

Ramifications of Myths on the Society and the Individuals as Discerned in the Novel *The Scarlet Letter*

V.Vanitha Jeyakumari^{1*}, Dr.S. Ram Manohar Pari²

¹B.Sc, M.A, M.C.A, M.Phil, B.Ed., B.A., M.A.,SET.,NET., Assistant Professor of English & Ph.D. Research Scholar
KG College of Arts and Science Coimbatore. Mobile.no: 9944127152

Email : vanithajeyakumari.v@kgcas.com

²Assistant Professor of English and Research Supervisor KG College of Arts and Science Coimbatore.
Mobile.no: 9566582628 Email: parimanohar@gmail.com

Abstract

This research paper investigates the influence of myths in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*. Hester Prynne, the protagonist, whose life is forced and shaped by the society where she lives. The society is a puritan society which gives important to the moral and religious values. The people in the society live obeying what Bible say and shape their lives based on the Biblical myths. Utilizing psychoanalytical theory, the paper delves into the society's force on Hester Prynne, emphasizing how the biblical stories kept as the standards for the people to live. The novel has no explicit mention of myths but they are understood through the characters' actions and words.

The novel has the custom-House (introductory to "The Scarlet Letter"), twenty three chapters and conclusion. It is set in a pre-independent America. It tells the story of a young mother and her illegitimate child. Hester Prynne, the protagonist, is trapped first into a loveless marriage and then into adultery. Brought out of the prison with the scarlet letter 'A' fixed on her bosom, she is publicly disgraced. She refuses to disclose the identity of her daughter's father. Hyster Prynne becomes the first real heroine of American fiction.

It is easy to say she is the real heroine but it is very difficult to live each day bearing the letter 'A' and the shame. The society where she lives only brought such a shame on her life. This is because the society's norms are based on the Bible and its stories, which we call Biblical myths. The myths only shaped the lives of men in that society. They want everyone to be puritan and to be true Christian and so not to commit any sin. Because to obey them Hester Prynne keeps herself quiet not revealing the name of the man who made her to bear the letter 'A'. If she has revealed him, there won't be such shame in her life. The analysis thus highlights the ramifications of myths in the society and the individuals.

Keywords: Biblical myths, Impact, Myths, Stories, Transition, Transformation, Power

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Introduction:

This research study delves into the great impact of Biblical myths on the society and how the same society forces the life of individual. In literature, these stories are referred to as myths, a term derived from the Greek word "mythos," which refers to the tales, legends, or fictional narratives of a people. Traditionally, myths are defined as widely accepted ideas or beliefs that are incorrect or false. However, in a literary context, they encompass traditional tales aimed at explaining natural or social phenomena, often featuring supernatural elements.

The story of *The Scarlet Letter* was based on the political and religious life of the people of Boston, Massachusetts during seventeenth century. Hester Prynne was married to a man. He was a learned physician. He was interested in gaining knowledge and so he went to somewhere leaving his young wife at Boston. Hester waited for his arrival. She became impatient. She assumed her husband to be lost at sea and decided to have an affair with a young man. She never exposed the identity of the man to the society. She knew that it was her error in her life and she calmly accepted her weakness like how Eve was easily tempted to eat the fruit of good and evil, and made

error in her life. It is how the biblical myths have impact on society and individuals. The novel does not explicitly say about myths and its impact on society and individuals. But through the way the people live we can understand that Biblical myths are followed strictly by them. They give important to live a good life. The system of the society is puritan. Their rules and regulations are framed by the state based on both religious and political.

There are many scholars who have done their research on this novel, the *Scarlet Letter*, on various perspectives such as the ordeal of Hester Prynne, the female protagonist, the four faces of frailty, the self-conscious dimension and Renegotiating transgression. My current research study is focusing on the myths that influence both the society and the individuals and it is purely done using qualitative methodology. The character of Eve is similar to the character of Hester. This study examines the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. Also analyzes its impact on both the society and the individuals.

HESTER PRYNNE AND EVE:

The novel describes the plight of Hester Prynne, who has been forced to wear a scarlet letter 'A' (adultery) on her

*Author for Correspondence: vanithajeyakumari.v@kgcas.com

dress as a sign of shame. There are no laws to punish the person who committed the adultery now. According to a law passed in The Charters and General Laws of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay in 1694, the punishment is given to Adultery. These laws are based on the puritans' standards. The punishment is accepted by Hester without any question. She is not ready to reveal the name of the man who made her bears the scarlet letter. Because of the reasons that it might spoil the reputation of that man or she is ready to suffer for her illegal relation with that man. Bible said that Women are weaker vessels. The first parent, Adam and Eve, were in Garden of Eden and were very happy. When Eve was wandering alone in the garden, Satan came in the form of a snake and tempted her. She ate the fruit which god told not to eat and made Adam too eat it. He knew that Eve has made a mistake. In order to save her he ate it without questioning her. Immediately he felt something different which is not like before. God too knew it. He questioned Adam whether he had eaten the fruit which he has asked them not to eat. He told God that his wife gave him and when she is questioned, she said that Satan tempted her to eat. As a punishment they were sent out of the Garden of Eden. Because of the disobedience of Eve they fall and came to the earth. This is the first mistake done by our first parent. The same weakness of Eve is seen in Hester also. She too has affair with a man because of her weakness. She thought her husband was lost at sea and that tempted her to have illegal relation with a man and had illegal child. This is similar to how Eve tempted to Satan's words in the absence of her husband Adam.

A townsman in the crowd exclaimed that Hester is weak and tempted strongly by a man to commit sin. Here Hester is also like another Eve. Eve was strongly tempted by Satan. This made it clear the impact of the mythical story of Adam and Eve on the people of Boston.

THE IMPACT OF BIBLICAL MYTHS ON THE SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUALS

In the chapter 2 'The Market Place', the prison lane was occupied by the inhabitants of Boston to see Hester, a woman who bore in her arms a baby of some three months old. On the breast of her gown appeared the SCARLET LETTER - An in fine red cloth surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic golden thread. It is like a spell on her. It only has differentiated Hester from all people. Hence Hester has drawn a circle and kept herself in that sphere.

The people of Massachusetts are very particular about the righteousness. So, they wanted her wrong to be exposed to the public. They highlight that the righteous colony of the Massachusetts would be blessed only if they expose her wrong to the public. The people wish to follow righteousness as they are brought up by the Biblical myths. The people want Hester to follow righteousness. If we psychologically see to this, we can understand the mind of the people. Their minds are deep rooted in Bible and all its rules and commands which can be called as Biblical myths in Literature. People are very

particular to reveal her wrongs to the public to get salvation. So that the colony of Massachusetts would be blessed. Here it is clear that both the society and the myths affect the individuals.

The society often associates her situations with the events in the Bible. Hester and her infant were being compared with the sinless mother, Mary. Jesus was born to redeem the world. Mary got pregnant before her marriage through holy ghost. Her infant is good. Whereas Hester too got pregnant by a man and refused to open it. Her infant became illegitimate child. According to a papist, Hester is contrasted with Mary in all aspects. Mary stood for sinless motherhood and Hester stood for sinful motherhood. A papist too represents a society. So, it is very clear that Bible and all its mythical stories and events influence the people and the individuals.

The very important event that society forces the individual is seen in Hester's life. In chapter 7, The Governor's Hall, we see Hester is visiting the Governor. She wanted to deliver him a pair of embroidered gloves and wished to have interview with him regarding the more rigid order of principles in religion and government to deprive her of her child. They want the little Pearl capable of moral and religious growth. The authority of the state decided to take away Pearl from Hester. Some of the public did not show any interest on it. In the same chapter there is an event that the children of puritans ask each other to fling mud at both Hester and her Pearl. It is clear that the entire society from older people to small children know about a woman with the scarlet letter 'A'. Though the children do not know the real meaning of it they have known something because of the people often talking in public about Hester. Both Hester and Pearl came to the precincts of the town. The children of puritans who were playing there looked at Hester and the letter and spoke gravely one to another about the letter 'A'.

The society too mocks Hester and Pearl. The individual is also called society. One day both were on their way to the Governor's Hall. On their way the children of puritans were playing. Even these children represent their society. They saw both Hester and Pearl and mocked the little girl Pearl. They told that she is the likeness of the scarlet letter (her mother). Though Pearl is a child of not knowing what is good and bad she is being called the scarlet letter by the children of puritans. The study shows how the puritan society has influence on them. I am highlighting here that the puritan society is built fully on Bible.

The influence of myths is seen on the people till now throughout the world. They believe in some super natural sources. They see meteoric appearances and interpret them according to the revelations they get. For example, a blazing spear, a sword of flame, a bow, or a sheaf of arrows in the midnight sky are such examples. There is a wonder seen in the sky in the form of the letter 'A'. It is in red color. Red color stands for blood. Mr. Dimmesdale looked at it and reminisced his past life. Some people believed the letter 'A' to be Angel. But he believed it to be the scarlet letter 'A' since he has done

wrong equally to Hester. She got punishment openly wearing the letter. But he didn't get punishment for his wrong. According to Mr. Dimmesdale he believed that God shows the letter A to remind him of his past sin. So, he has to do something for his salvation. He has to expose his past sin to the public and in this way, he can confess his mistake and get salvation according to Christianity. This type of seeing supernatural things on the sky and interpreting them to our knowledge is still in the world. Hester's good qualities were being accepted by the high rank men, wise men and learned men in the society. These people also represent the society. It is evident that Society has a positive influence on Hester as years went by. Often the Individuals when they come across the strangers, they question them whether they could see the woman with the embroidered badge. Thus, criticizing always Hester. The men in high rank called her saying Hester is their Hester – the town's own Hester. They often have spreaded her good works in the town. They expressed her in different ways. She was a supporter of both poor and sick. She was too comfortable to all distressed people like her. According to them her scarlet letter had the effect of the cross on a nun's bosom, a kind of sacredness. Gradually the meaning of symbol changes from Adultery to the powerful and peculiar mind of Hester. The act of these men prove that the society has positive impact on her. Anyway, the society shapes her life. The society shapes itself by what is said in Bible or by the political and religious norms.

CONCLUSION:

The Scarlet Letter has lot of elements to be studied. It narrates the story of a young mother and her illegitimate child. Hester Prynne has the important role in the story. Her marriage with a young learned man is not bloomed with love and care. When her husband is lost for long period, she is tempted to fall into Adultery. When she is brought out of the prison with the scarlet letter 'A' fixed on her bosom, she is publicly disgraced. She is not willing to open the fact of the who made her wear the scarlet letter. This act of the protagonist brought the fall in her life like how Eve fell into sin. Here the influence of the story of Adam and Eve is reflected on the protagonist. Hester has guilty feeling and hence accepted the punishment that is being given to her. The society where she lives is a puritan society. It has its own rules and regulations for its citizen. And everyone is supposed to obey. The puritans frame their rules and regulations from Bible. They have their foundation only on Bible. The study associates the Biblical myths with the different situations that are expressed in the novel by Hawthorne. My study is also supported by many scholars and articles. Hemalatha Nirvan (2009) said about the ordeal of Hester Prynne in her Ph.D. dissertation. According to Ghate Varsha H (2018), the importance is given to the female protagonist, Hester Prynne, in her Ph.D. dissertation. Sophia Sharma (2004) wrote about the four facets of frailty in his Ph.D. dissertation. Pradeep Kumar Sharma (2013) has researched the concept of transgression in his Ph.D. dissertation.

People solve problems on their own ways. Every family in the society solves problems based on something they have in their minds. The puritan society has its own norms to live. The Biblical stories and events help them to solve their problems. The major issues in the society are also solved using myths. Nobody has seen the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve. But still all believe them to be the first parent and believe the fall of Adam. The fall is due to the weakness of Eve. Here we see the weakness in Hester. The problem of Hester is being solved in the novel by the way she lives obeying the norms of the society. She is punished to have the scarlet letter 'A' to discriminate herself from the rest of the society. She has a child, Pearl. The wrong which she has done in her life should not affect the child. there is a common proverb in Tamil that Daughter is like her mother. So her qualities may affect the little Pearl. Hester accepted her mistake and the scarlet letter 'A'. She lives with her daughter and she is very careful about her daughter. She wants her not to be like her but to be one whose life should fill with moral and religious values. Because such values only give better life in the world.

The problem of both the society and the individuals always seek the support of myths. Myths may be any kind. Myths are nothing but the experience of the success of men and women in the past and carried throughout the generations.

People have different opinion on the current issues between the Israel and the Palestine. They relate their fight to the Israel mentioned in the bible. People still believe that Christ would come and solve the problem of Israel and Palestine. What do we say about this. It is their deep rooted faith in Biblical myths. Thus my research finds to be true. The researchers can further prolong their research in children literature and characters of men.

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