

## Critique of Western Modernity and Valorization of Eastern Cultural Values in Karan

### Bajaj's *The Seeker*

*The aim of this research is to examine how and why Karan Bajaj, Greco-American novelist with an Indian origin, critiques the Western modern values and valorizes the Eastern cultural values in his work of art The Seeker. His literary works follow the issue of morality, ethics and humanitarian values and how it is celebrated in the East and the West. A certified yoga teacher Bajaj's artistic endeavor celebrates Eastern cultural and spiritual values. His protagonist starts the personal journey towards enlightenment from the modern hectic lifestyle of the West. In The Seeker, Bajaj delineates the story of a Western man pursuing inner peace and happiness in the Eastern spirituality that is to say inner peace and happiness cannot be pursued by modern means of luxuries and facilities Western modernity attributes to. Through the theoretical lens of alternative modernity, the researcher investigates the Eastern cultural values and the issue of Western modernity. His concern behind valorizing Eastern cultural values is to establish a peaceful society where there is love, respect, sense of harmony and humanity.*

**Key Words:** Alternative modernity, Eastern culture, Values, Western modernity, Humanity, Yoga, Peace.

This research paper makes an attempt to examine how and why the American novelist with Indian origin, Karan Bajaj, critiques the Western modern values and why/ how he valorizes the Eastern cultural values in his artistic endeavor *The Seeker*. Moreover, the researcher hereby sees how the alternative modernity regards the Eastern cultural values and how it departs from 'Western modernity' with reference to Bajaj's *The Seeker*. Bajaj through the novel, *The Seeker*, postulates the story of a Western man pursuing inner peace and happiness in the Eastern world. He not only

valorizes Eastern cultural values, but also urges for the establishment of love, respect, sense of harmony and humanitarian values in the modern world. As the novel sets in the context of modern period, it presents how the discontent and dissatisfaction of a modern [Western] man resolves into a peaceful path of Eastern philosophy.

Presenting the current modern world and worldly practices, Bajaj shows his humanitarian point of view through Max, the protagonist of the novel, who spends his life for the service of others. Max, the protagonist and Wall Street banker, after the death of his mother, sets out to find the cause of pain and suffering in the modern hectic lifestyle. He does have all the luxuries that a human being desires to have. But his inner desire takes him from New York to a hidden ashram in South India to a freezing cave high in the Himalayas. Through the means of *yoga*, he finds inner peace and happiness. In this sense, the novel, *The Seeker*, critiques the Westerners definition of happiness. That is to say inner peace and happiness cannot be pursued by modern means of luxuries and facilities Western modernity attributes to. Max's attainment of peace is merely the outcome of his societal experiences that he had to undergo. Thus, the researcher casts light on how Max's discontent and dissatisfactions resolve into a peaceful path of Eastern philosophy.

The novel is viewed from the perspective of Max, a Wall Street banker of New York seeking comfort of life in India from pain and suffering. His mother brought him and his family to New York from Greece in search of a comfortable life but he moves to India for the sake of peaceful life. Sense of love, respect, humanitarian and communitarian values of the Eastern world give him comforts he was deprived due to modernity and the modern hectic life. Max, the protagonist, in the course of serving others knows the value of love and humanity. He comes to know the value of love and humanity from Ramakrishna and NaniMaa who spend their life for

the sake of others. He sees his mother's image in the image of NaniMaa. NaniMaa, originally from Nepal, runs a Bhojbasa guest house in the Himalayas. There she welcomes and provide sheds for the travelers passing by the Himalayas. Furthermore, she helps and rescue travelers who are in trouble. Max, the protagonist is rescued and saved by her twice while he was in the Himalayas. He, instead of going to Sri-Lanka decides to spend rest of his life in the cottage of NaniMaa after her death. Her lovable service towards strangers without expecting the return shows the humanitarian values prevailing in the East.

Similarly, Max's intimate relationship with Ramakrishna and NaniMaa further strengthens Bajaj's aim to show communitarian value of Eastern society discarding extreme individualism and logocentrism. Ramakrishna, a yoga guru, lives in the hidden ashram of Southern India following spiritual path. He welcomes all the new members who want to follow his spiritual path. He helps people for the spiritual awakening through the means of *Yoga*. Max becomes a family member of Ramakrishna in the new land of India. Hari, previously known as Ahmed, was an Egyptian film actor and Shakti, previously known as Lucia, was an Italian astronomer who lives as family members of Ramakrishna. They followed strict headed rules and systems of *yoga*, meditate and perform other spiritual activities collectively in order to attain inner peace. Ramakrishna shows how one's consciousness is interrelated to another and how the things are interconnected to each other. Ramakrishna along with Hari, Shakti and Mahadeva plants crops and shares half of their food they grow. They help the villagers if they are in trouble. They become family member of Ramakrishna despite of different origin. The very act of serving villagers selflessly by not expecting the return can be found in Eastern world. Hari, Shakti and Mahadeva from the Western world, are in Eastern world, to pursue inner peace and happiness. Bajaj,

through the persona of Ramakrishna, mentor and guru of Max shows how the communitarian value paves the way for building selfless attitude and humanitarian value.

This research report attempts to prove the uniqueness of Eastern cultural values. It also shows how Eastern culture, especially the Hindu culture, gives comfort to life which is shattered by the advances of Western modernity. Max, the immigrant from Greece, becomes Wall Street banker doing hard work in New York City. His family migrated there with a dream of luxurious life as the Western modern world celebrates. The question arises when and why does the novel problematize the Westerner's definition of happiness in regard to the artificial luxuries and facilities. The problem arises when Max, chooses the Eastern world for the fulfillment of his inner question that is the cause of pain and suffering in the material Western world. The researcher contemplates on his quest and tries to explore why he embarks to the Eastern world all of a sudden? What is the significance of his yogic lifestyle for which he leaves his job, family and country? What could be the political goal behind this act?

Bajaj makes Max, the protagonist, embark his journey towards Eastern world because Eastern cultural values can lead him for the attainment of his quest. He may have attempted to question Western modernity. Through *yoga*, a man can experience earthly things revolving around birth to death and can overcome out of it. Bajaj's main concern is to valorize Eastern cultural values questioning Western modern values.

Bajaj's novel *The Seeker* not only valorizes the Eastern cultural values but also critiques Western modernity based on the surroundings of New York and India. With the use of third person narrative, Bajaj presents the cases of drugs and violence of

New York, prayers, temples and yogic lifestyle of India, profit oriented organizations of New York and selfless motive of Eastern Ashrams. Bajaj uses third person narrative technique in order to give clear understanding of East and West. He presents how Max does have profit oriented bond in the organizations of New York while selfless attitude in the India. Protagonist's relationship with Sarah in New York shows profit oriented bond of organizations while his intimate relationship with NaniMaa, Ramakrishna and to the villagers serves the sense of love, respect, and brotherhood of Eastern society. Same Max sees other people as individual in New York while all the creatures of the world having the same soul as his in The India. One does hard work to gain luxurious life in the West, however one works harder for the sake of others only to get inner peace and happiness in the East.

With the artistic use of language, Bajaj delineates the different values of Eastern and Western society. Sense of violence, greed, selfishness and materialistic feeling of the West is contrasted to the sense of love, humanity and harmony of the East with the usage of the language. Language of Andre gives the sense of lust, selfishness degradation of individual bond with society. He spends his days taking drugs and drinks in the apartment. His language gives the clear understanding of his state of loneliness as he does not have any intimate relationship with other people. However language used by Eastern people gives the state of harmony, interrelativity. All the things they do and say connect one to another in the East as they believe on collectivism. Ramakrishna's language is witty and gives a sense of wisdom. People get spiritually awakened under his tutelage.

As the novel sets in the modern time, it deals with the issue of loneliness, selfishness and sense of violence occurs in the West. As the West gives emphasis on materialistic feeling and individual self, people tend to forget their bond with the

society. Bajaj, by presenting the loneliness of Andre, childhood friend of Max, shows how Western modernity leads to the degradation of individual bond with the community. His state of loneliness gives the clear understanding of pitfalls of individualism.

Spirituality calls for the salvation from the worldly life. Issue of truth, love, beauty and integrity are highlighted by the spiritual means of *yoga*. Through *yoga* Max is able to liberate himself from the Western means of individualism seeing oneness everywhere. Once he leaves Ramakrishna's ashram when he comes to know about Sophia, his sister's illness in New York, but returns realizing everyone in the world has same soul as Sophia has. Ramakrishna cures various illnesses with the help of *yoga*. He is able to silence his mind, can overcome the mere boundary of passion, desire, anger, guilt and grief through *yoga* and meditation. He comes to know the cause of pain and suffering, birth and death, energy of God and the karmic cycle of cause and effect. In the meantime he leaves the Ashram and heads towards the Himalayas to become a yogi as Ramakrishna insists him to go. He does yoga and adopts the environment of Himalayan cave doing meditation. He comes to know that his body is not his, neither the pain nor the sense of agony. He is saved from the glacier by NaniMaa. She takes care of him and suggests him to go to be a yogi. His decision of staying with her in her last days taking her responsibilities generates the truth, love, beauty and the value of humanity as one sees oneness everywhere.

Bajaj, as a diasporic Greco-American novelist, with an Indian origin raises the Eastern and Western cultural values in the context of modern period in *The Seeker*. His literary works follow the similar theme regarding the issue of morality, spirituality and humanity. It seeks to present the modern ideology of the West and calls for the establishment of native values which are suppressed in the name of

modernity. Bajaj fulfills his inner desire by through the protagonist, Max, attaining inner peace and happiness in the midst of Eastern culture. Eastern world unlike West gives continuation to the past values and tradition that is why Bajaj fulfills his lack that he has faced in the city of America re-flowering the tradition or spiritual values of the East. His protagonist abandons all the luxuries and facilities for the sake of peaceful life.

Karan Bajaj's *The Seeker* has been discussed and analyzed from the various perspectives. Max, under the tutelage of Ramakrishna learns the yoga and yogic lifestyle. Similarly, NaniMaa dedicates her life for the service of others. Max abandons Western practice in which self is preferred over another and dedicates his life in the service of others in the cottage of NaniMaa. It gives a true account of Eastern cultural values by which the protagonist gets spiritual transcendence. Westerners take spirituality as a negative quality of non-west has been presented in a positive way in the text. His literary works follow the issue of morality, ethics and humanitarian value for pursuing inner peace and happiness. Max, Wall Street banker turns to be a Himalayan yogi. This is the result that this novel celebrates the Eastern cultural values. Many predecessors have examined his work from various perspectives. It projects marvelous account of Eastern philosophy. Jonathan Evison claims that:

Upon finishing this novel, you will likely to find yourself asking the big questions. You may also find yourself selling your possessions, dusting off your passport, quitting your job, and buying one way ticket to the end of the earth. Karan Bajaj has written a compelling adventure with vivid setting, meaty themes, and a satisfying conclusion. (11)

These lines illustrate Max's state who, left New York and comes to India and its effect to the reader. He learns the value of love and respect unlike the Westerners who regards love relating to material possessions. In the service of other one can feel the love as NaniMaa feels in *The Seeker*. It counters the Westerner's projection of Eastern world and valorizes Eastern cultural values. The value of love, respect humanity and brotherhood of Eastern world given inner peace as Western world is deprived of it's as the advances of modernity in its highest peak.

Eastern cultural philosophy calls for the salvation from the worldly life. Spirituality, especially the Hindu culture calls to overcome from the narrow individual bond and the world of sensation. In this respect Madhumitha Srinivasan mention's Karan Bajaj's words in his article "I'm a Yogi First" that, "the book is contemporary take on man's classic quest for transcendence . . . at its core, the book is a page turning adventure of a Manhattan based investment banker who goes from the dark underbelly of New York to a world hidden ashrams and remote caves in India" (17). Max does have all the luxuries in the luxurious world of New York but is not happy with his life. In order to fulfill his dissatisfactions he sets his journey to the Eastern world, does yoga, adopt the environment and finds that real happiness lies in oneness with nature. Adriana Trigiani argues:

To the world, Max Pzoras is a winner-driven and successful. But the outward trapping of success can no longer hide his lack of inner grace. Max knows it, so he goes in search of his true purpose in India, where secrets are revealed and awe awaits, an elegant pros, with an energy that sustains and inspires, Karan Bajaj has written a novel to treasure. The characters and story he spins will leave you breathless, along with the knowledge that the spiritual journey of a lifetime begins with a single question. (7)



Bajaj here counters the West's negative stereotypes towards the Eastern cultural values which gives emphasis on the sense of harmony to each other. Hari, Shakti and Mahadeva(Max) collectively do the activities in order to help the villagers in the Asharam of Ramakrishna. When villagers are suffering from drought, they are also suffering and do hard work to overcome the situation. It also critiques on the modern man's definition of happiness and argues that one's happiness lies in inner peace of the self.

Bajaj offers a path of peaceful world of Eastern philosophy in his novel *The Seeker*. Like Max, Karan has had to undergo from the similar situation. Bajaj also did a *yoga* training course in the south India, hiked through Himalayas and glaciers growing up as Greco-American. Kavita Bajeli in the article "My journey from New York to Himalaya inspired *The Seeker*" asserts that, "My mother's untimely death from cancer unsettled me quite a bit and forced me to confront the questions about the cause of suffering and death that had been in the back of my mind for years" (23). Like Karan Bajaj, Max chooses his journey to the Eastern world after the death of his mother. Max regards Eastern cultural practices; especially the Hindu culture can answer his quest on the cause of pain and suffering. He chooses his journey to the Eastern world because Eastern cultural practices, the Hindu culture can answer his quest on the cause of pain and suffering. In the same way Vinita Kinira insists that, "the internal and external journeys are reflected in *The Seeker*" (36).

Bajaj's novel *The Seeker* addresses the unique quality of Eastern culture. Attribution of culture is related to the mode of life, ritual and custom. Western culture valorizes material gain and materialistic feeling while Eastern culture gives emphasis on the purification of soul. Max earns material gain according to the Western cultural ethos in the city of New York. Max obtains inner peace and happiness in the midst of

Eastern cultural values. Through the novel the writer urges to establish the humanitarian value and peaceful world which is vanishing from the ethos of Western modernity as it gives emphasis on materialistic feeling and individual selfishness.

Treaver G. in the *Fiction Foresight* analyzes:

In this surprising novel of spiritual discovery . . . a young American travels to India and finds himself tested physically, emotionally and spiritually. It's an enlightening journey that takes you thousands of miles across the globe to experience something beyond our understanding . . . . This isn't just a spiritual journey for Max, its one for both author and reader alike. (n.pg)

This novel rightly critiques the Westerner's definition of happiness and argues that attainment of inner peace is the core meaning of happiness. Bajaj presents how the Eastern cultural values give comfort to life which is shattered by the advances of modernity. Attainment of peace is possible through the means of spirituality as it advocates serving one's life for the sake of humanity and the self over the other. It calls from the salvation of worldly life. Respectively, *Publisher Weekly* comments on *The Seeker* that, "a man renounces a comfortable life in the West to pursue spiritual enlightenment in India" (27).

Bajaj, through this novel, counters the definition of modernity posed by the Westerners. Westerners created negative discourse towards the Eastern cultural values. But Bajaj here presents the story of a man who knows his self and gets inner peace and grace in the midst of Eastern culture. In this line, Ganesh Ambarish in his article "*The Seeker* by Karan Bajaj" believes that, "Karan Bajaj's latest book *The Seeker* is Gautam Buddha's story contemporarized . . . . Max, the protagonist, is a troubled and restless soul who leaves his high-paying job and relationships behind to find the one true meaning of his existence and to ultimately attain inner peace and

enlightenment” (19). Max’s discontent and dissatisfaction resolves into a path of peaceful world of Eastern philosophy – the Himalaya.

Karan Bajaj’s *The Seeker* shows how Eastern cultural values give comfort to life which is shattered by the advances of modernity; commodification of things, individualism and materialistic feelings. Bajaj advocates for humanitarian and communitarian value, and he calls for love, respect and brotherhood for the establishment of peaceful society. This research work deals with the issues related to Western modern values and more precisely concerns on how it is critiqued and why/how the novelist valorizes Eastern cultural values.

Through the theoretical lens of ‘alternative modernity’, this research project makes an analysis of the novel *The Seeker*. The concept of ‘alternative modernity’ presented by Arif Dirlik is primarily used to prove the hypothesis. Moreover, the researcher will encapsulate the theoretical insights from Ziauddin Sardar’s *Postmodernism and the Other: The New Imperialism of Western Culture*, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan’s *East and West: Some Reflections*, Dilip Parameshwar Goankar’s *Alternative Modernities* and others. Here, Radhakrishnan presents brief historical account of Indian and other Asian cultures, European civilizations, oriental influences describing the effects of technology in the modern world and the future of religion. The negative depiction of the West has been countered in the text presenting the story of a man achieving peace and grace in the Eastern culture. It sees how the novelist critiques Western modern values and how alternative modernity regards the theory ‘Western modernity’.

Alternative modernity calls for the new understanding of modernity. It counters the single definition posed by Western thinkers and argues that there are different trajectories of modernity. Western concept of modernity emerges in the age

of Enlightenment. Modernity, in this point indicates industrial revolution, capitalism and urban culture where people can experience something new unlike their tradition. People tend to forget their past and live in the future where there is capitalism, individualism and freedom. But Eastern people follow their tradition and give continuation to the tradition regarding communitarianism, humanitarianism and spiritualism. Western thinkers regard modernity as single pervasive phenomenon which encapsulates all the markers of modernity. Raising question on the approaches of Western modernity is alternative modernity. ArifDirlik views that, “modernity may no longer be approached as a dialogue internal to Europe or Euro-America, but as a global discourse in which many participate” (17). Alternative modernity believes in the multiple forms of modernity rather than the single form. Similarly he argues, “The significance of claims to alternative modernity lies elsewhere: in the assertion of the right to different societies to define modernity. The Euro/American hubris that modernity must follow the course of Westernization has been questioned and challenged all along” (8).Dirlik claims for other possible trajectories of modernity. To be different from West too has own distinctive modern. Alternative modernity seeks to affirm the traditional norms and values discarding the thinking of Western intellectuals who create the dichotomy between East and West. The main concern of the alternative modernity is not to abandon all the views that Western modernity poses but to redefine the concept of modernity on the ground of culture, on the people’s way of living or on the ground of locality. NederveenPieterse in his book *Evolution of Mexican Idylls: A Glance of Non Western Culture* argues:

To think of alternative modernities, and to accept that modernity is not synonymous with Westernization, is not to abandon the fact that emerged in the West. Modernity is plural, and it confirms the fact that the historical

trajectory of Western modernity was not simply a sign of temporal progress but a culturally situated phenomenon. Arguments for alternative modernities confirm the need for cultural theories of modernity. (142)

Alternative modernity seeks to redefine the definition of modernity on the cultural ground rather taking the Western modernity as the sole modernity of the world. It emerges to address the plural version of modernity which grasps the ethos of right to difference.

To question on the Western modernity regarding its modern values itself indicates the alternative modernity. It addresses those values suppressed by ideological formation of the West and rescues from the hegemony of it. Defining alternative modernity Friedrich Jameson in the book *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* states:

Alternate or alternative modernities . . . this means that there can be a modernity for everybody which is different from the standard or hegemonic Anglo-Saxon model. Whatever you dislike about the later, including the subaltern position it leaves you in, can be effaced by the reassuring and ‘cultural’ notion that you can fashion your own modernity differently . . . but this is to overlook the other foundational meaning of modernity which is that capitalism itself. (12-13)

Jameson talks about the multiple version of modernity regarding the cultural notion of each society. One can be modern within his cultural value. It’s time to look on the foundational meaning of modernity which advocates for the materialistic feeling, commodification of things and individualism. Marshall Berman opines, “Modern environments and experiences cut across all the boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity

can be said to unite all mankind . . . to be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air” (15). Berman emphasizes on commodification of things, urbanization and industrialization which put each and everything under the monetary value and to make the world into one.

Alternative modernity seeks to reform the native values, where as modernity stands opposite to traditions, norms and values. Ideological formation of the Western modernity suppress the norms and values of the past and at the same time it marks civilization of Eastern society as uncivilized as they follow their tradition. In this respect, Arif Dirlik in his article “Thinking Modernity Historically: Is “Alternative Modernity” the Answer”, argues, “Eastern Asian societies. These societies are presently more enthusiastic than many Euro-American societies about “development” an idea born in Euro-American modernity they opposed” (21). Moreover, he explains that, “as they have been carried around the world through the medium of capitalist development, Euro/American values, even as they are challenged by re-flowering of native values under its fertilization” (21). Alternative modernity incorporates new social practices and cultural spaces giving continuation to past rather breaking with it. Karan Bajaj through his artistic endeavor *The Seeker* tries to re-establish native values for the establishment of peaceful society. Indian origin Greco-American novelist Bajaj presents the story of a man who attains inner peace and grace in the Eastern society. He narrates, “He [Max] was standing in the middle of two worlds, between the death and destruction in the projects and the hope and life in Trinity and Harvard. He was meant to discover something about the nature of suffering and why it chose who did it” (33). As the Western modernity suppresses native values with its ideological formation, it gives emphasis on technocratic achievements rather than moral, ethical or spiritual achievement. In this line Paramhansa Yogananda says that,

“the West is high in material achievements, but lacking in spiritual understanding” (38). In this novel, Max, the protagonist has all the material achievements in the city of New York but is not happy. In order to get spiritual comfort he sets his journey to Eastern world, the India, “ within a week quitting his job, he had said goodbye to Sophia, taken care of his apartment and finances, gotten an Indian visa, and flown to New Delhi via London so he could reach the Himalayas before the winter peaked in early January” (41). Spiritual means of integrity, love, respect and sense of brotherhood give comfort to the modern hectic lifestyle.

Bajaj establishes communitarian and humanitarian value showing Max’s intimate relationship with Ramakrishna and NaniMaa discarding extreme individualism and logo centrism. Max becomes the family member of Ramakrishna; a yoga guru lives in south India. As he opens his doors to strangers Bajaj narrates:

That was when Max knew he wouldn’t leave. Not until he reached a shadow of Ramakrishna’s greatness. Selflessly opening his doors to strangers, offering everything his land produced to others. Before taking a morsel himself, a mind retrained and composed, not restless and hungry, Max had come to India to become a yogi, a Ramakrishna. How could he think of leaving for petty comforts like hot water and mindless chatter? (173-4)

Ramakrishna selflessly opens the door to strangers and connects him to the villagers offering his land for the service of villagers; the community. Ramakrishna’s nature, his deeds towards stranger and villagers give the true account of Eastern culture. There Hari, previously known as Ahmed, an Egyptian film actor and Shakti, previously known as Lucia was an Italian astronomer live as a family member of Ramakrishna. Max realizes why he wants to separate himself for petty comforts while

Ramakrishna connects himself to other showing humanity. With this respect ZiauddinSardar distinguishes Eastern and Western traditions as:

In the Western liberal framework, the individual is constantly at war with the community. The individual's main concern is to keep his/her identity intact, separate from all others, to preserve the boundaries at all cost, to enclose herself/himself within a protective wall. Where as in non- Western cultures, morality is defined by the community, or society.(61-2)

Sardar, hereby opines that how the Western world is suffering from the ethos of individualism separating oneself from the another, whereas the Eastern world preserve morality negotiating with other. Karan Bajaj, through *The Seeker* depicts the story of Max and his lifestyle, his earlier views, Ramakrishna's views towards stranger and how they are trying to negotiate in India. Max says, “[W]ithout any masks to wear, without the need to front as someone he had fallen apart. He couldn't rein in his mind no matter how much he tried to focus on the space between his eyes or observe his breathing. This just wasn't his path. But where would he go next? New York was too soft, India was too harsh” (168). Here, Max shows his concern to get the facility separating oneself from all other; Ramakrishna, Shakti and Hari. Sooner he realizes that, “he had quit his job to learn Eastern philosophy, life's why and how. . . He'd leave that day itself”(152). Max leaves Western world where morality is defined under the technocratic ideology, where Eastern philosophy regards morality is something defined by others. There is strong need to revive the values as Max realizes his loopholes. Alternative modernity emerges to fill the loopholes of modernity which undermines the past with technocratic ideological formation.

Alternative modernity claims for the right to difference. It also calls for the transformation in our understanding and revalorize the past as we have known all



along. ArifDirlik argues that, “difference is a quality not just of relations between nations, organizations etc., but of social and biological relationships internal to them” (42). To be culturally different is not to be modern rather it is culturally different way of being modern. Modernity exists in the culturally situated phenomenon as alternative modernity believes in multiple version of modernity. DilipPrameshwarGoankar in his book *Alternative Modernities* writes:

Born in and out of the West some centuries ago under relatively specific socio historical conditions, modernity is now everywhere. It has arrived not suddenly but slowly, bit by bit, over the long duree- awakened by contact; transported through commerce’ administrated by empires, bearing colonial inscriptions; propelled by nationalism’ and now increasingly steered by global media, migration and capital. And it continues to “arrive and emerge”, as always in opportunistic fragments accompanied by utopic rhetoric, but no longer from the West alone, although the West remains the major clearing house of global modernity. (1)

Here, the word 'everywhere' denotes for nowhere means modernity exist in different forms in different societies in multiple version. Alternative modernity counters the Western modernity viewing it as monolithic, pervasive phenomenon. In the same vein, Chatterjee says, “Its alterity consists most importantly of perceived differences from an imagined model of Euro/American modernity that has been upheld in the past as a universal model of modernity” (218). Chatterjee questions on the Westerners idea of creating the dichotomy between East and West and firming the single definition of modernity either in the form of urbanization, industrialization or in the form of colonization. Modernity insists to abandon the tradition and traditional values to be modern or to experience something new. The Pitfall of Western modernity lies in

discarding itself from the tradition. That is why Bajaj's protagonist headed towards the Eastern world where people give continuation to the past rather breaking with it. The Ultimate goal of modernity is to provide inner peace and happiness to a human being. Bajaj's *The Seeker* counters the Westerner's negative attitude towards Eastern spirituality.

Through the spiritual means of *yoga* Bajaj sees oneness everywhere. Bajaj makes the protagonist, Max, Greco-American Wall street banker, embark his journey towards India to become a yogi. Bajaj in one interview says:

I also personally did a yoga teacher training course in the South of India. I meditated silence for weeks; I hiked through the Himalayas and even crossed a glacier barefoot, just as Max did in story. Every character in this book has the name of real person I met at some point if in the journey. Every place mentioned is a place I physically visited. This "real-life" research is in addition to the hundreds of books that I read about yoga philosophy, meditation, wilderness, survival, living in a cave in the Himalayas, growing up Greek- American and soon. (42)

Bajaj fulfills his inner desire to attain inner peace and grace through the means of spirituality making the protagonist Max as himself. As a Greco-American he finds the sense of integrity, love, respect and humanity regarding the material achievement in the West. Furthermore, Bajaj as a diasporic novelist with Indian origin seeks spiritual comfort where humanitarian value exist discarding monetary value. It is possible in the Eastern world as they give continuity to the humanitarian and communitarian values focusing on being human. In this regard Dirlik insists that, "spiritual comfort has to be sought elsewhere, in the turn to religion or to cultural legacies suppressed by modernity that provide identity in a world of consumptions that threatens to erase it"

(36). Bajaj finds spiritual comfort in the Eastern world as the Western modernity suppressed it giving emphasis on materialistic achievement. Eastern spirituality advocates for patience of spirit and the gentleness of soul. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan comments that, “for the Westerners life is a thing to be possessed and enjoyed” (89). Similarly he argues that, “they [European] are content to work with the material ready to their hands and reduce it to order and decency” (56). Easterners regard life is something lived for others while westerners regard as a thing to be enjoyed. One works hard in order to attain luxurious life in New York while the other works harder for the sake of humanity in the East. Max’s intimate relationship with NaniMaa shows the value of humanity in a full fledged way.

Max, the protagonist, decides to spend rest of his life in the cottage of NaniMaa after her death. NaniMaa, originally from Nepal, welcomes and provides shelter for the travelers passing by the Himalayas. NaniMaa’s characterization as Mother Teresa serves the humanitarian values prevailing in the East. She rescues and saves the life of Max twice. Max sees his mother’s image in the eyes of NaniMaa. Bajaj narrates, “six years after his mother’s death he was seeing yet another body disintegrate from him” (323). Furthermore, he explains, “Max looked into her eyes. He saw his mother, whose attachment to her children and work had grown in the end” (341). Max sees his oneness in the eyes of NaniMaa as Eastern spirituality believes in interrelativity to each other.

After the death of NaniMaa he decides to spend the rest of his life serving the travelers; carrying the deed of NaniMaa. His very decision/act of serving travelers in the cottage of NaniMaa shows the humanitarian ethos of Eastern society and it equally put self over the other discarding extreme individuality. Once Max leaves the ashram of South India knowing about Sophia's illness and heads to New York for

her recovery. But he returns back to the ashram knowing each one of them, in the world as same as Sophia, “each one of them, everyone in the world, was the same as Sophia” (255). Here the protagonist liberates himself from the narrow bond of individualism and sees his oneness with everybody as Eastern spirituality urges to liberate oneself from the narrow bond of individualism. The Narrator explains, “His hands, the plow, his body, the earth, his sickle, all seemed one, a living organism coexisting in silent harmony with the peerless mountains that turned from gold to orange, then orange to purple in the soft light of the fall sun” (344). Animate and non-animate things do have same power as the same energy of God vibrates everywhere.

Max finds difference between the meaning of love he has perceived in the West and he gets in the East. Idea of love, in the West is something related to the material attainment and wealth, while in the East, it is related to the emotions and feelings of a person. Max’s mother drags him and his sister to New York to see them as wealthy well bred people. However, NaniMaa, in India, drags him from the glacier to see him healthy. Max said, ““I have money,” . . . “not worry about money. Just eat. You are thin. Not healthy at all.” Said NaniMaa” (319). NaniMaa, from the Eastern world sees another fellow human being discarding his possessions unlike the Western world. Thus, Max writes, ““I’m happy here”” (346). Here he finds that the real happiness lies in the inner peace of the self, connecting oneself to another. Thus the value of collectivity, interrelativity and integrity can be found in the Eastern world, so the reason of happiness too. In this line Arif Dirlik explains that, “it’s [alternative modernity] fundamental significance is ethical: to keep ourselves and our endeavors in a perspective that induces modesty, and helps overcome the hubris that nature is humanity’s conquer” (39).

The main concern of alternative modernity is to give the values of past as the values of modernity. Karan Bajaj valorizes Eastern cultural values as it gives continuation to the values of the past. With the usage of language he contrasts Eastern world and Western world. Protagonist's usage of language while he is in the West is profit oriented, relating to individual and material feeling. Max connects himself to other in the East. Even his [Max] mother brought him in the New York to see them as well bred people. He says:

If his uncle, a waiter in Philadelphia diner, hadn't pulled them into the US, Max would've been a peasant in Greece. How causally he had walked out on everything his parents had moved a new country for. So determinedly his mother dragged Sophia and him to Manhattan on Sundays so they could see educated, well bred people living in doormen building and eating in candle lit restaurants from the outside and aspire to a better life. (45)

He becomes Wall Street Banker doing hardwork in New York, but is not satisfied with his life. He confronts on the cause of pain and suffering after the death of his mother. His achievement could not answer his confrontation rather Eastern cultural values. He recounts, "Nothing separated him from the throngs of Western hippies searching for themselves in the Himalayas. His Harvard degree, his Wall Street experience, wouldn't him a leg up this ladder. Nothing would- except his will" (49). West lacks spiritual value giving emphasis on material attainments while spirituality calls for the establishment of love, respect, sense of brotherhood to each other. As the westerners believe in science and scientific technology, Dirlik postulates idea that, "even the search for spiritual values has to be phrased I the language of science in order to nerespectable" (36).

Technological development, modern scientific achievement and extreme individualism of the West, disconnects human being from the society. As a result, state of loneliness, depression occurs in the West. State of Andre shows how human being becomes lonely despite of modern advances and facilities and how the monetary value leads to the degradation of the individual soul. In the novel state of Andre is presented as:

Andre sat in his wheelchair in a white sleeveless shirt and underwear, dreadlocks disheveled, drool slipping down the corners of his mouth. Max stepped in. the house was heated like a furnace. Ammonia and bleach fumes seeped into Max's skin, making his throat itch. A bottle of E & J, naked light bulbs, a cardboard box with greasy pizza crusts, broken lighters, razor blades and residue of white powder lay on the kitchen counter- the aftermath of a crack binge. (13)

State of Andre gives the clear understanding of the issue of loneliness occurred in the West as it celebrates individualism in a full fledged way. That is why Max remarks that, "these Americans, Europeans are lonely man, loneliness drives you mad. That's why I don't want to leave India" (302). State of loneliness occurs while a person focuses on the self. It clearly points that East believes in communalism and spiritualism seeing oneness to each other.

ZiauddinSardar, with reference to Islam, differentiates between Western thought and Eastern thought that:

Islam always combines right with responsibilities. Indeed, there can be no rights without responsibilities . . . the main difference between Western and non- western perspectives is that while the former focuses exclusively on

individual rights, the later emphasizes the rights of humanity-including the humanity of individual and combines these rights with responsibilities. (73)

This shows how Easterners and Westerners do have different thought. West put self at the center while Easterners believes in the salvation of the individual self and follows communalism and collectivism.

Bajaj in this novel, presenting various fictional characters from different background (East and West) shows the need of humanity and humanitarian value for the establishment of peaceful society. Here, Shakti, previously Lucia, an Italian astronomer and Hari, previously Ahmed, Egyptian film actor, practices spiritual means of yoga in the India. They like Max, leave their job for the sake of peaceful life in Eastern world. As the Westerners do believe in science, Eastern people do and see various things according to spirituality and philosophy of Hinduism in which all of the people are bended in the name of God. They see the presence of God everywhere. In *The Seeker*, Shakti describes:

The yogis in 10 B.C. are like scientists. Not just scientists like . . . mystic also. They analyze nature. They go within man. They find that like nature, essence of all life is also same alive, intelligent energy. Insects, animals, you, me, everyone, our core is same. Call it God or consciousness or whatever you want. But underlying us all is just one energy. We just don't see it as that because it is covered by layers of individual thoughts and desires. (180)

Shakti describes how one thing is interrelated to another and how we failed to see it due to our individual desires and greed. Westerners separates oneself from the another in the name of competition believing on material gain where as Easterners maintains spirituality seeing another as same as them that is the presence of God everywhere.

Bajaj advocating spiritual means of yoga and spirituality suggests human being to see another fellow human being as same as them.

Bajaj, through *The Seeker* counters the West's negative depiction towards the East. Another main concern of the writer is to show uniqueness of Eastern culture and its hospitality. Through the persona of Ramakrishna and NaniMaa, Bajaj shows his cosmopolitan point of view. Ramakrishna and NaniMaa welcome the strangers irrespective of religions, races and nations. They are the epitome of humanity who serves their life for the sake of humanity and self over the other. Ramakrishna describes that, "'Half of whatever we grow goes to the village, no matter how little or how much we produce,'" he said. "Going beyond the narrow reaches of family and friends and feeding a stranger before feeding yourself is necessary. It purifies you, simplifies your life'" (157). This line further clarifies the writer's aim to show his humanitarian and cosmopolitan point of view liberating oneself from the narrow individual bond of individualism.

Westerners regard spirituality as a derogative quality of the Easterners has been presented positively in this novel *The Seeker*. Bajaj presents the story of a man who learns of being human with the spiritual means of yoga. Initially he regards yoga as weird activity even in the ashram of India but slowly and gradually he becomes the follower of yogic principles and be a yogi. Ramakrishna, his yoga guru exemplifies about the yoga:

You have done yoga before" he said. "These postures are but one very small part of yoga. Breathing attentively is yoga. Complete absorption in your work is yoga. Thinking about others instead of yourself is yoga. Anything which makes you forget your small self and become one with the infinite is yoga." . .



. “many things happen to you here, . . . Take them of what they are, signs pointing toward the path, not the path itself. (155-6)

Ramakrishna delivers the essential meaning of yoga which grounds upon motto of humane and humanity. When Western civilization enters into the materialistic achievement, Eastern civilization remains consistent following spirituality. When Westerners discard their tradition in the name of modern, Easterners give continuation to the values of the past rather breaking with it. That is why Max writes, “I’m happy here” (346). Here, “here” indicates India, Eastern world where Max, a Western man succeeds to liberate himself from the material world. He explores:

I am the seeker, the act of seeking, and the one who is sought,

“What’s happening, brother? Your lips don’t move but I can hear your words.”

I am the field and the knower of the field.

“Brother . . .”

*Suffering alone exists, none who suffer. The deed there is but no doer thereof.*

*The path there is, but none who travel it.*

There was just the one and no other.

He had reached the end of his yoga. (354)

These final lines of the novel, suggest that the protagonist has reached the end of his yoga, where he can experience earthly things revolving around birth to death.

Karan Bajaj, presenting the story of a Western man turns to be a Himalayan yogi, shows how Eastern cultural values of love, respect, sense of harmony and humanity leads to attain inner peace and happiness. Max does have all the luxuries and facilities as Western world celebrates. But he was not satisfied with his life. His inner desire of getting peaceful life led him to the Eastern world where there is continuation of traditions, values and norms seeing oneness in each other. Through

the spiritual means of yoga, he gains inner peace and happiness. This is the result that it valorizes Eastern cultural values. Bajaj's main concern behind valorizing Eastern cultural values is to establish a peaceful society where there is love, respect, sense of harmony and humanity.

Bajaj's *The Seeker* constitutes the rise of Eastern cultural values to make balance between modern cultural aspects of the East and West. *The Seeker* is the story of a young man who leaves his job, family and country to find the meaning of life. He begins his journey as a young Western man who wants to know the cause of pain and suffering and ends as a yogi who can resolve all the experiences of life from birth to death. He starts his journey to meet Brazilian doctor who also turns to be a Himalayan yogi in India but stays in Ramakrishna's Asharam. There he comes to distinguish the idea of harmony, love and humanitarian value of the East and West. He knows the beauty of respect and love as one get seeing oneness in other. Then he heads towards the Himalaya to become a yogi. Once again he survives from the glacier in the guest house of NaniMaa. He sees his image in the image of NaniMaa. She takes care of him until he becomes healthy. He sees her selfless service towards travelers even in her old age. He gets address of Brazilian doctor (yogi) who lives in Sri Lanka from the NaniMaa. She insists him to go there but he decides to stay taking care of her in her last days. After the death of NaniMaa, he stays in the guest house of her serving travelers.

Max's life as Western Man gives the sense of luxuries, facilities and his individual achievement. He has all the luxuries that a human being desires to have. His mother's death confronts him on the cause of pain and suffering and heads to Eastern world, India. Max, as a Mahadeva in the Aashram of Ramakrishna knows why the Western people feel the lack of love, integrity as they discard themselves

from the traditional values and norms. In this regard, alternative modernity claims for the different version of modernity claiming each society is modern in its own way. At last, Max as a yogi decides to spend the rest of his life in the Bhojbhasa Guest house for the service of others. Bajaj presents the story of a Western man turns Himalayan yogi in the East. Here, Max gets inner peace and happiness in the service of others, seeing oneness everywhere. Through the novel *The Seeker* Bajaj urges to establish a peaceful society where there is love, respects, harmony and humanity.

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