
Vasudaiv Kutumbakum in the Writings of Sarala Barnabas: A Study of the Strategy of Transpositioning in *The Rainbow* and *the Covenant*

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Abstract:

The concept of Vasudaiv Kutumbakum is the belief that the whole of creation belongs to one family. This idea of a Universal family necessitates a narrative that brings together people of all beliefs, cultures and ethnicities. These kinds of narratives could be called narratives of integration as opposed to narratives of segregation.

An attempt has been made, in this paper, to demonstrate one of the methods of narrative design by which a writer could transform a peculiar narrative of segregation that existed earlier into a narrative of integration. Therefore, the paper examines the art of using the narrative strategy of transposition employed by Sarala Barnabas in her novel

The Rainbow and the Covenant. The basic theories, principles and methods of narratology, narrative analysis and narrative discourse by Gerald Genette, Gerald Prince, Mieke Bal, Shlomith Rimmon Kean, etc. have been referred to. The present paper focuses on one of the several narrative strategies used in like manner. This is significant from the pedagogical point of view in terms of contemporary post-colonial studies and studies of memoirs and legends.

Keywords: #Sarala Barnabas #The Rainbow and the Covenant #flood myths #narrative transpositions #Vasudaiv Kutumbakum #narrative analysis #narrative discourse #narratology

Introduction:

Literature has been known to be an expression of society since time immemorial. It would describe its world or would present it in its more desirable forms or probable ignoble forms. Poets and artists were referred to as seers because of their ability to present the aspects of the world that were hidden to the common mind. Applying this poignant potential to the art of writing fiction, one can safely assume that contemporary fiction would collectively represent society in its varied manifestations and direct into it a peculiar dynamism, breathing into the work of art its own life force. In this paper, I am presenting the representation and juxtaposition of two opposing energies, one that resisted multiculturalism and the other that encouraged multiculturalism, in the novel *The Rainbow and the Covenant* by Sarla Barnabas.

One of the major forces of resistance to multiculturalism in narratives is found within certain stories embedded in folklore and legends. Some of these folklore and legends present an archetypal pattern that goes against multiculturalism. However, the archetypal pattern of segregation can be modified by narrative design in a subtle manner to create another pattern that encourages cultural integration in contemporary literary expressions.

There are signifiers in the narratives that, when seen as associated with cultural artefacts or entwined with the narratives of folklore or legends, recur in fiction at different points in time. These particular signifiers accumulate meanings and interpretations over time in passing social contexts. Thus, with every recurrence in fiction they imbibe the narrative with different kinds of identity locators or tracers. Thus, depending on the stance taken by such signifiers within the narrative, they may point towards the signified identity that is displaced many times over or distorted or skewed away from its original or primal signified.

The selected novel dips into the cultural backdrop of the writers and rewrites the stories of individuals who, through their characters, bring about integration among diversity. Through a narrative analysis of the selected novel, an attempt has been made to identify the different methods of narrative design that explicitly or implicitly draw on symbols or patterns and evolve their own dynamic movement within the multicultural rubric.

Literature review:

Research on the narrative analysis of fiction has been done over the years on a large scale, however, for the present study the application of these narrative theories from the perspective

of creation of ideology will be considered. The concept of what is a nation, the fluidity of the concept of a nation, thinking beyond the concept of a nation are the topics discussed in the article titled *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and feeling beyond the nation*. Among those who have provided the concepts and methods of narrative analysis, Gerald Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* is the most exhaustive but gives the definitions of the many aspects of a narrative for analysis. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's work titled *Narrative Fiction: A contemporary Poetics* is more contemporary. She mentions the methods used by Todorov to study narrative syntax and equilibrium of events. In the article *Understanding Narrative Hermeneutics*, Brockmeier and Meretoja demonstrate that 'human understanding is mediated through social circumstances and language... the matrix of which is always in flux... every act of understanding is singular...all our interpretations are reinterpretations. According to narrative hermeneutics, interpretations not only have a bearing on how we act and interact, constituting frameworks of intelligibility and action- with new interpretations creating new possibilities of action.' (Genette) (Shlomith) (Meretoja 2014)

Method:

The aspects of narrative analysis include deciphering the underlying schema of the narrative. This is in line with the hypothesis that the selected novel has employed narrative techniques that render it as a narrative of integration in contrast to the narrative of segregation in the legend it alludes to. Among the various narrative strategies used towards the same objective, this paper focuses on the transpositions of characters, gender and names, actants, etc.

Observation:

A. The story of the novel:

(i) The selected novel is a narrative that conveys strategies of inclusion, exclusion and integration that are contained in written and oral texts such as legends and memoirs. These objects communicate cultural histories. They tell at once the Grand narrative of the community, the family, and the polyphonic stories of the people. They also render a distinctive dynamic role to the archetypal symbols, rituals, stories and legends from the communities' pasts.

(ii) The novel deals with the theme of integrating families, communities, and religious and national groups. It renders a different perspective to the narrative structure that lends new approaches to the portrayal of the characters and their quest for harmonious living in a multicultural setting that attempts to unite the familial relationships that were severed and rendered bitter by collective nationalist, religious, political movements in their aftermath.

The Rainbow and the Covenant is a narrative wound around the efforts of a patriarchal figure Akbar Khan, to search for his kin that were long lost. He was the descendant of Sikandar Khan, who after his association with the missionary Andrew McFarlane was inspired to take on the religion of Christianity. The people of his community sought to kill him for the apparent betrayal of his faith. His father Bakhtawar Khan helped him to escape. Akbar Khan, now wants to search for his kin among the severed clan of Bakhtawar Khan. His search informs him that Bakhtawar Khan was close to the then nawabs and his descendants had also established familial relations with them. He discovers Farhat, the heir of nawabs who had lost their privy purse after independence through Mark, his son-in-law. He offers medical aid to his ailing daughter whose surgery he could not afford. Akbar Khan met a young waiter Salim at the hotel that he was resting in and through various events that occurred he discovered that Salim was a descendant of Barkat Ali a descendant of Bakhtawar Khan. He learns that Bakhtawar Khan's son Rizwan had participated in the uprising of 1857. The anger of the British against the treason led to the killing of the young generation of that time. The clan fled in different directions to save their lives. The daughter of the nawab's Turkish wife was married to Bakhtawar Khan this, linking Farhat and Akbar Khan in a familial relationship.

Thus, the novel tells a story of a family torn apart because of conflicts between religions and nationalities. The desire to write a memoir inspired Akbar Khan to bring them all together again after generations had passed. The narratives of segregation were transformed into narratives of integration, through acts of forgiveness, compassion and generosity, in the large extended family that Akbar Khan discovered.

B. The aspects of the legend it alludes to:

The novel has been analyzed to discover the explicit and implicit strategies involved in displaying the narratives of the legends they allude to. These in turn help to assimilate the ways in which the narratives of the selected novels build on the theme of cultural integration as opposed to the original theme of cultural segregation in the legend.

(i)The title:

The combination of the words 'Rainbow' and 'Covenant' in the title are immediately denotative of the legend of Noah's flood. The legend of the flood is an archetypal myth of the deluge that can be found in many cultures around the world. The Matsya Purana talks about the flood of Manu and the Saptrishi who escaped in a boat, the Sumerian myths have their own version of the enki and the flood. The flood involving the ark of prophet Noah occurs in

different version in the Jewish and Muslim tradition. However, as the symbol of the 'Rainbow' and the concept of the 'Covenant' is found in the Christian biblical account of the flood, and, moreover, the entire narrative related to Akbar Khan is located in a Christian context, the flood narrative is taken for analysis from the Christian biblical version of the flood. Thus, the title of the novel alludes to the legend of the prophet Noah and the deluge of forty days that destroyed the world except for Noah's family in the ark.

(ii) The patriarchal responsibility:

The story of the flood is that in the times that the prophet Noah lived, the world was full of 'unrighteousness'. Mankind was shown to follow 'evil ways' except for the god fearing Noah. Therefore, he was assigned by God to warn the people to mend their ways or they would be destroyed by a huge flood.

(iii) The narrative of segregation:

At the end of the appointed time, Noah was asked to board the huge Ark that he had been constructing in the meanwhile, along with his wife, three sons, their wives and a pair of every animal species. Once they were secured in the Ark, the legend says that, God sent a 40 days long deluge that wiped out every living thing in the world.

(iv) The hint of hope:

The Biblical account states that God was grieved to see the situation and made a covenant with prophet Noah never to destroy the earth by flood again. The rainbow was then put in place in the sky as a symbol of the promise made by God to Noah and in extension to mankind that the earth would never be destroyed by water again.

C. The strategy of Transpositions:

(i) The Title

The title of the novel derives from the words as recorded in the biblical account of the flood. This account of the text in the biblical narrative becomes the hypotext of the title 'The Rainbow and the Covenant'. The reference to the Rainbow and the Covenant is made in the narrative of the novel without mentioning the flood or the Prophet Noah. A single comment about the Rainbow in the Covenant is made at the end of the narrative of the novel at the end of the epilogue. "Across the sky was a rainbow of such perfection as he had never seen before, ... Token of the covenant given to man. How meaningful that covenant has been to me and mine from Sikandar Khan down." Thus the phrase 'the Rainbow and the Covenant' becomes an allusion to the hypotext in the title of the novel as a kind of pastiche.

(ii) The plot: the conflict and the denouement

(a) The legend of the flood has a narrative that can be described in two parts. The first part that is the narrative of segregation / disintegration and the second where God puts down his bow in the sky as the sign of his promise to never again bring such world scale destruction again. In this narrative the contention that led to the conflict was communal in the sense that it divided the 'world into righteous and unrighteous.' The punishment for non-adherence was death. The hypotext is the narrative of segregation / integration where death is a punishment for not confirming or not surrendering to a central power, in this case, a particular idea of God. The denouement was that only those faithful to the god were saved and in the case of the narrative of the hypotext, a single family, Noah's family was saved.

The second section of this particular narrative reverses the idea of punishment by death and establishes a covenant with the symbol of a rainbow. God sets down his bow that can be seen as similar to a war now, as a token of ceasing all anger accompanied with a promise to never again destroy all life with flood.

(b) Considering the narrative in the diegetic text, that is, Akbar Khan writing the memoir of the Khan clan, one finds the diegesis is shifted to two situations. The narrative contains within it two stories. One is the main story of Sikandar Khan and the other is the story of Akbar Khan, his descendant.

The idea of a limited family saved in the Ark in the hypotext is transposed into a very large extended family encompassing members from different nationalities and religious faith. The sons in law who are the representatives or transpositions of the daughters in law of Noah belong to different nationalities. The extended family of lost kin, the clan of Barkat Ali belongs to a different religious faith whose ancestors would once have killed their brother in the name of religion. The grandson, Salim is drawn closer into the 'Ark'. Thus, the 'Ark' of the hypotext that closed itself against the 'other' community in the diegesis opens itself and invites and brings into its security a large multicultural gathering.

(c) The objects: The Ark and the Memoir:

The 'Ark' in the legend came into existence to safeguard only those who adhered to the principles of a particular group/ community. The rest were destroyed. The popular narrative of the legend shows that a family of eight survived.

The comparable actant in the narrative of the novel is the 'Memoir,' a book in which the records of the family, their memories, would be maintained. The physicality of the object, the Ark, has

been transposed to another object, the memoir that would contain and preserve, not the physical existence of the family but their stories as memories. The memoir, in contrast to the Ark, is expands to include all the kin that Akbar Khan could locate.

The Ark is comparable to the function of a cultural artefact or a monument

(d) Genders and their names:

There is a striking parallel to family structure and the patriarch in the narrative in three situations. The author Sarala Barnabas' father Rev. Dr. Bhaskar Pandurang Hivale was the visionary founder of Ahmednagar College against great odds in 1947. He had three daughters, in the traditional conservative sense, no male heir. His sons-in-law and family took on the responsibility to take up sides with his daughters and continued to expand and strengthen the educational institute.

The case of how Akbar Khan's sons and daughters are treated in the narrative is interesting when seen as a reflection of Rev. Dr. B. P. Hivale's family. Akbar Khan has three daughters and two sons. All the members of the family have names that are used by people belonging to the Muslim community, such as Akbar, Ayesha, Ruksana, thus binding them into a different closer system in contrast to the names of his sons David and Andrew that are more popular among the Christian community. This narrative design throws a very peculiar light on the understanding of the role of the characters. Throughout the narrative Akbar Khan's sons do not play much of a role. It is his daughters and his sons-in-laws who stand by him in his search for roots for his memoir.

Parallel to this association is the transposition of the genders in the narrative of Noah's legend in which Noah had three 'righteous' sons who were saved in the Ark along with their wives. However, in the novel, genders are transposed and we have Akbar Khan with three daughters and their husbands helping Akbar Khan write his memoir.

(e) A metanarrative:

This transposition of the Ark into an expandable memoir performs itself like a metanarrative about the work done by literature, or the act of writing a narrative, history, a story. Literature can by itself either break the world with narratives of segregation or bind the world in narratives of integration.

Conclusion:

Thus, the archetypal stories and legends from the communities' past are given a dynamic role to play in the new social context of polyphonic voices and multicultural societies. The

archetypal pattern is made inclusive instead of exclusive. The conflict of the plot is brought about due to the narrative of segregation promoted in the community's cultural past. The narrative structure of the contemporary novel provides an allusion to the earlier narrative of segregation and also provides the denouement through narrative strategies that render them into narratives of integration. Thus, fulfilling the requirements of being a part of the 'Vasudaiv Kutumbakum.'

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