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Symbolism, Imagery and Allegorical Elements Anantha Murthy's *Samskara*

Vishnu Kumar

Research Scholar,

The Department of English & MEL,

The University of Allahabad,

Prayagraj, India

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Abstract

Anantha Murthy's *Smaskara* is a manifestation of symbolism, allegory and the use of imagery. It has shown the real picture of south Indian Brahmins. It has been considered as an allegory of superstitions backwardness and downfall of Brahmanism. The beauty of this novel is that the novelist has presented the reality through symbolic characters and myth. Praneshacharya is the symbol of orthodox and traditional Brahmanism that was prevalent at that time and which is also exist at the present period. Naranappa is the symbol of apostacy. Even in the figures of speech, he has used wordy images. But before we discuss the use of imagery, symbolism and myth, we should have clear cut idea about the meaning of symbolism, imagery and myth. Symbolism means the representation of hidden ideas and hidden concept by using some more symbols for its symbolism, as an attitude of the human mind in its approach to the material thought and idea, and to give real meaning has been relevant since the beginnings of writings.

Keywords- Symbolism, Social, Superstition, Imagery

Introduction

Symbolism is the presentation of ideas, objects and life in the general through means of imagery, metaphor and beauty and musical ideas of language. Through the images the writer has presented t5he reality to make people aware about these superstitions. As such, symbolism opposed to realism, in that realism presents things as they are, and symbolism presents things through indirect objects. As we know that absence is more important than presence, so in this regard, symbols are more important than reality. Most of the beauty of the poetry achieved through some form of symbolism. In theme all allegory is symbolic and allegory and symbolism are most important devices of twentieth century to present the exact condition of the society.

The first impression of horror and hatred that the reader gets from the novel is from the use of vultures and rats as signs of horror and fear. As we know that the death of any

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animals is considered one of the worst in the society and the writer has shown that the people are living in the womb of the god and they are not creative. Their life is governed by the dogmatic views. Anantha Murthy describes the visitation of the birds of prey to pick up the dead and dying rats in Durvasapura Agrahara in a graphic manner deriving essence of horror and fear in the minds of the readers thus:

As the looked on, the vultures on their carved his neck around like a danseuse, looked around and whirred right down to their feet to peck at and pick up another rat which had run out from the storeroom to the backyard, and flew back to his perch on the roof. Both husband and wife, their life breaths shaken up together as never before, sank down to a sitting position. Another vulture flying for in the sky came down to sit on Naranappa's house. He lifted his head, flapped his demon wings loudly, came to a standstill and inspected whole Agrahara with his eagle eyes. After that more flying vultures came down to sit, two by two, two on each house as if they had agreed upon it earlier... (*Samskara*: 52)

The birds of prey had left their burial grounds to descend on the Agrahara, and to see the plight of the Naranappa they gathered but they did not have any solution because their life is governed by the Praneshacharya. They are all hypocrite because they show that they are real followers of Sanskar but when they see the gold they forget all the sanskar of hindu religion.

The most striking element in the novel is the use of erotic imagery. The writer has shown that to show their superiority and dominance they have made several rules and those rules they have maintained for the lower caste of people but in the matter of a girl they forget all the rules and they try to have sex even with a woman who belong to lower caste society. He has used some erotic images of banana to arouse sexual feelings, the meeting of Praneshacharya and Chandri in the forest, the author has used phallic symbol of banana in the following words:

Chandri leaned him against her breasts, took the plantains out of her lap, peeled them and fed them to him. Then she took of her Sari, spread it on the ground, and lay on it hugging. Parneshacharya closed to her weeping flowing in the helpless tears. (*Samskara*: 55)

When the Acharya was returning from the temple in forest along with Chandri, he had feeling of repentance in his heart which has been described through a very appropriate imagery. Murthy describes the dilemma of Acharya on his return to the Agrahara after his sexual affair with Chandri through a rich imagery, "But if I don't tell the agrahara Brahmins, if Naranappa's body is not properly cremated, I can't escape fear. If I decide to live with Chandri without telling anyone, the decision is not complete, not the fearless . . . if I hide things, all through life I will be agonized by the fear of discovery." (*Samskara*:113)

Besides the images of horror and erotic feelings, Anantha Murthy has also used simile and metaphors quite profusely in the novel. The mind of the author is full of figures of speech suitable to the theme of degradation of Brahmanism. One symbol of the cow has been used

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for the virtue of devotion in Hindu religion in the very first chapter. The novelist has described the Acharya's great respect for the mother cow which has been described in the following words:

Before he sat down to his meal, he picked up the fodder for Gowri, the cow, on a banana leaf and placed it in front of Gawri who was grazing in the backyard. Worshipfully he caressed the cow's body, till the hair on her height rose in pleasure. In a gesture of respect, he touched his own eyes with the hand that had touched the holy animal. (*Samskara*: 4)

Samskara has many levels of interpretations. It is religious novel but it is also an allegory. We must understand the definition and meaning of allegory. Before we can comprehend *Samskara* as an allegory, we must know allegory is created in a literary work when one or more meanings, in addition to the literal one, or to be derived by the reader. Thus, in narration, in objects, incidents or people are represented indirectly to the reader by means of personification or symbolism since the neoclassic age in English literature, allegory has been comparatively rare. In modern times, authors have been open and direct in the expression of their ideas. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is outstanding example of allegory in the romantic period. Here Prometheus represents mankind. Zeus (Jupiter) stands for evil or the spirit of operation and Asia represents the spirit of nature. With Shelley, Zeus, who had *Prometheus Bound* into slavery, stands for the church and its orthodoxy, its priests, and ministers. Modern readers have little patience fables, parables and other literary forms with involved and hidden moral meanings.

The characters in an allegory have no individual personality but they are embodiments of moral qualities and other abstractions. The allegory is closely related to the parable, fable and metaphor, differing from them largely in intricacy and length. A great variety of literary forms have been used for allegories. The medieval morality play *Everyman* personifying such abstractions as fellowship and good deeds, recounts the death journey of Everyman. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress*, a prose narrative, is an allegory of man's spiritual salvation. Spenser's poem *The Faerie Queen*, besides being a chivalric romance, is a commentary on morals and manners in 16th century England as well as a national epic. Although allegory is still used by some authors, its popularity as a literary form has declined in favour of a more personal form of symbolic expression.

According to Northrop Frye's definition "An allegory is all commentary or the relating to the events of a narrative to conceptual terminology. It is one sense allegorical interpretation; *Samskar* seems especially open to this mode of interpretation because not only the events but the objects described in the novel seem to be invested with allegorical overtones."

The character of Pranesacharya is allegorical because he represents all the orthodox traditional and Madhava Brahmins. His asceticism daily activity of worship and service. All show the practices of Madhavas. He remains faithful to the ideas of service and purity in the

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first two parts of the novel. Similarly, Naranappa represents the new modern qualities of a person who does not believe in castism or Puritanism. He can live with a low caste woman Chandri and treat her as his own wife. He can eat, drink and do fishing as Muslims do.

Therefore, he represents the modern virtues or vices of the new Congress ideology. Through Lakshmiddevamma, the novelist has represented the cause of the Brahmins widows. Therefore, Lakshmiddevamma stands for the widows of the high- caste sections of the Hindu society.

The novelist has described at length the courtyards of the brahmins of Durvasapura were full of blooming flowers. They were used for purposes of worship and they were never enjoyed for their beauty of fragrance. The description in Chapter two is full of realistic details which set the tone of allegory in the rest of the novel. But the flowers in Naranappa's yard were different because they were solely meant for Chandri's hair and for decoration of her bedroom. This is allegorical because it shows the disparity between sensuous aspect of life and detachment through the denial of senses.

The flowers that bloomed in the gardens of the Brahmins in Durvasapura agrahara are a good example of this. These were used for purposes of worship and never were enjoyed for their beauty of fragrance. The chapter two is remarkable palimpsest of realistic details and allegorical nuances, setting the tone for the rest of the novel. Only the flowers in Naranappa's yard were different because these were solely meant for Chandri's hair and vase in the bedroom, for sensuous human enjoyment and not for divine consecration. The basic polarity of the novel between direct involvement in the sensuous aspect of life and a detachment through the denial of senses is thus indicated as early as in beginning of the novel.

Much later in the novel when Praneshacharya's accustomed world is shattered by Chandri's touch, he becomes aware of this opposition between his earlier detachment and present involvement:

He had so far not desired any of the beauty he had read about in the classics. All earthly fragrance was like the flowers that go only to adorn the god's hair. All female beauty was the beauty of the Goddess Lakshmi . . . all sexual enjoyment was Krishna's when he stole the bathing cow girls garments and left them naked in the water. Now he wanted for himself a share of all that. (*Samskara:77*)

In this novel, the author has symbolized women's cupidity by the symbol of snake. Chandri wore her black snake like hair in a knot and Padmavati's snake braid coming down her shoulder, over her breast. Unsettles the Acharya's equilibrium. Even when unbraided women's hair has erotic associations. At Shripati's call Beli came out, her hair washed in warm water, wearing only a piece below her waist, naked above, waves of hair pouring her back and face. The hair serpent eroticism thread runs throughout the novel, for example, in the description of the woman acrobat at the fair as the serpentine . . . all curves, and of Belli like snake writhing in the sand. All the Brahmin women in the contrast to Chandri, Belli,

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Padmavati and the heroines of the legend and myth are depicted as frigid with ‘ dwarfish braids’ and withered bodies.

In the novel *Samskara*, the flowers in the Naranappa’s courtyard represent human lust and cupidity like some raging lust and the word raging connects it to his own lust when he confronts Chandri’s body like a raging striped tiger. Praneshacharya reflecting on his encounter with Chandri in the forest, recognizes his body’s tigerish lust which lay dormant all this time under pity and compassion. Once having tasted blood now the tamed tiger is leaping out, baring its teeth. Also by implication the tiger gets associated with other aspects of life that fall outside the rarefied and attenuated Brahminic existence the world of violent entertainment and crude joy. The acharya is horrified by the tigerish world of cock fights which threatens his new found values as well as his orthodoxy.

The novelist has also presented many mythological stories and legends of Hindu religion. First of all the god Maruti’s temple reminds us of the legend of the god of Maruti and his brave deed of saving the life of Ram’s brother Lakshman. The village Durvasapura has a mythological reference. Besides the village Durvasapura, there is the river Tunga. There is a legend about Durvasa Rishi. The story of Durvasa Rishi has been described by the novelist in the following extract, “There was a place legend about it. Right in the middle of the flowing Tunga river stood an island like hillock, overgrown with a knot of trees. They believed Sage Durvasa still performed his penance on it’ (16) In the myth making aspect of a novel the journey serves a symbolic function. It brings out a transition between two aspects of a character’s life, one which is over and the other yet to begin. In *Odysee*, there is a nine year long journey which is symbolic and myth making. Similarly, in *Samskara*, the third part of the novel deals with the long journey of Praneshacharya. After the cremation of Bhagirathi and his close sexual association with chandri, he goes on a long journey in which he tries to find his real self and identity. In his soliloquy Acharya thinks about and tell himself:

We shape ourselves through our choices, bring form and line to this thing we call our person. Naranappa became the person he chose to be. I chose to be something else and lived by it. But suddenly, I turned at some turning. I am not free till I realize that the turning? Dualities, conflict, rushed into my life. I hung suspended between two truths, like Trishanku. How did the ancient sages face such experience? (*Samskara*: 85)

Thus, through this paper, I have tried to depict how the writer has used these symbols, imaginary and allegorical feelings to convey his intense ideas and has shown his dissatisfaction towards the society. As a social critic of the 20th century, he has pointed out the evils of the society through his symbols and also suggested some reformative measure.

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