

**The Tapestry of Detachment and Nothingness in Haruki Murakami's  
work: An experimental interaction between Nihilism and Zen Buddhism.**

By

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**A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Bachelor of Arts**

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# Declaration

It is hereby declared that,

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing a degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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# Approval

The thesis titled **The Tapestry of Nothingness and Detachment in Haruki Murakami's work: An experimental interaction between Nihilism and Zen Buddhism.** submitted by Dola Saha, ID: 20103020 of Summer 2023 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

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## Abstract

The philosophical conflict between religion and Atheism has a significant rise around the modern and contemporary times following the historical inconveniences of constant war, loss and decay of moral ground. This paper focuses on aligning the contradictions through the philosophical perspective of Nihilism and Zen Buddhism through the characters of Eastern writer Haruki Murakami who is known to be focused on Western culture and style than the authenticity of his homeland, Japan. Though the main agenda of the thesis is to critically examine the characters from Murakami's novels and their relation with Nihilism and Buddhism on a simultaneous and intricate aspect, it also explores supernatural themes which are connected to eastern religion and mythology and been used by the author. The paper analysed the historical, cultural, and political realm of Japan in modern times to analyse the characters traits as contemporary Japanese youth in Murakami's literary universe addressing the duality of choices and actions being simultaneously presented as escapist and confrontational towards life. Therefore, the thesis is an analytical venture to address and link the ideas of Nihilism and Buddhism and their point in human life through the analysis of Murakami's literary canon as an experiment of double-edged perspective of human life.

**Keywords:** Eastern Philosophy, Japanese Literature, Buddhism, Zen, Nihilism, Enlightenment, Self, Post-World War, Disparity, Detachment.

## **Dedication**

To all the lunatics, who would visit Manila to have ice-cream,  
only because it rhymes with vanilla.

To all the like-minded people

## Acknowledgement

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## **Chapter 01 (Introduction)**

The philosophical idea of Existential Nihilism is based upon the denial of any spiritual, religious ideologies but depending upon certain foundation for an individualist morale with rationality rather than religious boundaries. Etymologically, the word Nihilism refers to ‘nothingness’ while the spiritual aspect of it emphasises upon the acceptance of ‘eternal suffering’, acquiring individuality and self-realisation comprehending the suffering of living. Friedrich Nietzsche’s nihilistic ideologies such as the denial of existence of spiritual superior, the ideas of man climbing their intellectual limitations, and accepting the sufferings rather than constantly hoping them to disappear, are based upon the denial of European Christian morality (Evans, 1995). Nietzsche’s nihilism practically focuses on humanity and an anthropocentric way of social and spiritual ideology. While philosophical ideologies vary according to geography, spiritual belief, historical and cultural tapestry, Western nihilistic idea has a major resemblance with the East Asian spiritual ideologies of Buddhism. The Japanese philosophical roots traces back to the ancient spiritual beliefs of Shintoism and Buddhism while most of the philosophers are from the spiritual background shaping the philosophical landscape of the eastern region. Zen, as a part of Japanese ancient spirituality, seems to have philosophical resonance with the Western nihility. Western idea of Nihilism grew with the emergence of enlightenment in the nineteenth century and the irrelevance of centuries old Christian ideologies at the time of industrial growth (Stewart, 2023). Additionally, the specific movements of the twentieth century including the horror of devastating World Wars and the holocaust also had a topographical role in shaping European nihilistic ideologies. On the other hand, Zen as a spiritual belief has remained in Japan since ancient times being resonated with the Buddhist ideologies. The base of Zen is enlightenment, self-reliance, and detachment. Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami, in his work, incorporated the Japanese elements including



the geographic and spiritual elements in his work along with the western cultural elements. The works of Murakami reflected a duality between the ideas of Nihilist and Buddhist ideologies through his characters, setting and actions. Japan as a setting also played a major role in the character development in his novels incorporating them with the emotional states of the characters and to portray their idea of life through which, the concepts of Nihilism and Zen Buddhism is addressed. Through this, a conversational aspect of two different philosophy has been put through the novels and this philosophical argument between Zen and Nihilism can define the literary pursuit of Murakami.

The trajectory of Murakami's literary canon is based on enriched philosophical and historical elements. While being a part of the popular culture of the twenty-first century, the literary works of Murakami cover important themes like Existential questions, history, spirituality, and the search for meaning. Most of the characters of Murakami's fiction represent contemporary Japan, the evolution and hybridization of Japanese culture in the post-world war context and the inner conflict of the individuals about life, emotional attachment and the rapid change of society. Japanese contemporary literary canon has an emphasis upon the hybridity of Japanese culture, history, spiritual belief, and Western cultural and ideological impacts on Japan. Similarly, like the emergence of disparity in Europe in post war period, modern Japan also historically remained in the process of recovering from the violence and horrors of war and political unrest. Despite of being an ancient philosophy, Zen Buddhism remained a major factor behind Japanese spirituality, culture, art and literature which stayed relevantly present during the social shift of Japan as a modern nation. Japanese art and spirituality have Zen as a crucial element of aesthetics like music, art, narratives and even in forms of martial arts (Davis & Ikeno, 1949). The narratives parallel the Western aesthetics as well as the traditional Japanese understanding of beauty. Being influenced by the Western culture and literature, Murakami

could successfully create a conversational aspect of the West and Japanese hybridization of culture and ideology. The influence of Western ideologies and aesthetics on the author can be explained through the frequent use of Western aesthetics. Murakami often incorporated music from Beatles, Gioachino Rossini, Claudio Abbado and other Western musicians through his narrative. He also addressed European mythology and literature to his work of Japanese setting which resembles the hybridisation of the socio-cultural fabric of contemporary Japan. Additionally, Murakami was at his youth during the student movement in Japan which also contributed to the cultural scenario urban Japan and the literary setting of the author. Through that, Murakami is inclusive of the Japanese spiritual and psychological situations in the post-world war context. While many critics raise questions over Murakami's 'Japaneseness' in his narratives, this paper would advocate to highlight the experimental notion of Murakami with Nihilism and Zen Buddhism through his characters. By focusing on the choices, actions and the philosophical standpoints of the characters of Murakami's novels, it can be possible to trace the dual residue of the diverse philosophical ideologies within one character. In this way, a critical analysis of the characters from the philosophical point of views, the duality can be determined. Also, through the elaborate analysis and comparison between Nihilism and Buddhism, the significance of the Japanese setting and elements within the novels which influenced the actions and direction of the lives of the characters, can be reflected.

Murakami's works contains elements of philosophical inquiry, journey to self-realisation and aesthetics as well as ideological notions. A primary observation of Murakami's characters can depict the absence of any spiritual beliefs from the scenario. While Japan as a country depends on its variety of spiritual practices like Shintoism, Buddhism, Taoism, Murakami's characters do not show any association with any of the religious ideas but definitely reflects the philosophical and artistic standards which DT Suzuki demonstrated in *Zen and Japanese Culture* that the religious philosophical perspectives are blended with the Japanese cultural

tapestry. *Kafka on the Shore* being one of the most critically acclaimed literary pieces of Murakami, reflects modern time Japan and the artistic openness. Kafka Tamura as a character is well read and intellectually enriched with both Western and Japanese literature, spirituality, and mythology. The elements that has been used throughout the novel beginning from Kafka's prophecy of life by his father tha he would resemble the fate of Oedipus from greek mythology to the associated supernatural incidents which happens with Nakata, shows the hybridity of culture through the novel. To elaborate, the way it has been represented that Kafka and Nakata's souls gets exchanged to bring the prophecy of Kafka's father into reality, is a concept which has been a mythological concept throughout the major Japanese mythologies. The way Murakami incorporated Greek and Japanese mythology, enhanced the artistic quality of the novel. Similarly for the philosophical essence of Nihilism and Buddhism, he experimented with the characters to provide dual ideas through one singular character and their actions. Particularly, the characters of Haruki Murakami tend to reflect Nihilistic and Buddhist characteristics at the same time with their intentions and thoughts. Apart from Kafka, the characters like Nakata and Hoshino, their conversations, incidents, and thoughts, directs the philosophical aspects towards a sense of 'nothingness'. For example, the meeting of Hoshino and Colonel Sanders (as a reflection of subconscious or mystic spiritual entity), takes a highly philosophical turn when Sanders claims to Hoshino he exists beyond good and evil. The appearance of Colonel Sanders, the founder of an American restaurant chain is an unpredictable turn but it symbolically represented the cultural hybridity and the Nihilistic traits of Japanese philosophies. Clearly, an American business personality who contributed to the global exchange of food, a cultural element, was talking about Japanese philosophy and beliefs to Hoshino which clearly represents how influenced the contemporary Japanese cultural scenario has been by the globalisation of modern culture. Sanders explains the idea of God to Hoshino, a religiously afraid person as,

“God only exists in people's minds. Especially in Japan, God’s always been kind of a flexible concept. [...] God is no longer God. If you think God is there, He is. If you don’t, he isn’t” (Murakami, 2002).

Colonel Sander's explanations about the Japanese idea of God and religion comes across the standpoint of Friedrich Nietzsche's character Zarathustra. Zarathustra stated similar idea about God and religion after returning from his isolation. According to Zarathustra on his account of God being dead,

"Once the offence against God wa the greatest offence but god died, so that these offenders died also. Now the most terrible of things is to offend earth" (Nietzsche, 1896).

This idea surely resembles what Hoshino had been told by Colonel Sanders. Zen Buddhism being emerged from a religion, also does not preach obedience towards God, rather focuses on the self of human beings to ease the sufferings of life and Murakami, through the conversation of Hoshino and Colonel Sanders incorporated the resemblance of Nihilism with the Buddhist ideas.

Moreover, According to Murakami in *1Q84*,

“Truth is often accompanied by intense pain, and almost no one is looking for painful truths. What people need is beautiful, comforting stories that make them feel as if their lives have some meaning. Which is where religion comes from.” (Murakami, 2009)

In a sense, the narratives do talk about the quest of meaning, enlightenment, and peace. The author sees religious spirituality as an existential entity to comfort the eternal suffering with optimism. Murakami’s novels are often associated with Japanese transition from traditionally acclaimed Buddhist philosophies to the post-World War II modern Western Existential philosophies and the student movement of Japan, emphasising on the existential and traditional

merging of post war period. Nietzsche's philosophical stand on morality or human action as a subjective event, free from any predominance of religious or spiritual instance, can be noticed in the work of Murakami. His tendency to represent each character with their own philosophy, life choices and personal moral standpoint, supports the Nihilistic claims of Nietzsche about eternal suffering and the necessity of evolving as superior version of self as Beyond-man. Simultaneously, there is also a tendency of the characters to isolate themselves, alienating and detaching from everything resembling the spiritual ideas of Zen Buddhism. Characters like Toru Okada, Lieutenant Mamia from *Wind Up Bird Chronicle*, Kafka Tamura, Miss Saeki from *Kafka on The Shore*, and even Toru Watanabe, Naoko and Midori from his realist novel *Norwegian Woods* are in constant crisis dealing with life. Evaluating the characters actions, decisions, and perspectives, this research will delve into tracing the duality of the characters and their philosophical interplay with Nihilist and Zen ideologies. Murakami's characters deal with the internal conflicts within a world with inevitable obstacles and dilemmas. The author seemingly experiments with the characters about the internal and external struggle. Murakami creates situations and puts the characters in a state of choice between escape and confrontation. The escapist nature of Murakami's narrative is clearly present in Kafka Tamura where the novel begins with Kafka running away from his normal life where he only gets to confront his inner self and other bizarre experiences instead of having the escape he was looking for. He isolates himself in Oshima's cabin in the woods as a journey to self-discovery, individual awakening. *Kafka on The Shore* as a literary piece includes fragmented elements taken from ancient Japanese mythology and spiritual belief. Themes like soul exchange, time travel, and reincarnation are inseparable components of East Asian religious and spiritual beliefs. With the assimilation of Western and Japanese mythologies Murakami creates a bizarre metaphysical world for the characters with serious existential tension. Similarly, Toru Okada, the protagonist of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, is also fragmented with the escapist and confrontational

characteristics at the same time. He searches for the lost cat which symbolises his lost relationship with his wife and spends nights with Creta Kano escaping from the internal turmoil of losing his wife at the same time. Creta Kano can be another example of suffering and nothingness. Crete Kano as a character, metaphorically defines the experience of eternal suffering and painlessness within one life. This resembles the ideas of Nihilism and Zen creating a visible contrast between the two philosophies. It is hard to say that the characters willingly embrace any one ideology from the two sublime philosophies of detachment, but there surely is significant overlap between Buddhist and Nihilistic ideologies among the characterization of the protagonists. Zen resembles the existential ideas of human life emphasising on meditation enhancing the power of thinking, self-connection as the way back to a more bearable version of life (Nishitani, 1990). But the characters of Murakami present a subliminal individualism and escapist approach through the actions resembling the methods of Zen.

The novel *Norwegian Wood* is beneficial to get a view of the post-war Japanese urban and political structure, significantly portraying the underlying political tension among the youth and the existential questions. Toru Watanabe, the protagonist of *Norwegian Wood*, gives the impression of a confused and lost teenager with constant desire to be loved and being wanted. Watanabe keeps moving between Naoko and Midori, Tokyo, and the hills of Kyoto to search for his internal tranquillity where his personal philosophy shapes towards detachment from people around him. Watanabe seems to willingly embrace the uncertainty of Naoko's love and his struggle for commitment. He willingly ignores the social unrest around him while isolating himself internally from the world. To understand and examine the aspect of the fictional entities of Murakami, it is important to understand the aesthetic approach of the author along with the cultural, historical and socio-economical perspective of the characters. Keeping Nihilism and Zen, two radical ideologies in alignment, the philosophical ideologies of the characters can be

analysed. The ideas of 'self', enlightenment, and freedom, are something to be evaluated to link connection with Western and Japanese doctrines. Additionally, the author's personal influence and perspective towards Japanese artistic tapestry is equally necessary for supporting the claim of Zen and Nihilistic arguments being closely intertwined.

## Chapter 02

### Research Question

The philosophical argument between the two perspectives of Nihilism and Zen Buddhism has been a recent venture in the literary field. An argumentative analysis of the two philosophical perspectives through the work of Haruki Murakami, a Japanese author, is important to analyse the complex connections of philosophical standpoints with Japanese context experimenting the life of contemporary Japanese youth. With the important viewpoint of philosophical and literary analysis, it is an essential research venture examining if the literary works of Haruki Murakami, do presents an interplay between the divergent philosophical viewpoints such as Nihilism and the spiritual belief of Zen Buddhism and how they're influenced from the practical life of Japan ? From another critical point of view that how one specific action and scenario present dual residue of Nihilist and Buddhist perspective, the query emerges that, how do the philosophical views synchronised pursuit of meaning and escape from reality?

### Methodology and theoretical framework:

The research has fundamentally been dependent on a qualitative outlook through the critical reading of the primary texts, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, *Kafka on the Shore*, and *Norwegian Woods*. A philosophical and Historical approach to the designated primary texts helped linking the Western and eastern philosophy of Nothingness. Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, has been an important perspective in thematic analysis of the primary sources. Additionally, Japanese Philosopher and Author DT Suzuki's idea of Zen in art and human, been an incredible guidance for the analysis of the two philosophical perspectives. Also, the modern interpretation of Zen by Keiji Nishitani as an important tool to bridge the two



aspects. Furthermore, the concepts such as Nietzsche's *Beyond-Man* and D.T Suzuki's Satori and Milan Kundera's Art of Novel and experimental self, have helped to craft the thesis.

Finally, the critical readings of relevant books, research articles and historical evidences from Post World War Japan, has helped trace the literary, historical, and philosophical tapestry within Murakami's literary work.

### **Literature Review:**

Haruki Murakami's literary canon covers themes like nothingness, detachment, and search for meaning. Where the novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* begins with a sense of loss, loneliness, and detachment. The questions of love, relationship and connection intensifies with Toru Okada's introspection,

“We can invest enormous time and energy in serious efforts to know another person, but in the end, how close are we able to come to that person's essence? Do we really know anything important about anyone?” (Murakami, 1994)

The questions incorporate the philosophical aspects of Buddhism and a radical opposite of religious spirituality, Nihilism. Characters like Toru Okada, Lieutenant Mamia from *Wind Up Bird Chronicle*, Kafka Tamura, Miss Saeki from *Kafka on The Shore*, and even Toru Watanabe, Naoko and Midori from his realist novel *Norwegian Woods* are in constant crisis dealing with life, specifically finding the connection they desire for. Murakami described the relationship of Watanabe and Naoko in *Norwegian Woods* with Watanabe claiming,

“I do want to try my best, though, I must or else I won't know where to go. Naoko and I must save each other. It's the way for either of us to be saved” (Murakami, 1987)

Through the characters, the author tries to incorporate the emotional attachment and the need of it in human life. Also, often the characters seem to be confused between the choices of

human connection and detachment. The designated novels emphasise on human relationship, emotional attachment, detachment, and enlightenment at the same time. On *Kafka on the Shore*, Kafka Tamura is seen to be taking shelter in Shikoku, in the vicinity of the library and in Oshima's house at the mountain-top to escape from the oedipal curse<sup>1</sup> and to find this deeper sense of self. Also, Hoshino, a minor character from the novel, is shown to be accidentally being a part of the quest of Nakata, only to realise in solidarity that how meaningless his life has been (Murakami,2002), "The more he talked, the more Hoshino realised, how pointless his life has been" (p. 564). The human life and human connection in the novels of Murakami gets intertwined with the purpose of finding the "Self" and ending up with a void of nothingness. With the incorporation of philosophies like Zen and Nihilism, two types of philosophical portals are opened to examine the characters.

D. T. Suzuki, in his book *Zen and Japanese Culture*, emphasises on the practice of Zen and how this spirituality has shaped the cultural and historical aspect of Japan. In chapter one, Zen is identified as a process towards enlightenment and freedom. The Japanese concept of 'Satori' which is about finding meaning of life is a crucial part of Suzuki's explanation of Zen. The Japanese idea of enlightenment is merged with the notion of self-realisation and reliance by Suzuki in the chapter. (Suzuki, 1970). Chapter two of Suzuki's book indulges on how the discourse and understanding of Zen, loneliness, and emptiness has shaped the Japanese artistic emergence, and the correlation between *Sunyata* and understanding of life while also criticising the Westernised idea of emptiness.

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<sup>1</sup> Oedipal Curse- Kafka Tamura was cursed by his own father that he'd kill his father and have sexual relations with his mother.

“It may look most miserable, insignificant, and pitiable, especially when it is put up against the Western or modern setting. To be left alone, [...]is indeed no sight at all.”(Suzuki, 1970)

Suzuki incorporated into his chapter that Zen, having minimal connection with morality, has a crucial contribution towards the construction of Japanese artistic background. Similarly, David C. Bates in “*Religion and the Sacred in the Works of Haruki Murakami*” has examined the relation between Japanese and Western culture and religion with the literary canon of Haruki Murakami. Bates pointed out the influence of Buddhism in the development of Murakami’s settings of novels and how those are given shape by Japanese history and culture with the mixture of Western influence. Zen, as a major part of Buddhism in Japan, also represents the artistic quality of the author. The characters of Murakami, embrace the loneliness for the long-awaited enlightenment and self-reliance. According to the elaborate explanation of DT Suzuki and Work of Bates, the residue of Japanese elements in Murakami’s work can be traced through his novels. A major interconnection between Toru Okada and Lieutenant Mamia from *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle* is Okada being influenced by Lieutenant Mamia’s experience in the well, being entirely isolated from the world and how he also ended up doing the same. Lieutenant Mamia expressed the state of enlightenment and disparity through his narration of his experience in the well.

“I was able to descend directly into a place that might be called the very core of my own consciousness” (Murakami, 1994)

The mysterious incident of ‘flood of light’ inside the darkness of a deep well can be interpreted as Mamia’s lost enlightenment which influenced his later realisation that “One may have to live the rest of their life in hopeless depths of loneliness and remorse” and he took the state of mind as his own salvation. (Murakami, 1994). The Japanese intellectual, thinker and philosopher Keiji Nishitani discussed the paradigmatic side of Zen Buddhism, in the book *Self*

Overcoming Nihilism, it mentioned the relation of human beings with serenity and how Zen is a way of that. Nishitani introduces Zen as a particular method of “investigating upon oneself”, to think and disband oneself from the hustle of urbanity and globalised cultural criticism of the specific aspect of Nihilism in the context of Japan (Nishitani, 1990).

On the other hand, Friedrich Nietzsche, in his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, raises questions over freedom, salvation, the socially established morality, and the difference between evil and good.

“Thou callest thyself free? [...] Free from what? What doth that concern Zarathustra? Free for what? Canst thou give thyself thine evil and thy good, hanging thy will above thee as a law?” (Nietzsche, 1896).

Nietzsche questioned the ideas of freedom and morality along with religion through the conversation of Zarathustra with the Saint in the woods. Zarathustra’s love for ‘men’ and the saint refuses to prioritise men over his spiritual belief on a superior entity. The challenge Zarathustra put with the argument of *God being dead*, was certainly to prioritise the life of human beings and their venture of looking beyond themselves, their subconscious. It clearly criticises the Western religious morality and stereotypical spiritual expressions, along with prioritising the importance of being connected to themselves, connected to the earth to perceive and prioritise the virtues of human beings. The questions raised by Nietzsche correspond with the search for meaning related to the concept of *Satori* mentioned in D.T Suzuki’s *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Nietzsche introduced the concept of beyond-man<sup>2</sup> or superman, with the self overcoming notion. Alexander Tille, the translator of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, pointed out how the concept of beyond-man was incorporated within Zarathustra,

“As if it were outside of time and space, and certainly outside of countries and nations, outside of his age, and outside of the main condition of all lives—the struggle for

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<sup>2</sup> *Zarathustra’s introductory speech, p.5*

existence. [...] Nietzsche's imagination of supreme, is a province of boundless individualism, in which a man of mark has free play"(Title, 1896)

The idea of beyond-man can be compared with the paradigm of Zen according to the definition as it goes by the ascension towards the higher spiritual realm, suppressing the demands of instinctive behaviours (Suzuki, 1970). Therefore, the Nihilist ideas of Nietzsche comes along with the Zen perspectives through the concept of beyond-man, As Eastern philosophical emphasis on meditation and detaching oneself from the earthly desire and ascending to a intellectually superior form, the beyond-man concept resides within the Eastern philosophy and Murakami attempted to express this specific idea through the self-searching elements within his character in the novels.

The position of Japanese literature was determined by various aspects and global amalgamation. Modern Japanese literary canon is a trajectory of the social and philosophical movements in Japan and Murakami's portrayal of historical issues indicates how this influenced the Japanese artistic progress. Mathew Stretcher, a scholar of Modern Japanese Literature, in his chapter on Murakami on the book *Modern East Asian Literature* discussed the involvement of the Author with the Japanese student movement known as Zen Kyoto movement. *Youth and History: Individual Change in Postwar Japan* is an article by Robert Jay Lifton which is evidence of the ideological shift of the youth of post-war Japan and their concern for individual freedom, self-realisation and their interest toward Western Nihilism. On the other hand, Murakami's work emphasises on the post-war and post-student movement era questioning and examining the self-realisation and individual freedom through his characters from the novels. (Stretcher, 2002). The book chapter<sup>3</sup> claims the emphasis of Murakami towards

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<sup>3</sup> Murakami Haruki, *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*

the generational crisis for identity in the post world war II period, the 1950's decade, and how the youth of that time got engaged in political activism in order to define their identity and self. Murakami's work foregrounds the generational conflict for self-definition for the decades of post war period consisting of the constant quest for finding meaning of life, self identity and a concrete connection among the surroundings. Murakami provides the characters with psychological and supernatural ability to fulfil the requirements of philosophical and spiritual manuals of self-discovery. According to Strecher,

“The Magical Realism in Murakami's fiction, most commonly manifests itself as the protagonist's ability to enter his own unconscious and revisit memories of people and things he has lost. In this way he archives partial reunion with his inner self by recovering, temporarily, a portion of his historical past”(Strecher)

Corresponding to this claim, Japanese spirituality, Buddhism, Zen, Nirvana<sup>4</sup>, the ancient schools of spiritual philosophy is latently present in the actions, situations and minds of the characters created by Haruki Murakami. Contradiction may arise about the author's interest towards Western individuality more than the contemporaries like Kenzaburo Oe but his work does affiliate with the meiji writers dealing with individuality connecting to the Western culture more often (Suter, 2008). *Japanisation of Modernity: Murakami Haruki between Japan and the United States*, a work by Rebecca Suter, determines the association of Murakami's writing style with the style of Meiji period<sup>5</sup>, aligning with other authors such as Natsume Soseki and Mori Ogai. Relevantly, Natsume Soseki has spoken about the Japanese openness towards the Western literature and how greatly it has influenced national and cultural growth. The idea of transmission of civilization and Japan's modification is highly appraised by Soseki and this is

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<sup>4</sup> Nirvana: The goal of Buddhist spirituality towards enlightenment, freedom and rebirth.

<sup>5</sup> The Meiji period began with the Meiji restoration in 1968 by overthrowing the Shogunate empire (military rule). This period is known for the redesigning of Japanese political and military structure to successfully establish the country as a world power which lasted till the end of the Meiji period until 1912. (World History Encyclopedia) [https://www.worldhistory.org/Meiji\\_Period/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Meiji_Period/)

also present in the works of Murakami as well (Soseki, 1911). In another essay of Soseki, *My Individualism (1914)*, the purpose of self-awareness and individuality of a writer and mutual respect towards others identity and culture as well as own, has been talked about. Haruki Murakami, as a Japanese writer, does hold the idea of individualism as an artist to depict a particular narrative. The uniqueness of the author is rather followed by the examples given by Soseki on having acceptance towards different cultures and it reflects with the use of Japanese and Western elements in Murakami's narratives. On the other hand, the work of Kenzaburo Oe, *Japan the Ambiguous and Myself*, has stated that Japanese literature is unquified by the 'oriental philosophies' such as Zen Buddhism. Oe found relevance of Zen as a philosophical aspect in twentieth century literature which is one of the goals of the thesis of examining the author's work under Zen Buddhist philosophical notion, making the essay an element for stronger corroboration (Oe, 1995). Oe have clearly stated his opinion about Murakami as an "Un-Japanese" author because of the cultural and linguistic hybridity in the work of Murakami written in Japanese language. But the individual imagination of the author as a Japanese novelist is immensely globalised and according to Edward W. Said's proposition of rethinking the literary framework on the context of nationally identified literature can be used to rebuttal Oe's assertion on Murakami's work being non-Japanese. Said stated in *Global Literary Study*,

"Two aspects of these intellectual frameworks in particular seem more in need of revision than others-first, the idea that literature exists within a national framework and, second, the assumption that a literary object exists in some sort of stable or at least consistently identifiable form."(Said, 2001)

Murakami's work exceeding the Japanese regional elements and being experimental with the global literary and artistic aesthetics, does incorporates the proposal of Said about literary self and identity.

Rebecca Suter on the other hand, in *Looking for Meaning: The Writer and the Detective* emphasised on the need of “putting order into chaos” and how Murakami incorporates with the power of subconscious, mythological allegory and metaphoric situations in order to bring the order or establish meaning. She claimed that Murakami has been positioned between the halfway of positivist rationalism and the use of anti-rationalistic effect on his work. According to Suter,

“The absence of a conclusion intertwines with the other self-reflexive strategies used by Murakami, creating a destabilised and destabilising vision of reality. It is within this vision that the writer should attempt to give meaning to the world” (Suter, 2008).

Murakami himself in his non-fiction *Novelist as a Vocation* mentioned his ideas about novel and novelists. He mentioned the presence of the unconscious while creating a character and understanding the actions of that character. Also, the author talks about the responsibility and association with putting meaning in chaos as a writer and the influence of his Japanese background as a writer in his writing (Murakami, 2015). While Murakami reflects on his writing technique and the characteristics of his own characters created from fragmentation and unconsciousness, Czech novelist Milan Kundera in his *The Art of The Novel* elaborated the idea of self in literary expression. His questions “What is self? How can self be grasped?” align with the created characters of Murakami. And the same questions incorporated with the Japanese philosophical aspect of Zen Buddhism and Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*. Kundera explains the role and responsibility of a novelist of creating the sense of self within the narrative.

“It is through action that man steps forth from the repetitive universe of the everyday where each person resembles every other person; it is through action that he distinguishes himself from others and becomes an individual” (Kundera, p.13)



But Kundera himself talked about the paradoxical conception of ‘quest for self’ which also can be seen in the narratives of Murakami. To quote from *Norwegian Woods*, “Life doesn't require ideals, it requires a standard of action” (Murakami, 1987). On the other hand, *Kafka on the Shore* ends with Kafka Tamura deciding to go back to Tokyo with an unclear understanding of the self he wanted to resonate with. Murakami resonates the ‘paradoxical dissatisfaction’ Kundera emphasised upon with an escapist notion of Kafka Tamura. While he was searching for his inner self and trying to escape the given fate, the world, he realises only the quest or escape, is only to reach a dead end.

“Time weighs down on you like an old, ambiguous dream. You keep moving, trying to slip through it. But even if you go to the end of the earth, you won’t be able to escape it. Still, you must go there, to the edge of the world. There’s something you can’t do unless you go there” (Murakami, 2002)

Both with their idea of self and action indicate towards the choices one makes to deal with the inevitable circumstances. Patricia Welch, in the article titled *Murakami’s Storytelling World*, genuinely explored and discussed the matter of identity, meaning and choices of the characters from his novels. His characters seemingly hold a dilemma between escapist and confrontational nature. Often the characters are crafted as ordinary people with ability to think in exceptional ways, ability of exceptional activity yet, dealing with “self-imposed isolation”. Welch stated the connection between the clash of outer and inner worlds of the characters who never can entirely depict their own consciousness. The characters from different novels like Toru Okada, Kafka Tamura, Creta Kano, and Naoko, suffer from confusing circumstances with ‘predetermined’ paths for them. Mathew Strecher in *Dances with Sheep: The Quest For Identity in Murakami Haruki* elaborates the illusion of freedom of choice in the particular characters with the influence of consumerist society and their struggle to understand their identity and controlling their ability of making choices and how they remain with two radical decisions to

choose from. Similarly, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* reflects on the character of Tereza, as an “Experimental Self” and the interrogation upon the idea of ‘self’. According to Jay Rubin Murakami used the method of self-examination as a creative act in his novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (Strecher, 2022). As Murakami is slightly dependent upon his unconscious mind while creating the characters, the notions of the author’s internal and external situations are bound to reflect upon the characters. The characters also reflect the historical circumstances of Japan through their passive behaviour of nothingness and search for self.

Murakami’s characters are the example of situational actions. The characters act according to the situation and are bound to face the inevitable consequences of actions no matter how they want to escape it. There are various specific situations and actions which suffice an escapist impression. Murakami incorporates the situational actions among his characters through their confusion and unknown pursuit towards life. Toru Watanabe seems to be losing his sense of meaning and pursuit of life. Watanabe naturally reflects the ordinary youth of post-war Japan, with a personal history of loss and desire towards particular people. The other protagonists like Kafka Tamura and Toru Watanabe too are resemblance the ordinary Japanese citizens with the internal need of finding the meaning. All of the characters depend upon their situational choices to put “meaning into their chaotic lives”. There are indications of the characters choosing spiritual isolation, and getting into a paradox of suffering and self-realisation. According to Zen, isolation, self-realisation can be the way of meaning. On the other hand, existential Nihilism deals with the suffering of isolation, lack of connection and disparity. Overall, the provided literary evidences addresses the question of philosophical duality within the novels of Haruki Murakami. With the comparative analysis of Friedrich Nietzsche’s Nihilism and DT Suzuki’s account on Zen Buddhism the question of the interplay of Zen and Nihilism in the works of Haruki Murakami. Keeping the philosophies of Suzuki, Nietzsche and Nishitani in

parallel, a distinctive literary perspective of philosophical duality in Murakami's work can be defined. Where the major critics have precisely examined the existential notion of Murakami, the Nihilist elements were often overlooked which this thesis intended to look into. Additionally, the simultaneous discussion of Japanese traditional philosophy of Zen Buddhism through the works of Murakami, tracing the Japanese elements within his novels also intend to redefine the widely acclaimed criticism of Murakami's work being "Un-Japanese" with his tendency of mixing Western artistic and cultural elements with the Japanese setting. Along with the important standpoints of Keiji Nishitani, Friedrich Nietzsche and DT Suzuki and other critical view towards the philosophical views, helps to find an intermediary position through Nihilism and Buddhism within the characters from *Norwegian Woods*, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* and *Kafka on the Shore*. The critical analysis of the characters of the novels reflecting with the ideas of Zen Buddhism, Nihilism and the combined workes of Nishitani and other discussed critics, will elaborately define the concentration of Murakami experimenting with the characters to find a possible way of life, balancing pain and tranquillity.

### **Chapter 3: Japanese spirituality, art, and literature**

While Haruki Murakami defines himself as a Japanese writer, the presence of Japanese historical and philosophical relevance in the works of the writer is dynamic. Japanese art, philosophy, literature, has a close influence of the religious, or more accurately, the spiritual praxis. The Zen spirituality is associated with inner peace, resonance with natural prospects, getting closer to the divine. Japan as a land of diverse cultural with spiritual and artistic background, holds Buddhism and related philosophical grounds as one of the central concerns. Emerging from major religious bodies, Zen got infused into the regular lifestyle of Japan in every possible angle. This emerged as more than just a religious perspective and became a philosophical practice which affiliates with human life as a lifestyle, as a thinking process, as a path of individual enlightenment. Zen Buddhism as fundamental perspective for modern and contemporary Japanese literature, holds a significant priority in analysing Murakami's work in this paper. Primarily, Zen Buddhism has an ancient root in Japan as an imported idea from China which later emerged as a fundamental doctrine of ideologies and an inseparable element of Japanese customs and tradition. From the ancient practice of Zen being associated with meditation, Samurai culture and religious significance, it made its way to the modern Japanese nationalism, politics and still plays a remarkable role in art forms like literature. As the product of Postmodern literary period, Murakami's texts cannot be defined as straightforward expression of Zen, but the philosophical and allegorical presence of Zen is something which must be explored.

Because of the historical course of Japan, the global representation and dynamics becomes noticeable in the context of Post World War period and its growth as a unique entity across the globe. The nationalistic and political trajectory of Japan as a country evolved gradually during the post war period leaving scars of generational and collective trauma. The political turmoil

during the meiji restoration period, following the long history of *Shogunate* rule, conceptualised Zen Buddhism as a nationalistic element with national integrity towards the Western world (Sharf, 1993). Japanese perspective towards life and spirituality is importantly dependent on the basic associated meanings of Zen. Zen, as a school of philosophy is entitled with enlightenment, freedom of life and emptiness along with other deeper concerns of life. The philosophical notion of enlightenment and liberty associated with Zen, has especially interconnected with self-realisation and self-enlightenment. The self-realisation or understanding of self, demands a certain level of disconnection and nothingness in human life which Zen nurtures through its meditational standpoint. It is established in the doctrine of Zen that human being must climb up the ladder of attachments of life, to think, to realise to reflect so everything, every obstacle and inconvenience seems insignificant (Suzuki, 1970). Freedom and enlightenment are synonymous in practice of Zen which means spiritual freedom is supposed to make one distinguish the difference of worldly delusion (*Maya*) and Enlightenment. Major Asian and East Asian religions have the interconnection with detachment and meditating to experience freedom. Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism have this simple idea of detachment in common which is the pursuit of enlightenment through intense meditation, disconnecting the mind, ascending towards spiritual freedom from feelings, connections, and ethical conundrums (Eirfring, 2016). Zen is an approach towards accepting the meaninglessness of life in a comforting way. It often refers to the separation from the chaotic world and worldly problems, relations, connections, materialism and indulging upon the idea of *Shutaisei* (Selfhood). Understanding the self and overcoming the self is one of the main concerns of the philosophical realm. Zen from the historical perspective, the influence of Chinese and Indian philosophy is relevant and it can be said that the entire religious realm of Zen Buddhism is a generational hybridization of Chinese minds and Indian Thoughts (Suzuki,

1970). This is a relevant information about Zen Buddhism, for supporting the later religious, spiritual and cultural hybridization of Japanese philosophy with the west.

Zen in the modern times does follow the ancient ideas of detachment and is a major contributing factor to Japanese art and literature. According to D.T Suzuki, Zen has been a catalyst in shaping the characteristics of Japanese people in general which worked as a driving force of aesthetics and the artistic minds which is present in many contemporary works of literature by writers as Murakami who uses the ideas from the doctrine as allegorical instrument in the characters behaviours. Japan's geographical situation, the mountains, the forests, are extremely suitable for practising Zen. The way the Idea of isolation is present in Zen Buddhism for seeking tranquillity in life, is also evident in other Eastern philosophy and Vedic scripts, reflecting a widely distributed idea of isolation and its impacts in human life. The geographical setting of Japanese literature, specifically Murakami's work is mostly based on the mountains, forests or someplace serene. For example: Kafka Tamura, the protagonist of *Kafka On The Shore*, has a major connection with the Kochi mountainous forest land, exactly where he faces self-enlightening experiences, he could connect with the afterlife, his significance in the real world and the direction of his life.

The political history of Japan influenced Zen as a cultural term time to time and the modern post-world war period was when Zen was being talked about and practised through the artistic forms. With the traumatic experience of world war, nuclear attack and political unrest, the nation started to grow into distress and disparity, and the decades of 50s and 60s became an epitome of rising emptiness, nothingness and disparity through Japanese literature. With the rising tension of generational distress and modern globalisation, the land of sacred spirituality, was moulding with the popular culture and was constantly being open to globalisation in terms

of culture, philosophy, and lifestyle. The student uprising known as the Zen Kyoto movement, in demand of certain socio-political modification, held a major role in the modification of ideological, philosophical, and cultural standpoint of contemporary Japan. The post-war generation of artists and intellectuals was eager for examining, experimenting with the global aesthetics, and modernising their cultural expressions. And another significant shift happened after the 70s when the youth of Japan started to turn away from political activities and started to be tagged as 'The Introverted' generation moved towards self-experimental activities. The artists, writers, owned the experimental point of view in their art to examine the 'self', spiritual realm and meaning to understand, if the contemporary world have or lack them (Rimer & Gessel, 2011). Murakami being a present observer of both the phenomena, as a student, a citizen and most importantly a writer, also resembles the socio-cultural, literary shifts of the postwar period. Murakami's literary canon, reflects a globalised image of Japan with the inclusion of popular culture worldwide. But most importantly, the philosophical praxis in Murakami's literature, can be considered as an expression of the intensified philosophical experiment as the 80s, 90s century Japanese art claimed about. And the analysis of symbols, metaphors and the overall behavioural characteristics of the characters represent an unresolved conflict between Japanese and Western philosophical point of views specifically the idea of emptiness in Zen Buddhism and the same concept of emptiness, detachment, and freedom, in Nihilism which, on the other hand, denies any possible meaning of life.

Overall, the literary tapestry of Japan saw a major pessimist shift through the postwar period. The modernization of literature created the new realm of literature of ideas, the novel of mental life where the writers started to depict their personal ideas and perspective through the narrative. The neo-realist novels started to emerge as aesthetics under the influence of Western ideologies and literary canons. The life stories, experiences and sufferings of regular people

were being the central idea of literature, portraying the post-war darkness. (Yamagiwa, 1953). The postwar literature of Japan became an experimental expression of sorrow, disparity and nihilistic ideas connected with the loss in the world war and death of millions of people. A sense of self-preservation and presenting one's individualism also started to be the pinpoint of Japanese literature as well as the political ideologies. As after the destruction of war, the country had to emerge as an established country, it started to make the international relations stronger through political treaties and a rise in artistic imitation of the west. While Yamagiwa argued in *Fiction in Post-War Japan* that the traits of Japanese artists consisted nihilist and pessimist ideologies, there were also various writers, novelists creating art just for entertainment in an escapist manner, for mass audience. Post war Japan, in order to construct a new social order and escape the "polluted past", the socio-economic, socio-cultural construction turned into materialistic notions which directed the literary debates more towards spirituality, search for meaning and self-understanding concepts (Shimazu, 2003). The social coping mechanism of Japan from such devastating past is also a relevant discussion as while growing as an economic hub of Asia, it remained political orthodox presenting with national, regional ideas as source of nationalism (Takashima, 1951)

The intervene of post-modern style on the other hand, especially the writings of Murakami, can be depicted as both styles referred by Yamagiwa in *Fiction in Post-War Japan*. Works of Murakami undoubtedly covers the demand of entertaining page turners as well as high intellectual relevance with Japanese and Western ideologies.

The Western influence on Japanese culture and literature in the desperate times of nothingness was highly influenced by the Existential nihilist ideas which also held the similar emerging history in the West. As Japan has been accessing global perspectives, it was a matter of time that Western philosophies made their way into Japanese culture. The hybridization of Japanese



philosophy and culture is not just a contemporary modern phenomenon, the philosophical interfacing with other Asian philosophy and religion has already been mentioned. So, at the time of globalisation, rapidly growing interaction among the international society and culture, it is obvious that literature also will get influenced by the change and the writers need to specifically identify the change of social aesthetics, taste of art among people in order to represent the truth, the actual scenario of the society, making fiction more realistic. Murakami's literary canon is individually evident of these socio-cultural changes among the urban society of Japan. The apparent use of European intertextuality, pop culture, Western ideologies are the realistic representation of internal, psychological chaos of Japanese citizens. The post-modern Japanese philosophers, from the doctrine of Zen Buddhism, support the hybrid ideas of Existential Nihilism coming from the west. With the argument of Keiji Nishitani, Nihilism shows the social and historical decay and loss of past ground for a generation. Nihilism has been identified as a social phenomenon which is interrelated with the postwar spiritual decay in Japan by the relevant thinkers and intellectuals. In this argument, Nihilism, or the relation of Nihilism with the ideas of Zen, takes a turn towards philosophical anthropology in the context of Japanese traditions. It can also be easily argued that writers like Murakami collided the boundaries of history, philosophy, and psychology with socio-anthropological terms within the literature. Where the arguments of philosophy and literature being imported from the West to Japan was raging, Nishitani raised the argument of Buddhism being the root of Nihilism, where Nietzsche supposedly used Buddhist references in his discussion of Nihilism (Nishitani, 1990). With that question arising in Japan, being the practical centre of Zen Buddhism, requires more philosophical attention to examine the relation of Zen and Nihilism and creating a dialogue between the two aspects. Murakami tends to follow creating universal characters, with the tendency of being lost, confused and eager to depict the meaning of life. According to the argument, Murakami not only creates literary realm of fiction or fantasy but also with the use

of magical realism, he bends the regular literary structure, using a heavy postmodernist style folding the stories within layers of personal struggle, historical void, ethical dilemma and most importantly, philosophical reflection on existence.

## **Chapter 4: Watanabe from *Norwegian Wood* as Experimental self and the Confusion of Nihilism**

The novel *Norwegian Wood* is a reflection of existential crisis, nothingness and isolation through its main character Toru Watanabe. Though it can be said that Watanabe represents the characteristics of previously discussed post-war youth of Japan, but he also bears the characteristics of universalised existential angst with the decisions, choices and actions taken by him. I frowned upon Watanabe as a character approaching the novel from a reader perspective but enough critical observation makes the character appear as an epitome of disparity and detachment. Watanabe was burdened with the pressure of just existing, with serious lack of human connection like love, affection, and stability while he was in a constant crossroad of different choices. It is hard to say that if Watanabe was able to find his meaning into the chaos of reality, in fact, a pattern of growing disparity and seeking salvation can be seen instead. The way Kizuki was turned to Naoko, Naoko turned to Watanabe to bear with her unbearable life before committing suicide and after that, Watanabe rushes back to Midori, with the same demand of being saved possibly from the void of existence.

“Again and again I called Midori from the dead centre of this place that was no place”(Murakami, 386).

One can wish the ending to be a conventional ending of a romance novel but Watanabe doesn't fall into the category of a 'prince charming', rather, he raised significant questions about relations and existence. Firstly, as majority of the Murakami's characters, Watanabe's narrative also didn't include any parental or familial bond. It can be considered that the novel was just a part of Watanabe's life but there was no visible contribution or emotional attachment with the family in his dreadful condition. Rather, he found strangers to replace the emptiness and absence of Naoko, and his sanity. Just like him, Midori chronicled about her complicated

relationship with her family, which made her craving for love and attention by any means. His call to Midori does seem like returning to a lover after the epiphany of love, life, meaning which on the other hand, can also be the unbearable sufferings of his life due to the death of the only person he wanted to hold on to. This is how, the disparity is transferred from one person to another, where the expectations were to heal each other. But Murakami rather kept the conclusion clouded for readers following the trait of ambiguity within the entire novel which essentially leaves the room for multiple interpretation. The novel can be seen from multiple perspective with the “formulaic style of literature” that Murakami created and surprised the readers with the unconventionality in an apparent romance novel (Strecher, 2002). The pursuit of Watanabe since he met Naoko was to save her, make her inner void filled but he failed to do so. Watanabe is a crucial creation of Murakami and appear as an experimental character who was given certain choices and actions defining the character. It is a character that seemingly tests the claims of Sartrean existentialism, trying each and every possibility in his life to curve out a meaning, yet failing miserably, addressing the paradox of ‘free will’. Human beings are in no way entirely free to choose anything for themselves rather they have the social and moral framework that governs the desires, meaning and choices people take in their lives. Hence, no individual is in charge of his own life which leads us to Nietzsche’s ‘eternal suffering’ where there is nothing but suffering in human life. Not only Watanabe’s desperation of being saved from the void of detachment, Midori’s struggle to find happiness is also an indication towards the meaningless search of tranquillity.

Watanabe resembles the notion of detachment from people where he finds himself unable to connect to anything and anyone in his new life in Tokyo other than Naoko, who was known to him from his teenage life in his hometown. Murakami created this plot as the Japanese tapestry of change and post-war modernity where people are adapting to the Western popular culture

and emergence of materialism among the urban Japanese population. The character of Nagawa, the dorm-mate of Watanabe, is fascinated about the material world and succeeding in the capitalist way of life where he knows, he can be a 'Zen saint' if he wants. Yet, the fascination, the attraction towards the dazzling shine of outer world, the bars and prostitutes, only out of curiosity and social experiments with his own life which he certainly saw as a gamble where he held absolute control of making random choices for himself. I would argue, Nagasawa is often overshadowed by the protagonist while as a character he has a significant influence in the direction of the novel and the characterization of Toru Watanabe. He is a character well read and intellectually enriched with literary knowledge, moulding, and shaping the thoughts of Watanabe in almost each step of his Tokyo life.

“Hey, you know that thing Dostoevsky wrote on gambling? It's like that. When you're surrounded by endless possibilities, one of the hardest things you can do is pass them up”

As Nagasawa referred to Dostoevsky's gambling, it is equally important to look at what actually Dostoevsky had with his addiction of gambling. Murakami beautifully connected Dostoevsky's addiction to Nagasawa's experimental decisions of his life. To Dostoevsky, Gambling was a way to be in charge of situations which are under his control that the real world could never be, but gambling could provide the satisfaction of being in charge (Rosenthal, 2015). Nagasawa, as an advisor and role model for Watanabe, was depicting exactly this so that they can make choices among uncountable possibilities in order to explore life, if not discovering the meaning of it. Murakami threw Watanabe among all these situations with people with various intellect to conduct the experiment of existence upon the character.

Milan Kundera created Tereza to understand the situation, to understand vertigo and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* as an interrogation (Kundera, 1989). He analysed the

‘experimental selves’ through his work, through his characters by putting them into situational traps. Similarly, Murakami, in his novels too undergo the similar process of experimenting with the self within the novels. The evaluation of self within Kundera’s work and his ideas on action and self, are resonating with the literary canon of Murakami. *Norwegian Wood* was more like a psychological approach to examine the philosophical behaviour of the characters of contemporary, post-war Japan. Though Watanabe seems like a regular character from the growing city of Tokyo, he also reflects the other important socio-cultural and socio-political notions within the Japanese youth of post-war period, being in a perplexed condition and searching for his individual self. “It is through action that man steps forth from the repetitive universe of the everyday where each person resembles every other person” (Kundera, 1989). Kundera emphasised upon the choices human beings make in order to create the identity of that person and how human identity ‘depends’ upon the choices he makes in the mundane world. But the major issue with the major characters and particularly the protagonist of *Norwegian Wood*, was to being unable to make a choice. With the political, social and cultural changes and hybridization happening within post-war Japan, the reflection of struggles of coping up, melancholia and the struggle with past, becomes the central attribute of the characters, where the characters stumbles upon different philosophical characteristics through their daily life (Mirza, 2017). The choices made by Watanabe or other characters through the novel also align with Murakami supporting Soseki about the individual self and the idea of hybridization of socio-cultural perspectives in order to create something unique. Definitely, Watanabe cannot be referred to as a character with high influence of the Japanese society, rather with a mixed idea of living rejecting what was the norm, rejecting what was expected from him a character.

Watanabe met Midori, and talked about *Das Capital*, they frown upon social movements, questioned revolution and absurd demands of the protesters from female groupmates. Watanabe had Naoko to talk about their past and have their adventures together to be mentally dependent on her, he had Reiko and her bizarre story of past, he saw the student protests of Tokyo and he made his choices, his actions to find his self-identity, on the basis of timing of everything was happening around him. Even if only his relationships with Naoko and Midori are looked upon, yet the two complex characters bring enough chaos to his psychological state. Naoko, a mentally disturbed person from the suicides of her sister and boyfriend, was somewhat numb about the feelings of love, being unable to love or express it for Watanabe which left him scarred. The pursuit of the two persons was totally different where one was looking for love and connection, the other one, was deprived of the ability of loving or being in association with someone. Murakami explored and experimented with the difference of sexuality and genuine love. Naoko and Nagasawa are the two examples of the contrast between love and desire and the protagonist tended to be on an internal conflict between the two ways of intimacy and could not bring them together at once (Strecher, 2002). The relationship tapestry remains unresolved with the inability of the characters to make decisions or come to a point of settling down which raises questions on the authenticity or credibility of love as a healing element that the characters were manifesting for (Strecher, 2002)

A pattern or strategy that can be seen within the novel that to a certain degree, all the characters are in representation and at the same time, rejection of the philosophical norms. In particular, the sense of duality is present in the narrative while the fundamental need of every character is to make meaning out of their lives, to find their 'self' and get free from burden of loneliness. Based on my analysis, it could be argued that the characters, while having the ideas about the practical world, living into the duality of individuality and society, sexuality, and love,

contradicts the Japanese spiritual and philosophical ideologies. According to Zen Buddhism, it is prescribed to practise spiritual enlightenment through liberation from the ideas and feeling about the reality (Davis & Ikeno, 1949). The basic idea about Zen or Buddhism is that detachment and individual spirituality can help people deal with the harsh reality whereas, in *Norwegian Wood*, the lonely and detached characters are in major disparity. It is evident that the characters are too into the cosmopolitan culture and urban style of living and I would argue, Murakami experimented with the idea of detachment from different angle where there were no conclusion or outcome as described in the spiritual aspect, for the characters out of their experiences. On the other hand, while there are Nihilistic characteristics within the characters, they cannot be picturised as the form of Nihilism as the characters altogether do not come to any conclusion or any decision about life but the only thing that's evident is that all of the major characters, wanted to live within tranquillity and peace. The visible scenarios of the novel points out the 'eternal suffering' within life and it can be said that Murakami intentionally put the characters within the complex crossroads. But in this discussion, the characters' dilemma is in greater position than the writer's intension as in the experimental sense, it must be observed that how the characters behave within the boundaries of these existential ideas. The protagonist alienated himself to not to get hurt by the external issues while still being in internal distress and state of uncertainty. While Watanabe and Naoko, both were leading a detached emotional life from each other with difficulties loving and being loved, they could not detach themselves from their horror of past. The mental illness of Naoko and alienation of Watanabe, were both triggered by their complicated and scarred past through which they lost their balance of life and ended up in a ceaseless existential crisis (Mirza, 2017). I would argue that Naoko was going through a nihilist phase of her life, because of her past experiences and apparent loss of control and attachment from her own life, where she almost accepted the fate of her being in constant disparity and being unable to connect with anything as for her the meaning of life and



other significant things like love, attraction, connection became blurry. Naoko accepted her fate of being confined into the hospital in Kyoto mountains. Besides, Watanabe also found the hospital to be a place of peace and tranquillity for a certain period of time with his closeness with Naoko and Reiko being a help in both of their mental stability for a short period of time. The only sense of stability in the entire narrative was within the hospital days of Naoko, living in an isolated spot, away from the real world, away from the hustle of urbanity which also didn't last for long and ended with the suicide of Naoko. The setting of the hospital as described, was the resemblance of the Zen monastery with the freedom of ones' spiritual and intellectual growth with growing detachment from the real world.

The character analysis under the light of Nihilism and Zen as the two conflicting ideology, reflects that there are fragmented ideas, metaphors and narratives revolving around both the ideologies and philosophical aspects. Nihilism being the epitome of meaninglessness and has the primary philosophical notion within the novel. In the material world where everything was turning easy-going and accessible in modern Japan with the imitation and hybridization of Western elements, the characters kept coming across at an unsettled and disoriented emotional condition with deep disparity. The fragmented use of Zen Buddhism was also present within the novel as a layer of philosophical features within the choices, feelings and actions of the characters adding a complex sublime within the narrative. As the novel here is being considered as an experimental approach toward the quest for self, the quest remains unsolved. The Novel shows the immense disparity among the characters in search of tranquillity and peace within the connection of people, just to end up with a never-ending loop of disappointment, void of loneliness.

## **Chapter 05: The metaphoric puzzle of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle.**

The novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* by Murakami, explores the spiritual trajectory through the ideas of self-search and enlightenment, with a dramatic resonance with Japanese history and philosophy. The novel traces back to the traumatic past of the world war period and the traumatic effect of it within families and relationships. The post-war disparity remains a strong theme of the novel while keeping a close connection with the metaphorical adventure of self-discovery through the spiritual projection of Eastern philosophy. The argument of Nihilism and Zen being strongly amalgamated within the post-modern Japanese society gets intensified in the novel with the association of symbolic argument through allegorical characters representing the postmodern issues of life and suffering. One of the likeable traits of Murakami is how he places his characters in places and situations with inevitable open-ended yet tailored choices like a game of chess. In *Wind-Up*, the dynamics of different characters are crucially necessary to put light on different East Asian ideas and Western Nihilist ideas. Nietzschean Nihilism has the tendency of being more historical than existential if seen from the perspective of Japanese school of philosophy stating that it grew from the epoch of European modernism and the horror of war and destruction, because of lostness of human faith over some superior guardian power. This has been granted as a European element emerged along with the destruction of war leading to decay of spiritual faith and it can be argued that according to this idea of historical essence of nihility, the question of self, got flipped within the European philosophical realm (Nishitani, 1990). While European Nihilism is being considered as a historical idea of self and existence according to the Japanese philosophical perspective, the school of Japanese philosophy and particularly Zen, providing a more comforting aspect of life, is claimed to be the answer for living. On the other hand, like in *Norwegian Wood* the dilemma between Western and Eastern

philosophical behaviour, *Wind-Up* extended the experimental notions with more developed and direct address towards the philosophical ideas.

Murakami's picturisation of the characters and especially the characters of novels like *Wind-Up* and *Kafka on the Shore* with some supernatural ability can be interpreted as an attempt to put 'order into chaos' of existence (Suter, 2008). Evidently, Murakami used supernatural allegory, mythological ideas and metaphors within the creation of his literary realm which are symbolically present in the previously discussed novel *Norwegian Wood* but in *Wind-Up*, he explored Eastern philosophy in a practical way in an ordinary Tokyo man's life. In the case of *Wind-Up*, the narrative and symbolic details must be more prioritised than the conclusion itself to examine the role of the philosophical ideas. Firstly, the coping mechanism of the certain characters are something to focus upon as the novel has many absurdist elements replacing the meaningless incidents as an attempt to put reason. The lost cat, the ancient well and the spot on Toru's cheek, plays the role of absurd entities creating symbolic meaning and connection with reality. The other supernatural incidents are aligned with the Japanese elements of mystical beliefs and supernatural ideas which are evidently inspired from ancient Japanese spiritual conceptions which are highly influenced by Buddhist philosophy. Also, the intertextual feature of the novel suggests the intellectual richness of the characters and the presence of their own perspectives about life. Okada's thoughts and aesthetic approaches reflected a dependence upon the global realm of art and culture. On that note, it is important to specify that the title of chapter one of book two, *Appetite in Literature*, suggests the relevance and essence of Western literature within Okada. Throughout the narrative there are mention of intellectual properties including Greek philosophy, modern European and Russian literature, music, and art which has been used to inspire the situations and it can be interpreted that the

influence of West on Murakami and his Japanese ideas, are used in the literary experimental self in the novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*.

From the beginning of the novel, the protagonist has been put into a situation with undefinable uncertainty about his entire life. The confusing phone call to realising the disappearance of his wife, following the disappearance of their cat, was all served to him as the author was using the character as an experimental Guinea pig to explore the credibility of the metanarratives. Another crucial similarity of Toru Okada and Toru Watanabe, along with their similar name, is that both were entirely relied upon the people around them to put meaning into their life, to find the peace, in which, both terribly failed, after the disappearance of Kumiko, Okada's wife, he lost all sense of existence as he even felt his existence for the first time after he was married to this woman.

“Only after I married her, had it truly dawned on me that I was an inhabitant of earth.[...]I lived on earth, the earth revolved around the sun, and around the earth revolved the moon”(Murakami, 1994).

It is comprehensible that taking the traits of both Watanabe and Okada, there is a certain pattern for the characters to deeply revolve around the people, and having their identity and meaning of life, defined by a third person. But Okada's situations were more complicated than Watanabe in the sense that Okada was a grown-up adult, dealing with midlife crises like joblessness, finance issues, sense of betrayal, loneliness, and a heavy sense of identity crisis. In a conversation with a stranger woman about 'distinguishing characters', he expressed his heavy concern about his identity, and being perplexed about what it really was. He seemingly had a conflict between his external and internal characteristics from his height, hair and used accessories to intellectual properties and abilities and he discussed them just to come to a point where nothing was significant enough for the assigned situation. He even recalls the societal

problems of Japan being a “Carnivorous society” as an epitome of political unrest and classism where one must be within the elite class to make a point of living within the country (Murakami, 1994). Then within all the ongoing chaos, being inspired from the experience of Lieutenant Mamia, he decided to isolate himself from everything, into a strange, dried, and dark well, to think, to evaluate and to unravel the issues of his life which are going on all at once. This act can be evaluated in two ways. Firstly, it can be seen as, one losing all hope and desire from life to choose something absurd, to get isolated and escape from reality other than taking any action to solve or deal with the problems because he gets the point of eternal suffering within life. From one angle, this choice of Okada presents him as nihilistic while not taking any realistic action while his wife is missing, rather thinking about the baselessness of his entire life. On the other hand, evaluating the time spent within the well by Okada, it also can be seen from another direction that Nishitani suggested for modern spirituality of being the antidote of Nihilistic notions. The attribute of isolating one, to think and be in a calm lonely place, is also the direction practicing Zen as a lifestyle. It reveals how the two philosophical ideas and attributes are dynamically intertwined within the Japanese spiritual, intellectual property, where people like Okada, are clueless about what to even think. Hiding down into the well from the reality waiting for a sudden enlightenment like Lieutenant Mamia did find within the well into the Japan-Russian war. Among the multiple ways of explaining the life of Okada, it also can be said that this person is also an example of ‘going with the flow’, or just choosing to do so, with visibly no interest within any social or political issues around including the important perspectives and incidents needed to live in the society. Rather, there is a visible indifference about things like religion or politics. But the actions and choices of this character, leaves enough space to see the fragmented elements of Zen within where his internal suffering can leave him detached from the people from his consciousness. He was a person who avoided confrontation to keep peace within his life, making meaningless and false assumptions about

his wife's behaviour just to console himself from the hard reality, until it all went out of his control.

On the other hand, a completely radical view of life is infused into Okada's consciousness through May Kasahara, a nihilistic voice within the novel, which infuses an unbreakable seal of disparity. May Kasahara, the teenage neighbour of Toru Okada, reflects the darkness, the meaninglessness and hopelessness of living. May was portrayed with a strange obsession with death and experimenting with it for which, the situation of Okada influenced her even more. She wanted to know how death felt in life (Herring, 2020). Perhaps, this was for the desperate desire for understanding the meaning of life, as death was the ultimate end according to her, there surely was something meaningful about death which attracted her to know about it, or to re-establish her optimism about life. May Kasahara radically supported the nihilistic idea of life being entirely meaningless.

“But finally, Mr. Wind-Up Bird, isn't that just what life is? Aren't we all trapped in the dark somewhere, and they've taken away our food and water, and we're slowly dying, little by little...?” [...]I'm only sixteen,' she said, 'and I don't know much about the world, but I do know one thing for sure. If I'm pessimistic, then the adults in this world who are not pessimistic are a bunch of idiots.” (Murakami, 1994).

The encounters and conversations of Okada and May, had a conflicting tone about life and views towards it. Like Toru Okada and Naoko from *Norwegian Wood*, May was also a young character, with hopes and expectations removed from the world. May represented the indifference about life, acceptance of the uncertain and the internal-external distress in a nihilistic perspective.

As the evaluation suggests Okada being internally tormented and his life choices can go both ways of the designated philosophical perspectives, Crete Kano, another important character, can be a physical example of the both ideas of Nihilism and Zen representing the problem with

the two ways, separately. Crete somewhere creates a bridge between the two sides of Okada and May and presents a symbolic image of the reality of life. Superpower and supernatural things are dissolved within the novel symbolically providing philosophical directions, for the characters and the readers as well. And it can be argued that, Murakami saw the intense connection of supernatural phenomena with Japanese native culture and belief which has given a surreal direction to the experimentation of the 'self' within his novels like *Wind-Up*. And that suggests the relation of Japanese ancient culture and Western ideologies being dissolved altogether into the lives of Post-War Japanese artistic and social domain. A Postmodern feature of the novel would be the fragmentation of incidents and ideas through the whole narrative which are thinly connected with a string of narrative. To solve the puzzle within, there might be several approaches and perspectives to interpret the incidents with but in this context, Crete acts as a key element for the fathoming the idea of living. Crete was born with a supernatural curse of feeling an intense amount of physical pain. She grew up enduring each possible pain she could feel starting from her birth, making her life miserable and leaving her in disparity of a literal eternal suffering. Crete described her life as,

“From the moment of my birth, I lived with pain at the centre of my life. My only purpose in life was to find a way to coexist with intense pain.”(Murakami, 1994)

When Crete talks about being in pain, that is not internal tormentation like Okada or Watanabe, it is brutally fierce physical torture she has endured through her life. The intense suffering made it impossible for her to be in good terms with life or to be closer to any other human being. But similarly, from the failed suicide attempt when she got her most desired freedom from all the suffering and pain, she lost her feelings altogether, even the basic sense of being alive was removed from her existence. This left her as an embodiment of nothingness. That was the way finally she could live without any pain but eventually without any physical feeling at all which

left her within a complex position of numbness to lead her life. According to the testimony of Crete about the phase,

“I was in a state at that time in which I had absolutely no perception of pain. And not only pain: I had no sensations of any kind. I lived in a bottomless numbness. Of course, I don’t mean to say that I was unable to feel any sensations at all-I knew when something was hot or cold or painful. But these sensations came to me as if from a distance, from a world that had nothing to do with me. [..]My unfeeling flesh was not my flesh.”(Murakami, 1994).

Her declaration of the complexity going on with her life, brings out the conflict between Nihilism and the ascension of an individual through detachment as described in the ideas of Zen Buddhism. This crucial character, Crete, is an important factor behind the development of the strings of the narrative and also raises realistic questions about what to embrace? Eternal Suffering or eternal detachment? Through Crete, the conflicting ideas of Nihilism and Zen Buddhism have been pointed out that even with Nothingness, *Sunyata* as the similar element residing within the two theoretical approaches, they have clashing outcomes. It raises the question of how credible the result of practising Zen is in practical life. As Zen vouches for removing one’s connection from the material world, to get rid of suffering, detaching them from any worldly feelings and desire, Crete works as a tool to show a weightless life without any worldly connection, no feeling, surviving the world. The aftermath of her loosing her faculty of sensory, indicates the grave meaninglessness of living in a painless world. It is obvious from Crete and Okada’s situation, that both, metaphorically representing a vast group of people in the world, were longing for a middle point, a proportionally balanced life to finally be free from all the tormentation.



Nishitani's school of philosophy saw Zen as the overcoming element of *nihilism* and interprets European nihilist ideas as an unconventional perspective of living comparing with the general ideas of Buddhism about detachment and enlightenment. It is to be mentioned that idea of Nihilism introduced by Nietzsche reduces the spiritual dependence on a superior entity and is an expression of opposing the traditional religious values while Buddhist religious ideologies delves upon some ethical standpoints such as Karma<sup>6</sup>(Kewon, 1996). Nishitani, as a modern philosopher, combined the ideas of the two philosophical standpoints of Nihilism and Buddhism and interpreted Nietzschean nihilism as a practical approach to life suggesting nihilism as "a return to a life-affirming mode of existence"(Braak, 2015). In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the statement of god being dead, can be seen as a radical emphasise on converting the concern of humanity from pleasing the creator towards the reality and existing human civilization. So it can be said that Nishitani's approach to analyse Nihilism in the Eastern philosophical and spiritual context was an effort to address a balanced philosophical ground where Nihilism and Buddhism can co-exist. The character Crete Kano from *Wind-Up*, with her life before and after the supernatural physical change of abilities to feel pain, metaphorically addressed the same idea as Nishitani that where the balance between pain and numbness is necessary to live. This was also the point Okada was looking for to make his meaningless life livable to some certain and his another companion, May kept overlooking with her pessimist perspectives towards life. The symbolic representation of the internal crisis of human life through the specific characters can be depicted as a reflection of the people dealing with such existential angst for various reasons. Zarathustra's statements and perspective can certainly be seen to attach with the *Wind-Up* puzzle to get a patched up tapestry of human life and purpose. But seeing *Wind-Up* as an experimental investigation, it is necessary to take the socio-political

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<sup>6</sup> Karma- The word karma etymologically refers to 'actions' and in Buddhist and other Eastern religious and philosophy refers to the term as the sum of peoples choices, actions and the consequences from certain moral grounds.

element within the novel as well, where there is reflection on war, brutality and disparity linked with the devastating past. When the time of post-war depression and globalisation of Japan leaves the people amid a crisis of confronting their own life, the desperation of bringing life in order grows stronger. In that case, as Nietzschean Nihilism suggests, people must come down from the metaphoric mountain of isolation, ascend from the deep dark well of waiting and ‘superterrestrial hopes’ to break free and “remain faithful to earth” (Nietzsche, 1896).

## Chapter 06: Void, Tranquillity, and Conflict of self in Kafka on the Shore

*Kafka on the Shore* as the most celebrated novel of the author, and a paramount of the conversation between Zen Buddhism and Nietzschean Nihilism Had been kept for the discussion about the dual residue of the two philosophical perspectives following the previous arguments based on the other Novels of Murakami. As the main feature of the characters in *Kafka on the Shore* surely follows the pattern of other characters like Watanabe and Okada. But the experimental progress that can be seen throughout all the principal perspective, the protagonists of the three novels are explainable through the Japanese philosophical pattern. Japanese tendency of considering Zen and other religious philosophical terms and practice as artistic muse, is also visibly present within *Kafka on the Shore* where in the former discussions, only layers and fragments of Japanese philosophy had been found (Suzuki,1970). Loneliness, Sunyata, nothingness from Western perspective and Eastern perspective have a conflicting existence through all the discussed novels of Murakami and also a crucial thing to look for in *Kafka on the Shore*. Comparing Kafka with Nietzsche's Zarathustra, it can be discussed how the philosophical existence of the two characters and their sense of nothingness according to different point of view, different period and different notions, aligns with each other.

Nietzsche's Zarathustra, from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is an ironic characterization of an important faith-preaching figure from ancient times. The way Kafka from *Kafka on the Shore* and Zarathustra from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, aligns with their ultimate idea of confronting life rather than seeking comfort in isolation, also raises questions about the radical portrayal of Nihilism as a philosophy. Firstly, the origin of the name Zarathustra, goes back to 1500 BCE as Zoroaster, to the lineage of monotheism (Aiken, 2003). Though there are questions and

clouded judgements about relation of Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Zoroaster but it surely seems ironic that the name of highly influential priest of ancient Iranian religion, has been used by Nietzsche, only to 'radically' state the non-existence of any supreme being (Aiken, 2003). Though the discussion here does not argue with the fact if actually any divine deity exists, but, to focus on human life like Murakami and Nietzsche did, the notion of God being dead or non-existence of the divine, surely have impact in the entire system of humanity. As it already been discussed that Eastern idea of religion and existence of 'God' is more philosophical and symbolical than practical, Nietzsche's notions of living in a hopeless, meaningless world, eventually leads us to Eastern beliefs and notions of existence from Asian philosophical perspective. The concrete ideas of ethics, good and evil, evaporates with the idea of God not existing according to Nietzsche and that in fact, does clears up the path for subjective discussion about life and meaning (Suzuki, 1970).

Murakami's Kafka is seen to be delved into the realm of loneliness and with escapist tendency rushing away from regular modernised idea of life, away from the capitalist society of Tokyo to the silence of remote suburban area. Kafka's character does not differ from the other two discussed protagonists Watanabe and Okada where all of them are well read and influenced by the global and Western literature and culture and all three of them gives away the essence of hybridity. Following the redefinition of Edward Said about national boundary of literature, Murakami worked with the global elements present in the lives of contemporary Japanese youth. If the present elements of society is overlooked in the literary realm, it doesn't get to contain the authenticity of reality in literature. And it is often not possible in postmodern time to confine literature within the national or ideological boundaries as the lifestyle and concerns of human being do not remain confined within any geographic, political or artistic boundary which would define the national framework. So, seeking philosophical and cultural hybridity

through Murakami's work can be defined as a process of tracing literary progress through the contemporary globalising society. Also, the effect of Japanese writer Natsume Soseki and his perspective of cultural curation within literary realm which realistically defines the state of Japanese people at present times. It is another issue of discussion that Japan's cultural growth and the evolution of lifestyle also have left the scar of loneliness and nothingness among the population and Kafka is also a reflection of a proportion of people who indulge on the journey of enlightenment and self-search. The novel *Kafka on the Shore* is certainly different from *Norwegian Wood* or *Wind-Up* with its direct surreal narration known as magical realism which often corresponds with the supernatural elements from Japanese mythology and philosophical realm. Through Suzuki's speculative form of Japanese spirituality, Zen in particular, the art forms can be efficiently connected to the cultural background of Japan and *Kafka on the Shore*. Kafka deliberately seeks help and guidance from his introspective sound of the Crow, and rushes to find the "mechanism buried inside" him. The idea of self-enlightenment and major traces of Buddhist idea of enlightenment is engraved throughout the character development of Kafka. Starting from the conversation with the Crow, his inner voice, the duality of his character to the idea of Kafka being the resurrection of Miss Saeki's lover, are the century old concepts of Eastern philosophy which reciprocate with the idea of Nietzsche's eternal return. Kafka and other corresponding characters go through bizarre experience like soul changing, getting into collaborated consciousness which can also be seen in the case of Okada and Crete, talking to animals, being one with the nature etc which directly and perpetually refers to the realm of Buddhism. If Kafka is considered also as an experimental venture of Murakami, he acquires the details from his surrounding through his journey to the unknown. Also through Kafka's sense of alienating himself from the urban life of Tokyo, can be also seen as an allegory of Watanabe running away from his grief, and the return of the two characters back to the city, can be referred as their enlightened self after experiencing different aspect of life. The

conclusion that is missing from Norwegian Wood can be depicted from the conclusion of Kafka, the self he finds within his journey, the self he returns with from the mountain to Tokyo, to finally having the courage to face the reality, to speak with the police about his father's death, like Zarathustra did return from the mountain finding no meaning of isolating in the name of god searching, but to face the reality of earth, to "remain faithful to earth" like the Beyond-man, uninfluenced by the harshest reality of life (Nietzsche, 1896).

"Nothing's going to disappear just because you can't see what's going on. In fact, things will be even worse the next time you open your eyes. That's the kind of world we live in, [...] Only a coward closes his eyes, closing your eyes and plugging up your ears won't make time stand still" (Murakami, 2002)

The statement that came from the antagonist entity, the father of Kafka Tamura who was in the middle of doing the weird ritual with the hearts of the cats. The experience of Nakata is more bizarre and vivid in some points which often gets eclipsed by the existence of Kafka's experience and perspective. Following the quote spoken by the strange man, Nakata finally got the power and motivation to save the cat from the traumatic death by the man. He could kill the man, take an action to make a change, to what he felt was right, rather than just existing and waiting for things to be over. According to the discussion of this paper, Nakata who were just a random old person of Japan living out of government money and his magical ability, committed a murder which he was running from till his death. Where Kafka and Nakata are entwined under the supernatural circumstances, Nakata's experience is equally or more important in this discussion as he remains in the story as an important figure carrying out the mental scars from the World War II period. Kafka's longing for freedom and Nakata's will of fixing the magical portal to fix everything both were equally absurd and full of metaphoric elements from the reality. Now the character of Kafka also like other discussed characters goes

both ways of nothingness be it Nihilism or Buddhist while remaining in the haze of confusion about life. The non-existent encounter of Kafka and Nakata, did fill a void of time a space through indescribable incidents. To refer to Rebeca Suters work on this the chaos of reality and the venture of searching the calm, Murakami intentionally created spiritual and incidental chaos within the novel and experimented with the Japanese mythology and notions of Zen Buddhism.

The self-search of Kafka Tamura, the sense of enlightenment (*Satori*), starts with the conversation between the crow, an imaginary reflection of Kafka's self and Kafka remains until his return from the mountains. Kafka was in mysterious situation of soul exchange and roaming with literally one and a half soul. Kafka decided to get away from his oedipal fate which turn out to somehow coming true. Nataka didn't want to kill someone which he ultimately had to, these actions of the characters evidently stand for the development of the characters. The concept of *Übermensch* with the collaborative interpretation of the school of Zen, agrees with the characters of Kafka and Nakata, who alienated from the world, got the motivation to go back to it and face it. About the idea of enlightenment, it can be interpreted that the geographical setting of the cabin of Oshima, where Kafka went multiple times to discover tranquillity, can be seen as a Buddhist way of seeking solace within the nature. Certainly, the Japanese geography would have its impact on an author and his created characters, yet, the frequent inclusion of silence, solemnity, and similarity within the environments of the monasteries, does turn to the credibility of Zen Buddhism in human life of Murakami's canon. Not only Kafka, other characters too are rushing towards the nature, to run away from their internal turbulence. Another important character of Kafka on the Shore Hoshino, might be a minor supporting character, but his realisation of connection between God and human, adds priceless dialogue to the aspect of nothingness and meaning. Murakami's venture is surely not with religion or moral Constance but his perspective about god being an concept of human belief according to

what they want, where they want him to exist play along with Nietzsche's nihilistic idea. Though not radical, Hoshino's realisation about the concept of God included the radical nihilistic sense within the novel.

Kafka tries to get free from his life, he wanted freedom from his curse but eventually, he learns that that would not be possible and freedom is an illusion. The doctrine of Zen suggests that freedom means knowledge about oneself and getting free from the attachment to the world which leads to a better life and enlightenment, similarly, Kafka ran around with his consciousness speaking to him, the boy named crow guiding him around and speaking reality as if its a conversation with a third person. But the conversation of Kafka and Oshima, the illusion of freedom is described as, "people actually prefer not to be free", which is true as people created their own symbol of arbitrary freedom under different terms like religion, nation, civilization, and morality. Kafka's ultimate freedom was to understand where he was needed, and going back to the mainstream life after his quest to the answers for 'self' and after failing miserably to escape his destined reality. This duality of choice and decision, that the characters of Murakami seem to have dual perspective of their actions while escapism and confrontation collides, the bridge between radical Nihilism and Zen Buddhism gets built. The detachment and loneliness they tend to delve into, is the fundamental force behind the disparity and lostness of the characters. Kafka needed to find his mother, get away from his father and solve the mystery of his sister, which he technically could not, yet, had the satisfaction to accomplishing his fate.

The actions of the characters can get both ways with the notion of nothingness and in search of ultimate enlightenment. The crow appears in certain periods of confusion of Kafka and converses within his introspective with different views and ideas, which are already part of



Kafka as his inside voice, the “Prophetic tone”. For Nakata, Hoshino and Kafka, the similar pattern is that they all are running away from things, in search of certain other. To break it down, a man may find himself in a position where he cannot move forward, cannot stay still or do not want to and rather they want to escape from the reality, build an invisible wall around to cut the world off. From the views of Nihilism, the void of one’s existence cannot be fulfilled and the search for meaning would in fact turn to the notion of eternal suffering. Though the characterization of Kafka has been presented as a confused teenager running away from his chaotic life, but as he returns from the Shikoku mountains and decides to go back to his life once again, as a newer and wiser version while he only is not changed but the view towards the outer world changes. Kafka’s return defines the embracing the void, the boundless, internally detached way of life. Kafka and Toru Watanabe are similar in the way of searching for attachment in people in order to make sense out of their lives, a general aspect of human life where people are mostly bound to be with other people and find their meaning and identity through the others. But the ultimate idea of nihilistic nothingness as described by Nietzsche, is also about the idea of living through this nothingness while being ascended to such form where the void becomes ones way of living. The idea of self-education, self-realisation and enlightenment are the intertwined idea of both Nietzsche and Nishitani. Murakami’s characters has the perception of being into internal chaos but characters like Watanabe, Kafka and Okada, they represents the ultimate embracement of their life, regardless of the fact how chaotic it used to be. *Kafka on the Shore* ends right on the scene where Watanabe returned, a station of Tokyo city, calling their only friend from payphone and realise their new perspective of life, finding themselves as the “Part of a brand-new world” (Murakami, 2002).

The discussion of *Kafka on the Shore* also resembles with the metaphoric view of *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Each character with their crucial functioning in the quest to the unknown, provides fragmented ideas to the readers about the absurdity of human life, the endless void of

existing and meaningless picturization of life. The characters were seeking connection to the world, while making themselves alienated from it. This paradoxical behaviour is the dual residue of hybridised philosophical views of Nihilism and Buddhism. It can be said that the eternal suffering of Murakami's characters is a resemblance of the post-world war scenarios among the Japanese population and the decay of spiritual authenticity.

## Conclusion

The synopsis of the characters from Murakami's canon provides an overview of philosophical interplay of Nihilism and Buddhism. From the angle of History, culture and political viewpoints, the discussed novels successfully provide a bridge to converse through the thin boundary of the two philosophical viewpoints. The paper also explored against the recent critical scepticisms about the author being too Westernised from the literary view of Edward W. Said, and does trace the crucial elements of globalisation and Japanese ancient philosophy of being the conflicting component of the characterizations of the characters. The spiritual and philosophical point of views of people changes with time and the theoretical perspective, also changes depending on the scenario according to the subjectivity of the world and Murakami's venture through the imaginary realm providing surreal ideas of reality is also an expression of that subjectivity. The ideas of Nietzsche and Keiji Nishitani about philosophy and self, aligns with the characters, the socio-cultural and historical backgrounds of the novels. The fictional entities in the discussed novels, does show the conflicting ideas about living with the influence of Western and Japanese literary, and cultural realm altogether. Considering the critical analysis of the two contrasting philosophical viewpoints of Nihilism and Buddhism through the characters of Murakami, it can be pointed out that, Nihilism and Buddhism remained relevant through the discussed novels and the protagonists creating a philosophical interplay with each other. Furthermore, It is visible after the critical analysis that Kafka, Watanabe and Okada, as protagonists also longed only for the tranquillity and peace to live rather than only being happy within the materialist world. Their quest was towards finding a balance, an emotional space for coexisting with all the meaninglessness. On the other hand, Crete's life defines the necessity of that balance explaining the dichotomy of pain and pleasure in a state of indifference. Zen and Nihilism both undoubtedly emphasised on the emotional acceptance and indifference towards the eternal suffering. However, the search for meaning of life, the

actions and choices of the characters, incorporated with the outcome of life regardless of either perspective of Zen and Nihilism is applied. The ending of *Kafka on the Shore*, does resemble both the philosophical institutions, but despite of all the inner conflicts, he went back to face the reality, ascending from the fear of confronting it. This provides the notion that there will remain the duality in either case of the two philosophical standpoint but, like Kafka realised, there were no escape from reality, rather, everywhere there's confrontation, either the self or the external world.

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