

J.K.Rowling's Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone: a Religious Perspective

Dr. S. Sumathi,

Assistant Professor of English (SF).Vellalar College for Women (Autonomous), Erode.

Abstract: *The artistic and aesthetic beauty of literature can be appreciated and rejoiced when it is compared and correlated with diverse literature across the boundaries. There is prevalence of ideologies, socio-cultural intersections between religion and literature from the medieval to contemporary periods. Religion is saturated with several mythological characters, settings and situations that facilitate the readers to juxtapose diverse literatures to strike contrast and mark the relationship of the creative works of the authors. This paper traces out the parallelism and similarity between J.K.Rowling's Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone and Hindu mythology. One can enjoy the beauty of a work of art and delve deep into the subtle and literary meanings by comparing with other works of art and literature. The Harry Potter series cannot be taken only as a story of magic and adventure but can be interpreted in relation to Hindu mythology. The analysis in this vein reveals the rich tapestry of incidents and situations in the Harry Potter series have a close association with our religion .*

I. Introduction

J. K. Rowling, (1965-) is one of the eminent British writers endowed with boundless fertile imagination and ingenious artistry. Her creativity redefines the children's literature. The stupendous fabrication of Rowling demarcates her novels from generic commercial creations and propels the seven Harry Potter series to the highest sphere of literature. Reading the Potter makes the readers indulge in an alternate universe superior to the ordinary world. The success of the author lies in her ability to combine fantasy and reality. Rowling incorporates the elements of mythology, fairy tales and legends to give a rich texture to her own plot, character and setting. She reinvents the old myths through a pattern of amazing and astounding twists to fulfill the readers' desire.

The birth of Harry Potter in Harry Potter and Philosopher's Stone is similar to the birth of Karna and Krishna in The Mahabharatha, Jesus Christ and Moses in Bible and Abijit of Tagore's Mukta-dhara. Karna is the son of Kunti by the sun deity and he is born with a pair of golden ear rings and an armor like coating which glimmers like the sun. He is put in a basket to float down the Ashwa river. At Champapuri, on the banks of Ganga, he is rescued by a charioteer Adhiratha and his wife Radha, who being childless are delighted to adopt this god-like child. Karna is reared by his foster parents who has close resemblance to the birth and growth of Harry. According to the Book of Exodus in Bible, a new Pharaoh who ascends to power in Egypt around 1200 BC enslaves the Jews. He decides to kill all boy babies of the Jews. But one mother saves her baby by putting him in a basket made of reeds and leaves it in the river Nile and sends her daughter to watch the basket afloat. The Princess, the daughter of Pharaoh notices the basket, and saves the baby and names him "Moses". The sister of the baby is called to find a nurse to take care of Moses. The mother of Moses is appointed as the nurse to take care of her baby son. Moses grows up in the royal court and attains high level of education. He matures to be the leader of the Hebrew tribes and later the Promulgator of the Ten Commandments.

Reflecting on these literary happenings, Harry is considered as a destitute, abandoned by his wizard parents, James and Lily. The Headmaster of Hogwarts, Dumbledore and professor McGonagall to save the baby Harry from the cruel hands of Voldemort, leave him under Dursleys. In response to the rare meteorological events, baby Harry arrives at the door step of his aunt and uncle. Rowling correlates this incident with the life of Christ. Hagrid transfers Harry, the child of magicians to an ordinary world. The visit of the three gift-bearing wise men to the new born Christ is also altered by Rowling. Shortly after the birth of Harry, three wise persons visit him, and they are Dumbledore, McGonagall and Hagrid. In the gospel story, the three wise men deliver gifts to the new-born Christ, whereas, Rowling's three wise persons, leave Harry to his uncle and aunt. The fact that Harry is raised by his relatives also bears resemblance to the story of Christ, for Christ's true father is the Father in Heaven and Joseph, like Dursley is only a step father.

Krishna of The Mahabharatha born in prison is brought up by foster parents in Brindhavan in order to protect him from the brutal hands of Kamsa. He is nurtured with care and affection by his foster parents. But Harry gets humiliation in the hands of his foster parents. Krishna and Karna of The Mahabharatha, Moses of

The Bible, Alvars of Vaishnava Sidhantha are foundlings, later elevated to the exalted status to serve mankind. Krishna becomes the king of Madhura, Karna is bestowed with the kingdom of Angatha, and Moses is uplifted as the promulgator of Ten Commandments. In *The Philosopher's Stone*, Harry endures the tortures and torments for ten years under Dursleys. Later he is shifted to Hogwarts where he regains his true identity and the dormant wizardry is stimulated and is recognized as an acclaimed personality.

Karna of *The Mahabharatha* is born with armor and celestial earrings. Harry is gifted with bolt like lightning scar which serves as a badge of honour. "Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bent forward over the bundle of blankets. Inside, just visible, was a baby boy, fast asleep. Under a tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning" (16-17).

Harry's distinctiveness is shown by his birthmark. The scar is the distinctive feature for Harry. Even though he is small and skinny for his age, he wears Dudley's old clothes and puts a pathetic appearance. The only thing he relishes about his personality is his bolt of lightning thin scar on his forehead. "The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead which was shaped like a bolt of lightning. He had had it as long as he could remember and the first question he could ever remember asking Aunt Petunia was how he had got it"(20). The origin of the scar remains a mystery to Harry and there is no one to explicate the cause. But the scar of Harry elevates his status as a notable personality. Harry arises from the ironic world of distress and frustration, and attains the eminent stature in the magical world. Voldemort, the dark lord casts the dangerous mortal spell on the parents of Harry. Lily's sacrificial attempt to save baby Harry backfires the spell and destroys the physical structure of Voldemort. A connection between attacker and victim is formed during which parts of Voldemort's powers are transferred to the infant, and Harry is bestowed with a lightning-bolt shaped scar on his forehead. The scar serves as an identity for Harry and acts as an indicator alerting him towards the approach of danger. The scar is a part of link between his mind and the dark lord. He experiences a terrible pain in the scar whenever Voldemort advances strong negative emotions on him. The impending crisis is forecasted through the unbearable pain. The centaur realizes Harry as a distinguished personality in the wizard world by the scar.

The hooded figure raised its head and looked right at Harry- unicorn blood was ribbling down its front. It got to its feet and came swiftly towards him – he couldn't move for fear. Then a pain pierced his head like he'd never felt before, it was as though his scar was in fire – half-blinded, he staggered backwards. He heard hooves behind him, galloping, and something jumped clean over him, charging at the figure. The pain in Harry's head was so bad he fell to his knees. It took a minute or two to pass. When he looked up, the figure had gone. 'Are you all right?' said the centaur, pulling Harry to his feet. 'Yes – thank you- what was that?' The centaur didn't answer. He had astonishing blue eyes, like pale sapphires. He looked carefully at Harry, his eyes lingering on the scar which stood out, livid, on Harry's forehead. 'You are the Potter boy,' he said. 'You had better get back to Hagrid. The Forest is not safe at this time – especially for you. (187)

Kunti, the mother of Karna in *The Mahabharatha*, left the swaddling clothes with the abandoned Karna, which would burn any woman who would claim him as her child. Similarly Harry is empowered with the scar and it is the protective shield for him. In the final encounter with Voldemort and Quirrel, the dark lord urges Quirrel to seize him. When Quirrel touches Harry, he endures the terrible affliction in the scar and at the same time the hands of Quirrel get burnt. The terrible pain in the scar tortures Harry but at the same time it insulates and shields him from danger.

In *The Philosopher's Stone*, Dursleys treat Harry as a drudge and whipping boy. They treat him as a slave and show no consideration for him. There is no one to pay attention to the needs of Harry. He has been made neither timid nor bitter by this treatment, an early sign of the admirable qualities which are so vital to his destiny. Strange things seem to happen around Harry, and Dursleys refuse to believe him when he says he is unaware of the happenings. There is no one to discern the power of wizardry in Harry except the boa constrictor in the zoo. Harry pays close attention to the boa constrictor. The glass enclosing the snake vanishes and as it uncoils, it acknowledges Harry's inherent magical flair, and responds to Harry's doubts and expresses its gratitude. "As the snake slid swiftly past him, Harry could have heard a low, hissing voice which said, "Brazil here I come... Thanks, amigo" (26).

In Hindu mythology, there is enmity between Garuda and Kalinga. Garuda attacks Kalinga to kill him. Kalinga being scared by the assault, flees to the river Yamuna. The dwelling of Kalinga is forbidden to Garuda, due to the curse of sage Shaubhari. Kalinga and its family are unfettered, poisoned the river, resulting in the death of many lives in Brindavan. Krishna decides to kill Kalinga. In the encounter between them, Kalinga accepts his defeat and begs to be pardoned. Krishna orders Kalinga to decamp the river and backtrack to its native place. Harry, like Krishna emancipates the boa constrictor from the cage due to his inherent magical talents and the boa constrictor moves towards its native place in Brazil. Harry cannot identify his own magical power till he releases a boa constrictor upon his enemies. He is totally unaware of his actions and its consequences.

The author refers to the elixir of life, the "Philosopher's Stone", a substance which is believed by medieval alchemists to have the power of transmuting base metal into gold. It also possesses the power of prolonging life and curing all injuries and diseases. It can be related to Sanjeevani and Amrita. Sanjeevani is a magical herb which has the power to cure any malady. It is believed that medicines prepared from this herb can revive a dead person. This herb is mentioned in the Indian epic, The Ramayana. When Ravana's son Indrajit hurls a powerful weapon at Lakshmana, Lakshmana is badly wounded and nears his death. Hanuman is entitled to fetch this herb from the mount Dunagiri in the Himalayas. Amrita literally means "that which is immortal". It is the divine food which endows eternal life. With the aid of Lord Shiva and Vishnu, the Devas drink Amrita for attaining immortality.

In the Christian myth, the Philosopher's Stone can be related to the Bethal Stone. Jacob uses a stone as his pillow when he camps in the area of Luz. In his dream, he has spectacular vision of angels ascending and descending upon a ladder. Jacob beholds God standing at the top of the ladder giving the promises. He has previously given to Issac and Abraham. He furthermore promises to be with Jacob on his journey. When Jacob awakes, he names the place Bethal which means the 'House of God' and the stone is termed as 'Bethal stone'. He places the stone upon a pillar and anoints it with oil. Jacob consecrates the stone and makes it fit for the receipt of offerings. Later, the area of Bethal is considered as the 'gateway of heaven'. In Hindu mythology, standing stones or pillars are embodiment of God. The Hindu deities are engraved on stone statues, as stone is a symbol of strength, eternity, resolution and immortality. The cosmos is made of five elements: earth, water, fire, air and space. A stone has all five elements in it. The Hindus infuse power to the stone statues through detailed rituals and the chanting of mantras. Then the statue is considered to be receiving of cosmic power and capable of distributing it among the devotees. One must remember that human body is also made up of five elements. The specialty of the Philosopher's Stone is that the philosophy of life is infused into it.

In the magical world, Voldemort, the talented, powerful but sinful wizard craves for Elixir to attain immortality. 'Ragu' of Indian pantheon can be correlated with Voldemort. There goes a fierce battle between Devas and Asuras for the divine food Amrita, the heavenly nectar of immortality. Lord Vishnu, in the enchanting form of Mohini, distributes the Amrita to the Devas. Ragu, an asura disguises himself as a deva, and drinks nectar. The sun god, Surya and the moon god, Chandra inform it to Lord Vishnu. But before the nectar could pass into the throat of Ragu, Lord Vishnu cuts off his head with the Sudarshana Chakra, the wheel of justice. The head due to its contact with Amrita, remains immortal but he is deprived of the parts what is below the head. As Ragu, Voldemort lacks physical structure, and depends on others for a physical form.

Harry refuses to submit the treasure but Quirrel seizes it. The physical contact with Harry burns Quirrel and he prepares to curse Harry to death, but the pain in Harry's scar is severe enough to drive him out of consciousness. Harry performs a courageous act of grabbing his opponent's face but reaches the brink of death. The heroes of quest need guides and companions to initiate their venture, and at the same time they must rely on powerful rescuers to retrieve from critical situations. Dumbledore arrives in time to safeguard him. Harry recrosses the threshold of his quest and regains consciousness. Dumbledore explains the item of the challenging quest, the Philosopher's Stone and informs Harry that the stone is destroyed which resulted in the death of Nicholas Flamel and his wife Perenelle, the makers of the stone, and for them death is also a great adventure. In Christian and Islamic philosophy, the souls wait for the second coming of Jesus and the Judgement Day respectively. Till then, the souls are in the sepulcher. But Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism believe in rebirth. Here, the novelist here subtly expresses the rebirth theory by making lives and deaths as adventures, as confronted by Nicholas Flamel and his wife. This is sung by Adhi Sankara in the song Bhajagovindam, as again again man is born and again again he is dead. This doctrine is depicted in Tagore's Gitanjali as:

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodious eternally new.

At the immortal touch of the hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth To utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and Still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill. (Tagore 1)

II. Conclusion

One can enjoy the beauty of a work of art and delve deep into the subtle and literary meanings by comparing with other works of art and literature. The Harry Potter series cannot be taken only as a story of magic and adventure but can be interpreted in relation to Hindu mythology. The analysis in this vein reveals the rich tapestry of incidents and situations in the Harry Potter series have a close association with our religion. This way of correlation brings to light the greatness inherent in the myths and the enriching perspectives that

illumine and enthuse the readers. The cornucopia of religion - fantastic, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, passionate and spiritual speculations can be achieved with the association of various literatures across the globe.

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