



KAFKA ON THE SHORE: A MURAKAMIESQUE SPIRITUAL TAPESTRY

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ABSTRACT

Haruki Murakami's fictional landscape offers the possibility of spiritual renewal through the depiction of inner realities. Murakami's texts embodying the cultural undertones of Buddhism, emphasize the impermanence of the physical life in relation to the soul. His protagonists, misfits yet altruistic, in spite of being cosmopolitan, are seen embarking on spiritual journeys seeking solace and consolation, in search of the sublime to confront the inner narrative. Zen Buddhism as a pathless path asserts that spiritual transformation is possible for anyone who sincerely seeks it, without resorting to divine rescue, intervention or supernaturalism. Murakami's metaphysical tour de force, *Kafka on the Shore* (2002) daringly highlights the domains of the psyche and spiritualism. This article examines *Kafka on the Shore* as a quasi-spiritual saga concretizing the Zen Buddhist doctrine of *samsara* particularly through a deft delineation of the characters' journey from affliction to purification, self-awareness and affirmation. The research investigates how Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* illustrates the Zen Buddhist ideology of *samsara* by invoking the concepts of impermanence, violence and sexual taboos.

Keywords: *Samsara*, Impermanence, *Karma*, Self, Taboo.

I. INTRODUCTION

Spirituality in Haruki Murakami is associated with the attainment of reality by establishing a transpersonal connection with the world. Since reality is subjective, spiritual liberty plays a crucial role in Murakami's postmodern landscape. Spirituality emphasizes on the ability of the person to transcend his ego. Murakami pushes his characters to emerge as self-actualized beings through spiritual cleansing. He intends to analyze the psycho-spiritual development of characters with particular emphasis on their existential dilemma, spiritual emptiness, sense of loss, individuation, journey through uncharted territories and need for enlightenment.

American journalist Philip Weiss, who writes for *The New York Observer* suggests how Murakami's idea of God serves as an intrinsic concept that only need be accessed at will (Weiss, 1999). Kasturi Sinha in "Cultural and Spiritual Appropriation in Murakami's Works: A Critical Analysis" talks about Murakami's unconventional spiritual beliefs which focus on combining attachment and detachment, connection and dissociation (Sinha, 2024). His characters embark on a journey into the inner consciousness as a form of self-therapy to cater to their spiritual needs. They travel from a fabricated conscious world to the actual unconscious and then return to the newly attained conscious reality (Sinha, 2024). Murakami's unorthodox take on spirituality is reflected from his assertion that he does not believe in the existence of God but rather in the inner consciousness of the human system. Writer and literary critic David C. Bates in his work "Religion and the Sacred in the Works of Haruki Murakami" provides an account on how Murakami embodies the surreal and otherworldly encounters in his works by infusing religious and sacred motifs, defying realistic logic and how his postmodern works portray narratives from varying religions including Buddhism

(Shintoism), Confucianism and Japanese folk mythology (Bates, 2013). Murakami is concerned with the spiritual voidness in contemporary Japan amid all the materialistic comforts.

Haruki Murakami's literary landscape embodies certain metaphysical tropes which include fatalism, freedom, liberation, suffering, an ensemble between consciousness and unconsciousness, mundane and supernatural and living and dead. Murakami has also dabbled into the realms of magic realism, surrealism and the earthy mythology of Shintoism (worship of *kami*)^[1].

Kafka on the Shore marks Murakami's touch of divinity with its pseudo-spiritual overtones, psychic and paranormal phenomenon such as mass hypnosis, trickster spirits, concept of *limbo* (merging of real and spiritual worlds), emptiness, subjective confinement of inner mind, journey of self-discovery and a cross-Japanese pilgrimage. Unlike Murakami's earlier narrators, Kafka Tamura is created with a divine spark as he is meant to struggle against impossible odds that surround him, committing and dispensing taboos beyond the confines of good and evil.

Kafka on the Shore intertwines two interrelated narratives, the life of a fifteen-year-old drifter Kafka Tamura, estranged and precocious, who runs away from home and Satoru Nakata, a sixty-year-old mentally handicapped, half-witted cat finder. Kafka, abandoned by his mother and sister in childhood, seeks to restore familial harmony by embarking on a prodding quest. The story marks Kafka's attempts to evade his father's gruesome Oedipal prophecy that he would murder him and engage in sexual relations with his mother and sister. The story is all about making choices and coming to terms with one's past, desires and destiny. Kafka travels under the intimidating surveillance of his alter-ego, "The Boy named Crow". Kafka believes he has dodged his fate, until he awakens from a four-hour blackout behind a Shinto shrine, drenched in blood. The women he encounters in his expedition coincidentally happen to be the right ones, Sakura and Miss Saeki, just the right age to be his sister and mother respectively.

While on a mission to locate a missing cat, Nakata encounters a trickster spirit in the apparition of Johnnie Walker, a seamless facsimile of the Scotch whiskey icon, who has taken over the body of Kafka's father, Koichi Tamura. The normally mild-mannered Nakata, in a fit of rage stabs him with a kitchen knife, when he shows him his collection of captured neighbourhood cats, vivisectioning them one by one. Nakata, aided by another spectral presence in form of Colonel Sanders, locates the "Entrance Stone" which serves as a portal between the physical and the metaphysical worlds. Eventually Nakata reaches his final destination, the Komura Library, where he finds Miss Saeki, takes her by the hand and sends her peacefully into death.

Murakami's protagonists (*1Q84* being the only exception) embody the new type of softened masculinity of the Japanese man called the herbivorous man/grass-eating man (Nihei, 2013). Attention is given to the fragility of manliness and to the layered structure of masculinity including their anxieties, sensitivities, fears and insecurities. The Murakami man values freedom and solitude over intimacy. He is lonely, disconnected, melancholic and an isolated individual who is capable of doing extraordinary things. He is passive and the isolation, boredom and emotional distress he goes through are rather self-imposed. Murakami's narrators are seen contemplating the consequences of their choices.

Haruki Murakami's fiction has always revolved around the fundamental aspects of existence in an alienated cosmopolitan environment. This corresponds with the fact of aging with dignity and a personally-oriented or rather self-determined form of death. The purpose behind this is to thrive towards a rekindling of spirituality through liberating the modern Japanese man. The childlike pursuit of gratification is replaced by a sensibility of what lies underneath the façade of everyday life. This leads a release from the push and pull of one's fixations and passions and the conquest of greed, hatred and delusion.

Spirituality serves as a remarkable component in shaping the Japanese awareness, aiming at analyzing and interpreting religion with reference to personal connotations and experiences. In Japan, spirituality is regarded as a way of living, a common ethical code and not something to be preached. The therapeutic healing and rejuvenation offered by spirituality is reflected in the Murakami's fictional universe. The paths towards the

¹ Shinto or "The Way of Gods" is regarded as Japan's native religion, a faith far more earthy compared to Buddhism emphasizing on its abstract teachings of detachment and nirvana. The native spirits of Shinto referred to as "kami" populates the Murakami fictional universe (Strecher, 2014).

spiritual worlds are very well tread in his texts. Spirituality in Murakami spans over a wide array of dimensions ranging from Buddhist overtones, Shintoistic pursuits, shamanistic aspects, occidental spirituality and esoteric discourses (Guevarra, 2018).

II. METHODOLOGY

The research article follows an analytical, theoretical and philosophical approach, investigating how Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* illustrates the Zen Buddhist ideology of *samsara* by invoking the concepts of impermanence, violence and sexual taboos. Zen Buddhism, a form of Mahayana Buddhism, is regarded as a way and view of life which emphasizes on personal living experience. Zen is known for offering a spiritually permeated outlook on salvation, healing, search for solace, human fulfillment and a peaceful death. As the most practical discipline for attaining spiritual liberation, Zen Buddhism embodies the organized philosophy and life of the Far Eastern people, particularly of the Japanese. Zen Buddhist sensibilities are believed to supposedly heal the dissociation and trauma faced by the Japanese man. Murakami's protagonists are Zen-adepts in their everyday existence, for they lead apparently unexceptional lives, neither do they behave in an exclusive manner nor do they flaunt their piety or wisdom. They are yet aware of the fact that their existence is totally empty.

Samsara also known as causal dependence in Zen Buddhism "is the repetitive suffering-laden cycle of birth, death and rebirth" (Wilson, 2010). *Samsara*, also referred to as worldly life, is the painful cycle of unenlightened existence, an illusory cyclic existence perpetuated by ignorance, desire, afflictions and the resultant polluted *karma*. Afflictive obscurations such as ignorance, animosity and attachment create *karma* and suffering that propels *samsaric* rebirth (Loy, 1983). The ultimate aim is to relinquish one's desires and gain insight into the true nature of reality and transcend one's imprisonment in *samsara*. The cessation of *samsara* is referred to as *nirvana* (enlightenment). The phenomenal world of everyday life is the *samsaric* world which comes into being through causality and conditionality. The concept of existence or reality is at once diverse and subjective in both Zen Buddhism and Murakami. Murakami's narrators are characterised by a sense of alienation, resignation, dissociation, and a mismatch between desire and reality causing them to remain trapped in this vicious cycle of *samsara*. While the novel does not explicitly discuss *samsara*, the metaphysical events, narrative structure and the character journeys mirror *samsaric* existence as suggested in Zen Buddhist thought. Murakami transforms this cyclic existence into a symbolic and psychological terrain through fragmented identities, parallel worlds and *karmic* destiny. The research traces Kafka Tamura's salvific journey from a life of self-inflicted suffering, perpetuated by the clutches of *samsara* to a life of maturation, peace and liberation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impermanence and Triviality of Physical Life

Zen Buddhism underscores the belief in a permanent self, ego or self-consciousness as deceptive. A realization of the ephemerality of existence eradicates afflictive obscurations, and releases one from the bonds of *samsara*. "The delusion of permanence and independence are the basis of our grasping and craving. This is what the Buddha called the world of *samsara*, the endless cycle of birth, death, and delusion" (Cocciolillo, 2015). The belief in the existence of an independent self seems delusional, for everything in the universe is transient. Both Zen Buddhism and Murakami assert on freeing oneself from the misconceptions of the self.

The soul or the self is a prerogative for both Zen and Murakami alike, for it is the sum total of one's decisions, thoughts, deliberation and consciousness. The soul is not ephemeral, though it is vulnerable to physical attack and destruction. The vulnerability of the soul and its critical role for humanity is of primary concern for Murakami. The Murakami man struggles to protect and preserve his individuality, guarding his soul or self. His individuality is grounded either in his inner narrative or his alter-ego. The alter ego can either be a friend, who needs to be protected at all costs, or a doppelganger marking the protagonist's malevolent or dark impulses. The preservation and destruction of the soul is marked by its separation and isolation from the physical. Matthew Carl Strecher in *Haruki Murakami: Challenging Authors* states "The removal, annihilation or corruption of the soul is regarded as a fate considerably worse than death, a message that pervades Murakami's fiction" (Strecher, 2016).

Haruki Murakami believes the metaphysical world or the timeless alternate reality as that which inevitably overlays with the image of death. The supposedly “real” physical world and the metaphorical “other world” intersects remarkably in his fiction. The journey into the metaphysical world offers a metaphorical expression for the journey into the traces of one’s self. Murakami is intrigued by the opposition between the physical and the metaphysical realms and the dichotomy between the body and soul. The process of leaving the body behind and entering into an ethereal spirit-like existence is a liberation (*nirvana*) both of the soul and mind. His heroes often venture into forests, wells or underground spaces to battle an invincible enemy and is mostly tempted to make an easy exit, give up a share of his soul or even his obsession for the lost object. The metaphysical realm in *Kafka on the Shore* functions as a “changing room wherein the inner self leaps from one physical vessel to another” (Strecher, 2016). The realms of the physical, metaphysical and dreamlike states of consciousness depict the Buddhist cosmology evoking *samsara* through multiple planes of existence.

Murakami’s fictional landscape and the concept of *samsara* suggest the dissolution of the sense of self. The Murakami man’s forays into the other world results in his Great Death, the death of the ego, in order to be reborn as the true self, freeing him from the confines of *samsara*. The errors and afflictive obscuration in his very being is vanquished only after a struggle unto death, leading to a final abandonment of self. Death is not something that frazzles the Murakami man for he does not perceive a radical difference between means and ends.

Kafka Tamura’s expeditions into the metaphysical world are burdened by the dread and longing that he might meet his real mother and sister. The ignorance of what lies in store for him coupled with his obsessive need to restore his family initiates his *samsaric/karmic* cycle. Kafka is burdened by the ominous Oedipal curse which leads to his confinement in *samsara*. He commits the murder of his father Koichi Tamura, through a dream circuit/proxy in the metaphysical realm. Though his father’s murder occurred in the other world, he cannot escape from his own responsibility, ensuing in his *samsaric* entrapment.

The diametrical opposition between self and other is to be abandoned in order to free oneself from the clutches of *samsara*. Each character in *Kafka on the Shore* searches for their other “half” (Strecher, 2014). For instance, Kafka finds his other half in Saeki and Nakata and Kafka metaphysically complement each other, the conjoining of both resulting in restoring the balance. Nakata and Kafka’s existences are intertwined in a strange metaphysical way and Nakata becomes Kafka’s alter-ego. Kafka’s spiritual emancipation is linked to Nakata fulfilling the task for him. Nakata and Saeki have lost their selves to the metaphysical realm and live in the conscious world with their other halves. Nakata being devoid of memories, has no concept of reality. Both Nakata and Saeki only cast their shadows partially because they are trapped in a parallel universe, both in desperate need to leave their physical bodies to find a sense of closure. Here Murakami introduces the concept of “living spirits”, which serve as a metaphor to one’s shadows, also referred to as shadow selves. These refer to parts of the individual that are suppressed, reflecting on past vulnerabilities and trauma which guides their actions and embodies their deepest darkest desires. Before her death, Saeki insists on burning her diary, unread, signifying the last portion of her soul. The manuscript represents the mortal remains of Saeki and its burning signifies her cremation. The regeneration of the self is therefore determined by the choices and conditions the characters make.

The purpose of Zen is the annulment of the fundamental discrimination between the body and mind (Cleary, 1986). Murakami repeatedly hints the detachment of mind from body, the body being perceived as a dispensable vessel comprising an invisible and intangible self (Strecher, 2016). Kafka must detach from his body to carry out the demands of fate. Kafka puzzled by the profound emptiness of his being, dissociates from his self to embark on a journey to the other world. His estrangement results from his weakening ties within the physical realm which necessitates a reconnection with his inner consciousness. The most heinous acts are committed by him in the metaphysical realm of the dreamscape. Born with a genetic curse, Kafka loathes all things he inherited from his father. Kafka despises his father’s tainted blood that runs through him, again signifying the dichotomy between flesh (vessel) and spirit, from which there is no escape. He says,

I don’t like this container I’m in at all. I haven’t liked it once since the day I was born. In fact, I’ve always despised it. This face, these hands, my blood, my genes...it’s like everything that was passed along to me by my parents is cursed. If I could, I’d escape from them, like someone running away from home (Murakami, 2005).

Johnnie Walker, the personification of Kafka's father, a spectral presence, is incapable of doing anything by himself, but manipulates others into doing his bidding. He compels Nakata into killing him, enabling Kafka's journey into the metaphysical realm, scheming and ensuring the fulfilment of his prophecy, also providing himself a gateway to travel between realms in order to re-emerge as an even more powerful entity, crafting his own *samsaric* cycle. In the Murakami universe, the only choice for the characters to escape the metaphysical world and remerge into the physical world is through their Death, resulting in rebirth and an acceptance of the reality of existence. The separation of body from mind and the combination of both into a harmonious union (rebirth) in the physical world is the purpose of the Murakamian labyrinth. In *Kafka on the Shore*, one comes across fathers lost and found, signifying the impermanence of the soul,

Kafka's real father, Johnnie Walker, Colonel Sanders, Nakata – they are all father images. The novel is full of fathers. So it is not simple as just killing the father and having done with it; no matter how many times the father is killed, he just keeps re-emerging in different guises (Strecher, 2014).

Brimming with desperate need, instinct and chance work in Kafka's favor. His decision not to remain in the suspended state of the alternate reality but to go back to the real world marks the principal event in his maturation (Rubin, 2012). In his quest for self-absolution, Kafka Tamura undergoes a metamorphosis. Kafka's atonement is performed through the transmigration of his soul into the *samsaric* world. His tortured soul is transformed in Great Death, the step of dying unto himself that is coincident with rebirth in realization.

Someone who thinks the self and the body are the same falls to the extreme of nihilism by believing that both become non-existent at death. If that were the case, there would be no need to practice the path because *samsara* would end with death. Someone who thinks the self is one thing and the body is another falls to the extreme of absolutism by thinking that at death the self is released from the body and abides eternally. If the 'I' were permanent and eternal, the path could not put an end to *samsara* because something that is changeless cannot cease (Gyatso, 2018).

The idea of permanence being equated to consistency and impermanence to annihilation should be given up. This depicts the metaphysical bases of Mahayana Buddhism and particularly Zen. Though Murakami's early fiction "promises a future reunification of the self, his ultimate message is one of learning how to live without the self" (Dil, 2007). According to Murakami the self is grounded in a kind of inner narrative, buried deep within oneself. The descent to the alternate reality (real and symbolic) to confront the dead and quests for the other half to recover one's lost self, runs throughout Murakami's fiction. These fractured identities become a *samsaric* illusion. Kafka goes "over there and escapes with more than he possessed when he entered" (Strecher, 2014). He fights against impossible odds to preserve his inner narrative through a vigorous, unyielding defence of his self; the manifestation of subjective will to protect his individuality.

Fear, Anguish and Violence

Fear is ubiquitous. Fear and *samsara* are companions, the greatest of fears being death or annihilation. Insecurity, fear and anxiety are related to attachment. Fear is the root cause of *samsara*, for it imprisons the individual, leading to a skewed perception of moral conduct and forcing them to commit unwholesome and wrongful deeds.

The trajectories of fear in *Kafka on the Shore* vary from individuality and subjectivity (free will) to the force of inertia (fate). Kafka is ensnared between the hazy memories of the past, the abandonment by his mother and fears the assured prospects of the fulfilment of the prophecy in the future. This triggers his destructive impulses and he finds himself losing control and carrying out acts of violence involuntarily.

In *Kafka on the Shore*, opening the passage between the real world and the alternate world suspends moral codes and principles such as good and evil, right and wrong – *samsaric* snares such as violence and sexual liaisons are manifested freely without retribution, offering the subjugation of trauma (Strecher, 2014). Murder, incest and the most serious human taboos are irrelevant on the metaphysical side, transcending the human constructs. Murakami's orientation towards the subjective sense of good and evil is interchangeable. This results in moral relativism. He says, "the protagonist may be good, but at the same time may be evil, necessitating a complex sort of person. Like the game Othello, being in a chaotic, complex world where a change to one piece causes the whole thing to reverse itself" (Koyama, 2010).

Freedom from *samsara* is the responsibility of the individual for each individual has the opportunity to shape his destiny. In *Kafka on the Shore*, Murakami perpetuates the cycle of *samsara* through murder. The novel posits Murakami's approach on the questions of violence, anguish and commitment which are central to *samsara*. Violence and killing occur in the most meaningless collaboration of cruel coincidences. The question of agency is blurred in which "wanting to have someone killed, or dreaming about it, is enough to induce the act of killing itself" (Strecher, 2014). The crime and the criminal remain virtual. The act of violence is triggered upon Kafka by fateful forces replacing his inner consciousness, keeping him entwined in *samsara*. All the characters are either perpetrators of violence or victims of arbitrary violence. Kafka, the victim of an unhappy marriage and dysfunctional family is at the same time a hypothetical accomplice for committing patricide and incest. Saeki, similarly, is a victim of the unfortunate circumstances surrounding her old boyfriend but at the same time a victimiser for having married Kafka's father without loving him and eventually abandoning Kafka. Kafka, Miss Saeki and Koichi Tamura are caught in the web of *samsara* and are victims of meaningless violence, a loop that can be dissolved solely through acceptance and release.

Reflecting on the mind-boggling coincidences and contrivances of the long distance killing of the father – Nakata doing the killing and the blood showing up on Kafka's hands; the only phantasmagorical narrative that could prove that Kafka murders his father metaphysically through a proxy. Nakata possesses no fear, erroneous views or wishful-thinking. He lives by vow and repentance, making him a philanthropist. He embodies good will and benevolence which are the antidotes of fear in Buddhism. This distinguishes him from Kafka who lives by the continuance of his *karma*. Kafka is doomed like Oedipus to remain entrapped in the cycle of violence and violation, yet he embraces this evil version of himself which takes the form of violence and looks for justifications for his departure.

It is possible for one to escape the confines of *samsara* and yet be alive. This is ultimate fearlessness. Kafka conquers his fear and anxiety and makes the conscious decision to return to the real world. The novel exemplifies the themes of family and destiny through the displays of violence and personal pleasure (Dil, 2010). The forbidden predispositions for violence and sex, the elements that combine incest or the Oedipal myth are the hidden aspects of Murakami's labyrinth ensuing in *samsara*.

Taboos, Sexual liaisons, and Parenting

Most of the trauma and internal conflicts faced by Kafka Tamura stems from repressed desires and memories from his childhood. These desires are projected either through dreams or surreal encounters which provide a sense of closure. Kafka is to seek a non-striving attitude to eradicate the root of his suffering. The determination to escape from *samsara* involves abandoning the obsessive craving for *samsaric* pleasures. According to Zen, when sensual pleasures are converted from sharing to using, it becomes perverted (Watts, 1991). Kafka's *samsaric* ensnarement results from his desire for the mother. Put differently, being unable to possess what he desires or being separated from it, brings him suffering. The mother-son dyad is explored with conviction in *Kafka on the Shore*.

Kafka's imaginary striving and peremptory urge for the absent mother results in his objectification of Miss Saeki. This marks the primordial union of a young boy and an older woman seeking self-gratification from each other, filling in each other's voids. Miss Saeki's dual personas prevent her from fitting into the stereotypical role of a mother figure. The archetypal mother figure stands for devotion and selflessness. But Saeki's *samsaric* entrapment is driven by self-indulgent sexual obsession and attachment with her lost past. Before she dies, she offers Kafka her blood, representative of the milk provided by a mother to her offspring. This ceremonial ritual purges Kafka of the cursed toxic blood he inherited from his father, acting as a stimulus for his personal growth, recovery and liberation (*nirvana*^[2]).

Koichi Tamura had programmed the prophecy or curse inside Kafka wanting him to take over his will. Oedipus complex suggests the idea of a boy child developing an object-cathexis (erotic desire) towards the mother and thereby identifying with the father (Hmar, 2021). The father eventually becomes a threat, followed by his desires to get rid of him, switch places with him, juxtaposed by both rivalry and admiration for him. The tug of war or hostility between the father-son relationship is explored in *Kafka on the Shore*. Rightly put

² "The result of afflictive thoughts and actions is *samsara*; the result of thoughts and actions purified by the realization of emptiness is *nirvana*. The presence of ignorance or wisdom determines whether this mind is in *samsara* or *nirvana*" (Keown, 2000).

by Sakura, “Your father sounds like an alien from outer space...from some far-off planet, took on human form, kidnapped an Earth woman, and then had you. Just so he could have more descendants. Your mother found out, got frightened, and ran away” (Murakami, 2005).

Repeated rebirth or *samsara* results in endless wandering as symbolised by the metaphysically embodied Johnnie Walker and Colonel Sanders. Johnnie Walker stands for the spirit while Colonel Sanders stands for flesh emphasizing on the body-spirit dichotomy. Johnnie Walker signifies insanity, bloodlust and destruction whereas Colonel Sanders’ character is representative of the pleasures of the flesh, depicting the injunction of enjoyment. They do not claim to be God, but resemble trickster spirits with extraordinary powers meant to maintain a sense of balance in the universe. As Colonel Sanders remarks, “I’m neither a god nor a Buddha nor a human being. I’m something else again – a concept” (Murakami, 2005). These trickster spirits with their undecipherable forms resemble “hungry ghosts”^[3] driven by excessive desires and attachments and hunger for power.

Kafka fulfils the demands of fate by committing patricide and incest. This marks the retelling of the Oedipal myth - Kafka is driven by “the power of the prophesy; the ending of which fate has been pronounced for him” (Rubin, 2012). What distinguishes Kafka from Oedipus is the awareness of his fate right from the beginning. This eventually works in his favor for he has the liberty to change fate to his own advantage and craft his escapade from *samsara*. Kafka succeeds where Oedipus failed, he fulfills the prophesy and turns it to his advantage. But he is not damned as a result of transgressing the taboos. Since these happen in the metaphysical world which are beyond the constraints of time, space, good and evil, Kafka is able to subvert the most heinous taboos. This renders the human taboos of murder and incest as irrelevant, transcending constructs of morality and even the individual (Strecher, 2014). Though the deeds Kafka commits happen in the metaphysical realm, the very fact that he is aware of the prophecy makes him a potential anti-hero.

Kafka’s Oedipal inclination comes into fruition when he sucks Miss Saeki’s blood in the metaphysical realm. The blood of the female characters serves as a ‘cleansing’ agent. Kafka is redeemed from his Oedipal curse and is purged, cleansed and in a way rebirthed by Miss Saeki, providing him with new life, saving him from the confines of *samsara*.

Murakami’s depiction of all the carnal acts in *Kafka on the Shore* serve a ritualistic purpose (Rubin, 2012). These sexual liaisons open up a portal to the parallel world cleansing people of their spiritual impurities and rescuing them from the clutches of *samsara*. Kafka engages in a taboo sex act solely for the fulfilment of the prophecy. By forcing Miss Saeki and Sakura into himself, although involuntarily, Kafka eventually recovers his lost family.

IV. CONCLUSION

Zen Buddhism is envisioned as the ultimate path of salvation aiming at transcending the cosmos which is replete with suffering (*samsara*). As the most practical discipline for attaining spiritual liberation, Zen makes it possible for every individual to escape the confines of *samsara* in this very lifetime. “If sentient beings truly lacked the possibility to be awakened and were doomed to irreversible *samsaric* suffering, no one would ever regret being in *samsara* or long to be free from *duhkha* and attain *nirvana*. No one would aspire for full awakening or make effort toward that goal” (Gyatso, 2018).

Kafka on the Shore, Haruki Murakami’s surreal, self-aware tale digs deep into the recesses of the narrator’s psyche to churn out the dilemma and anxieties faced by him who eventually undergoes a radical transformation. The metaphysical realm or “other” world, acting as both a trap and a sanctuary, serves as a repository for the narrator’s self-reconciliation and actualization. The quest is one of recuperation in order to cure the narrator from the burdens of repressed anxiety and nervousness. Kafka though mindful of his past

³ In the Buddhist description of *samsara*, six realms of rebirth are enumerated. These are gods, humans, demi-gods, hungry ghosts, animals and hell beings. Wrong views and unethical actions result in rebirth as animals, hungry ghosts or hell beings. “The hungry ghost is someone who goes here and there looking for someone to love them, but is perpetually dissatisfied with every relationship. The hell being resembles the mind of someone overwhelmed by fear, animosity and violence” (Gyatso, 2018).

and augmented by the pain of trials and adversities, manifests empathy and forgiveness which helps him overcome his destructive impulses.

Kafka Tamura manipulates the prophesy which allows him to recover his lost family, although temporarily. He has not tricked fate but rather allowed it to work in his favor. Kafka willfully decides to leave the other world, still in possession of his soul. His destiny is and always has been in his hands.

The responsibility lies within the individual who needs to make an inner journey at some point in his life. Murakami's spiritual ideology is a way of life endorsing an ethical system of self-actualization concerning with overcoming anxieties, repressed desires and trauma, factors which invoke entrapment in *samsara*. The purpose behind this is to thrive towards a rekindling of spirituality through liberating the modern Japanese man. For a society obsessed with materialism, cosmopolitanism, consumerism and achievement, Japan needs to trace its steps back to its Asian roots seeking the domains of religiosity and spirituality.

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