

POWER DISCOURSE IN *ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST*

Vandana Saini

Assitant Professor

Deptt. of Applied Science

Rayat & Bahra Institute of Engineering

and Bio- Technology,

Mohali, Punjab 140104

Abstract

Michel Foucault, the French philosopher, psychologist, nonfiction writer observed that there are two kinds of power, sovereign power and disciplinary power. In the past the people were subjected to sovereign power of monarch but in modern society disciplinary power has spread its roots everywhere. The transformation of Western Societies from monarchical power to disciplinary power is epitomized in Foucault's description of the Panopticon, an architectural device advocated by Jeremy Bentham towards the end of 18th century. According to Foucault the panopticon is a machine in which everyone is caught and which no one knows. In contrast to monarchical power, there is disciplinary power, a system of surveillance which is interiorized to the point that each person is his or her overseer. This disciplinary power uses various social institutions to act as tool to reach an end of surveillance. The exertion of power by different social institutions erodes the individual's personality and makes him hollow inside. Where there is power, resistance is bound to be there. There are certain individuals who do not want to toe the line of authority and want to shape their own future according to their own light but such individuals are not appreciated and are considered to have a deviant behaviour. They are even termed as rebels. Some strong individuals come out to be successful whereas others are smothered by the social forces

In this research paper I have tried to show the conflict between the people who exert power and want the identity of individual to be trampled and the one who subvert that power to save their identity. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* the Big Nurse becomes the epitome of power who tries to subjugate all the inmates of the mental asylum but she is confronted by McMurphy who by instilling in other inmates the zest to live and to save one's entity becomes victorious.

Ken Elton Kesey's first novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is a modern classic and it has been able to hold the interest of the readers across the boundaries. It continues to appeal to a wide audience, including literarily sophisticated readers. It is one of the few works to achieve acclaim in three forms: novel, play and film. The play, written by Dale Wasserman, appeared on Broadway starring Kirk Douglas in 1963 and was revived in 1971. Its film version appeared in 1975, directed by Milos Forman and starring Jack Nicholson. It was a box office hit and won six Academy Awards.

The success as play and movie as well as novel suggests that the story's theme is fascinating and related to the contemporary issues. Confinement, control and loneliness had been the words defining the dark moods of the cold war, still at its chilliest when Kesey started with his writing career. The specter of communism, so elusive and, therefore, so difficult to control produced a culture of suspicion and of silence; those with something to hide and those who feared being misunderstood. Institutional conformity became the subject of the most widely acclaimed fiction as well as the popular sociology of the post-World War II era. The reduction of individuals to figures in corporate taxonomy came to haunt the writers of that era. Kesey's imagination too got affected by the methods used by the government to control the masses. Kesey volunteered for the government sponsored drug experiments at the Menlo Park Hospital, where he was paid seventy-five dollars to take drugs like LSD, ditrane, mescaline and IT – 290 to check its effect before they found way into the mainstream of American popular culture.

Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is the story of inmates of mental asylum and can be said to have traces of his own experiences at the Veteran's Hospital in Menlo Park where he worked as a psychiatric aide. Kesey by writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* has put a big question mark on the therapeutic and welfare motives of the institutions like mental asylums. Kesey echoes Michel Foucault when he doubts therapeutic motives and considers mental asylum as way of forcing the internal soul to fit someone else's idea of the ideal external environment. Michel Foucault's book *Madness and Civilization* suggested that the modern concept of madness was a cultural invention of control. Any one who refused to toe the line of the authority was considered mad and was put in mental asylum where his voice got circumscribed by the four walls of mental asylum. And this is happening even today. So the modern man is in a fix, if he toes the line of authority he loses his identity as an individual and ends up in becoming a puppet, dancing to the tunes of authority, and if he does not conform he is considered to be insane.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest holds a mirror to the society. The mental ward, the microcosm within reflects the macrocosm without. It unveils the predicament of modern man who is losing his freedom and individuality in the technologized modern world. Contemporary man is losing the rhythm of life as he has divorced himself from nature and has become a cog in machine, a robot sans love, sans emotions.

According to Irving Malin *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* "is an honest, claustrophobic stylistically brilliant first novel which makes us shiver as we laugh-paradoxically, it keeps us "in balance" by revealing our madness."¹ Robert Boyers opines that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* "is wholly successful as an indictment of modern society, and as an exploration into the kind of subtly repressive mechanisms we help to build into the fabric of our daily life."² According to R.L Sassoon, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* "tells a story at once horrific and humorous: an appalling night-mare that has its sources in the most ordinary, recognizable reality and issues continually into the delightful farce of only daydream."³

The critics have deplored the condition of the modern man but the state of being of man has been like this from time immemorial because according to Foucault to imagine a society without power relations is impossible. Where power operates exploitation is natural. According to Foucault, “Power is not a commodity, a position, a prize, or a plot; it is the operation of the political technologies throughout the social body.”⁴

In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, Kesey turned the mental ward into a symbol of the tricks of control. Therapy meant learning to internalize the moral codes of a society, not treatment of illness. Foucault opines that “Bio-power spread under the banner of making people healthy and protecting them.”⁵ The main objective of Bio-power is to normalize society but unfortunately, “normalizing society has turned out to be a powerful and insidious form of domination.”⁶ *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* projects the same conflict, the mass society and its norms of conformity and the individual’s impulse to freedom. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* shows life shuttling between dream and dread as visualized by Tony Tanner. For Tanner “there is an abiding dream in American Literature that an unpatterned, unconditioned life is possible in which your movements and stillness choices and repudiations are all your own; and there is also an abiding American dread that someone else is patterning your life, that there are all sorts of invisible plots afoot to rob you of your autonomy of thought and action, that conditioning is ubiquitous.”⁷ *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* explores how the cardinal democratic principle of individual liberty tries to save itself in the face of the restrictive demands of social and moral authority and conformity.

The work of conformity is done by the Combine which is not just an organization; it is mechanism whose ends are efficiency and adjustment. It aims at producing similar, adjustable docile products. Some people may want to get ‘out’ or protest against it but any such deviants are sent to mental hospital where people like the Big Nurse and special machine can adjust them.

The Big Nurse is the instrument through which Combine works. Bromden, the paranoid narrator comments that “it’s not just the Big Nurse by herself but it’s the whole Combine, the nation-wide Combine that’s the really big force and the nurse is just a high ranking official for them.”⁸ “The ward is a factory for the Combine. It’s for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches.” (36) Being the agent of Combine the Big Nurse becomes the symbol of the sovereign power. Sovereign power as described by Foucault in the first part of *Discipline and Punish* is that form expressed in recognizable ways through particular and identifiable individuals. The individuals are visible agents of power, known by others and by themselves to be such.

All the inmates are scared of the Big Nurse because she exercises power and control over the inmates. Chief Bromden who himself is six feet and eight inches considers himself small before the Big Nurse, the Chief’s image of himself is almost dwarf-like because he does not have the courage to do anything; not to speak or take action. Bromden is scared of the Big Nurse’s power which he relates with the size, “... she blows up big – bigger and bigger, big as a tractor, so big I can smell the machinery inside the way you smell a motor pulling too big a load.” (5) Bromden is so convinced of the Big Nurse’s authority that he attributes the passage of time to her. She takes on mythic proportions in his mind as someone so powerful that she can run anything she wants to. Harding tells McMurphy regarding the Big Nurse that, “She’s impregnable herself, and with the element of time working for her she eventually gets inside everyone. That’s why the hospital regards her as its top nurse and grants her so much authority; she’s a master at forcing the trembling libido out into the open...” (65)

The Big Nurse keeps the patients cowed and docile, either by subtle humiliation or by the fear of punishment. Big Nurse speaks for the fixed pattern, the unbreakable routine the submission of individual will to mechanical, humourless control. In one incident McMurphy wants to brush his teeth before the proper teeth brushing time. He is told that he could not do it as it was against rules. The inmates were not allowed to see the world series of baseball on T.V because this would disrupt their routine. They had a specific schedule for performing daily chores. The time for brushing teeth, shaving, cleaning, breakfast, house duties and watching T.V was all compartmentalised into different slots. The same monotonous routine added to the drudgery of their life. The Big Nurse exercises her power and control in the name of discipline. Foucault opines, “Discipline may be identified neither with the institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a physics or an anatomy of power, a technology.”⁹

The Big Nurse uses many strategies to intimidate the inmates. “What keeps knowledge moving is the ‘will to power’ in the public arena of history. Foucault uncovers strategies of power within a discourse in order to show that power is inescapable because it is inextricably combined with the will to knowledge.”¹⁰ The Big Nurse abused her inmates both physically and psychologically. She was well aware that her inmates are quite sensitive to flaws in their personalities. Billy Bibbit was driven to commit suicide because she knew that he was afraid of his mother so the Big Nurse threatened him that his loss of virginity will be exposed to his mother. The other strategy used by her was to treat men like little children: with pity and disdain. This is humiliating, and it is also nearly impossible to fight against. Bromden feels that McMurphy also feels bad and agitated the way they are treated like kids. “A couple of times some stupid rule gets him mad, but he just makes himself act more polite and mannerly than ever till he begin to see how funny the whole thing is – the rules, the disapproving looks they use to enforce the rules, the ways of talking to you like you’re nothing but a three-year-old- and when he sees how funny it is he goes to laughing, and this aggravates them no end.” (103)

Punishment was another strategy used by the Big Nurse to have her hold on the inmates. Foucault writes in *Madness and Civilization* that if any inmate of the mental asylum flouted rules he, “will be punished by reduction of gruel, by increase of work, by imprisonment and other punishment customary in the said hospital, as the director’s shall see first.”¹¹ The Big Nurse gave punishment to the inmates for not doing the work properly and for not behaving in a proper manner. McMurphy for his misbehaviour with the Big Nurse got the punishment of cleaning the toilets. “... that their should be some manner of punishment meted out for the unspeakable behavior concerning the house duties three weeks ago.” (170) The Big Nurse gets agitated when her rules and regulations are flouted. “ “We waited this long to say anything, hoping that you men would take it upon yourself to apologies for the rebellious way you acted. But not a one of you has shown the slightest sign of remorse.” ” (170) The Big Nurse openly threatens Acutes that if they did not follow the rules they will end up as Chronics. She also threatens that the non-conformists will get shock treatment. The Big Nurse warns McMurphy that if he doesn’t admit his mistake he would be given shock treatment. “... it might be beneficial that he receives some shock therapy-unless he realizes his mistakes. All he has to do is admit he was wrong, to indicate, demonstrate rational contact, and the treatment would be canceled this time.” (242)

McMurphy has been warned when he entered the mental asylum that if he rebelled against the Big Nurse he would meet Ellis Ruckly’s end. This is what happens with McMurphy. According to Michel Foucault earlier the punishment was given in general public so that the

masses would learn a lesson. “A representational punishment would immediately bring to mind, for those who observed it, both the nature of the crime itself and the remedy which had been imposed to correct it. Such a punishment would function as a deterrent, recompense to society, and a lesson, all immediately intelligible to criminal and society.”¹² McMurphy does get punished for challenging her authority by getting lobotomized. McMurphy’s lobotomy has also been used as an example to intimidate others that the result of rebellion is lobotomy. “The ward door opened, and the black boys wheeled in this Gurney with a chart at the bottom that said in heavy black letters, MCMURPHY RANDLE P.POST. OPERATIVE. And below this was written in ink, LOBOTOMY.” (277) The Big Nurse used lobotomy to intimidate the other inmates to teach others a lesson that they would meet the same end if they challenged her authority.

The fear of the Big Nurse is such that the inmates cannot laugh. Bromden says, “The Acutes move around a lot. They tell jokes to each other and snicker in their fists (nobody ever dares let loose and laugh, the whole staff’d be in with notebooks and a lot of questions) and they write letters with yellow, runty, chewed pencils.” (13) The awe of the Big Nurse was not only experienced by the inmates but by the place itself. The environment of the mental asylum is parched and dreary. “The air is pressed in by the walls, too tight for laughing. There’s some thing strange about a place where the men won’t let themselves loose and laugh, something strange about the way they all knuckle under to that smiling flour – faced old mother there with the too-red lipstick and too – big boobs.” (43)

The authorities have dehumanized inmates to such an extent that they have simply become puppets, stirred by the strings of the hospital staff. “The technicians go trotting off, pushing the man on the Gurney, like cartoon men- or like puppets, mechanical puppets in one of those Punch and Judy acts where it’s supposed to be funny to see the puppet beat up by the Devil and swallowed head first by a smiling alligator....” (33)

Michel Foucault in his book *Madness and Civilization* writes,

It was doubtless a very old custom of the Middle Ages to display the insane. In certain of the *Narrturmer* in Germany, barred windows had been installed which permitted those outside to observe the madmen chained within. They thus constituted a spectacle at the city gates. The strange fact is that this custom did not disappear once the doors of the asylums closed, but that on the contrary it then developed, assuming in Paris and London almost an institutional character.¹³

Such a practice has been showcased by Kesey in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. The obedient puppets are displayed by the Public Relation Officer. He feels proud and flaunts about the success of conforming the individuals. The people come to see the inmates as if they were a piece of exhibition. “Sometimes, at the door, it’s a young resident in early, so he can watch what we’re like Before Medication. BM, they call it. Sometimes it’s a wife visiting there on high heels with her purse held tight over her belly. Sometimes it’s a clutch of grade – school teachers being led on a tour by that fool Public Relation man who’s always clapping his wet hands together and saying how overjoyed he is that mental hospitals have eliminated all the old-fashioned cruelty.”(9) The Public Relation Officer shows them television and other entertainment facilities but does not tell about the actual treatment given to the inmates.

Even after a passage of a long time the things have not changed much. Foucault paints a dark picture of filth and suffering in mental asylums. The hospitals are regimes of punishment

and moral condemnation. “Tolerance, rehabilitation and cure were not central items in the absolutist lexicon.”¹⁴ The Big Nurse treats the inmates of the mental asylum in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* very badly and cruelly. “The Big Nurse got him clear across the room, right through his greens. She jumped back without getting the needle pulled out after the shot and it hung there from his pants like a little tail of glass and steel....” (49)

The aim of the mental asylum is not curing the patients it is to make them robots to move around following the orders of the Big Nurse. The inmates like Ellis had to suffer because of the negligence on the part of the asylum authorities.

But there are some of us Chronics that the staff made couple of mistakes on years back, some of us who were Acutes when we came in, and got changed over. Ellis is a Chronic came in an Acute and got fouled up bad when they overload him in that filthy brain – murdering room that the black boys call the “Shock Shop.” Now he’s nailed against the wall in the same condition they lifted him off the table for the last time, in the same shape, arms out, palms cupped, with the same horror on his face. He’s nailed like that on the wall, like a stuffed trophy. (15)

Ruckly’s was another such case where the staff made a mistake in one of their head installations. Pharmaceutical attempts to cure the inmates are just pretence, actually the inmates were given injections and pills to intoxicate them to keep them in line and out of will. “Miss Ratched shall line us all against the wall, where we’ll face the terrible maw of a muzzle-loading shot gun which she has loaded with Miltowns! Thorazines! Libriumis! Stelazines! and with the wave of her sword, blooie! Tranquilize all of us completely out of existence.” (262)

Foucault picks out Jeremy Bentham’s plan for the Panopticon as the paradigmatic example of disciplinary technology. In the panopticon structure the supervisor can see all the inmates of the prison but the inmates cannot see him. From one point he controls all and keeps a check upon the activities of the inmates. In Foucault’s terms, “the Panopticon brings together knowledge, power, the control of the body, and the control of space into an integrated technology of discipline.”¹⁵ The Big Nurse has her own glass panopticon from where she observes the activities of all the inmates. “She is there, looking out through her window, got a tape recorder hid out of sight some where, getting all this down-already planning how to work it into the schedule.” (64) Bromden believes that everything is controlled by the Big Nurse by sitting in that glass cell. “I see her sit in the center of this web of wires like a watchful robot, tend her network with mechanical insect skill, know every second which wire runs where and just what current to send up to get the results she wants.” (26)

The Big Nurse tries to exercise her power by knowing the weak points of her inmates. According to Foucault, “... power can not be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it.”¹⁶ So in order to have a peep into the conscience of the inmates the Big Nurse makes the inmates to spy upon each other and to write the secrets in the log book in the name of therapeutic value. Bromden comments upon her this act, “I know she’s just waiting to get enough evidence to have some guy reconditioned at the Main Building, over hauled in the head to straighten out the trouble.” (14) Foucault holds the opinion that, “In setting itself the task of making the discourse of the unconscious speak through consciousness, psychoanalysis is advancing in the direction of that fundamental region in which the relation of representation and finitude come into play.”¹⁷

Foucault opines, “Those who occupy the central position in the Panopticon are themselves thoroughly enmeshed in localization and ordering of their behaviour. They observe, but in the process of so doing, they are also fixed, regulated, and subject to administrative control.”¹⁸ This is what happened with the Big Nurse, she being an instrument through which Combine works; herself gets moulded by the Combine. Her compulsiveness for order, control, power and punishment has been conditioned in her as the guardian of the ward by the same forces that have misshapen the inmates and places them under her care. She is in this light as much a victim as a victimizer, but she does not see herself as a victim. As an ex-army nurse accustomed to regimental and inflexible routine, Big Nurse has come to value order for its own sake, and her rage for order has been enacted at the expense of her womanhood and her natural relationship to the world. M. Gilbert Porter opines, “Although she functions as an Orwellian Big Brother for the Combine, nature has endowed her with an ample bosom designed for nurturing and comforting.”¹⁹

The extent to which the Big Nurse has succeeded in dehumanizing herself is clear from the mechanical form she assumes in the eyes of others. To Bromden, the tips of her fingers are a “Funny orange. Like the tip of a soldering iron.” (4) In her purse “there’s no compact or lipstick or woman stuff, she’s got the bag full of a thousand parts she aims to use in her duties today – wheels and gears, cogs polished to a hard glitter,” (4) To McMurphy, the Big Nurse is a “ball cutter.” He says, “No, that nurse ain’t some kinda monster chicken, buddy, what she is a ball – cutter. I’ve seen a thousand off ‘em, old and young, men and women. Seen ‘em all over the country and in the homes-people who tried to make you weak so they can get you to toe the line, to follow their rules, to live like they want you to.” (54)

The Big Nurse exerts power not only on the inmates but also on the doctor. Harding tells McMurphy “Doctor Spivey... is exactly like the rest of us, McMurphy, completely conscious of his inadequacy. He’s a frightened, desperate, ineffectual little rabbit, totally incapable of running this ward without our Miss Ratched’s help, and he knows it. And, worse, she knows he knows it and reminds him every chance she gets. Every time she finds he’s made a little slip in the book work or in, say, the charting you can just imagine her in there grinding his nose in it.” (56) The Big Nurse exerts power even on the training doctors. She wants that they should vote for McMurphy to be sent to the Disturbed Ward. They are under constant threat of the Big Nurse. They are well aware of the fact that, “she’s the force in here to be dealt with.” (133) Bromden knows, “If these boys don’t play it just right they’re liable to finish their training up in Portland at the alky hospital. (133) The trainees get cowed and they begin to fidget around like the doctor. One by one they start supporting the Big Nurse by speaking against McMurphy.

Harding, the intellectual knows that conformity is demanded by the society and he, in a very pessimistic tone says that they must accept their condition. He says to McMurphy, “Oh, don’t misunderstand me, we’re not in here because we are rabbits – we’d be rabbits wherever we were-we’re all here because we can’t adjust to our rabbit hood. We need a good strong wolf like the nurse to teach us our place.” (58)

Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* opines, “that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.”²⁰ The Big Nurse makes use of her knowledge of the hatred of the blacks against the white because of maltreatment met to them by the white. So she selects black aides whose exposure to social injustice and racism on the outside has created in them an unfocussed hate that is a constant source of energy. She channels that hate and that energy to impose discipline on the

inmates. “They are in contact on a high-voltage wave length of hate, and the black boys are out there performing her bidding before she even thinks it.” (32) These black orderlies maltreat the inmates. “They push him face down on the mattress. One sits on his head and the other rips his pants open in back and peels the cloths until Taber’s peach – colored rear is framed by the ragged lettuce – green. He’s smothering curses into the mattress and the black boy sitting on his head saying, “Tha’s right, Mistuh Taber, that’s right ...” ” (32-33) The inmates were not only physically exploited but they were also sexually harassed. Bromden acknowledges that the inmates are sexually exploited by the orderlies, “Black boys in white suits up before me to commit sex acts in the hall and get it mopped up before I can catch them.” (3)

The Big Nurse uses all her tools and techniques just to have control and power over the inmates. She controls the inmates with rigid routines, pills, the log book, group therapy Electro Shop Therapy and with the threats of punishment. She has the knowledge how to deal and tackle the inmates of mental asylum. Her knowledge of using different kinds of techniques and tactics to make the inmates conform makes her more authoritative and powerful.

Where there is power, the resistance is bound to be there. “When sovereign power operates, we know that we have been acted upon, in what ways and by whom.”²¹ The red haired, tattooed con man, McMurphy shows resistance to the power exercised by the Big Nurse. According to Tony Tanner, “McMurphy speaks an older American language of freedom, unhindered movement, self-reliance, anarchic humour and a trust in the more animal instincts.”²² From the day McMurphy entered the mental asylum he made the Big Nurse feel insecure as he tried to subvert her authority. She got scared and felt that she would lose her control over her inmates. She says, “There are such people in our society. A manipulator can influence the other patients and disrupt them to such an extent that it may take months to get everything running smooth once more.” The tug of war between the Big Nurse and McMurphy runs all through the novel. They both use different techniques and strategies to run down each other.

Now the study of this micro-physics presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property but as a strategy, that its effect of domination are attributed not to “appropriation,” but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functioning; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory.²³

The continuous struggle for power goes on between McMurphy and the Big Nurse. “She knew she’d lost one big round and was losing another, but she wasn’t in any hurry. For one thing, she wasn’t about to recommend release; the fight could go on as long as she wanted, till he made a mistake or till he just gave out, or until she could come up with some new tactic that would put her back on top in everybody’s eyes.” (175) According to John Wilson Foster, “McMurphy is able to become a true rebel, someone who implicitly and totally rejects the whole thrust of the society that martyrs him.”²⁴ McMurphy, the manipulator, the con man has seen more of outside world. According to the doctor as his history shows, “He has acted out his hostilities against authority figures – in school, in the service, in jail! (134) The initials of his name have been termed by the critics as RPM standing for Revolution per Minute. The Combine could not catch him. “Combine missed getting to him soon enough with controls. Maybe he grewed up so wild

all over the country, batting around from one place to another, never around one town longer in a few months when he was a kid so a school never got much a hold on him, logging, gambling, running carnival wheels, traveling light footed and fast, keeping on the move so much that the Combine never had a chance to get anything installed.” (82) McMurphy has been a rebel from the beginning. The Big Nurse takes out the folder and starts reading the case history of McMurphy. “McMurry, Randle Patrick. Committed by the state from the Pendleton Farm for Correction... Distinguished Service Cross in Korea, for leading an escape from a Communist prison camp. A dishonorable discharge, afterward, for insubordination. Followed by a history of street brawls and barroom fights and a series of arrests for Drunkenness, Assault, Disturbing the Peace, repeated gambling, and one arrest-for Rape.” (40) He has seen the inside of the institutions like school, the army, jail, prison camp and now the mental hospital. All these institutions called for high capacity for survival. He is the product of the very system he combats. He brings in the fresh breeze into the claustrophobic asylum; he introduces the smell of earth which dispels the smell of germicides, foot powder, piss etc. He introduces himself to the inmates and announces, “You boys don’t look crazy to me.” (18) He tries to subvert the rules and regulations of the Big Nurse by infusing in the inmates a little courage to live. McMurphy gives them the lives they are too afraid to live for themselves. He says to the inmates, “I haven’t heard a real laugh since I came through that door, do you know that? Man, when you lose your laugh you lose your footing.” (63) McMurphy puts up a proposal in changing the time of watching TV because all the inmates wanted to see the World Series of baseball. By voting, the inmates win but when McMurphy sits to watch TV the Big Nurse switches it off but in order to confront her, McMurphy sits in front of the grey screen. “ And we’ re all sitting there lined up in front of that blanked out TV set, watching the gray screen just like we could see the baseball game clear as day and she ranting and screaming behind us.” (125) After a successful rebellion over the airing of the World Series on television, the patients gain hope and self-confidence.

McMurphy acts as a saviour for all the inmates. He wants them to attain their manhood so he plans an outdoor fishing trip and hires two whores Sandy and Candy to accompany them. When the Big Nurse comes to know about the plan about the trip she tries to intimidate the inmates by pasting the news on the board regarding the people who died by drowning. But the Big Nurse does not succeed. Not only this McMurphy and the other inmates along with an official of the ward enjoyed at night. They drank and had fun with the prostitutes. When this secret is revealed the next day, nurse Ratched’s power over the men is completely eliminated: her rules have been disregarded to the point of obliteration, and her routine and regime have both been interrupted by the events of the previous night. The Big Nurse gets so much frustrated that she lobotomizes McMurphy. According to Hemingway, man can be destroyed but not defeated. Similarly McMurphy though got destroyed but he refused to become a cog in the machine. McMurphy retains his power over the Big Nurse, even in his absence. He taught to the inmates the secret of laughter according to Daniel James Wood “If power is the theme of the novel and laughter the currency in which it is dealt, then McMurphy leaves Nurse Ratched utterly bankrupt: though she removes him from her ward, he removes the perpetual smiles from her face and allows the other inmates to wear one on theirs instead.”²⁵

“Power relations are not localized in confrontations between social classes or between citizen and the state; rather they are conceptualized as existing at the most elemental level of the social domain and might be said to constitute it.”²⁶ So power seems to have affected the relations of husband – wife and even of mother-son in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.

Billy Bibbit, the thirty years old stammerer is leading the life of a timid rabbit and has never been able to have any kind of satisfying relationship because of his dominating mother. His stammering is only an effect of the matriarchal oppression. McMurphy understands his problem and tries to solve it. He smuggles a prostitute into the ward to rejuvenate the emasculated Billy Bibbit. The experience proves to be efficacious. He comes out of his hibernation to enjoy sex and assert his individuality. But, when the Big Nurse comes to know about it she considers it to be a challenge to her authority. She uses the matriarchal trap on him. “Oh, Billy Billy ... I’m so ashamed for you ... poor boy, poor little boy ... What worries me, Billy... is how your poor mother is going to take this ... She’s very sensitive. Especially concerning her son. She always spoke so proud of you.” (271) These words make Billy so ashamed that he decides to end his life by committing suicide.

The glaring example of the crushing effect of patriarchy is to be found in the example of Chief Bromden’s father. Here the power is of patriarchy doubled with that of white race. Chief Bromden’s father lost his self importance under the oppressive effect of his wife. The chief uses the surname of his mother because his mother refused to take her husband’s surname. Chief Bromden nostalgically recollects. “My father was full chief ... He was real big when I was a kid. My mother got twice his size... He fought (the Combine) a long time till my mother made him too little to fight any more and he gave up.”(188) This belittling experience becomes a nightmarish experience for Chief Bromden, “But when I saw my Papa start getting scared of things, I got scared too...” (188) These sexually repressive mothers and wives want to castrate the men. Harding also remarks to McMurphy, “We are the victims of a patriarchy my friend.” (56)

Harding is a henpecked husband whose voluptuous wife, Vera seems to serve as the spokesperson for the Combine by constantly reminding him of his “difference”, his effeminate ways: “Dale” she asks, “when are you going to learn to laugh instead of making that mousy little squeak?” (156) “Oh Dale, you never do have enough, do you?” (157) Harding is continuously chided and criticized by his wife when she comes to meet him in the mental asylum.

Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality* talks about homo sexuality and other socially deviant sexual behaviour. “On the other hand, what came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex, reveries, obsessions, petty manias, or great transport of rage. It was time for all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past to step forward and speak to make the difficult confession of what they were.”²⁷ Harding’s personal problem grows out of his homosexuality. “I indulge,” he tells McMurphy, “in certain practices that our society regards as shameful. And I got sick. It wasn’t the practices, I don’t think, it was the feeling that the great, deadly pointing forefinger of society was pointing at me....” (265) The society wants the individual to follow the dominant discourse and if someone shows a deviant behaviour he is looked down upon and is made to feel guilty. Harding is not ashamed of being homosexual but the society makes him feel so. Harding values the sacrifice made by McMurphy and musters up courage to face the outer world. Harding overcomes his shame and decides that he will not let the disapproval of society intimidate him over his being a homosexual.

Chief Bromden is the standing example of exploitation of the coloured by the white. Though Chief Bromden has the height of six feet eight inches and weighs two eighty pounds yet psychologically he is the smallest, the weakest and the shortest. He tells McMurphy that he cannot stand up for himself against the aides and Big Nurse: “I’m way too little. I used to be big, but not no more. You’re twice the size of me.” (187) Bromden has distorted sense of his own

size which is the result of the intimidating power of the Combine. Bromden's sense of insignificance can be traced back to his childhood experience. When the government purchasing agents who came to negotiate the acquisition of the tribal lands simply ignore Bromden as a subhuman ten – year- old irrelevancy. They talk about him and his people as though he is neither present nor conscious nor articulate. When he speaks, they do not acknowledge his speech. Bromden says that it was not he who feigned: "it wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all." (179) As Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* came to invisibility, so Bromden comes to deafness and dumbness, and withdraws from the world and finds repose in enveloping fog.

McMurphy fills Bromden with courage and helps him to attain his original size. He shows courage when he assists McMurphy in the shower fight. He does not let the sacrifice of McMurphy go waste because he knows that what McMurphy did, he did to help the inmates live a life of dignity. "We could not stop him because we were the ones making him do it. It wasn't the nurse that was forcing him, it was our need that was making him push himself slowly up from sitting his big hands driving down on the leather chair arms, pushing him up, rising and standing like one of those moving-picture zombies, obeying orders beamed at him from forty masters." (274) Bromden kills McMurphy because he does not want that McMurphy's vegetable existence be used as an example to intimidate the inmates. "The ward door opened, and the black boys wheeled in this Gurney with a chart at the bottom that said in heavy black letters, MCMURPHY. RANDLE P. POST.OPERATIVE. And below this was written in ink, LOBOTOMY." The smothering of McMurphy by Bromden is considered by M. Gilbert Porter "The suffocating embrace of death is also an embrace of love, and it formalizes the passing of the torch of life from McMurphy to Bromden."²⁸ Bromden celebrates his transformation in his triumphant bursting forth from the cuckoo's nest and in his liberating run – "flying Free" – in the direction of the wild geese towards life and others who may need his help. "I been away," he declares "a long time." (281)

Foucault believes that the repression of sexuality leads to mental stress and abnormalities and it should not be done. Even in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* the inmates are shown to be afraid of sex. Many of the patients – notably Harding, Billy Bibbit – are in the hospital at least in one part because their sexuality has been thwarted. One of Nurse Ratched's greatest crime is that she represses and denies the sexuality of her patients and even, with her heavy white uniform her own sexuality. Not only the Big Nurse even Miss Pilbow, the other nurse on duty is scared of sex and considers it to be bad on the pretext of religion. When McMurphy tries to enter the door where she was distributing pills, she gets panicky and shouts "Stay back! Patients aren't allowed to enter the – Oh, stay back, I'm a Catholic!" (74)

The uninhibited sexuality is a big part of McMurphy's – Kesey's – idea of sanity. According to him sane men and women are unafraid of sex. In order to obliterate the fear of patients regarding sex McMurphy smuggles in two prostitutes so that people like Billy Bibbit can retain their manhood.

Kesey in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* projects not only the deplorable conditions of the mental asylum but he has tried to show that the things outside are the same as within the asylum. For we realize that the outside world is not much better. There, Indian villages are destroyed to make way for dams; the landscape is overrun with identical houses for identical businessmen and their identical wives and children. Any attempt to live a life in any way different is crushed. By showing us the similarities between the Inside and the Outside, Kesey makes his book strike with considerable force-for we come to see that the victims of the Nurse

and the Combine are not only the inmates of the mental asylum, but perhaps we ourselves as well.

References

- 1 Irvin Malin, “Ken Kesey: ‘One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest’,” *Critique : Studies in Modern Fiction* V (1962) : 84.
- 2 Robert Boyers, “Attitudes Toward Sex in American ‘High Culture’,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 376 (1968): 36.
- 3 R.L.Sassoon, “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” *North West Review* 6 (1963): 116.
- 4 Hubert L.Drefus, and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault : Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Sussex : The Harvester Press, 1982) 185.
- 5 Drefus and Rabinow, 196.
- 6 Drefus and Rabinow, 198.
- 7 Tony Tanner, *City of Words : American Fiction 1950 – 1970* (New York : Harper & Row, 1971) 15.
- 8 Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (London: Penguin Group, 2002) 164. All subsequent references in the parentheses are from this edition of the novel.
- 9 Michel Foucault, “Discipline and Punish,” *Literary Theory : An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) 477.
- 10 Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London: Methuen, 1984) 160.
- 11 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization : A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* , trans. Richard Howard (New York : Vintage Books, 1988) 60.
- 12 Drefus and Rabinow, 148.
- 13 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988) 68.
- 14 Roy Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason* (London: Unwin Hynam, 1990) 10.
- 15 Drefus and Rabinow, 189.
- 16 Michel Foucault, *Afterword Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, by Hubert L.Drefus and Paul Rabinow (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982) 214.
- 17 Elizabeth Wright, 161.
- 18 Drefus and Rabinow, 189.
- 19 M.Gilbert Porter, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest: Rising to Heroism* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1998) 48.
- 20 Michel Foucault, “Discipline and Punish,” *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) 465.
- 21 John F.Covaleskie, “Power Goes to School: Teacher, Student and Discipline.” <http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook/93_docs/COVALESK.HTM-29K->
- 22 Tony Tanner, “Edge City,” *Modern Critical Interpretations: Ken Kesey’s One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, ed. Harold Boolm (New York: Chelsa House, 2002) 17.
- 23 Michel Foucault, “Discipline and Punish,” *Literary Theory: An Anthology* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) 465.

- 24 John Wilson Foster, “Hustling to Some Purpose: Kesey’s One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,”
Modern Critical Interpretations Ken Kesey’s One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, ed.
Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2002) 72.
- 25 Daniel James Wood, “Treatment of the Theme of Power in Ken Kesey’s ‘One Flew Over the
Cuckoo’s Nest’ ” 18 September, 2004 < <http://www.google.com>.
- 26 Barry Smart, Foucault, Marxism and Critique (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) 87.
- 27 Michel Foucault, “The History of Sexuality,” Literary Theory: An Anthology, ed. Julie
Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) 684.
- 28 Porter, 67.