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## THE EFFECT OF THE CHARACTERIZATION OF MAX IN KARAN BAJAJ'S *THE YOGA OF MAX'S DISCONTENT*

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study is to characterize the main character, Max Pzoras, in Karan Bajaj's *The Yoga of Max's Discontent*. Indeed, the main character's characteristics are unique and poorly portrayed. Therefore, it becomes the attraction of the researcher to study. Using Bogdan's qualitative approach, the study indicates that the main character, Max, has bad characteristics as follows: emotional, suffering, and indecisive, through which Max undergoes a terrible effect that is traumatic. Then, through the gap in the study, the researcher hopes so much it inspires other researchers to conduct further study in the same novel with different points of view in order that the literary study develop in a significant way.

**Key words:** emotional, suffering, indecision, traumatic.

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### INTRODUCTION

Terry Eagleton (2013) in his book *How to Read Literature* defines character as the extraordinary individual symbol that refers to what a man and woman are described as well as the man and the woman themselves. Apparently, the symbol dedicated to a person appears to be the person himself whose distinctiveness of the mark is the uniqueness of that person. Thus, a character of a person is the representation of the person totally. Eagleton's delineation of character is supported by J.A. Cuddon (2013)

in his book *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* that states that a character refers to the summary of a detailed individual kind.

It seems that Lina Varotsi (2019) in her book *Conceptualisation and Exposition, A Theory of Character Construction* gives approbation to Eagleton's statement above that an individual is represented by absolute noticeable behavior differentiating her from the others by a number of criteria. Though a character of somebody could be the predictable copy of ways of thinking and acting, however, that somebody cannot be prevented from acting out of character. Perhaps, he performs his behavior provided that he mingles with people with different characteristic.

Andrew Bennet, et. al. (2014) in their book *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory, fourth edition* state that In literary works, characters are famous as the literary life meaning that characters are the attention of the readers' interest as well as charm, love and hatred, respect and blame. It is because characters are the only elements of literature that make the readers concentrated on them in literary works. Through the readers' competence of the identification, sympathy as well as opposition of the characters, the characters are then unavoidable part of how the readers comprehend themselves, a part of themselves. Marta Figlerowicz (2016) strengthens the meaning of character that it is the structure of a unseen human performance with the unquestionably partial form of a story, followed by Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (2017) that it is with the readers' contribution with fictional types becoming a important part of the literary practice.

Further, fictional character can be broadly perceptible in a film, a literary work, as well as a piece of advertising with the compressions as well as increases of the hazardous features and actions of the characters (Euron, 2019) with the description of universal human categories with the movements and ethics possessing a universal human wisdom, apart from what their real personal, social and historical identities likely are (Owen, 2021)

Apparently, the differences between fictitious characters and real persons are quite clear; fictitious characters are recognizable because they are expressive, predictable, and identifiable found in plots whether or not they are happy, by which the readers make characters from symbols in any literary work. Real persons are not only unknowable but unpredictable as well as literary characters (Saje, 2014).

Accordingly, the researcher would like to do the analysis of a character in a novel that has nothing to do with the author and the background of history when the novel is written in. Then, New Criticism is worth an application whose analysis is politely the official features of literature, that is, a text's meaning (Berterns, 2014) omitted from definite authorial or historic contexts (Upstone, 2017). The novel belongs to Karan Bajaj's *the Yoga of Max's Discontent*. The researcher gets interested in analyzing Max's character as his character is so exclusive in that it is quite different from other characters that end in happiness, whilst, Max's character gives the readers' education how life should be.

To get the gap of the study, the researcher refers to the previous authors as follows: Ni Komang Karisma Dewi, et. al (2021), Ni Komang Arie Suwastini et. al (2022), and Syahrudin Said, et. al (2023). Ni Komang Karisma Dewi, et. al, in their article the Characterization of Amanda Collier in Nicholas Sparks' *the Best of Me*, do the analysis of Amanda Collier's character. With the qualitative data analysis from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, the study finds that the main character Amanda Collier is curious, brave, and impulsive.

Ni Komang Arie Suwastini et. al do the analysis of the characterization in their two articles in the same year: the Characterization of Felix Salinger as the Main Character in Morris Gleitzman's *Once* and the Characterizations of Professor Snape in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. With textual analysis in the first article, the study finds that Felix Salinger is religious, brave, caring, and creative, whilst, in their second study, with close reading, Professor Snape is labeled

as knowledgeable, curious, observant, hardworking, loner, partial, loyal, responsible, and authoritative.

Syahrudin Said, et. al do the analysis of the characterization in Personality in Michael Punke's *the Revenant*. With the theory of protagonist and personality, the study finds that the main character is brave and strong even though he is deserted and robbed by his friends, Fitzgerald and Bridger, in the woods.

Apparently, the characterization of the aforesaid main characters are normal in that they do not educate the readers how life should be. It is far different from the researcher's study that through Max's characterization, the readers get new understanding that characters of a person can give effect to the person himself whether good effect or bad one. Then, in this study, the researcher analyzes how Max is characterized and the effect of his characterization.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study uses qualitative because it analyzes a social phenomenon which is a holistic fact in society with full of meaning (Sugiyono, 2010). Besides, this method is done in a natural setting in a description instead of numbers (Bogdan, 1982). Thus, the researcher confirms that this method delineates phenomenon in society.

### **Data Source**

Insomuch as this study belongs to literary one, the data are taken in the form of description and dialogues from Karan Bajaj's *the Yoga of Max's Discontent* with the researcher himself as the instrument of the study.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The researcher collects the data in a table in a note with two columns; the first column is with the data of Max's characterization and the second data is the effect of Max's characterization. Therefore, this kind of technique makes the researcher easy to analyze the problems.

### **Data Analysis**

To come to the effect effectively, the researcher delineates the characterization of Max. Then, the researcher confirms the effect of Max's characterization. This way of analysis is proper since the effect and the character description should be connected to each other.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Max' Characterization**

Graduating from a university does not guarantee that a person has a balanced emotion. It is experienced by Max whose mental is not well controlled especially by the death of his mother. Besides, he lives in a harsh city whose people try to be rich by doing anything, lawful or unlawful jobs as if they continued the American dream happened in the era of forties. Such is Max living in the middle of the luxurious upper-class lifestyle and the tremendous poverty and violence of the Bronx city.

### **Emotional**

Being in a harsh environment makes Max a person who is easily aroused by emotions. Especially when Max has just been left by his mother. His mind is confused and has no direction. The incident begins one cold night. Max and Sophia leave the hospital to look after their mother, who has cancer that has spread to her lungs, causing difficulty breathing. Then a homeless man approaches Max for money and pulled Sophia closer to him. Then there is a fight between Max and the man.

“He grabbed the man's neck. The man raised his thin arms weakly. Max let go of his neck and pushed him back with force. The man fell on the ice. Max swooped down next to him and raised his fist to break the man's quivering jaw. Someone grabbed his hand. Max swung his other arm back, trying to break free. Again someone caught it. Max pushed his shoulders back. The grip tightened. Max whipped his head around.” (Bajaj 2016, p. 5)

From the quote above, it can be seen that Max is an emotional figure because of the fight between him and the gang guys. He could not control his emotions, so a fierce

fight ensued. Max is already injured, but he seems to have lost control over himself, causing the man to fall limp. Max appears to give no mercy to the man and continues to beat him from the head, neck, and jaw to the man's shoulders. Until someone comes to stop him, but Max does not care and just continues to fight.

“The Indian man had returned to standing behind his food cart, a pan in one hand, a mug of water in the other. Max went up to him. “Thank you. I could’ve hurt him badly,” he said. “I don’t know what came over me.” (Bajaj 2016, p. 6)

The quotation above explains that Max seems oblivious to what he has done at that time. He thanks the Indian man who helps stopping him from beating the homeless man. Max thinks that if it were not for the Indian man, he would hurt the man even more. Living conditions, the environment, and Max's many thoughts trigger him to act out of control, emotional, and unconscious. Moreover, he has to accept that his mother now has cancer that has spread, making it difficult to breathe, where breathing is vital to life's sustainability.

### **Suffering**

In *The Yoga of Max's Discontent* by Karan Bajaj, Max, the main character, is described as having a suffering personality. The death of his mother overshadows Max. The picture of his mother so haunting him that he cannot fall asleep. This is a condition of psychological injure that can be healed by his own consciousness. The separation from close relatives are naturally painful but we cannot get lost in sadness.

“Max was restarting work the next day after a week off, and he hadn't slept well for several nights. But he felt like talking to someone who didn't know of his mother's death and wouldn't offer unwanted condolences and homilies.” (Bajaj 2016, p. 21).

The quotation above shows that suffering is one of the characterization a person may have, confirming the aforesaid delineation of characterization that character of a

person makes him different from the others. Through Max's suffering, the researcher comes to the understanding that there are people that cannot easily forget miserable events coming to him, whilst, other people can. Again, such is the nature of a character. It then reminds the researcher of the words of Novalis (Hardy, 1996) that character is a fate. Character of a person determines his future life.

### **Indecisive**

Following the death of his mother, Max's characterization turns out to be indecisive meaning that Max has no strong decision to make for his future life. It happens when a friend of his comes to offer him something that makes him peaceful, however, he keeps hesitating.

“Did the yogis find any answers? After a moment's hesitation, Max switched over from Excel to Chrome and began searching the internet for information about Himalayan yogis.” (Bajaj 2016, p. 32)

His friend's offer is to heal Max's miserable life after the death of his mother as well as his separation from his beloved girlfriend. As the nature of character, miserable character seems to be attached to Max through his late response of the offer by bothering himself 'searching the internet for information about Himalayan yogis' instead of giving immediate approbation. “A shadow of doubt arose in him. Was he unraveling after his mother's death, becoming just another privileged white fucker with rich people's problems?” (Bajaj 2016, p. 32). Indeed, Max's hesitation is worthy of a reward since nowadays people are untrustworthy that they make advantages of the mourning persons by fake promises. Yet, in the case of Max whose story is back years ago since there were no fake promises, Max's hesitation is classified as the characterization that differentiates him from others.

### **The Effect of Max's Characterization**

#### **Traumatic**

It seems that emotional, suffering, and indecision lead Max to something psychologically terrible, that is, traumatic and it is the only effect undergone by Mac.

The main character Max Pzoras is described as traumatized by the death of his mother, which he witnesses as his mother struggles with her illness from the beginning until her death. He also struggles with the suffering of a harsh living environment and the pain he experiences because he has to separate from his girlfriend, Keisha. These traumatic events have a lasting impact on Max and shape his character throughout the novel. The healing offer of Max's friend in the novel is partly an attempt to heal from these traumas and find a deeper meaning and purpose in his life. Most of Max's traumas emerge from his dreams when he sleeps, depicting past events that reappear in his dreams and making it difficult for him to forget them.

“He was still using the Buddha's image as a surrogate, and even that kept slipping from his mind as it digressed to other thoughts, unspiritual thoughts such as a presentation he had screwed up at work, fucking Anna, his guilt about Keisha, and his mother's dying face. "Have you ever had such dreams?" said Max when he calmed down. "I don't know. Maybe. I don't dream much," she said. Max sensed something, probably her disappointment at not having a similar experience, unpleasant as it was.” (Bajaj 2016, p. 180)

The quotation above explains some of the things that traumatize Max. When he is chatting with his meditation (thing offered by Max's friend for the healing) friend Hari, Max tells that while doing meditation, his mind is still unable to focus, especially since he is a beginner who still uses Buddha images as a substitute. Even Max is still unsuccessful and keeps slipping from his main thoughts to other thoughts. Ideas that he thinks are unspiritual coming from his past experiences. The thoughts are the presentation he has messed up at his work as a wall-street analyst, screwing Anna, and his guilt about Keisha for having made him feel bad. These thoughts are the presentation he has messed up at his job as a wall-street analyst, screwing Anna, his guilt towards Keisha for impregnating her and feeling unprepared to take responsibility for Keisha, and seeing the face of his mother, who is dying while

struggling with cancer, but finally, her struggle stops. The trauma manifested in his dreams as vivid and recurring nightmares often leaves him anxious and restless.

“Often he would wake up in the middle of his night with his heart beating wildly. "My life, my life," he would repeat to himself. Those images again. Sophia, three years old, brown head, curly hair, and cute lisp saving a piece of Werther's candy their mother's employer had got from Germany for him when he returned from school by holding it in her mouth. Her out-stretched hands and dimpled smile.” (Bajaj 2016, p. 184)

Another quotation also describes Max's traumatization that comes in his dreams. This time is the description of his sister Sophia. Sophia is still three years old with curly brown hair, and her speech is still unclear with a piece of candy she gets from her mother's employer when her mother is still working. Sophia's dimpled smile that adorns her beautiful face makes Max unable to forget that memory until it enters his dream. His happy life with his family differs greatly from Max's current life.

“His anxiety would spiral the next day, coming to a head in the hour-long break they had between lunch and the afternoon asana class. With no work to distract him, his mind would spin doomsday scenarios. He'd be broke and unemployable soon; he was squandering his most productive years; all this wasn't real life; he'd regret this time forever. He remembered himself studying all night in a corner of the living room, obsessed with nailing the SATS while the world crumbled around him-the stock market crash, his mother's being out of a job, losing welfare, nights when they went to bed hungry, the terrifying prospect of homelessness, crack entering the projects, his friend Pitbull's throat slit in a gang fight, Andre's going to jail, waves of arson in the neighborhood.” (Bajaj 2016, p. 185)

Another quotation also explains Max's trauma that begins to cause anxiety. The anxiety peaks when Max rests for an hour between lunch and the afternoon asana class he would do. He has no positive thoughts to distract from the negative thoughts in his brain. With the thought of him being broke and unemployed soon, he feels he has wasted his most productive years and will regret this time forever. He remembers studying all night in the living room corner to pass the SATS exam while the world around him is crumbling. So is the stock market crash, his mother losing her job, the loss of prosperity in his family, the nights when they go to bed hungry, the terrifying prospect of homelessness, crack entering the projects, his friend Pitbull's throat being slashed in a gang fight, Andre going to jail, and the wave of arson in the neighborhood. All those anxieties returned to Max, and it is still challenging for Max to forget.

“That night he didn't come out for meditation. He lay still on his bed just as his exhausted body told him to. When he went to the bathroom, he saw that Shakti's mat was empty as well. Max came back and slept. He saw his mother with a crumbling cookie in her pale bony fingers. Sophia stretching out her hand to offer him the melting candy. Swirling, spinning blackness.” (Bajaj 2016, p. 194)

At night when it is time for meditation, Max does not participate. He feels asleep in his bed because he is tired. Then he wakes up and goes to the bathroom, and he sees that his friend Shakti's meditation mat is also empty. Then he goes back to sleep because he feels he has friends not to do meditation that night. Then he sleeps again and dreams about his mother and Sophia. He sees his mother carrying a crumbled cake in her thin, pale hands. Then he also sees Sophia offering him a melted candy, and the image is lost in the darkness. The image is from his childhood moments that continue to overshadow his life until now.

“Max awoke with a start. His throat choked. Keisha, black eyes brimming with tears outside the clinic in Tarrytown. He had forced her to ride the Metro North with him so that no one up would see them. Just as he had pressured her to abort their child. His chest filled up. Max hadn't wanted to be a father at seventeen like all the other guys in the projects. He had wanted to go to college so his mother's sacrifices didn't go to waste. The mud walls of the hut closed in on him. Max covered his eyes with his hands and tried not to cry and lose water.” (Bajaj 2016, p. 194)

Max has a past with a woman named Keisha, who was once his girlfriend. Max and Keisha have a tumultuous relationship characterized by their passion. Max and Keisha are 17 years old at that time, still very young. In Max's dream, he sees the moment when Keisha, with black eyes, is in tears outside the clinic in Tarrytown to check Keisha's pregnancy. Max feels very guilty because he has forced Keisha to take the Metro North with him so that no one would see them go to the clinic. He thinks that if he has forced Keisha to take the Metro North with him, it is the same as he has pressured her to abort their child. Max's chest is tight, thinking he has forced Keisha to take the Metro North with him so no one would see them go to the clinic. He thinks that if he has forced Keisha to ride the Metro North with him, it would have been the same as if he has pressured her to abort their child. Max's chest tightened at the thought. He does not want to become a father at a very young age like the people in the New York housing project. He wants to go to college so that his mother's sacrifice to raise him would not be in vain. When he remembers that moment, he tries to hold back his tears by covering his eyes with his hands. From this quote, it can be concluded that the trauma Max experiences is quite deep, and many things cause it.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the analysis above, the researcher concludes that Max's characterization is exclusive in that no other characters in the previous studies undergo like Max that they end in good characterization. It then becomes the gap of this study in spite of the fact that there are no previous studies giving the effect of traumatic as in Max's characterization. From this viewpoint, the researcher hopes so much that there are other researchers developing this study by analyzing this novel from other point of view in order that literary study develops significantly.

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