

CONCEPT OF FREEDOM AND ATTAINMENT OF HAPPINESS IN JONATHAN FRANZEN'S *FREEDOM*

MURUGESAN. S ¹ and Dr. C. SANTHOSH KUMAR ²

¹ PhD Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University. Email: murugesanstm94@gmail.com

² Research Supervisor, Professor, Department of English, Annamalai University.

Abstract

This research study explores the intricate relationship between freedom and happiness as depicted in Jonathan Franzen's novel *Freedom*. The narrative of the novel revolves around the multigenerational history of the Berglund family in Minnesota, USA. With a blend of humor and cruelty, the story vividly portrays the pleasures and burdens of liberty in the midst of the adventures of adolescence. The easy way people compromise at middle age, the changes suburban expansion brings in the life of individuals, the consequences of power through poignant storytelling-Franzen offers a profound and thought-provoking solution. The author presents modern times, describing failures and delights that individuals encounter as they live in an increasingly perplexing environment. There are different types of characters, each grappling with his own interpretation of freedom and its implications. Franzen investigates the nuances of individual freedom and explains the ways characters struggle hard to attain it. The Berglund family represents multigenerational history that serves as the microcosm of the broader American society. Readers are introduced to the complex relationship present among individuals who thrive hard to attain independence. The researcher seeks to shed light on the concepts maintained by individuals about freedom and different ways they adopt in order to attain happiness in life.

Keywords: Utilitarianism, Modernism, Multigenerational, Liberal Individualism, Post Modernism.

In recent years, the concept of freedom and its connection to happiness has gained significant attention in various fields, including literature, psychology, philosophy and science. Researchers and scholars have explored the idea that freedom and happiness, both in terms of personal liberties and autonomy, is closely connected to overall sense of satisfaction in the life of individuals. This connection has led to a perfect understanding of how societal structures can impact the happiness of individuals, highlighting environments that focus on freedom for all individuals.

Jonathan Franzen's novel *Freedom* offers a narrative that delves into the minds of readers with a thought-provoking exploration of the complexities surrounding personal liberty and its impact on individual development. Through the lives of the characters, Franzen examines the ways in which societal expectations and obligations can hinder personal fulfillment and limit individuals in pursuing their desires. Patty has got extramarital relationship with Richard unmindful of her husband. The novel raises questions about the way in which individuals are truly free to make choices, when external factors such as family and cultural bond often leave behind a powerful influence in decision taking.

In order to understand the complex relationship between freedom and happiness as portrayed in *Freedom*, this research thoroughly examines the experiences, decisions, and interactions of the Berglund family. Walter and Patty are husband and wife. Walter represents freedom and Patty is for happiness. But when they come to a point of convergence, they find it difficult to

adjust as they both do not coexist. And it provides significant insight into the complexities of human desires and aspirations for fulfillment.

Freedom serves as a powerful reminder of the fundamental psychological support for autonomy and self-determination in order to lead a truly happy life. Patty, the mother of Joey, wants to live with her son. But the son considers it as a disturbance to be with the parents. So he goes away to live with his girlfriend Connie all alone. This research of freedom and happiness shed light on modern American literature in particular and changed life pattern across humanity in general.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the ways the characters of Franzen navigate to attain happiness within the context of their freedom. And it attempts to identify the difficulties and predicaments characters encounter in their quest for personal fulfillment by analyzing the complexity of freedom and happiness. Additionally, it seeks to explore the potential conflicts that arise when individuals exercise their autonomy while considering the impact of societal expectations and constraints. Patty is the root cause of all familial disharmonies as she has got an extramarital affair. This has led to a lot of chaotic twists and turns into the life of Walter. His children also left Patty. Thus he is made to live a lonely existence.

In the novel, the author explains the concept of pleasure within the context of the American liberal endeavor. One's happiness offsets the freedom of others. The protagonist's concept of freedom interferes with the personal desires of others. Through vivid character narration and intricate plotlines, the author questions some of the societal norms that take away freedom and pleasures of individuals. Our actions are based on our desires. If we want to stick on to the social norm, we may not be able to attain happiness. Franzen's novels are packed with the concept of globalization, privatization, and liberalization. He is for universalization of humanity or world as one where all live in utmost harmony.

The novel explains the way of attaining happiness when an individual lives for his own pleasure apart from contributing to a social cause for the greater good. At the time of mountain top removal, all the inhabitants got disturbed. Feeling quiet unhappy with the project, Walter has been finding an alternative to birds that lost their shelters. He converts his house into a sanctuary for birds which are affected by modernity. The author explains the importance of discovering genuine happiness in a society by frequently sacrificing one's own desires for the good of the group. This altruistic character saves the environment from destruction. Ultimately modernity requires individuals who have been created by Franzen for safeguarding the universe.

Readers are provoked to reflect on their own lives and consider how they can pursue their own dreams while still making a positive impact on society. The author intends to express that individual fulfillment and societal progress are not mutually exclusive, but rather can be achieved through a harmonious integration of personal desires and social responsibility. In the traditional novels characters mostly have motivations whereas Franzen's works present characters who are having independent goals. They all strive towards attaining their goals but

in the process of achievement a new system emerges, thus giving way for quicker social transformation.

The characters in the novel not only strive for personal growth and success, but also recognize the importance of contributing to the betterment of their communities. Franzen encourages readers to strike a balance between individual fulfillment and societal progresses by presenting very complex characters who challenge the idea that one must sacrifice the individual goal in order to develop the society. Patty engages herself in training students in basketball. The impoverished children are motivated to play games. This enables to introduce a group of youngsters into sports activities. Thus her difficulty in dealing with her personal affairs is in no way affects her ultimate aim of departing a skill known to her to the individuals in society. This unique approach of storytelling prompts readers not only to fulfill their aspirations but also to align them with the greater good for a larger audience, society.

The complex storyline of *Freedom* reflects the difficulties that people frequently encounter in real life, behind the balancing acts of other issues. The portrayal of characters of the author navigating dilemmas adds depth and realism to his storytelling. The readers engage with the moral ambiguities inherent in the pursuit of happiness. Through the nuanced exploration of pleasure, happiness, and freedom readers are provoked to question their own values and priorities. Readers consider the fine line that separates individual happiness from the good of the group by exploring the struggle the characters undergo as a result of their decisions.

In this novel there is a particular scene where the character Joey Berglund encounters. Jonathan, roommate of Joey, reads the works of John Stuart Mill. Joey, a young and rebellious character, is intrigued by Jonathan's choice of reading material. As they engage in a conversation over Mill, Joey is captivated by the ideas of individual freedom and societal progress that Mill advocates to others. This concept is a turning point for Joey, sparking his own intellectual curiosity and planting the seeds for his personal journey towards self-discovery and understanding.

The reference of Mill provides us an idea as how the novel can be understood, particularly in relation to the exploration of liberal individualism during the eighteenth century. The fascination of Joey with the concept of Mill leads him to understand the historical and social context in which the ideas of Mill were developed. He does not like the prevailing situation and begins to question the norms and values of his own society, and seeks to understand how the principles of individual freedom and progress of Mill can be applied in the modern context.

The exploration not only enriches the understanding of Joey over the philosophy of Mill, but also prompts him to critically examine his own beliefs and values, setting the stage for his transformative journey throughout the novel. The utilitarian philosophy of Mill, centers around the concept of self-interest, suggesting that individuals typically act based on their own self-interest. Here happiness is the ultimate goal of individuals.

Utilitarianism gives priority to maximize overall happiness for greater number of people, rather than solely focusing on individual happiness. This philosophy challenges Joey and looks into the ethical implications of his actions and how they may impact others. This ultimately

questions the true meaning of happiness and the role it plays in his own life. The purpose of all actions is to maximize happiness by making decisions based on thoughtful consideration.

Joey thinks about the welfare of others as much as he thinks of himself. This collective thinking promotes a sense of belongingness and encourages him to prioritize actions that have a positive impact on the collective happiness of society. The journey of Joey towards the understanding of true meaning of happiness is connected with the ethical decision-making of creating a more harmonious world for all. This makes the individual to participate in the larger social order resulting in attaining greater pleasure by reducing the pain within them.

There is a connection between the novel, *Freedom* and the ideas of Mill on liberal individualism and utilitarianism. This understanding ultimately results in the exploration of freedom, happiness and the personal fulfillment. Joey understands the connection between freedom and the ideas of Mill about the importance of individual autonomy and the conflict that arise when trying to balance personal happiness with the well-being of society. This enables the readers to question the complexities of moral decision-making and consider how one's own action can contribute to a more just and contended world. The inclusion of philosophical concepts in the novel invites readers to reflect on the motivation behind action and moral implication of the characters in their understanding of happiness.

There is a connection between individual behavior and happiness. The self-interested and intentionally activated actions tend to align with the accepted societal norms. This will make others to accept us. This connection results from the fact that societal norms frequently shape collective values and expectations. As individuals engage in self-interested actions, they experience a sense of belonging and acceptance, which contribute to their overall happiness. Deliberately activated actions reflect the effort to make choices that are in line with personal values and goals, this further enhances individual happiness. Patty has become old. So she cannot anymore play the game and get recognition in the midst of the public. But then she motivates a group of young players in sports. At the time of competition she is particular that her squad wins the game. She has been a constant motivating spirit behind all the players.

There is a possibility for compromise where there is harmony between inner and outer self. This state represents the epitome of success and bliss, encapsulating the essence of activities that have historically shaped people. Individuals in general can feel a great sense of fulfillment and contentment in a state of total acceptance when they are no longer dealing with stress and turmoil that frequently accompany conflicting actions. It is through harmony between personal values and choices that individuals can truly embrace their own happiness and find meaning in their lives. In spite of the challenges posed by individuals, the acceptances derived from these experiences contribute significantly to the sense of freedom of the people. When individuals accept difficulties and setbacks that come with their efforts, they are able to get immunized and attain inner strength. This acceptance empowers them to overcome obstacles and navigate through life with a greater sense of freedom and self-assurance. Happiness of freedom derived from acceptance allows individuals to live authentically, making choices that align with their true selves and bringing a deep sense of fulfillment.

It is important to note that happiness is not merely a narrative construct. It is the end result of acceptance in every respect that bestows true happiness upon individuals. This type of acceptance not only enables personal growth but also enhances relationships by accepting the world as it is. On being accepted themselves in the midst of others, people create an environment of understanding and compassion, fostering deeper connections and healthier interactions. The power of acceptance extends beyond individuals happiness that contributes to a more harmonious and inclusive society. The principle of utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill, emphasizes the promotion of happiness through right actions. The novel explores the multifaceted concept of freedom, which encompasses the absence of pain and pursuit of happiness. The author includes the complexities of postmodern society. Stephen Burn and Jonathan Franzen address the way of attainment of happiness. The Berglund family is portrayed as having too much liberty and wealth. Too much of anything is not good. They are discontented and there is a feeling of fury and desperation. Among them the protagonists, Walter and Patty, are depicted as living in a state of agony, struggling to find happiness amidst various problems. The exploration of the complexities of personal freedom and its impact on individual well-being is a recurring theme throughout the novel.

There are ecological concerns presented in the novel. The ambition of wealthy individuals to accumulate wealth at the cost of nature is presented strongly. The incorporation of this theme adds depth to the exploration of freedom, happiness, and personal fulfillment. The protagonist Walter is dead against the Mountain Top Removal (MTR) project. Birds and other inhabitants of these places are disturbed apart from making the land barren for anyone and everyone. Extracting coal may be for the production of electricity but it ultimately results in ecological readjustment which is against nature and the future of all species living on earth. By presenting characters who grapple with conflicting desires and responsibilities, readers are made to engage with the moral ambiguities inherent in the pursuit of happiness. The novel serves as a mirror to enable contemporary society that gives an opportunity to readers to critically examine their own lives and choices. Patty, the central character of the novel, has got the tendency to live in groups. She effortlessly assumes the roles of an affectionate mother to her children and a care taking neighbor, embodying the spirit of togetherness and connection. Patty plays a pivotal role in reconciling with Walter and the residents of the Lakeside housing estate. Her ability to cope with the environment makes others to recognize and accept her with all help for future endeavors. She is getting absorbed in the parental care forgetting all other troubles haunting her.

The journey of Patty in this novel is marked by both individual growth and a transformational manifestation. Through her experiences, she learns the importance of allowing her daughter to make her own mistakes and reclaim her position in the lives of her children. This act of reconciliation not only strengthens their bond but also serves as a testament to the unwavering love and commitment of Patty as a mother. The novel explores the conflict between Patty's practical generosity and Walter's abstract reason. Walter's altruistic initiatives often result in more harm than good. She discovers that true happiness lies in accepting the world as it is, thinking of what already happened cannot yield pleasure.

In the age of cultural decay, Franzen is particular in choosing characters without spiritual aspiration. The final irony of the novel is the transformation of the family vacation home into a sanctuary for the Cerulean songbird, which symbolizes the freedom of America. The author employs post modernistic lethal ironies. This brings us back to the old uncivilized life. America is brought into a political and social conflict where freedom is abused for societal damage. Here each individual is affected beyond repair causing a deep transformation into a new era.

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