Chapter-7

CONCLUSION

Iris Murdoch and Jacques Derrida, one the most important English novelist of the second half of the twentieth century and a philosopher of international acclaim, another a world renowned philosopher who changed the history of philosophy and literary criticism; when both of them come together, many truths are bound to unfold. The goal of truth always is an infinite task; an endless journey. It is a conscious task, away from the delusions of the unconscious complacency.

Murdoch’s novels portray world in general as mysterious and chaotic; human limitations lead to impossibility of understanding or even knowing the world. People in her novels see the world as they want to see, from one narrow, relative point of view. Personal delusions, selfishness and private mortal gratifications make her characters revolve round and round in an inevitable delusional circle. She believes that human beings are motored by an energy; highly personal and separate and yet extremely powerful and not easily understood by its owner. It is the Unconscious (see Conradi, Peter. Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist. Houndsmills: The Macmillan Press Limited, 1986.) Under its power we human beings work like a machine, repeatedly repeating ourselves. Freud believed that we don’t have a control over it but Murdoch understands that through loving Attention towards the Other and the Self we can move from the Cave towards the Sun. The reality lies open, just in
front of us but we don’t perceive real as real but what our ego wants us to see. The customary habits that we have formed over the years create a mirage in front of our eyes which we believe is truth, these habits can slowly be changed through constant effort to be and do Good.

Self is dynamic, fluid like changing all the time. It is like a flowing river. One has no control over his thoughts. The next thought that comes is completely unpredictable; this is the power of unconscious which Murdoch is trying to portray in her novels. To grasp the mind is like holding the wind, only for some time you can have control over it and then again the whole process restarts; the unconscious takes control. Murdoch’s characters are mostly suffering under the power of unconscious. Few who try to come out with the help of Good are left at that. They realize their path but the readers are not to have a glimpse of that. Uncertainty looms over all her novels. What after Good? This is the central question to which she never answers. In all her novels, one story ends and many begin; there are no fairytale endings in Murdoch; the happily ever after do not appeal her. For Murdoch this human life is a journey from illusion to reality, from dreaming fantastic ego to actuality and understanding the other. It is a moral quest; moral because it is very personal. Her individual characters are struggling to understand this reality.

Most of them live all their lives in a fantasy world. She wants to show the physical transformation of characters through inner change. Innate goodness and love
transforms the soul from darkness to light. She believes that unless human beings become good they are under the control of mechanical forces; the unconscious whose operation is undecipherable. She wants to revive the value assigned to Good by the great master Plato. Contingency and melodrama are her devices to put a veil on her underlying deep rooted ethical meanings which the researcher has tried to find through Derridean deconstruction. She firmly believes that literature is the medium which teaches or rather shows the reader a glimpse of life; to perceive that one can never realize all of reality completely and some things are better kept hidden. There are layers and layers of meanings hidden in Murdoch’s novels which when peeled deftly leads one to comprehend that accepting the other as a separate entity and love for one and all indiscriminately with complete attention may help in leading a happy life.

Though Murdoch has lambasted Derrida and his structuralism severely in her *Metaphysics as a guide to morals*, she uses the techniques of deconstruction in her fiction - ‘aporias’ or dead endedness and continuous deferral of meaning are the two most common devices she uses. She never allows her characters to understand the meaning of their lives, continuously denying them ‘truth’ unless they come out of their false images and false goods; this is what is very important to deconstruction-the belief that we cannot deny metaphysics, that there should be no denial of idea of truth but only its acceptance.
Derrida understands world to be always in ‘Representation’; human beings always act in a special way, hiding their true selves and Murdoch’s novels show the same. Her novels show world as fake, selfish and feigning; always representing. Murdoch takes an ethical dimension with the idea of Good and understands that with ‘unselfing’ human beings can come out of vices which are natural to them and move towards a virtuous life.

Like Wittgenstein she believed that life is a mystery and it can only be shown, never explained. In her novels the same kind of points were always being approached from different angles. Diverse stories, innumerable characters, situations, all end with same understanding that; this life cannot be understood only accepted. Like Shakespeare she shows life to be a stage where one has different roles to play. She firmly believes in the idea of Good and how it can lead one from ignorance and everyday rut to acceptance and understanding. Murdoch gives no guarantee of happiness but her characters of Good definitely have an attitude of calmness towards the frailty and transitoriness of human condition and they strive to understand something more than it. This endeavour to be good leads towards moral improvement which is gradual increase of one’s knowledge of the world; it slowly takes to understanding of the other and ultimately self-realisation; as only by understanding ourselves can we remove all personal prejudices, illusions and fantasies.
Murdoch’s novels show a level of hope which is otherwise absent in post-modern writings. Her novels present a deep, mysterious and indefinable quality; Good which makes one realise that truth is not as harsh and unjust as it appears and it is attainable provided you ‘unself’ of your fantasies. Through her characters, plots and stories she shows life’s myriad details. Her works never give us an answer and reaffirms the ‘unfinalizability’ of human life; the sense that the last word about our lives cannot be written nor the final analysis achieved, it is always deferred. The absence of meaning in Murdoch is related to deconstruction’s central idea; pregnant absence with significance. Derrida understands that absence of meaning is the very possibility in a text. Murdoch’s insistence that truth is yet to be discovered gives her novels a significant charm as the most important questions in life have no ready answers; one has to hunt for them, peeling off layers and layers of unconscious complacency as we are trapped in a net of illusion; thinking ourselves to be autonomous but it is invented to placate the self. She comprehends consciousness to be ‘freedom caught in a trap’. There is a deep understanding why her novels never end conclusively as she believes it is extremely difficult to comprehend the other; the truth is elusive and ‘it is a task that never ends’.

She believes there are 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, is it like Stuart or Lisa, or is it like Peter, Hugo, Bellamy or Nigel? It is always incomplete and indecipherable. The essence of the Good is ‘irreducibly indefinable or mysterious’.
Murdoch understands 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 many of her characters understand near their death as Bruno and Harriet did; when it is too late.

Murdoch's work is multi-layered and it is up to the readers to find how many layers, how many of the hidden allusions and possible interpretations can they discover. Murdoch entraps her readers in the Derridean ‘play’. It is a fact that Murdoch uses numerous stylistic devices to make her novels interesting and exclusive and that she never allowed anybody to edit her work. Italics is one of her many devices; to ‘play’ with the readers. The italic is the typeface of the elite. It is the master trope in English rhetoric. Italics fracture the English body type; it is to print the other, the highly authorial words. Iris Murdoch uses italics as a medium to show her authorial presence, to look into the unconscious desires, actions and motives of her characters. Looking carefully at the italicized words, we can look into the hidden unconscious of her characters. The less the number of italicized words, the less muddled that character is in the novel. The more the italics the more the quest for truth, reality and understanding of this world and more the confusions. This is what the researcher has tried to show in this thesis. The researcher feels that Murdoch is a mysterious, mystic, magical writer who wants to show us the world as it is; utterly confused,
selfish, fragmented and disoriented working under the power of the unconscious but still the last impression that we get after finishing off her novels is of wholeness and oneness, as she leaves the little light of truth behind which is difficult to decipher but not impossible.