

A STUDY ON ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE FILM, *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION*

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Abstract:

Existential Crisis connotes the changing world order and it becomes a hidden motif in exposing identity trauma throughout the film, *The Shawshank Redemption*. It is a movie directed by Frank Darabont which tells the struggle undergone by the protagonist Andy Dufresne who is being accused for a false crime. This film is a nexus of institutionalisation of moral values and impact of place on personality of the characters. In *The Shawshank Redemption*, all the characters try to find ways to live their life both in prison and in outside world. But, some characters find solace in prison which creates a great effect on the audience thereby creating catharsis. How each and every character wish to live their life far away from the accusing world becomes the essence of the story. This research article sets out to analyse this film from the point of view of Environmental Psychology and Existentialism.

Keywords: Identity Crisis, Morality, Framework, Trauma, Place

The Shawshank Redemption is an American drama film written and directed by Frank Darabont in 1994. The film is about Andy Dufresne, a successful banker who is being accused of murdering his wife and her lover as well as he is sentenced to life imprisonment at the Shawshank Prison. This movie is produced by Niki Marvin and starred by Tim Robbins as Andy Dufresne and Morgan Freeman as Red. It is originally based on the 1982 novella written by Stephen King titled *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* with a subtitle *Hope Springs Eternal*. This story is narrated completely by a character named Red who claims to have written the narrative from September 1975 to January 1976 and an additional chapter was included in spring 1977. The screen adaptation has received many positive critical reviews and was nominated for seven Academy Awards in 1994 with an inclusion of Best Picture. United States Library of Congress selected this film for preservation in National Film Registry.

The Shawshank Redemption is a good example of Prison Literature which is also a literary genre characterised by works which are written while a person is confined in a location against his will such as prison, jail or house arrest. Prison literature informs the readers about prison and the incidents which encircle it. It can be a memoir, fiction or nonfiction. Prison Literature discusses redemption, trials, freedom, oppression, loyalty and justice. The concept of Time emerges as a major motif in *The Shawshank Redemption* as well as in the other narratives about prison. These types of literary works of art got a transition during the twenty-first century and began to voice out positives in spite of pessimistic portrayals. According to Laura Pepper Wu, an editor of The Write Life Magazine, "Stepping out of one's everyday reality and into confinement brings a quietness that allows for true reflection and good sight, the pillars of good writing".

Film and Literature are the two art forms which build and grow together to give an artistic experience to the readers as well as the audience. Literature is one of the popular forms of art during the 18th and 19th century. Cinema prevailed only during the twentieth century. Literature creates webs of imagination in the minds of the readers whereas a film presents those imaginations as a visual feast to the eyes. Written words are brought to life through

sounds, techniques used in the world of cinema. Both Literature and Film are interdependent because they develop and inform each other.

Environmental Psychology explores the relationship between humans and the external world. A psychologist named Hellpach was the first to use and define the term "Environmental Psychology". Egon Brunswik was the first person to use the term environmental psychology in print. It deals with the ways in which environment shapes an individual and emphasizes much on how humans change

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the environment and how the environment changes human experience and behaviour. It is both value-oriented and problem oriented and aimed at solving complex environmental issues concerning individual well-being. It is also known as Eco psychology, environment-behaviour studies and cognitive ergonomics. Place identity is one of the repeated motifs of this study because of an individual's incorporation or adaptation or even assimilation of a place into larger concept of self. One's personal connection with the place creates a sense of belonging and purpose because the person lives and procreates memories within the place. As a result of which, an attachment is built. The other concepts which are discussed in this field are attention, perception, cognitive maps, ideal environments, environmental stress and managing, involvement and protective behaviour.

The terms which are very significant in the field of environmental psychology are Environmental behaviour, Restorative Environments, Health psychology, Pro-environmental behaviour, Organisational psychology and Architectural psychology. Arousal theory, Environmental Load theory, Behaviour constraint theory, Adaption level theory, Environment stress theory and Ecological theory come under Environmental Psychology. Existentialism and Environmental psychology are intertwined because the concept of existence is very much dependent on the ecosystem where an individual lives. Existentialism stresses much on action and freedom. It is also a form of philosophical inquiry that examines the problem of human existence and throws light on the subjective experience of thinking, feeling and acting.

In 1947, Portland, Maine Andy Dufresne, the main protagonist of the film, is convicted of murdering his wife and her lover and he is sentenced to two consecutive and prison contraband smuggler who also serves life time imprisonment. Every time he goes for parole application, he could not give satisfactory answers to the officers. So, his parole gets rejected unfortunately. Andy buys a rock hammer and a large poster of Rita Hayworth from Red. Andy faces many sexual assaults by a group named "Sisters" and their leader, Bogs. They literally left Andy lifeless and they were transferred to another prison. Andy overhears Byron Hadley's conversation who is the captain of the guards about being complained of taxes on inheritance and Andy helps everyone from the problems of taxations. Warden Samuel Norton shifted him to the Prison library where he meets the elderly inmate Brooks. Halten. Andy managed all the financial matters for other prison staff, even guards from other prison including warden. He writes weekly letters to state legislature requesting funds to improve prison library.

Brooks, after serving fifty years in prison, is paroled and he could not live in the external world and he hangs himself eventually. Andy plays a music excerpt over public address system in the prison and he is punished with solitary confinement. In 1963, Warden Norton begins to exploit prison labour by receiving bribes and so on. Andy using the alias "Randall Stephens" launders all the money for warden. Tommy Williams, a young boy enters prison in 1965 who befriends Andy passes General Educational Development exam. He reveals the

truth of Andy's case and he eventually tells warden and got killed by him. On the other hand, Andy was in worst conditions and he was released from the solitary confinement after two months. Andy tells Red about a place called Zihuatanejo which is a Mexican town where Andy asks Red to he gets released. Red fears when Andy asked him for a rope of 1.8 feet. At the next day of roll call, Andy's cell is empty and he escapes from Prison. Eventually Red gets his parole and as he promised Andy, he visits Buxton and finds his way to Zihuatanejo. He finds Andy there and the two reunited friends embraced happily.

Existential Crisis plays a vital part in this story because all the characters including Andy initially could not adapt him to the environment that he is being forced to enter. The world outside Shawshank prison is entirely different for the old prisoners who stayed in prison for more than a decade. Especially, in the prison library, an elderly man Brooks Halten finds his companion not as human beings but as books which give him love and solitude. On the other hand, Red seems to have an advantage of smuggling goods inside the prison and this shows his act of assimilation which is comfortable for some and crisis for many. In the beginning, Andy is very calm and he finds solace in works that he loves much specifically in sculpting statues. Prison is new normal for all prisoners who have to restrict as well as restrain themselves in doing things which are quite normal. Andy is the first person who seems to have reformatory ideas like educating the young, helping or even making

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use of his banking talents to the officers for the benefits of the prisoners and even making the place as eco sociable as possible. From the perspective of environmental psychology, Andy changes the prison ambiance to a certain extent yet rules and disciplines stop him to achieve his goal till the end. The outside world serves as a major threat to the prisoners because of constant changes happening physically, mentally and psychologically. The confined atmosphere where the prisoners live is considered to be better than the external world. The supporting characters in the movie feel an alienation in the outside world. For instance, Brooks Halten got released from the prison yet he is not happy. He took a knife to kill again to continue his life in the prison or to find solace in the prison environment. Though he worked in a shop, lived in a good place, he is not very happy as he was in the prison. Here, the director exposes how architecture itself decides the very psychology of human beings in the living environment. The way in which cinematography showcases how places impact personality is the cause and effect of environmental psychology. Because of Brook's attachment with the prison ambiance, he decided to end his life rather continuing it. He does not want to breathe the air of freedom instead he chose death as his liberation. The notion of freedom is depicted in several ways like the chances they receive at the moment which is different from their normal imprisoned life.

Red narrates what freedom in their life as "We sat and drank with the sun on our shoulders, and felt like free me" (37: 59: 00).

In this film, a problem is presented with a solution continued by it. The concept of moral values and institutionalisation become a repeated motif of *The Shawshank Redemption*. Brooks and Institutionalised behaviour could be seen in the scene where Andy, Red and all other characters discuss the death of Brooks as

"He is an educated man. Outside he is nothing" (59:50:00)

Andy, who is genuine and loyal receives a life time imprisonment which questions the ecology and its nature where the concept of justice becomes a never-ending inquiries. Even though the supporting characters find themselves in isolation in the external world, Andy too feels the same. This is where The Shawshank Prison remains as a place which can be hopeful

for few and hopeless for the rest. *Hope Springs Eternal* sums up that in every situation there lies a hope which can be for living or for dying.

Red expresses his anger towards the prison world as well as world outside “They send you here for life. That’s exactly what they take” (1:00:17). The aspect of redemption can be viewed from the perspective of living a life filled with hope and freedom of one’s own. That’s why Andy mentions a place called Zihuatanejo, which is a Mexican Town to Red so that they can really feel what life is even it is topsy-turvy. Red finally gets a parole when he opens himself up and faced the situation boldly. His words on hope become a living philosophy as he ruminated on life aspects by using bird as a metaphor. Red is assumed to be linked with Christ who is going to or who redeems all the prisoners inside the prison. The movie takes up a transition in such a way that Andy exposes a life to relive for Red. This is where Stephen King reveals the conflict that exists between God and Science.

The aspect of absurdity is concealed in order to make the audience question the very existence of an individual. Catharsis is seen in the incidents of the alienation faced by Brooks and Red as they have to adjust themselves to breathe the new air and it ends up with the question of survival or existence. The concept of free will emerges only from the environment that arouses an individual’s behaviour. It is the same ambiance that made Andy comfortable as well as to escape from the prison. He welcomes Andy in the Mexican town which amalgamates redemption and salvation. The movie ends with a scene in a beach which exposes life is always intertwined with nature. From the perspective of environmental psychology, Human beings are part and parcel of nature. The environment decides the man to be good or bad depending upon the situation that one faces. Sometimes, the power which lies in the hands of person decides the environment and the process of assimilation. Confined world is not a barrier if one chooses to live a life filled with freedom.

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