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## Madness in the Society: Analysis of 'One Flew Over Cuckoo's Nest'

### Abstract

Sanity is what society projects it to be, and which isn't true always.

Ken Kesey's novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* stands against the institutionalised mental illness in hospitals. The novel can be analysed as a metaphor of nineteenth century America when asylums were a place where non-conformists of the society are sent to. Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* discusses these notions clearly along with the interconnected themes of power, insanity and rebellion. The patients in the asylum may seem insane, but the idea of insanity is often misinterpreted and misrepresented by the society. Madness is connected to correction rather than sickness. Therefore, the techniques used to heal the illness are far more unethical. This paper is an observation of insanity or madness in the society. It also unravels the concept of 'unreason' by Foucault in Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The social and historic reading of the whole text explores Anti-Conformism (Beat Generation) and Counter Culture Movement (Hippie-culture) in America i.e, Individual v/s Society.

Keywords: Unreason, Insanity, Stigmatization, Anti-conformism, Individual

## 1. Introduction

Ken Elton Kesey, prominently known as Ken Kesey, an American novelist and a popular counterculture figure of the nineteenth century was born at La Junta, Colorado in 1935. He considers himself as a connection between the revolutionary Beat Generation of the 1950s and Hippie movement of the 1960s. He finished his bachelor's degree in 1957 and joined Stanford University for a course in creative writing. At Stanford, he lived in Perry Lane, where Bohemian transition resided along with several new practices and activities. His radical change began after he was appointed at the Veterans' Hospital in Menlo Park for paid experimentation. Kesey was paid to inject various psychedelic drugs such as LSD in order to report its effects as results. He believed that these LSDs which alter his perceptions is an escape from rational reality to experience himself heightened imagination and consciousness. When he worked as an aide at the hospital, the encounters with the patients and surroundings influenced him to write his widely acclaimed novel, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) uninterrupted. It has become, later a magnificent film by Milos Forman, starring Jack Nicholson and won all five Academy Awards---Best Movie, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress, and Best Screenplay. It is one among the few works in the world that have turned into a success in three forms: a novel, play and movie. This novel is critically discussed and became one of the modern classics of the era. The counterculture developed by Kesey and his works influenced the socio-cultural aspects of America, even the contemporary literary-entertainment world. Kesey's works are evolved from the experiences of these cultural dilemmas. As Belikova states:

The cross-country journey confirmed and strengthened Kesey's prior viewpoint. This journey built a broader notion of how an ideal society would look like. Kesey portrayed the idealistic vision based on the experience he had during the journey. He enjoyed the freedom, the activities they indulged in. He observed that his 'fellows' had a similar mindset as they dreamt about harmony and freedom. Thereupon he desired to adjust the social norms. (Bělíková 23)

The novel also looks at the concepts of truth, insanity, reality and power of mid-century America. It tries to showcase the truth of asylums and the unethical treatment of mental patients during the Revolutionary era. He used LSDs to explore his inner self and real world among his fellow beings when he volunteered for drug-testing in Veteran's Hospital. This solely provided him characters, plot and notions of sanity of psychiatric hospitals. The novel is discussed both

as a literary text as well as a psychiatric material for its *bona fide* account of the events in the mental hospital. As The Telegraph states:

Dr Frank Pittman, the renowned American psychiatrist, has said the publication of the book "had an enormous effect" on his field: "It gave voice, gave life, to a basic distrust of the way in which psychiatry was being used for society's purposes, rather than the purposes of the people who had mental illness," Dr Pittman told The Discovery Channel. The book's publication contributed to a backlash against the entire psychiatric treatment system in the US in the 1960s.... It also catalysed the development of more effective antipsychotic drugs that allowed more patients to be treated at home and live more normal lives. (Swaine)

The notions of New Historicism use the socio-cultural and historical aspects of the period of literary production to analyse a work. Here, the novel is analysed taking the American society of 1950s-60s as the context. As we analyse the novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a symbolic text of anti-conformists of America. Kesey was a revolutionary hero of the Beat Generation and he lived a disparate and unacceptable life as a non-conformist. Rebels of the Generation were arrested and sent to prison or mental asylum to suppress them in order to accept and conform to the authoritarian laws. Foucault's text, *Madness and Civilization* scrutinized through historical and theoretical ideas of truth, insanity and power. The "hospital of madmen" or "MadHouse" in his discourse is semi-judicial confinement that has the power over the regime of insanity. 'Unreason' creates madness. The abyss between reason and unreason is the fear of the power and fears of incarceration in these asylums.

## 2. Anti-conformism (beat generation) and Counterculture Movement (hippie-culture) in America: Individual v/s Society

"If you don't watch it people will force you one way or the other, into doing what they think you should do, or into just being mule-stubborn and doing the opposite out of spite." Ken

Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Though America lived a fairy-tale life before the World Wars, the repercussions of the massive strike and heavy bloodshed tormented the citizens. And there were internal issues that haunted the social and political facets of the nation. The era of 1950s and 60s changed the entire system of nation through a whole set of decisive events and reformations. The

‘birth of a new nation’ began with the presidency of John F Kennedy and eventually his assassination in 1963. Government political system started to control and regulate the citizens within the country. Post-war America confronted racism and black-white discrimination, which led to segregation and evacuation of people from cities. So, the high-flown ‘American Dream’ disintegrated with these issues though materialism turned out to be their only luxury during that time. Industrialization transformed the lives of men and the younger generation was sent to schools and colleges to gain high-paid jobs. Women were passive members of society within the households. Many protests occurred for women’s rights and Black-American racism. The total disharmony of the Vietnam wars effected different areas of the nation. Meanwhile, the murder of social right activist, Martin Luther King outraged the people. The riots and violence in the cities affected the younger Americans intensely because until then these children were taught middle-class values such as hard work, commitment towards nation and morality which now turned to be in vain. These values were shattered with the unrest and discomfiture in all strata of community. The mental dissatisfaction and emotional upset were expressed by the Americans through drugs, sex and music.

In 1944, a group of people gathered at Columbia eventually revolutionised the entire era with their ideas and practices. These people were the main proponents of Beat Generation- Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Céline Young, Edie Parker, Joan Vollmer Lucien Carr, and Ken Kesey. They opposed the truth of an ideal home and an ideal nation. They were against materialism and civilizational rules. Beat Generation fearlessly disagreed to the social norms and values, and this rebellion was for individualism. This circle generated many popular and successful literary products as well as avant-garde art and musical works. Later, Beat Generation which was nicknamed as “BeatNiks” dissipated slowly. “At last, the period of the Beat Generation presumably never fully ended. It simply evolved into the underground movement of Hippies.” (Bělíková 19). Student activism in 1960 evolved in shaping the Hippie culture. The dissatisfied youngsters walked against materialistic America and they participated in dance, music, art, drugs, and sex. They experimented and rejected the authority along with it. Kesey stimulated the counter-culture activities through the distribution of LSD in his cross-country road trips with his acquaintances. Hippies conducted rock-music festivals with a notion of ‘community of free-spirits’. They broke the stereotypes of political, financial and social barriers and even chose to live in poverty without education and materialistic possessions. In an interview in 1948, Kerouac was asked to define ‘Beat’, and he replied that “the ‘Beat’ is associated with being

raw or beaten down and with going against the tide. It symbolizes roughness, free mindset and individualism” (Běliková 17). Counterculture existed in every era. The term defines the culture that ideologically stands apart from the conventional social norms, ideas and culture. In history, these are the major countercultural movements that triggered reformations in the generation- romanticism, Bohemianism, Hippie sub-culture and the famous counter-culture movement of the 1960s in America. This 1960 rebellion in the United States identified with the disapproval of youngercitizens on the war in Vietnam and nuclear weapons. The reasons for this counter-culture attack includes women’s rights, racial discrimination, wars and nuclear weapons, political conflicts, autocrat rules and sexual disparities. Ken Kesey himself bridges between both the revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s. As Christopher Lehmann states, “Kesey is sometimes called the guru of the psychedelic age. Furthermore, he was a symbol of rebellion with a different perspective on life. He is ascribed to be the link between the Beat Generation and the Hippie counterculture” (Běliková 22). He travelled with hippies and protested the social conventions but spread the ‘reality’ of America through his literary works. Americans realized the significance of the ‘self’. They began to break out from the societal framework due to the compressed industrial life. They turned themselves into a collective consciousness mutual realization and acceptance in a group, the ‘all-one’ thought. It invoked people to reckon upon the Eastern and oriental Buddhist terms like ‘self’, identity, and Nirvana. Individuality fits deeply into the American self under the influence of this counter-culture movement and their motives, which is clearly seen in McMurphy, the central character of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. In a radio program named ‘American Icons: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest’, novelist and the program host Kurt Andersen comments on the novel, “Ken Kesey had worked in a mental hospital, but his first novel was really a parable of what happens when you stand up to the Man — a counterculture fable that doesn’t end well”(‘American Icons’). Critic Raymond M. Olderman portrays asylum as wasteland of T.S Eliot.

McMurphy’s protest Big Nurse changed the context of the novel, then “it becomes a battle pitting the individual against all those things that make up the modern waste land, for the Nurse represents singly what the institution and its rules really are” (Olderman 36)

Citizens are socially moulded by-product of the cultural forces. Cultural history lies in the works of the time-period. In this work Kesey brought out the concept of madness and mental institutions of the time. Both the asylum and the America of the time were homogenous. The novel can be read with the ideas of New Historicism. Cultural critics take the factors of

culture at par with social setting into consideration. In the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey portrays the power and influence of Beat Generation America of 1950-60 fully within the sphere of the mental institution. America's Mental Health Policy of 1950-1960 changed the way of treatment of insanity in the society.

“After 1950, mental institutions showed to be overcrowded as well. As too many patients occupied the wards it was almost impossible to devote proper care to each patient. It escalated to such extent that mental hospitals could have been easily mistaken for prison camps. Violence among the patients emerged. It was inevitable to make a change”. (Běliková, 14)

The idealistic policy was called, ‘deinstitutionalisation’ which became a failure when people refused to accept mentally ill citizens inside their community. During the early nineteenth century, rigorous treatment was given to those people as in the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The protagonist was medicated to lobotomy and other therapies such as hydrotherapy, electric shock treatment, psychotherapy and so on. These radical methods of treatment worsened them physically with side effects. McMurphy was an image of forthcoming transformations in the asylum. His laughter was genuine that Chief Bromden narrates as “This sound real. I realized all of a sudden, it's the first laugh I've heard in years” (Kesey 15). He brings the merriment inside the cold and angst hospital ward. Authority regulates their lives and patients suffered, whereas laughter is uncommon and unheard, “Everybody on the ward, patients, staff, all, is stunned dumb by him and his laughing” (Kesey 15). His gestures, his smile and his talk has reached every man in the ward. He brings in another world with him to the place where life was monotonous and unaltered. Anti-Establishment themes depicted his personal non-conformity through the work. But Kesey was read in infinite undefined perspectives because of its ambiguous narration through a medicated insane protagonist Chief Bromden.

“Although first published in 1962, Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* still enjoys a wide readership. Kesey's 'hippy' reputation and the book's unusual expression of anti-Establishment themes, ranging from rebellion against conformity to pastoral retreat, would explain its current popular appeal. The critics' response to the book is less understandable. Warm reception by reviewers has been followed by relatively little critical interest.” (Sherwood 3)

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is set in parallel with the American society where citizens are sent to a mental asylum in order to teach and reform to fit them into the morality of the community. They are trained, punished and bruised to make them 'socially acceptable' or a normal human being. In the novel, 'Therapeutic Community' teaches "how a guy has to learn to get along in a group before he'll be able to function in a normal society.... how society is what decides who's sane and who isn't, so you got to measure up" (Kesey 43). This 'Community' brings every patient together to discuss their issues, ideas, and opinions in the presence of the Big Nurse and fellow patients. This discourse corrects the patients and manipulate their views and manipulates them to agree to the 'rights' of the 'Combine'. The novel is written in four parts and parallel in the structure of the plot. The title itself, is allegorical. Cuckoo's nest is the mental asylum, cuckoos are the insane people and the cuckoo that flew over the nest is McMurphy. The name of the Big Nurse suggests 'ratchet' (a device consisting of a bar or wheel with a set of angled teeth in which a pawl, cog, or tooth engages, allowing motion in one direction only) which in turn symbolises the purpose of her life in the asylum. According to the protagonist Bromden, she has "no compact or lipstick or woman stuff, she's got that bag of a thousand parts she aims to use in her duties today wheels and gears, cogs polished to a hard glitter...." (Kesey 10). She stands for the 'Combine' and works to manifest the regulations upon the 'non-conformists' patients in the asylum. As Chief states it, ".....that it's not just the Big Nurse by herself, but it's the whole Combine, the nation-wide Combine that's the really big force, and the nurse is just a high-ranking official for them." (Kesey 148)

Whereas, McMurphy is an embodiment of counterculture, he informs the 'cuckoos' the purpose of his arrival: 'Yessir, that's what I came to this establishment for, to bring you birds fun an' entertainment...." (Kesey 16). When he says this, McMurphy is normal and sane. He was accused of a fight in the Pendleton Work Farm he worked, and he acted insanity to escape imprisonment. The court, then, stated that he is a psychopath and sent to the asylum for examining his psychoses. But McMurphy partakes in the games and fun activities with all inmates and entertain them equally even Chronics. Though narrator doubts what McMurphy aims through this weird act of shaking hands and continuous laughter, "he looks like he's enjoying himself, like he's the sort of guy that gets a laugh out of people" (Kesey 23). Soon, he becomes the leader among the patients. He revolts against the 'Big Nurse' when she says he must follow rules, he points out, "...that is the ex-act thing somebody always tells me about the rules.... just when they figure I'm about to do the dead opposite" (Kesey 23).

Kesey's ideas of the Beat Generation is portrayed through McMurphy. He encouraged fellow men to act against the rules of Mental asylum tyrant, the Big Nurse. Finally, he turns to be a failed passive 'psychopath'. Although he fought tough to hold on to his 'sane self' but surrendered to the power of the autocrats in the asylum. As the critic on Kunz comments, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest measures the entropic, closed society we fear becoming against the dynamic, open society we dream of being—an encompassing masterpiece that is sure to be thought-provoking for generations to come" (Kunz 81). The novel is a true treatise about divergent worlds - normal and abnormal, in American milieu of the nineteenth century. The folk elements of the novel originate in Kesey's life in the Oregon, the place influenced his personality and style of writing. Critic Gerald Graff analyses the role of nostalgia in Kesey's development of the iconoclastic idea in the novel. He states, "Nostalgia for a period in which the pitting of a heroic protagonist against a hostile, persecuting bourgeoisie corresponded roughly to social fact" (Tanner 149). 'Self-reliance' is the manly attribute that every American wish to possess. It is an American image of heroism and manhood. Beidler defines the term, self-reliance

"is made up in part of self-confidence (knowing that you can), in part of selftrust (knowing that you can), in part of self-consciousness (knowing that you can) and in part of self-control (acting on the knowledge that you can). Those who are self-reliant are usually not bound by authority or tradition, are independent in thought, and are courageous and tenacious in pursuit of their goals." (Tanner 150)

Kesey made McMurphy as hero who isn't weak but strong, who isn't impotent but potent of making changes in the asylum. The novel attacks the 'Combine' indirectly. 'Combine' is system which was generated by the policies of autocrats. Robert Rosenwein explored Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest in his essays. His ideas of historical context through social psychology are compiled to a book named A Casebook On Ken Kesey's One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest. "Moral re-socialization, relearning social positions, and protecting society from the insane were the justifications for keeping those considered deviant from society in these wards, just like the one described in Kesey's novel." ("Along That Road to Crazy"). He analysed how mental illness is treated in America and Europe. Rosenwein gives the history to showcase how insane people are incarnated and hospitalised in asylums. His statement analyses the cultural impacts in the novel:

“The attitudes and values portrayed in Cuckoo's Nest have their roots in the "beat" generation. The beats were intellectuals, writers, and artists who were alienated from and did not conform to the conventions of their days. Their vision of 1950s America as a repressive, conformist society that persecuted the individual was taken up by Kesey in portraying society as a mental hospital that overpowers and controls its citizen-inmates.” (Rosenwein 48)

The secret system keeps patients under control. She dominates in order to train them to behave within the principles of the authority. The force of asylum manipulates them through humiliations and punishments. Here, patients are submissive puppets with several mental disabilities. McMurphy exerts the individual identity or self and helped fellow men to act against the stringent mechanised life inside the hospital. Kesey puts in his words the state of the country: “Never before did I realize that mental illness could have the aspect of power, power. Think of it: perhaps the more insane the man is, the more powerful he could become. Hitler an example....” (Kesey 185). Billy when he says the above dialogue knew that Hitler’s ideology is insane, but his insanity is not suppressed because of his power over the world. Otherwise he would have been called a ‘sociopath’ or ‘psychopath’ and locked up in an asylum. So, these men have strong opinions about the politics of the country. Asylum is a prison for people who are against the social code of conduct. Ruth Sullivan in a psychological analysis of Kesey’s novel states that it gives readers a justification for their controlled life under the Big Government “and the self-pity is enhanced by the anti-establishment tone”. (Sullivan)

McMurphy, in turn disrupts the scheduled routine of the ward. Bromden considers it as a liberation he enjoys among the insane. He transforms the inmates to dispute arbitrary institutional power. Nurse Ratched considered him as an exploiter within the ward who disobeys the rules and manipulates everyone in the institution. When Government system condemns the Beat Generation and counter-cultural movements for their protests and distinct ideologies for reformations at that time. Here, Big Nurse is the archetype of authority in the American society. In the last part of the novel, McMurphy becomes a silent saviour of these insane fellow men. His sacrificed life is for his mad friends, though he brought changes among them. Big Nurse imprisoned these abnormal men under her rules and stabilized the controlled existence in the hospital. She defeated him with her power slowly and eventually used every man to detest McMurphy. Chief admits the confidence that McMurphy shares with others, “He’s pleased to be sitting next to McMurphy, feeling brave like this.” (Kesey 96). McMurphy brought the individuality of the ‘Chronics’ and ‘Acutes’. And when he stood

strong and rigid in the shock treatment, Big Nurse suggests an operation to cure- lobotomy that shatters him completely into a passive patient of psychiatry. Kesey also outlines the American situation of materialism and industrialization: "All that five thousand kids lived in those five thousand houses, owned by those guys that got off the train. The houses looked so much alike that, time and time again, the kids went home by mistake to different houses and different families. Nobody ever noticed." (Kesey 187). Here Kesey symbolises the loss of identity in America. The world in the asylum becomes a microcosm of the world outside, the mechanised system rules and laws followed by simultaneously both sane and insane men. The division among the patients is a part of the organization. It is a model of 'split and rule' (dīvide et imperā), Chronics are "machines with flaws inside that can't be repaired, flaws born in, or flaws beat in over so many years of the guy running head-on into solid things that by the time the hospital found him he was bleeding rust in some vacant lot" (Kesey 17) and Acutes are only sick "enough to be fixed" According to critic, John Wilson Foster, "Further it is arguable that the ward is the logical outcome when private enterprise is distorted, as it has been in America, by monopoly and political exploitation. It is the land of the free that Big Nurse is able to hold autocratic sway, disguising her motives and power behind the camouflage of "progress" and "welfare"" (Foster 72).

The insane people knew the truths of the society and the patient's conversations tend to provide the 'absolute truths' about the modern industrial world. Power is related to knowledge. The power that Foucault discusses in his writings, indeed is represented throughout the novel. According to Foucault, it is a 'disciplinary power' that were seen in the administrative systems, schools, prisons and asylums in Europe and America. Men are trained, subjugated and altered to fit themselves to the norms of the society. Foucault studied sociology, psychology and political system to understand how physicality is made to behave in certain conditioned ways. Moreover, "Power is also a major source of social discipline and conformity. In shifting attention away from the 'sovereign' and 'episodic' exercise of power, traditionally centred in feudal states to coerce their subjects...." (Gaventa and Pettit). Here the non-conformity lead to subjugation through rigid and compressed medications and treatments inside the asylum. Foucault also uses the term, 'bio-power' to state "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" ("Biopower"). Foucault's power theory relied on the concept of action and

resistance. “To challenge power is not a matter of seeking some ‘absolute truth’ (which is in any case a socially produced power), but ‘of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.’”

(Gaventa and Pettit)

His ‘absolute truth’ is disconnected from every form of hegemonial institutions. American sustenance in contemporary period required conformism, truth as deciphered in the books of the system. He goes to the micro-disciplinary institutions of the ‘system’ which used to correct, regulate and rule them. It’s not ‘state government’ ruling but segmented controlling units. In his book, *History of Sexuality*, he used the concept of confession in the Church. He analysed how citizens are governed through indirect instructions given by the priests.

Likewise, people are monitored to adapt themselves to the set of values and rules which is indeed an application of this power through knowledge. “In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that modern society is a “disciplinary society,” meaning that power in our time is largely exercised through disciplinary means in a variety of institutions (prisons, schools, hospitals, militaries, etc.)” (White Fuse Media Ltd). In the novel, Bromden give voice to the truth in the mental hospital “... you think this is too horrible to have really happened, this is too awful to be the truth! But, please. It's still hard for me to have a clear mind thinking on it. But it's the truth even if it didn't happen.” (Kesey 14) ‘It’s the truth’, that are imposed upon citizens to accept it and realize it. The truth which co-exist, just like the power. Power is not segregated form but a system that co-works to train the people. This ‘power’ limit citizens from who we really are. Foucault used prisoners of the time as a model of it,

“the purpose of constant surveillance is not to scare prisoners who are thinking of escaping, but rather to compel them to regard themselves as subject to correction. From the moment of morning rise to night’s lights out, the prisoners are subject to ceaseless behavioural inspection.” (Koopman)

This inspection and correction are seen throughout the novel. Eventually, these patients change into a subtle and more volatile beings. In that era, mental institutions are built to put the non-conformists to instruct the truth and entrust to obey the rules made inside and outside the institution. Otherwise, men are abandoned and disintegrated from normal society. “The insanity of the institution is foregrounded when a man who asks a simple question is tortured and rendered inhuman. It is a *Catch-22*: only a sane man would question an irrational system,

but the act of questioning means his sanity will inevitably be compromised.” (“SparkNotes: One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest: Themes, Page 2”). The counter-culture activists and non conformists of that era are represented through the character, McMurphy whereas, Nurse Ratched symbolises the oppressive authority which defeats men with punishment for obedience within the realm of asylum. McMurphy struggles and revolts against to liberate citizens. Rebels like McMurphy is repressed, not because they’re insane but they don’t agree with the established ideas and social norms. And everyone in the hospital is mad, as McMurphy tells the old man “You’re making sense, old man, a sense of your own. You’re not crazy the way they think. Yes...I see...” (Kesey 107). In the asylum, institution decides the sane and insane. The power that controls the asylum is Combine which is an invisible organization and a mechanism that regulates and levels the emotions, thoughts, and actions of man. The Big Nurse serves as a surrogate for the Combine. Chief Bromden narrates how mental hospital acts as a factory to produce ‘disciplined’ citizens after the treatment, fixing mistakes of mind through corporal modulation:

“The ward is a factory for the Combine. It’s for fixing up mistakes made in the neighbourhoods and in the schools and in the churches, the hospital is. When a completed product goes back out into society, all fixed up good as new, better than new sometimes, it brings joy to the Big Nurse’s heart; something that came in all twisted different is now a functioning, adjusted component, a credit to the whole outfit and a marvel to behold. Watch him sliding across the land with a welded grin, fitting into some nice little neighborhood where they’re just now digging trenches along the street to lay pipes for city water.”  
(Kesey 36)

He is adjusted and made to fit into the realm, though empty and unsatiated. Bromden is a victim of Combine who is manipulated under established methods and patterns of exploitation through futility and fear. Eventually men are brought to self-awareness and self-identity through McMurphy. He liberated them to find themselves and their emotions. Unfortunately, the he is subdued through shock treatments which in turn transformed the asylum again to Big Nurse’s rules. McMurphy’s rebel is in a way, America’s fight against the authorial power. He fights against the system in all ways but failed at last. ‘Fear’ is the sole factor that keeps these men cowers within the scheduled system. McMurphy took them to the reality.

‘Freedom-land’ is what American dream promises to every man. “but perhaps it would be

insanity, chaos, a nightmare which could not be controlled” (Tanner 32). But writers redefined and restructure the reality through their works, “only men, who, like Kesey, believe that ‘a man should move off his sure centre out into the outer edges’ and ‘test the limits of life’ are likely to find out” (Tanner 32). There are various boundaries set for the people by social norms, few of them content to remain within the power structure; but those who walked out are called insane. Kesey took risk to stake himself and go ahead with his uniqueness in writing against the laws and rules. Kesey epitomises McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* as a ‘revolutionary allegory’ in which McMurphy is a martyr of revolution. His front-lobe castration is a sacrifice as Chief puts it, “all you (the Combine) could do was keep on whipping, till you couldn’t come out any more and somebody else had to take your place.” (Kesey 244). McMurphy is mentally and physically paralysed after the treatment.

Kesey’s technique of the novel focusses on:

“The questioning of a monolithic bureaucratic order, the rejection of stereotyped sexual roles, the simultaneous awareness that healthy sexuality and a clear sense of sexual identity are prerequisites for human emotional survival, the recognition and rejection of hypocrisy, the devotion to the expression of individual identity....” (Leeds 36)

In psychology, dehumanisation is defined as “Dehumanization is the psychological process of demonizing the enemy, making them seem less than human and hence not worthy of humane treatment. This can lead to increased violence, human rights violations, war crimes, and genocide” (Maiese). It exists in modern America which is depicted through the novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. In the society, “people have become things.... Society has become an intimidating force for consumerism and conformity called a “Combine”” (Porter). Dehumanisation is eventual and slow process of bio-power. It fully makes the people numb and desensitised to follow the laws of the Combine blindly. However, it gradually destroys their physical, mental and emotional strength. It also results in alienation and impotence. The novel narrates patients who were turned to be insensible and unreactive towards the supremacy of the institution. Harding, fellow patient in the hospital reveals to Doctor Spivey how frightened they’re of Big Nurse:

“No one's ever dared come out and say it before, but there's not a man among

us that doesn't think it, that doesn't feel just as you do about her and the whole business - feel it somewhere down deep in his scared little soul.” (Kesey 53)

McMurphy evoked the passive men to grow out of the terror of forces, who submitted themselves to the institution without self-realization. The name Big Nurse is like the ‘Big Brother’ in Orwell’s novel, 1984 which is the ultimate regulator of the society. Here, the citizens are dehumanised to manipulate them and divorced their natural instincts and suppressed their emotions and feelings inside the wards of the asylum. Harding says to McMurphy the ‘reasonable evaluation’ of the contemporary man is lifeless, weak and frightened.

“This world . . . belongs to the strong, my friend! The ritual of our existence is based on the strong getting stronger by devouring the weak. We must face up to this. No more than right that it should be this way. We must learn to accept it as a law of the natural world. The rabbits accept their role in the ritual and recognize the wolf is the strong. In defense, the rabbit becomes sly and frightened and elusive and he digs holes and hides when the wolf is about. And he endures, he goes on. He knows his place. He most certainly doesn't challenge the wolf to combat. Now, would that be wise? Would it?” (Kesey 54)

Before the McMurphy’s arrival, Chief tend to be more introvert and hidden in the asylum. He even forgot the way of communication through conversations. He was called a ‘deaf and dumb’ but he watched the world. He understood how Combine has manipulated people and recollects how government took away his tribe’s land and loses of the war followed by it. Chief’s ‘mad’ narration about past through hallucinations, images, and dreams became an insight to the present American society scenario. “For those who are pushed beyond reason, madness can be the experience of an excess of meaning.... It can be the result of hypersensitivity or an acute awareness of a deep and terrible truth” (Vitkus 68).

The milieu restrained the emotional well-being of the citizens. It rather, subdued and ruled the people to regulate their thoughts and actions accordingly. The ‘stronger’ group crushes the ‘weak’ to become more frightened and elusive so that they do not stand to oppose them. The instability and discordance among the people and government are reasons for the revolutionary changes during 1950-60s. But these changes paved for revolts and never ending disputes which resulted in reformations in Mental and Psychiatric Health institutions.

Thus, the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* analyses the sociological outline of the of American society.

### 3. Conclusion

Kesey questions 'craziness' or 'madness' from the beginning of the novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. He fills the plot with American metaphors and allegories to emphasize the in-depth effects of unstable political and social milieu has on the citizens. The idea 'reason' is itself can undergo changes and unreason is a norm constructed to oppress in order to retain the social structure in the Western American culture. The text is read along to examine the America as a social realm. Mental illness is stereotyped taboo that exist in the society. The lack of awareness makes mental unhealthy segregated. The novel opens the door to an asylum, and in its film adaptation the film was shot in an actual mental hospital with a few real mentally unstable habitats in the hospital. Thus, the novel is apt reading of 'reason' and 'unreason' (madness). These ideas are incorporated in the study of the novel. The novel is narrated by Chief, a tribal (racial) 'crazy or madman' who in fact a victim of the Combine, the ultimate power of the society. McMurphy is accused with severe punishments to 'flew over the cuckoo's nest'. Here madness has no definite explanation. And it's not an absolute concept established in this world. Kesey portray power inside an asylum- as a fight against authority(reason) and 'crazy' patients (unreason). The by-products of the war are emotional and physical numbness. Here the reason and ordinance are equal because if one person is against the law, he's sent to asylum rather than prison. Punishment and mental treatments stand together. The way these citizens are pinpointed to suffer and die in the hospitals. Moreover, mental disorders can be treated just not with shocks and drugs but community therapy and medicinal treatments which are less painful and more secured. Criminals and mentally disturbed patients are extremely different, whereas in American society of that time, culprits are given therapeutics and medications. It indeed regulated their thoughts and actions simultaneously under authorial control.

The connection between criminality and madness is visible in the novel. McMurphy is brought to the hospital from the 'Pendleton Farm for Correction' shows the mentality of America on insanity and sanity. McMurphy's death is a death of a defeated rebel. Whereas, Chief's escape in the last scene is a triumph of his own self over the ruthless authority that deceives every citizen that walk apart their system. His insanity turned to sanity from the second he leaves the

hospital. He knew he can fight against the Combine and save his fellow men. So, he unshackles his self to live independently in the world he lost for years. Finally, he departs to the nature where he belongs to in the past years. Though the quest for liberty in McMurphy ends his life, it really helped Chief to envision an escape to freedom.

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