

*Application of Queer Theory to
Yann Martel's Self*

Chapter III

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“The appeal of ‘queer theory’ has outstripped anyone’s sense of what exactly it means”

(Warner 3).

Queer theory is a field of critical theory which emerged in the early 1990s out of gay, lesbian and feminist studies. The term ‘Queer Theory’ is considered as an umbrella term for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender who are moving between genders, transsexual- who keep physically changing gender, intersexual- who possess both sexes. Annamarie Jagose, an Australian Professor of English defines the term queer theory in his book *Queer Theory: An Introduction* in 1996.

[It] has come to be used differently, sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identification and at other times to describe a nascent the critical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies. What is clear even from this brief and partial account of its contemporary deployment is that queer is very much a category in the process of formation. It is not simply that queer has yet to solidify and take on a more consistent profile, but rather that its definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity is one of its constituent characteristics. (1)

Queer theory looks at any kind of identity or behaviour that would arise out of the conventions of sexuality. It examines the non-normative expressions of gender,

sexuality and identity. It encompasses people who are in the margins of society in terms of race, sexuality, and religion. It also includes people who do not accept conventional expectations of society.

Gender identity is a person's identification as male or female. Every individual is categorized and identified as male or female. Some have sex chromosome abnormality during gestation period. The word, 'sexuality' became very common in the late 19th century Europe, America and Canada when scientific, anthropological and sociological studies of sex came into existence. The prefix such as 'bi', 'hetero' and 'homo' were coined to denote a person who possessed particular sex desire.

The term 'transgender' was popularized in the 1970s and was expanded to an umbrella term in 1980. In the 1990s, the term was used in the media and academia. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines transgender thus: "Transgender is a condition in which a biologically normal person believes himself/ herself to be truly a member of the opposite sex, despite anatomical evidence to the contrary" (606). Transgendered individuals identify themselves as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. In *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Jonathan Culler writes:

Queer theory uses the marginal- what has been set aside as perverse, beyond the pale, radically other- to analyse the cultural construction of the centre, heterosexual normativity. In the work of Eve Sedgwick, Judith Butler, and others, Queer theory has become the site of a productive questioning not just of the cultural construction of sexuality but of culture itself, as based on the denial of homoerotic relations. (131)

Queer theory challenges the conventional behaviour of sexuality. It suggests gender is not the result of nature, but is socially constructed and reinforced by society often. Peter Bary states, “The underlying question in queer theory is whether it is gender or sexuality which is more fundamental in personal identity ... it tends to endorse ‘experimental’ forms of sexuality” (143). Biologically sex refers to organs, hormones and chromosomes. Those who possess vagina, ovaries and xx chromosomes are considered as female and those who possess penis, testes, xy chromosomes are considered as male. Intersex people possess a combination of both. The testis and the ovary grow separately but bilaterally. They grow together within the same organ. They are called as Hermaphrodites, and is shortly known as “herms” who possess one testis and one ovary. Annamarie Jagose in *Queer Theory: An Introduction* describes further:

Queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability- which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is, more properly its effect – queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire... queer locates and exploits the incoherencies in those three terms which stabilize heterosexuality. Demonstrating the impossibility of ‘natural’ sexuality, it calls into question even such apparent unproblematic terms as ‘man’ and ‘woman’. (3)

Gender identity is about an individual’s apprehension of oneself and his interpretation of things around the world based on one’s gender as a man or a woman. Gender identity is different from gender expression and sexual orientation. Gender

expression is the manner in which a person behaves or dresses or interacts. “Homosexuality is commonly and widely understood to describe sexual attraction for those of one’s own sex” (Jagose 7). Terms such as ‘homosexual’, ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ and ‘queer’ was used to frame the same-sex desire in the twentieth century. In *Literary Theory: The Basics*, Hans Bertens remarks, “Queer theory questions traditional constructions of sexuality and – especially in its British version- sees – non- heterosexual forms of sexuality as sites where hegemonic power can be undermined” (225).

The word ‘homosexuality’ was coined in 1869 by a Swiss doctor, Kärerly Maria Benkert. “By the 1910s and 1920s, men who identified themselves as different from other men primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest rather than their woman like gender status usually called themselves ‘queer’” (Jagose 101). In *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality* the term queer has been considered as an archaic term. “ The words declining popularity may therefore reflect today’s greater visibility and acceptance of gay men and lesbians and the growing knowledge that most of them are in fact quite harmless, ordinary people” (Dynes 1091).

Queer theory is a synonym of exceptional, abnormal, unaligned, unpredictable or bizarre characters. This theory is also a result of postmodern view of mini- narratives which talks about the identity of a small group of homosexual people. Queer theory is a new way of thinking about sexual identities. “Queer theory examines the constitutive discourses of homosexuality developed in the last century in order to place queer in its historical context and surveys contemporary arguments both for and against this latest terminology.” (Jagose 6)

Queer theory has been influenced by the work of Teresa de Lauretis, David Halperin, Michel Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Jonathan Culler and Judith Butler. Italian women's activist and film scholar Teresa de Lauretis, has been credited with coining the phrase, 'Queer Theory'. She used it as the title of a conference that she sorted out in February 1990 at the University of California, where Lauretis is a Professor of The History of Consciousness. Lauretis, one of the queer theorists welcomed queer as "Another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual" (Lauretis iv).

David Halperin in his essay *The Normalization of Queer Theory* tells how Lauretis coined the word queer: "She had heard the word 'queer' being tossed about in a gay affirmative sense by activists, street kids, and members of the art world in New York during the late 1980s. She had the courage and the conviction to pair that scandalous term with the academic holy word 'theory'" (339). In 1991, Lauretis edited a special issue of the feminist cultural studies journal *differences* titled, *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*. "The project of the conference was based on the speculative premise that homosexuality is no longer to be seen simply as marginal with regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality against which it would be defined either by opposition or homology" (Lauretis iii). Three years after the publication of de Lauretis's volume *Differences* came second queer issue subtitled, *More Gender Trouble: Feminism meets Queer Theory* with an introductory essay by Judith Butler.

Judith Butler was a Professor of Comparative Literature and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley, and is well known as a theorist of gender, sexuality and identity. *Gender Trouble* is the influential book for queer theory by Judith Butler. Gender should be seen as a fluid variable which changes in different contexts and at different times.

Butler identifies gender in her *Gender Trouble* thus; “An ongoing discursive practice ... open to intervention and resignification” (3). The idea of performativity is introduced by Butler in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble* where she states that gender is a set of repeated action.

Gender proves to be performance that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed ...there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’, that are said to be its results. (25)

Judith Butler is of the opinion that gender is performatively constituted. For instance one’s choice of clothes is pre determined by the society, within which one is situated. In *Gender Performance* Butler says, “Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance” (95). Society is constructed on structure and is organized by power hegemony. Thus gender identity must conform to the societal norms. Queer theory emphasises the importance of individual’s desire and insists upon dismantling the social construction of gender identity based on hierarchy. “Positioned abrasively toward notions of the normal” the queer texts “explicitly or implicitly denaturalize notions of sexual normality and provide evidence of the mutability and variability of human sexual desire and performance in excess of the hetero/homobinary” (Hall 149).

Gender is a constitution of identity which is culturally and socially instituted through repetition of acts i.e styles, movements, language, bodily gestures over a prolonged period of the time. The repetition itself produces a set of behaviours which

appears as the natural configuration of gender. This constitutes the individual identity which differs from people to people. Thus gender identity acquires cultural meaning. Butler in her *Gender Trouble* says, “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (33). When an individual adhere to the attributed normative gender behaviour and associated cultural percepts he or she will be rewarded with self-determination. When an individual fails to perform the assigned gender roles he or she will be socially ostracised and marginalized. Butler asks the following question in her *Gender Trouble*:

And what is ‘sex’ anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal, and discourses which purport to establish such ‘facts’ for us? Does sex have a history? Does each sex have a different history or histories? Is there a history of how the duality of sex was established, a genealogy that might expose the binary options as a viable construction’. Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interest? (6-7)

Hence gender identity needs to be constantly performed and has to be maintained. Simon Watney defined the term ‘Queer’ thus:

It is clear that not all gay men and lesbians will come to accept the term ‘queer’ in relation to themselves, even if they fully understand why other people find it useful. This is entirely for the good, since it serves to acknowledge that there are no natural or inevitable connections uniting

everyone whose identity is formed on the basis of homosexual object choice. (22)

Queer theorists started writing about queer people who undergo sociological as well as psychological problems. Queer theory is a new way of explaining human experience. Even words are gendered. The hierarchy of society is getting exposed in an indirect way of explaining what is male and what is female through language. To categorise gender and sexuality as a single characteristic is highly impossible. Thus the importance of queer theory was felt. Queer Theory acts as a signifier for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. Queer theory is revolutionary as it debunks social construction.

Yann Martel's first novel *Self* (1996) was short listed for the 21st Chapters/ Books in Canada first Novel Award, then Canada's most valuable first-novel award with a prize of 5,000 Canadian dollars. The novel narrates the story of the unnamed protagonist's gender identity and gender transformation. The protagonist is a college student who wakes up one morning to discover that he has become a woman. The narrator, at first male, explains various events from his early childhood, his memories of living with his parents who were working in the Canadian embassy and they lived in Ottawa, Ontario. He goes on to explain events from his years in private school, till he graduates and travels to Portugal where he, on his eighteenth birthday, wakes up as a female. After the transformation, the narrator concludes her trip and continues studies in the university in the fictional Roetown. She begins writing, and keeps travelling, visiting such places as Spain and Thailand to name a few. Eventually her works gets published, and after graduating, moves to Montreal, where she gets a job as a waitress. She meets Tito, her

lover and lives with him. As the novel is nearing conclusion, she is raped brutally by a neighbour in her secluded apartment and her body reverts feminine qualities and begins her life as a male again.

The narrator identifies himself as queer or as intersexual. Queer theory and psychoanalysis is applied to this novel to understand the gender identity of the protagonist. His intersexual body clearly challenges the social construction of sexuality and gender. It is obvious in the story that the narrator is excluded from the normal people in order to avoid social consequences. The narrator's intersexed body echoes societal as well as psychological problem as the narrator is socially marginalised. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler defines gender thus:

To define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre given sex ... [because it] must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. (7)

The novel *Self* is an experimental exploration of the gender and sex. The novel is a recollection of a thirty year old protagonist from birth who in the course of time transforms into a woman, and changes back into a man later. The protagonist just wakes up and finds himself transformed into a woman. He remains a woman for seven years and then turns into a man again. The unnamed narrator recounts his past. The author as well as the narrator of the novel was born in the same year at Spain. The narrator tells: "I was born in 1963, in Spain, of student parents- I heard only later, through hearsay. For me, memory starts in my own country, in its capital city, to be exact" (S 3). He started his

education in 1968. “I started my formal education in 1968 at Jiminy Cricket Kindergarten. It operated in English, but my parents had no choice. At the time it was the only quality kindergarten in San Jose” (S 18). The narrator explains the evolution of his gender identity by recounting events from his life.

The novel is an interesting case study of sexual identity and orientation. The protagonist analyses his ‘self’ with the identity of ‘sex’. His identity is formed by a process of identification which is never completed. Lacan says, “Identity, then, is an effect of identification with and against others: being ongoing, and always incomplete, it is process rather than a property” (Mirror 79). The narrator’s intersexed identity is central to queer studies. Peter Bary in his *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* states, “The underlying question in queer theory is whether it is gender or sexuality which is more fundamental in personal identity... It tends to endorse ‘experimental’ forms of sexuality” (143).

Martel gives significance for the analysis of sexual identity of the protagonist in this novel. He explores different layers of identity which centers upon sexual identity and self- identity. The protagonist appears to be a male initially and later identifies himself as belonging to the other sex in the later part of the novel. He is not aware of his problem in the beginning. As days pass by, his hormonal imbalance joins with emotional imbalance and changes him completely to another sexual identity.

The narrator struggles physically and psychological to assert his self- identity. The foundation of the narrator’s understanding of the difference between his ‘self’ and others takes place in the narrator’s mind in the beginning of the novel.

I became aware of a voice inside my head. What is this, I wondered.
 Who are you, voice? When will you shut up? I remember a feeling of fright.
 It was only later that I realized that this voice was my own thinking, that
 this moment of anguish was my first inkling that I was a ceaseless
 monologue trapped within myself. (S 2)

The narrator's voice plays an important role in creating self-awareness and self-realisation. He talks to himself as he works on a problem which is going on in his mind. He asks questions in order to find out solution for his problem. As the title of the novel implies, he is explaining to himself what he is doing and thinking. He talks to himself silently in his mind. His inner voice refers to his inner self. It includes all aspects of his consciousness as an individual. His self-identity starts to develop in his early childhood which evolves from social dialogues with his parent. Though his self-identity is deeply rooted in him, he struggles to identify his sexual identity because of his biological condition.

The narrator's parents were the role model for him. His parents were diplomats working in the Department of External Affairs. "Beyond the normal overseeing of parenthood, neither my mother nor my father intruded unnecessarily into my world" (S 3). He had a happy and fun filled childhood, full of love, adventure and happy experience. In spite of all the responsibilities with which they struggle, his parents shower love upon him. "They were at the central periphery of my life. They were my loving, authoritarian servants.... I would feel a hot burst of love, adoration, worship, tenderness, for my sweet mother" (S 4).

The narrator's parents were early feminist. The period of 19th and 20th century belongs to early feminism. The term feminism was coined by Martha Lear and the term feminism focused on inequalities. It was the time when women were discriminated in the

domestic and social sphere. Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1792) advocated the social and moral equality of the sexes. “My parents were early feminists and they did not use the word “opposite” when speaking of the sexes. Indeed, why should they be considered opposite? The word is aggressive, defines by negation, says very little. The sexes are complementary, said my parents- a more complicated word which they explained to me by analogy. Male and female were like rain and soil” (S 20). Thus his parents taught him gender equality. They practiced feminist ideals in their own relationship. They treated each other with respect, and did not follow the conventional gender roles. The narrator comments about his parents thus:

I have never seen such a harmonious, complementary couple. She was highly articulate. He was a published poet. She had a disciplined mind that could work with great intensity, a mind that was always open to the world. He had lost his father when he was ten and was a rather moody, brittle man, prone to melancholy, yet he had a capacity to marvel at things. She had a naturally optimistic bent and she loved the arts. They nourished her soul and her wisdom. Her emotions were never wrong. (S 7)

The protagonist’s parents divided their duties equally, in an unbiased way and they believed that each one is responsible for their own trouble. Mostly he has seen his father cooking better than his mother. They thought that it is important to teach their child that he has a right to his own body and what happens to it. They also know that racial inequality and discrimination against LGBT individuals are common in many countries. They teach him not to fear diversity, but to love those who are different from his childhood days.

His parents are not afraid to discuss about sex and biology to their child. The narrator's affection towards Noah was interpreted by his mother thus: "There were in fact only *two* sexes, not infinite numbers" (S 21). The narrator is inquisitive to know about sexual identities from his early childhood. "Girls, *by definition*, were females with little bums who could only be wives. Boys, *by definition*, were males with little fingers who could only be husbands" (S 22). The narrator's mother further classified, "To be male or female, a thing has to be alive, move on its own, and be visible" (S 25). He comes to know the fact about sexuality through his biology lesson. "Many biology classes later, when I learned that plants do in fact have sexuality, when I fully understood the terms pistil, stamen and pollen, I discovered with pleasure the slow, charged sexuality of nature. No wonder spring was such a sensuous time" (S 25).

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* also reflects transformation, but it is of a different kind. The story of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* begins with a travelling salesman, Gregor Samsa who is waking one day to find himself transformed into a monstrous vermin. The story of Gregor Samsa is based on the Greek mythology, in which, Tiresias the blind prophet of Thebes, who is transformed into a woman for seven years. Gregor's physical transformation makes him unable to take up everyday duty. Gregor's transformation makes him to exclude from the society and his own family. To Gregor life becomes an adventurous journey to discover his self-identity.

Since the narrator's birth, change and transformation has been central to the narrator's life. He changed school, languages and countries often because of his parents' profession. Such transformation provided him opportunity to bury his past errors. He tells,

Indeed, from my earliest years the idea of transformation has been central to my life. Naturally so, I suppose, being the child of diplomats. I changed schools, languages, countries and continents a number of times during my childhood. At each change I had the opportunity to re-create myself, to present a new facade, to bury past errors and misrepresentations. (S 8-9)

Change and metamorphosis is one of the main themes of the novel. Change occurs to everything and everybody in the world. The narrator loses his teeth and gets larger and stronger teeth after some time in the same place. This is one proof of human metamorphosis. He gathered evidence on the metamorphosis of day and night, of weather, of the seasons, of food and excrement, even of life and death. “I envisioned life as a series of metamorphic changes, one after another, to no end” (S 9). There is a physical change which causes a lot of changes in his understanding of his biology and society. After the physical change, transformation passes to higher level and changes the psychological and emotional balance of the narrator. The transformation of the male narrator into a woman is presented as a completely natural process. He did not desire to be a woman; he just wakes up being one. He is a woman for seven years and then turns into a man again. No one likes to discover ugliness in oneself but the narrator discovered something unpleasant, it was something private. The discovery came slowly. The narrator of the story is continually adapting her self- identity to suit her biological change. This adjustment influences her conduct, and sexuality. The narrator explains:

It was over the course of a night that things came to completion. I awoke suddenly. I don't know what I was dreaming, why I should have awakened.

I sat up. I was confused. I couldn't remember anything – my name, my

age, where I was - complete amnesia. I knew that I was thinking in English, that much I knew right away. My identity was tied to the English language. And I knew that I was a woman, that also. English speaking and a woman. That was the core of my being... Everything was all right, everything was all right. This happened on a special night. I got up in the morning, stood naked in front of the mirror looking at myself and thought, "I'm a Canadian, a woman – and a voter". (S 107-108)

The novel takes a twist when the male narrator becomes a woman. Like all women the narrator gets her first menstrual cycle. Her reaction is filled with horror and shock. "I know that it was coming, that it had to come, but to me it was like death; the oldest story in the world, yet still a surprise" (S 119). Though there is a physical change in the narrator's life, the mind has not adapted its sexual identity to the physical change. When the narrator becomes a woman, she is in a woman's body but still thinks like a man. So, the narrator is still attracted towards women. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler says human beings are divided into two groups, namely women and men. She goes on telling that feminists reject the idea that biology is destiny. She developed an account of patriarchal culture which assumed that masculine and feminine genders would inexorably be built, by culture, upon 'male' and 'female' bodies. Butler objects to sexual classification which echoes throughout in *Gender Trouble* where she deconstructs gay and lesbian identity as follows:

Such a consideration of psychic identification would vitiate the possibility of any stable set of typologies that explain or describe something like gay or lesbian identities. And any efforts to supply one ... suffer from

simplification, and conform, with alarming ease, to the regulatory requirements of diagnostic epistemic regimes. (27)

Though at the outset, the narrator's attraction to men is heterosexual behaviour, she feels it to be homosexual. For the first time, she kisses a man and thinks, "This is homosexuality. I'm a homosexual" (S 201). She is shocked and thrilled because she feels to be a man though her body has acquired feminine attributes. The narrator feels proud that he has transformed into a woman. When the first menstruation comes she feels, "I should be proud for I was now a woman" (S 119). "This messiness, this filth, this stench, this pain – once every month! THIS IS UNFAIR, COSMICALLY UNFAIR! No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, No! I want to be reincarnated as a mule, the last of my line" (S 119). Yet she felt lonely most of the time in her room while undergoing emotional crisis. "“Existential crisis” would be the name of the syndrome, but I will not dwell on it. Angst is not much of a peg to hang things on. We all go through it, we all cope with it, or try, so why talk about it?" (S 116). House keeper in the hostel, Pokrovski helps her to handle her menstrual problem. "Sex linked me to my body; exercise; extremes of temperature; hunger; sun in my face. My menstrual cycle had the opposite effect. I felt it happened to me, not with me. It emphasized to me how foreign and separate my body and I could be" (S 122).

The narrator, who has transformed physically into a woman, feels like a man and falls in love with Elena. Elena is in love with Jonathan so the narrator keeps her feelings hidden. Once again the narrator undergoes a psychological trauma. The narrator shows her mental agony by stamping the ground. It is said that the pain gets released when it is expressed. She cried for the unrequited love. "There is no pain so hard to imagine when

you're free of it, yet so real, so overwhelming, when it afflicts you, as that of unrequited love. It's simply unbearable ... I was sick with love, truly sick with it" (S 126). The narrator tries to change her mind but the pain of unrequited love remained strong.

It poisoned my life. Once, late at night, leaving the college library, I was so overcome with misery that I stamped the ground and the words "I am so unhappy!" burst out of me. They were said in such a strange voice, with so little restraint or modulation, that I was astonished. I stood still. For the duration of a few seconds expressing the emotion seemed to deal with it. The pain was out of me, floating in the air, catching onto the branches, infiltrating the bark of trees, seeping into the grass. But then I thought of Elena – saw her, felt her – and the pain rushed back in. (S 126)

The narrator felt that, the likeness of world got shrunk into the narrow ideas of love. So the narrator comes to the conclusion: "Towards the end of my second year I came to the conclusion that in all my life – I was nineteen at the time – I had had only two original ideas (discounting my early theory on love)" (S 127). The narrator feels so worried and tries to pacify her pain. "“Why is there pain?” “Why is there existence?” “Why is there God?” “Why is there anything?” Are these questions? Can one tango successfully with them?... I cannot accept this loss" (S 127). The statements behind pseudo-questions are due to fear, pain or bewilderment.

The narrator goes to Greece. She buries her thoughts by travelling from one place to another. There she meets Ruth, who was from Philadelphia. She is forty six years old. Ruth has nine years old son and two daughters as well as one stepson. Ruth is twice divorced. She divorced her first husband because he is a money- minded fellow. Her second husband is

her friend's husband. Her friend was caught or swept away by sea water. So out of pity she married her friend's husband. Her second husband is an alcoholic, so she divorced him. The narrator's relation with Ruth who is old enough to be her mother shows her insecurity after series of love failures. The narrator struggles with loneliness and lack of emotional connection with whoever she loves. She felt the world was right when she spent time with Ruth. They share something that they had never felt before, a special bond. They both have common sufferings in their life which makes them united. They travelled around Greece together. "She envied me. She even found me a little intimidating at first, she told me. She thought I was so smart, so daring. Such energy, so much enthusiasm. And I had travelled so much. And what a tragedy to have lost my parents like that" (S 140).

Later the narrator moved to Roetown to continue her studies in the University. Daniel, Karen, Martha, Sarah, Spanakopita all five took a house and they had their own room. Though they are different the only thing the five of them had in common is a feeling of being lost and confused, in varying degrees. Karen seemed to have sadness within him. The only thing that united all their life is unhappiness. The narrator feels it is happiness that was missing in her life and says, "I believe it was this lostness that prevented us from getting closer to each other" (S 169-70).

The narrator met Roger during a discussion of a novel. They start a relationship but the narrator is betrayed by Roger. She says, "To him I was no more than terrific sex. The passion suffused no further than his loins, certainly not to his heart – which is what he wanted to hide, this chasm between cold indifference and wild abandon, this lack of communication between what he felt and what he did" (S 230). She takes revenge upon the disdainful man by setting fire to his house and then leaves the water tap open. "A fire

is the only suitable punishment for a man with a cold, selfish heart. The worst he came back to was a house flooded with Congo water, with bloated floors that did not creak, for once, as he splash-splashed across them and up” (S 229).

The narrator starts a new relation with Tito while working as waitress in a hotel. Her relationship with Tito was comforting and makes her forget all her suffering that she had faced all through her life. “The word “Tito”, would trigger in me a pulse of happiness, a rippling wave that flooded my system” (S 254). Her heart ponders over the time she had spent with Tito. She counts the days they were together. Her real life is supplemented with imaginary life. She delves in imagination all the time to forget the bitter incidents of the past. She concentrates upon the sweet events of present and dreams about the hopeful incident of the future. “I thought of Tito all the time, of our 8008 precious moments together.... In the feeble realm of my imagination, everything went on as before, the future was still on.” (S 320)

All of a sudden everything collapsed when she was attacked by a stranger in her apartment. The final events are printed in parallel columns. In the left is the description of the brutal event and in the right the narrator’s psychological reaction to it. One of the key turning points in the novel is this rape. The author compares rape with Holocaust. Holocaust is acknowledged brutality whereas rape is not. Rape is rarely discussed in public discourse and hardly appears in fiction. The incident makes her psychologically imbalanced. The world becomes strange for her. She started to suspect people around her. She started checking all the windows over and over and kept a knife in her hand because of persistent fear. She underwent all kinds of psychological and emotional sufferings include

fear, anxiety, panic, depression, and loss. Once again the voice came into her head and announced, “The day would become an ordeal, a trap of five senses and one voice inside my head, a voice that never shut up, only sometimes changed languages” (S 316). She is afraid to express her anger, even in her dreams. She started hating men. “The world is Pandora’s box and my eyelids are its lid: every time I blink, evil and horror escape the world and jump in through my eyes. The simple truth is. I am afraid of men” (S 322).

Self-identity is essentially a social product arising out of experience with people around. It refers to the experience of personal well being. Self-identity is about our perception about us through our own experience, reflection and feedback from others. Self-identity comprises of a set of human attitudes, beliefs, values, habits, abilities, ideas, thoughts, outlooks of a person. Self-identity is developed through the children’s interaction with people and their environment from the acceptance or rejection in a given situation. An individual’s identity is shaped to a great extent during infancy and early childhood.

The narrator’s journey through different stages of personality development and sexual identity is discussed in the novel. Martel focuses upon exploring the concept of sexual identity in this novel. Sexual identity is related to physiological and psychological condition. The narrator’s self-identity or personality is the essential part of his nature which makes him different from everyone and everything in this world. Foucault says people with marginalised sexual identities are victims of the operation of hegemonic power, produced by the very same rigid social structures. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault says,

For two centuries now, the discourse on sex has been multiplied rather than rarefied, and if it has carried with it taboos and prohibitions. It has also, in a more fundamental way, ensured the solidification, it has also, in a more fundamental way, ensured the solidification and implantation of an entire sexual mosaic. (53)

Martel uses the concept of physical change in the narrator's life to show more clearly and effectively the psychological perspective of identity crisis. Physiology and psychology coordinate to establish a person's personality. The narrator becomes a woman but keeps thinking like a man and is attracted to women. Though her new attraction to men is heterosexual, the narrator feels guilty. The narrator keeps changing the conceptualisation of his own gender-identity. Yann Martel in his interview on Sabine Sielke says, "Everyone has multiple identities. Because it is a big, complicated world, we tend to simplify our identity, forgetting that all of us all the time are wearing many, many hats. Yet we tend to meet only one otherness at a time" (20).

In the second half of the twentieth century the concept of identity has been problematised by such theorists as Louis Althusser, Sigmund Freud, Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault. Gender does not happen once when the baby is born, gender identity is created due to repeated action. The term gender is used in different disciplines such as sexual psychology, psychoanalysis, social psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology and feminist philosophy. One of the eminent theorists of psychoanalysis is Jacques Lacan. In his well known theory 'Mirror stage' he proposed that the human child between six to eighteen months acquires the concept of the self upon seeing his image in the mirror. Jacques Lacan's 'The mirror stage' locates the beginnings of identity

from the moment when the infant identifies with his or her image in the mirror, perceiving himself or herself as whole, as what he or she wants to be. The self is constituted by what is reflected back by a mirror, by the mother and by others in social relations. Lacan says,

We have only to understand the mirror stage/ as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image- whose predestination to this phase effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term images” (Mirror 503)

Mirror stage is the beginning of an infant’s self-awareness. The infant identifies itself as a loose collection of body parts until it sees its reflection in the mirror and thus identifies itself as a complete individual. The infant who cannot control its own body, derives a sense of pleasure from the ‘other’ person in the reflection. Paradoxically, while the infant identifies itself with the reflection in the mirror, it is also alienated from it. The child develops a sense of rivalry with the mirror image and this rivalry continues into adulthood. This is because the child sees the image as a flawed representation of its actual self. The mirror stage helps the child to develop a sense of identity. In Lacan’s words:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressures pushes precipitously subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an “orthopedic” form of its totality- and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity. (Ecrits 78)

The child starts to identify itself as a complete being during the mirror stage. It also starts to feel a sense of hostility towards the image that is representing itself. Sean

Homer says, “From the moment the image of unity is posited in opposition to the experience of fragmentation, the subject is established as a rival to itself” (26). Homer then takes it a step further by saying, “The same rivalry established between the subject and him/herself is also established in future relations between the subject and others” (26).

The mirror plays a prominent role as the novel progresses. The narrator sees his own reflection in the mirror. When he happens to see his first look at himself in the mirror, he finds enchantment in his own way. The narrator’s self-identity sinks into alienation and conflict because of his transformation to a ‘woman’. The narrator sees himself as a unified being for the first time when he recognizes himself in the mirror. He sees his transformation in the mirror’s reflection. At first, he doesn’t identify with his reflection at all. Later, he realizes that the image that he sees in the mirror is his own. This reaction can be compared to that of a child who derives pleasure from his own image. The narrator asks,

Do children look into mirrors? Do they look at themselves, beyond checking that their unruly hair has that degree of tidiness demanded by a parent? I didn’t. Of what interest was a mirror to me? It reflected me, a child – so what? I was not in the least bit self-conscious. The world was far too vast a playground to waste any time looking at part of it reflected, except perhaps to make funny faces, two fingers pulling down the lower eyelids, one pushing up the nose. (S 10-11)

Just as the infant identifies itself for the first time as a disconnected collection of body parts, the narrator also looked at his body. The narrator’s emotional reactions are

intense and sudden during his childhood years. He thinks that the world is the way he sees it. He has discovered that things that happen around the world are explained by rules.

“Childhood, like wisdom, is an emotion” (S 11). During his early years he perceives things with his eager eyes.

During the narrator’s childhood, he always looked at things eagerly with his large eyes but was unaware of his needs. Feelings are registered deeply in his early years. Fish and water is the recurrent theme in this novel. Fish is compared to the narrator’s eye balls and the white cortex to the water. He buries his emotions under his eyes just as fish hides in the water. As a child he is not interested in his own body or face or colour. For him eyes are just to see things around the world, with his huge eager eyes he captures whatever he sees. The narrator mentions, “As if, paradoxically, I were then nothing but a huge eager eye, an emotional eye, looking out, always looking out, unaware of itself” (S 11). Lacan argues in ‘The Mirror stage’ that the formation of the ego begins with the infant’s perception of his or her body as a stable reflection, a reflection which becomes internalized as the ego. Lacan says that “The ego is an ideological illusion. Identity is fracture and no stability is possible” (Ecritis 36). Thus the narrator’s quest for identity starts right from his childhood.

Freud, the father of psychoanalytic theory categorized human personality into three-part structure- id, ego and super ego. The personality of an individual evolves through continuous struggle between the individual’s attempt to get satisfaction of his own inborn instincts and his co-ordination with the environment in which he lives. In Freud’s view all human beings are born with basic instincts i.e sex and aggression which need immediate fulfilment but they cannot directly express those because of the rules and

realities of the society. The narrator is in love with girls, but because he has been socialized by his parents and by society, he knows that he cannot go directly to her and express his love for her. Hence he plans to meet her privately, develops a close relationship with her for some period of time and attempt to attain her love. So the narrator learns to compromise between instinct and reality from his childhood.

The human mind is functioned on the three levels of awareness: conscious, preconscious and unconscious. Conscious refers to the perception, thoughts, emotions and feelings existing in a person's awareness. Preconscious is not immediately accessible to awareness. The unconscious affects id, ego and the super ego. Some ideas, memories, feelings or motives which are disturbing are repressed from consciousness. The unconscious deals with process of suppressing a thought or desire. This repression is also responsible for dreams. The narrator is motivated to fulfil his immediate pleasure. This drive for fulfilling his pleasure leads to a clash between him and the society. He finds happiness in looking at the pictures of women in the magazine. "A boy suffering from pictorio-sexual bulimia" (S 78). In order to get rid of his loneliness he started watching movies and reading books.

No longer an enemy but the companion of my lonely hours – there were my furtive minutes of ecstasy, there were all the moments of anguish, idleness and discovery that make up adolescence, but I would say that my busyness took none of my time, for the one thing that truly consumed me was emotions – and my consistent approach was to shy away from the greatest source of these emotions. (S 78)

The narrator forgets Sonya by spending his time looking at the naked picture of girls printed in the magazines. He is afraid that his parents should not discover his secret activity yet he continues the same to satiate his needs for pleasure. “Thus was I introduced to that poisonous Western concept: the beautiful female body.... I was always in mortal fear of being found out by my parents, so it was a secret, paranoid activity, performed with my ears cocked for the least signal of their unexpected early return from work” (S 77). He has to incorporate the societal code by which he is raised therefore there is a continuous conflict between his instincts and expected behaviour. Societal values internalized in him produces anxiety and so he learns to hide his instincts.

Id is the innermost core of the personality which is closely linked to the biological process. Id seeks immediate satisfaction of inborn instinctual wishes like sex or aggression without the considerations of any logical or rational thinking. Id is also known as the “pleasure principle” (Guerin 129). To reduce tension the Id forms an internal image or hallucination of the desired object. The narrator often imagines a girl in order to overcome his tension.

The Id is the influence of heredity, the superego the influence, essentially of what is taken from other people – whereas the ego is principally determined by the individual’s own experience, that is by accidental and contemporary events. To this three tiered division of the psyche Freud associates three psychological qualities- the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious. (Singh 170)

The Ego has direct connection with the external world. The ego is oscillating between external world and the internal instinctual need of id. Hence id, the image must

meet the ego, the real object. The ego is also known as the reality principle which needs to test reality in the appropriate object. “Whereas the Id is governed solely by the pleasure principle, the ego is governed by the reality principle” (Guerin 130). The ego seeks for the logical thinking and appropriate planning for execution of the wishes related to id.

The super ego is the conscience. Super ego is known as the “morality principle” (Guerin 131). Super ego is also known as self-control as it mediates between right and wrong. When the id seeks pleasure and the ego tests reality, the superego expects perfection. The narrator’s excess amount of stress reflects in the narrator’s psychological distress.

“Freud attributes the development of the super ego to the parental influence that manifests itself in terms of punishment for what society considers to be bad behaviour and reward for what society considers good behaviour” (Guerin 131).

Freud categorized his personality theory around psychosexual stages. It is classified into the oral stage, the anal stage, the phallic stage, the latency stage and the genital stage. The pleasure derived from all those stages is called ‘libido’ or the sexual instincts. In each psychosexual stage the libido is focused on some characteristic which affects further development. The oral stage starts from birth to eighteen months. During this period child will be dependent upon others for its needs. The mouth is the source of pleasure for them. The child indulges himself into sucking, biting or chewing. The child gets a sense of attachment and is not able to differentiate the self from the person on whom he is dependent. The narrator feels “A hot burst of love, adoration, worship, tenderness, for my sweet mother” (S 4).

The anal stage starts from eighteen months to three years. During this stage the id is slowly brought under the control of the ego. The pleasure shifts from mouth to anal region. Toilet training is given during this period. Internal conflicts about withholding and retentiveness will reflect the person's unresolved problems in toilet training. The novel starts with the mother's giving toilet training to the child.

I awoke and my mother was there. Her hands descended upon me and she picked me up. It seems I was mildly constipated. She sat me on my potty on the dinning-room table and set herself in front of me. She began to coo and urge me on, running her fingers up and down my back. (S 1)

The Phallic stage starts from three years to six years. During this stage masturbatory stimulation and the observation of distinction between the gender and sex is formed. The narrator loves Noah during this age. Children are very expressive; they do not know to hide their real emotions under fake expression. The narrator being a child, he is unaware of his sex. He tells his mother that he has fallen in love with Noah, his classmate, a boy without knowing that a boy cannot be a wife. He tells, "I have no idea why I fell in love with Noah Rabinovitch...Memories sometimes a distant spectator which can name emotions but not convey them" (S 20). Though, on the outside they appeared and behaved like no more than best friends, but he felt that wonderful, sizzling feeling of love.

The latency stage starts from six years to twelve years. Children of this age show a distinct preference for the same-sex relationships. Human beings have a fundamental need for group life and for close relationship. His lack of close friends and broader social contact brings the emotional discomfort or distress known as loneliness. It begins with an

awareness of his separation from Noah. The narrator feels empty, isolated, deprived and distanced from others. These feelings cause havoc to his emotional well-being. He is traumatized after the separation of Noah as he shifts to a new school. He felt he is alone in this world after being separated from Noah. Noah disappeared from his life suddenly and this was his first psychological crisis.

The narrator asked his mother pointing out the car whether this is male or female. She replied that male and female apply only to living things and further clarified that the car is just a machine and so it has no sex. Again he asked his mother whether a tree is a male or female. She told that only things that are alive and move have sexual identity. Later, he discovered with pleasure the slow, sexuality of nature and understood that trees and flowers also make love to reproduce. In a series of thought-provoking inquiries he gets the information needed regarding sexual identity. Later his mother explains, “There were in fact only *two* sexes, not infinite numbers” (S 21).

“Female and male? Is
that all? Even on other
planets?

“We’re only on this
planet, love. We’re only on
planet Earth.” (S 26)

The narrator begins to use the contextual information found in his everyday experiences to understand his own sexuality. He thus understands the casual complexities of his self-identity throughout his childhood years. One day while he is playing in the garden

he finds a worm. He asks his mother about its sex. To his surprise she tells it is both male as well as female. "I carried away this miracle of the universe. Every time the words occurred to me- "Both male and female!" – I was amazed anew" (S 28). He cuts the worm into very small pieces with a sharp knife, trying to find their sex organs. He feels incredible that a living organism could be both male and female. Next he did his research with snail, ants, small turtles, spiders, slugs, frogs, and toads. All these creatures have the universal emotion. "I'm going to die, I don't want to die. I'm going to die, I don't want to die" (S 30).

He committed all these atrocities in solitude, without delight. He says "Each cruelty, each final spasm of life, resonated in me like a drop of water falling in a silent cave" (S 30).

Though he is interested in the sexual identity of other living things he was unaware of his own sexual identity. For him, "It was the organ with which I urinated, a casual part of my identity, *c'est tout*" (S 26).

The genital stage starts from twelve years to twenty years. This genital stage is the maturity stage. He is capable of genuine love and sexual satisfaction. Libido is reawakened; sexual maturity is attained and is structured by social norms. He expresses his series of love emotion one after another. The image of eyes is the recurrent symbol in this novel, because emotions are expressed through eyes. "It has only happened to me twice in my life: I could hardly see her for the fish in my eyes" (S 40). Again at the age of ten he was in love with Mary Ann, his classmate. They both were friends and they both played all the time. The friendship ends when Mary says that she loves her friend Paul. "As I buried the fish, I said to myself over and over, to the point of stupefaction, "There is no love, there is no love, there is no love. With a vengeance, in the cool, dark

soil, I meant to bury the fish in my eyes” (S 44). He believed to have buried his love under the sand in the garden.

The psychological pain he underwent after each love failure was unbearable. “This pain, the pain of unrequited love, occurred at such regular intervals during my childhood and adolescence that I don’t care to write about it. It was a terrible and continuous pain and there was no deflecting it, only bearing it” (S 45). Again in his school in Paris he was attracted towards Gora. Later he loved Sonya, his school mate and she reciprocated his love. “I felt no frustration over this since I still did not make the connection between the human and the ecstatic. They ran parallel” (S 75). He becomes sick of love failures.

Once again he feels the pain of separation from his loved one, when Sonya leaves him abruptly. Sonya’s father got promotion and she has to move to British Columbia. They both cried openly and made plans for the future, he felt completely lost. After the loss of Sonya he searches for happiness to get away from his loneliness. He started reading play boy magazines in the basement. “For this was exactly the impact they had on me – an explosion. As I reached for the closest one, feeling like Ali Baba as he entered the den of the forty thieves, Sonya faded from my memory” (S 77). He cries in his room. He becomes aggressive with his parents and isolates himself from them. He wanders about the house, the neighbourhood, the city, but finds nothing to make him happy.

The narrator was psychologically traumatized and depressed after the sudden death of his parents. This psychologically distressing event results in an abnormal human experience and prolonged stress response which leads to trauma. His parents died in the air crash leaving him alone in this world. “Not fifteen minutes after leaving Havana the

plane was a ball of fire crashing into the Gulf of Mexico. Such is the intrusion of the tragic, when one becomes aware of the turning wheels of life. But I am getting ahead of myself' (S 8).

After his parents death it is he who has to take care of himself. He felt alone in this world. The narrator is mentally and physically devastated. He feels lonely after his parents' death. The psychological trauma subtly induced his biological transformation. It works through the exposure of multiple body systems due to excess amounts of stress hormones. The sudden death of his parents and his sorrow is reflected in his emotions and inarticulated yearnings all through his life.

His parents provided him with economic as well as social security and provided him moral support. They had shaped his perceptions about himself. The circumstance of his parents' death affects him intensely. When he lost his parents he felt a range of emotions ranging from emptiness to loneliness. He remains aloof with grief and tears. He has to cry for his parents' death, but he did not do it. Instead he kept his grief under his conscious level. "All of them expected me to burst into tears. But I strove to show them that I could handle it, that I wouldn't cry because I was an adult" (S 91-92). "I burst into tears under the head of a hot, noisy shower a number of times, but mostly I relegated my grief to the dark basement of my consciousness, there to swim about and have the effects that Freudians will delight in surmising" (S 95). After his parents death he moved from Mount Athos boarding school to Mount Athos orphanage.

In many ways I denied my parents' death. When one is an adult, one's parents' deaths are usually a slow, waning process, first one, then the other, and these are a painful reminder of one's own mortality. They are

death echoing death. But I was still fully imbued with that quite stupid, invincible thing called youth. My parents' sudden, foreign deaths struck me not as the tolling of a bell, but as another stage in my ever-expanding, metamorphic life. (S 94)

The adolescent period is a stressful period. It is centred on behaviour through which feelings and emotions are expressed. He comes across the most important physical change during this period. His physical change emotionally upsets him. The age of puberty makes him conscious about his body. Puberty is also the phase of sexual maturity. One aspect of sexual maturity is being curious about sex and also about bodies of people that they are attracted to. He felt stuck between retaining his childhood and wishing to transform into an adult. The age of puberty is considered as the age of trouble. This stage of adolescence is uncomfortable at times and would probably create their likes and dislikes. Adolescence is the stage in which the narrator struggles to fit in with his peers. In this adolescent stage children might perceive reality differently rather than what is perceived as appropriate by their parents and friends. During adolescence a person is neither completely an adult nor a child anymore, so puberty can potentially lead to uncertainty about self-identity.

Once where the idea of choice, real, personal choice, was introduced.

One where knowledge and confusion increased exponentially. One where notions such as success and failure, will and sloth, appearance and reality, freedom and responsibility, the public and the private, the moral and the immoral, the mental and the physical, replaced the simpler guiding notion of fun. At the centre of these changes was a new ache, that of sexual need,

and a new loneliness- deep, bottomless it seemed, pure torture. Puberty for me was a path unmarked by signposts or sudden illuminations. I thought I was the same as always, absolutely the same, until I realized that I no longer enjoyed playing with toys quite so much, or being with my parents all the time. (S 50)

Though in his childhood, the narrator is not bothered about looking at the mirror but in his adolescent age he wants him to look at the mirror often. His thought process changed. He discovered his body. He thinks that body and mind are interrelated. "I discovered my body. Till then my mental and physical selves had been in such harmony that I had never considered them separately, or as separable" (S 51). During puberty, since his body undergoes many changes, he becomes sensitive about his physical appearance. Adolescence makes a person to keenly observe body growth and they are very much sensitive about their appearance.

Solitude became a pleasure. There are certain moments of adolescence that are beyond the grasp of words... what I mean is, because of your youth and overarching vitality you have tricked life into overlooking you, and you have crept up on it from behind and you are near its heart and you can hear its heartbeat... a vague awareness during adolescence that vitality is outstripping comprehension. I monitored the growth of my body hair. (S 52)

He had a long hair upto his shoulder. "I'm not sure whether it was more the fashion of the time, the mid-seventies, or my parents' personal liking, but at that age I had rather long hair, nearly down to my shoulders" (S 59). Students in France did not mind about his hair style. He cut his hair short because it made him look manly.

During adolescence, he feels irritated quite easily, loses his temper or feels depressed. It is difficult for the narrator to comprehend the metamorphosis that begins at puberty. “At first, puberty was a physical phenomenon for me. It was a new hairiness, an awkward physical growth, a skin disease, the discovery of a secret pleasure. Only dimly did I realize that it was also a mental phenomenon. I barely noticed that a new universe slipped itself in front of my eyes” (S 50). Childhood experiences definitely have a strong influence on a person’s adult personality and behaviour.

The narrator started writing a novel in order to avoid loneliness. Gender identity of the narrator changes due to the psychological trauma caused by the sudden death of his parents. The narrator transforms into a woman biologically but wonders at his sexual attraction towards men. “I’m not sure why, as a woman, I began to desire men. After a moment of surprise it became a matter of feeling – and I acted upon that feeling, without reflection. It’s an odd thing to question desire” (S 183-84). The narrator started thinking about men. She never had desired men before. She tries to find out the reason for desiring men. She became vividly aware of male physique and symmetry, manner, smile, walk, hair etc. She scrutinized her memories, examining men in a new light. She started paying attention to men’s glances, those pestering glances that men give to women. She thinks she is homosexual, but a deviant one as she has a female physique with a male psyche.

Man and woman jointly contribute to this world. Man and woman constitute binary opposition based on biological opposites. It is believed that if there is presence there must be an absence likewise the opposition of light/ darkness, soul/ body, east/ west. The basic fundamental oppositions include good/evil, truth/ falsehood, masculinity/ femininity, thought/ feeling, mind/body. In western metaphysics, the first term in each of

these binary oppositions has been privileged. Likewise heterosexuality is authentic than homosexuality. By setting up a binary opposition, heterosexuality comes into the centre and marking other sexualities to the margins. Michel Foucault, the French historian denaturalizes the dominant understandings of sexual identity in *The History of Sexuality*.

Foucault's argument that sexuality is a discursive production rather than a natural condition is part of his larger contention that modern subjectivity is an effect of networks of power. Not only negative or repressive but also productive and enabling power is 'exercised from innumerable points' to no predetermined effect. (94)

The narrator's psychology is directly related to gender identity as male or female. Sexual orientation refers to an emotional or sexual attraction to men/ women or both sexes. According to Butler, there is no predetermined identity even in the biology of sex. In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler describes performativity as, "That reiterative power of discourse produces the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (2). But in general both men and women use gender norms in day to day behaviour without realizing it by using prefix of Mr. and Mrs. before their name. Judith Butler argues that neither gender nor sex is completely natural. They are naturalized by the belief of correct performance of their assigned sex and gender according to the norms of the society.

Yann Martel analyses the psychological trauma of people with subverted gender identities through the narrator's transformation from one to the other sexual identity and orientation. Identity is the essential quality that makes a person distinct from others. Biological identity is the source of one's distinct consciousness. In addition to emotional crisis, the narrator suffers from gender identity. His sufferings, longingness, loneliness,

mental agony, stress, pain erases all traces of happiness once he is aware of his unnatural gender identity which is a biological issue as well as a psychological problem. “Each time I was left with nothing, with only the terrible loop in my head” (S 325).

Queer theory is applied to analyse the character of the unnamed protagonist of this novel who seems to be abnormal biologically and faces abnormal condition psychologically. As Warner clearly puts: “Queer politics has not just replaced older modes of lesbian and gay identity; it has come to exist alongside these older modes, opening up new possibilities and problems whose relation to more familiar problems is not always clear” (xxvii). Yann Martel promotes the cause of social inclusion of people with ‘other’ sexual orientation, such as lesbian, gay, bisexuals and ‘other’ sexual identity such as transgender and intersexuals who are relegated to the margins of the society by representing their trauma in his literary creation.