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Critique of the Ethos of Individualism in Strout's *My Name is Lucy Barton*

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Letter of Approval

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes Elizabeth Strout's novel My Name is Lucy Barton to critique the ethos of individualism prevalent in American society. In the text, Lucy is presented as the true epitome of American individualism, who ignores family value and relations in order to move forward in her life. Ethos of individualism makes the protagonist self-centered because this ethic makes her to focus on accomplishing her dreams and goals by ignoring other people who are part of her life. She avoids family values, relationships, emotional bond and connection. However, individualistic ethos brings many positive changes in Lucy's life. She establishes her distinct identity and status as a writer. She gains success and material prosperity. Yet, this ethos makes her to suffer from loneliness, isolation, emotional detachment and lack of human connection when there is nothing left to be achieved in her life. For this, the researcher uses Alexis de Tocqueville's observation of "Nineteenth century American Individualism", Steven Lukes' ideas on "Individualism in America" and R. Philip Brown's "fundamental elements of individualism", as methodology for analysis. The rationale is that by understanding the effect of ideology of individualism appeals to value the familial love, bond, relationships, affection and humanitarian values. Thus, this research paper concludes that people should make balance between the responsibilities towards self and other. The significance of the study is to present how Lucy suffers due to her ethos of individualism.

Keywords: Individualism, American culture, Emotional Detachment, Family Value, Realization

Elizabeth Strout's protagonist critiques the ethos of individualism in *My Name is Lucy Barton*. It is the story of the narrator and protagonist Lucy Barton. It is set in rural town Amgash and New York City. It is based on cultural norms and values of American society. This is the serious concern of present context because Americans are becoming more individualistic than previous time. This text embodies the reality of American cultural and societal values. Individualism is the cultural and societal values of America. American people prefer individualistic ethos in order to get success, status and fame. Nineteenth century marked as the rise of individualism in America. Individualism makes people self-centered because this ethos leads them to focus on accomplishing dreams of prosperous life by avoiding other moral values. Though the ethos of individualism provides opportunity for progress, achievements, success, material prosperity, status and values of good life. But individualistic people face crisis like loneliness, isolation and emotional detachment. It is because such people create emotional and physical distance with their family, relatives and close ones. Americans in their young age are self-centered and become victim of their own thought later. They realize significance of family bond, love and emotional attachment when they are in troublesome situations. Strout warns against the extremity of ethos of individualism in American society.

Individualism is highly emphasized in American culture. It emerges in American society during nineteenth century. People believed they can get high degree of success by following the ethos of individualism in their nature. Individualistic people avoid family values and relationships in order to move forward in their life. Lucy Barton, in the text, is one such character who follows ethos of individualism. Her desire to transform her life makes her individualistic. Lucy's individualistic mindset to move forward in life without considering her family brings loneliness and

isolation in her life. She wants to move away from her hometown. She has fascination with urban sphere and hatred for her rural hometown. She gets scholarship in one of colleges outside Chicago and finds job there. There she meets William decides to marry without the permission of her parents. She moves to New York City with William and never visits her hometown and family for nine years. Her new life begins in city. She starts her writing career and establishes her identity as a writer. She discards the marital relationship with William later. She leaves her daughters also. She does this only to focus in her career. She has no time to spend with her husband and daughters. If anything is significant to her then that is her career in the writing field. Lucy achieves success, she gets what she wanted but does not find solace and satisfaction in her life. She is extremely confined by her belief of individualism.

Lucy is guided by the cultural value of her society. American cultural values of being successful, gaining material prosperity, identity and status influence her. She follows ethos of individualism extremely. In this, society is also responsible in making Lucy self-centered. Her family is poor and is of low status in the society. Their neighbors do not like them. There is cultural alienation. Even Lucy and her siblings are insulted in the school by teachers and classmates. Everybody hates them because of the poverty of her family. Thus, Lucy has no friends in school and neighborhood. In this sense, Lucy becoming extremely individualistic is the cause of poverty and social outcaste. She wants to establish her identity and status in the society. She does not bear to be in the condition of her family. She concentrates on changing her life in better way. The reason behind her becoming individualistic and self-centered is to establish identity, status and achieve success and prosperity. Her aim is to meet the criteria of status fixed by the society. It is because she does not want to be the matter of hatred and social outcaste.

Lucy's intention behind following the individualistic ethos is to transform her life and to get rid of poverty and social hatred. Though her intention is positive, but she is unable to make balance between her determination and her moral obligations to her parents, siblings and family. This is the only fault of her, which makes her extremely self-centered and leads her be individualistic. In this all, she creates emotional detachment with her parents, family and close ones. She remains alone and isolate. This does not matter her earlier. Even she does not realize this lack and distance. She needs the support and presence of her family and close ones, for the first time when she is admitted in the hospital. Where she is alone, there is no one to console and talk with her. Her husband is busy in his job and household work as well and she has no connection with her family and siblings. She is desperate for the presence of someone. She tries to be fine but she is not in reality.

But later on, Lucy comes to understand about the significance and value of familial bond, emotional connection and support. She goes to her hometown to meets her mother and father during their illness. She feels sorry for what she does with them and her siblings. After the death of her parents, she realizes the significance of parental love and support in true sense. She cannot stop feeling pain after losing them. Secondly, she lives in regret for leaving her husband and daughters. She remembers the moments which she spends with them. She is alone in her apartment and misses the word "Mommy" from her girls. Her heart swells up.

Lucy understands the value of parental love and support, when her mother comes to visit her in hospital. Her mother's presence provides her ease and comfort, she feels relief from tension. She wakes up at night usually and dozes fitfully or stares through the window but that night she sleeps well. Lucy and her mother talk about many people from Amgash, which is common nature of human beings. They talk in a

way as if pressure of feelings come out. Which they have repressed so long. She asks about her siblings to her mother. Her mother reveals that they are not doing anything good in their life. She commits only Lucy moves forward in her life and makes it far better. But her other children remain in the poor condition. Lucy's mother tells about Kathie Nicely, Harriet, Aunt Celia, Abel Blaine, Marilyn and some other people. Lucy shows curiosity to know about these people. Lucy and her mother feel uncomfortable to share their emotion and feelings, because of their long time converge. So, they keep on talking about other people from their hometown. Strout is suggesting that self-reliance is acceptable to an extent but when this self-reliance becomes completely self-centered, then it becomes unworthy. In this sense, the author is not completely against the individualism but she suggests that not to follow individualistic ethos extremely.

Numerous critics have examined this text from different perspectives. In the text, Strout presents an image of woman who is obsessed with the individualistic ethos. She is self-centered and that brings estrangement in her life. Randolph comments, "Her character is often both leery of and hungry for human connection" (176). Lucy is also leery of and hungry of human connection. She follows the ethos of individualism since her childhood. She believes in her own ability and strength. She focuses on accomplishing her dreams and ambition. This creates distance with her family and hometown. She is hungry of human connection in her life later on. She realizes this lack when she is admitted in the hospital. There she tries to get nurses to spend few minute with her. She feels emotional attachment with the doctor because he visits her frequently. The presence of doctor and nurses provide her contentment. The death of her parents marks as the turning point in her life. She goes to her hometown. She becomes overwhelmed by the death of her parents. She cannot stop feeling pain.

She misses her daughters and husband, when she is alone in her apartment.

Similarly, literary critic Claire Messud writes, "Strout articulates for her readers albeit of the circumspectly perhaps the only way the Gordian knot of family binding together fear and misery, solace and love" (4). Messud illustrates Strout's articulation of the significance of the family binding, love and solace. It is presented very finely by Lucy. Lucy presents her life in Amgash with her parents and siblings. Her past life is very miserable. She mentions about her home town and the condition of her family. She accepts the significance of family, which provides solace and love. While narrating her life story, she shows the values of family. In a hospital when it is not identified, for what she is suffering from is also the cause of anxiety and depression due to the loneliness.

Hannah Beckerman, a literary critic comments, "In Elizabeth Strout's deeply affecting novel, the eponymous heroine endeavors to make sense of her story in spite of the vagaries of memory, the power of collective denial and the masterful ability of those closest to her emotional needs in misunderstanding and depression" (3). Beckerman illustrates Lucy's attempt to make meaning of her life by uncovering memories of past. She depends in her past memory to narrate her life story. Strout gives emphasis on the inner self of the character in the text. Lucy shows emotional needs when she is in hospital. The misunderstanding between her family and herself is also evident. Lastly, she regrets for undermining the significance of parents, siblings and family. When her daughters choose to live with William rather than with her, she feels pain of being mother. She expresses the depressive feeling, when she is alone in her apartment. The difficulty becomes more evident when Lucy tries to explain why it is that her present life in fact better than her life in Amgash.

While thinking about her childhood in Illinois, she remembers about her

writing mentor Sarah Payne, since her first meeting at cloth store to present time. Barrett Andrea comments, "A web of illusions, partial memories and teasingly cubist fragments weave through and into the earlier novel, fortified by recurring images and memories" (3). Lucy narration depends on her memory. Her estranged mother's visit in her hospital bed makes her to confront her past. Her story is the web of illusions because; memories of her past life are partial. She is not able to make meaning of her past life. She does not say everything clearly. Several times the narrator, Lucy makes reference to the act of recording rather than writing or telling. There is a sense of quite urgency a concentration on the accuracy of her recollections. The novel is the collection of fragments of memories of different time and period. This text assures and precise details of the narrator's struggle with memory of her own past life. She wishes to escape from her past life. She never entreats to remember her hometown and memory of it. But her estranged mother's visit unfolds the memories of the past in rural Amgash one after another. This shows the inescapable power of the memory of the past. She realizes that no one can escape from the memories of the past. No matter how far person moves forward in life but he/she is connected to the past memories.

Lucy and her mother are unable to express their love for each other. It is because of the lack of emotional attachment between them. Both are together after long period of time. Danielle Mclanghlin states that "Lucy attempts to extract from her mother an admission of love are heartrending, as her mother's seemingly inability to provide it in any direct fashion at least; But against all odds, their exchange are in their own way often uplifting" (4). Mclanghlin points out the Lucy's wishes to get expression of love from her mother. But her mother keeps on talking about other people from her hometown. Lucy tries to make her mother to talk about herself. Lucy's mother pretends as she does not have concern about Lucy life. Her mother

does not want to show her emotions in front of Lucy. Lucy expects affection and love from her mother in direct way. The reason behind this inability to express love and emotion is the estrangement between them so long.

In this way, different critics and reviewers have expanded Strout's *My Name is Lucy Barton* from different perspectives. They focus on the emotional aspects like love, family binding, past memories, images and the way of storytelling. They have not shed light on the issue of individualism, which is very significant issue in the novel. So, the major thrust of this study is to explore the issue of individualism, prevalent in American society which is embodied by the protagonist. Secondary objectives of this research are to explore the negative consequences of the individualism in the protagonist life. In the text, Lucy's ethos of individualism brings loneliness and lack of human connection in her life. So, she is critiquing the ethos of individualism while narrating her life story. This very research paper exposes the negative aspects the ethos of individualism which is presented by the protagonist in this novel, *My Name is Lucy Barton* by Strout. Individualism is closely associated with self-interest and selfishness. In this regard, Alexis de Tocqueville's notion on "Nineteenth century American Individualism", Steven Lukes ideas on "Individualism in America" and R. Philip Brown's "fundamental elements of individualism" are applicable in the text so, the study highlights the very thing.

In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville provides insights into individualism in America. His book is based on close observation of American society, culture, democracy and individualism from the perspective of Frenchman. The concept of individualism in American society seems to have been discussed by him. He observes that in democratic countries, people are apt to be individualistic. It is because democracy ensures the rights and freedom of individuals. Personal freedom is main

element of the democracy and it provokes individualism. In democracy, each individual has freedom in decision making, thought and action. In America, personal freedom and freedom of choice is highly exercised. According to Tocqueville, "individualism is the natural product of democracy and it is prevalent in democratic countries. He further observes that in democratic communities there are large number of independent citizens. These people entertain a presumptuous confidence in their strength" (107). It becomes possible because democracy provides them this opportunity.

But it is not only democracy, which makes Americans to follow the ethos of individualism. Individualism has gained cultural value in American society. So, these cultural and societal values are also equally responsible in promoting individualism among Americans. They are highly influenced by this ethic. They think that individualism is the only means to achieve success, prosperity and establish identity. It is because material prosperity is highly valued in American culture. Regarding this, R. Philip Brown states, "Individual dignity and the spiritual value of the perfectible individual human soul became the founding concept of the American nation and the central doctrine of American social and political culture" (3). Here, Brown observes that individual dignity and the spiritual values of individual of being perfect human being is the founding concept of American social culture. In this sense, this cultural values of America lead Americans to follow the ethos of individualism.

In *Democracy in America* defines, Tocqueville defines individualism as "a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellow-creatures and draw apart with his family and his friends; so that, after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself" (104). Through this line, ethos of individualism is related to

autonomy, which alienate individuals from their family and friends. After that, one makes little world of his/her own. This feeling makes people alienate from their fellow. Even this isolates people from their family. They consider only about themselves and their good life. Tocqueville's view on individualism is successfully portrayed in this novel *My Name is Lucy Barton* by Strout. Here, author's heroine is such type of protagonist who embodies individualism and later critiques the ethos of individualism. Lucy, the protagonist of the novel is the epitome of individualism prevalent in American society. Due to poverty of her family other children do not like to play with her. She prefers to spend time with tree rather than with her siblings. She spends more time in school. She concentrates on her study and keeps herself busy in reading books. But she does not encourage her siblings. She dreams of better life and future but her family is not part of her dream. She behaves as if she is alone in the world. She likes to stay away from her home and family, it is because she wants to be different from them. She creates little imaginary world of her own. American society and cultural value also play important role to make Lucy individualistic. Because in her society her family is treated as outcaste only because of the poverty. Her family is isolated from the society. So, Lucy determines to make her life better in order to establish her status.

Ethos of individualism is evident in the American culture particularly and to the western society generally. The protagonist belongs to rural area of America. Lucy is influenced by the mainstream culture very much. Individualism is prevalent and followed heavily in American society. Lucy's appreciation of good life are characteristic that is vital in American culture. Americans want to achieve success and status in the society. In this regard, another American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson is the true advocator of individualism. In his essay *Self-Reliance and Other*

Essays, he glorifies self-reliance and its values. He states, "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, that is genius" (19). For Emerson, believing in one's own thought and private heart is applicable for all men. This is what he calls genius. Americans are guided by this very belief of self-reliance. Strout projects this very issue in the text as Lucy mentions, "This is me and I will not go where I cannot bear to go - to Amgash, Illinois- and I will not stay in my marriage when I do not want to, and I will grab myself and hurl onward through life" (177). Emerson's ethos of self-reliance is truly expressed by the protagonist. Lucy believes in her own thought. She does what her heart lets her to do. She hates her hometown that is why she does not go there. She does whatever she thinks is right for her. She does not care about feelings of other people who are part of her life. She divorces her husband because she does not want to stay in that marriage. Her concerns are limited to herself only. She grabs herself and moves forward through life. Lucy advocates self-transformation and intends to transform various aspects of her life.

Another theorist, R. Philip Brown presents fundamental elements of individualism. It is more close to the private concern of the individual. His second and third elements of individualism are as such:

A second important element of individualism is the notion of autonomy, or self-direction according to which an individual's thought and action is one's own and not outside control. A third important individualist concept is that of privacy or private existence in a public world: an area within which the individual should be left alone by others and be able to do and think whatever one chooses in order to achieve one's own view of the good life. (4)

Here, Brown points out the elements of individualism as autonomous and self-

directional in which individual controls thought and action.

Individualistic people do not let other intervene in their life. Another concept of individualism is private existence of individual in public world in which one is alone and free to do things in own way to get positive changes in life. Such people suffer from loneliness in their life. These issues are successfully portrayed in the novel, Lucy is autonomous and self-directional and controls her thoughts and actions. As novel depicts,

My senior year, the guidance counselor called me to her office and said that a college just outside of Chicago was inviting me to attend with all expenses paid. My parents did not say much about this, probably out of defense for my brother and sister, who had not had perfect or even particularly, good grades; neither one went on to school (25).

Lucy sees herself as consistently pursuing devotion to her own self interest. She does not talk to her parents about this matter. She is proud that she gets scholarship but she does not think about her sister and brother. She does not let her family members to influence in her life. She acts according to her mind. She is very private and does not share her feelings and thoughts with her family. She maintains her private existence among her family members. She does and thinks whatever she chooses in order to achieve her own view of good life. For her, leaving her rural hometown is first step make her life better. She treats as if her family is not part of her life.

In the same way, American individualism makes people selfish, who are not concerned with the feeling and emotion of other. Tocqueville writes about Americans as, "They owe nothing to any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their destiny is in their own hand..." (106). Here, Tocqueville regards Americans as not having no any

consideration with other. They form the habit of standing alone. They think as if their destiny is in their own hand. It means Americans believe in themselves. They think that they can change their destiny with strong commitment and hard work. They form the habit of standing alone. Such people seldom share their feelings with anyone. They think that what they achieves in their life is due to strong commitment and hard work. They do not have any consideration with other people, who are part of their life. Even they do not hesitate to leave their family and home.

Likewise, individualistic ethos makes people self-centered. This is the tendency of giving priority to one's own interest. Thus, this leads people to be selfish and forget the humanitarian values. Regarding this, Cyril Ghosh describes, "individualism represents nothing other than a mere atomistic self-interestedness" (110). Here, Ghosh points out individualism as similar to individualistic self-interestedness. In which, people are more self-centered. Such people only care about their own self- interest. This view is applicable in the novel. The protagonist is very self-interested in her manner and thought. When she is in collage she makes love relationship with William and weds him. But Lucy's intention behind this marriage is to settle in New York City to establish her identity and career. She finds her marriage with William one best means to move away from Amgash for forever. She uses her husband to cross the class line. Because her husband is the lab assistant. She decides to marry him when he tells his future plan of moving to New York City after marriage, where he has post doctoral appointment waiting at a university. As Lucy narrates, "This was his idea, that we would go together to Amgash and would explain to them how we are going to be married and move to New York City, I had no concept of turning my back on anything. I was in love, and that felt natural" (29-30). The reason behind marrying William is to cross class line. She does not marry him for

love and emotional tie. She has two daughters with William. But she divorces her husband and leaves her daughters later on. She uses him to move away from rural Amgash for forever. It is her husband who makes arrangement of her mother's visit in the hospital. He cannot make visit to her so he calls her mother from Amgash. So, Lucy may not feel bore and alone lying on the hospital bed. But she has no any concern with the feelings and emotion of her husband. She aims at gaining name and fame as a writer among people.

Lucy's self-centeredness lets her be ruthless to become a writer. It is the matter of right and she is free to behave according to her wish. Though it is evident that her ruthless determination transforms her life. She accepts that she becomes ruthless to execute her goals. Her friend Jeremy first says her ruthless. But she does not accepts that she is ruthless. But when her mother tells her in the hospital that she is not like her brother and sister. Because she moves ahead and her life changes. Lucy thinks that her mother means that she is ruthless already. She is ruthless actually, because she has no any consideration about other's feelings. She likes to spend time with tree rather than with her siblings in her childhood because she wants make herself distinct from them. Likewise, she has no any connection with her parents and siblings until the day her mother shows up at the foot of her bed in the hospital. In this way, ethos of individualism makes her self-centered and ruthless.

Similarly, she divorces William later. She uses him to move away from her hometown and settle in New York City. She also leaves her daughters which she has with William. She says that she has no time to spend with them. She is busy in executing her career. She thinks that if she stays in her marriage then, she may not be able to complete her another book. She finds these relations as obstacles in her career. She does not fulfill moral obligations toward her husband and daughters. Her ruthless

determination makes her to forget that she is human.

Lucy's ethos of individualism is not only associated with self-centeredness but it also implies rationality. In this regard, philosopher Emile Durkheim in his essay "Individualism and the Intellectuals" argues: "it is quite true that individualism implies a certain intellectualism: for freedom of thoughts is the first of freedom" (49). Here, Durkheim points out, individualism and intellectualism is interrelated. Intellectualism in the sense of freedom of thoughts. Individualism implies some sort of intellectualism. This view is applicable to Lucy's manner and behavior in the novel, *My Name is Lucy Barton*. Lucy individualistic mindset also implies intellectualism in her manner and actions. She transforms her life completely in positive way by being individualistic. It is not easy to one from poor and rural background, to establish name and identity in city like New York. She starts her journey alone in the process of achieving success and status. Lucy crosses the class line after marrying William, her first husband and moves to New York City. She makes decisions in her life intellectually. Her decisions like studying in senior college, leaving her hometown marrying William, moving to city. Likewise, divorcing her first husband and leaving her daughters and her second marriage imply her intellectualism. In this regard, there is no place for emotion and feelings. Lucy acts according to her mind, which undermines her emotion. She justifies her decisions as right many times.

Ethos of individualism is negative, when it is followed extremely. There are both negative and positive aspects of the individualism. Similarly, Steven Lukes quotes Louis Blanc's views on individualism in his book *Individualism* (1873), as such:

individualism is important in having achieved a vast progress. To provide breathing space and scope to human thought repressed for so long, to

intoxicate it with pride and audacity: to submit to the judgment of every mind the totality of traditions, centuries, their achievement, their beliefs; to place man in an isolation full of anxieties, full of perils (25)

Here, Lukes defines individualism as having both positive and negative aspects.

Individualism paves path to achieve progress. Individualism gives space for individual's thoughts mingle with self-respect and fearlessness. It provides opportunity for personality development. Individualist people feel pride and audacity and it makes people soul judge of their mind, beliefs and achievement. In this sense, individualism is important. But this ethics isolates man from family, close ones and relationships and brings anxiety and perils in his/her life at the same time.

These issues are successfully portrayed in the text *My Name is Lucy Barton* by Strout. Lucy's individualistic mindset brings achievements and success in her life but it brings anxieties and isolation in her life at the same time. She feels warm when nurses and doctor visit her in her hospital bed. When she is admitted in the hospital, she states, "had anyone known the extent of my loneliness I would have been embarrassed. Whenever a nurse come to take my temperature, I tried to get her to stay for a few minutes,..." (06). In these lines, her longing for emotional attachment can be seen. She is desperate for someone's presence. As she follows the ethos of individualism, loneliness becomes pervasive in her life. This shows the need of familial love and contentment in the troublesome situations. Her individualistic mind set provides space and scope to her thought repressed, which she repressed earlier. Individualism provides her freedom to act in her own way. She becomes able to transform her life completely despite of coming from the poor background. In many ways, Lucy's story is an individual success story. She gets success materially, and she has also taken hold of the opportunity to reach out beyond material success to a fuller

sense of what she wants from life.

When Lucy's mother comes to see her in the hospital, she says that her mother being there, using her pet name makes her feel warm and liquid-filled. She feels as if her tensions are gone. Her mother's presence provides contentment to Lucy. She sleeps well that night. Lucy and her mother talk about many people from Amgash, which is common nature of human beings. They talk in a way as if pressure of feelings comes out which they have repressed so long. She asks about her siblings to her mother. Her mother reveals that they are not doing anything good in their life. She commits only Lucy moves forward in her life and makes it far better. But her other children are not able to bring such changes. Likewise, Lucy's mother tells about Kathie Nicely, Harriet, Aunt Celia, Abel Blaine, Marilyn and some other people. These people belong to her hometown. Lucy shows curiosity to know about these people. Lucy and her mother feel uncomfortable to share their emotion and feelings, because of their long time converge. So, they keep on talking about other people from their hometown. Her mother lives for five days with Lucy. Lucy extends this five days visit of her mother into the novel.

Similarly, Markella B. Rutherford relates the concept of individualism interrelated to many other values. She mentions, "Individualism is a complex and vast concept interrelated with a number of other value laden concepts such as autonomy, freedom, rights, equality, justice, identity and ethic" (116). According to her, individualism is interrelated to many other values of individual. She relates individualism with freedom, rights, identity and other concept. Autonomy is freedom to act independently. In this, other's involvement is not required. It is also the matter of right. Individualism is also related to equality in the society. Lucy's individualism is also related to these concepts in the novel. Lucy's goal is to establish her new

identity by pursuing the ethos of individualism. She wants to get equality and justice in the society. Her wish is get rid of social hatred and tag of social outcaste in the society. She does everything independently without the interference of her family and other people. She becomes able to establish her distinct identity as a writer. This is her dream, which she pursues since her childhood. Lucy follows individualistic ethos in order to get standard status in the society. Freedom is the significant factor in her life; she does freely whatever she likes. She prefers freedom in her actions and thoughts. There is direct connection between Lucy's commitment to make her life better and being self-made person in a country like America that prides itself on individualism of the people.

When Lucy goes to her home with William her parents get surprised. William is German and Lucy's father has terrible experience with two German boys. Her father suffers from guilt because he has killed one young German boy in the war unintentionally. Her father is hunted by this incident sometimes. William reminds him the older version of that boy, who has come to taunt him and take away his daughter. Her parents are not convinced with Lucy's relationship with William. Even her mother talks to Lucy and says she should have thought once before deciding to marry. But Lucy does not care about her father's feeling. She says that she does not know what else happens with her father in the war. Lucy weds William in the absence of her family. Lucy's family does not attend her wedding.

Lucy takes many important decisions of her life independently. She divorces her husband and daughters. She weds another man from poor background and shifts to Chicago. She says she needs to be alone, it is essential for her writing. She behaves as if she is alone in the world and has no any responsibility towards other people. This indicates Lucy's primary focus on accomplishment of her writing career. She is highly

influenced by the cultural norms and values of American society. Though, she is in far more better status in present time, but she doesn't find solace and comfort in her life. She gets those things which she yearns for since childhood like better economic status, life style. But she doesn't find satisfaction. She is always triggered by something unknown. She suffers from psychological alienation. She transforms her loneliness into writing. She says that her writing provides her some sort of comfort. She tells the reason behind writing books. She writes because people may not feel loneliness.

In American culture, the ethos of individualism is highly valued.

Individualistic people consider only about their own welfare. They focus on fulfilling their personal interests in any cost. In this regard, Tocqueville adds,

The inhabitants of the United States alternately display so strong and so similar a passion for their own welfare and for their freedom, that it may be supposed that these passions are united and mingled in some part of their character. And indeed the Americans believe their freedom to be the best instrument and surest safeguard of their welfare; they are attached to the one by other. (150)

Here, Tocqueville observes that Americans have strong passion for their personal welfare and freedom. It is because freedom provides way to ensure their welfare.

They are only concerned to their welfare and success. Their passion for welfare is mingled in their character. So, it can be taken as one of the characteristics of

Americans. In this sense, they are attached to their welfare through the freedom. So that they value personal welfare and freedom.

Lucy is also strongly passionate for her own welfare and freedom in the novel.

Her freedom of choice lets her take many decisions related to her life independently.

This provides her more space to concern about her welfare. As the novel depicts,

And I think how I did not go to visit my brother and sister and my parents because I was working on a story and there was never enough time. (But I did not want to go either). There never was enough time, and then later I knew if I stayed in my marriage I would not write another book, not the kind I wanted to... This is me, and I will not go where I cannot bear to go- to Amgash, Illinois- I will not stay in my marriage when I do not want to" (177).

This passage shows Lucy's true intension clearly. She depicts strong passion for her welfare. She shows extreme ruthlessness here. She has ruthless determination for her passion and welfare. This is how she mingles and unite her passion in some part of her character. She is free from all the restrictions family, husband and children. She is not abide by the responsibility towards her family and husband. It is her choice whether to visit her family members or not. She gives very simple reason for not going to visit them. She is busy in working on a story and there is not enough time. But real reason is that she does not want to go there. She divorces her husband in order to write another book. She leaves her husband for this simple reason. In this way, she is passionate for her own welfare and she uses her freedom for her own welfare. She has no any consideration to anything but she is determined to forward her writing career. She avoids everything which she thinks can be hindrance to complete her another book. She shows the true nature of selfishness.

Though the ethos of individualism brings welfare in Lucy's life it also brings emotional isolation. She transforms her life successfully, yet she is isolated from her family and relatives. Robert Neelly Bellah asserts, "American cultural traditions define personality, achievement, and the purpose of human life in ways that leave the individual suspended in glorious, but terrifying, isolation" (06). Here, Bellah points

out that individualistic ethos provides personality, achievement and glory but also puts individual in terrifying isolation. One gets everything of his/her wish by being individualistic but remains isolate from family and relatives. The fact is that such people separate themselves from their close ones. It is evident that Lucy maintains distance with her parents and siblings in the novel. She does this to transform her miserable condition and bring many positive changes in her life. Her preference to individualism leads her life in the way of success and prosperity. She gains personality as a educated person, achieves success in the field of writing and gains material success. But this creates emotional and physical distance between Lucy, her family and close ones.

In this way, individualism brings isolation and emotional detachment in her life. As Lucy states, I said, after two such men had just walked slowly by, "I know it's terrible of me, but I'm almost jealous of them. Because they have each other, they're tied together in a real community. I was lonely. Lonely was the first flavor I had tasted in my life, it was always there, hidden inside the crevices of my mouth, reminding me" (41-42). She is leery of human connection. When she sees AIDS victims walking together, she thinks though they are dying but they are together. They have community where they can share their feeling with one another. And she finds herself not attached to such tie. She realizes this isolation when she is in her middle age. She realizes the importance of family bond and togetherness when she is in hospital. She has many things but there is the lack of human connection, love and support. These are significant factors in human being's life. There is a long-standing anxiety that Lucy, who flees from home and family leaving the values of family and relationships.

Strout addresses the critiques of the ethos of individualism prevalent in

American society. Americans are individualistic in their manner and thought and they think rationally. Their intellectuality undermines their emotion. It is unjust tactic to serve their desires and ambitions. Family values, bond and affection are almost insignificant for individualistic people. They believe that they can achieve anything by the ruthless determination. This ethics makes them alone throughout their life. Such people realize this isolation when they are in trouble. When there is no one to support and assure them. This realization occurs later in their life, when they achieve everything but find themselves standing alone. As in the text, Lucy determinedly discards family values and marital relationship to work on her career.

Besides this Lucy gives priority to material possession. She says money matters in each person's life. She asserts, "I think of my mother in the hospital saying that money had not helped Elvis or Mississippi Mary. But I know that money is a big thing, in a marriage, in a life, money is power, I do know that. No matter what I say, or what anyone says, money is power" (172). These lines show Lucy's belief regarding monetary value. For her money is everything. She says that money matters but this money does not help her.

Similarly, another theorist Wuthnow argues, "individualism is capacity to make own decisions, rather than simply living up to the expectations of community or fulfilling obligations to someone else" (270). He points out that ethic of individualism leads people to make own choice. Such people discard living up to the expectations of the community. This ideology makes people to forget the moral, familial and social obligations. In the novel Strout's protagonist, Lucy is assertive, ruthless and determined who discards norms and values of the family. Lucy is able to seek her individual identity and self-respect. She refuses to stay in her marriage to fulfill her self-interest. She even does not complete her moral obligations toward her own

daughters, parents and husband. She simply leaves them in order to accomplish her goals. She escapes from her responsibility. Her individualistic mind set makes her to forget responsibility to the people who are in her life. But later on when she is alone in her apartment she misses everyone who are part of her life.

Lucy achieves many things in her life but suffers from loneliness. She realizes this loneliness when she is alone in her apartment. She keeps on thinking about her past memories. Regarding this, W. Edward Craighead and Charles B. Nameroff comments, "Individualism often brings with it the following: feeling of alienation, loneliness, isolation, inferiority, worthlessness, depression, and defeat" (471). This issues are presented successfully by the protagonist in the novel. As Lucy states, "I could not feel about other memories of my marriage; the happy memories hurts me, is what I am saying. But the memories of the Yankee games were not like that: They made my heart swell with love for my former husband New York" (176). This passage shows the protagonist's suffering from loneliness, isolation and worthlessness. As she follows the ethos of individualism, it brings loneliness in her life. After leaving her husband many years later she keeps on walking to the East River. She looks up the river and think of the baseball game she goes so long with William and feels sense of happiness. She asserts that she cannot feel about other memories of her marriage because happy memories hurt her. But the memories of Yankee games are not like that: they make her heart swell with love for her former husband and New York. She also mentions about William's reaction when she prepares food for him. This shows how much she misses him after leaving him so long.

In the same way, she expresses love for her parents. When her mother becomes ill, she goes to visit her in the hospital bed in Chicago. Because she wants to

give her what her mother gives her, the kind of constancy of attentiveness. There she meets her father and becomes emotional when her mother tells her to leave to take care of her two daughters at New York. Lucy feels decisiveness in her mother's voice. At that time, she wants to say that she will never see her, if she leaves. She cannot bear to never see her again. When she steps through the door to leave, she says, "Mommy I love you" for the first time. But it becomes too late show love and care for her parents, but she show at least. She feels the pain of losing loved ones. After one year her father dies of pneumonia; she goes to her see her father the day before he dies. She says sorry to her father many times at that time. The only word "Gone" come from her mouth. When she goes back to New York after seeing her father and mother, the year before, after seeing them for the last time. The world seems different to her. Her feelings become indifferent for her daughters, husband and New York City. She feels as if she is lost. She cannot stop feeling pain. She is overwhelmed by the death of her parents. She regrets for not being with her parents and creating emotional and physical distance with them. The memories of her mother's and father's death hurt her. She realizes the value of parents after losing them. The moments which she spends with her parents before their death become valuable to her. Similarly, she misses her siblings and talks to them in phone frequently. She worries about their condition and provides possible help.

Similarly, she remembers in Bloomingdale how she and her daughters used to go first to the counter and have frozen yoghurt, and then they laugh about their stomach ache. There are some years when her daughters become angry with her. And Lucy never goes to Bloomingdale without them. She asserts that in her apartment, she makes sure to have extra bedroom always so that her daughters can come and stay. But her daughters never come. She says that she never blame her children although it

breaks her heart. She affirms, she is the one who leaves their father at the time she really thinks she is just leaving him. She leaves her girls as well, and leaves their home. She misses her daughters and the word "Mommy" which she is desperate to listen from them. Her thoughts become her own and she is distractible. She tries to forget the rage of her girls during those years and some other moments. In this sense, she regrets for what she does with her parents, siblings, husband and daughters. The guilt becomes pervasive in her heart.

So, this text has been interpreted as a story about the duality of human nature, following and questioning the ethos of individualism. In America individualism is regarded as cultural value, Lucy is also guided by this value. She loses her ethics as a human being and adopt the individualistic values. Her freedom leads her to become individualistic. Whatever, she does in her life is only for her. She is ruthless and does care about other's emotion and feelings. She primarily aims at accomplishing her goals and objectives. For this she avoids every things possible which she thinks may hindrance in her career. Cultural value of American society is also responsible for making Lucy individualistic.

In analyzing *My Name is Lucy Barton*, Strout's protagonist is presented as the true epitome of individualism prevalent in American society. Lucy discards family value and its importance in her life. She seeks to make her life better. She feels disgust towards the condition of her family. She finds her life imperfect with her family in rural Amgash. To get perfect life, she follows the ethos of individualism. She maintains distance with her family. Later on, she leaves her husband and daughters to work upon her career. Being an individualist, Lucy forgets that she is human being and she needs love and support of family and close ones. Lucy, in the text represents the ways that ethics of the society impose standards of human life and

compel them to do anything in order to achieve that standard. Her desire of perfect life brings crisis like lack of human connection. She is guided by the culture of her society.

In conclusion, this research paper discovers the negative consequences of the ethos of individualism in American people's life. Strout critiques the ethos of individualism prevalent in western society through the protagonist Lucy Barton. Throughout the text, Strout warns against the extremity of the individualism because when people pursue this ethos, they forget that they are human being. The protagonist is self-centered earlier but later on realizes significance of family, love and togetherness in person's life. She leaves her home town and family. She focuses on transforming her life and accomplishing her dreams and goals. When she establishes her identity and status as a writer in New York City, she leaves her husband William and her daughters. But in this process, she remains isolate from her family and relatives. There is the huge lack in her life. But she realizes this lack when she is admitted in the hospital to get her appendix out. There she is completely alone, her husband is busy with his job and she has not seen any of her family members until the day her mother shows up at the foot of her bed in the hospital. Besides this, she remains disassociate from her family so long after that meeting. She visits her hometown Amgash and family when she goes to see her ill mother. In true sense, she feels regression and guilt of being self- centered, when she becomes alone in her apartment. She misses her daughter and former husband terribly. She understands the value and importance of parents after their death. She feels bad for not making any emotional touch with her siblings as well. Hence, including these facts, the research presents an individualistic people's struggle for happiness, satisfaction, meaning of their life and existence.

This paper explores American cultural values are the pacifying agents that justifies incredible quest for perfect life. Lucy ignores familial affection and relationship to establish her identity, status and to gain material prosperity. Therefore, passion for better life becomes evident in the individualistic ethos of American culture. In this sense, *My Name is Lucy Barton* clearly revolves around a major concern of present time and its norms and value, the criteria of the perfect life and people's skepticism towards meeting this criteria fixed by the society and culture mainly in American context. Because success and prosperity is irreversibly linked with high status in the society, individualism looks set to continue into the next century and beyond. Hence, the ideology of individualism is disease which makes the human relationship unhealthy. So, this ideology should not be taken as granted. Thus, Strout is suggesting that Americans should make balance between their personal determinations and moral obligations towards other.

This research paper analyzes the negative aspects of the individualistic ethos. In the text, Lucy becomes a victim of her own thoughts. Being an individualist she avoids love, affection, bond and family relationship. She focuses on executing her goals of good life. She avoids every relationship because; she thinks these can be hindrance in her career. But this ethos brings loneliness and alienation in her life later on. She is leery of human connection. She feels this lack in her life when she becomes alone and there is no one with her. She remembers about the moments which she spends with her husband and daughter in New York. She feels guilt for what she has done with her family, husband and daughters. She lives in regression and pain. But it becomes too late to correct anything. She comes to understand the negative aspects of individualism when loneliness becomes pervasive in her life. The analysis of the text focuses that people must fulfill their moral obligations towards other and they must

follow the family values to live a healthy life.

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