

# Theme of alienation in The Marble Faun

Dr.Kajal Kumari

## Abstract:

This novel examines few problems like the complications of a foreign culture. This complication evolves from psychological state of mind where an individual finds himself entrapped into the circumstances of life. These circumstances are not easy to understand as it also covers most of the human values. Living abroad sounds nice but it raises many questions associated with identity crisis. The novel has also talked about the positive responses of human sufferings which have been calculated in terms of benefits. . In the whole canon of American Literature the name of Hawthorne is ineffaceable which stands for morality. He is also very controversial in terms of religion and politics. This author has always been a subject of debate. His most of the writings project realism which surrounds the history of American culture from Puritanism to spiritualism.

*Key words:- Alienation, Identity ,Crisis, Pastoral, Romance, Humanism.*

This novel has been written on the eve of the American civil war and it has the setting in Italy. It is not simply an outline of a story but it has covered the spheres of pastoral, fable, travel guide and some elements of Gothicism. There are four major characters in this novel: Hilda, Miriam, Donatello and Kenyon. Miriam is an amiable painter who is beautiful enough to be compared with several legendary women like Cleopatra, Judith, Cenci, Beatrice and Eve. There is a mystery in portraying her character that she has an unknown past. This novel examines few problems like the complications of a foreign culture. This complication evolves from psychological state of mind where an individual finds himself entrapped into the circumstances of life. These circumstances are not easy to understand as it also covers most of the human values. Living abroad sounds nice but it raises many questions associated with identity crisis. The novel has also talked about the positive responses of human sufferings which have been calculated in terms of benefits. Some scholars have found this work less successful than the other works of Hawthorne, but in terms of interest it is always interesting to read and understand this American writer. It has projected a unique picture of the foreign culture upon the American values. In the whole canon of American Literature the name of Hawthorne is ineffaceable which stands for morality. He is also very controversial in terms of religion and politics. This author has always been a subject of debate. His most of the writings project realism which surrounds the history of American

culture from Puritanism to spiritualism. His artistic genius has been compared with a rare flower which blossomed in the bed rock of America. It is really very interesting to unfold most of his plots. His use of symbol clearly reveals the softness of the rare flower:-

“...the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion. American civilization has hitherto has other things to do than to produce flowers, and before giving birth to writers it has wisely occupied itself with providing something for them to write about. Three or four beautiful talents of trans-Atlantic growth are the sum of what the world usually recognizes, and in this modest nosegay the genius of Hawthorne is admitted to have the rarest and sweetest fragrance.”<sup>1</sup>

We know that the primary area of interest for Hawthorne was always human follies so he raised such issues frequently in all of his novels. He was preoccupied with the central theme of religion, morality and human follies. It seems that he was a kind of person who wanted to create a utopian world. This utopia is certainly a work of fiction but even this fiction looks like a decorative art of the author. In much of his writings there is a symbolic appearance of human values. Nineteenth century was the age of profound changes for the whole world. The new civilization was an outcome of agricultural and industrial revolutions. This was a very dynamic change which was very fundamental in nature. There were many challenges as it was a question of development. Human relationships were also changing drastically as old religious beliefs were also challenged. Those beliefs were prominent during eighteenth century but now they were questioned. It was also a period where ideas like nationalism were appreciated and people loved to stand for a common cause. Many national boundaries were created especially in America and England. There were revolution in each and every field and even the public transportation system was strengthened. It also changed the life style of common men. In spite of all these changes there were many problems created by the unresponsive and inadequate social institutions. The century witnessed the growth of socialism, capitalism, transcendentalism, Darwinism and much more. Men were carving for perfection. Vladimir Astrov has tried to explain the responses and concerns of people in one of the article entitled *Hawthorne and Dostoevski as Explorers of the Human Conscience*:-

“Hawthorne (1804- 1864) and Dostoevski (1821- 1881) lived in a time of deep spiritual and social change. The whole structure of the inherited civilization was visibly cracking. Man was becoming aware how neglected and dismal was the life in which he had hitherto acquiesced. His first reaction was to tear down the old mansion from top to bottom .Yet soon enough he had to admit that it was easier to destroy than to build anew. Revolutionary enthusiasm and boundless dreaming was not enough. Instead of general welfare and happiness, capitalism conjured up new forms of enslavement. Democracy freed the masses, yet too often manacled the best. Something was wrong -- not alone without, but within. The very foundation of life seemed crumbling. More and more the eyes of the most sensitive again turned inward.”<sup>2</sup>

The close reading of the above paragraph clearly states that there was a chaos between order and disorder. The beliefs which were old were no more acceptable in the society. Tearing down the old mansion is a whack upon the religious sect of Christianity. Even the authority of the supreme god was questioned. It had been expounded brilliantly by Nietzsche’s madman that God was dead. The existence of God was only to approve the decision and action of man. It only justified the behavior of man. In the modern age there was hardly any need to take the approval of god as all the action of human kind was justified. The author Hawthorne only reminds that God was not dead but the morality of human world was at stake. Let us analyze this point in detail. “God is dead” is a phrase used by Nietzsche but does it mean that there was the existence of God but later the God died. It is not so simple as Nietzsche believed that Christian God was no longer an absolute moral source as the institutions which were responsible for showing the supremacy of God were unfit. Hawthorne in 1855 has expressed his views in *Notebooks*. He says that:-

“God himself cannot compensate us for being born in any period short of eternity. All the misery endured here constitutes a claim for another life, and, still more, all the happiness; because all true happiness involves something more than the earth owns, and needs something more than a moral capacity for the enjoyment of it.”<sup>3</sup>

The mythical concern of Hawthorne about the fall of man shows the detachment of man from nature and God. There is a kind of alienation and in *The Marble Faun* it has been illustrated properly. It is very noteworthy that in case of Hawthorne this fall is different from Milton as he was not an orthodox Christian. For Hawthorne the concept of heaven and hell was different from other writers as he believed that the only inexorable judge of a man was he himself. Blasphemy or the denial of the supreme authority is a sin but the denial of man was also not less than a sin. For Hawthorne human heart paved the path to heaven. Purity should be embedded deep inside the heart to attain beauty of the soul. His ideas were not complex as he believed in purity of the soul. It is a fact that during the period of 1860s the world was under a deep stress by the outbreak of the civil war of America. It was an outcome of the Abolitionist passion which was widely spread in all over the country. When it was happening New England was no more considered as the cultural hub as many of its contributors or authors had died or scattered. The fiction of Melville was not spared because of its eccentricities and obscurities. In these circumstances the career of Hawthorne also echoed the decade. His writings reflected the spirit of the New England. Apart from these realities associated with the author, another thinker Reverend Leonard J. Fick has tried to establish a parallel between Hawthorne and another great men of letters like Niebuhr, Melville, Dostoevski and Barthe those men have been referred as opponents of Natural-Man school. It is interesting that Fick has not called Hawthorne as existentialist but Arminian who propounded his own theology. He remarks that:-

“in contrast to the recognized teachers of Puritanism, he insisted upon each individual’s own role of in the important business of working out his happiness. Unlike these same puritan divines, who thought that the good of man consisted ultimately in glorifying God, Hawthorne believed that the glory of God was to be identified with the happiness of His creatures.”<sup>4</sup>

This idea of Fick that Hawthorne was an Arminian is certainly not unreasonable because there are some parallels between the theology of Arminians and the author. Fick also thinks that life was made of three layers according to Hawthorne. Among these three layers Natural bliss forms the outer shell or it is the first layer of life. The second layer is the frustration, darkness or the gloom hidden beneath this first layer. Eternal beauty is the last layer of life so it can be referred as the core of life. It was the providence of the almighty from where the activity of the mind and body was

controlled. This thought runs parallel to the ideas of existentialist thought. Critic like Jean Normand has tried to establish some similarities between modern existentialists and Hawthorne. He says that:-

“if one wishes to seek for a philosophic tendency in Hawthorne’s work, then it is not toward transcendentalism that one must look. Hawthorne’s position is decidedly existential—not out of any intellectual conviction, but instinctively, as is clearly apparent from the deep inward sense he had of the individual’s radical solitude, an ineradicable sense of apartness that he is able to communicate to us all the more easily today because it is the deepest obsession of the modern soul—so deep that modern man is terrified of it , rejects it, and seeks for refuge in violent collective activity.”<sup>5</sup>

During those times Hawthorne avoided going to church and believed that the theological ideas governing church were superfluous. Yet, he was concerned with religion and his understanding of the religion was different. It is remarkable to see that Hawthorne has created his female characters with some controversy and it seems that he understands their pain which they are going through. It can be seen in almost all of his novels. There can be some personal reasons behind it. Elizabeth Hathorne who was his mother had to face an unwanted premarital pregnancy. This situation of her can be understood by the characterization of Hester Prynne of *The Scarlet Letter*. By the pressure of the puritanical society Elizabeth was ostracized. When the novel *The Scarlet Letter* was written in 1849 Hawthorne’s mother died. He has witnessed the struggle of his own mother who was a widow also. In many of his personal writings and letters his love and admiration for his wife can be felt. It is also a truth that he has also developed certain kind of relationships with ladies like Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody. In the puritanical society of England the widows were expected to live with the memories of their dead husband. They were also bound to cherish the life of abnegation. Apart from this Hawthorne’s mother was a kind of lady who challenged the blind customs of the society. She was a strong lady who was full of will power. She was not like the other widows of the society. She participated in the rituals of the family. She enjoyed sharing affection and joys. Mark Van Doren remarks about her that:-

“It appears on the contrary that she was an excellent cook, an attentive mother, and an interesting talker about things past and present.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus, it can be understood that the author Hawthorne was always surrounded by strong ladies who deviated from the weak and pre established wrong notions of the society. *The Marble Faun: or, The Romance of Monte Beni* is the last romance written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. It is said about this novel that it was not welcomed cordially. As far as the characters are concerned there is an Italian count and three American artists who are in a leading role and the story moves around them. It is very interesting to see that Donatello the count of Monte Beni resembles the sculptured faun of Praxiteles. Miriam is a painter and Hilda represents the New England girl. The character Kenyon is a sculptor. It is very noteworthy that Donatello resembles a sculptor and in true sense he is half human. His sense of freedom and irresponsible behavior clearly reflects that he lacks human values and understanding. He is full of anxiety. This novel has a story and it is about three young artists and one Italian count. These characters meet in Rome and the count falls in love with Miriam. We have talked about Miriam that she has a past which is very horrible. She is haunted by some strange man who is related to her past life. In a passionate moment Donatello murders the mysterious man and the complications starts from here. He is a dim-witted young man who has little education. He has no emotional, moral or intellectual depth. His morality is awakened only when he finds himself guilty. He is like a creature who is often guided by his false spirits. It is very interesting to see that he loves nature and its inhabitants. He seeks pleasure in the gardens and woods. When he commits the murder he finds himself in a difficult position and his inner self keeps on changing. His sin brings this change and he retires to Tuscany where he has his ancestral home. Now he discovers about himself that he is hardly concerned with nature. The gardens and woods which earlier delighted him were no long a source of delight for him. It seems that his internal nature has also changed with the situation and he is unable to find himself. Finally a time comes when he is captivated and imprisoned for his crime by the authorities. His sin gives birth to his understanding of morality. So morality has a connection with sin. It is all about images in the mind of a character and these images are constructed through society. There is the existence of God only because the devil also exists. The devil is the committed sin and the God is the idea of morality which Hawthorne advocates. So the author has different kind of understanding of religion which is far away from Christianity. Miriam Schaefer is another character which attracts our attention not only because she is beautiful but there is something mysterious about her. She has a past which is certainly dark because she is haunted by her past life. She is a painter and she has a firm control over Donatello who is her lover. As far as the symbolical and allegorical embodiments are concerned in this novel we shall find that the real and the ideal world fuse together which results into a curiosity. This curiosity is so high that as a reader we want to know quickly about the advancement of the story. As the story advances towards its climax we feel

that it is not only a story but Hawthorne has put real life characters in the novel. The setting of the novel is closely related with the story and it seems that the setting is the spirit whereas the plot is the flesh and the whole novel is a single body. Critics have charged Hawthorne that he lacks realism in most of his novels but we will not be wrong in saying that Hawthorne's realism is very different from the other contemporary writers of his age. Even his understanding of the religion is very different and this is one of the reason that why he challenged the Christian values. He challenged those values only because there were many loopholes in Christianity. He believed that God is not dead but he resides inside the heart of the human being. The identity of the God was at stake because his doctrines were a subject of commercialization. There were two concepts for a single religion one was followed by the rich whereas on the poor it was imposed. In terms of symbolism the present novel *The Marble Faun* is more elusive than the other novels written by Hawthorne. Here the character evolves from obscurity and at last they again vanish into it. Hawthorne intention was not simply to show the idea that good characters were meant for good ends whereas bad characters were about to be doomed eternally. He viewed life with different angles and this is one of the reasons that in spite of dealing with sin as one of his central issue he always talked about the value of art. His art was more valuable than other American writers because he has a clear insight of his artistic imagination. His only intention is to explore the question that what is morality all about? Is it a thing of consideration for modern man? These questions haunted him regularly and he understood it very early in his life that every religion has some positive as well as negative roles. The negativity lies in the wrong analysis of the religious doctrines which leads a human being towards destruction. This destruction is not only personal but the whole society is affected from it. In the very opening of the book we find four main characters Miriam, Hilda, Donatello and Kenyon exploring statues from a gallery which had been found from a dug up in Rome. Except Donatello the three characters are the real artists and they are very interested in these statues. The story has some noteworthy elements like courtship, murder, deviation from innocence and alienation caused by the committed sin. Apart from the pedantic symbolism the art of Hawthorne acts like a window from which the reader can look and analyze the different situations of life. The Italian setting of the novel has also been a subject of debate among many scholars. Critics from Matthiessen to James have raised almost the same question regarding Italian setting of the novel. Their complaint is that in this novel the setting has been given too much concentration. H. H. Waggoner has remarked that in this novel we can find:-

“too much of Rome, and too much about art.”<sup>7</sup>

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