

Symbolistic Significance of Indira Goswami's Pages stained with Blood

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Abstract: *The paper studies the symbolism and ideas concerning the novel by Indira Goswami's "Pages stained with Blood". Symbols are the abstract ideas which represent the story from their literal meaning. The author's words in her blurb provides a clue, by calling it as her pages from her diary which contains the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 that took place in Delhi, following the assassination of Indira Gandhi. However, the author repeatedly goes back to the history of Delhi, its places, events and people, connecting the past and present on one hand and the multiple narratives on the other in an intricate manner. Several elements of the novel have proved to be realistic.*

Key Words: *Delhi, blood, violence, narrative, symbolism.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The story is in the form of a diary of a young Assamese woman who teaches at the University of Delhi and is an author. She keeps writing a book on the events of Delhi and frequently records her first hand experiences of the violence in Delhi. The novel deals with the anti-Sikh riot of 1984, where the Operation Blue Star at the Golden Temple in Amritsar graces with sudden twist and turns to the novel and the protagonist plunges headlong into the crisis since most of the people she is close to are Sikhs.

While studying in Delhi, the author witnessed some of the tragic and fearful days of her life. The house where she used to stay during her university times was near to the Roshanara Garden which was a shelter to the local thieves and goons. It is as said during the daytime the places belong to the elder writers who performed the 'Ram-charit Manash' for the people.

The main characters of the novel are Guru Hanumanta, Sikh driver Santokh Singh, Balbir Raddiwala and brigadier Mansingh. Kaikaus Burjhur is a close friend from her university. Guru Hanumanta gifted her a handwoven floral designed shawl before she left, while she kept it safely with her one of those valuable things. She used to go to university with Santokh Singh in his three-wheelers. Santokh Singh began to fell in love with her while paying off his duty regularly, but the narrator did not accept his feelings. Since she thought of him as a brother and calls him 'bhaiya' every time. But lately she realized too develops her feelings for him. Once, Singh comes drunk to her room unconsciously, while behaving awkwardly. The narrator could not tolerate his actions drew him chasing him away from her room. After while he never visited her again which she feel bad for him. This turned to some gloomy nights when the narrator started searching for him in the 'galis' or narrow paths of drunkards' and wine shops.

Balbir Raddiwala come to her house on regular basis, used to collect his things kept in her balcony, while some of them he would gift her too. He used to have his evening 'chai and biscuit' at her place. Balbir also kept two of his boxes full of books with her at her place.

Next the narrator met Brigadier Mansingh at the Calcutta Airport, since both of them miss their connecting flight. That night she had to spend the night at the lounge. But then brigadier find her a room to stay the night. Brigadier resembles Burt Lancaster, the American actor, dark and wiry. One evening while staying in Delhi, he brings her a bouquet of red roses. It makes her feel wonderful and she used that knowledge in her stories.

Another character in the novel was Sikh Baba, who was a refugee. In 1947, three buses left for Dera Ismail for Delhi. It was then that his daughter Kuldeep Kaur vanished. Kuldeep was murdered and her corpse was found a week later in a wheat field in Khankhana. The attack started on 7 September, 1947. Sikh Baba was taken to the field to identify the body. She had no clothes on her body; her breasts had been cut off and hung on a peepal tree. Baba had not spoken since that day.

Another important part of the novel is the surge of prostitution of Delhi. The narrator visited this places in order to know these women and their characters for detailed analysis. At that time of the year, Punjab was terrorified with violent environment due to the attack of terrorists. Even they attacked on the Golden Temple. And that is the time when Sikh Army assassinated India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by gunshot so closely. After this, Sikh Movement started off in Delhi. They have ruined the paths of Sikhs and burnt them. The entire Delhi was stained with blood and tears. Everywhere there is the smell of burning man. Meanwhile, the corpse of Santokh Singh was lying there and Balbir was

lost. His son was killed and his eyes are taken out by sword. . At last, her book gets drenched in Santokh Singh's blood and she loses all her recorded material.

One by one, everyone left the narrator alone, atlast Mansingh too left for China for his own cause.

2. THEMES AND SYMBOLISMS OF THE NOVEL :

The Thin Line between Fact and Fiction

The novel depicted the character of a memoir, and often the protagonist is identified as Indira Goswami. It is seen that there is no instances of the differences between fact and fiction is present in the novel. The narrator has several other similarities with the author herself, but this is a 'work of fiction' and so it is remembered as a fictional novel. Especially since the protagonist obsesses on her notebook and a large part of the novel is taken up by her running to get it, taking it out, carrying it, picking it up, dropping it, opening it and sometimes, even writing in it. The happenings and tremors are though factual, but author did not commit that it was her.

Sexuality in a conservative Assamese society

The novel depicted a lot of sexual inferences between the narrator and the characters present in the novel. In the greater conservative Assamese society, the term sexuality may consider a derogatory term which created commotion to the frank confession of sexual attraction of the first-person narrator feels to Santokh Singh who is the rickshaw puller, with whom she visits the riot-affected areas such as Jahangirpuri in Shakti Nagar. The narrator's perspective speaks of considering a number of male admirers while she keeps in touch with them in order to sharpen her writing skills. She collects narratives from her male companion. She addresses that her feelings and acknowledgement of her sexual desires were clear and open. There is this 'deep impossible urge inside me to study men so that I can portray them correctly in my novels,' ... 'I want to analyse a man's mental world and use that knowledge in my stories.' Of course, the men don't know that, she explains. We are constantly reminded that Santokh Singh is prepared to even jump into a fire for her and she knew that he was ready to sacrifice his life for her. She too admires him as she responded 'His sweat drenched shirt let out a whiff I found very manly.' Sometimes, the treatment is more subtle. 'Brigadier Mansingh again looked me over with those Jung Bahadur eyes, those glowing orbs that pierced my flesh wherever they fell. I could feel a constriction in my chest.' Her response, 'I didn't know why but I felt as if two streams were about to start flowing from my eyes.'

Delhi

The Delhi of 1984 has witnessed the most tragic and intense days which became an important part in the novel. The book is about Delhi and its adjoining places. The narrator enlisted every diligent detail of the events took place in the Delhi of 1984, the protagonist explains all of the minute experiences which she jots down in her diary including the riots following Indira Gandhi's assassination. She meets people along the way, telling her stories, falling in love with her and showing her new aspects of the city. The author attempts to showcase all of the major events of immense political and social crisis, the narrator tries to complete her book by visiting various places such as Mirza Ghalib's house, the prostitutes of GB Road, the famous red light area of Delhi. Usually, her preoccupation is to study the remains of Mughal Delhi and the Delhi of the dispossessed. The Delhi riot is a serious attempt at reconstructing the traumatic experiences of a minority community suffering at the hands of the majority population in an independent country.

Blood

The title of the novel itself suggests blood as an intense metaphor and presence in the novel. The anti-Sikh riot presents a painful scenario of lost lives and humanity. All the hair-raising accounts of the riot-affected areas in Delhi are presented within the horrors and bloodshed in the narrative provides a contrast that intensifies the effect through a contradiction created on the other. Blood signifies violence which she determines about the war, killings and the Anti-Sikh riots of Delhi. The interconnection between the horror and bloodshed stories from the past and 1984 provides a diachronic continuity to the dark pages of human history.

Dr. Goswami's 'Pages Stained with Blood' is remarkable for its depiction of violence and riots that had overwhelmed Delhi in 1984. She has written from her personal and real life events within realistic imagery. The harsh reality of the people and their communal activities like murder, killing, bombing, raid, operations and destruction 'spread over Delhi like the shadow cast by vultures on a corpse' (Goswami, 2001, p. 89) There were many loses, of both man and women and materials. These violent activities gradually spread over the neighbouring states of Punjab, Haryana and Kashmir. The author writes the terrible and horrific scenario as:

'...Killings and more killings! heaps of used cartridges. Some villagers are etched in my mind, too deep to be wiped away. The bodies of woman, her child and old man, caught in the crossfire of... riddled with bullets... a soldier... blown apart by the explosion, pieces of his flesh flying up could be seen from a distance. I could not help imaging the contorted look on the face of the soldier, the hazy image haunting me for a long time.' (Goswami, 2001, p. 109) The novel also depict historical events and have portrayed the society around them in general and the Sikh history of a very crucial time in particular. In 'Pages Stained with Blood' presents a series of vignettes of broken lives and blighted

hopes culminating in the murderous violence and fury of 1984 riots in Delhi. An attempt has been made to discern and discuss the bare-facts of history of the Anti-Sikh Riot, together with the root of its movement in the historical perspective and sequence and the impact that it had in context of socio-political conditions in India. The idea is to know how these bare facts of history are delineated by author of international fame. The three days between the 1st and 3rd November, 1984 saw Delhi engulfed in flames in an unprecedented wave of violence which left more than 2000 of its Sikh citizens dead. The charred remains of the corpses, the burnt out shells of houses, and 50,000 people uprooted and traumatized in horror and agony huddled together in the relief camps are a scar in the history of India and this finds a reflection in this novel. In *Pages Stained with Blood* portrayed the deceit, cruelty and injustice of anti-Sikh riot of 1984. The prelude to the eruption of blood-mad-violence is built by reminiscences of the horror of partition and glimpses of the human wrecks it has left behind. Old Delhi with her crooked byways and historic memories whisper to the author of similar cruelty and betrayal and violence down the ages as she restlessly explores its obscure nooks in her obsessive quest for expiation. She seeks to confront and record unflinchingly the most terrible and painful images of man's inhumanity to man.

The experiences are remembered for the fact they have created in the mind of the author. In the narrative, the narrator makes use of the several strategies to create her memories, such as seeing the historical sites and hearing the voices from the historical past, listening to their stories from people, reading about historical incidents.

3. CONCLUSION:

'Pages stained with blood' as a narrative is an unfulfilled desire and unaccomplished project. The collision of stories of romanticism, horror and bloodshed in the narrative provides a contrast that intensifies the effect through a contradiction created on the other. The narrator's contact with the characters develops through usual day-to-day activities that any normal person would develop in a society. It is this remarkable uncertainty and lack of completeness on the one hand and optimism on the other that makes 'Pages stained with Blood' an important narrative of the Assamese Fiction.

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