

# Role of Death in “The Small Town Sea” by Anees Salim

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**ABSTRACT--** *Death is the crucial part of life. Death brings out the emotional feelings of humanity. Anees Salim reflects the human’s emotional response to death through the character of thirteen years old child narrator, who recounts his experience after his father’s death. Death is associated with aloneness, love, fear and decay. In this paper, we shall study what is the effect of death on life and it will also highlight the human experience of death and decay. It represents a dominant theme of death in Anees Salim’s novel The Small Town Sea, and express the sensitive correlation between the dead person and his close relatives. Anees Salim’s style of writing in this novel reveals his viewpoints regarding life and death. This novel shows that in spite of the inevitability of death, people struggle to live. As in this novel, the protagonist’s dying father moves to his hometown to spend his last days, closing to death.*

**Keywords--** *Life, Responsibilities, Fear, Struggle, Inevitability of death, Separation, Psychology and Death.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

–Life and death are interrelated. Death is inevitable for every human being in this novel as well as all the human being who has born on the earth. The literature depicts human life. Death is corresponding to last step of life. So literature reflects not only life, but death also. While depicting a human life, the author cannot ignore the life’s last step i.e. death. The theme of death in literature has been used in various forms since the introduction of literature. Anees Salim is one of the main authors in Indian Writing in English who represents the theme of death in his two novels named *The Blind Lady’s Descendants* and *The Small Town Sea*. Anees Salim is an author known for his books like *Vanity Bagh*, *The Blind Lady’s Descendants* and *The Small Town Sea*. Anees Salim represents death as life. Death brings human’s love and hatred feelings towards dead person. By reading this novel, one gets the full understanding of human life’s development towards death. Death evokes the internal emotions. Those emotions purged the inner feelings of human. It produced quantum effect on the human psyche. Each emotion undergoes a series of purgation. Death and emotions are interrelated. Beneath the surface of the emotions, there are many sub layers of emotions are present. A human can be happy or he pretends to be but internally he knows every second pushed him to near to death..

Anees Salim represents how the characters in the novel are purged by the death<sup>7</sup>. Psychologically, they pretend not to be affected by death, but their actions remind us of death.

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Death as a major theme has been used symbolically as well as physically. Evidence of such novels can be found in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*.

It is the story of fictional representation of a nightmare that occurs due to death and is making the base of the story. Actually, the story revolves around a family, and their fear. This story presents the life of the family and consequence of the death of family members. In other words, this novel records the death's effect on the family.

In this novel thirteen years old boy shifts to his father's home town with his family. In this book, the importance of one's wish is also clearly defined before death. As his father was near to death due to cancer and wants to spend his last days in his home town. This shows his love toward his hometown.

Death's every step also brings about the importance of life in the form of last wish. Human life is full of wishes. Every minute human sees his wish as his companion. Every step he takes in his life to tackle the burden of the wishes, but that wishes are only based on materialistic world. It is only the fear of death that directs him toward the real pleasure of life. The father comes to know that his death on his doorstep and realizes his inner wish to go to his home town<sup>2</sup>. During the humdrums of life, he does not realize the importance of life. But sometimes one's wish can become the reason of other's unhappiness as shown in this novel; son faces the destitution due his fathers' wish which also represents the element of a generation gap in this novel. Writer portrays the character's last wish in a very prominent manner.

Father and son relation represents the generation gap in this novel. His son wants to spend his time in the city and shows willingness to see the completion of metro line and moreover, his interests in enjoying the materialistic life. But a father who is next to death, realize the beauty of nature against the materialistic things and wants to spend his life in his hometown at the shore of the sea. But the same shore of the sea gives the different meaning to modern son who associate the sea with death. He comes across many death stories at the sea shore in his small town in the novel.

Native place gives an eternal and eternal relief to narrator's father. Vappa could not escape himself from death and last wish.

But his son starts a new life in a new place. Further, he associates everything with death. He befriends with Bilal whom he thinks as the symbol of death. The protagonist associates Bilal's cashew flowers' smell with death.

This book is successful in capturing the child psychology of death. This novel represents death as part of life. Every character is associated with death directly or indirectly. Their actions are affected by their own death or the other's death. The protagonist's sister Little was born on the same day, the Vappa died. Thus, in this novel Anees Salim presents death as the symbol of one's life alienation, complexity, aloneness and tension and futile effort to fulfill one's ambition.

In this novel, author presents every action of his character symbolize a step toward death. Everyone's destination is death in this novel. This is the universal truth which has been well described by Anees Salim in this novel. At once Vappa expressed his woe with smiling face and said:

"I have come back to die here"( *The Small Town Sea* 67)<sup>10</sup>

The rain also as a symbol of development of death because Vappa's death body was buried "where the earth was still soggy from last night's rain"( *The Small Town Sea* 1)<sup>10</sup>

Nobody knows that what will happen after his/her death. We can say that nobody has a choice in his life or after his death.

“Had someone told him where he was going to be buried, he would have instantly approved of the spot”.  
(The Small Town Sea 3)<sup>10</sup>

Vappa had not any good relationship with his father (Uppuppa) but his dead body was buried next to Uppuppa. So Anees Salim presents the hollowness of a man’s life by using death as a symbol. Life is totally meaningless with its meaningless thoughts. The hollowness of life can be seen with the Vappa’s non serious way of talking before dying. An hour before dying, Vappa talked about little things that happened long ago. His way of talking was contrary to everyone's expectations. He talked about his rejection letter from a girl. But in spite of little talk there was meaning and significance of death<sup>4</sup>. In fact, this novel presents that death is continuing with time, which is associated with life that takes place in various shapes in human life either in the form of a rejection letter or in other.

Anees Salim describes the lucid picture of man’s psyche towards death. He shows that man takes his death as an important thing in his life. He wants others to be careful of this. As Vappa imagined that, “All India Radio will have no option but to read the news of my death in a grave, breaking-news tone. I can even be the president of India” (The Small Town Sea 9)<sup>10</sup>

He cursed himself for being born in a small town where the only thing was the sea”. (The Small Town Sea 9)<sup>10</sup>

Vappa shifting to his hometown is the symbolic progress towards death. The death plays the villain role. Most of death stories revolved around the sea in this novel. Usually, the sea represents life and its hardships. But Anees Salim represents most parallelism between sea and death. Sea symbolizes the hardships of human life and compare the life with the depth of the sea. Waves symbolizes the haunting ghost and it engulfs life in this novel. Sea also represents the human helplessness before death as shown in the novel. Sea also shows the misery of life in the hands of nature. School nearby sea is always considered in danger by the father in this novel. Different waves of the sea represent different roles in the life of man. As in this novel, wave of the sea is symbolic of father’s approaching death. People travelled half the world to the sea shore to enjoy its beauty, but Vappa comes to die nearby it<sup>1</sup> and listen to the mystical musical sound of waves. Every moment, Vappa was near to death, he was struggling during his days of death

The effects of the parent’s death on the children are also reflected in this novel through Orphan Bilal, who becomes a friend of the narrator. Sometime, the narrator becomes obsessed with the thought of his parents’ death<sup>5</sup>.

“Too scared to go inside, I sat on the veranda and imagined my family dying in a car accident, leaving me orphaned like Bilal”. (The Small Town Sea 3)<sup>10</sup>

He tries to save his mother from any mishapening. Without any hesitation, he gives his mother the instructions handbill regarding breast cancer, which he got from his school.

In this novel, we also come across with father’s fear about his son’s life after his death. Father wants his son to learn to walk alone. The father said to his son, “you should learn to walk alone” (The Small Town Sea 73)<sup>10</sup>.

Mother’s fear can also be seen when she says repeatedly,

“I don’t want to leave him behind”( The Small Town Sea 150)<sup>10</sup>.

The conflict between life and death is reflected through conversation between Vappumma (Grandmother) and Umma (mother) over the Umma’s concern to look after her son (narrator). Here Vappumma says that: “Don’t

worry about your's son', she said. 'I will bring him up the way I brought up his Vappa' (The Small Town Sea 180)<sup>10</sup>

Death affects the owner of the property also.

Change is the law of nature. Vappa discovered a secret beach on the sea. It has happened by accident, but in the end it was rediscovered by someone. "Our private little beach was not ours alone any more (The Small Town Sea 65)<sup>10</sup>

Narrator's aloneness after his father's death is well described with various forms of death due to disease, drowning. The narrator could not understand the humor in the coconut tree climber. There is no development except death. Death comes to every character in one form or in other like disease and neglected treatment. Every moment Vappa was near to death. He was struggling to cope with his closing days. The novel described the psyche of father who live with the awareness that death is looking upon him and he tries to reconcile his family and force them to go to home town with him. Even during his meal all of a sudden a thought of death come to him and he started crying in front of public.

The contrast between childhood and old age is also presented in this novel<sup>11</sup>. Two aspects of life are very well presented in this novel, i.e. childhood and adulthood. Father wants to spend his old age, the last step of life in his own home town, but son longing for his city life. Father is stuttering towards death, but son is moving towards the new phase of life. Thus life and death have been described in this novel.

The father is the symbol of death and son is the symbol of life who longs for the colorful life. But he has to sacrifice and has to leave the city for his father's wish. Here in this novel, life and death are closely depicted. Writer knowingly kept these two things side by side. Little girl was in the cradle and shows as a sign of life. The small girl child is represented as the symbol of beginning, a young boy who is expecting many things from society and society is vice-versa. Dead body which is the symbol of the termination of all human pains, sufferings, matching, smelling, love, joy, play and desire, materialistic desire, etc. When a human dies he liberated from all those earthly things.

The Vappa was very careful about his son and did not want him to go to beach on the sea<sup>3</sup>. In this novel author resemble birds' wings flapping's sounds with the sound of *rooh* leaving the body. Son's reaction towards his father's coming death has described "I want to the back of the house and sat on the step of the disused cowshed, my head in my hands alone"( The Small Town Sea 113)<sup>10</sup> Father's death leads to maturity and responsibility in son as he writes<sup>12</sup>, 'from here I will walk alone'.( The Small Town Sea 114 )<sup>10</sup> Son's movement toward maturity and responsibility can be seen when he catches bird with an intention to train the bird and teach it while his father is on the way to death.

Sleep and silence are the coded words of death<sup>8</sup>. After father's death son (narrator) quote,

"I heard the silence in his grave and that was probably when I cried in my sleep and asked him to come back". (The Small Town Sea 146)<sup>10</sup>

Son's silence is linked with the dead father in this novel. Actually silence can be experienced with the experience of death. Actually silence is linked with death, but sound is linked with life. During the life, it is impossible to hear the silence that's why the son hears the silence after his father's death<sup>6</sup>. Even Little's long sleep is associated with death in this novel. As she grows up and started to forget about her beginning of life.

“That certain boy is very quiet----- he talked to certain dead people in his novel”. (The Small Town Sea 141)<sup>10</sup>

Our society's expect from dead persons' son and immediate relatives have been psychologically well described in this novel. The writer does not directly involve his character, but he used the psychology which perceived by reader instead of explaining directly. Female condition after her husband's death is also reflected in this novel. After husband's death, she is expected to remain within the four walls of the house<sup>13</sup>. As Umma after Vappa death declined to go to beach with Sea.

“ She said it would offend Vapumma if she went to the beach the same day, her widowhood completed forty days of apprenticeship”. (The Small Town Sea 139)<sup>10</sup>

In this novel, the situation of widows has been described after their husband's death. They live in darkness. They face emotionally and psychologically imbalance. They struggle to fit in this world. In this novel two widows were sitting together at night and struggle to cope with darkness. Darkness represents the melancholy in their life. Night is the carrier of darkness, which carried the burden of all devilish things. A life which carries all sorts of rays of hope, but darkness is the queen of melancholy, despair and sadness which eats narrator's mother internally and make her deserted. She is frightened by the darkness of death. Darkness psychologically changed her life and made her to worry about her family members<sup>9</sup>.

Writer attentively used the dead word with night. He has explained the inner feeling of two women with the help of the night. Night plays important role in the character's life. The novel's protagonist is fascinated by night. Gloominess holds his hand always as in night darkness prevailed everywhere. Protagonist got up every night and see outside, but every night he did not find moon light. Thus, it presents human life which is full of uncertainty. Night had played an important role as the novel progressed. Protagonist's mother had always in gloomy state. Her life is now full with darkness. Here two women one younger and other old represent the two aspects of life i.e. life and death. They affect each other. Night, darkness, cry, fears are the parts of death. So extinction from present life is the initiation of death. So both women were talking to each other during the night. The moon shows some hope of light, but writer emphasizes on the shadow of a man to show the gloominess of death. After darkness, everybody is waiting for the light and symbolized by Vapumma's waiting for the morning with the chimes of cuckoo, cuckoo.

## II. CONCLUSION

Thus we can say that Anees Salim presents death as a character in this novel. Death is the symbolic representation of society's destruction and decay. Anees Salim represents the depth role of death in human life. Salim discovered the hidden psyche of the human behind the fear of death. This book reveals life's sadness in the form of loss, i.e. loss of father, mother, sister and a close friend of the narrator, Bilal. This book represents the inescapable tragedy that comes directly in the form of death or indirectly in the form of sadness, grief and fear. By reading this novel, we find that how thirteen-year-old boy act to overcome the difficulties of grief.

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