Chapter -4

SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE MACHINE

_Sacred and Profane Love Machine_ can be called a novel of moral philosophy as it refers to man, his character, virtue, choice, motives and contingency. Like all Murdoch novels this one also shows us plurality of human nature and leaves us with it—an open ending; she doesn’t pass a judgement as truth for her characters is always deferred, postponed or short-lived; their epiphanic moments last but for a short period before they fall again in the illusory world; under the power of the unconscious which she calls machine in the novel’s title itself. This open-endedness ‘demands an active questioning response from readers’; makes them seek answers which are generally not available. The continual suspension of penance and understanding is what makes her novels pieces of lasting fascination. The machine like repeatability of characters, their moving to and fro in interstices of each other’s minds and life makes _Sacred and Profane Love Machine_ ‘a psychological novel’ also; it explores “mysterious reaches of psychic energy” (Dipple, 1982, 229). It can be read at a very simple superficial level as the story of a fantasy ridden man Blaise who runs two households; one with wife and other with mistress of nine years. At the same time serious readers can find many layers and levels of ideas of thoughts and actions of characters; with a moralistic or amoralistic vision. She has attempted to enter into the complex recesses of the human mind and projected the complicated aspects of the human personality.
Sacred and Profane Love Machine’s main theme is love-marriage triangle. Blaise, a psychiatrist has a 19 year old son with his legal wife Harriet and another son Luca who is 8 with his mistress Emily. Emily comes from a background of poverty and insecurity. She has no family, no money and no supporting social structure. She constantly complains to Blaise and asks him to set up a regular household with her and let Harriet try becoming the one who lives in a small flat and is visited when convenient. Blaise finally agrees to her demands and tells Harriet everything in a letter. Harriet, takes it with exceptional calm (which was unexpected by Blaise) and invites Emily to Hood House and even starts taking interest in welfare of Luca, the stepson. To the surprise of his parents Luca, also loves her back. The events so turn out that eventually Luca starts living with Harriet and Blaise with Emily. Harriet lives in pain, riding on it like a sea shares her feelings only with Monty and later tells Blaise in a letter about her feelings. Harriet having nobody to rely on after the revelation; dejected by all men Blaise, Monty, Edgar, her own son David and even the imaginary Magnes Bowles leaves for Germany to her brother, Adrian along with Luca. Harriet gets shot at the Hannover airport in a terrorist attack but manages to save Luca by shielding him with her body. The roles are shifted in the end much to the pleasure of Emily – who takes over the role of Blaise’s legitimate wife.

Parallel to this story is the story of Monty, a detective story writer who is both Blaise and Harriet’s confidant. He himself is struggling and meditates about his fruitless life and seeks to be a schoolmaster. He is unable to grieve his dead wife, whom he loved dearly and killed out of rage and jealousy as she constantly bragged about her
imaginary love affairs. He killed her as he could not “bear her consciousness” (SAPLM, 297). Monty comes to know after her death that all her affairs were sham. May be she just wanted to test his love. She was dying a slow painful death and Monty was unable to relieve her, he was so disgusted in the end that he totally avoided her; never used to go to her just like Bruno of Bruno’s Dream, for the entire world she dies of cancer. Now, he meditates about his fruitless life and thinks about becoming a schoolmaster.

The moral dilemma of Blaise is the centre of this story. When Luca is found in the garden of his legal home with Harriet, he decides to tell Harriet about Emily before she finds from some other means. It is a desperate attempt by him to save the situation and keep it under control. His only fear is Harriet, but then he thinks:

Men in other ages and society had been able to have two or many more women whom they kept incarcerated in separate places and visited when they felt in the mood. An elderly less loved wife could be retained as an amiable companion, or simply out of pity, and should feel no resentment at that. A man, any man, surely needed various women, there were so many possibilities and styles of love and affection and habit. Why should some of them automatically exclude the others? He led a double life. Did that make him a liar? He did not feel a liar. He was a man of two truths, since both these lives were valuable and true (SAPLM, 80).

His egoism and male superiority complex is quite visible from this train of thought. He and Emily share a physical relationship which the narrator refers as peculiar and strange. They share a kind of blind sexual love which justifies his “sin was an awful
private happiness blotting out all else; only it was not sin, it was glory, it was his
good, his very own, manifested at last.”(SAPLM, 72) When afterwards Blaise is
living with Emily in their new flat he feels “Intense mutual erotic love, love which
involves with the flesh all the most refined sexual being of the spirit, which reveals
and perhaps even ex nihilo creates spirit as sex.”(SAPLM, 261) His love for Emily is
purely physical whereas with Harriet it is more of a mental love, he feels at peace
with Harriet. One thing is clear that he feels justified of his double life and did not
want to disclose it to Harriet until Luca appears on his doorstep.

Blaise is one character who is selfish from beginning to the end of the novel. He
never wants to come out of his egoistic desires. He wants to control everybody in his
life. He is interested in ‘machinery of behavior’ of his patients. He has full control
over Harriet and Emily, as both of them are dependent on him. He finds his patients
“grubby grey contingent of predictable people”. He is not a qualified psychoanalyst
but a charlatan who started his therapy as a kind of experiment and “he enjoyed
power, all meddlers with the mind enjoy that” (SAPLM, 20). He enjoyed his
absolute power over Harriet, Emily and his patients. Blaise is a fantasizer who lacks
knowledge of what lies outside of his psychic machinery. He is controlled by his
mind machine which never runs out of fuel. The title of the novel is Blaise’s sacred
and profane love machine. He to fulfill his pervert sexual fantasies has kept Emily as
her mistress from last nine years. He cannot fulfill his dream to be a doctor as he
can’t stop Emily’s allowance so that it remains a secret from Harriet forever. He
blames Emily for this misfortune and resents for his lost goodness and virtue. Blaise
is a demeaning character who lies at the drop of a hat and keeps a check on both Emily and Harriet through Pinn, the informer. Blaise is unable to reform as he is not true in his confession also; he manipulates in resigning himself to Harriet which leads to chaos in everybody’s life. He doesn’t consider sin to be awful. He is a complete ‘Cambridge muddler’; when he is with Emily he wishes Harriet to die and when he is under Harriet’s overflowing ‘normal’ love he forgets Emily. His and Emily’s fantasy world made them live like gods together. There was complete ‘spiritual – physical grasp’ of each other. But ‘erotic-love is never still’ and Emily eventually started asking questions. He had put Harriet as fat, elderly and ‘no longer loved’; Emily called her ‘Mrs. Placid’. Blaise and Emily never wanted a child – ‘a problem’. With Luca, their quarrels started, ending to painful mechanical arguments.

Their fights intensity increased with each passing Tuesday (their love-day). Emily now no longer wants to be ‘Queen of the Night but Queen of the day’. Blaise in the beginning of novel wants to escape this Putney madness and return to Hood House. The title of the novel directly relates to Blaise’s psychoanalytical state as observed by Dipple:

Blaise’s secretly powerful animal or sexual nature is opposed to his conscious moral behavior. He mourns for his lost goodness where a steady allegiance to Harriet would have held him, and indeed she carries in her person the qualities that he recognizes as morally vital – goodness, love of the conventional Christian God, generosity, forgiveness. Emily on the other hand, represents his interior self, and it is interesting that for him the sacred and profane are divided in coarse and simplified terms (1982,237)
Murdoch was influenced by Simon Weil’s philosophy. Both of them believe that unless human beings become good they are under the control of mechanical forces; the unconscious whose operation is undecipherable. Blaise’s life has machine like pattern because of his failure to achieve separation from his fantastical viewpoint of seeing others (Monty tells this to him). He never recognized or attended to external reality; is blinded by the self. His perception was always fogged with self-love and lack of ‘attention’. Blaise’s fantasies have damaged the lives of all his patients. They all felt well and left him after the ‘ghastly creep’ went through a series of life changing events (Harriett’s death, Blaise’s near death survival from hungry dogs). He first felt shocked at Harriet’s sudden death but came out of it too soon for his pleasures. “I will not allow this horror to lodge itself deep in me he thought. I will not let the abomination of death make a place in my life. I must immediately think about myself about my future, about how Emily will console me, about how I shall one day be happy … I will not think about Harriet’s sufferings they are over” (SAPLM, 339).

The little amount of guilt that he had is also gone with this and he becomes a selfish, hopeless mediocre person again. He never felt ashamed of his behaviour; When Harriet forgives him he becomes ecstatic “like a fat cat…glowing all over with satisfaction” and “could not keep a lunatic smile off his face” (SAPLM, 155). He was “amazed at his coolness” (SAPLM, 260) with the way he handled the situation; feeling he has done the right thing by leaving Harriet and thinks that she will get used to it. He under his machine, the unconscious was only thinking and entertaining
those moral ideas which made him justify his action. Justice and morality were far away words in front of his intense mutual erotic love which had blinded him; made it impossible for him to look at others. He is obsessed with the self which is such a dazzling object that if one looks there one may see nothing else as in Kantian sense.

This novel is a strong depiction of power and controlling needs of humans, “the ego in its quest for omnipotence easily and readily pictures itself in a world of its own making, a world of self serving fantasy”(Schweiker,1996,221).Harriet with her untested goodness, innocence, truthfulness and absolute obviousness is trying to behave in a morally dignified manner after knowing of Blaise’s affair; is actually under the power of unconscious, wants to enjoy the power which she is going to have now over Blaise and Emily; she will be in the lead now for the first time(which of course she does not realize).When the power game is reversed after the drawing room scene(revelation); Blaise chooses Emily and she realizes that she was never in control. Harriet becomes messy and ugly which earlier Emily was; a sign of lack of control in Murdoch. It is a switch over of places similar to Lisa and Diana of Bruno’s Dream. Harriet is the only character who matches the idea of goodness expounded by Murdoch. Initially, she lives through others, with Blaise and her son David. She wants to be ‘behind’ Blaise looking at the world through his eyes. She says she has “no other being, no other vision” (SAPLM, 29).She is floppy, empty, disjointed. And this was for her really a form of being happy. When circumstances change in her life she becomes ‘a person, an individual, something with edges’.
Blaise feels that Harriet suffers from “a sheer excess of undistributed love, like having too much milk in the breasts’ (SAPLM, 19). She herself “knew that she led a selfish life because all her otherness was too much a part of herself” (SAPLM, 16). She wants others also to reciprocate the love, the nurturing which does not happen. The childlike innocence natural to children is dangerous in the adult Harriet. She must grow up and Blaise’s revelation has given her power over him, she makes Blaise feel, “her will, her strength, her new strength, the strength he had made in her by this ordeal” (SAPLM, 150). Now Harriet becomes preoccupied with her and her mind like never before, she was aware that her whole mental being had altered. Harriet feels powerful as she thinks that her family needs her but she is the one who thrives on her family; her protective, forgiving, compassionate nature gives her a false illusion that they depend on her. She makes an attempt to be a new person but her powerlessness is shown again as she receives Blaise’s second letter telling her that he has decided to live with Emily. She feels devastated, “like a cloistered jungle native suddenly infected by the virus of civilizatoid, she kneeled over” (SAPLM, 270). Harriet’s innocence is destroyed by Blaise and Emily’s sexuality. Now, like David, she also has an adolescent sense of just starting out in the world, As if she were young and in anguish’ (SAPLM, 271). Now, she rejects Blaise and seeks to fulfill her ‘powerful loving nature’ in someone else. Harriet turns successively to Monty, Edgar and Blaise’s imaginary patient Magnus Bowles. Monty thinks that she is invading his life. Edgar also doesn’t reciprocate her love as he is promised by Monty (his first love) a visit and may be a stay at Oxford.
She contemplates at the airport about her past and realises that Blaise is the only one who needs her love and she will ultimately return to him. She thinks “the only escape from this is a kind of violence of which I am not capable” (SAPLM, 343) and “She has grown up” and will no longer be able to live innocently through others. She thinks “There is no great calm space elsewhere, where a tree stands between two saints and raises its pure significant head into a golden sky. What had seemed to be an intuition of freedom and virtue was for her simply a trivial enigma, an occasion for little meaningless emotion.” (SAPLM, 334) Harriet now finally knows where her future lies; with Blaise when suddenly an odd intrusion comes from the outer world. She dies in a terrorist attack at the airport waiting room-shielding Luca in her arms, with her body. For Harriet the reward for being virtuous is death. Murdoch wants to portray the messy and cumbersome nature of human life; just when the reader tries to come closer to understanding the book, ‘it unmask itself’. There is a ‘purposeful frustration of desires’ in Murdoch which Conradi calls “stubborn imperfection” (1986, 4) and Murdoch contingency.

In an interview conducted by Michael O’ Bellamy (1977) Murdoch exclaims “Real people are terribly odd, but of course they keep this secret. They conceal their fantasies. Obviously, people don’t tell most of the things that they think to anyone, not even their psychiatrists. Human beings are very odd and very different from each other. The novel is a marvellous form in that it attempts to show this”. The powerful bereaving Monty fits exactly into this description. He is searching for his true identity inspite of being a novelist; a fiction-maker. Like Blaise he also is a
fantasiser. His chief creation is Milo Fane, an adolescent, fantasized image of Monty first created as a defense against Monty’s mother. When young, Monty had decided that “he would not let his mother kill him, as it seemed that she might easily do, by the sheer intensity of her love, like a huge Sow rolling over on its young” (SAPLM, 112). Dorothy A. Winsor has observed that love is equal to killing in this novel. Adolescent David also feels claustrophobic with Harriet’s undaunting attention and love. “Monty’s mother is ‘eater-up’, a ‘taker-over’. So Monty created Milo, ‘a remorseless Killer ‘in whom Monty could live in this Kill-or-be-killed world, inspiring ‘terror’ in his mother and giving him an unholy sense of power” (Winsor, 1983, 406). He killed his wife Sophie; unable to kill his mother, he took his revenge by killing Sophie. Now, Monty wishes to shed his Milo Fane image, the alter ego and come to terms with a reality separate from him. He wishes to stop writing and become a school teacher, whose simple duties would keep him away from his fantasies. In the past Monty had somewhat achieved a possibility of goodness through his love for Sophie, who was ‘hopelessly foreign, alien, unjustifiable, unassimilable’.

She was a separate being, the other whom he wanted to possess but could not due to his jealousy and ultimately he choked her to death as she lay dying of cancer. He killed her, he tells Edgar as he could no longer stand her consciousness, “because she maddened him.” (SAPLM, 296) He had thought that Sophie’s death would “enlighten him in a sort of spiritual orgasm” (SAPLM, 39) but it leaves him with ‘horror of her absence’ and an awful separateness. What he expected from her death
and couldn’t find, he seeks the same in the boring schoolmaster life. Monty knows that by taking this teaching position, he will separate himself and thus protect others from “his demonism combined with his intellectualism in the person of Milo Fane, the ironical, disillusioned diminished man of power.” (SAPLM, 37) He decided to say farewell to his sardonic alter ego which he had externalized in this detective. Another refuge that Monty seeks is meditation which leads him nowhere. “All his spiritual efforts had been mere adventures ending in fright and muddle”. (SAPLM, 32). Edgar’s intervention finally makes a change in Monty’s disposition; he feels almost human. Confessing to Edgar helps Monty to stop his suffering. Now he no longer mourns Sophie but feels that “she is part of him forever” (SAPLM, 325). He feels a false sense of freedom when he tells Harriet about his imaginary creation Magnus’ suicide. Magnus was produced to help Blaise in his weekly outings with Emily. But this freedom becomes real when he tells Edgar “I am blind and lame” (SAPLM, 299). These are signs of goodness in Murdoch as they imply ‘humility and castration’. Monty felt relieved after sharing his ghastly secret with Edgar; it’s rejuvenating for him; he again makes a contact with the outside world, answering letters and repairing his phone line. He makes love to Kiki St.Loy, goes to Italy to stay with Richard Nailsworth— the actor who played Milo and tells Edgar that he “may even produce another Milo Story” (SAPLM, 366).

Monty and Harriet are self-conscious people; capable of unselfing. They are struggling against others, for separation or domination which both of them acquire by the end of the novel. Murdoch in an interview with Sarjerao Sagare (1999) said
that fundamental thing in a great novel is showing a ‘kind of moral vision’ which she is able to show well through both Harriet and Monty. Both of them refuse to exercise power over other characters in the end which is a sure sign of having a moral bent in Murdoch. Through Monty it is shown that life has to be lived and experienced (he rejected the idea of suicide). Although he doesn’t emerge into the light from Plato’s cave; he is brought out from his past guilt into the present through his experiences with Edgar. Harriet comes out from the cave through self-introspection (unselfing) at the Hannover airport. Monty is the image of illusion in *Sacred and Profane Love machine*. He is Mephistopheles personified. He says “I don’t really exist” (SAPLM, 291) and “his master was a sorcerer” (SAPLM, 32). He is thought of as a character of wisdom and insight to whom other characters turn for advice but in reality he is also a ‘muddler’ as brilliance and ignorance go hand and hand in Murdoch. Monty is a best-selling writer, who inspires millions, is also struggling to get personal things sorted. He is a mess inside just like Edgar (oxford Professor – Scholar) who has written innumerable books on logic, mathematics and variety of subjects but thinks he is ‘retarded’. Monty is a shoddy artist, who had ‘the artist’s capacity to cheat’. He is trying to find answers in his own intelligent muddling way. He tries meditation but to no respite.

Even Murdoch in an interview with Bellamy (1977) said that Monty did not get much out of Buddhism. He calls it ‘unBritish rubbish’. He believes that “this business of trying to get rid of the ego often seemed idiocy” (SAPLM, 124). He like all other intelligent muddlers of Murdoch is confused and ambivalence rules him, “it
might be perfectly true that there was no deep sense in things, that nothing and no one had real dignity and real deserving, that ‘the world’ was just a jumble and a rubble and a dream, but was it not supreme cheating to make this senselessness seem to be the very essence of one’s being?” (SAPLM, 125). Self Love is the first step which leads to understanding others. This realization never comes to Monty. He has a false vision and things appear to him as he wishes them to be; other people are a means for him. He is full of ‘crucial puzzles’ when he is meditating and ponders:

Spirit, after all can provide a much more durable holiday from morality than sin ever can. What was he seeking, truth or salvation or goodness? Sometimes it seemed to him that these roads diverged absolutely and only conceivably came together at some end point which he would never reach. Sometimes he felt as if he was simply seeking knowledge, or, more simply still, power (SAPLM,124).

He never opened up to anybody. Once, he tried talking with Blaise but to no success; he found out that Blaise is a theoretical analyst; ‘a stupid posing false face’. One commendable thing about Monty is he knows who he is. He understands his self, he is full of vanity, pride, despair, but he doesn’t want to come out of it. He tried once and failed. His confession to Edgar relieved him of his moral burden and his love and sympathy eased him. Monty knew that Edgar’s frivolities would irritate him and he could harm him, so he leaves for Italy to be a different person and says “almost all one’s thoughts about oneself are simply vanity… the attempt to attach interest and importance to what has none” (SAPLM, 359). Monty and Harriet are the only ones in
Sacred and Profane Love Machine who recognize their true nature: Harriet understands where her future lies; Monty will still be muddling.

Edgar Demarney, Oxford don and renowned scholar is another Murdochian intellectual muddler. Initially, he seems just as mediocre as Blaise; solipsistically involved with himself; making him not only morally bankrupt but also entangled in a net of slavery and delusion. He was in love with Sophie and he loved Monty from college days. He comes grieving to Monty’s house looking for his letters to Sophie; thousands of them which he had written telling her everything about himself. But, his love both for men and women is always unrequited, he feels:

I’m the most frustrated man in the northern hemisphere. I have got semen running out of my ears. Oh God, I’m talking quite ordinarily, aren’t I, as if – and she’s dead – thank God for drink. Getting through time has always been my problem. I’m always more or less sizzled now, only nobody notices – at least I hope they don’t – I never get quite sober – if I did I’d be screaming … I’m such a wet, such a failure. (SAPLM, 46).

Edgar lives in the past; he has kept all letters of Monty, and Sophie since college. He even remembers minutest details of each conversation held. He is a muddler groping in dark, when asked by Monty about his religious beliefs. He says “Well, I go, I tag along, I don’t know what I believe” (SAPLM, 49). He believes that Monty has some kind of fateful control over his life and destiny. He lacks structure and separate definition. He tells Monty that “You’ve got hardness in you, a centre. I’m
soft all the way through... May be I’m retarded, yes, that’s it, retarded” (SAPLM, 47). His retardation is like Harriet’s innocence; her living for others. He loves everybody in a pre-sexual way. He loves the Smalls. He was content only in loving Sophie and not possessing her. He now wants to love Harriet. He needs love, is full of love but there is not even a single taker for his love. No sooner he meets Harriet he says “I know quite a lot about love. Don’t you worry? Just let me love you.” (SAPLM, 119). It is Edgar who brings about Harriet’s revelation; helps her come out of her goodness which is pretence for others. His deluded speech at the party is the turning point in Harriet’s life. He says:

Because you are good you think that you can save them, but it is they who will defile you. You must not assent to what is wrong that is not what the Gospel requires. You are a believer in Christian marriage. One must be in the truth and you are not. You must come away so that he can see what he has done. As it is he sees nothing. This is a lie, this man’s lie, and he must live it and undo it. But you have put him in a position where he cannot stop lying. No one here, not even you, is good enough to redeem this thing. They will not tolerate your forgiveness, in the end they will hate you for it, they will go on intriguing as they have always done, they will not even be able to help it, and you will find too late that you have not been a healer but an accomplice of evil. He must decide, he must choose, that is where he has put himself. He has not acknowledged his fault, he is continuing in it, and you will be eternally his victim, abandoning him to wicked ways and conniving at his sin. For his sake you must not allow this foul thing to continue...Don’t you see that you are putting him in a situation where he simply can’t help lying to you? You have not required the truth of him. You must require him to decide. Vague tolerant pity is not true kindness here. You are trying to spare yourself (SAPLM, 210-11).

Harriet cries for the first time and starts to feel the reality of the situation. She is shaken out of her good dream world; from the power of unconscious. She now
comes to fully understand “the sheer awfulness of the situation” (SAPLM, 213) and the power that she felt in herself of controlling the lives of Emily, Blaise and Luca fades away. She realizes it “was beyond her will and beyond the will of others too” (SAPLM, 214). Edgar’s speech is a realization not only for Harriet but for Emily and Blaise too. They both decide to stay together and forsake Harriet. Edgar once again comes to Harriet’s rescue and asks her to marry him. She rejects him as she wants solace in Monty. One of the main concerns of this novel is forgiveness. Although Harriet is the one who seems to be forgiveness personified. It is Edgar who forgives and in facts forgets, which is true forgiveness. He is a jester who never seems to be affected by people’s misbehaviour especially Monty. Monty humiliates him innumerable times but he keeps on loving him. He is a totally devoted person, he attaches himself to Harriet too soon, to bring her out of her grief; he is a consoler who consoles Harriet, Monty and David too. He asks Monty not to be secretive, ferocious; ‘petty, small minded and cowardly’. It is to Edgar; Monty tells that he killed Sophie when Edgar intuitively asked him. After Monty’s confession Edgar thinks that he can control Monty. He becomes selfish and sees the possibility of his love coming truly to him. He rejects Harriet when she comes to him after Monty’s dejection. To his horror Monty rejects him once again and Mockingham (it has become a joke true to its name); “Monty’s final piece of frightfulness” (SAPLM, 359). He falls in trap of guilt which was once Monty’s “If he had taken Harriet to Mockingham then she would still have been alive now. I preferred a ghost to reality, he thought: and yet I could not then have abandoned Monty, he held me in grip of steel. O rapacious ruthless ghost” (SAPLM, 360). The novel ends with Edgar’s
throwing away the letters he had written to Sophie in fire at Locketts. He bids goodbye to the past – the past obsessed with Monty and looks forward to being visited by three handsome, good looking women; Kiki St. Loy, Constance Pinn and Mrs. Small and realizes that “Monty is simply a chap with his own troubles, a chap just like me after all ... He is not the dear awful monster ... He is an ordinary human fellow with his muddles and his needs” (SAPLM, 366). He consoled and comforted David after Harriet’s death by stating that he should forgive and be merciful to his father and Emily even though they hurt him. He becomes a moral support for David and shows him the way to live his life happily with:

All human solutions are temporary...One has to live in one’s own little local world of religion mostly. For nearly everyone religion is primitive. We hardly ever get beyond the beginning any more than we do in philosophy. If it’s natural for you to cry out “Christ help me!” Cry it and then be quiet. You may be helped...I mean just that one’s ordinary tasks are usually immediate and simple and one’s own truth lives in these tasks. Not to deceive oneself not to protect one’s pride with false ideas, never to be pretentious or bogus, always to try to be lucid and quiet. There’s a kind of pure speech of the mind which one must try to attain. To attain it is to be in truth, one’s own truth, which needn’t mean any big apparatus of belief. And when one is there one will be truthful and kind and able to see other people and what they need. (SAPLM, 351)

Murdoch has chosen to end the novel with Edgar and his thinking about the “innocent frivolous unimportant happiness once again in the world”(SAPLM,364) to remind the reader that our lives are bound to be full of upheavals and downfalls but the basic human nature is to come out of it and find joy in what is available. Through
her novels she presents the serious and the comic together; they are sides of one coin in life and so in her fiction. The most important thing which Murdoch wants to tell through Edgar is about evil – “a central necessary recognition must be that evil lies within the self.” (Dipple, 1982, 197) and freedom can be acquired by self-forgetfulness. As we become less addicted to our own needs, drives and desires and start including others; looking at them with love, we grow spiritually and creatively which is an important aspect of personal well being. Through this novel Murdoch is suggesting that we are responsible for our actions, quality of thoughts and states of mind.

Identity crisis is also one of the central aims of this novel and it is fully exploited in David; all characters are struggling for a stable identity but it is made openly visible through David; adolescent turning into adult. The novel opens with David’s crisis, he feels drawn away from his mother and father in the beginning and as the novel progresses he moves towards sex, which is a kind of permanent separation from both his parents and innocence. The highway that is being built across the meadows near David’s home represents his emerging sexuality. The road gradually gets constructed as the novel progresses and is open for people at end, which coincides with his sexual independence. Whereas Blaise and Harriet regard the road as a civilized spoiler of nature, David likes it. After learning of his father’s double life, he visits the unused highway, lies down upon it and is consciously aware of his life spoilt by his father’s sexual guilt. He somehow relates to this highway. The spoiling of his life can be described by the effect the road has on the countryside. “How irrevocably
spoilt, down to its minutest detail, his world was now. Even the countryside was
spoilt the animals, the buels, the flowers” (SAPLM, 198). He has now become aware
that this separation is leading him to desire for both ‘violence and sex’.

In Murdoch’s novels sex and violence are always compared as both are attempts at
personal domination. “No one from now on forever would know…What it was really
like him” (SAPLM, 199). David’s sexual initiation happens through Constance Pinn,
Emily’s charwoman and roommate when he refuses to go to Germany with his
mother; it is final severing of ties with his mother. In reality he achieves a limited
separate identity in his body through sex. This is the ‘profane’ sex which results in
temporary salvation; a lull before the storm. Just before his sexual encounter with
Pinn, David had passed the newly opened highway which is his transition towards
sexuality and he sees a dead hare which implies the death of his natural innocence.
His belief in saviour Jesus which was his major source of happiness also diminishes
and finally vanishes with his growing adulthood and muddleness.

Each character has its own working machine; the unconscious whose basic nature is
to fulfill desires and find happiness. Their relationships also work on this principle.
The illusory worlds of characters mingle, ‘their machines are constantly stimulating
each other’s machine’. Emily and Pinn live together, are selfish, want to live in
 riches and don’t have moral scruples. Pinn cunningly takes over Emily, from
charwoman to confidant; usurps her job and works as a spy on her for jealous Blaise.
She wants to make love to Montague Small, the celebrity instead has sex with young David and wants to go to Oxford to meet Edgar. Pinn-the phenomena (SAPLM, 186) tells David “people get in awful messes…life is a series of messes…falling in love can’t be avoided and has to be forgiven” (SAPLM, 234). Seemingly, she is Emily’s friend and Blaise’s spy but her deep desire is to see them fail. She wants to avenge her wronged mother and brother; her dad used to batter both of which the former died and the latter became a vegetable for life. Her father remarried and doted on the new family. Pinn sees her father’s image in Blaise and wants to hurt him. She lures David with a promise of making him friends with beautiful Kiki. Having handsome, ‘film star’ like David; she has had her revenge from Blaise, Monty (who refused her earlier) and unconsciously from her father as well.

Emily on the other hand is not a victim of Blaise (as thought by Harriet) but a partner in crime. Her sole aim is to have a materialistic satisfactory life with Blaise. She wants to switch places with Mrs. Placid and let her undergo the pain which she has felt over the years. Blaise somehow understands Luca to be a weapon used by Emily for constant threatening; also doubts her for knowingly missing her contraceptive. She understands Blaise well with his half truths, full lies and ‘transparent cunning’. She loved Blaise in the beginning and after the quarrels and in ‘the situation’ also she felt “this was the absolute of what a love should be. And this feeling had never really gone away… She owned Blaise in a way that no one else ever could” (SAPLM, 181). She is a vulnerable woman who always speaks her mind out unlike sophisticated Mrs. Placid, who ironically for the first time starts to feel ‘real
consciousness of her mind’ after meeting her. Emily after the revelation runs and thinks that Blaise can never be hers now. But Blaise came running after her and with ‘little dancing flame of joy’ she knew that now Blaise is hers forever.

During her early days she used to kill Harriet in her thoughts millions of times and when Harriet dies ‘she concealed her satisfaction under a gentle cool tact’ and felt real ordinary happiness for the first time after her marriage with Blaise. She could see things about Blaise now, which she never did earlier. She felt “Suddenly grown, expanding upwards and outwards so as to contain what had formerly contained it. She contained Blaise. She felt now, in the tenderest way, larger than he was, stronger, wiser, and she watched him and read him with meticulous loving closeness” (SAPLM, 344). She became pregnant as the novel closes and looked at her future as ‘a golden land’. Murdoch through Emily and Blaise wants to show us life as mediocre and ordinary with simple, worldly, daily, pleasures; “a resignation to being unambitious and selfish, and failed which gave him (Blaise) a secret wry delight” (SAPLM,343).

Murdoch first named this novel *A Monster and its Mother*; all men in the novel are mother dominated. Monty, David and Luca are shown to be suffering under their respective mothers misplaced loves. We are told that Edgar has never ceased mourning his mother. Even Blaise was in awe of his mother. Luca the love child of Blaise and Emily is referred a demon, a monster, a force and an unpredictable
creature who “altered everything down to the atoms and electrons...he had an exceptionally high specific gravity.”(SAPLM, 65) It is Luca who begins all the action in the novel with his secret trips to Hood House; the novel begins with him standing under the acacia tree staring at the house; Harriet and David see him as a premonition, a dream; it is he who is going to change their lives forever. It seems Murdoch wrote this novel keeping Luca as the central metaphor. He hardly speaks but his presence is magnetic; Harriet is pulled towards this magnificent being and is eaten up by him; which was ironically love for her.

Love is a means of releasing oneself from self enclosed cage; it enables to look at the detailed particularity of others which Harriet comprehends at the airport. Loving Luca truly she recognizes that love is the essence of everything. Novel after novel Murdoch seems to state the same thing that whatever happens ‘love still exists’ but under the unconscious complacence the characters don’t seem to understand its essence. They love themselves and others but in a selfish way which hinders their growth. Her characters are human beings and if we learn to love ourselves without the influence of the unconscious complacence (lack of self knowledge is also unconscious for Murdoch) then we can move a rung higher on the ladder of good. The Self is dynamic, fluid, ever changing; humans have no control over their thought process –the next thought that arises is totally unpredictable; arising from the unconscious. With self–introspection (unselfing) we can come out of the power of the unconscious, but grasping the mind is like grasping wind, it slips away and we fall into the same trap; it is a life long journey to come out of the power of
unconscious through continuous unselfing and looking at the other with love. Life is both about clarity and muddle-headedness; ambivalence rules human mind with periods of sanity and insanity, in control and under control of the unconscious; always in a dilemma, hesitating, wavering, vacillating when something destructive strikes. Unless we realize that there is going to be disorder, mismanagement as well as smooth running, life is going to be full of misery. An acceptance towards all should come which Harriet understands near her end. It seems this is what Murdoch wants to show us in this novel.

In a letter to David Hicks Murdoch writes “Human lives are essentially not to be summed up, but to be known, as they are lived, in many curious partial and inarticulated ways” (quoted in Conradi, 2007, 195). There is a deep intuitive sense in characters which is manifested almost all the time in Sacred and Profane Love Machine; their fears, dreams and even thoughts come alive. Harriet dreams of a strange, radiant child’s face shining at her window; that is manifested in Luca.

Emily dreams of skinning a cat; she keeps cats as pets and having dreams like this can be interpreted as being insecure, which she is. Skinning a cat means her unconscious desire to kill Harriet and to take her place. Blaise dreams of semi human faced fishes drowning a cat. Both dream of a suffering cat, which is essentially Harriet. They both feel pity for the cat in their dreams but in reality when she dies, her things and memories are erased immediately from Hood House. Emily says
“God, sometimes I feel like people who go to an airport with a machine gun and just shoot everyone within sight. You simply have no idea how much I suffer” (SAPLM, 94) and this is exactly how Harriet dies in a terrorist attack. In one of Monty’s Milo Fane episodes on television Milo severs Achilles tendon of one of his victims and the same thing happens to Blaise when Harriet’s hungry dogs attack him after he decides to live with Emily. In the beginning of the novel Harriet felt strange and anxious looking at Giorgione’s picture of Saint Anthony and Saint George in the National Gallery while Blaise was away attending Magnes Bowles alias Emily. She contemplates:

There was a tree in the middle background which she had never properly attended to before…she had never before felt its significance, though what that significance was she could not say…there it was in the middle of nowhere at all with distant clouds creeping by behind it, linking the two saints yet also separating them and also being itself and nothing to do with them at all, a ridiculously frail poetical vibrating motionless tree which was also a special particular tree… hypnotized by the tree, Harriet found that she could not take herself away…(she felt) anxious thrilling sense of a garbled unintelligible urgent message…was it something prophetic?(SAPLM,52-53).

She was supposed to come to terms with double life of Blaise and the tree could mean Luca; the one who made their double lives single. Harriet when alone, contemplating again at the airport near her death understands the meaning of her life with the same imagery and thinks “There is no great calm space elsewhere, where a tree stands between two saints and raises its pure significant head into a golden sky.”(SAPLM, 334)This seems to be the central motif of this novel. Murdoch seems
to show the close relationship between art and life. In all her novels paintings are
given special privilege; she believes literature and visual arts are deeply related and
influence one’s consciousness.

There is an uncanniness which is shown in *Sacred and Profane love Machine*; an
interaction between the real and the supernatural. Monty feels Sophie’s ghost in
Locketts and wonders “can ghosts decide to manifest themselves” (SAPLM,32). He
has recorded Sophie’s voice and the tape recorder seems to have Sophie’s ghost.
Harriet feels its presence when the recorder was playing “as if a wind blew through
the house, as if an airy shape passed through, passed by, and Harriet felt cold, cold.
Something very cold and frightful seemed to have passed through the house and
touched her in passing” (SAPLM,302). Murdoch is going to show poltergeists in her
next novel *The Good Apprentice* and some of the characters performing super
human feats also, for now she seems only to be interested in making their presence
felt.

This was the hermeneutical reading of *Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. Deconstruction’s “most characteristic form is of philosophy’s quest for clarity, for
distinction, for fundamental questions yet showing over and over again that such a
trajectory must stall at crucial points”(Thomson,299). No matter how much we
analyse and deconstruct Murdoch’s texts with intertextuality, clotural reading,
looking for aporias and blind spots or with binary oppositions – there are certain
places where we have to bow down to contingency; both physical and mental; the
networks of metaphysical concepts which underlie all Murdoch novels. Derrida calls for slow stratified reading of books whose meanings link up everywhere with other texts, genres or topics of discourses. Sacred and Profane Love Machine has a lot of intertextual elements. Grieving and tears are a necessary part of all Murdoch novels which reminds of Greek epics; Virgil’s The Aeneid had a special place in Murdoch’s heart, she felt “there are tears in the very nature of things and men’s affairs touch the heart” (Conradi, 2001, 558). David sees The Iliad opened on a table in bereaved Monty Small’s house which though he has opened to impress Edgar who is a classical Greek master and has written numerous books on the subject. David, Edgar, Monty, Harriet all of them speak of Greek mythology. The novel’s title has a:

direct link to Greek drama’s version of deus ex machina, allude to Homeric characters: Achilles, Agamemnon, Ajax and Clytemnestra; Greek Philosophers: Anaxorus, Anaximander and Anaximenes of Miletus, Aristotle, Heraclitus and Empedocles and gods: Hera, Hermes, Atlas, Artemis and Athena to contextualize the characters who are heroic or wise or powerful or egoistic(Heusel, 1995, 238).

Shakespeare is one dramatist who has tremendously inspired Murdoch; so lot of allusions can be traced in almost all her novels. Bran Nicoll (2004) notes that Harriet’s death is inspired by Cordelia’s death in King Lear. Richard Todd (1984, 79) compares David’s predicament to Hamlet’s with his father’s obscene hasty marriage. There is a repetition of the character named Septimus Leech from her novel A Severed Head to which Murdoch states “that reappearance of Septimus
Leech is a play and a little game to amuse a small number of kindly readers” (noted by Nicol, 2004, 22). This is a metafictional dimension of her fiction. “Septimus Leech’s reappearance contributes to the reality – effect of fiction, thrilling the reader familiar with her work into recognition of an extended world outside the compact focus of the novel” (Nicol, 2004, 22). Emily’s one of the cat’s name is Little Bilham; a character in Henry James’s The Ambassadors who is advised to ‘live all he can’ which ironically Emily’s placement prevents her from doing. Conradi (1986, 213) notes Edgar’s innocence and school boy like attitude is like Dostoyevsky’s The Idiot’s Prince Myshkin who returns to Russia after spending several years at a Swiss sanatorium, but he possesses an emotional intelligence that surpasses all of the characters in the novel. Harriet is like a character named Franka Sheerwater in Murdoch’s novel The Message to the Planet which she had written fifteen years later. Both these ladies’ husbands have mistresses. Both Harriet and Franka speak almost same lines which stuns the readers notes Heusel (1995, 144-45).

Franka in a monologue about women’s space says “it’s as if my mind has suddenly broken through into a new area, a space, a vast capacity which I never dreamt I had” (TMP, 154) and Harriet thinks “There is no great calm space elsewhere…she was caught in her own mind and condemned by her own being” (SAPLM, 334). Franka is better off than Harriet as she had a true woman friend Maisie; a better listener than men friends of Harriet who help Franca in comprehending her true nature. Whereas Harriet is sacrificed to contingency, after she understands that Blaise and Emily are meant together and she has to allow them
to be; Franca is spared and is made to live with this reality. Murdoch themes are always carried on in her novels; progressing for a better understanding of the world; which implies why there is a repetition of patterns and symbolism in her novels which she says in an interview with Rose (1968, 63-66) comes from the unconscious; “In a way one is just a slave of one’s unconscious mind. There is a pattern in the ‘random chaotic flux’ of her novels; an integral part of narrative; “ the process by which author puts together a patchwork of events and signifiers and the reader organizes these into a meaningful sequence”(Nicol, 2004, 57). There is repetition of death, murder, artists (mainly writers), scholars, dreams, melodrama, gothic, male narrators, philosophical dialogues and discussions, homosexuality, masochism, mother-fixation, father figure etc. in almost all of her novels – these are the framework of her novels, a pattern which reminds one of Lacan who thinks of repetition as one of the four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis.

Murdoch’s affection for repeating plots, characters and patterns owns to the Buddhist notion of Karma as “we pay for all we do, say and think, but not necessarily at once”(Conradi, 1989, 81). Martha Nussbaum compares the plot of Sacred and Profane Love Machine to Dante’s plots; “the havoc caused by egoistic self-deception.”(1996, 38). She sees a similarity between Dante and Murdoch’s view of sexual love; it creates a fog around the ego and fails to see the other as a separate and different being; the strong erotic desires of Blaise has led him to rationalize his guilt and he feels it to be right to keep two separate households. It is well known that Murdoch was greatly impressed and was in love with Elias Canetti throughout her life. All her
power figures are structured on him. Monty the ‘isolated, utterly autonomous individual’ reminds of Peter Kien hero of Canetti’s only novel Die Blendeung; both of them deny encounters with the external world and desire for absolute power over their respective worlds. Both Sacred and Profane Love Machine and The Green Knight begin with a similar context of a dream like arrangement where a stranger is seen at night watching the place of dwelling of main characters.

Conradi in her official biography states the “the character and history Iris presented to the world were not conscious artefacts, but resembled unconscious myths” (2002,538). Derrida says ‘Nothing is outside of a text’, with reading and rereading of a text new patterns come out. In Sacred and Profane Love Machine she uses italics in an intriguing manner; to show the unconscious complacence patterns of her characters. Ambivalence ruled Murdoch’s life and her characters lives too. The less the number of italicized words, the less muddled that character is in the novel, the more the italics the more the confusions. Harriet and Monty’s words are the most italicized, as they are the ones who have the dangerous unconscious complacent attitude. Harriet was living the life of a simple devoted housewife in the beginning of the novel; there are hardly any italics in her speech. As the story progresses, secrets open, confusions arise and her life becomes complicated; the italics start to increase. Most of her italicized words are spread over last seventy pages of the novel which show her frustrated, anxious predicament clear. She finally leaves for Germany feeling neglected and alone and meets her dreadful fate. Monty’s words are the most italicized; he wears a mask all the time. Monty is a character who is mysterious to
core as he has chosen to pretend. He reminds of Derrida who believed that human beings live in pretence all their lives. Once when he opens up to Edgar, we feel as if we now know him but again at the end he leaves Edgar and goes to Italy alone leaving us in doubt. He knows that he had been vulnerable when he told ‘the secret’; of killing Sophie to Edgar and decides that he won’t let Edgar thrive on his misfortune. He becomes strong again; falls back in inevitable unconscious circle and leaves.

Derrida “remarks that there is no code-an organon of iterability-that is structurally secret” (Milligan, 2012,85),similarly there is no fixed system of rules in the world. Murdoch establishes the Platonic conception of Good with metaphors that are irreducible; we can’t read off clear cut commitments concerning what the good really is? Is the good like Harriet or is it like Monty, it is always incomplete and indecipherable. The essence of the Good is ‘irreducibly indefinable or mysterious’; as Derrida would call it complete comprehension of the Good is always deferred.
END NOTES


