

ISSN: 0976-8165

Vol.8, Issue-V (October 2017)

THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

8th Year of Open Access

The Criterion 

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Aspects of Love, Culture and Religion as portrayed in Dr. Kamal's "Madhabi"

Nongmaithem Suraj Kumar

Research Scholar

Department of English

Nagaland University.

Article History: Submitted-27/09/2017, Revised-30/10/2017, Accepted-07/11/2017, Published-20/11/2017.

Abstract:

Dr. Lamabam Kamal was a compact man endowed with the gifts of great writing skills. *Madhabi* was the only novel written by Dr. Kamal in 1930. The novel is a tragedy based on the love story of a girl named Madhabi, who sacrificed all she had for her love, Dhirendra Singh. On the other hand, the bond of friendship and promise between Birendra and Shashikumar, the mesmerising marriage of Uirrei and Birendra and the natural landscape of Shillong is portrayed beautifully. The culture of typical Meitei community vis-a-vis religion is beautifully depicted in the novel. Further, it also narrates about the beautiful and lovely relationship between mankind and nature. The researcher here is trying to find out the love, culture and religion in the book.

Keywords: Budding stage, Sacrifice, Culture, Victim, Dakshina.

Introduction:

Manipur, a small state in the North-Eastern part of the India is a land bestowed with the gifts of good natural landscape. It is surrounded by Nagaland to the North, to the West by Assam; Mizoram to the South and Myanmar (International Country) to the East. It mainly consists of a small valley with hilly regions as a major portion of the total area of the land. Here, one would find Loktak Lake, the only fresh water lake in the north east. Further, one would find "Keibul Lamjao National Park", the only floating national park in the world. It is the home for Sangai "The Brow Antlered Deer". Not only this, Manipur is a home for various people of different cast, culture and religion.

The land has produced some of the renowned authors, playwright, novelist and poets. To name a few includes Dr. Lamabam Kamal, Hijam Anganghal, Pacha Meitei, R.K Madhubir and Aribam Chitreshwar Sharma. All these persons are known for their immense literary contribution and will remain forever in the literary world engraved with golden colours. Most of them talks about the society, the culture, natural beauty, crime against women and crime against various sections of the society.

Dr. Lamabam Kamal was born on 7th March, 1899 at Langthabal, Imphal. He died at an early age of 36. Dr. Kamal was a compact man endowed with the gifts of great writing skills. He could be regarded as the pioneer writers of the modern Manipuri Literature. He was a great novelist, short story writer and a romantic poet. Not only this, he was also a great

playwright. It could be said that no Manipuri writer during the time of Kamal, have left so deep a mark on the imagination that even today he is still remembered in the literary world of Manipur as a great classical writer. Further, he was gifted with an extraordinary talent to become a great poet and his work "Lei-Pareng" (Garland of Flowers) proves it. He was conferred the title Kaviratna—the greatest poet, in 1948. Dr. Kamal is regarded as one of the three most important Manipuri poets of the 20th Century, the other being Hijam Anganghal and Ashangbam Minaketan. He could be regarded as the pioneer writers of the modern Manipuri Literature. His writing in Manipuri Language was in such a delicacy that any reader would refuse to leave the book until they conclude reading. Though he died at the early age, his works are still remembered even today. This shows the capability of the author to enchant the people with his writings.

Madhabi was written in 1930 by Kamal, while he was a student at Berry White Medical School which later came to be known as Assam Medical College in Dibrugarh. His novel was mainly influenced and inspired by the social changes brought by the English system of education in the early decades of Twentieth century in Manipur. The main themes include romantic ideas of love, friendship, sacrifice, religious tradition and marriage.

About The Book:

A tragic novel of twisted fate of two girls named Uirrei and Madhabi (both are the names of flowers). On one hand, Uirrei got married with her love Birendra while Madhabi sacrificed her life for her love Dhirendra. The inspiration of never-ending love showed by the characters in the novel is quite amazing. The novel also depicts the change in the traditional Manipuri society where the poor and weak are strangled by the rich people in the society. The poor often falls prey in the hands of the rich and powerful people. The novel is set mainly in the valley parts of Manipur. The culture of typical Meitei community vis-a-vis religion is beautifully depicted in the novel. Further, it also narrates about the beautiful and lovely relationship between mankind and nature. The traditional culture of the people like the climbing of Baruni Hill is beautifully portrayed and the religious ceremony of a typical Manipuri marriage is beautifully shown.

Main Paper:

Love seems to find a prominent place in the novel. The love story of Uirrei and Birendra, Madhabi and Dhirendra is shown in the novel. Love at first was the most striking feature of the novel.

"As Uirrei departed, Biren felt a certain pull in his heart, as if by the rope of love; he could no longer stay in the hutment playing the part of Mahadeva". He called, "You, flower-gathering girls! Mahadeva has fulfilled your wish; now you should come and untie me." (7) The above lines beautifully describe the blooming of love between Uirrei and Birendra. Birendra, who was a studious student, never felt before in his heart the strange feeling which gave him shock. This strange feeling was the love and later found in full bloom which ultimately led to the marriage in the end.

On the other hand Madhabi too was in the *budding stage* of love with Dhirendra. Though, she could not express her love and feeling to Urirei. She gave a slight indication to her, that the later felt awestruck at her words.

“After covering some distance Madhabi said, “Dear Urirei, I have dedicated my heart and soul to someone. I am not, therefore, at liberty to move about freely and we may not meet as often as we did. Let us meet when woe betide us.”” (8) This shows the loyalty and dedication of Madhabi to her lover. This feeling happens when one is in the bewitched world of the so called love.

Love is blind, have no boundaries and no need for reorganisation from the lover or the one who is being loved. The mind of the lover is filled with excitement, joy and thrilled when they are with the one whom they love.

“Bhubon felt happy beyond measures. His wish to take Urirei along having been fulfilled, he made quite some noise on the road singing songs and beating the rhythm.”” (14) This shows the thrilling effect of a person who is in love. Happiness of being with love ones has no limit.

The love for god is also shown beautifully shown in the novel. Even, though Urirei knows that Bhubon is a bad person, her love for god was too deep that she leaves her fate in the hands of god.

“So leaving everything to God, she said, “Yes, I would like to.”” (14) This line was the answer given by Urirei when she was asked whether she would love to visit and offer prayer to god with Bhubon. Without any hesitation, she said yes as she believes that god would not let her harm in any way.

The strength that love gives works wonder even in the time of danger. This part of strength is beautifully shown in the novel when Birendra was surrounded by the goons who were trying to capture Urirei.

“Biren rushed to the scene, stood erect in front of the men and said, “None can move from the spot; anyone disobeying risks his head being cut off by this sword. If you want to go, leave the girl and go.”” (24) This shows undying and unflinching power of love.

Distrust and fear of being in love is visible in the novel. This is shown beautifully when Madhabi confronts Dhirendra with soothing yet powerful words.

“The girl replied, “Absolute reliance cannot be placed on the words of boys. I have seen a number of innocent girls trapped into love by boys suffer, as they have been left alone later on.” (27-28) This shows how love can sometimes led into the trap of mistrust and fear of losing someone.

The long distance love can sometimes change the mind of the people and this exactly happened with Dhiren and Madhabi. While Dhiren left Calcutta for higher studies and Madhabi was left alone at home creating certain illusions in her mind about the young men in general about love matters.

"She offered her life to Dhiren when they met for the first time; however, she intensely disliked the fickle mind of young men. She believed that love on the part of the young men sprang not from heart but from the eyes." (55) Love can cause a slight distraction in the mind of lovers especially the females. Likewise, Madhabi has lots of thoughts in her mind like her lover is in love with someone else or he doesn't love her like the way before. This can sometimes lead to drastic change in the part of so called love.

Love in the form of *sacrifice* too, is crafted beautifully by the author. There is no rule that all those who love each other are meant to be together but sometimes sacrifice takes place to show the true and pure love. This form of love is shown by Madhabi for Dhiren.

"Madhabi did not disclose her identity, as she felt that such a disclosure would cause impediment to the marriage of Dhiren with the daughter of Rajen. She would be committing a great sin against an innocent girl of her age." (90) The feeling that one has got when the lover could not recognise his love is heart-breaking. Just like it, Dhiren could not recognise Madhabi even if she was in front of her even though she could recognise him. Her love for him was too deep that she thought of sacrificing it and this shows the true love in the part of Madhabi.

Culture of a particular community defines the type of arts, customs, living styles and habits of people. Here, too in the novel the different forms of culture of Manipuri people are beautifully shown.

In the olden days unlike today, the respect of younger generations to that of the elder ones were great. A person might behave in an unnatural way to their colleagues but when they encounter an elderly people, they regard them with high gratitude and respect. This type of situation is beautifully carved by the author in the novel.

"They however got a little unnerved when they saw five or six elders sitting round the fire and took leave without further noise" (2) This shows the typical Manipuri culture in the olden days. Respect was shown by young ones to the elders, irrespective of their nature and educational qualification.

It is the wish of every parent to see their children dedicated to their studies and to be with the good companionship. If they sense any short of negligence, they try to take care of their children by either guiding them in a good path or with a short motivational speech. Likewise in the novel, Biren's father thought that it will be better to send his son to Calcutta for further studies as an unnatural evolution of behaviour is shown by his son. It was the duty of a father

to look after for his son and expects to have a good future and career. This, culture of duty is moulded beautifully in the novel.

“He decided to send Biren for studies outside Manipur lest his education came to an abrupt end.” (30) This line beautifully describe the situation of Manipur in past. Parents believes that sending their children away to other states for studies would be good as the educational system in the state is quite poor and same culture is followed even today.

Like today, in the past the poor people often falls *victim* of the rich and powerful people of the locality. It's like a culture where the rich people can hurt poor to their likes. In the novel too, when the marriage proposal was denied, Bhupon's father had decided to exercise his money and muscle power to the poor family of Urirei. His evil plan takes in the shape of fire. Urirei's house was set ablaze by some boys who were roaming in the locality for the preparation of Holi festival.

“As the festival of Holi was drawing near he sent his followers who got in touch with young boys roaming about in preparation for the Holi and set fire the house of Urirei at the dead of the night.” (40) This shows that the habit and nature of evil minded people will never change. Like today, the evil people in the past have the same thought.

To render help to those who are in need has always been a great virtue of Manipuri people. This act seems to take place like a culture in the society of Manipur; one could see people helping each other in the times of sorrow, happiness and vice- versa. Unlike olden days, a person of today usually takes pleasure at the sorrow of others and satisfies themselves with fake sorrow in their faces hiding their excitement in their heart. But, in the olden days people usually helps themselves not only from their own community but also render help to the people from another community especially outsiders.

“Quite surprised, Biren looked about and saw a man buried alive up to the waist! The two friends rushed to the spot, dug up the earth and dragged the man up.” (60) Helping someone in times of danger is thought and believed to be a great service by the people of Manipur. This culture has always been preserved from the olden days and is followed even today.

The marriage culture of a typical Meitei marriage is beautifully crafted by the author. The movement of the bridegroom, the behaviour of the people is shown. At a particular stage in the novel it seems like the vivid image of a real marriage is felt. The power of the words deployed by the author is to such extent that the excitement, joy and happiness if felt.

“As the right time came, the bridegroom moved like an elephant at a slow pace and took his seat on the marriage dais. Dhiren went in to serve his friend. By then, the crowd of spectators got themselves quite busy. They took betel-nut by the right hand, held smoking pipe by the left and looked at the bridegroom.” (86) The above lines beautifully describe a typical Manipuri marriage scene and the part played by groom, his friends and the people attending the ceremony.

Religion takes an important place while discussing about a particular community. Likewise, in Manipur religion occupies an important place. The likes of the devotion and faith in God to that of ceremonial marriage is shown beautifully in the novel.

"There was noise in the lanes and by lanes and this party did away with the solitude of night. Early-rising birds began to chirp. Everyone was ready to go to the place of worship." (9) These lines show the never ending joy of the people who were going for the worship of Mahadeva. The place is located at the high hill of Baruni, so people have to wake up early in the morning to start their journey. Going together in pairs or groups with lovers, siblings, friends and family members is worth speaking.

"The young ones lay down before the Lord and prayed with complete abandon. They put sindoor on their foreheads. Urirei prayed:

*If born as flowers
Let us bloom on the same stem;
If born as birds
Let us sit on the same branch;
If born as plants,
Let us coil as creepers."* (18)

The bond of faith in Lord is shown beautifully with the grace of prayers upon the lord. A likely marriage ceremony is held in front of the lord by putting sindoor on their foreheads. After a while the beloved chants a mesmerising form of poem before the lord and seems to ask Lord to give such a boon.

A typical Hindu-Meitei marriage ceremony is crafted in the ending part of the novel to show the type of marriage system prevalent in the society during the author's time.

"Apprehending that he might miss the *dakshina*, the Brahmin priest was extremely annoyed; he said, "This is something very untoward."" (87) Marriage is a beautiful religious ceremony where two souls are to be bound together for the rest of eternal journey. The performer of the marriage rituals should be also truly devoted to their task irrespective of the situation. Not all the performers are truly devoted but sometimes one could find greedy persons. The above lines clearly show that the Brahmin (performer of a marriage ritual) was merely performing religious occasion for the sake of receiving *dakshina* (reward).

Conclusion:

Thus, the author beautifully portrays the kind of society which was there in his time. The way people treat each other, the social and religious tradition of the people is also depicted in the novel. Love, hatred, sacrifice, friendship and religion are some of the main features in the novel. Kamal wrote the novel in simple yet promising and powerful words that the readers are often brought to his world at that point while reading it. The portrayal of each character in the novel gives the readers the true taste of the typical Manipuri society. Further,

one could see the change in culture due to the mixing up of various communities in the state and the evolution of religion could also be seen clearly in the novel. It will be right to proclaim as a Classic Manipuri novel.

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