

Gurdial Singh's Parsa : Textuality and Strategy

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Parsa is an important novel written by a versatile genius - Gurdial Singh. This novel deals with eternal and universal truths in the contemporary reality. This paper deals with the close study of the text of the novel. It is an effort to analyze the textual-strategy of the novel. For this purpose, the theory of textuality is very important. In contemporary literary criticism and theory the word '*textual study*' has assumed a new significance and meaning. As a matter of fact textual study is different from the traditional text based study.

As a new critical practice the idea of textual study of literature has been developed by the Post-Structuralist and Neo-Marxist critics. Roland Barthes in his article *Theory of the Text* avers that text is the phenomenal surface of the literary work; it is the fabric of words which make up the work and which are arranged in such a way as to impose a meaning, which is stable and as far as possible unique. This concept of the '*text*' is different from traditional meanings because it takes not only written material but also the whole written-non-written linguistic aspects. Roland Barthes develops the concept of '*text*' against the '*work*'. According to him 'The work is held in hand, the text is held in language.' In text, the meaning is created by different signs and discourses. In literary and cultural text different ideology is depicted by different discourse. These type of discourses are created by different values, views and faiths and they make the reader familiar with the subject. The discourse is the battlefield of different ideologies, they give language to different kinds of conflicts. Every text is made of textuality and strategy.

Parsa is a fictional narrative that depicts the different characters, incidents, actions and situations relating to the socio-cultural ethos of Punjab. The hero of this fictional narrative represents the composite culture of Punjab. He is a '*Brahmin*' by caste but a farmer by profession. He is known as a '*Jatt Brahmin*'. Born in a Hindu family he has a Hindu name but from his appearance he looks like a typical Sikh. He is the embodiment of a person who is alienated in the society and is in search of authentic human values. Actually he is the representative of whole of Punjab that is based on the ideology of medieval Muslim Sufis, Hindu Saints and Sikh Gurus. He is a common man who loves his land very much. The novelist depicts the characteristics of Parsa through the medium of a family narrative. Parsa lives a life of a simple farmer, but he never loses his self-respect. He sees his youngest son Basanta as true inheritor of his ideology and philosophy of life. The willingness to sacrifice everything for self-respect and the readiness to face the consequences of one's actions are the true ethical traits of a person inheriting the glorious traditions of Punjabi people. Thus the hero of this novel, Parsa, is the true representative of Punjabi consciousness.

The next part of the novel is shown through his family traditions in the context of contemporary society and culture. It covers various incidents of his life - the death of his wife, keeping his promise to look after the betterment and education of his children, the structure of family relations, his unconventional relations with a widow, Mukhtiar Kaur and its result, Basanta's death in police encounter, his defiant gesture of providing shelter to lonely Savitri and his relations with Pala Ragi are the prominent motifs of the

novel. These motifs are the structuring components of the thematic structure of this novel.

The novelist tries to make his novel meaningful with the help of the internal and external contexts of these incidents. For instance, after the death of his wife Parsa becomes emotional and he faces all the sorrows and sufferings alone. But he does not follow the traditional, so called rituals that gives the different meaning to the novel. Parsa's refusal to obey the hypocritical traditions of the prevalent social setup presents true picture of his mental makeup. This refusal can also be seen in his relations with Mukhtiaro. These relations are considered illicit by society but he defiantly obeys the dictates of his enlightened conscience. Thus the novelist presents a narrative situation that justifies and gives inner logic to Parsa's actions. Although his actions are unconventional in the eyes of society but he commits no sin in any sense of the word. The eternal conflict of desire and control is dramatized in this narrative that questions the relevance blind traditional morality.

Parsa disinherits his two elder sons, though not from his material property but from his emotional and spiritual wealth. It is not because of his temperamental dislike of their life-styles but for ideological differences. Parsa's medieval consciousness does not accept the so called modern values. He doesn't approve the actions of his sons getting clean-shaved to look smarter neither does he like the hypocrisy of his son who is a police officer. He doesn't like any compromise for his identity and traditional values. The novelist tries to give significance to his text with a variety of textual strategies and creates multiple meanings at the same time.

The textual study of the novel demonstrates that there is inter-textuality at play in the novel. He creates such an inter-textual space by using different ancient myths from Mahabharata, the Puranas and ancient folk tales as well as the discourses of Gurbani and Sufism as well as those of contemporary revolutionary movements like the Naxalite Movement. All these aspects creates thematic variation of the novel. Parsa's younger son Basanta sympathizes and participates in the Naxalite movement and is killed in police encounter. This shows the radical nature of Parsa's consciousness.

The novel was published in 1991 and the significance of the text and discourse of this novel assumes renewed meaning. Its relevance can be deeply felt in the context of contemporary situation of Punjab. This contemporary situation is created by the terrorist movement of the times bent upon destroying the glorious composite culture of Punjab. Operation Blue Star and Anti-Sikh Riots of Delhi are the results of the so called terrorist /militant movement.

The text of *Parsa* correlates, at conscious or unconscious level, with this movement and presents a counter model of traditional harmony. Through the character of Parsa, the writer reacts against the powers that tried to divide the Hindus and the Sikh on communal basis. The textual study of the novel presents the message of medieval Saints, Sufis and Gurus and the novelist tries to awaken us to the consciousness of composite Punjabi culture. Through the intertextuality he also revolts against the difference of caste and creed.

Gurdial Singh's novel Parsa depicts many similar and inter-related meanings. The novel is not an imitation of fixed reality. The created conflicts are tradition v/s revolution, hypocrisy v/s reality, desire v/s control, individual violence v/s social revolution. At the same time the glorious traditions and values of Punjabi culture are accepted. No doubt, Parsa is valuable fictional text of Punjabi literature. With the help of its textual strategy the novel becomes very significant and creative discourse.