



KR Meera's The Unseeing Idol of Light: A Psychological Perspective

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Abstract

Indian Literature in regional languages is a store house of knowledge and wisdom. It has a long literary tradition. Literature written in Sanskrit and Prakrit languages is considered to be the earliest literary productions. Now a day, literature in translation has got global recognition. There are many male and female writers producing regional literature. KR Meera, a Malayalam novelist, is an outstanding literary figure. She has produced many novels in Malayalam which have translated in different languages. Her *The Unseeing Idol of Light* is a classical literary production that deals with many issues concerning human life. It is a social discourse at the same time it deals with human relation. The objective of this research article is to explore mind and behavior of characters in the novel from psychoanalytical perspective. Fundamentally, it incorporates psychological dimensions. It focuses memory, nostalgia, hysteria, stress, mental disharmony and disorder. This research article looks at the novel from a psychological point of view.

Keywords: Psycho analysis. Social discourse, Feminism, Patriarchy, Memory, nostalgia.

Introduction

The role of literature in human life is invaluable. It is a powerful weapon. Literature is not only an imaginative product but it also portrays hard reality in an imaginative way. It makes society think about those issues which society deliberately ignores. There is no doubt, that literature civilizes human society. It awakens human minds. It directs the society. It demands socio-cultural and economic equality. It critiques unjust social practices that dehumanize society. As long as men were writing they seemed to have supported male domination. When women took up writing they brought a transformation in society. The impact of social practices in India kept Indian women under suppression for long time. Those practices disturbed women psychologically. So, Indian women novelists writing in different Indian languages have brought a great social and Cultural Revolution in India. Their motto was to voice the issues pertaining to women.

In this regards Dr. Dhar observes:

Indian Women Novelists have given a new dimension to the gamut of Indian English Literature. In the mid of the nineteenth century many Indian Women started to write in English language. Beginning with feeble interrupts at being heard, women novelists have incorporated the recurring female experiences in their writing (Dhar, 1)

They use literature as a weapon to raise questions regarding male domination in society. They challenged the age long socio-cultural notions which marginalized women. Women writers in Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam and many other Indian languages have written about female experiences, their exploitation, religion,

domestic life. Their goal has been to establish a just society giving equal significance to both male and female. These women writers have gone through those excruciating experiences. They observe social realities and gender discrimination and voice the unjust treatment given to women. Hence, regional literature written by women has a great social and cultural value. Indian women novelists writing in regional languages have changed Indian literature by presenting women as complex and independent individuals rather than stereotypes. Their novels explore important themes such as gender, family, caste, culture, and social change while reflecting the traditions and values of their regions. Through their realistic stories and unique writing styles, they have used literature to question social inequalities and give voice to women's experiences. Their works continue to influence Indian literature and contribute to the growth of feminist thought and social awareness.

KR Meera is an Indian novelist who writes in Malayalam language. She started her career as a journalist. Therefore, she has had a firsthand experience of socio-cultural and economic conditions of women in India. She left journalism and devoted herself to writing. She has produced many novels, novellas, short story collections and essays. Her popular novels include *Aarachaar (Hangwoman)* Sooryane Aninja OruSthree Yoodasinte Suvishesham (*The Gospel of Yudas*) Ghathakan Meerasadhu Andhathayude Daivam (*The Unseeing Idol of Light*) Qabar Khabar. Her notable collections of Short Story include *Ave Maria Ormayude Njarambu Mohamanja Krishna Gatha*. For her impactful literary contributions she has received Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, Odakuzhal Award,

Vayalar Award, and Gita Hariharan Endowment Award. This research article throws light upon psychological dimensions in the novel *The Unseeing Idol of Light*. The novel deals with an important theme of human relationship especially the relation between wife and husband. The foundation of any family is the smooth relation between wife and husband. If the relation goes wrong, the family is broken. Characters in the novel go through traumatic experiences.

Review of Literature

Basically, a writer is a social product. The socio-cultural, economic and political forces shape his/her personality. The writer observes human behavior closely. He pens his experiences in his literary works. K.R. Meera is not an exception to this. She has written about human life, social system, and plight of women. Her literary corpus focuses bitter reality in society. Her novels deal with important themes such as gender, power, violence, memory, love, trauma, and social injustice. She is well known for portraying the inner lives of her characters with great psychological depth. Most of the research work which has been carried out on her literary work is from social-cultural and gender point of view. This research article has taken into account a psychological perspective. *The Unseeing Idol of Light has so far been analyzed from female point of view. Going through the plot of the novel, one comes to know that the novel has a protagonist namely Deepti who disappears from her family. She is pregnant. Most of studies deal with the plight of women in her novel like Rekha K G whose work entitled Rewriting Women: A Critique of Misogyny, Structure and Agency in the Novels of K.R. Meera (2022).* But this article focuses on the psychological dimensions of the novel. Sigmund Freud's Unconscious Mind its effect on human behavior, Jacques Lacan's theory that explains that the unconscious can be structured as language. He argues that identity is formed through language, symbols and desire Lacan's theory is especially useful for studying novels in which characters struggle with loss, absence, and psychological suffering. Peter Barry also explains that psychoanalytic criticism studies the unconscious aspects of literary texts and reveals the deeper meanings hidden beneath the surface. Psychological approach has been very vital in understanding deeper meaning of the texts.

Theoretical Frame Work: Psychological Perspective

Psychology and Literature go hand in hand. They closely connected with each other. It is not possible to understand any literary text without applying psychological perspectives. Psychological Perspective is an approach to look at literary pieces and to analyze the characters in the literary piece under consideration. It is a tool to analyze the behavioral patterns of the characters in the work. According to Rene Wellek and Austin Warren:

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren interpret the concept of literary psychology in a broad sense. According to their approach, it encompasses the psychological analysis of the author's personality, the investigation of the mental foundations of creative activity, the examination of psychological phenomena represented in literary texts, and the study of literature's influence on readers' consciousness and emotional experience. These dimensions collectively demonstrate the close relationship between literature and psychology, highlighting the role of literary works as both artistic and psychological expressions (Wellek & Warren, 320).

The psychological criticism studies the minds of the characters in the novel. It analyzes unconscious and suppressed desires of the character and its impact on the behavior of the protagonist. It studies inner conflicts of the characters in the work. As Sigmund Freud points out: "The interpretation of dreams is a royal road to knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind" (Freud, 608). A psychological critic studies dreams in literature to understand a character's unconscious mind. While Jacques Lacan observes: "The unconscious is structured like a language" (Lacan, 203). Lacan means that our unconscious mind does not work randomly. It follows patterns and rules similar to language. Hidden thoughts and desires are expressed through symbols, metaphors, slips of the tongue, dreams, and images rather than directly. Peter Barry, a renowned literary critic and the author of *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, has rightly pointed out: "Psychoanalytic criticism sees literary texts as manifestations of the author's psyche or as representations of the unconscious" (Barry 96). This means that a literary work can reveal the hidden thoughts, feelings, fears, desires, and emotions of the author or the characters. A psychoanalytic critic studies these hidden psychological aspects to understand the deeper meaning of the text.

Research Methodology

This research article studies a novel titled *The Unseeing idol of Light* by KR Meera, a contemporary Malayalam novelist. The researcher has done a close textual analysis of the novel. The analysis is done from psychological perspective hence psychological literary criticism has been applied. Elements such memory, trauma, unconscious mind of characters, their behavior patterns and their psychological conflicts and its effect on their life have been taken into consideration. Psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Carl Jung have been given running references to prove the thesis of the article. The study incorporates socio-cultural and psychological dimensions of the novel. The study follows close textual reading. Since this research has applied multidisciplinary approaches therefore this research has become interpretative and interdisciplinary.

Discussion

It was on the day of Shyam's engagement that Deepti went missing. She had been eight months pregnant at the time. She had arrived in Cochin by the evening train from Calicut on a Saturday (Meera, 4).

The novel begins with horrible news that Prakash's wife Deepti disappears from home. Her disappearance while pregnant triggers novel's central idea. The reality shatters Prakash. It is very traumatic situation for him. He is unable to bear the separation from Deepti. This sets the tone of the novel. The impact of mysterious disappearance of Deepti is that Prakash loses his eyesight. Another most painful reason for his loss of sight and confidence is that Deepti is eight months pregnant. Prakash and Deepti form a happy family. Deepti is expecting. Prakash is happy as he is going to be a father. Everything is fine and all of a sudden while on journey Deepti disappears without any logical reason. This makes Prakash psychologically and physically weak. His friend Shyam and Prakash keep on searching Deepti but she is not found. Shyam wants that Prakash should marry again. But Prakash is not ready to marry. He is unable to forget Deepti. Prakash is alone, blind and psychologically completely shattered. As LaCapra observes, "The traumatic event has its

greatest and most clearly unjustifiable effect on the victim, but in different ways, it also affects everyone who comes into contact with it" (LaCapra 9). Meanwhile, there is another woman with a traumatic history. Her past life was a hell. She is broken and seeks solace in Prakash. But Prakash is unable to give her what she desires. Prakash is extremely obsessed with the memory of Deepti. He can't erase the luminous memories of Deepti. He is extremely obsessed with memory of his wife. He is going through a very painful mental experience. His search for his wife goes on. He does not leave any stone unturned in his search for Deepti. He has lost his eyesight because of his psychological and traumatic condition. His connection with Deepti is deep: In his dazzling memory of Deepti, she had softly pressed her face on his back and repeated after him (Meera, 5). Prakash maintains smooth relation with people like his father Justice Ravi, Madhav Menon, the father of Deepti, Rajani, an orphan woman who harbors romantic feelings for Prakash, Chandramohan, Rajani's spouse whom she wedded in an unsuccessful effort to sever ties with Prakash, Abha Das Munshi, a young Naxal lady whom Ravi fell in love with during his stay in Kolkata, before his return to Kerala, and Sooraj, a visually impaired boy with whom Prakash shares an inexplicable bond. But, how come he fails to maintain relation with his own wife is the main question and the author does not open it till the end of the novel. This kind of narcissist conduct of Deepti puts the reader in dilemma. The reader is unable to comprehend the cause of her disappearance. This kind of psychological unstable state set of mind pushes the reader to go into psychological exploration in the personality. How come she takes such a drastic decision of separating from Prakash, that too in such a critical condition when she is pregnant? This is because of psychological imbalanced personality. It is an example of self-destructive nature. Prakash has got emotionally weakened. He tries his best to locate Deepti but he fails to find her. Finally, he tries to establish new relation with Rajani. But he fails to do so as the Deepti's memory does not allow him to connect with any other woman. Rajani realizes the fact that Prakash does not want to marry her. Finally she takes the decision to marry Chandramohan. She is a psychologically wounded woman who is in search of love and acceptance. She wanted to marry Prakash but she could not and that unfulfilled desire affects her personality that is the reason why she does not wish to keep sexual relation with her husband. She has had sexual relationship with Prakash. She has got pregnant from Prakash. She marries Chandramohan. When he comes to know that the baby she is carrying does belong to him he gets angry with her: Don't you feel guilty about conceiving two children with one man and then marrying another, Rajani?' Rajani burst out laughing in response..... You want to give birth to another man's child in my home? And then give it my name in place of its father's!' Chandramohan lost all control on his temper (Meera, 157).

The world and the people in the novel are psychologically shattered. Their past was painful and those painful experiences don't allow them to a happy life in the present. But Jayprakash's blindness has no organic cause it's a result of psychosomatic, triggered by acute psychological trauma. He thinks so deeply about Deepti. He has lost his mental balance. His memories with Deepti can't be erased. This is the main cause of his lost of sight:

Even after so many years he had not been able to reconcile himself to Deepti's departure, he had been completely prepared to be a father, and eager to play with his little son,

when Deepti disappeared in his mind's eye, he repeatedly saw how on that evening, seated in the kitchen, Deepti and he had enjoyed platefuls of ada with tea (Meera, 15).

This shows that when some women leave, they also take with them the sight of those men who had loved them. Prakash had had wonderful time with Deepti. Even today after a gap of many years he is still haunted by the memory of that last ordinary evening they spent together before she disappeared. This kind of memory makes the loss feel even more unbearable, because it was so unremarkable at the time. Perhaps, the most appropriate psychological analysis of the characters in the novel can be found in the following remarks given by Van Der Kolk as characters in the novel are found to be struggling with themselves. But they can't overcome their fear, anger and depression due to their past. All the characters in the novel suffer from an unknown fear. They expect something and get something else and that makes their life terrible. They are not happy with what they have. This novel provides us psychological understanding of human beings.

The Unseeing Idol of Light stands out for its remarkable portrayal of intense emotional and psychological distress. Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs, and, in an attempt to control these processes, they often become experts at ignoring their gut feelings and numbing awareness of what is playing out inside. They learn to hide from themselves (Van Der Kolk, 97).

Literary text is not mere a story. It is not mere a piece of writing. It is not an imaginative writing. It has a medicinal impact on the readers. According to Aristotle tragedy has a cathartic function. The audience experience pity for the suffering of the hero and fear that such misfortune could happen to anyone, resulting in an emotional purification or release. So a literary text has psychological effect on the reader. The Unseeing Idol of Light is a novel in which the characters are psychologically distressed. They go through intense traumatic experience. The protagonist around whom the entire novel moves on is Prakash. He is psychologically broken. Fate plays very bitter role with him. He is good and a dedicated husband. He loves his wife. He cares for her but justice is not done to him. He suffers for no reason. His pregnant wife disappears suddenly. For him, it is a great psychological shock. He loses his eyesight and remains unmarried forever. Even in the case of Rajani, who has a painful background feels attracted to Prakash and yearns to marry him, yet he can't marry her due to the sweet memories of his wife Deepti. He cannot take the decision to marry her. The novelist KR Meera has portrayed psychologically disturbed characters in the novel.

Conclusion

K.R. Meera's *The Unseeing Idol of Light* is a social and cultural discourse. Apart from being a novel dealing with the patriarchal social order and oppression of women and their struggle for identity, the novel deals with the behavior with the protagonists in the novel and its impact on the other characters. Hence, the novel provides a fair space to look at it from psychological point of view. The thematic concerns of the novel are love, loss, separation, unfulfilled desires, mental health, nostalgia, memory and uncontrolled patterns of conduct and so and so forth. Characters like Prakash, Deepti, RajaniShyam and Chandramohan are controlled by the external forces at the same time they are victims of their internal, unconscious mind and unknown fear. The novelist

explores their suppressed emotions, social constraint and its result on their behavior. The psychological perspective provides different layers of meaning of the novel. The novel exposes hidden motivations of the characters. The Freudian approach helps understand unconscious condition of characters. Although they look happy but internally they are full of grief due to their unfulfilled desire. Lacan attempts to deal with concepts like language, memory and absence and how these things govern their behavior. The novel illustrates that psychological wounds often remain invisible yet profoundly determine human responses to love, loss, and social reality. As the novel has multiple issues like patriarchal order, marginalization of women, domestic violence and how these factors increase psychological disturbances in the life of women. Thus, *The Unseeing Idol of Light* establishes itself as an important contribution to contemporary Indian literature by integrating psychological depth with social criticism. Another important finding one may come across that life is not a bed of roses. Human life is full of challenges and man has to meet happily. But while meeting those critical and depressing, man often loses his interest in life and takes wrong decisions which ultimately shatter his life. In order to heal such people there is a need of understanding them with invites readers to recognize that healing requires not only personal resilience but also empathy, understanding, and social transformation. The novel ultimately affirms that the human mind is a site where memory, desire, pain, and hope coexist, making psychological inquiry indispensable for understanding literary texts and human experience. Therefore, a psychological approach provides a comprehensive framework for appreciating the richness of Meera's artistic vision and the enduring relevance of her exploration of the complexities of the human psyche.

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