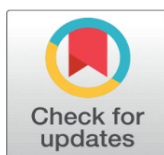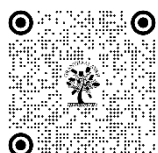# RELEVANCE OF RENÉ GIRARD'S THEORY IN FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT'S DRAMA "THE VISIT"

Dev Kumar Choudhary [1], Dr. Chiinngaihkim Guite

[1] PhD Scholar, Department of German Studies, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of German Studies Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India

ABSTRACT

Human desire is essentially imitative, or mimetic, according to René Girard's mimetic theory, rather than emerging naturally from inside. The scapegoat mechanism, according to Girard, is frequently used to manage rivalry and possible conflict that arises when people want what others want. Girard's theory has ramifications for comprehending social dynamics, aggression, religious rituals, and other facets of human conduct. According to Girard, people do not choose what they want on their own. Rather, their "models" mimic the aspirations of others. A scapegoat mechanism may appear when rivalry and conflict over scarce resources or prestige result from mimetic desire. Like in the drama "The Visit" by Friedrich Dürrenmatt the protagonist Ill represented as scapegoat. Al the citizens unite against Ill and kill him for the prosperity of the society. His theory applied in number of fields like literature, religion and anthropology.

Keywords: Scapegoat, Sacrifice, Mimetic Desire, Rituals, Imitation

1. INTRODUCTION

In Friedrich Dürrenmatt's Drama "The Visit" (German: Der Besuch der alten Dame) the idea of scapegoating, mimetic desire, violence and sacrifice has been reflected. As the city Güllen once used to be prosperous and culturally rich has turned into wreckage. Citizen of Güllen are suffering from poverty and the citizens of this city blame Ill (the main character of this drama) for this condition. For regaining the peace and prosperity how these people engaged themselves to kill Ill.

Here the idea of scapegoating by René Girard is being given.

René Girard conducted substantial investigations into the role played by violence and ritual in human culture and religion, especially with regard to sacrifice and myth. His research, which is frequently examined in conjunction with one another, provides perspectives on the beginnings and purposes of religious practices and their relationship to human social frameworks.

René Girard (25 December 1923 – 4 November 2015) was a historian, literary critic, and philosopher of social science with French-American roots, whose contributions are part of the philosophical anthropology tradition. Girard's

main contribution to philosophy, and later to other domains, was in the area of psychology of desire. Girard maintained that human desire functions in a way that imitates or mimics others, rather than arising spontaneously from individual human traits, as many theoretical psychologists had assumed. Girard's theory of human growth is based on a triangle model of desire, in which people express their desire for an object of desire by expressing their own desire for it.

Despite René Girard's theories' anthropological foundations, they have reverberated far across disciplines, including history, psychology, sociology, theology, biblical interpretation, and literary studies, and they are frequently used in an interdisciplinary fashion. Despite the different applications in different. In academic disciplines, his theories basically try to expose the behaviour of people in society. Therein lies the popularity of his theories, especially for literary scholars. Rene Girard explores the phenomena of the scapegoat, which has profound religious, cultural, and ritual roots, in his 1986 book "The Scapegoat".

The term first appears in the Bible, in the Book Leviticus. The high priest of the Israeli people symbolically transfers the sins of the people onto a goat, which is then driven into the desert, thereby freeing the people from their sins. Hence the compound word "scapegoat" originated. Today, this term is often used in everyday language without the religious context. Girard derives his scapegoat theory from religious texts describing the rituals. According to Girard, every human being has a mimetic desire. The starting point of all our desires and longings lies in the imitation of other people. "Desire" here refers to the wishes and drives that are evoked by imitation. Girard calls this theory "mimetic theory." In other words, people fundamentally imitate each other, and this imitation becomes the basic mechanism of a person's social education. This can be seen in society and also in the family. A child tries to follow and imitate his father, mother, or older people in society. Aristotle noted in Poetics that imitation is perhaps the only characteristic found exclusively in human beings.

"The instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures; and though imitation he learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated."[1]

These characteristics distinguish human beings from other living creatures. From acquiring language and developing regional accents to practicing religious discipleship and formal education, it is primarily through imitation that a person develops. "Through imitation (mimesis), one learns what to desire by observing and imitating the desires of others"[2]. In this way, knowledge, culture, and language are transmitted from one human being to another.

From the origin of human civilization to the present day, culture has been acquired and transmitted through imitation:

"There is nothing, or next to nothing, in human behaviour that is not learned, and all learning is based on imitation. If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish. Neurologists reminded us frequently that brain is an enormous imitating machine. To develop a science of man it is necessary to compare human imitation with animal mimicry, and to specify properly human modalities of mimetic behaviour."[3]

According to Girard, mimesis refers to the fundamental imitative desire that forms the primary, unconscious, intrinsic, and vital dynamic that influences human behaviour and thinking. Humans develop everything through imitation, e.g., their language skills, culture, ability to learn, etc. Therefore, it can be said that primary mimesis is an important element of socialization and enculturation. Even if the way in which one tries to satisfy one's needs, e.g., food and clothing, is imitative. "Man differs from other animals in his great aptitude for imitation (mimesis)."[4] Whether it be devotional practice, languages, or culture, imitation plays an important and significant role.

Girard says that there are differences between desire and need. However, he distances himself from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. According to Freud, drive is mainly the term for libido or sexual instinct. According to Girard, in contrast to need, desire is amorphous and has a heterogeneous structure. It is not easy to explain desires such as appetite and needs such as hunger or thirst. Desire, as a unique characteristic of humans that distinguishes them from other beings, is a cultural phenomenon shaped by interpersonal relationships and imitation.

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[1] Butcher, S. H., The Poetics of Aristotle, 3rd edition, The Macmillan: New York, 1902, P. 15.

[2] Trice, Michael Reid, Encountering Cruelty: The Fracture of the Human Heart, Brill Publication, Amsterdam, 2011, P. 248.

[3] Girard, Rene, Things hidden since the foundation of the world, (Trans. Bann, Stephan & Metteer & Michael), Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1987, P. 7.

[4] Trice, Michael Reid, Encountering Cruelty: The Fracture of the Human Heart, Brill Publication, Amsterdam, 2011, P. 248
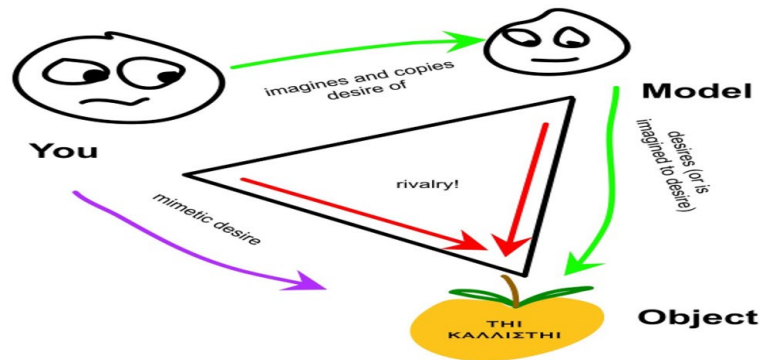
Desire or longing does not have a linear structure that runs between the subject and the desired object, but rather it has a triangular structure, in which the true energy of desire is mediated by an intermediary that makes the desires desirable.

Christ Fleming has recommended the following triangular model. (Models are copied from Google)

1[5]
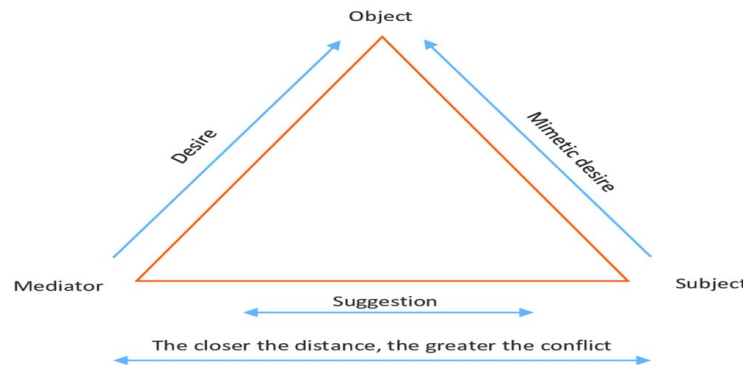
2.[6]

Mimetic rivalry is symmetrical. We copy the vengeful desires and actions of our competitors or rivals. Individual differences are lost and both parties resort to violence, which Girard calls "double." This has happened many times before and will continue to happen regularly, but today the process does not necessarily lead to death. When rivalry increases in a society, violence among people will also increase. Victims are sought in the form of scapegoats. In other words, the community is prepared to use violence against the scapegoat so that society can be saved from this problem.

This mimetic desire also leads to jealousy, to mimetic rivalry, which in turn could lead to violent conflicts in society. This is how Girard explains the causes of violence between individuals or groups of people in every community and society. However, frustration cannot remain permanent. It must find an outlet. The stronger group thus transfers the blame for the frustration and crisis, whether religious or economic, to a weaker group, which becomes the scapegoat. In this way, violence is "rationalized."

Girad's theory thus explains the emergence of collective violence. In order to overcome the phase of violence, people need some form of scapegoat. The blame is placed on the scapegoat, who is first marked, then isolated, and then subjected to violence.

Walter Burkert has a similar theory, but with a different emphasis. In his book "Homo Necans" (which means "Man the Killer" in English), he describes prehistoric hunting, killing, and the division of the dead victim as part of deep human nature. According to him, the prehistoric hunting tradition still exists in the modern world. However, the forms of hunting have changed over time and are often suppressed by education. But there are cases where they also occur in the civilized world. The scapegoat is hunted down by a group of people like prey and killed or "sacrificed," and the collective group of

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[5] Google pic
[6] Google pic

hunters feels purified by this act. The scapegoat is usually weak and unable to defend itself against attacks. The sacrifice of this scapegoat creates a sense of unity and restores peace within the community.

The following table illustrates this phenomenon:[7]

The mimetic desire
↓

The mimetic rivalry
↓

Violence
↓

Scapegoat
↓

Peace
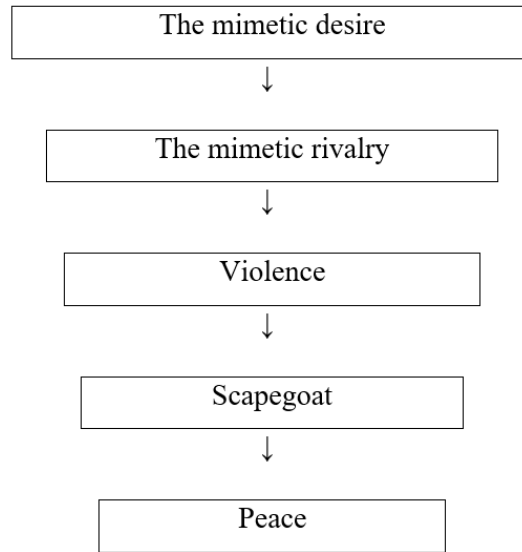
When social orders break down, tensions in society eventually reach a peak. To overcome this crisis, people look for a scapegoat. The community, which was previously not integrated, unites against the scapegoat. This means that the blame for the problems and the downfall of society is placed on one individual. As Girard explains in his book "The Scapegoat," scapegoating behavior can be explained with the help of Caiaphas' statement:

"If the entire nation is sure to perish then it obviously would be better for one man to die for all the others, especially since he increases the imminence of the danger by refusing to keep quite."[8]

Girard calls the process in which the sins of a community are loaded onto a being according to archaic rituals and he is condemned to sacrifice "scapegoat behavior." The victim must be killed so that order, peace, and harmony can be restored in the society. Violence against the scapegoat is a form of minor violence that prevents major violence. With the help of the scapegoat, major violence is prevented or at least limited. According to Girard, "the purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric."[9] The biblical story of the scapegoat is then linked to the modern world. This is mentioned in "The Scapegoat" by René Girard: "Caiaphas is the perfect sacrificer, killing the victim to save those who live. The high priest's decision provides the final revelation of the sacrifice and its origin."[10] People also view the murder of Jesus Christ as scapegoating because Jesus sacrificed his life for the entire community. It can be said that scapegoating takes on a sacred meaning in the Bible. Humanity is saved through sacrifice.

Scapegoating still plays an important role in society today. According to Girard, this explains the conflicts between the majority and minorities in a society: "ethnic and religious minorities tend to polarize the majorities against themselves."[11] This ancient ritual still appears in society today in various forms. The Nazis, for example, blamed the Jews for the lost First World War and the associated economic crisis. A classic case of scapegoating.

According to Girard, there is a hidden lie at the heart of myth. He explains that the raw truth of human violence is not only concealed in myth, but also sacralized. Myths are the concealed stories, the literary veiling of the scapegoat mechanism, the distorted scenario of a collective murder of a single victim that saves society from social fragmentation. Thus, the myth is the distortion, a lie that conceals all the important truths about the violent behavior of the scapegoat. Girard's examination of the Bible is based on an anthropological reading, then he says that the Gospel is the core of truth

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[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNvgIb-mPf4. Accessed on 08.01.2024

[8] Girard, Rene: The Scapegoat (Trans. Freccero, Yvonne), Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986, P. 113.

[9] Girard, Rene, Violence and the Sacred (Trans. Gregory, Patrick), Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1972, P. 8.

[10] Girard, Rene: Violence and the Sacred (Trans. Gregory, Patrick), Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1972, P. 8.

[11] Girard, Rene: The Scapegoat (Trans. Freccero, Yvonne), Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986, P. 17.

about humanity. Girard's theory of mimetic desire functions as the "driving force" of human violence. According to him, the myths of all cultures display these characteristics, which often represent the sacred. Myths not only conceal original acts of violence, but they also elevate violence and ritual through sacred justification and the alleged guilt of the victim. Myths are retroactive transfigurations of the original and ancient crisis, whose reinterpretation in the field of cultural order is carried out by Girard:

"The scapegoat mechanism is central to Girard's theory of religion which, he maintains, legitimizes or sacralises a certain social or cultural configuration. In order that peace can be restored, victimization and ostracism are (unwittingly) utilized to this end. For Girard, the special function of particular kinds of religious ritual is to maintain the peace occurring as a result of the sacrifice by institutionalizing a repetition of the sacrifice at the same time that this repetition works to cover up its historical reality. For Girard, the textual form of this 'covering up' is what he characterizes as 'myth'."[12]

Girard calls this scapegoat the "surrogate victim." The internal conflict caused by mimetic desire is permanently expelled from society with the help of the "surrogate victim." The scapegoat or "surrogate victim" is always the weak person who cannot resist violence.

Girard explains how peace can be reestablished. According to him, there is no specific mechanism available to humans to curb aggression. When rivalries and conflicts arise, aggression also arises and violence becomes epidemic. It creates a chain reaction and can no longer be stopped. Girard further asserts: "Sacrifice contains an element of mystery."14 In other words, violence is mystified and ritualized by myths and religion and passed on to future generations. Furthermore, as mentioned above, human aggression is redirected toward a figure or a group. People now unite against someone who is chosen or marked as a scapegoat. Girard calls this process "scapegoating." This is an allusion to the ancient religious ritual described in the Bible, in which communal sins were placed on a goat, and this animal was then driven into the desert or sacrificed to the gods.

"Sacrifice is the most crucial and fundamental of rites and it is also the most commonplace. All systems that give structure to human society have been generated from it: language, kinship system, taboos, codes of etiquette, patterns of exchange, rites, and civil institution. Thus a theory of sacrifice has produced a comprehensive account of human, social formation, religion and culture."[13]

2. CONCLUSION

In this drama, Alfred Ill embodies the scapegoat. He is hounded, hunted, killed, and sacrificed to satisfy Claire's sense of justice. This also allows the people to satisfy their hunger for money. This play also has religious dimensions. It is an ancient ritual, namely that in order to gain prosperity for a community or family, a sacrifice is made to God.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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