

The individual against the society, feminism and experimentalism in the short story “PRASHN” (The question) by Gajanan Madhav Muktibhod

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Abstract

This story “Prashn” (The question) by Gajanan MadhavMuktibhod is a masterfully executed short story. This paper explores the story from the aspect of the experimental narrative style, theme of the individual against the society and feminism. The analysis has been done by showing that all these three aspects are actually a unity and how the integration of style and themes perfectly, heightens the experience and the message delivered.

Key words: Experimentalism, Narrative style, society, individualism, unity of a story, integration of elements, message and heightening of experience.

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Introduction

Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh was a great innovator in literature and is one of the greatest modern writers in Hindi. In this story called “Prashn”. He weaves a masterful story that explores the themes of the society against the individual and feminism. In the following all these aspects are analyzed along with his innovative, experimental narrative style.

The plot and the narrative style that expresses experimentalism

The story Prashn (The question) by Gajanan Madhav Muktibhod is a focused lens on the aspects of the private individual and living soul against the judgment, often blind, of society. At the same time the story addresses the issue of feminism in an indirect way. All this is achieved in a story where the narrative style itself is not presented in a normal evocative way. Instead the

whole narrative style is presented in a heightened way. The starting of the story itself is presented as a pursuit, but the pursuit is in the mind of the character Narendra Kumar. He has been teased in school, his friends pointing fingers at his mother for having an affair with the uncle.

The boy is deeply shaken and is running with a question for his mother. But Gajanan Madhav Muktibhod makes the running look like actual running or as someone chasing the boy. That is the thing that is really experimental narrative style and is a powerful device that both express the truth of the mental state and in heightened terms. The reader is left actually experiencing the agony of the boy from the inside. He identifies and the heightened emotion reaches horrific levels.

To communicate the inner world in external, sensory ways was the masterly genius of Gajanan Madhav Muktibhod that will be appreciated and studied for years and decades to come. His is a foreshadowing of the intensity of experiencing and the style that is needed to bring that intensity into experiential reality. Gajanan Madhav Muktibhod perfected that art. His style was ingrained in him and expresses his own deepest self and experiencing style.

The physical descriptions of the “fallen woman” but shown with tenderness and beauty as Narendra comes home is remarkable as a contrast and here the story is a like a twist, an inner twist. The fallen woman is shown to be beautiful, serene and loving. How can that be?

The introspective passages of Susheela, in which Susheela recalls how she happened to have that affair, after her son confronts her, is again expressed in a way that makes the reader *see* her emotional state and conflict, her agony and the bewildering question she wants to ask society- “How am I wrong?”

Then her physically going and taking her son with total care and concern in her lap and expressing herself is that final redemption for her and her son who realizes the purity of the individual and the blindness of society. The effect of her honesty and courage, on him, is so strong that that blinding vision makes him an artist and a social reformer spreading the light given by that one incident!! That is the genius of short story writing of Gajanan Madhav Muktibhod . The experimental, narrative style integrates perfectly with the profound theme of individual against the society and also feminism.

The individual against the society in the story

For centuries a battle has raged between the individual and the social mores, traditions and expectations. The issue of good and bad from this angle has been the theme of writer after writer for ages.

Each writer approaches this issue in his own original, unique way that depends on his way of experiencing this theme in life and his creative power, his sensitivity, his ability to experience life from the inside and his genius to express that original voice in masterly words.

Gajanan Madhav Muktibhod expresses that conflict in such a heartrending way that that very “fallen woman” rises in our eyes and we see the cruelty in a stark way, in a way that becomes inescapable. That is the power of integration of theme and story writing style.

At last it is seen by Narendra and the reader that what is needed is courage. Meekness is the thing killing the spirit of the individual and making him living dead. The light that is needed is precisely the individual courage to confront society with the good. Susheela tells Narendra- “Tell them that your mother is not like that. She is good. “

Good wins, has won in history, because of these leaps of courage and hence the grand ending of the story, of the spreading off light is fitting and the message is given but as an experiencing. Is that not the supreme nature and function of Art?

Feminism in the story

A concurrent theme is also feminism. A woman asserting her right to her life, to her happiness, to her truth as she sees it, to her independence and to her assertiveness are shown. Susheela is not on the roads raising banners, but the truth in her does make her tell her son- “You are a coward (if you cannot confront the people with the truth)”

It is that statement that makes that profound earthshaking impact on that small boy and converts doubt to reason based conviction. It is that moment that the full truth, like a lightning, is revealed to him. It is the voice of a woman that makes him realize the true nature of feminine rights that is nothing more than the right of a human being. The social context of India especially

makes the story even more militant, in a quiet deadly way, the way of truth that would be, the way of courage that names it and lives by it.

This story is a beautiful feminist theme integrated to a human theme. Susheela is a perfect lover, wife and mother. Is that not the goal of feminism to show that role in its purity?

Conclusion

All the elements, the narrative style, the beautiful characters, the purity of thought and words, the raging, intense pain, the joy of transformation, the moments of truth and the final message are united with great brilliance by Gajanan Madhav Muktibhod and with that dream like quality that pure thinking does have. This elevates the story and the theme to the greatest stories of all time. It is required reading, because purity of soul, and individual, private rights to one's own judgments is a theme that is both eternal and contemporary.

REFERENCE BOOK:

“PRASHN” □□□(The question) WRITTEN BY Gajanan Madhav Muktibhod