

The Phone Call Addiction in Ahlam Mosteghanmi's *Nisyan .Com, The Art of Forgetting*

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Abstract

Phone is an important thing in our life. It is one of the greatest technology graces. It enables people to contact with each other all over the world and helps them wherein emergency. Instead of its numeral profits, it becomes a mania. Everyone is going crazy about phone call. It is not clear how many people have been in contact with their phones. They check them in every time and keep phones with them everywhere. This study aims to pursue the addiction on the phone call in Mosteghanmi's *Nisyan.Com, The Art of Forgetting*. It focuses on Mosteghanmi's view of how a person gradually be addicted on his\ her phone calls.

Keywords: Phone call – Addiction - Nomophobia

Introduction

Addiction is “a complex condition, a brain disease that is manifested by compulsive substance use despite harmful consequence.” In other words, it refers to the “intense focus” on using something with inability to stop.¹ Nowadays there is another type of addiction, which is disseminated throughout the world. Due to new technologies such as (smart) phone, “computer” and “tablet”, people suffer from “behavioral addiction.” Habitually many lose sleep because they keep watching their phones “waiting for an email,” message, miscall or call. They feel that something is missing when they forget their mobile phones at home. The over usage of phone is playing a vital role in causing a psychological illness. In other words, it leads to a change from “bad habit to mental illness.” This kind of change or illnesses is called a “nomophobia”: no mobile phone or the fear of being without phone. Sometimes people belong to the persons behind phones. They addict on hearing certain voices. Especially when two persons decide to build their world together as couples. If the call stops, there will be a phobia or the fear of losing the other voice. This can “lead to social isolation, a certain degree of alienation.”²

Literature also tackles such social problems. The Algerian author Ahlam Mosteghanmi is among many who deal with this idea. In her novel *Nisyan.Com, The Art of Forgetting* (2009) she tries to show the effect of phones in people's life. She states how this technology may cause psychological illnesses.

Phone Call Addiction in *Nisyan.com, The Art of Forgetting*

Ahlam Mosteghanmi, the daughter of the revolutionary Algerian Mohamed El Cherif, was born in Tunisian spring in 1953 while her family was in exile. From her early school days, Mosteghanmi was fond in writing with a high voice. She is not only a contemporary Arabian poetess and novelist but also a combination of revolution and love. She produces a different texture from her authors. As her father, she fights oppression and tyranny, but with ink and paper. She lets her pen speaks instead of her therefore she is confronted from the early days of her career. Her admission to complete her study is refused from University of Algiers, shortly after her graduation with B.A.in Arabic literature from the same university. She was also “dismissed from the Union of Algerian Writers”. This would not stop her dreams to be fulfilled. In 1982, she could get her PhD in sociology from La Sorbonne in Paris. “She is An Algerian woman was not only writing poetry in Arabic”, “she had upset the status quo by writing too frankly and freely about topics such as women's rights.” Her major works are collection of poetry *On the Harbor of Time* (1973) and novels: a Trilogy including *Memory in the Flesh* (1993), ‘Chaos of the Senses’ (1997), and *Bed Hopper* (2003). In 2009, she published her novel: *Nisyan.Com, The Art of Forgetting*. Her fiction is a manifestation of “human tragedy and unfulfilled dreams”. Her literary efforts made her awarded many prizes such as “Naguib Mahfouz Prize” for her first novel, *Memory in the Flesh* in 1998 and the “Pioneers of Lebanon Committee Medal” for the rest of her trilogy in 2004. As the best Arab “woman sensation,” many of her works are translated into English language.³

As a sociologist, Mosteghanmi is concerned with her community problems and this is clearly appears in her novels. One of the socio modern problems is the phone. This invention takes a great role in her works. It could be called postman or cupid of love. Its voice is as an arrow that shoots the ears of its listener to make him/her happy by its hissing or sad by its silence. Mosteghanmi either begins her story with:

....In a raining day, I heard his voice by the phone (p.25).⁴

or ends by:

So, she is going to commence to launch war against all the shackles that her heart adhere to starting from the phone that he presented it to her. She does not want an expensive phone that never rings, but a simple one that rings (p.309)⁵.

Phone is one of her important characters to the point that she personifies it as a man:

To me the phone is the man of my life (p.309)⁶.

She describes its users as slavers. Whereas he/she is sitting lonely and worried during his/her waiting for the other side:

Suddenly, the phone has become a kind of slavery and insult also when someone never replies as if you were not human being or he was preoccupied with more important person than you (p.150)⁷.

The idea of slavery to the phone takes a wide range in her novel *Nisyan. Com, The Art of Forgetting*. The novel is a series of tips that the author uses to heal a friend after being shocked by her lover's phone stoppage who suddenly disappears leaving her to the memories of their old messages. Mosteghanmi finds herself as a substitution to that man. The conversation between her and depressed Kamilia becomes a morning habit that she cannot get rid of. At the end, the author shocked by a manly voice on her friend's phone. She discovers that Kamilia decides to return immediately to her lover after his coming back. So the narrator is obligated to find out a new phone number to heal herself from the infection of 9:00 am (7:00 GMT).⁸

Throughout the novel, Mosteghanmi treats phone call as a brain disease. She makes her effort to find a psychological treatment to Kamilia from her "nomophobia". The indirect meaning of the fear of losing her lover's call. So "behavioral psychology" is the best. "It is one of the most – studied fields in psychology, and it offers great insight into how to break bad habits and build up healthy habits in their place."⁹ As a therapist Mosteghanmi needs a plan to apply her program of treatment in order to face:

In confrontation to the telephone starvation policy (p163).¹⁰

Habits are difficult to change, because they are strongly connected by the continuous support from the brain:¹¹

In fact, I have, still, waken up at the same hour that he used to phone me for years (p.55).

"Habits are also patterns of behaviour and it is the breaking of patterns that are the key to breaking the habits themselves." To break such patterns the author has to do something about the prompts of such behavior.¹² What is the main triggers for Kamilia's belonging to that phone? He is a person that she used to talk with at 9:00 am. "Behavioral psychology claims that all of our behavior is either rewarded or punished, which increases or decreases the chance of repeating that behavior." For example if someone smokes he/she will be rewarded by relief, but definitely he/she will be sick. Kamilia should choose a reward or a punishment that is relevant to her previous habit. She needs to acquire a new one giving the same reward without "downsides."¹³ So there must be a substitution. Mosteghanmi suggests herself to be that one:

What is your opinion to phone you every morning at 9 o'clock? (p.56)

Kamilia must have a "strong will power" to do so. She has to submit to the punishment (no phone call) or receive reward (her friend's call) by replacement:¹⁴

As long as you haven't broken the biological watch of his love, the man will never leave you (p.55)

So the two friends begin their daily conversations but not about love. They speak about how to forget love:

Since then, every morning, (oblivion telephone) rings at 9 o'clock at my friend's home (p.58).

Usually, the doctor decides with his patient to "reduce the does down". In other words, stopping addiction gradually can help to recover completely.¹⁵ Mosteghanmi takes use of this as a remedy and She starts giving Kamilia the tips of forgetting:

My voice was an emotional trick that breaks her inner watch. It uses words to lessen the blueness of bruises caused by loss. A tablet of compassion that she takes every morning in telephone misleading will make her forget an invisible caller that never comes (p.326).

Mosteghanmi's fault is putting herself in the same ring that surrounds Kamilia. She faces the same stoppage of the phone call, when Kamilia suddenly returns to her lover leaving Mosteghanmi waiting her on a phone:

Woe to her...

She has made me so addicted to telephone calls that I have to give up this habit (p.326).

So the narrator returns to the start point in healing addicted but this time not for Kamilia or anyone else, it is for Mosteghanmi herself. There are two options in hand either finding one of her friends who is ready to be in ongoing touch with her exactly as she does with Kamilia or using the same reason for Kamilia's sickness, which is a job for a man:

There are two alternatives:

The first one is to start searching for names of my friends in my phone at 9 o'clock. Behaving so is sickness that I don't want. The second one is to allow a man to do this emotional telephone task (p.326).

Conclusion

Due to its great role in healing patients, Some psychologists use *Nisyan.Com, The Art of Forgetting* as a medicine. The author herself mentions this by saying that she bought it once from a pharmacy.¹⁶ The novel shows how a person might be an addicted to his phone. In fact, most of us suffer from this illness, which made us restricted to our phones living in an isolation from our world. The narrator explains in details how phone call can be addiction, which should be healed psychologically. So people must be wary from this communication which is so dangerous for both: our psyche and body.

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