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“No One Came”–Farcicality of Waiting in M T Vasudevan Nair’s *Mist*

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Abstract

M T Vasudevan Nair, the renowned writer of Kerala, paints the psychological tussle of the characters through his novel *Mist*. Even the title of his work contains ambiguous meanings that can be penetrated only by a deep psychological insight. In this novel, he talks about the coveted spaces related to the psyche that cannot be explored. These unnoticed spaces speak more than the noticed ones. The work reminds us of the absurd literature where the term ‘waiting’ meant ‘waiting for nothing’. The absurdity that each character undergoes creates terrific pain in the reader. Logic or reason has no answer to this pain. Readers stray for some sense in the happenings but ultimately prove to be futile. Waiting leads to a growing stress in the meaninglessness and dysfunctions in life. The dominant consequences were strain, deformation and breakdown. The characters understand the futility of their waiting but create a world of make belief just for their own survival.

Keywords- *Waiting, Meaninglessness, Modern Life, Silence*

The theme of waiting is a well marked characteristic of the modern and post modern literature. In these literature most of things in the world do not make sense. Absurd literature probes into the meaninglessness of life and the element of futile hope in which people live. M T Vasudevan Nair’s *Mist* is often considered a story of long waiting. It is not only the story of unending waiting but also the tale of meaningless and alienated stagnant life of modern man in general. Living (or survival) becomes synonymous to waiting. Vimala, the central character is a teacher who waits for her lover, Sudhirkumar Misra, who deserted her nine years ago. They have once shared a passionate love affair with many memories and promises. She continues to wait for a letter, call or visit from him. She finds hard to liberate herself from the emotional entanglement. “This moment had been there waiting for us on the

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long road of time” (9), a line written by Sudhirkumar. Vimala has been waiting for the moment for years and years.

One of the most salient aspects of the novel is that waiting results in nothing. The work moves through the snow capped Nainital where mist drops to please the tourists. For Vimala, it is the coldness of her memories, mist of emotions and misty appearance of the time that she lives through. Her father, who was once an embodiment of all virtues, has now fallen sick two years before and lost all his grace and charm. She reproached her mother because of her illegal affair with Mr Gomez. Her brother took advantage of this situation and blackmailed her frequently. Her sister, Anitha, is in a confused state and has fallen into a trap which is sure to end in a tragedy. She understood that death will be a guest for her father because spiritual death has occurred to him several days before. Vimala wonders whether her father perceived about her mother’s relationship with Mr Gomez. In order to escape from the boredom she joined as a teacher in a school situated in a hill station. The life there also soon bored her and the only moment which gives happiness is in the memories of Sudhirkumar Misra. Her happiness lies in the person who never turns up. This is the predicament of modern man whose happiness rests on the thing, object or person which never exists. Writers like Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Tom Robbins, Harold Pinter and many others have attempted to portray the bewilderment an individual feels in the face of a meaningless and absurd world.

Vimala has few spaces to move about. If it is too chill she would keep to her room in the empty boarding house. At other times she can be found either beside the lake brooding over her life or in the vicinity from where she can get good view of the lake. Whenever she feels like taking a stroll, her steps would consciously take her to the lake which seems as it had accidentally dropped down between two lakes. And the air of the lake is in tune with her feelings. She recalls her haunting dream of a moment at the end of a dark winter, a moment from life when she met Sudhir - the moment which she loves to cherish till her last breath and that which gives her unending happiness.

When the story begins, Vimala is heading towards the lake as she suddenly feels disgusted with her existence. The lake, like her, is waiting for the month of May – the season when “unknown travelers and tourists reached the place”. (14) The boats are tossing idly on the both shores of the lake. She sits on one of the wayside seats and looks at the deserted lake. She is reminded of the ferry boat smelling of cashew oil, the folk songs and the lush green paddy fields of which, too, have the bruises of the years on it. The boat man is the young lad, Buddhu. He is curiously waiting for his father – a white man. He has not seen the man who has fathered him; he only has an old photograph of him.

The world was waiting...

One day he would come again... You and I, we have all been waiting for ages.

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On the rocks of ages snow would fall and melt and again the mist would form
crusts on them

We are all waiting. (16-17)

The lines echo in the story to exemplify their feverish wait. She understands Buddhu for she too has been waiting every year, for a long lost dream to blend into the reality of life. Both Vimala and Buddhu are engaged in the same quest for life.

The only lively character in *Mist* is the Sardarji because he has made reconciliation with the truth of life and death. Vimala here remembers the line “Death is a clown with no stage sense”. (47) He is like the Meursault in Albert Camus’ *The Stranger* who is ready to face death boldly. The lonely notes of the Punjabi folk song that he sings during the stillness of the evening, stirs Vimala. She is reminded of Sudhirkumar Misra’s favourite line underlined in violet ink,

Im dying my own death
and the deaths of those after me.

Im living my own life
and the lives of those after me. (33)

Poetic lines and music add to the intensity of Vimala’s waiting. Sudhirkumar Misra, Vimala’s lover never returns. Vimala’s waiting is in a way a hold on the memories she has in her life; the only good ones in her life. Every man needs something to believe on. Loneliness is considered a personal feeling of a lack or absence of meaningful human relationships. This state is a crucial risk factor for human health that can impair both physical and mental health. Music can act as a mood regulator thereby enhancing the person who feels alone. Music affects the emotional and psychological state of a person altering his/her emotions and mood. It also has the potential to change, maintain and enhance mood along with relaxation and emotional control.

On the night of her father’s burial, Vimala has a strange dream in which she and her lover are riding in a swan shaped boat. It is Buddhu who starts rowing. But strangely enough, when she starts talking, her lover’s face changes into a clean shaven face with blue veins twitching on it. The dream is significant as far as the plight of Vimala is concerned. It implies that Sudhirkumar will never come back and her waiting becomes symbolic of death. Every object, thing or person in the novel serves to intensify the feeling of Vimala. *Mist* is a work of psychological enmeshment. The traumatized Vimala finds herself imprisoned in his seductive words and love.

The mist in the story serves to punctuate Vimala’s temperament. Mist can be regarded as a metaphor for loneliness, emptiness, lack of warmth, frustration and frozen human relationships. The anxious yearning for a long lost person is eternalized in the novel with the music of silence. Silence is another important aspect of the novel which increases the

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intensity of Vimala's waiting. Here silence is the absence of sound and also the absence of anything pleasurable in life. It is also the stillness of a period in which she enjoyed happiness. She lives in the memories of a stagnant period. Passivity or inactivity creeps into Vimala who is equal to just a body which breaths. At times, the silence Vimala maintains fears the readers as we are not able to decode the meaning of her soundlessness. According to religious masters, silence has the capacity to build trust and peace in a person. Vimala constructs a mental state in which she is prepared to wait for Sudhirkumar for several years more; with a sacred calmness in her. Waiting becomes a religion in her. Waiting becomes a religion for her. The silence that she maintains has made her a good listener. She is ready to listen to Buddhu and empathically comment on his problems.

To the last of the novel, Buddhu along with Vimala is hoping that something would happen for the next year, even if both of them understands the futility of waiting.

"The season is over too soon, is it not memsaheb"

"Yes, it's true."

"No one came!"

She too said in a troubled voice:

"No one came."

"We will wait for next year, memsaheb!"

...

"He will come. Won't he, memsahib?"

...

"Yes, he might." (57)

The absurdity caused by the mismatch between characters' tone and the content of their speech can be seen as a reaction to a world emptied of meaning and significance. If the world is meaningless, it makes no sense to explain or evaluate it as comic or tragic, good or bad.

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