LITERARY QUEST

Power and Domination in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter Series*

Mr. Santosh Vishwanath Bhagat

Assistant Professor, Department of Science and Humanities,

Konkan Gyanpeeth College of Engineering, Karjat, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

The world of Harry Potter is full of imagination and magic where characters are interlinked with some power of magic. There is a conflict between witchcraft and good magic for their existence. The series of novels reflect the true picture of the present political and social conditions where the powerless are suppressed politically, socially and economically by the powerful people. The aim of present research paper is to explore various issues related to power in the world of Harry Potter. The issue of power is approached mainly through Foucaultian concept of power. According to Foucault, power is something that is exercised: "There would be no power if it were not exercised by agents", and "Power is exercised by individuals or groups of individuals".

Keywords

Power; Magic; Witchcraft; Evil Power; Domination; *Harry Potter Series*; J. K. Rowling.

Introduction

Human culture has a feature of fantasy since ancient times. From ancient mythology to the modern science-fiction, stories have fantastic characters and settings. There is a heavy load of symbolism under the cover of fantasy being conveyed through structures called archetypes. The idea of archetype as a symbolic structure which is repeated countless over time and space was identified and studied by the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung and these archetypes can be recognized in many forms of art or even in dreams.

A literary phenomenon of the 21 century, the *Harry Potter Series* tell the story of a wizard-boy and his journey into hero-hood. In every hero's journey, its culmination is the confrontation of the hero with an arch-villain. Every step in the journey has a symbolic significance and the villain follows its rules. The villain is a force to which the hero has to oppose; the villain is also the representative of darkness. Villain in the *Harry Potter series*, Lord Voldemort, lives his own journey; one which is incredibly similar to the archetypal journey lived by the hero, Harry. The readers can find out the power domination in this series of novels.

Methodology

The researcher has used the descriptive and analytical method for the study. The MLA style of documentation is followed for the present research paper; even the interviews of the writers and the interviews of the eminent personalities on J. K. Rowling and her works have been used in the research process.

Objectives

The purpose of the study is stated as follows:

1. To point out elements of witchcraft in *Harry Potter Series*.
2. To investigate the impact of witchcraft on child psychology.
3. There are some struggle for power and domination motif in the *Harry Potter Series*. So the purpose of this study is also to analyze it in detail.

4. To study how magical elements encourages children to explore witchcraft.

5. To analyze the features of evil characters through the writer's perspectives.

Voldemort as a character through Rowling's Perspective

In 2001 interview, Rowling said Voldemort was invented as the nemesis for Harry Potter, the protagonist of the series and she intentionally did not flesh out Voldemort's flashback at first. "The basic idea he didn't know he was a wizard and so then I kind of worked backwards from that position to find out how that could be, that he wouldn't know what he was. When he was one year old, the most evil wizard for hundreds and hundreds of years attempted to kill him. Lord Voldemort killed Harry's parents, and then he tried to kill Harry. The villain tried to curse Harry, but for some mysterious reason the curse didn't work on Harry. So he's left with this lightning bolt shaped scar on his forehead and the curse rebounded upon the evil wizard, who has been in hiding ever since".

In the second book, Rowling establishes that Voldemort hates non-pure-blood wizards, despite being a half-blood himself. In a 2000 interview with the BBC, Rowling described Voldemort as a self-hating bully: "Well I think is often the case that the biggest bullies take what they know to be their own defects, as they see it, and they put them right on someone else and then they try and destroy the other and that's what Voldemort does." In the same year, Rowling became more precise about Voldemort. She began to link him to real-life tyrants, describing him as "a raging psychopath, devoid of the normal human responses to other people's suffering." In 2004, Rowling said that she did not base Voldemort on any real person. In 2006, Rowling told an interviewer that Voldemort at his core has a human fear: the fear of death. She said: "Voldemort's fear is death, ignominious death. I mean, he regards death itself as ignominious. He thinks that it's a shameful human weakness, as you know. His worst fear is death."

Throughout the series, Rowling establishes that Voldemort is so feared in wizarding world that it is considered dangerous even to speak his name. Most characters in the novels refer to him as "You-Know-Who" (Rowling 192) or "He-

Who-Must-Not-Be-Named" (Rowling 189) rather than say his name aloud. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallow,* a taboo is placed upon the name, such that Voldemort or his followers may trace anyone who utters it. By this means, his followers eventually find and capture Harry and his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. In the second book, Rowling reveals that *I am Lord Voldemort* is an anagram of the character's birth name, Tom Marvolo Riddle. According to the author, Voldemort's name is an invented word. Some literary analysts have considered possible meanings in the name: Philip Nel states that *Voldemort* is derived from the French for "flight of death", and in a 2002 paper, Nilsen and Nilsen suggest that readers get a "creepy feeling" from the name Voldemort, because of the French word "mort" [death] within it and that word's association with cognate English words derived from the Latin *'mors'.*

Power, Domination and Prejudice

The central conflict in the *Harry Potter Series* stems from the juxtaposition of the Muggles and the Wizarding community. From the beginning, Muggles have been portrayed in unfavorable light; the likes of the Dursleys, Harry Potter's disagreeable guardians, are the first examples we are given of Muggles. In addition, it is clear the majority of the Wizarding community holds itself above Muggles. There are some wizards who do not necessarily hate or despise Muggles, but rather are fascinated by the Muggle's lack of intelligence; that is their lack of intelligence regarding wizards and the world of magic. Some wizards prefer to study Muggles same like the normal people study how gorillas live and cope with the surrounding. The most notable example of this attitude is reflected in Mr. Weasley. One of the first characteristics we learn about Mr. Weasley is that he is "crazy about everything to do with Muggles" (i). Even though Mr. Weasley does not exhibit an extreme form of prejudice, he still expresses a condescending attitude, nothing "how many ways Muggles have found of getting along without magic" (ii). Certainly this statement emphasizes an appreciation of the Muggle's ingenuity, but the fact remains that Mr. Weasley seems far more prone to study Muggles as opposed to considering his equals. It is important to

note, however, that Mr. Weasley would never intentionally cause harm to Muggle. Indeed, Mr. Weasley's job at the Ministry of Magic is in The Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, Protecting Muggles from artifacts that have been bewitched by wizards to cause harm or mischief, also known as "Muggle-baiting" (iii).

The concept of Muggle-baiting is seen very clearly at the Quidditch World Cup in Book IV, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. For the first time Death Eaters appear in this book; these are the followers of Lord Voldemort, publicly using magic to harass families of Muggles, suspending them in air and throwing them around. Whereas Ron Weasley insists "that's sick" (iv), the death eaters enjoy the torture of Muggles. This is a vitally important point in the exploration of race and hierarchy in the *Harry Potter Series*. Cynics would say it is human nature to place those who harbor prejudices into positions of power; from this point of view, it is fair to say that prejudice is a requirement of power. Therefore, the Death Eaters, who take a sadistic approach in their treatment of Muggles, are discernible as figures of power. The danger of this combination - power and violence - is reminiscent of past dictatorial regimes, such as Adolf Hitler. Another example of Hitler déjà vu arises with the increasing emphasis on blood purity in the later books of the *Harry Potter Series*.

Impact of the Characters that Hold Power

Harry's rebellion, however, is not only an act against Voldemort and his cohorts but also an act in response to a corrupt government: a government that should help to suppress a dictator on the rise. The government has the Ministry of Magic, the Wizarding world's existing governmental body. Although Draco Malfoy's father, who works for the Ministry of Magic, is undeniably corrupt, we do not really see this corruption reflected in the Ministry's proceedings until the end of Book IV and most of Book V. In order to serve its best interests, the Ministry chooses to deny the return of Voldemort after Harry witnesses his "rebirth" in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. The ministry is willing to go to extreme, indeed, length to portray an appearance of control, utilizing both its power over the most popular media outlet, *The Daily Prophet*, as well as placing

a particularly crooked Ministry official in Hogwarts. The Ministry, through its recruitment of an interim professor, Dolores Umbridge, is able to enact unfair ordinances within Hogwarts, challenging, for example, the students' right to free speech. Only at the end of Book V, after the return of Voldemort is inevitable, will the Ministry acknowledge his existence. Never, however, does the Ministry take responsibility for its severe breakdown of ethics-its withholding of critical knowledge from the people. As a result, Harry loses faith in existing government, the Ministry of Magic and opts to fight for a new system. Therefore, when Rufus Scrimgeour, newly elected Minister of Magic in Book VI, tells Harry it is Harry's "duty to be used by the Ministry" (xix), Harry refuses to become the Ministry's new poster boy. He will not stand for the government that is corrupt and materialistic like evil regime of Voldemort and his Death Eaters.

Existence of the Power

According to Foucault the power exists when it is used or exercised. The children are not allowed to use magic outside of the magical world, it means when they are in Muggles' world they are powerless though they have power. The power is not exercised here and hence there is no power. The protagonist uses power outside of the magical world; even he is not allowed to do so. When someone has power, that power should have utilization otherwise it is considered as no power. The good magic is on the side of Harry Potter while the bad magic on the side of the villain, Lord Voldemort. There is a conflict between the powers; the villain has been shown very powerful in the *Harry Potter Series*. The evil men try to dominate Harry Potter. The domination is not possible because the hero has some part of the powers from the villain, Lord Voldemort, so the power is divided.

While reading the Harry Potter Series, readers sometimes have lost themselves in the imaginary world of Harry Potter. Sometimes children may think that the magic used in the series is real because the novel is based on Magical Realism, which makes one to believe in the magical things for some

moments.   While reading the series the reader would feel himself/herself as a part of the action.

Conclusion

Though the novel is based on the magic which is not real, it makes us to think about the real political, social and economical situation of the present age. In reality, one can observe that the political power is always dominant over the powerless people.   One can find discrimination in the societies and economical imbalance; all these things are reflected in the *Harry Potter Series*.   Rowling is successful at demonstrating the difficulty, perhaps impossibility of changing an entire system of beliefs.   Indeed, literature often critiques society, receiving harsh criticism along the way.   As a result, what one is left with at the end of *Harry Potter Series*, although portrayed in a magical and fantastical world must be true to realism.   Therefore, prejudice still exists, someone still places the individual ahead of the society, and hierarchy cannot be wiped out.   Perhaps it is best to conclude that *Harry Potter Series* actually demonstrate that the society should strive for harmony that can only exist with diversity.

Works Cited

Alton, Anne H. "Gneric Fusion and the Mosaic of *Harry Potter.*" *Reading Harry Potter: Critical essays.* Ed. Heilman, Anatol and Giselle L. Westport: Praeger, 2003. Print.

Anthony, Piers. *Demons Don't Dream.* New York: Tor Books, 1999. Print.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Use of Enchantment.* London: Penguin Books, 1991. Print.

Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire.* London: Bloomsbury, 2000. Print.

---. Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix. London: Bloomsbury, 2003. Print.

---. Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. London: Bloomsbury, 2005. Print.

MLA (7th Edition) Citation:

Bhagat, Santosh Vishwanath. "Power and Domination in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter Series*." *Literary Quest* 1.4 (2014): 13-20. Web. DoA.

DoA – Date of Access

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.