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Compulsive Behaviour: An Inquiry from a Legal Perspective in Malcolm Lowry's Novel 'Under the Volcano'

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ABSTRACT

The novel "under the volcano" written by Malcolm Lowry covers various aspects of human life. The life patterns and habitual actions play an important role in the context of the actions done by an individual. When a habitual action turns into compulsivity, it starts acting detrimental for the individual. To get a better perspective, the meaning of compulsive behaviour mentioned according to the US National Library of Medicine is "A behaviour where a person feels compelled to perform a behaviour even if the behaviour is inappropriate or counterproductive in order to relieve anxiety or stress" (Luigjes, 2019). This paper attempts to analyze the relationship between crimes committed by humans and the role of compulsive behaviour in it. The paper also tries to analyze the relationship between compulsive behaviour and Addiction and their association with criminal tendencies. The paper tries to understand the psychological aspect involved in behaviours that turns addictive. This research also focuses on the detrimental effect of addiction on the personal as well as the social life of an individual. With the help of various sources, the paper also tries to examine the relationship between addiction and self-destructive behaviour.

Keywords: *Compulsive, Behaviour, Compulsivity, Addiction, Relationship.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In this research paper, before the reader begins to look into the various social and psychological aspects involved in the novel, it is necessary to understand the conditions in which the novel was written and most importantly, to know about the author of the novel, specifically in the context of the topic under review. It is a human tendency to reflect one's own life experience in any artistic work. This could be the case in the novel under consideration as Malcolm Lowry, "born in a well-off family, began drinking at the age of 14" (Volcano: An Inquiry into the Life and Death of Malcolm Lowry, 1976) which later turned into an addiction. After getting

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addicted to alcohol, “Malcolm Lowry’s life was marked by isolation and self-destruction” (Volcano: An Inquiry into the Life and Death of Malcolm Lowry, 1976). Along the same lines, it is very evident in the novel that the man in the lead role exhibited alcoholic addiction and was self-destructive in nature. Similarly, Malcolm had a turbulent relationship with his first wife as she disliked his alcoholic behaviour. In his novel ‘Under the volcano’ also, the lead hero had unhealthy married life due to alcohol addiction. The author started writing the novel in the year 1936 and was published in 1947 (Lowry, 1946), thus the environment in which the novel was written was itself destructive as it was the time of World war II.

Both the author and the main character of the novel exhibits Addictive behaviours. To understand the behaviour of an addict, it is necessary to analyze and understand the role of compulsion in it. In compulsion, the addict is said to be carrying out an activity against the will that is “It is the compulsive nature of the addiction that distinguishes it from non-addictive behaviours” (Heather, Is the concept of compulsion useful in the explanation or description of addictive behaviour and experience., 2017). Therefore, it can be inferred that the condition of the addict starts to deteriorate with the onset of compulsivity.

This issue is discussed in detail in the research paper. Also, Compulsivity affects the personal life as well as the social life of an individual as is evident from the life of Malcolm Lowry as well as the life of the lead character in the novel. To have a better perspective, A definition from the US National Library of Medicine is mentioned “The observable, measurable, and often pathological activity of an organism that portrays its inability to overcome a habit resulting in an insatiable craving for a substance or for performing certain acts. The addictive behaviour includes the emotional and physical overdependence on the object of habit in increasing amount or frequency.” (Addictive Substance Dependence, 1974-1991). A wide range of topics related to the role of compulsive behaviour in form of addiction resulting in criminal tendencies is to be discussed in this research paper. As the case with the character in the main role in the novel and as with the author of the novel, a criminal tendency emerges, if not always but mostly from a compulsion to do an act having a detrimental impact on the social life of the person. This could be understood, most specifically, in cases of criminal recidivism. This aspect of compulsive behaviour is discussed in detail in the research paper. Also, it is very evident from a basic understanding of the topic that it is common to see an addict indulging in self-destructive behaviours.

Research Methodology

Research Methodology refers to the techniques used for identifying, selecting, processing, and

analyzing information about a topic. Data refers to the qualitative and quantitative values in form of information on a particular topic. This research paper is based on the qualitative way of methodology, primarily both analytical and descriptive way, to achieve its objective as it analyses and examines the concepts that have already been established through several studies and researchers. The paper aims to understand the relationship between compulsive behaviour and criminal tendency. The paper also aims to analyze the connection between compulsive behaviour and addiction. The paper, in the end, tries to draw logical inferences regarding compulsivity, addiction, and criminal tendency. The paper also makes logical connections to the novel 'Under the Volcano' and its author, whenever required. This data is broadly classified into two types that are primary and secondary data. This research paper depends upon both primary and secondary sources of data to achieve its objective. The primary sources used are official government websites of different legislations and books. The researcher has also used secondary sources such as Journal articles from India and abroad, newspaper articles and data, books by prominent authors, and commentaries available on various online legal databases. This paper also acquires information from legitimate websites and online platforms and the credit for the same has duly been given.

Literature Review

A literature review is one important aspect of researching as it provides the researcher with enough information regarding the topic which eventually aids the researcher in the process of researching. Various literature is available on the said topic in form of articles, books, and essays.

In an article titled "Defining Compulsive Behaviour" (Luigjes, 2019), several definitions of compulsive behaviour are mentioned. This article talks about compulsive behaviour and its role in psychiatric disorders. It is also trying to understand if there exists any relationship between neurological diseases and compulsive behaviour. It also talks about addictive behaviour in relation to compulsive behaviour. This article acts as a valuable source of literature for the present research.

Another Journal article titled "Is the concept of compulsive useful in the explanation or description of addictive behavior and experience" (Heather, Is the concept of compulsion useful in the explanation or description of addictive behaviour and experience., 2017), This article focuses mainly on two issues. The first one is an addiction and the second one is a compulsion. This article also concludes that addiction in itself is not a compulsive action rather the compulsive nature of the addiction makes its compulsion. This concept is discussed in detail

in the present research work. This article is another important source providing valuable information for the current work.

The book “Addiction and Choice-rethinking the relationship” (Heather & Segal, 2017) exclusively talks about addiction and the most accepted theories behind the cause of addiction. The author talks about a theory that believes that an alcoholic is in complete charge of his actions, thus they do alcoholism willingly with free choice. These scholars do not support the alcoholic ‘disease view’ according to which it is stated that alcoholism occurs due to certain defects in brain structure or certain brain diseases. The other theory argues that the activity of alcoholism is not a matter of free will and choice rather it is compulsive in nature. The researcher of the present project elaborately discusses this further in the paper.

Another book related to the present research is “Addiction and Change” (Diclemente, 2018) talks about how the development of addiction takes place and how addicted people recover. This book elaborately discusses the process of becoming an addict and the process of recovering from addiction. This book also discusses the factors that can either trigger the addiction or recovery process. It is also representing addiction as a process of a cycle where the author concludes that the point of recovery starts when a person reaches the complete level of addiction. The researcher of the present work talks about this understanding in the paper as we proceed further.

In a book titled “Addictive Personality: Understanding the Addiction and Compulsive Behavior” (Craig, 1996), the author is covering the broader aspect of addictive behavior by taking into account the different objects of addiction such as food addiction, sexual addiction, shopping addiction, internet addiction. The author also talks about the addiction cycle and is focused on the method of identification of addiction and recovery methods before it turns into another form of addiction. The author, then and now, points out the major role of compulsivity that makes an addict vulnerable to such addictions. The author also makes a stand saying that addiction is an illness and compares it to cancer. The details of all this are discussed further in this research work.

A Journal article “Treating Drug Abuse and Addiction in the Criminal Justice: Improving Public Health and Safety” (Chandler, 2010) talks about addictive behavior and its close connection with criminal activities. It presents a view that the criminal justice system can act as a major player in providing healthy consultations and methods to make the criminals leave the addiction. This could also reduce the change in criminal recidivism. It can also reduce drug abuse and criminal behaviour.

A Journal article “Malcolm Lowry’s “Under the Volcano”: A critical reception study” (Black, 1966), talks about the allusions involved in the novel “Under the Volcano” and its meaning. This aspect of the novel makes it different from other literary works, considering the condition of the author, Malcolm Lowry. These allusions make the novel and its concept of life and death more evident and meaningful.

The book “Review of *Sursum Corda: The Collected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*” (Asals, 1966), contains the collection of letters that Malcolm Lowry sent to the publisher when the publisher asked for some changes in the novel. Malcolm Lowry gave a clear insight into the purpose of using certain words in the novel and their importance. After this letter reached the public, people began to read and re-read the novel to understand various levels of allusions, that were related to the looming backdrop of world war-II, addiction, negativity, depression, compulsive behavior, and death. In the article “Compulsive Behaviour” (Compulsive Behaviour), the writer mentions how one can overcome compulsiveness by noticing its day-to-day activity. All the above literature provides valuable information for carrying out the present research.

II. ANALYSIS

Based on the understanding from the novel ‘Under the Volcano’, We find underlining references to the problems one has after getting into the practice of compulsive drinking. The compulsion of an individual makes the person repeatedly do a certain activity even if that action is causing harm to him or the people around him. It is interesting to see that the author of the novel and the lead character of the novel share a similar storyline in their life. This could not simply be accidental, rather the life of Malcolm Lowry is very evident from the story of the novel. The novel provides various episodes of Compulsivity, not just in the context of alcoholism but in other aspects.

We find a chapter in which it is hinted at that there existed an affair between Hugh, Consul’s half-brother, and Yvonne, Consul’s wife. Thus, if there existed such an affair, it indicates the inability of Hugh and Yvonne to refrain from indulging in the unethical act, indirectly pointing towards the compulsive nature as doing such an act would surely harm their relationships with the Consul and social acceptance in the society. Similarly, Consul possessed the habit of compulsive drinking because of which he suffered physically as well as mentally. His compulsive addiction to alcoholism became the cause of his death. He also suffered personal losses such as the leaving of his wife, Yvonne, as it became unbearable for Yvonne to come to terms with his addiction. The letter sent by Consul to his wife, Yvonne, as a request to her to come back to Consul reflects the peak of ill-effects of compulsive drinking. The Consul

mentions episodes of ‘Alcoholic Stupor’ (Health Line, 2018) which is a condition in which a man experiences disturbed mental senses and inability to Judge reality. The Consul also wrote about a disease called ‘Delirium Tremens’ (James, 2020) which is a disease caused due to alcoholism that leads to problems such as shaking of the body, confused state of mind, and hallucinations. This disease can also be fatal. It is to be noted here that while in the episode of hallucinating, the Consul heard two alternative voices, one saying “All is lost” (Lowry, 1946) and the other saying “There is still hope” (Lowry, 1946). This could be interpreted that this voice signifies the hope of the Consul, pointing towards the conflict between his state of compulsion and the desire of Consul to quit drinking. Thus, we can see that even if Consul wishes to resist compulsive drinking, he is unsuccessful in his attempt. Another evidence of this is the part of the novel where Dr. Vigil, the local physician, gave strychnine, a chemical meant for avoiding drinking. While Consul takes the Strychnine, he still felt tempted for whisky. This explains the level of addiction the consul had for alcohol. Another such example is the part where Yvonne, Consul’s wife, is sobbing and Consul, instead of showing any care for her, is repeatedly saying “I love you” (Lowry, 1946) to the bottle of whisky. This explains his mental state of compulsivity because it was not that the consul did not care about his wife, as evident from his letter to Yvonne to return, but it was compulsive drinking that made him behave in such a manner. Another evidence of compulsive behaviour is the episode of Consul lecturing himself on the issue of drinking, which indicates that the consul felt helpless to resist his temptations for drinking, which is also pointing towards the compulsive nature of the activity.

Thus, as it is evident from the above lines that compulsive behaviour could have a major negative impact on the functioning of a human in its full capacity and with positive motives. Now, let us look at the connection between compulsive addiction and criminals. It is found from several surveys that many of the criminals are into one or the other form of addictive activity. It is mentioned by a legislative body in the following lines:

"The problem is that 35% of those in prison have a drug addiction and 6% acquire that addiction once they are in prison, so more come out with an addiction than went in with one."
(Vaz, 2013)

This compulsive addiction also acts as a trigger for criminal recidivism that is the repetitive crime committed by the criminal. Thus, there is a real connection between addiction and criminals. To understand this better, the book titled “The Addictive Personality: Understanding the Addictive Process and Compulsive Behaviour” helps a lot. It says that people go for addiction to avoid the reality of their painful existence. Addicts start to view the addiction as

the solution to the issue and this makes them over-dependant on the substance or activity of addiction. However, this activity of running away from the problem and responsibility creates even more further problems for them. The addiction also builds its firm base on the emotional level of an individual, again making him/her to dependent on the addictive activity on an emotional level as well. It also says that the compulsive addict repeatedly tells themselves to avoid the activity of addiction but whenever they are free or feeling uneasy, they resort to their addictive activity. This compulsive nature of addiction takes a person into a spiral of negativity, such as despair, fear, hopelessness, and instability of mind, from which the addict finds no escape.

According to the book, at this stage, we find the need for a recovery process, such recovery can come from loving friends and supportive family. It could be interpreted as a situation when the family and friends will become more important to the addict more than the addictive activity, then only the addict will be able to overcome his addiction. Another article states that meditation acts as a powerful tool to prevent addicts from doing addiction. (Alexandee, 2010)

Therefore, all the above analysis makes the researcher of the paper conclude that there exists a real relationship between addiction and compulsion. It is also inferred that there exists a major role of compulsion in the process of addiction and criminal activity as well as criminal recidivism. It is also clear that it is not that one cannot recover from compulsive addiction. This is completely to overcome addiction with the help of a proper support system such as family and friends along with medical experts if needed. Techniques such a meditation can also help the addict to recover by reducing the urge of doing addiction. (Addictive Substance Dependence, 1974-1991)

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