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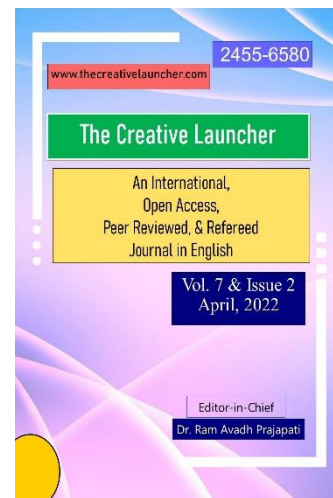
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Antisemitism in Umberto Eco's *The Prague Cemetery*

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Abstract

The present paper focuses on the history of antisemitism and exploring it in the novel, *The Prague Cemetery* by Umberto Eco. Gradual development of antisemitism and conspiracy theories related to it will also be analysed in this paper. Umberto Eco's realistic portrayal of the then European society and various conspiratorial events and cover ups will also be dealt in the paper. The comparison between forging of the antisemitic text *Protocols of The Learned Elders of Zion* and its hate spreading message and use of it by Hitler as well as the main character Simone Simonini will also be done. A comparison will also be made between the condition of 19th century Italy and 20th century Germany. Simone Simonini's acquired antisemitism, xenophobia and conspiracy theory against the secret society The Freemasonry will also be analysed through the textual lines of the novel.

Keywords: Antisemitism, Christianity, Conspiracy Theories, Jews, World Domination

Umberto Eco has established his name as one of the best Conspiracy Fiction writers. He has also written novels dealing with history and medievalism. The present novel is *The Prague Cemetery* that was published in 2010. He has made this novel an amalgamation of history, fiction and conspiracy theories. He has talked about the history of antisemitism and conspiracy theories about it in the novel on a broad scale. The novel talks about the problem of antisemitism through the story of the main character Simone Simonini. Umberto Eco has used shocking conspiracy theories in his novel, *The Prague Cemetery*. It talks about the false conspiracy theory, a hoax circulated against the Jewish community, alleging them of making a world domination plan. The novel also includes the making of the forged anti-semitic text *Protocols of The Learned Elders of Zion*. The novel has been criticized a lot due to the depiction of antisemitism. The protagonist in the novel is Simone Simonini, a narcissistic and antisemite guy. He inherited his hatred against Jesuits and Jews from his grandfather Captain Simonini who claims that Jacobins, the Bavarian Illuminati and the Knights Templars were responsible for planning the French Revolution. According to his grandfather's claims, Jews were behind all of this. Eco has claimed that all the characters in the novel are real persons except the protagonist, his grandfather and some minor ones. It tells the story of the birth and life journey of the protagonist through his personal diaries.

He narrates the publishing history of the hate spreading text *Protocols of The Learned Elders of Zion*. He also gives a shocking revelation of Hitler's endorsing it in his autobiography *Mein Kampf*. He also tries to establish the popularity of this text, saying that it is next to the Holy Bible in number of circulation. Simon started writing his diaries on 24 March 1897. Through writing his diaries, he unfolds various historical truths. He receives answers to his notes from Abba Dalla Piccola. He comes to know that he himself is Piccola whom he murdered years ago. He is attracted to forge the protocols due to the impact of his disturbed childhood and acquired antisemitism. The publication of the *Protocols* was so effective. The text was used to invoke

destruction during the civil war in Russia. Then it was brought to the West through the white colour Russians. They circulated the thought that the Russian revolution was the Jewish plot. Hitler, the infamous dictator of Germany used this book to spread his Nazi propaganda to start the most horrible genocide in the world. According to Cohn the *Protocols* intruded the collective unconscious so badly that a worldwide war of propaganda was started to unfold the so-called evils of Judaism before the world. It made a very fatal impact on history as well as the subconscious of people. The *Protocols of The Learned Elders of Zion* was published in 1905 by the Russians. A Russian far right publishing group Znamya is considered one of the earliest circulators of this text. From then the *Protocols* is one of the most loved materials for conspiracy theorists.

The novel narrates the story of a character named Simone Simonini whose lifespan is between 1830s and the 90s as a secret agent working for various secret societies as well as government organisations. He learns the art of forgery from an ill principled lawyer. He starts forging governmental papers and becomes the writer of hate mongering texts against Jews. The novel contains the themes of conspiracy theories and history. The novelist talks about the amalgamation of fact and lies that were spread against the Jewish community. He shows how the history is made and enigmatic by conspiracy theories.

Antisemitism is the feeling of hate against Jews. According to various scholars it is also a kind of racial prejudice. It was stretched across the countries and became not an ideology rather a movement that took place in Central Europe in the 19th century. Its deadliest consequence was the horrible Holocaust. According to Steven Beller “It is the irrational, psychologically pathological version of an ethnocentric and religiocentric anti-Judaism that originated in Christianity’s conflict with its Jewish roots –and achieved its evil apogee in the Holocaust.”¹

The study of antisemitism cannot be completed without the study of its roots in the horrible Holocaust or the shoah or the genocide of European Jews when the second World War was going on. There are a lot of conspiracy theories that also helped to see the Jews as the conspirators of the world domination plan or the chief body behind starting the New World Order due to their supposed enmity to Christianity.

Before analyzing the case of antisemitism, it is necessary to look into the history. One cannot understand the start of the success of antisemitism in the end of the 19th and 20th centuries without the side by side development of Christianity and its notional enmity against Jews. The feeling of anti-Judaism spurred after the refusal of Jews of Israel to recognise Jesus as the King and the Son of God. Due to the crucifixion of Jesus by the Jews they were supposed to be the Killers of Christ. They were rebuked, denounced, exploited and humiliated by the Christian majority over the centuries. They were considered to be those people who refused to accept revealed truth or Christ and were preserved for witnessing this truth when Jesus Christ would arrive in the second coming. Although they were protected by the Church orders, the feeling of hatred against them developed gradually. Their business opportunities were also limited. The very first famous anti Jew action was done in the North Western Europe after the first Crusade or Holy

War in 1096 when the crusaders murdered Jews saying them Christ killers. It was the consequence of the so-called Holy war. Then in the mid of the 12th century, the enmity against Jews became more illogical and fatal when they were alleged of performing rituals of killing the Christian children. Death of William of Norwich in 1144 was the first example of ritual murder of Christians by Jews. Side by side the more surveillance upon the business activities of the Jews went on and they were limited upon just one occupation that was money lending. They were excessively taxed, reneued and their property was also confiscated. Their name was linked with money although they were not so wealthy as the then Christians.

Due to this common negative thinking about them, the condition of Jews became very bad especially in the medieval age. They were considered as animals (Judensau or Jewish pigs) and forced to wear dresses different from others. They were alleged to poison the wells and became the victims of hatred against them due to their supposed role in causing black death. They were expelled from many states including England, France, Germany, Spain and Portugal from the 13th century to the 15th century. Hostility towards them achieved new dimensions in the 16th and the 17th centuries. In the age of reformation, in the Christian world, the negative stereotype of Jews was extended gradually. In the starting of the early modern European popular culture, Shylock was the most quoted example of a Jew, a greedy and dishonest usurper who asks for the flesh of a Christian. The Anti-Jewish prejudice was increased by the institutions in the 18th century. "Outbursts of popular Jew-hatred continued in various parts of Europe into the 19th century, as evidenced by the Hep-Hep riots of 1819 in Germany."²

Although in the 18th century, Jews were treated as part and parcel of the society of England but a hostile environment was in existence at that time also as Steven Beller says- "While there was some popular anti-Jewish sentiment, as evidenced by the protests against the Jew Bill of 1753."³ Benjamin Disraeli, a Jew became England's Prime Minister in 1874. His election as the PM was seen as the non-negative way of thinking of the then society. In the 19th century, although the antisemitic attitude developed but it was counter- attacked by the humanistic, reformative and liberal attitude in most of the region of West and Central Europe. In Italy and the Netherlands, they were enjoying full citizenship despite their faith. In central Europe, the modern antisemitism was born. Some regions of Germany were so impressed by the antisemitic thoughts that various antisemitic people were elected for the German Parliament and the high culture of the 19th century Germany was deeply influenced by the prejudice of anti-Judaism. In Prague, Czechoslovakia, the German speaking Jews were immigrated and altered by the Czech speaking Jews due to the actions laid by Czech nationalists.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the antisemitic ideology became more dangerous. In Russia, the Black Hundred movement was started against Jews and the Tsarist government also supported their exploitation. In spite of this, the Jewish community went on prospering. In Russia, Zionism took its first breath. It was their answer to the oppressors and the actions of making them feel different. In the Tsarist rule they were not considered as an essential part of Russian society

though Muslims and Tatars were enjoying this privilege. They could only achieve full citizenship after converting to Christianity.

The modern face of antisemitism was developed through not only the Russian making of *The Protocols of The Learned Elders of Zion* but also the enmity and hostility spread through the religious institutions and the acquired mindset of the rest of the Europe. *The Protocols of The Learned Elders of Zion* or *The Protocols of The Meeting of The Learned Elders of Zion* is a piece of forgery, having an agenda of hate against Jews. It popularized a conspiracy theory that the Jews were preparing for world domination. Material for this false propaganda was borrowed from various previous texts some of them were not anti-Jew though. This text was published in Russia in 1903. "The Protocols portrays the Jews and Freemasons as outsiders and enemies of Christian civilization. It highlights their seemingly strange and outlandish rituals, their supposedly secret symbols and secret contacts."⁴ According to this text they are controlling the media sources and have infiltrated the powerful political groups for their evil conspiratorial plans. It was rendered into many languages and circulated on a broad scale across the countries in the start of the 20th century. The worldwide Jewish world domination conspiracy theory was circulated among the masses through this text.

Simone Simonini says- "'All I know about the Jews is what my grandfather taught me. "They are the most godless people," he used to say. "They start off from the idea that good must happen here, not beyond the grave. Therefore, they work only for the conquest of this world.""⁵ Simone Simonini, the main character of the novel *The Prague Cemetery* is a forger of documents as well as a secret agent. He is a xenophobe, misogynist, anti- Jew, anti-Jesuit and anti-Freemasons. He inherits all of these things from his grandfather Captain Simonini. He is a paranoid type of person who believes in conspiracy theories. He is badly suffering from the paranoia of the New World Order. According to this conspiracy theory there are some powerful high-class conspirators who are gradually taking the world on the path of making the world a totalitarian state. They are using various organisations to execute their covert motives and they are very powerful since they have infiltrated all powerful nation's governments and their political parties. Freemasons, Illuminati, Knights Templars and Jews are supposed to be those cabals who want to establish a powerful militaristic world government that will turn the world into an Orwellian state. According to the conspiracy theories the Jewish community is working under their ideology of Zionism and secretly working to rule the world. According to the end time conspiracy theories, the cabals are working to hand over the world to the Antichrist or Dajjal.

The conspiracy theory of Jewish plot or their world domination plan is heavily executed by the novelist in the present novel. This theory is completely antisemitic. Simonini feels a bizarre pleasing feeling in contemplating this theory. He shows great attention in this assumption that Jews have organised the secret meeting in the Jewish cemetery of Prague and took oath for executing their plans. He meets Usman Bey, a real character who tells him that the Alliance Israelite and Freemasonry have relations for this motive.

Eco has tried to show the collective unconscious of the people who were living in 19th century Italy. The antisemitism had completely captured their minds that they thought about Jews every time. He describes the conversation between Guedon, Toussanel and Simone about their plans against the domination plans of Jews. Toussanel calls them the capitalists and blood suckers of the marginalized. He calls for a worldwide war against them. He says- "The battle against the Jews ought to be the main purpose of every socialist over the name."(24) Although he doesn't recognise communists as socialists because in his opinion communism was founded by a Jew and it was also a Jewish conspiracy. Eco gives another instance of antisemitism when Toussanel calls Benjamin Disraeli one of the Jew conspirator who was converted to Christianity to fulfill their plans. According to his claim Jews were conspiring for this plan. He says about Disraeli's opinion- "Disraeli had the temerity to write that the Jews were going to take over the world."(243)

Simone reads a book that was written by Disraeli. He reads a passage about the so-called involvement of Jews in every great revolution in Europe. Disraeli's book also claims about the Jewish infiltration of the Russian government and a Jew being the first Jesuit. According to him Jews were actually capturing the posts of universities of Germany. Simone further reads the book of Disraeli and assumes that a great revolution has been planted by Jews in Germany. He is so affected by the feeling of antisemitism that he seems to be an Italian Hitler. Hitler, the infamous dictator of Germany, was also an antisemite. He also denounced Jews in his autobiography *Mein Kampf* and called the German Jews the sole responsible for every problem of his nation. He and his comrades like Joseph Goebbels popularised fake news and conspiracy theories against them. In consequence, a common hatred was spreaded against the minority Jews and the dangerous Holocaust happened in Germany because Hitler also believed that for leading life it is necessary to completely eliminate their race.

As Simone forges the *Protocols*, an antisemitic text and uses it to spread hate and calls it his masterpiece, Hitler also used the *Protocols* for fulfilling his dangerous agenda. He and his followers circulated different editions of it. And even forced children to read it. He, like Hitler, wants to get rid of the so-called enemy of the state, the Jews. He says- "And so one day we'll have to try out the only reasonable solution, the final solution- that extermination of all Jews."(349)

According to Simone, it will be the ideal situation if this plan is executed otherwise the situations of the Nations will be worsened. According to him there is an organisation named The Alliance Israelite that is being run by the Jews. He advocates for concentrating on the activities of this organisation and says that if they want to destroy the root of this problem, they should take certain steps. For the destruction of this alliance they should completely destroy the Jewish community.

Umberto Eco has satirized the occupation of journalism also in this novel. He gives reference of a character named Taxil who wrote pamphlet filled with antisemitism. Another reference given by him is a character named Goedsche, an ex-worker of the secret police of Prussia. He circulated fake news about Jews because the secret service of Prussia used them for

propaganda. He adopted the pseudonym of Sir John Retcliffe and worked for an antisemitic newspaper named *Kreuzzeitung*. While, Simonini was also doing the same work of forging fake news and spreading hate. It shows the horrible condition of the then government and press. How they were completely affected by antisemitism.

Simone meets a character named Colonel Dimitri. He tells him that the Prussian secret service is also working to eliminate Jews because they also believe in the antisemitic conspiracy theories. He also describes the Dreyfus affair that spurred horrible anti-Jew pogroms. Theodore Harzl, a Viennese journalist covered this incident in France. Theodore Herzl was a citizen of Vienna and a journalist working in France as a reporter of foreign affairs. He witnessed the Dreyfus incident. He started the ideology of Zionism after his disillusionment from his ideology of assimilation for avoiding antisemitism.

The ideology of Zionism became the voice of the oppressed Jewish community. Emile Zola, the great writer of France also witnessed this affair. The Dreyfus affair is known as the Dreyfus conspiracy or L' affaire Dreyfus. It came into light in the late 19th century. This conspiracy shook the French nation from the top to bottom. In 1894, Germany ended its attacks on France and became victorious. On 18 February 1894, Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew person who was a captain in the French army, was alleged to have supplied secret information to the enemy nation Germany. He was court martialled and was given lifetime imprisonment on the Devil's island. Emile Zola advocated for the truthfulness of Dreyfus. He wrote and circulated an essay in a newspaper named '*J'accuse*' that divided France into the Dreyfusards and the anti Dreyfusards. The documents that were planted against Dreyfus were found to be forged documents. The Dreyfus affair affected French society a lot. An unbelievable rise in antisemitism was noted at that time. It became normal to spread hate for winning parliamentary elections. The press became very powerful at that time and impacted the then people of France a lot. Umberto Eco tries to throw light on the Dreyfus affair in the novel and gives another instance of antisemitism that was prevalent in the then era. He also shows the involvement of the press in provoking people and making them hate mongers. "Around 1894, I think it was, the newspapers talked of nothing but the case of an army captain, a certain Dreyfus, who had sold military intelligence to the Prussian embassy." (410)

Simone talks about an incident that happened in 1894 and according to every newspaper of that time, news was circulated about an army captain named Dreyfus who sold the military secret information to the embassy of Prussia. He says- "By sheer coincidence, the villain was Jewish. Drumont pounced on the Dreyfus case straight away and I thought that our periodical *Le Diable* should also contribute a few sensational revelations" (411).

Simone wants to make money through hate mongering against Semitic people but Taxil advises him to refrain from the news of army infiltration. He further says that there was one point to make a fuss about the Jewish infiltration in Freemasonry. He feels that Dreyfus was also a member of Freemasonry. Simone Simonini along with other characters is a victim of the paranoia

of antisemitism and conspiracy theories about the supposed world domination plan of Jews and their using Freemasonry as the front organisation for it.

According to Rocco Capozzi the novel *The Prague Cemetery* is, “a bitter ironic criticism of people who are in need of an enemy, or of a scapegoat choose to believe in conspiracies responsible for the misfortune for all the evil in the world– people, we should add, that are suspicious of anyone who is different and that chooses hate over love”.⁶

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