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CHARACTERISING LITERARY FOIL SERVING PERSONAS IN “HINGCHABIGI WARI”: EXPLORING VAL PLUMWOOD’S “INCORPORATION” THEORY

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ABSTRACT

Extending critical analysis, this paper delivers a study on the affairs concerning the folktale, “Hingchabigi Wari” in Huiem Behari Singh’s *A study of Manipuri Meitei Folklore*. The critical intent of this paper is centralized on imposing exertion of Val Plumwood’s theory of “incorporation” on the folktale. The study pursues explication of the relationships between the characters serving the literary foil.

Keywords: Folktale, Manipur, Incorporation, Foil, Dualism

INTRODUCTION

What does “incorporation” in *Feminism and the mastery of nature* entail?

Dating back to the theory of dualism in Ferdinand de Saussure’s Structuralism, the framework of *Feminism and the mastery of nature* facilitates lines of argumentation that draw negative account of the construct of the conventional western theory of dualism. Val Plumwood offers a challenge to the western theory of dualism in her *Feminism and the mastery of nature*; contriving theories like “backgrounding,” “denial of dependency,” “hyperseparation,” “incorporation” and so on.

The conventional western theory of dualism appertains to the configuration of binary oppositions. The dualism theory is conceived with the hierarchal structure; which involves two terms- the first being superior and the second inferior. A dualistic pair- masters/slaves serves a typical exemplar- the first term men stand superior to the women of the second term. With reference to the dualism, narratives are polarised into two terms of hierarchy. However, Val Plumwood deconstructs the theory of dualism in her *Feminism and the mastery of nature*.

“The master’s power is reflected in the fact that his qualities are taken as primary, and as defining social value, while those of the slave are defined or constrained in relation to them, often as negations or lacks of the virtues of the centre (Hartsock 1990:161)”¹

Plumwood’s theory of “incorporation” initiates a supply of critical understanding of dualism. As a matter of fact, the “incorporation” exposes substantial approach of the theory of dualism. It is construed that in the configuration of dualism, the “underside of the dualistically conceived pair”² (the inferior second term), is identified in relation to the superior first term. The identification of the first term is established based on the “underside” second term. The logic affecting the theory of “incorporation” is the apprehension that the inferior second term is inferiorised and considered “other” from the standpoint of the “self” in the superior first term. Despite being the fact that each term depends on the other for identity, the dualistic relationship fails to account for equally relational pair. The dualistic relationship is designed to cast primary and superior values on the first term figure; which is infact acquired by inferiorising the figure in the second term. Casting contrasting values on the two figures occupying the space of the first and the second terms, but in requirement of independence and equality with respect to the fact that the space of the first and the second terms are a construct from the “self” standpoint (the first term) rendering the space of the second term as the “other”. The “incorporation” reflects that the identification of the other based on the self on account of lacking the values of the self on the other is a case of “incorporation.” The space of the “other” is contrived to serve the purpose of literary foil. In dualisms- “men/women” and “masters/slaves”, “women” and “slaves” are foils to the primary figures of the first terms “men” and “masters.”

“In any narrative, a foil is a character who contrasts with another character, typically, a character who contrasts with the protagonist, in order to better highlight or differentiate certain qualities of the protagonist.”³

Studying Literary Foil Serving Personae in “Hingchabigi Wari” using “incorporation”

As a prevalent stock plot structure in folktales, “Hingchabigi Wari” concerns a fictional plot structure. The narrative dwells on a domestic setting, concerning the characters- father, daughter, step-mother (Wasareima) and a demoness mother. In the folktale, a man marries twice and he has a daughter from her first wife. The second wife is the daughter of a demoness. The climax of the story is heightened when the second wife who is the step-mother to the daughter, attempts to kill the daughter. On an attempt to put the life of her step-daughter to an end, she sends her step-daughter to the demoness mother under the pretext that she hands over a letter to the demoness for her. However, contradictory to her expectation, the story unfolds the death of the demoness occasioned by the step-daughter’s clever use of her knowledge. Conclusively, the story reveals that Wasareima dies at the hands of her husband as he learns about the incident from his daughter.

Applying the theory of dualism, the dualistic pairs from the narrative are- step-mother/daughter, demoness/daughter and father/step-mother. The dualistic relationships considering the context that in “step-mother/daughter” and “demoness/ daughter”, the psychological intent of the step-

¹ *Feminism and the mastery of nature*, pg. no.52

² Val Plumwood, *Dualism: the logic of colonisation. Feminism and the mastery of nature*. Pg.no.52

³ Auger, Peter, *The Anthem Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory*, (August 2010) pg..114

mother and the demoness of killing her daughter renders the placement. Moreover, in “father/step-mother”, regardless of the grounds and reason, the psychological consciousness of the father figure of his own physical capacity to kill his second wife, renders him the position of father.

“Dualistic distinction aims to maximise the number, scope, or significance of distinguishing characteristics. It does not do this in a random way, but usually by classifying characteristics as belonging exclusively, as far as possible, to one side or the other, thus setting up sets of complementary qualities formed through exclusion and denial of overlap.”⁴

Contemplating on the drawn dualistic pairs- “step-mother/daughter,” “demoness/daughter” and “father/step-mother,” considering Plumwood’s understanding of dualism, the dualistic pairs- “step-mother/daughter” and “demoness/daughter” in the narrative convey that the daughter in the second terms of the two dualisms is excluded by the first terms as the character “daughter” is not a biological daughter of the step-mother (Wasareima), which implies that the “daughter” is identified as the “other” by her step-mother (self) and the values and qualities of a “daughter” is denied of overlapping her own. Having applied the same principle, in ‘demoness/daughter,’ the “daughter” is identified as the “other” by the demoness (self) on the account of her being vulnerable, who is made availed to her disposal and consequently, excluded as the qualities and values of the daughter is denied of overlapping the demoness’. Moreover, in ‘father/step-mother,’ the interpretation facilitates that the father figure excludes the step-mother as the “other” to his “self”, considering the attempts to kill his daughter. Hence, she is denied of overlapping the qualities of the father (self).

As the polarised dualistic relation renders that the maximisation of distinction in dualism is based on classified characteristics and setting up complementary values, the step-mother and daughter representing all step-mother and daughters in the world, the “step-mother/daughter” in general terms can be construed that step-mother and daughters share no blood for which daughters are generally excluded as the “other” by the step-mother who is the “self” in the dualism. Likewise, in “demoness/daughter”, demoness representing demoness in general context bears no shared values and qualities with normal child like the “daughter”, for which she is the “other” to the demoness “self” and hence, she is bound to get attacked. Additionally, the same principle may be extended to the “father/step-mother” in the context of the narrative. When the conditioned relationship between the father and the step-mother at the end of the story is extended to a general context, generally, the step-mother of such sort is bound to be considered the “other” by the father “self” as any father figure would exert their capacity to put the life of his second wife to an end if she attempts to kill his daughter.

Conveying the dualisms, “step-mother/daughter,” “demoness/daughter” and “father/step-mother” in the context of Plumwood’s “incorporation,” it can be interpreted that in the narrative, the character daughter is identified and differentiated in relation to the step-mother. The detrimental intent of the step-mother to kill the daughter exposes the identity of the daughter as to what a step-daughter is to a step-mother. The life of the daughter is availed at the disposal of the step-mother; which renders her the position of the first term. The narrative suggests that the character of the step-mother is configured and defined based on its inferiorisation of the character “daughter” in the second term. It infact, effectively draws the conclusion that “the definition of the other in relation to the self as a lack or absence is a special case of incorporation, defining the other only in relation to the self, or the self’s

⁴ *Feminism and the mastery of nature*, pg. no. 50

needs and desires.”⁵ Extending the same principle to the “demoness/daughter” and “father/step-mother,” regarding “demoness/ daughter”, the daughter in the second term is defined in the narrative based exclusively on the demoness as to what a vulnerable child is to a demoness, which is infact based on inferiorisation of the second term “daughter.” Moreover, in “father/step-mother,” the step-mother is identified exclusively in relation to the father as to what really is a step-mother, the second wife to a father and a husband when his daughter is attacked to be killed by the one.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted settles on the fact that the first terms are defined, identified, distinctly differentiated based on inferiorisation of the second terms and on defining the second terms as the “other” from the “self” (first terms) standpoint. It unfolds that the narrative takes the detrimental intentions of the antagonists as the focal point and the study suggests that the characters in the second terms are a construct that are structured to render contrasting values and qualities of the first terms. The study conclusively, extends an inference that the second terms serve as literary foils to the first terms as the second terms are configured to highlight the qualities of the first terms in the narrative. The experiment effectively characterises the daughter, the step-mother, the daughter as literary foils in dualistic relation to the step-mother, the father and the demoness respectively, as in terms of dualistic expression- (step-mother/daughter), (father/step-mother) and (demoness/the daughter).

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⁵ *Feminism and the mastery of nature*.pg.no. 52