

## Upshot of Heredity and Environment on the behaviour of a character, with Special reference to The Call of the Wild by Jack London

Faroze Ahmad Chopan and Mamta Dave

Research Scholar DAVV Indore

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### Abstract

*Nature is indifferent force acting on the lives of organisms, and there is no doubt that one's heredity and social environment decides one's personality and manipulates the conduct of its subject. The paper has explored that the effect of both heredity and environment decides the future of an organism. London has intensely described the countryside, absurdly merging a menacing animism with a baleful misery. Keeping the environmental theme in mind, it is written with social and genetic determinism. Jack London has vividly portrayed his characters as pawns in the hands of nature. London has depicted the life journey of Buck from a pampered to a wild. Buck, a domesticated and pampered dog was forced by the surroundings to transform his character, and those hard situations arouse his traits of wildness. The law of club teaches him the law of the survival of the fittest. He faced each hard situation bravely, and survived by making the use of his heriditical assets and the life experiences. Buck's struggle, heredity and survival have been clearly defined. At the end of the novel one can see buck a totally transformed creature from what he has been introduced in the beginning of the novel, leaving human society and wandering freely with his wild mates. So it is an attempt to display both the forces by the entire description of the character Buck.*

**Keywords:** Genetic determinism, Heriditical assets etc.

It is obvious that one's heredity and social environment decides ones personality and manipulates the conduct of its subject. By depicting the character of low social and monetary classes who were subjugated by their environment and inheritance, Naturalist authors have made an effort to attain an acute objectivity and bluntness. Heredity and Environment has an immense effect as far as ones behaviour is concerned. Heredity is the transmission of traits to offspring from its parents or ancestors, or the conduction of genetic characters from parents to children. So, heredity had a huge effect on the behaviour of an organism. Environment refers to the surroundings of an organism, where he/she dwells. Environment is one of the prominent factors for moulding the behaviour of an individual; it is the place where an organism struggles for adaptation. So heredity and environment are the basic constituents of naturalism.

The origins of naturalism movement are European. It was one of the most prominent literary movements in America from 1890 to 1920. Naturalism is believed to have strong alliance with realism, in the collective stress on reflecting surface reality. It is a newer and harsher than realism. Other than a literary technique, it involves a philosophy of determinism too. The author also seems to have an indicative task of examining the problems of society. It has been explored that rudiments of naturalism

have its birth in the theories of Charles Darwin. The movement was formulated and originated by a French writer and theorist Emily Zola. Naturalism makes the use of comprehensive pragmatism to suggest that social circumstances, heredity, and environment had inevitable force in determining one's character. Charles Darwin's theory of Evolution had a great impact on naturalist writers. Naturalism can be called as a theory in literature highlighting scientific study of life devoid of idealism or evasion of the ugly.

As M.H.Abrahams has defined: "It is a mode of fiction that was developed by a school of writers in accordance with a special philosophical thesis. This thesis a product of post Darwinian biology in the mid-nineteenth century, held that man belongs entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul or nay other connection with a religious or spiritual world beyond nature: that man is therefore merely a higher- order animal whose character and fortunes are determined by two kind of natural forces, heredity and environment." (Abrams, p.261)

In Naturalism, characters expand and behave through the flexibility of environment or heredity. According to Illustrated Oxford Dictionary: "Heredity is the passing on of physical or mental characteristics from one generation to another." The word heredity is derived from Latin word hereditas- 'status of an heir'. Heredity is transforming

process to progeny from its, parents. According to illustrated Oxford Dictionary- "Environment is the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates."

There are so many writers who presented their creativity in fever of naturalism like Thomas Hardy with *Tess of the D'urbervilles (1891)*, Stephen Crane with *In Maggie: A Girl of the Streets(1896)*, Frank Norris with *McTeague (1899)* etc. Their mechanism for naturalism illuminates the aspect of naturalism that connects with environment and heredity. One of the prominent writers of the movement was Jack London, (12 January, 1876 to 22 November, 1916) was an American author of early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a renowned journalist and a well-known socialist too. He wrote several novels, novellas, short stories, poetries and articles. He is best commemorated or known for his selected but famous works like *The Call of the Wild (1903)* and *White Fang (1906)*. These are most appreciable novels of London. There are two main similarities between these two novels, First both set in 'The Klondike Gold Rush (California) and second in both the novels the protagonists are the Dogs- Buck and White Fang. Other famous novels are *The Sea Wolf (1904)*, *The Iron Heel (1908)*, and *Martin Eden (1909)*. We can easily catch London's life experience in his novels or works. London entered into naturalistic world with his unique style and became one of the great exponents of naturalism.

London's life journey from childhood to death reveals the story of struggle of a man who tries to discover the name of his real father, who fights poverty, who makes effort to find a true friendship, who searches for his soul mate or true love and most prominent thing of his journey was quest for identity. London did tough jobs to make his own identity by facing his all hard times of life with courage. His struggle and life experiences established himself into the world of naturalism.

As the novel *The Call of the Wild* explores the journey of Buck (a dog) and his transformation from a pampered to a sledge dog. The novel is fairly an autobiographical allegory based on London's conversion from teenagehood to a married and middle class writer. Greediness is a hereditary trait, found in all humans, which steals the calmness of a person. In *The Call of the Wild*, London has explored the greedy nature of human, who for their own benefits makes others to suffer. Buck, the protagonist has become a victim of man's instinct of greed, which disturbs his comfortable routine life. In the beginning of the novel we found that men had found a yellow metal (gold) in Arctic darkness, so people are rushing towards Northland. History witnesses that men's greedy nature has always made other creatures to suffer. In order to travel towards the frozen land of arctic they need heavy dogs, with strong muscles for toil, dogs must possess furry coats to protect them from the frost.

Unfortunately, Buck possessed the qualities of survival in the said conditions. Buck, who has been domesticated

in a pampered environment, his puppy-hood has been the happiest stage of his life, which he spent with pride. It is natural that a child grows like his parents, so had Buck. His parents were of two different breeds. His father Elmo was gigantic and loyal to man, and his mother a scotch shepherd dog. So, Buck is a mixed breed and possessing the qualities of both of his parents.

It has been experienced that of all the animals, dogs are the most loyal ones. They have been serving human civilization since beginning. Buck's father was loyal to men, so was Buck because of inheritance. As of the pampered environment of Judge Miller where Buck was brought up, he had a blind faith on mankind, was always feeling safe in their hands. So, when Buck was abducted, he accepted the rope with quite dignity without knowing the malice behind it. Besides a loving nature of man, Buck has never experienced the mercilessness nature of man. Love, mercy and greed, all are ancestral traits of man and uses them according to need.

After the abduction of Buck, he received the intolerable treatment which he had never experienced before. Buck was not ready to adjust with new conditions and strange owner, but it has been seen that when everything fails, power can be used as a magical wind, and it is in human genes that man has always made use of power for the purpose to oppress and control. So there was not any other way without accepting the new but wild environment. As the new owner says him: "Be a good dog and all'll go well and the goose hang high. Be a bad dog, and I'll whale the stuffin' outa you. Understand?" (*The Call of the Wild*, p.17)

The environment was not pampered but was a primitive one, where there was primitive law, the law of club. As by heredity Buck belongs to the wild primitive world, and grown up in friendly environment has made him civilized. However, the more he deals with hard ships, the more his cunning and survival instinct is arousing. Buck observed that to survive in such intolerable and hard conditions, he has to obey the environmental law, as he witnessed a merciless death of the one of his fellow, who could not deal with the condition. As Buck was shocked to witness: "Also he saw one dog, that would neither conciliate nor obey, finally killed in the struggle for mastery". (*The Call of the Wild*, p.17)

The Law of Club and fang, its mainly one part "Kill or killed" and one part "Survival of the Fittest". It witnesses a bloodthirsty locale where callousness and substantial potency are the solitary features that will facilitate one to thrive or endure. Before this, Buck has never witnessed such wolfish creatures fight, watching the awful death scene of his friend curly was a dreadful experience for Buck and also taught him a haunting lesson. For ones survival, an organism has to compromise with the changing milieu. The one who adjusts with the varying conditions and has a capability to abide is always fit for survival, if he falls short to do such, then he is considered unfit for survival, as Curly was.

In the novel you will come across when Francoi's fastened the arrangement of straps and buckles on Buck, Buck was taken aback, as he is a pampered dog and had never practised it before. Buck had never seen the dogs working like horses: "Buck learned easily, and under the combined tuition of his two mates and Francoi's made remarkable progress" (The Call of the Wild, p.23). The adaptable trait of Buck was a key of his survival. Initially, he don't know where to sleep, as it was covered all over by snow, gradually he learned to dig a hole, to sleep and to protect himself from cold. His fellow dogs used to rob his foodstuff, leaving him starving, then he learned how to consume fast and to snatch others ration too. "It marked his adaptability, his capacity to adjust himself to changing conditions, the lack of which would have meant swift and terrible death" (The Call of the Wild, p.30)

As London, describes Buck as a primordial beast and it has been clearly exposed that he is a dominant wild animal who tracks its gut feelings to endure and dominate others. Buck developed into a thriving wild creature by finding the arousal of dominant primordial beast in himself and began to cope with the savage environment: "Far more potent were the memories of his heredity that gave things he had never seen before a seeming familiarity; the instincts (which were but the memories of his ancestors become habits) which had lapsed in later days, and still later, in him, quickened and become alive again." (The Call of the Wild, p.57)

In chapter third, London has depicted Buck, having strong primitive will of survival. It has been portrayed that how the situation demands the arousal of primordial beast in Buck, and he was equally successful to respond. When Buck returns to his sleeping hole, he found Spitz already occupying his nest. This sets off the hidden monster in Buck and he jumps upon Spitz. It clearly shows what kind of role an environment can play in discovering the heriditical traits of an organism. When a group of ravenous huskies attacked the camp, they were unstoppable and were not affected by the clubs which thrash them and they attempt to guzzle all of the food supplies. The demand of the site was to protect food and Buck actively took part and fought fiercely, his inner beast was energized by their flavour of blood: "The warm taste of it in his mouth goaded him to greater fierceness." (The Call of the Wild, p.36).

The death of Spitz, witnesses the reversion of Buck in to a primordial beast: "the successful champion, the dominant primordial beast who had made his kill and

found it good." (The Call of the Wild, p.50) After all, the setting was successful in arousing the beast in Buck, by training and examining him, and he was successfully able to cope up with the circumstances:

"He had lessoned from Spitz and from the chief fighting dogs of the police and mail, and knew there was no middle course. He must master or be mastered; while to show mercy was a weakness. Mercy did not exist in the primordial life. It was misunderstood for fear, and such misunderstandings made for death, kill or be killed, eat or be eaten, was the law; and this mandate, down out the depths of Time, he obeyed." (The Call of the Wild, p.87)

"Every night, regularly, at nine, at twelve, at three, they lifted a nocturnal song, a weird and eerie chant, in which it was Buck's delight to join." (The Call of the Wild, p.44). Finally the call which has been haunting Buck from a long time hypnotised and engrossed him towards. The one thing which was preventing him till was the love of man. For Buck it was never easy to leave the man and answer the call of the wild, but after the death of his master, John Thornton, the tow force of wild increased and he thought that it was the right time to answer it: "It was the call, the many-noted call, sounding more luringly and compellingly than ever before. And as never before, he was ready to obey . . . The last tie was broken. Man and the claims of man no longer bound him" (The Call of the Wild, p.119). Buck was now a totally transformed creature from what he has been introduced by London in the beginning of the novel, leaving human society and wandering freely with his wild mates: " And Buck ran with them, side by side with the wild brother, yelping as he ran." (The Call of the Wild, p.121)

London has put forward that the universe often presented that free will is an illusion and organisms had always made the disastrous attempts for the implementation of free determination. So in conclusion one can say that London has successfully explored the force of inheritance, instinct and obsession and Nature is basically apathetic drive acting on the lives of an organism.

## References

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