

Examining the Limitations of Law in E.L Doctorow's Ragtime

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Abstract: *The novel Ragtime written by Edgar Lawrence Doctorow, introduces us to the United states social and political climate of the early 20th century. Doctorow's Ragtime novel deals with three families namely, white Anglo family, black family, and an immigrant family. The narrative focuses on the study of the system and not individual work. At the beginning of the novel, we see that all three families had a segregated way of existence, but by the end of the story, the three families have become one in a uniquely American type of ethnic heterogeneity. While reading Doctorow's novel, one will notice many issues coming up in different chapters, some of them are morality, change, time, injustice, woman and fraternity, repression, etc. Through this novel, we also understand the difficulty of accepting change. We understand the change through the reactions of different characters. Some characters welcome the change with a warm heart and smile while others reject the change and struggle with it. The main ideas of the novel are to find 'the truth of the American nature', 'the motion picture and photography' and 'the ambivalence in the Narrators voice'. The focus of Gerard Genette is to reveal how Doctorow combines history as the hypo text and his novel. The novel challenges the reader to question the nature of historical truth. Keywords – ragtime, American, families, Gerard Genette.*

1. Introduction

Edgar Lawrence Doctorow or E.L. Doctorow who was an historical fiction writer, was born on January 6th, 1931 in New York City, Bronx. Doctorow was a great American novelist known for his skillful and undoubtful work in every novel written by him. Doctorow did his graduation with bachelor of art (B.A.) from Kenyon College in the year 1952. He then studies theater directing for a year at 'Columbia University' and then worked in New York City for a period as a scripiter for 'Columbia Pictures'. He joined the American Library (new) as editorial staff in the year 1959, he left the post of script reader after working for five years to become 'editor in chief at Dial Press'. Doctorow had been a professor in many universities and colleges like 'Sarah Lawrence college' from 1971 to 1978. Following year Doctorow became Glucksman professor in 'American and English Letters' at the New York University. Doctorow was known for the way he used to present his novels in the historic period. In total Doctorow had written twelve books, three short fiction volumes, and one stage drama. His first novel was 'welcome to hard times' in 1960 in a philosophical turn on the western genre, this novel was later converted into a film in the year 1967. Some other books of Doctorow are Big as life in 1966 in which he used science fiction, The book of Daniel in 1971, Julius from Ethel Rosenberg for espionage in 1953, and Ragtime in 1975.

Ragtime is a historical fiction which was found in almost every house from 1902 until 1912. Ragtime is inspired by the true events of America. The whole novel revolves around those historical events, characters and ideas of America. The novel talks about the life of three families i.e. The Anglo white family, the black family, and the immigrant family, and how at the beginning they had a segregated way of living, and by the end of the novel we see an ethical heterogeneity. The novel opens up with the introduction of white family and their way of earning their bread. The novel shows that all the three families had some or the other link

but the most special and astonishing or captivating thing about this novel of Doctorow is that he had not mentioned the name of any character of the white family neither the narrator is detected nor his relation with any family. The book in total contains 40 chapters and reading each chapter is like reading an essay. In the entire novel the reader will come across various social and legal aspects such as mortality, injustice, repression, time, change, women and femininity, foreignness, technology and modernization, difficulty of adaptation etc. Change, belonging and repression are the main themes of Doctorow's novel Ragtime. The novel also deals with some social aspects or some social problems like the difficulty faced by individual to individual of accepting changes, the struggle for stability in once life and meaning, the impact of technological development on culture etc. The novel also deals with legal aspect of imprisonment and false liberalism. The novel mixes the historical figures with fiction and events which primarily took place in New York city to investigate the key moments during the United States' revolutionary era. Competition between popular literature and artistic literature which everyone claims to be the right to call it the greater benefit to society. Ragtime is one of the few novels that cut across this competition completely and have proven that it is undoubtedly a great success in both areas.

The research paper of the novel will be covering very interesting questions about the novel and will also provide the reader with the most interesting answer to those questions. Some questions which will be covered are: Characters reactions to the changes in their environment? What shoes changes say about their social positions etc? questions on role of technology? Advantages and disadvantages of technology? Etc.

The methodology which will be undertaken herein for the conduct of research is doctrinal in nature and primarily analytical and descriptive. For the purpose of research, mainly secondary material will be referred for example

examination of reports, books, articles, analysis of judicial decisions etc.

2. Research Methodology

The novel on which the researcher is researching on is E.L Doctorow's Ragtime and the method of research pursued by the researcher is the qualitative methodology. A qualitative method of research is the one in which first hand information or the primary information is used to go on with the research paper. The researcher has also adopted narrative model in writing down the paper

2.1 Research Objectives

- To understand and analyze the Lifestyle and culture of Americans in early nineteenth century.
- To get to know the importance of adapting change in one's life.
- To understand how Doctorow has used both historical characters and fiction together in one novel.
- To understand the real meaning and analysis of themes like- feminism, morality, injustice, change, repression, time etc.

2.2 Nature of Samples – Qualitative Research

The method of research adopted by the researcher is Qualitative method of research. Qualitative method focuses on the quality work and not quantity work.

First hand observation of things, interviews, recordings, group meetings, questionnaires, documents, affidavits, journals, books, text, observations etc are required to carry on this research methodology. It is used to have a deep study of any topic and get new findings.

Qualitative methodology is not as to what people are thinking but it is that why people believe a particular thing.

- 1) Observation- The researcher carefully, attentively and mindfully observed the views of people on the novel Ragtime. Further the researcher used her brainpower and intelligence to form a school of thought and a stand point.
- 2) Interviews- An interview has always proved to be a very generous and helpful source of information. It is something in which two people have face to face consultation and one of them asks question from another person and people express their true views and opinions. Therefore, entrusting on interviews proved to be very helpful to the researcher.
- 3) Group meetings- A group meeting is something in which a few people come together and have bona fide discussion about. People communicate and babble their views. Having group meetings helped the researcher in creating a bona fide plot of the novel.
- 4) Experiences- Ragtime is one of the most famous novel and there are many researchers who have conducted their research on this novel. Therefore, observing their experiences for my research on this novel was very helpful.

2.2.1 Qualitative Research Method- Advantages

It is a method of research which focus on the first hand primary sources to keep the ideas and interest of the researcher and help them to raise a new research question.

Beneath are some advantages mentioned to carry a qualitative research method.

- 1) NATURAL SETTINGS- It deals with the collection of natural thoughts and views. The information is first handed.
- 2) FLEXIBLE- A person is free to have a school of thoughts. The opinions and rules are not rigid or not decided before hand, the reader can have their own opinions.
- 3) GENERATION OF NEW IDEAS- In qualitative research, people are free to express their views and opinions which means that people are free to give their new ideas and therefore have better opportunities which otherwise won't exist for them.
- 4) MEANINGFUL INSIGHTS- When people are mindfully working on a topic of research, they are able to have new findings which adds to the success of that topic, giving society with meaningful ideas, opportunities and perceptions.

2.2.2 Qualitative Research Method- Disadvantages

It is rightly said that, where there are pros of something there are cons too and therefore pros and cons go hand in hand.

Following are some disadvantages of having a qualitative research method:

- 1) **Labour Intensive-** As computer is known for managing and storing large text, collection of data etc but in qualitative research methodology everything has to be done manually.
- 2) **Unreliability-** There are many uncontrollable factors which can change the data available. Therefore saying that the online sources are reliable is not true and they cannot be trusted wholly.
- 3) **Limited Generalizability-** Even after having rigorous analysis and availability of data it cannot be said the all the sources and bona fide and are unbiased.
- 4) **Subjectivity-** The researcher analysis the data and decides what is relevant and what is not. The research may find many parts relevant and many of them to be irrelevant. Therefore interpretations can vary greatly.

2.3 Nature of Sources- Sources

- 1) Books- In unexpected ways, books turn out to be very helpful for a researcher. Books related to the themes of my novel, which is Ragtime are listed below:
 - The beauty myth
 - The Feminism
 - To kill a mockingbird
- 2) Research Papers- Various research papers written by students of different universities turned out to be very helpful because these papers acted as samples for the researcher which helped the researcher in forming a view point and understanding the novel in a better way.
- 3) Book Reviews- Ragtime is one of the most famous books written by E.L Doctorow. As famous as the book, it has many readers. People's review on the novel very helpful

as different people have different views so in the process of forming a point of view these reviews were more than helpful to the researcher.

2.4 Data Collection Method

The methodology adopted by the researcher is qualitative method because for the deep understanding and analysis of a novel, this is the best method as it focuses on the quality work and not quantity work.

2.5 Data Analysis

The novel Ragtime written by Edgar Lawrence Doctorow in the year 1975 is one of his finest writing. The researcher has focused on the themes like- Morality, Justice, Change, Time, Injustice, Modernization & Technology, Repression, Femininity & Women etc. The whole novel evolves around these themes and the researcher has individually focused on each and everyone of them in the brief analysis part of this research paper.

3. Literature Review

On the novel Ragtime written by EL Doctorow, one can find enough material to carry a quality research paper on this topic. Talking to people and grasping their views and perceptions on this novel proved to be of great help to the researcher. There are many people who have written reviews on this novel. Few of them are mentioned below:

- 1) Book review of Ragtime by E.L Doctorow- by Andrew Kuharevicz
He briefly talked about this book and also about the importance of existence of books. He said that the novel Ragtime is a historical fiction which mentions many names and places throughout the book. He considers the book as "easy read" with short sentences and accessible speech. Andrew also states that the novel is a mysterious one as the narrator of the book is unknown only his voice can be recognized.
- 2) Book review of Ragtime by E.L Doctorow- By Lokeso
He states the novel as a "good novel relatable to our times" he says that even when he reads the novel today in era, it feels the same (same as when he used to read in his era). Lokeso says even though the novel is about America before World War 1 but it feels like you can relate it to 2019.
- 3) Aristotle's Ethics an article written in 2001 talks about morality and ethics. One of the themes in Ragtime novel is morality and the meaning and application of morality is very clearly elucidated. Therefore the researcher referred to this article so that the concept of morality is clear.

In the entire novel the reader will come across various social and legal aspects such as mortality, injustice, repression, time, change, women and femininity, foreignness, technology and modernization, difficulty of adaptation etc. Change, belonging and repression are the main themes of Doctorow's novel Ragtime. Following are the few books and its review which helped the researcher in understanding the main theme of the novel.

- 1) National bestseller THE BEAUTY MYTH (How images of beauty are used against women) by Naomi Wolf. A novel which talked about women, their power and professional success. Even after women recognition in various fields, Naomi is disturbed by a variant kind of society and argues that's it's the myth of beauty and outer appearance that makes the world's vision kinder towards you.
- 2) WILD FEMININE (Finding power, spirit & joy in the female body) by Tami Lynn Kent is another book on feminism that helped the researcher in understanding the theme of the novel. The novel reveals the amazing powers of women and her energy in everydaylife.
- 3) TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD by Harper Lee is a novel on injustice. It is novel which received Pulitzer Prize in the year 1961. The mocking bird who is compassionate and dramatic brought the readers to the root of human behavior. The novel makes the reader Realize hatred, love, cruelty, passion, kindness, humor etc. All these themes are a part of E.L Doctorow's Ragtime. Thus this book makes it very -very clear to the reader about these themes and provides the reader with better understanding of the novel's main plot.

The researcher read a few novels related to the theme of the novel. The name of the poet and the poem's title are listed below:

- What kind of times are these by Adrienne Rich.
 - Lady Liberty by Tato Laviera.
 - A Nomad needs for nothing by Brain Oarr.
 - Marrying the hangman by Margaret Atwood.
- 1) How I made it: E.L. Doctorow on Ragtime, an article plus questionnaire written by Boris Kachka was very helpful to the researcher as in this article there are 40 questions about the novel from Doctorow. In this article everything from house in Rochelle to New York in thirties to NY in nineteenth century to modesty to the historical figures of the novel is conversed.
 - 2) Throughout the research, for the reference and clarity of concepts, the researcher referred to some researchers written by students of various universities and others.
 - Zohreh Ramin & Seyyad Mohammad Marandi of University of Tehran.
 - Shmavon Azatya of La Trobe University.
 - 3) Encyclopedia.com- An online source which proved to be very beneficial and Convenient because in this online source, we are given a very brief introduction of novel and about the author is presented in uncomplicated and manageable manner. Also plot summary of each section of the novel is given for one step ahead and a cut above understanding.
 - 4) Another online source which proved to be very helpful is "BOOKRAGS" as here
Various essays and assignments by various students and authors are given on the novel Ragtime.
 - 5) Online sources like Jstor, SSC Online, grammarlyetc were very convenient and beneficial and an unbiased research paper.

4. Analysis of the Novel

It is frequently noticed that artistic literature and popular literature are rivalry, with each one asserting the fact that they are of best assistance to society. E.L Doctorow's novel "Ragtime" is one of a few novels that outstrip and surpass in both the areas. It is rightly said that nothing is perfect, if there are advantages of something, there are disadvantages too. The novel was criticized for trifle matters but proved to be great success when it got published in the year 1975. People really admired and eulogized the way Doctorow has used historical as well as fictional characters in the novel. It is a novel which is entertaining, challenging, interesting and to the true spirit of the times. It is one of a few novels which was the best seller and was found in almost every house in the mid-seventies. In the opinion of Genette, literary subject matters are not indigenous. The author works towards the benefit of whole society instead of individual work.

The folklore of music and literature has long been twisted. Just like the Ragtime music, the novel appears to be a counterpoint rhythm of both sides; the persecutor and persecute. According to some ancient sources, the word Ragtime has been derived from syncopation rhythm (musical rhythm) on the right hand. The main character of the novel vulnerable and susceptible to commit mistakes. For the most part, during the tour and this can lead the way of tenderness and soreness to the passengers. It has sometimes been mentioned that Ragtime is mechanical. Most importantly, the author has not only referred to Ragtime music but he has gone too far to Chanel it. Doctorow alleged that "Novel has become a Rag".

4.1 About the book

The book is about the mid 1970's when the Vietnam war was forthcoming and the author was about the complete is forth novel with last touch ups. Ragtime one of the most famous book in America which was found in almost every house in the mid -seventies. After the publishment of Doctorow's forth novel, his career in this field changed and it is said that this book brought the turning point in his career. This book of Doctorow is different from the once written before as in this book he stretched to all the boundaries of genre and converted historical work into a fictional one. The novel secretly said everything. It exposes the less spoken facts related to history and culture of America in 1900's but foxily revels the time- honoured issue of justice, freedom & identity.

4.2 Main Characters of the novel

1) Mother

- Part of upper -class family.
- Lived in New Rochelle.
- Married to Father.
- Disappointed by Marriage.
- Father died.
- Second marriage with Tateh.
- Mother's young brother treated her poorly.
- She was upset and regret this treatment.
- Experiences many changes while taking care of Sarah's and Coalhouse child.
- Sexuality awareness.

2) Father

- Owns a company of fireworks, flags and banners.
- Goes for a trip to Arctic
- He feels aloof after his return.
- He had this feeling throughout.
- He was wealthy as a child but after his father's death, he lost all the wealth and to work to make place for himself in business world.

3) The Little Boy

- Mother & Father's son.
- Narrative voice for various plots of the novel.
- Intelligent, curious, observant and precocious.
- Keen interest in learning.
- A friend of Sha.

4) Harry Houdini

- Real life character.
- A magician and appears frequently throughout the novel.
- Dependent on his mother.
- Suffers a lot after her death.
- He meets the little boy
- He is very much admired by the little boy.

5) Mother's Young Brother

- A reasonable person, finds sense throughout.
- Evelyn Nesbit is his love.
- Spends quality time together before she leaves him.
- He becomes depressed and unhappy.
- Soon he joins a fight force at Coalhouse for injustice.
- Travels various places like Mexico.
- Gets involved in revolutionary campaigns.

4.3 Brief Analysis

Ragtime, a popular music style of America that blossomed in mid- 90's and early 20th century, was mingling of European and African traditional music. Doctorow is published in over 30 dialect. He has written famous books like "The book of Daniel" and "Welcome to hard times". The main plot of the novel is about the relation betwixt two people and forgiveness. The whole story revolves around young Sarah and the black pianist. From the starting point of the novel we can sense the tone of the author as ironic. The novel highlights the predominant features of the American history and the general way of living of the people of America.

The explanation starts when the author Elucidate the walker looking for a young woman- Sarah.

The story advances when the narrator sees a baby crying in a carriage and every Sunday it became a daily visit.

The Pinnacle of the story is when father demand C. Walker to play piano and the family enjoys it therefore, he decides to continue playing his instrument.

The after- effect of the story is when Coalhouse Walker Jr. played his last and the final composition and said good-bye and walked off the door.

The Novel deals with the problem of relations between different people and the people who can achieve and do everything because of their high position in society. In the whole novel, author tries to convey the facts that people should forgive their past mistakes so that they do not regret those mistakes in future life.

4.4 Themes of the novel

The novel "Ragtime" teaches its readers to find their own identity and community and to share their happy moments with people they love.

- 1) The difficulty of accepting change- The novel talks about societal changes in the Country of America. Every character has different reaction to these changes. Some of the characters accept the change with warm and a pleasant smile while some of them find it hard to fit in the change and keep struggling with it.
- 2) The struggle for stability and meaning- In the Whole novel, the author tries to understand the experiences of the characters and the challenges that life brings to them. The focus of the author is to encourage the characters for their own desires and stability and grasp knowledge from the challenges that life throws at them.
- 3) The impact of technological development on culture- The Era in which the novel is set, is the Era of technological development and industrialization. These years also brought change in immigrants, life as well as in American urban landscape. Technological development helped a lot in the process of industrial and economical development of America.
- 4) Imprisonment and false liberation- Imprisonment is observed in many parts of the novel.
- 5) Victims and victimization, sex and culture clash are some other themes on which this novel is based upon

4.5 Main Motifs of the Novel

- 1) The nature of historical truth- Throughout the novel, the reader goes through various historical characters and events. Whereas he often calls and fabricates the situations. In this way the novel adopts and conveys a historical account.
- 2) The motion picture and photography- Role of imagination in this novel is a vital one. The innovation of the developing Era, adds to the importance of this time.
- 3) The ambiguity of narratives voice- The novel has a very different and distinctive style of narration. The narrator is neither any character nor involved in the novel in any matter and also the narrator cannot be guessed.

5. Conclusion

The novel suggests its readers to live a life to the fullest. Life is a journey full of unknown and unexpected circumstances. There might be many such situations and circumstances which are out of the order of life, but forgetting and letting them go so that you don't regret them in your later life is something which E.L Doctorow's novel Ragtime suggests.

Reading this wonderful novel is like reading a wonderful essay with a lot of description on social problems and social

aspects like the difficulty of accepting change. For the development of a person in an absolute and outright manner, stability is requisite. The novel wonderfully. Here in the novel some of the characters welcome the change cheerfully and joyfully whereas some of them find change to be inflexible and dense because of which they suffer in their later life. Example, when the father come back home from his Arctic tour, he is unable to accept the changed Behavior of his family towards him and started feeling aloof and depressed. Whereas mother accepts the change of new abilities and freedom in her life and enjoys the change.

The author has included both- fiction and history in this novel and has extracted fiction from history. There is plots of oppression in the novel but even after such oppression, characters have taken stand for their right an example is when Tateh took part a strike for increase in wages and Coalhouse takes power in his hand and gets his Ford repaired.

Coalhouse Walker breaks the myth of the black and the white as he represented the Negroes generation who make's one way of living life and proceeded to make their space in society. The blacks have risen even above the whites, than the father who cannot tolerate the good manners in him, his societal and economical status.

The whole novel contains many such circumstances and situations and plots where the reader might come through femininity, cultural & religion clash, sex, change, women oppressed, time, technology, false liberate etc. This novel opens with Genette's view point, but we can finally observe the way the structure and the system of The United States of America.

The author provokes and dares the reader to question the nature of historical truth of America. Doctorow builds the fiction plot from historical truths by keeping history in a particular plot of the events we are given related to history.

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