



VEDA'S

JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (JOELL)

An International Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

Impact Factor (SJIF) 6.018

<http://www.joell.in>

Vol.11, No. 2

(April-June)

2024

RESEARCH ARTICLE



GERONTOLOGICAL INSIGHTS INTO "A MAN CALLED OVE": EXPLORING THE JOURNEY OF AGING AND RESILIENCE

Manjusha C B

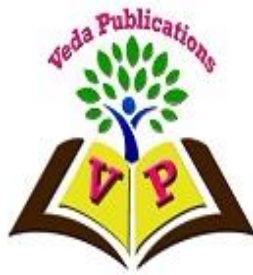
(Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, VNIT, Nagpur)

Email: manjushacb@hss.vnit.ac.in

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2024.11201>

ABSTRACT

This research article delves into the portrayal of aging and resilience in Fredrik Backman's novel "A Man Called Ove" through the lens of narrative gerontology. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks in narrative gerontology and conducting a comprehensive analysis of the novel, this study examines how Ove's narrative unfolds to depict the complexities of aging, intergenerational relationships, and the resilience of the human spirit. By synthesizing insights from existing literature and conducting a close reading of the text, this article aims to shed light on the significance of storytelling in understanding the experiences of older adults and the construction of identity in later life.



Article history:

Received on : 04-03-2024

Accepted on : 10-04-2024

Available online: 16-04-2024

Keywords: *Narrative Gerontology, Aging, Resilience, Intergenerational Relationships, Identity.*

Author(s) retain the copyright of this article

Copyright© 2024 VEDAPublications

Author(s) agree that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons

Attribution License 4.0 International License



INTRODUCTION

"Straight lines, even edges. People don't shovel snow that way anymore. Nowadays, they just clear a way, they use snow blowers and all sorts of things. Any old method will do, scattering snow all over the place. As if that were the only thing that mattered in life: pushing one's way forward." (A Man Called Ove)

Literature has become an indispensable tool for delving into the complex aspects of aging and resilience in recent times. "A Man Called Ove," a literary masterpiece by Fredrik Backman, captivates readers not only with its poignant story but also provides profound insights into resilience and aging through the eyes of Ove, the main character. This research paper explores the gerontological viewpoints present in the story and analyzes Ove's character development to reveal the subtleties of aging, adaptability, and the resilience of the human spirit¹. Ove, an elderly curmudgeon coping with the death of his beloved wife and aging in a world that is changing quickly, is portrayed in "A Man Called Ove" in a compelling way. Readers are given the opportunity to experience Ove's hardships, victories, and the profound changes that occur as he comes to terms with becoming older thanks to Backman's vivid storytelling. The main theme of the story is Ove's tenacity, which is demonstrated by his unwavering resolve to follow his morals, face hardship, and find meaning in the midst of hopelessness.

This paper explores Ove's character in detail, illuminating the psychological, social, and emotional aspects of aging as they are portrayed in the novel, by drawing on gerontological theory and research. We examine the dynamics of social support, intergenerational connections, and the importance of

community in promoting well-being in later life through a critical analysis of Ove's interactions with various characters and his evolving relationships. The article also explores the significance of resilience in Ove's journey, explaining the elements that allow him to face obstacles head-on with fortitude and resilience. Through an analysis of Ove's coping mechanisms, coping strategies, and adaptive responses to adversity, we reveal the complex interactions that shape the aging process between the socio-cultural context and individual resilience.

Essentially, the goal of this research paper is to shed light on the gerontological lessons found in "A Man Called Ove," providing a sophisticated interpretation of aging, resiliency, and the human spirit as they are portrayed in Backman's moving story. Through our investigation, we hope to add to the larger conversation about resilience and aging, highlighting the value of literature as a mirror to consider and deepen our understanding of the aging process in modern society.

Fredrik Backman's novel "A Man Called Ove" intricately weaves together themes of aging, loss, resilience, and human connection. Through the character of Ove, Backman presents a poignant exploration of the challenges and triumphs associated with growing old. This research article employs the framework of narrative gerontology to analyze how Ove's narrative unfolds, offering insights into the complexities of aging and the construction of identity in later life. By situating the novel within the context of existing literature on narrative gerontology, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the ways in which storytelling shapes our perceptions of aging and resilience.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Narrative gerontology examines the ways in which individuals construct and interpret their life stories as they age, highlighting the importance of narrative in shaping identity and understanding the aging process (Kenyon & Randall, 2013). Scholars such as Kenyon and Randall (2013) emphasize the significance of storytelling as a means of preserving personal agency and meaning in later life, arguing that narratives serve as a vehicle for individuals to make sense of their experiences and negotiate their identities. Moreover, narrative gerontology emphasizes the dynamic nature of storytelling, acknowledging that narratives evolve over time as individuals reinterpret and reframe their life stories in response to changing circumstances (Cole, 2016).

In the realm of literature, narratives featuring older protagonists offer rich opportunities for exploring the complexities of aging and resilience. Novels such as Elizabeth Strout's "Olive Kitteridge" and Amor Towles' "A Gentleman in Moscow" have garnered critical acclaim for their nuanced portrayals of aging characters grappling with existential questions and the passage of time. Similarly, Fredrik Backman's "A Man Called Ove" has captivated readers with its poignant depiction of a curmudgeonly yet deeply compassionate protagonist navigating the challenges of old age.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing close textual analysis to examine the narrative construction of aging and resilience in "A Man Called Ove." Drawing upon principles of narrative gerontology, the analysis focuses on key themes and motifs within the novel, tracing Ove's

journey from isolation and despair to connection and redemption. By closely examining the interplay between Ove's personal narrative and the broader socio-cultural context, this study seeks to elucidate the ways in which aging is represented and negotiated in the text.

OVE'S RESILIENCE IN COPING WITH LOSS AND CHANGE

"But sorrow is unreliable in that way. When people don't share it there's a good chance that it will drive them apart instead." (A Man Called Ove)

Ove emerges as a multifaceted character whose narrative is shaped by a complex interplay of past traumas, present challenges, and future aspirations. As he grapples with the loss of his beloved wife and the impending threat of eviction from his home, Ove's story unfolds as a poignant meditation on the inevitability of change and the resilience of the human spirit². Through flashbacks and introspective monologues, Backman skillfully reveals the layers of Ove's personality, inviting readers to empathize with his struggles and triumphs. Central to Ove's narrative is his relationship with his neighbors, particularly Parvaneh and her family. Despite Ove's initial reluctance to engage with others, his interactions with Parvaneh and her children gradually chip away at his defenses, leading to moments of unexpected warmth and connection. Through these relationships, Backman highlights the transformative power of human connection in mitigating the loneliness and isolation often associated with old age.

Moreover, Ove's narrative serves as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Despite experiencing profound loss and



setbacks, Ove demonstrates a remarkable capacity for resilience, drawing upon his inner strength and sense of duty to overcome obstacles and forge meaningful connections with others. His story underscores the importance of maintaining a sense of purpose and community in navigating the challenges of aging.

RECIPROCITY AND MUTUAL AID

"But sorrow is unreliable in that way. When people don't share it there's a good chance that it will drive them apart instead." (A Man Called Ove)

Mutual aid and reciprocity serve as major themes in Fredrik Backman's "A Man Called Ove," highlighting the value of human connection and community. At first, Ove, the main character, comes across as a lonely, grumpy old man who is fed up with everything in his surroundings. But as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that beneath his gruff exterior is a deeply kind person who, though in his own peculiar way, believes in the concepts of reciprocity and mutual aid.

The dynamics within Ove's community underscore the importance of reciprocity and mutual aid in fostering resilience. As Ove reluctantly accepts help from his neighbors, he also finds himself extending assistance in return. This reciprocal exchange of support not only strengthens social bonds but also enhances Ove's sense of purpose and belonging, essential components of resilience in later life³. The act of exchanging things and sharing emotions with people to gain mutual benefit is known as reciprocity. Ove exemplifies reciprocation in the book by his unwavering dedication to helping people and his frequent lack of expectation of

anything in return. Ove is reluctant to interact with his neighbors at first, but he eventually finds himself drawn into their lives and becomes a vital source of help and support. Ove is a living example of reciprocity; he gives freely of himself to those around him, whether it's mending a neighbor's broken appliances or speaking up for those in need.

Parvaneh, Ove's tenacious and energetic neighbor, is a moving illustration of reciprocity and mutual support in the book. Parvaneh keeps trying to get past Ove's hard exterior, even though he initially rejects her attempts to make friends. Parvaneh encourages Ove to embrace life anew and assists him in facing his past traumas through their interactions. Ove shows Parvaneh and her family how reciprocal their relationship is by giving them invaluable support and guidance in return.

In broad terms, "A Man Called Ove" examines the transforming potential of mutual assistance and reciprocity in creating strong bonds and thriving communities. The novel serves as a reminder that kindness and compassion have the power to cut through boundaries and improve the lives of both those who offer them and those who receive them, as demonstrated by Ove's journey.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

"He'd discovered that he liked houses. Maybe mostly because they were understandable... Houses were fair, they gave you what you deserved. Which, unfortunately, was more than one could say about people." (A Man Called Ove)

Through Ove's interactions with his neighbors, the novel emphasizes the interconnectedness of



human experiences and the formation of a collective identity within the community. Shared struggles, triumphs, and moments of vulnerability forge bonds that transcend individual differences, creating a sense of solidarity that bolsters resilience in the face of adversity. The protagonist of the story, Ove, starts off as a grumpy, reclusive old man who firmly believes in independence and seclusion. But as the narrative goes on, it becomes evident that Ove, whether he realizes it or not, has strong bonds with those around him. Unexpected connections arise between Ove's life and his neighbors'. For example, his attempts to distance himself from his neighborhood are consistently resisted by his neighbors' steadfast attempts to include him in their lives³. The idea that people are inherently connected to one another and that the relationships built to enrich human lives is highlighted by the novel's characters' interconnected.

Together, the people who live in Ove's neighborhood constitute a microcosm of society, each with their own peculiarities, hardships, and life stories. They create a shared identity as a caring community in spite of their differences. Ove's identity is inextricably linked to his position in this community. As the story progresses, it becomes more and more clear that beneath his rough exterior lies a sense of duty and responsibility towards his neighbors. The shared experiences of the neighborhood, like happy moments, acts of kindness, and the loss of loved ones, also serve to illustrate the neighborhood's collective identity. These encounters bolster the ties that bind the characters together and highlight the significance of community in forming personal identities.

Interconnectedness and collective identity function as potent thematic elements in "A Man Called Ove," highlighting the importance of community and human connection in influencing our lives. Readers are reminded of the transforming power of relationships and their profound impact on our sense of self and belonging through Ove's journey.

CHALLENGES AND CONFLICTS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

"Ove has probably known all along what he has to do, but all people at root are time optimists. We always think there's enough time to do things with other people. Time to say things to them. And then something happens and then we stand there holding on to words like 'if.'" (A Man Called Ove)

While the community serves as a source of support for Ove, it is not devoid of challenges and conflicts. Ove's clashes with neighbors such as Adrian and the White Shirts highlight the complexities of community dynamics. However, these conflicts also provide opportunities for growth and reconciliation, ultimately contributing to Ove's resilience through the cultivation of empathy and understanding. Several significant issues and disputes that the community faces, as portrayed in the novel which includes⁴ -

Community Integration vs. Social Isolation: Ove is characterized as a reclusive, grumpy man who finds it difficult to interact with his neighbors. In addition to being self-imposed, his isolation stems from his incapacity to adjust to shifting social norms. Ove's forced interactions with his neighbors give rise to



conflict and cause moments of tenseness and miscommunication.

Generational Divide: Ove's conversations with the novel's younger characters bring the community's generational divide to light. Younger residents frequently put him at odds because they have different priorities and values than he does. The strained relationship that Ove has with his new neighbors, Parvaneh and her family in particular, is a prime example of this generational conflict.

Community Cohesion vs. Individual Autonomy: Ove is adamant about upholding the community's laws and norms, and he frequently gets into arguments with people who don't follow them. His strict adherence to the rules puts him at odds with neighbors who have different ideas about what it means to live in a community. The conflict in the novel is primarily driven by this tension between individual autonomy and community cohesion.

Resistance to Change: As the community around him changes and adjusts to new conditions, Ove stands for a traditional way of thinking that is resistant to change. Ove's resistance to change, be it social norms or technological advancements, is often the root of the conflict between him and his neighbors.

Stereotyping and Prejudice: Ove has negative opinions about particular social groups, which strain relations within the community. His encounters with people who reject his preconceptions, like his friendship with Parvaneh, an Iranian native, serve to challenge his prejudices.

Grief and Loss: Ove struggles with his wife's passing and the sense of direction she gave him throughout

the entire book. His sorrow shows up as resentment and rage, which damages his relationships with people around him. Characters in the community who are also coping with different kinds of grief find common ground in the theme of loss, which fosters empathy and a sense of struggle among them.

Redemption and Forgiveness: As the narrative progresses, Ove's interactions with his neighbors change. Ove eventually finds redemption and a sense of community through forgiving himself and others through vulnerable moments and deeds of kindness.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Fredrik Backman's "A Man Called Ove" offers a compelling exploration of aging and resilience through the lens of narrative gerontology. By analyzing Ove's narrative within the framework of narrative gerontology, this research article has illuminated the ways in which storytelling shapes our understanding of aging and identity in later life. Through his portrayal of Ove's journey, Backman reminds the enduring power of human connection and the capacity for resilience in the face of adversity⁵. Moving forward, further research in this area could explore the intersection of narrative gerontology with other disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, to deepen our understanding of the aging process and inform interventions to support older adults in leading fulfilling lives.

Ove's story offers a comprehensive case study on the developmental aspects of aging from a gerontological perspective. As his life story unfolds and he interacts with others, it can be seen firsthand the dynamic nature of aging, which is marked by both



continuity and change. The significance of developmental tasks in later life, such as finding meaning, retaining autonomy, and adjusting to changing roles and identities, is highlighted by Ove's resilience and ability to adapt to life's challenges. Further understanding of how storytelling affects how aging experiences are constructed can be gained from narrative gerontology. Through a succession of flashbacks and interactions in the present, Ove's story is revealed, enabling readers to piece together his life's events and comprehend the influences that have molded his identity and worldview. Readers are prompted to consider our own ideas about aging and address any prejudices and stereotypes that might affect how one views older people by reading Ove's story⁶.

Furthermore, Ove's story emphasizes how storytelling helps people of all ages develop empathy and understanding. Readers get insights into the ageless themes of love, grief, and resiliency as they become fully immersed in Ove's world. By telling stories, Ove's persona serves as a spark for communication and understanding between generations, erasing stereotypes about aging and building bridges between the young and the old⁷.

"But Ove isn't bloody arguing. He just thinks right is right. Is that such an unreasonable attitude to life?"

(A Man Called Ove)

Moreover, narrative gerontology emphasizes how crucial narrative interventions are for enhancing quality of life and wellbeing in later adulthood. For older adults, Ove's story provides a sense of validation and affirmation, confirming their experiences and providing a sense of camaraderie when confronting age-related obstacles. We can fight

ageism and give older people the power to take back control of their own stories by promoting a diversity of aging-related narratives, which will also help to create a more welcoming and age-friendly society⁸. In conclusion, "A Man Called Ove" provides insightful analyses of the intricacies of aging and resiliency from the viewpoints of gerontology and narrative gerontology. Readers are reminded by Ove's story of the transforming power of storytelling in influencing how we view aging and encouraging empathy and understanding amongst generations. Our voices can foster a more compassionate and inclusive society that honors the inherent worth and dignity of people of all ages by embracing diverse narratives of aging.

REFERENCES

- Backman, F. (2012). *A man called Ove*. Atria Books.
- Cole, T. R. (2016). *The role of story in gerontology*. Routledge.
- Kenyon, G. M., & Randall, W. L. (Eds.). (2013). *Storying later life: Issues, investigations, and interventions in narrative gerontology*. Oxford University Press.
- Kenyon, Gary, and William L. Randall. "Narrative gerontology." *Journal of Aging Studies* 13.1 (1999): 1-5.
- Zeilig, Hannah. "The critical use of narrative and literature in gerontology." *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life* 6.2 (2011): 7-37.
- Pecorini, B. C., and E. Duplaa. "Narrative gerontology and digital storytelling: What benefits for elders." *MOJ Public Health* 6.6 (2017): 00192.
- Kenyon, Gary M., and William L. Randall. "Narrative gerontology: An overview." *Narrative gerontology: Theory, research, and practice* (2001): 3-18.
- Kenyon, Gary. "Holocaust stories and narrative gerontology." *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 60.3 (2005): 249-254.
- RANDALL, BILL. "11 Beyond Healthy Aging: The Practice of Narrative Care in Gerontology." *Adult education and health* (2012).
- Saunders, Pamela A., Philip A. Saunders, and Mary Amaechi. "Intergenerational coconstruction of narrative gerontology in theory and in practice." (2013): 520-523.