

## REPROACHFUL AND INSATIABLE: ENCAPSULATION OF CORPORATE GREED IN PAOLO BACIGALUPI'S *THE DOUBT FACTORY*

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### ABSTRACT

Paolo Bacigalupi is an exemplary writer of American Science fiction and fantasy books. His works highlight the issues concerning the effects of global warming, rising sea level, bioengineered plagues, and the unquenchable greed of the corporates. Bacigalupi, the winner of Hugo and Nebula award has authored *The Doubt Factory*, which chronicles the adventures of young adults and their attempt to expose the corporate malfeasance. It pinpoints the traits used by the pharmaceutical firms to distort the truth and the efforts taken by them to cover up their delinquencies. This paper attempts to expose the dark side of the pharmaceutical companies and how the young adults try their best to unveil the truth and create an awareness to the society. The acquisitiveness and extortion of the corporates is scrutinized in accordance with the corporate social responsibility theory.

**Keywords:** pharmaceuticals, drugs, greed

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an organization's responsibility to consider the interests of the customers, employees, shareholders and particularly, the social and environmental consequences of their business activities. Howard Bowen, an American economist, coined the term, corporate social responsibility and has been referred as the father of modern CSR. In the text titled, *The Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, he defines CSR as "the obligations of business to pursue those policies, to make those decisions or to follow those lines of actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Bowen, 1953). The core idea of CSR is that the business firms have an obligation to work for the welfare of the society by meeting the commercial, legal, and ethical expectations of the society.

Though Bowen coined the word corporate social responsibility, the seeds of CSR were sown even before the second world war. Number of definitions and theories were framed by scholars like, Archie Carroll, Elisabet Garriga and Domenec Mele and Maryna Saprykina. Archie Carroll, one of the most popular scholars, developed the CSR pyramid, is later known as Carroll's CSR Pyramid. It comprises of four obligations that all business firms

are expected to follow. They are economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility.

The base of the pyramid comprises the economic responsibility, which aims at making money. An organization or firm is supposed to gain profit from the business undertaken by them. In order to gain financial effectiveness, they invest in various fields like, advertisement, marketing, and so on. The business firms with considerable profit will remain in the business fields whereas, the unprofitable and unsuccessful firms lose their reputation in the field instantaneously.

In the initial pages of the novel, it is informed that an activist group named 2.0 is targeting Alix, one of the protagonists. The gang members are teen aged kids who lost their parents and beloveds due to the drugs produced by various companies like Marcea and Kimball- Geier. They need justice, so they seek the help of Alix, daughter of a product defendant firm named Banks Strategy Partner. Moses, the gang leader says, “*YOUR WHOLE FAMILY’S COVERED IN blood. Your dad kills people. He gets paid to kill. To him, we’re just numbers. He didn’t tell you?* (198). The words of Moses expose the dark and cruel side of the pharmaceutical firms. But Alice hesitates to believe Moses and the gang members.

The pharmaceuticals discussed in *The Doubt Factory* indulge in unethical activities like adding noxious chemicals in medicines for immediate relief. When greed pops out in the field of medicine, it results in the destruction of the human community. People devour medicines to cure their ailments. But sometimes the medicine they consume for their cure turns out to be a fatal. The Banks Strategy Partners acts as the “lead product defense consultant” (217) for most of the drug stores including Mercea pharmaceuticals, Kimball-Geier and Galen & Tate. The product defendant form is referred to as “the gold standard for defense” (218) by Bacigalupi.

The Banks Strategy firm supports the drug companies which has some major issues regarding their medications. For instance, when the consumers voice that the painkillers produced by a pharmaceutical firm acts as a threat for the life of the people, the firm seeks the help of Alix’s father to solve it. The task of the Banks Strategy is to defend a product on behalf of the seller, when FDA comes out with a report against the product. It performs its task prudently in defending the defective product and gains enough profit.

Legal responsibility stresses the viewpoint that, the corporations are expected to respect and follow the laws and regulations that are implemented by the government. The corporates in *The Doubt Factory* retorts the truth with the help of private foundations and thereby deserts the legal responsibility. When Alix dithers to believe, Moses tells her the road travelled by Marcea Pharmaceuticals and how they escaped stealthily from the clutches of law and FDA. He says,

Once upon a time, there was a huge company called Marcea Pharmaceuticals. Marcea made all kinds of drugs to make people’s lives better, and they made a lot of money doing it...Rumor was that a cholesterol drug called Alantia was causing heart attacks. Marcea had a lot money riding on this cholesterol drug of theirs. (214)

He also adds that Alantia, one of the drugs produced by Marcea Pharmaceuticals, is used to balance the cholesterol in the body. But people consuming Alantia is prone to heart attacks. The victims approach the FDA and it decides to terminate the production and the supply of the Alantia tablets. To cease the imminent loss, Marcea seeks the help of Banks Strategy Partners, in which Simon Banks, Alix’s father is the proprietor. Moses says,

The news that their drug was dangerous was a disaster for them. So Marcea made a plan. They decided that Alantia wasn't the problem. The problem was all the research reports that were claiming their drug caused heart attacks. The drug wasn't the problem. The science was the problem. The science that was getting reported to the FDA, and that the FDA was starting to believe... that was the problem. The FDA was starting to believe... And luckily for Marcea, it turned out that every single one of Marcea's new studies showed that their drug was safe and that the FDA was wrong to be worried. False alarm. (214,215)

Alix is informed by Moses that it is because of Simon Banks, Alantia is safe. After three years, Marcea Commission's studies are proved wrong. He says, "every single study they commissioned was proved to be garbage. But the press didn't see any of it" (216). The fake reports produced by the commission cease thousands of lives, including Moses's father.

Moses complains that Alix's father is behind the master plan of producing false reports and the extension of the sales period of Alantia. Moses accuses Banks Strategy Partners for double-dealing the FDA and common people. Moses says that, lot of firms involve in deceiving the people for more than hundred years. It is difficult to gather enough evidences against the firms as they are very cautious in handling the credentials. Thus, the legal responsibilities that are expected to be followed by the society are forsaken by the firms.

Ethical Responsibility insists the firms to indulge in fair activities and is expected to benefit the society and the environment. Unfortunately, the firms mentioned in *The Doubt Factory*, ignore the ethical practices. For example, Alix reads from a textbook that aspirin tablets fallout in the Reye's syndrome, which causes swelling in the brain and liver damage in children. The pharmaceuticals corrupt the human community by selling the tablets which are fatal.

Finally, in philanthropic responsibility, companies are expected to indulge in philanthropic activities and work for the societal wellbeing. The corporate people forsake other responsibilities but never vacillate to get involved in philanthropic responsibilities. They never hesitate to donate the church and safeguard poor. Bacigalupi writes, that they "donate to their churches and volunteer at the local homeless shelter...they're all double - plus-good people living the double-plus-good American dream (219).

Most of the media and political people are bribed by the corporate firms and they are picturised in media and to the society as they are philanthropic and works for the welfare of the society. But the underlying truth is, they involve in philanthropic activities like donation and offering welfare schemes only to establish themselves to be innocent and free from corruption. The true intention of most of the firms is to milk money by indulging themselves in criminal activities like faking the product and using harmful chemicals in the product. The philanthropic responsibility is used as a business strategy to attract the customers and to cover up their flaws.

Bacigalupi's writings acts as a clarion call to the young adults to plunge in to action. He exposes the mysterious side of the firms through his valuable writings. The corporates' ability to distort the truth and how the common people are exploited by them. For example, when the William & Crowe company people rush to the warehouse, the gang alert the media people and ask them to gather in the warehouse. A wide canvas is made to appear before them and the details regarding the scientists, government employees, researchers and their connection with BSP is displayed as:

## DOUBT FACTORY PLAYBOOK COUNSEL AGAINST A RUSH TO JUDGEMENT ATTACK THE SCIENCE

.....

KEEP THE PUBLIC CONFUSED  
CONFUSION = DELAY=\$\$\$\$ (281).

Simon Banks refers the banner as a “performance art” and tries to distort the truth. Moses and his gang are taken aback when the media people failed to cover the news. Cyntia, one of the gang members says, “they’ll frame the story around us. Talk about how sad it is that we don’t have a mental health system... NRA used that tactic” (284). The gang lose their faith and decides to give up the mission.

The negligence of the media is highlighted by Bacigalupi when the media fails to record the information exposed by the young adults in the poster. Cyntia says, “Everybody knows. People say it all the time. ‘Corporations control politicians.’ ‘Money controls politics.’ ‘Lobbyists control Congress.’ ‘Corporations write the laws’ (310). Bacigalupi’s focus falls on the entire system which includes government, politicians, businessmen, scientists and media. How the entire system is corrupted and forsakes their ethical responsibilities is stressed by him. He says that law and politicians have become puppets get controlled by the corporates.

Most of the characters in Bacigalupi’s novels are young adults who strive hard to accomplish a mission. Alix starts to gather more information concerning the pharmaceuticals and she understands the underlying truth behind the medicines and her father’s contribution to save the companies. She begins her investigation by searching the tablets name in the search engine. She finds that, “Since 1986 every bottle of aspirin sold in the United States has included a label advising parents that consumption by children with viral illnesses greatly increases their risk of developing Reye’s Syndrome” (315). She is shell shocked to know the truth regarding every medicine mentioned by Moses and his friends. She decides to help the 2.0 gang. She goes to the ware house in search of Moses and informs him about her findings. With the help of Alix, Moses gets an opportunity to access Simon Banks’ laptop and collects the list of companies involved in the fraudulent activities.

When Simon Banks is informed about the hacking, he orders the mercenaries to kill Moses and to bring back Alix. But, the Willams & Crowe decides to kill Alix along with Moses. Their plan is interrupted when 2.0 gang members disguise as FBI agents and save Alix and Moses. Alix writes an apology letter to her father that she is going to upload the clients’ files and adds, “The Doubt Factory is going to be famous” (483). She writes, “you’re the place where big companies go when they need the truth confused. You’re the place companies go when they need to convince people that up is down, and blue is red...wrong is right” (482). Though it is informed that, Alix along with the 2.0 gang gathered and exposed the corruption of the companies there is no evidence concerning the arrest of any of the people. Yet, their mission continues. Bacigalupi insists the readers to voice against the hideous activities of the firms in any form.

*The Doubt Factory* is a didactic novel and most of the characters pictured in the novels are teens who are striving hard to expose the real face of the corporate people. The CSR Theory is designed in order to generate regulations in the functioning of the firms. Unfortunately, the firms are interested only in following the economic and philanthropic responsibilities. To gain more money, they attempt to get involved in malicious actions which are harmful for the society as well as the human beings. In order to make best use of

the benefits of CSR, the firms should pay enough attention to the needs of society and environment by implementing projects appropriate to it.

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