



Exploring Symbolic Effects of Intoxicants in Anita Shreve's Testimony

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Abstract- This study critically analyzes intoxicants and their symbolic value with regard to social evil in Anita Shreve's novel, *Testimony* (2009). It considers an alcohol as an intoxicant and explains how such social practices cast impact on the meanings in which alcohol is used as a dominant ideology and examines how various social evils caused by the overuse of alcohol under the perspective of Critical theory by using Fairclough's (2001) Critical Discourse Analysis Model. It investigated symbolic associations of alcohol used as the powerful discourse of social evil. It also examined the various situations where certain linguistic structures analyzed the various interactions linguistically. The paper found out that the use of intoxicants constructs the social evils which further made human life by risking their honor and self-respect. The study will be contributory to the young scholars as well as an addition to the main bulk of knowledge.

Keywords: Intoxicants, ideologies, symbolic, linguistic structure, Critical theory

I. INTRODUCTION

This proposed study explores how intoxicants cause multifarious social evils and how, in that state of insobriety, man makes serious mistakes. This study also investigates how intoxicant can be used as a symbol in the conditions in which the people get involved in drinking atmosphere. Drinking situations and particular scenes will be observed in the proposed novel to see how people and particularly the students, are tempted to drink. The study will help how intoxicant specifically alcohol is presented as a symbol for social evil. This study is a critical analysis of Anita Shreve's novel who is a well-known American writer of 21st century. This study analyzed symbols (intoxicants) critically to grasp the deeper meaning instead of the aero-foil meaning. The material effect of intoxicant in turn reveals itself in the social environment. Beyond the perception of intoxicant in a pure health context, it has severe and serious drawbacks in social setting. It has been considered that the state of insobriety plays a very important role in masculinity conducts. Over-drinking relates to more masculinity desires and is responsible for masculinity activity. Drinking itself makes up sexual environment and results in getting hold of man's mind. It is seen that man as compared to woman, is more inclined towards immoral activities when man is overdrunk. (Morojele et al, 2004: 1-3)

Symbolists are of the view that artistry should comprise of inviolable truth that represents the things indirectly. The kids therefore at an early stage, use things as symbols to convey meanings (language) and vice versa. A small child for example pointing to or gazing at the feeder (symbol) conveys its hunger (language). In the same way its cries (the language as it expresses its desire) represent symbol (i.e. milk). Briefly, it can be said that language works on the basis of its symbolic character. Words have frequently more than one meaning and several different inner shades. Words are the tools for creating ideas, images, symbols and sensations. Therefore, words have a great effect upon our thoughts, actions and our behavior. The words we select for our language bring results accordingly. The impact produced by our words influence our surroundings and the persons we meet in our daily routine.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study under consideration is perhaps the maiden attempt to explore symbolic significance of intoxicants. There can be hardly found any previous studies on the novel except a review by Ann (2009) qtd in Adams (2009) who made an extensive review of the novel. According to the review, *Testimony* (2009) by Anita Shreve is the latest novel attracting the scholars' attention. It deals with a sex scandal at an exclusive private boarding school. In the first sentence of the first chapter, the headmaster of the Avery Academy receives a videotape. The tape shows three boys, (upperclassmen at the academy) and a 14-year-old female student drinking and engaged in a variety of graphically described sexual activities. This devastating event and the catastrophic fallout from the tape create the focal point for the novel, which considers the episode from the viewpoints of more than a dozen characters whose lives have been affected.

Each chapter is told in a different voice: the headmaster, each of the boys, the girl, various parents, other students, a cafeteria worker at the academy, a reporter, an attorney, and a police officer. He also notices certain symbols having diverse meanings. In this paper, the symbolic value of intoxicants is examined. Abram (2011) opines that a symbol is a word or a phrase that signifies an object or event beyond itself (320). According to Allan Cacho (2007), interpretation done at the level of recognition and that of symbolic changes the primary meanings of the text which Wimsatt and Brooks (2015) further elaborate that through symbols, either dualism is presented or the dual nature of materialism is denied by considering the opposing concepts as abstractions into a deeper reality that cannot be differentiated. Coleridge presents both these possibilities in his works and adopts the view of dualistic idealism. He perceived the world of nature as a reflection of the spiritual and the moral world (Rahme, 2015). These symbols also carry social elements which are explored by using Critical Theory as theoretical framework which also allows the reader to view the changes resulting from the social and discursive practices.

III. THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study investigated the texts of *Testimony* (2009) from the perspective of Critical Theory using Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model. It examined how the use of certain words carries symbolic values, and how the meanings resulting from them constructed different ideologies. The current study tries to highlight the symbolic character of drunkenness by referring to the multi-dimensional facets of meanings. It presents intoxicant (alcohol) as a symbol of social evil beyond its surface meaning of just a sedative. The study is contextualized with the consequences resulting from the excessive use of alcohol particularly by the teens.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative study under investigation is derived from the text of the novel of Anita Shreve, *Testimony* (2009), which is about an alcoholic fired incident occurred at private school in America creating a striking effect on the people. The story is narrated from different point of views. The whole story revolves around alcohol and alcoholism. This research is done under the broad view of critical theory that aims at bringing forth the social evils in a society. Alcohol is a drink that has sometime negative effect. Drinking shows even worse effect when it is used by the children. This study examines critically all such situations in order to spotlight where the evil lies. The study is backed up by the theoretical frame of Max Horkheimer's (1972) Critical Theory that emphasizes on the contemplative judgment, the critique of society and culture as a whole by adopting special cognition from various sources. This term 'Critical Theory' is rooted in sociology, and literary and linguistic criticism.

Moreover, it is a social theory which aims at reviving and bringing about change in society which depends on one's own analysis and thinking about the text. This study employs Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (2001) which connects text with interaction, and then interaction with the social practices. His model represents three main approaches in the field of discourse analysis. The model is an investigative practice by which the formal characteristics of a text are analyzed. The three phases of the model are used as tools for collecting data. Observations are made from the analyses of vocabulary, symbols, grammar, cohesion, power of utterances and intertextuality. These features of critical discourse analysis are applied to the text of the novel, *Testimony* to gain insights into the issue.

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data under investigation are derived from the text of the novel of Anita Shreve, a modern American writer and novelist. The novel, *Testimony* (2009), written by Anita Shreve is about alcoholic fired incident occurred at private school in America creating a striking effect on the people. The story is narrated from different point of views. The whole story revolves around alcohol and alcoholism. At a 'New England boarding school, as a sex scandal is going to spread around; the persons involved there in were recorded red-handed. The tape contains a chorus of audible sounds of the subject involved in the scandal i.e. men's, women's and many others, present on the spot!! Life is threatened in a blink of an eye moment. Anita Shreve, the writer is very successfully mingling a terrific dramatic effect with a very soft touch of suspense. The society is exposed to the last degree regarding the havocs that curb the lives of men into hell.

Testimony (2009) by Anita Shreve is a novel based on different levels of social circles of human fallibility. The term 'alcohol' is used not in the sense of a drink but in a symbolic way which represents social abuse how people, especially the teens, are affected by its perilous use. Alcohol is used at different occasions, the harms of which result in the destruction of human lives. Intoxicants usually cause multifarious social evils. In state of insobriety in particular, man makes serious mistakes. This detailed investigation shows how

intoxicants are used as a symbol revealing the situations where its harmful effects are viewed. In a situation in which Mike is seen drinking bottles on the surface of the hostel room. These students try to find all those things which bring insobriety, the narrator says “What was clearly now a dormitory floor, dotted with a half- dozen beer cans..... (6)”.

In this paragraph, Mike clearly indicated that it is the very use of symbolic term ‘beer’ that finally conveys the very message of the novel i.e. that alcohol has been used as a social abuse, social evil which brings disgrace and human fallibility. The dictionary meaning of ‘beer’ is a common name for intoxicant in liquid form, prepared by the process of fermenting grains with havoc added. It has the capability to make you intoxicant when you drink it. Drinking alcohol leads to destruction which can be undoing in life. Here ‘beer’ brings destruction to society. The word ‘dormitory’ means a college or university building containing living quarters for students. This word also put light on the above word beer that it is easily available everywhere and you can find it easily at college or in university. The college or school level students are immature and are unable to study a thing deeply and become a potential threat to honour.

Honor

Thinking about the incident, Mike thought that it would bring disgrace, disappointment and shame to the institution. As he says: “With its attendant images segueing into the words police and rape and alcohol and press, none of which any headmaster wanted in any sequence in any sentence..... (7)”.

He is thinking that now there will be a question mark on his personality and the institution. When the incident took place, Mike was unable to put an end to the upcoming circumstances. All the images of the different things were wandering in his mind. When we the readers read such lines or text we start thinking about ourselves that it might happen to us too. The word ‘police’ mean watch over or to guard an area by regularly walking around. This refers to a person who can be called upon to solve a problem which has taken place. The word ‘rape’ the dictionary meaning is, force (someone) to have sex against their will. The word clearly shows that it is a very bad thing and is not acceptable in society. Those people who are involved in such activities are treated as disregarded members of the society. The word ‘alcohol’ here means a liquid intoxicant. This drink makes you out of your temper and you behave like a foolish person and commit mistakes. Anyone in the society who is habitual to drink cannot be regarded as a respectable person, as we know that a drunken person is unaware of his own self then how will he care about other people as a whole. The word ‘press’ here means exert pressure or force to or upon. This term is active because when we heard the word press then certain important and shocking things comes to our mind, because the reporter has to ask a lot of questions about a particular incident. One must keep in mind one’s honor. Once you are put into the hands of a press, then, nothing can save you; so all these things are harboring in Mike’s imagination about the worse conditions. When man’s self respect is at stake, he is naturally bound to determine his social role for himself.

Social Roles

Mike was extremely worried about the things how they get that stuff. There are always seminars on alcohol to aware the students about the dangerous effects of intoxicants. They do not want to bring disgrace to the school and even to the society. Geoff, the dean of the students, had mentioned that there had been the usual number of kids who had been caught drinking or who were suspected of it...Though there had been many assemblies and seminars on the subject, it was Mike’s opinion that the problem was more severe than it had been in previous years. Every generation of students had done its share of being drinking, but it was pretty clear, from all the data he had seen, that the drinking was starting at an earlier age and was both more habitual and more intense it had been just a decade earlier.....(9-10).

Here, he used the word ‘kids’ which means a young person of either sex.. ‘Drinking’ is another word which means which stands for taking sips of liquid intoxicant. The word ‘suspected’ is used for believed likely, when we see such words or use such words then certain things comes into our mind that something is going wrong.. ‘Abuse of alcohol’ the word abuse actually means improper or excessive use of something. This idiomatic phrase shows that alcohol is being used in an improper way which is not acceptable in society. The word ‘impossible’ means something that cannot be done. This shows that once you have committed certain things which are unacceptable to the family and society then it is not possible for you to make a compensation of it. Here he used the word ‘stop’ which means to throw away something. By putting the word stop shows that once the evil has start in then it is impossible for someone to stop it and solve it. By stopping means that it might be under control and may not do dangerous actions. But here the situation is completely opposite because they have brought a tremendous change in themselves that it is not possible for them to stop the evil. The ‘worries’ here means an uneasy state of mind i.e. restlessness. Mike says that it was the most serious issue to our society and to the younger generation. We cannot prevent them from this stuff because it can be easily found everywhere in the city. He says that drinking was the top of worries and we were unable to put an end to this problem. It shows that the society is full of other problems as well and it brings disgrace to them and their families. The word ‘assemblies and seminars’ here mean a group of

people who get together for some social interaction and sharing. By putting these words we the passive readers can get the idea that there has always been programs on the subject to bring awareness to the people that it has a very dangerous effect on youngsters, to promote awareness and bring down the nature of drinking. The word 'alcoholism' here means excessive use of intoxicants. It impacts badly one's physical and mental health, when taken in excess; Excess of everything is bad is proved. He says that alcoholism is a world, once a person gets in then he, she may not be able to get rid of it. The word 'subtle' means difficult to detect or grasp by the mind or analyze. This word shows some background of the prevailing system of society that they are completely intermingled in such activities. 'Blatantly' means in a blatant manner. Mike says that past people didn't mind such things but now they have realized the evil effects of drinking. They have observed that our young generation is going to decay. They have ruined themselves, their families and the society as a whole. However, this incident made Ellen conscious.

Consciousness

Ellen, being disturbed by the incident that her son is involved is extremely worried. She is trying to find the answers to the questions in her mind. She was thinking about her son and the coming circumstances. She writes that she had heard that the drinking in the public school was ubiquitous, epidemic, and it is frightened you. You remember a dinner party at Julie's house. A conversation, a friend of a friend leaning towards you and saying, "Have you ever considered? (18). The readers are powerless due to their psychological and every day conventional frames of knowledge i.e. the truth of knowledge. Ellen has used the words 'ubiquitous, epidemic' being present everywhere at once, and widespread outbreak of an infectious disease; many people are infected at the same time. She is thinking that alcohol is present everywhere and can be easily got. She was worried that the disease (alcoholism) has struck the society. The whole society is involved in drinking so it has also affected the younger ones. She was thinking about the schools that even the young students are also involved in this disease. During the discussion your friend told you about your sons that have thought about his coming years. Then you start thinking and words coming to your mind, 'idea' 'took' 'shape' and 'blossomed' your mind start thinking about the planning and make ideas for the sake of the better future of your son. His father Arthur also gets anxious about his son's future, 'wary' by putting this shows, marked by keen caution and watchful prudence. He also gets involved that his son must be safe from such activities. The boy himself gets serious that he will be very cautious about himself. 'Intrigued' shows scandalized. Again Ellen starts thinking about your son and produces such words, 'wanted' 'save your son' you desired or wished to save your son from this horrible thing, which leads to destruction. It gives representation to the symbolic value of intoxicant i.e. alcohol and their role in the construction of ideology (9) and develops the idea how power is represented through language use.

Power in Discourse

Dot is talking to himself by saying that how much it is a stupid thing when a person is drunk. It makes people out of their consciousness and loses their temperament. He is lamenting over the things that he has done. As he says that Kids "get drunk and do stupid things. To take the hit for it. It just.....It just.....Suck man. Sucks" (44).The reader is expected to digest the message therein. The writer, by using the specific word 'kids' makes it clear that 'get drunk and do stupid things' always made 'kids' 'stupid' has an ideological value. The more appropriate word could have been 'intoxicated', 'dense' but the writer did not use these words. The writer is justified by using the word 'kids' because as we know that kids cannot hide their actions but explain it in an exaggerated manner. They do not feel shy on whatever they have done. Getting any amount of alcohol i.e. normal or excessive makes them extremely harmful particularly the kids. The word 'kid' best personifies the evil of alcohol use. Now when the kids are drunk then definitely they will commit stupid and even unbearable actions. "To take the hit for it" when you are attracted towards any type of drug, it means that it has the power to move somebody when it is touched. When you have intentions to check the stuff just for pleasure or for fashion you will be attracted by this thing in the future and especially the drugs have this quality in abundance. It is nothing but a mere thing which can lead you towards destruction. By using the verb 'sucks', she means that it is a mere thing but it has a great power to move someone in accordance to its own way. In a social circle, when power is abused, then people becomes anxious of who they are. They begin to look for their identity.

Identity

Identities are also constructed through language. Silas was thinking about the blunder they had committed in the past due to alcohol. He was repenting over what he had done. She was twisted and she was hungry and she knew how to make us hungry, and I am amazed that we didn't have any shame. I don't know where the shame went. I guess the alcohol takes it away. I guess that's the point of drinking, to take all the feelings and thoughts and morals away until you are just a body doing what a body will do (192). Shreve is very clever here by putting the female pronoun 'she' as we know that 'she' in patriarchal societies means 'female who is neither speaker nor hearer, 'she is my wife' but here in this paragraph it has the power to catch the intentions of the surroundings. She was 'twisted', 'hungry', 'she knew how to make us hungry'

these are some of the words which show that the word 'she' has. Here the word 'twisted' used by the writer may also use 'crazy' or something else but it will serve the purpose. Here 'twisted' means strange and mentally or emotionally unsound. By putting the adjective 'hungry' Shreve is fully aware that it is the word which carries all the meanings hidden in it. The word 'hungry' here means feeling a strong desire or need for something or to do something. She better knows how to catch the attention of those younger ones. She was so starved for this that she didn't care of her age. The repetition of personal pronoun 'I' makes the paragraph clear that it is less powerful subjective discourse in which a boy wants to repent at his action that he has done. The verb 'amazed' is used instead of 'surprise' because it does not carry its full meaning. The word 'amazed' means to surprise and sometimes confused (someone) very much, to fill (someone) with wonder. The negative sentence 'and I am amazed that we didn't have any shame. I don't know where the shame went' shows that he was confused to think that where the 'shame' had gone. Here 'shame' is used as a noun means 'repentance on one's wrongful deeds because you know you have done something wrong. All these things 'shame', repentances', 'moral', 'honor', 'characters', and so on they have taken by 'alcohol' are social evils. Here 'alcohol' is used as a noun which means a drug with sedative or tranquilizing effects. They were drunk and taken away by this social evil. It has a great power to dominate your whole body and control it. Then the body becomes a puppet in its hands. 'Alcohol' disturbs the central nervous system. It loosens man's self-consciousness and weakens his or her judgment power being a male or female.

Gender

Gender is represented through language in the novel too. Anna describes the very nature of Mike, how he came to our house. He had some intentions in his mind. Anna sees Mike unexpected visit, becomes nervous to some extent. He comes here with wine. As she says that "He came with wine. I reached across the kitchen table and covered his hand. He was shocked. I could see that. His eyes met mine, and then slipped away. We were drunk, or I was drunk. I wouldn't have had the courage to touch him otherwise. But I was glad I had done it. I can feel it still, the rough skin of his hand, the knuckles knobby, and the fingers warm. I pulled away" (212).

The vocabulary here used is not out of meaning, 'came, across, kitchen, table, covered, shocked, met, slipped, drunk, courage, touch, glad, feel, rough, knuckles, knobby, warm, and pulled. They convey the message in a way or the other. She says; he came with wine, clearly shows the intentions of Mike for her. Here the noun 'wine' is used as an alcoholic drink made from the juice of grapes. Here wine symbolizes the evil (referring to the Research Question 2) (9) nature of Mike, as we know that drinking can lead us to immoral activities. At a very first sight she gets through the eyes of him. She went to the kitchen 'kitchen' here means a room in which food is cooked, to bring something to cover his hand, here the verb 'covered' is used to conceal or to hide in order to protect it, because he had a bottle of wine in his hand. He was shocked; here 'shocked' is used as adjective means struck with fear, dread, or consternation, by the situation, because he was afraid of her husband and son. He could see that through her eyes when he met, the verb 'met' means accidentally be in the same place and interact with (someone), but slipped away. Here the verb 'slipped' means fall down unknowingly, because they were drunk. She was unable to touch him first but she took the courage and touches him. The noun 'knuckles' means metallic gloves, and the adjective 'knobby' means having knobs. She was compelled by the condition to satisfy him in either way due to his intentions from the very beginning. She says that 'she was pulled away' here the verb 'pulled' means motivated by some psychological or physical power, shows that she was caught and she was pulled. All this symbolizes that evil nature can lead someone towards destruction and immoral activities, which are not ethically and morally right. But it was a man who did that and brought disturbance in that family and ruined it completely.

Moreover, as a business man of such things, Daryl himself confesses the dangers of drugs. But due to the prevailing system of drugs and drinking, he does not care about the values. He says that he doesn't think that he is doing an immoral thing, because he is of the opinion that if he stop selling then they will have to get it from somewhere else. He does not care about them, who they are? He is just selling the product. He says that the kids are so eager to get it, and are even ready to pay double for this. There is no proper checking of drugs and drinking. As he says: "I do a sideline in cigarettes. Don't touch the drugs. There are other guys you go to for that. You get caught selling booze in this town. It's slap on the wrist. You get caught selling drugs; town doesn't have anything to do with it. You got to go to the country courthouse. You're fucked (80)".

The use of 'you' clearly shows the submissiveness of Daryl having a passive role in a communicative subject only. The personal situation of Daryl and the impartiality of other characters show the possibility of power relation in this piece of moral discourse. In this technique the writer has made the listener inactive and the speaker an active person makes this discourse reliable on the part of the speaker. The listeners, readers or other characters pay attention to the speaker and surrender secretly in an insensible way to the authority of Daryl to the dominant ideological suggestions. The negative sentence 'I do a sideline in cigarettes'. 'Don't touch the drugs'. With regard to power relation, the pronoun 'I' shows dominance and subjectiveness

whereas 'you' shows the objectiveness and passivity. The verb 'sideline' means to move from the centre of activity or attention; place into an inferior position, and 'cigarettes' means tobacco wrapped up to be smoked, clearly shows that he himself makes a difference between drugs and drinking. Every type of drugs has a dangerous effect on man's health. It leads to destruction. The contraction 'don't' means do not, the verb 'touch' to be in contact with something, and the verb 'drugs' here means administer a drug to, in order to be unconscious or docile. He is of the view that you should not touch any type of drugs because it can make a person out of his mental power. There is contradiction in the coming line that, 'There are other guys you go to for that' by saying that he is directing the younger ones to others that you may get such things from other as well. The word 'booze' here means an alcoholic beverage that is distilled rather than fermented; you can simply apply it on the wrist. The negative sentence which shows the society as well 'You got to go to the country courthouse. You're fucked'. It is not possible for anyone to go to the courthouse for complaining against drugs. The court itself put responsibility on the society to prevent your kids from this shit. The word 'fucked' is used in another sense, sometimes used interjectionally with an object (as personal reflexive pronoun) to express anger (9).

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper explored the symbolic significance of intoxicants in Anita Shreve's *Testimony* (2009). It also explored that the word 'beer' used an alcohol carried dual meaning giving birth to social abuse, social evils causing disgrace and human fallibility. Through the linguistic structure and the use of symbols used in social contexts integrated the text. The paper focused on the language of the characters who did not have fixed meanings. It also viewed how meanings changed with the situations completely. Through post-Structuralist investigative approach, the study examined that meanings were divided referring to the concepts rather than a specific meaning. By using Fair Cloughian model of Three Dimensions, the paper explored that the words such as wine, alcohol and beer carried symbolic significance and gave rise to multiple ideas. Being a Post-structuralism study, the symbols played an important role in changing the meanings of the text. The study however, traced out the social changes in human behaviours. On one hand, the study exposed the negative impact; on the other hand, it projected human consciousness, search for identity and determining social roles for humans as to show how they should live a life. So the existing research showed the symbolic significance of intoxicants in the novel of Anita Shreve *Testimony* (2009). The symbolic use of the word 'beer' has thus become a means of destruction to society as represented in the novel under study. Lastly, it is highly recommended that the novel should also be studied from the perspectives of semantic theories and stylistics theories so that all the possible themes and issues could be added to the already available information and, in turn, could be used as tools of reformation of the society.

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