

## Blindness: Psychoanalytic Reading

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**Abstract:** José Saramago's *Blindness* depicts the catastrophic outcome of a mysterious disease called "white evil". The white evil exponentially spreads and turns the city into a white incitement. Saramago details the story of an entire nation got affected by blindness without discrimination of any kind. However, the progression of epidemic and degradation of society goes towards the opposite at the same phase of time and speed. The sovereign government has also been portrayed as blind in their dealing with blind people. The narration of how (psychological) blindness influenced and changed the consciousness of a society without leaving any hope for progress is so detailed. The story (r)evolves around seven people including the blind man, his doctor and doctor's wife. This reading is focused on the doctor's wife to understand the psychoanalytic aspects of the novel. *Blindness* here stands for restrictions and limitations so when it comes to women these two terms are more significantly applicable. The transition of doctor's wife through various phases of events occurred in the novel has analyzed using the techniques of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. On the theoretical ground of Freudian awakening and Lacanian real the paper is arguing that the character of doctor's wife is able to confront the realities with and without vision and proved to be an archetype of empowered woman.

**Key Words:** blindness, woman, psychoanalysis

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

"If you can see, look. If you can look, observe", Saramago's quote from the Book of Exhortations expressing the idea behind the story in single line. The perspective on blindness usually goes around either medical or para-medical fields with emphasis on cause-effects and coping strategies. The social aspects of blindness come often with little or no interest on the societal context and blindness is always aligned to the individual as if they are the sole cause behind it. Of course it is true that we could encounter only a few artworks of (for) blind individuals in our society. Saramago's *Blindness* starts with an alarming red traffic light and screaming of a man "I am blind". The blind man then accompanied with a stranger. Blindness came into the life of a young man so causally and a stranger shows mercy towards him. The stranger become his friend through the kindness he has shown but finally turned to be a thief who has taken away the blind man's car. So here blindness is portrayed as a treatable social illness which is contagious in nature contrary to the medical or ophthalmologic aspect of it.

When the first blind man approaches the doctor he describes it as an impenetrable white instead of total darkness. Slowly new characters are also coming to the front without any particular names. So this novel affirms the societal reflections of blindness through nameless faces or identities through which the story is developing. Government has forced to take the steps against this "white evil". But the initiative for helping them ended up in a mental asylum, far from heart of the city. The notion of city is also very significant aspect in this story. Urban life is more prone to restrictions and limited options for emotional reactions. Though the incident happened in the mid of the city, the preventive measures has implemented on the outskirts of the city. So Saramago points towards the brutal reality of marginalized victims of our present social evils (here blindness) (forced to) exists away from the heart of each city.

The contradictory of naming the disease as a white evil is more sarcastic as white goes always for the divine and the black for the evil. Here Saramago combined the innocent, truthful white color (as if the disease is spreading vertically without assigning any criterion for selection) with the evil. So he ultimately questions the people who are around the blind group and stay as "sighted". The evil is not among or within the affected group. The evil of labelling someone as evil arises from the sighted witness's ignorant blindness. Here the boundary between the affected and the victims are merged to be nothing.

Slowly the number of affected people in the hospital is raising and also their demands for basic needs. Though the contagion attack the population without any criterion, the consequences of it's divided the people into multi layers as some are able to take their share of food or the basic necessities, some are taking others and some are left as having nothing left for them. Here Saramago reaffirms the brutal reality behind existing inequalities and discriminations in our societies. We could not find any logic for the cause of blindness and same way the after ill effects also proven as

illogical. The aftermath created tension among the inmates and they planned to leave the asylum. The military came and made the asylum into a concentration camp. Here Saramago shows the brutal dealings of sovereign constitution against its own people. The leather force from the authority gave them more bitter feeling than the blindness. The struggle of inmates becomes the struggle for power and survival against the blind terror and hate.

## 2. On Doctor's wife

The story is happening in a city, where we have immense possibilities of proximity with fellow beings along with promised anonymity. So city life introducing many faces each day without telling anything much about them. In this scenario how the doctor's wife transformed her world is quite significant. Blindness has become the disorder of human consciousness rather than the primary visual cortex. Saramago leaves the woman as sighted for his readers to open their eyes into the fascinating aspects of this novel. The doctor has been the first one who joined the mental asylum along with wife. But here the thought about why she should get part of the mental asylum arises as she is the one continue as sighted. However she decided to join the asylum reminds us of Gandhari. Saramago shows the irony of the society, where women are unconsciously persuaded to join with the alignments of the community lingered with them. Gandhari of Mahabharata, The Ithihasa is not at all a different character. She identified with the blindness of her husband and withdrawn herself from the beauty and enjoyment of "being sighted". Lacanian *real* has symbols and signification processes. So tying up the eyes with a piece of cloth is turned to be a significant process of identification with the victims of real realities. Here the doctor's wife is observing the drama happening around her and also being part of it. In order to experience the trauma we don't have to undergo it physically. As Lacan arguing, here the doctor's wife is able to experience the real effect of blindness by being sighted. She does have to undergo the trauma of being blind in order to understand the situation. Women of each and every society is blessed to experience the real tension happening inside but at the same time are also forced to be oppressive. During the time when the blind people getting their vision back, one of the characters says, I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, blind but seeing, blind people who can see, but do not see"

Doctor's wife initially starts connecting with them through her own way of understanding. It is through their understanding the doctor and his wife tells us that love is blind. She remains as the only character able to see and stays away from the contagion. Freudian psychoanalysis argues that the consciousness is getting influenced by the unconscious. The barbarian way of human life and its inevitable decay of human civilization is already there in the unconscious processing of doctor's wife. She remains stable and strong against the world which goes in the opposite direction. It symbolizes the struggle of minority against the forces which push them back into the primitive way of living.

Freudian semi-unconscious awakening is a process where one is acting according to the unconscious processes in the reality. Where they are automatically become prey for their internal impulses. Freud's clinical approaches were like fictional stories where he appreciated the gap exists in ir(rational)way of handling things. Clarity was not much there but a desire to convey the limitations of rational approaches where everywhere in his writings. Psychoanalysis grounded in the self-cure through reflective questioning. Freud admitted many a times that literary people understanding human beings better than anyone. His own terminology of *Edipus* and *Electra* crisis of developmental stages borrowed from Greek literature only. Doctor's wife is a strong character as she is able to differentiate between her own sighted self from the society turned to be blind. The subliminal realization works out well and it does not stop her from what she could do for others. She fights back as terrific comrade through her effort to retain normalcy by telling that we have still the power to be human.

Identification with others and assisting them in their fight for the basic necessities of life is happening through the awakening stage of sub conscious processing. The journey with others is not a mere passive act for her. She is collecting and organising the people and with all rational movements she was able to lead the blind in their search for light. It goes against the societal representation of women as an emotional being farther away from logic or rational thinking. She even kills the blind man with the gun but to save the rest. Literature related to blindness has shown that they possess extra ordinary powers or extra sensory perception to deal with their situation. The doctor's wife doesn't have any such powers, except her unconscious awakening skills though Saramago characterized her as a powerful being. She was able to see everything happening around her as lack of food, rape and fight for toilet paper etc. Unconscious awakening works through unintentional automatic processing of thoughts. Doctor's wife is able to observe even the minute detail of events happening in the city and semi consciously processing the information to reach the simplification of real. This woman is managed well to help them to get rid of unnecessary clashes. It is written as "she must be endowed with a sixth sense, some sort of vision without eyes". Women were subjugated for sexual abuse by mercy less men for food. The doctor's wife stabs the gang guru with scissors and also burnt the barracks. The fire of reaction to cruelty spread everywhere and the fire from a woman make others more stubborn and firm against the exploitation happening. She became the leader of the group and leads the team of her husband, the first blind man and his wife, the girl with the dark glasses, the boy with the squint, and the old man with the patch over one eye, back to the city. People who have gone blind to everything and even to their own self are portrayed here. It is a story of a civilization turned to be indifferent to the fellow human beings. Where people have got happy with what

they are getting rather than what they should have got. People started to defecate everywhere. The place becomes indistinguishable for the inmates. The doctor's wife started to guide the people of lost civilization to other indefinite possibilities of the world. The Blindness novel has different layers of meaning such as political, philosophical and psychological. The doctor's wife in the last pages of the novel delivers us a note or a kind of response "Why did we become blind, I don't know, perhaps one day we'll find out, Do you want me to tell you what I think, Yes, do, I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see, but do not see." Her eyes have seen all the pain of sightlessness.

She can locate, identify and recognise things, place and even faces for the world gone blind through the very process of sub conscious realizations and awakening. So a woman is taking the lead role through her realization of power and leading the society in the context of societal breakdown. Entire order of the civilization can be re-established through an empowered woman. So an inexplicable epidemic becomes the celebration of womanhood. The group formation is fully aligned with the structure of family, where a woman offers safety and comfort. Saramago satirizes the sighted people of the world that they are literally blind to the realities around them and to maintain the status quo, they adapt and label it as "unseen realities" of the world.

Doctor's wife reacts to the realities in and around her through her understanding of the real of the self. Saramago himself says that "I cannot save anything but what I can do is write about what I think and feel and the anguish of seeing a world that could already have resolved a large portion of its humanitarian problems, but which not only has not solved any, but which, in fact, aggravates many of them."

Once she has given reply to her friend's anxious query that whether God is blind. Doctor's wife answered as not even he, the sky too. The possibilities of spiritual interventions were critically acclaimed here by her. She connects God and sky together blind to the dilemmas of human life. By nullifying the spiritual realm, she intensifies the value of humanitarian actions and concerns. Rather than waiting for the God to act, it is me who hereby with you and I can see you. She too behaves as a blind when another girl asked about the beauty of her. She appreciates the beauty by being blind to the dirt on her body. So blindness in a way essential for us, the doctor's wife reminds us but to what we must be conscious about.

### **3. CONCLUSION:**

The phenomenon of blindness clarifying the basic questions about what kind of intervention we have adopt in the face of miseries and suffering has been answered through the empowerment of womanhood . Allowing women to unleash their potentialities universally will help the society to see things through the real mirror of self-analysis and reflections. Society knows that when things are getting organized a system can run more smoothly and swiftly. Doctor's wife was so strongly focused towards the basic necessities and attaining them through an organized movement. The (man lead) political intervention always fails when identifying even the target population for whom to work with. In the final stages of the novel Saramago describe a picture where people without water or food has finally found an empty cottage to sleep in, the wife is woken in the middle of the night to the sound of rain. Without any hesitation she rushes out onto the balcony: "Don't let it stop, she murmured and gets the two other women in the group to help her wash the clothes—"we are the only woman in the world with two eyes and six hands". Through suffering the doctor's wife encounters the real of the society and sub consciously processing the imageries in order to empower the world where she belongs.

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