kept himself busy with his job and social life, which he preferred to continue to avoid his trouble-seeking wife. Later, after getting a salary of 5000 rubles a year, he paid attention to the decorated furnishing of his house. He crazily collected the things to give an aristocratic look to his house. While furnishing the house, he fell and got some bruises which proved the starting point of his fatal disease. On the other hand, Mian Gee is portrayed as living in a patriarchal society where the wife performs the domestic responsibilities.

Wives' Attitudes towards the Dying Protagonists: The foremost thinking of Ivan Ilyich's wife is how to get the expected pension and to find out the ways to get something more in addition to it after his death. It is her right as a widow since she would need to manage expenses after her husband's death. Different phases of her life are presented: first, as a loving young girlfriend, then as an irritated wife creating tensions for her husband. A sudden change in her is shown when she tolerates her ill husband, and then a practical-minded widow, concerned about managing finance for her future widowhood. She seems senseless to her ailing husband, and along with her young

daughter, she is attending parties and functions, seemingly continuing their lives undisturbed. She seems surrendered to fate. She is a round character and changes herself in different phases of her life.

Mian Gee's wife is entirely different from Ivan Ilyich's. She is kind and considerate towards her dying husband. She tries to be with her husband to take care of his regular intake of medicines, even if it is late at night. She is quite opposite of Praskovya, Ivan Ilyich's wife, who is busy attending parties and social functions while her husband is on his deathbed. Thus, the attitudes of both ladies show their attitudes as representative of two different cultures. Praskovya comes to her husband with almost a complaining face, though inwardly she is worried about her husband's ailment. Whereas Mian Gee's wife always tries to create an impression that the ailing husband is not a burden on the family. Whenever she cannot control her weeping, she turns her face to the other side to wipe her tears with her shawl and comes to her husband with a smiling fresh face.

Children's Attitudes towards the Dying Protagonists: There is no description of Ivan Ilyich's children's early childhood in the storyline since Ivan Ilyich is shown busy with his work and his so-called friends for pleasure life. To avoid his quarrelsome wife, he tried to remain busy with his engagements outside the home. Ivan Ilyich's daughter is not different from her mother and often follows her mother's footsteps. The girl's intended one often visits her, and later proposes to her as per the expectations of the family. She is a beautiful young girl who is shown busy in her social activities, mainly attending parties, functions and other such social gatherings.

Ivan Ilyich's son seems attached to the father, and he abhors his mother's and sister's senseless attitude towards ailing Ivan Ilyich. He also scorns his father's hypocritical colleague-friends. Though the boy is in his school-going age, he seems much more mature than his middle age mother and adult sister. He realizes that his mother's and sister's attitude is causing mental torture to his ailing father. He is too young to do anything for the relief of his dying father. Often, his eyes are full of tears, and his facial expressions reveal his inner thoughts. Both the children, though they are far different from each other, seem unhappy over the disharmony between their parents. The sister has taken the mother as her role model, quite contrary to the brother who has sympathies for the father. The boy views his mother as a factor towards his father's ailment. The boy seems to have a passion to rise to a higher social position following his father's footsteps. Both parents have not given sufficient time to their children owing to their self-imposed busy routines.

Mian Gee's children, though a wider description is not available in the storyline, are just opposite to Ivan Ilyich's daughter. They have sympathies for their ailing father. Like their mother, they come to their father with a smiling face so that the father does not seem worried over his ailment. They have grown up in a collectivistic culture where the children love and sympathize with their parents, especially the ailing ones.

The Attitudes of People around them during the Protagonists' Ailment: The people around Ivan Ilyich, whom he had called friends but never treated so, treat him with the same indifference when he gets sick. Even, his wife considered his disease a burden and trouble for her. Ivan Ilyich, then, starts realizing what he has been doing to the people around him. He wanted them to pity him, but there was no one other than his son and servant Gerasin, and he started thinking: "What if my whole life has been wrong". Ivan Ilyich's wife shows only a false concern over his ailment, while inwardly she is only concerned about her inconveniences. Ivan Ilyich could realize all such behaviours, though he could not dare to speak his thoughts: "Yes, I am making them wretched. They are sorry, but it will be better for them if I die". Thus, he tries not to hurt them anymore. In

the scene before his death, it is his servant and his son who are grieved whom he sees with apologetic eyes for causing this grief to them.

The attitudes of people around a terminally ill person are different in individualistic versus collectivistic cultures. Unlike Ivan Ilyich who is in double trouble because of his disease and psychological troubles from others, Mian Gee gets sympathy from all the relations. Mian Gee's wife and children and other near ones and even other people do not feel irritated over his disease. Whereas Ivan Ilyich's wife always complains about his disease in front of other people and that Ivan has treated her cruelly throughout their married life.

Psychological Changes in Old Age and during their Diseases: Ivan Ilyich develops a craze to decorate his house, whereas Mian Gee develops an ardent desire to learn and memorize the names of different things around him. Both the protagonists become keen observers of occurring around them. They also keenly observe the attitudes and behaviours of the people around them. Mian Gee seems in better circumstances than Ivan Ilyich, since, living in a collectivistic culture, his near ones do neither complain nor misbehave about his physical and psychological unwellness.

After getting bruises on the side, Ivan Ilyich's health problems began and kept increasing till his death. Ivan Ilyich consulted many doctors but none could make a precise diagnosis. The pain caused him multiple psychological challenges, and people started looking down upon him owing to his awkward behaviour. Mian Gee's ailment also grew gradually like that of Ivan Ilyich's. Mian Gee gets temporary relief through medication, unlike Ivan Ilyich who cries most of the time.

The Protagonists' Surrender to Death: Both dying men are aware that their lives are nearly over, and thus they opt for a realistic view of their ailment and approaching death. Ivan Ilyich is shown boldly meeting his death though earlier he was quite resistant towards his disease. Mian Gee is also shown quite realistic about his incurable disease and is ready to face his death quite peacefully. The protagonists of both stories have resigned to death since they have realized that their diseases are incurable; they perceive death as the ultimate solution to their suffering. Though they are aware that even their deaths would cause some trouble to their families yet it would relieve them in the long run.

Allegorical Use of Death: Symbolism is a literary device to describe and mark people and their behaviours and thoughts with abstract ideas which represent something beyond their literal meanings and apparent use and status. A few critics and researchers have commented on the authors' allegorical use of death in the selected texts, e.g. Neimneh, Obeidat, and Bani-Hani (2016) view cancer and consequent death and related phenomena in Tolstoy's works as symbols of "industrialization and commercialism, i.e., changing environment and lifestyles", and illness as "a trope for social disarray: the disconnection of family relations, self-seeking careerism, and a deadly preoccupation with appearances and materialism" and the torments as "erroneous, specious and fallacious life" (p. 67). Kanwal and Ghani (2017) view the portrayal of death and related phenomena in Hussain's works as symbols of oppression imposed by tyrant rulers and consequent social and psychological torments. There is some use of symbolism in "Hazarpaya" since Khalida Hussain uses the symbol of 'Hazarpaya' to represent the painful situation of the patient and other sufferings of life in this world.

5. Conclusion

The projection and portrayal of death and allied phenomena in both texts are comprehensively presented. The protagonists suffer from incurable illnesses wherein even medication could only provide temporary relief from their pains. Their diseases acquire the status of living being within their living beings. Owing to the massive spread of the disease in their bodies, both the protagonists have made themselves realise that they are suffering from incurable diseases and their deaths are very near and their lives are nearly over. Ivan Ilyich keeps changing doctors with dissatisfaction whereas Mian Gee sticks to the treatment by one. Both the protagonists resign to death as an ultimate relief yet Mian Gee experiences less mental torture and agony owing to living in a collectivistic culture. Ivan Ilyich is pinched by many near ones whereas Mian Gee is consoled. Both stories also cover the symbolic and allegorical aspects of the sufferings of life such as hope and despair, happiness and worries, up and downs, and loss and gains.

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