

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE TO ELABORATE THE HOLLOW DIGNITY OF A 1960S FEUDAL FAMILY IN SRI LANKA: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NOVEL, GIRAYA BY PUNYAKANTE WIJENAIKE

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**ABSTRACT:** Punyakante Wijenaiké is an eminent Sri Lankan novelist who has addressed women issues of Sri Lanka throughout previous six decades. *Giraya* is her second novel in which depicts the oppression of a middle class woman who has been married to a feudal family. Feudal system in Sri Lanka features differently from western countries and one of its major characteristics is the hollow dignity of its family members. This particular feature in the novel has been elaborated by a thickly decorated figurative language and this paper provides an in-depth analysis of its figurative language in respect with the hollow dignity of the feudal family. This paper is a content analysis and it collects the secondary data from the printed book. The proposition is weighted quantitatively by referring the certain chapters. The researcher gives his qualitative analysis by deeply analyzing the quantitative data. The qualitative analysis is purely based on the figurative language used in the novel. Therefore it considers the figures of speech used in quantitative data as much as possible. After the qualitative analysis is done, it is obvious that symbolism, imagery, metaphor and simile have given a considerable impact on presenting the fact of hollow dignity of the feudal family. In there, symbolism has taken a significant place. Sarcasm has also given a considerable impact throughout the novel to establish the idea of hollow dignity of the feudal family members.

**Keywords:** Hollow dignity, Figurative Language, Feudal Family, Symbolism

## INTRODUCTION

Literature has an inseparable obligation with human beings as if the sea and shore. Since it reflects the life, the ultimate expectation of literature is the pleasure. Therefore literature presents the information of life in a pleasurable way. The literary man is supposed to be a social being who regulates his masterpieces based on the necessity of the society. What society often asked to be discussed is about the social issues of the people. Therefore most of the well-known literary masterpieces are results of firing social problems. In fact, the success of those kinds is nothing but revealing the social problems. In this regards *Giraya* is a tremendous Sri Lankan novel which portrays one of the core social problems in 1960s Sri Lanka.

Feudal system in 1960s Sri Lanka released a herculean pressure on its middle class and lower class people in many ways. In a field of estate, one family had been enjoying with its all properties and they had been inherited a high-class through their generation. The poor were considered as their labourers and servants. They were oppressed by high cast and giant inherited properties of the feudal family. This high cast and the properties imposed them a hollow dignity of themselves that they were honorable than anybody in the set up.

This is signified as one of the major features of Sri Lankan feudal system and that has been a focus of *Giraya* by Punyakante Wijenaike. Hollow dignity of feudal family members has been depicted in a laudable way in the novel through a carefully crafted figurative language. Presentation of the dignity was provided through many literary devices and among those symbols, metaphors, similes, images are prominent. Further the writer's avoidance intention of hollow dignity of the feudal family has been shown by the sarcastic tone.

This research paper evaluates the quality of this figures of speech and its figurative language when it addresses the hollow dignity of feudal family members.

## **22. METHODOLOGY**

First The Content of the printed novel, *Giraya* has been analyzed in respect with the suggested research topic. Therefore methodology follows the method of content analysis. In the content analysis, researcher has collected many of related quotations from the book and the book is considered as a source of secondary data. Quotations have been presented by chapter wise and the collection of quotations is the quantitative data of the research. Each quotation has been mentioned in the sample and they have been qualitatively considered in the data analysis. In the data analysis the quality of figurative language has been elaborated with its figures of speech. This evaluation has been done based on the collected quotations and they have performed a significant role in this research.

### **SAMPLE**

Even though *Giraya* is a novel, it has been written in the form of a diary. The narrator reads her diary for the reader which is in the first person point of view. In a diary, people put their notes according to the dates and days. In the same way the book has been published as the author's diary. Therefore, the chapters are invisible in the *Giraya*. Instead of that it has been ordered according to the dates of the year. Hence one date is considered as one chapter. Dates of the years have been presented according to the Sinhala cultural pattern. The researcher has assumed that the following quotations express the hollow dignity of the feudal family in the novel. Their figurative quality has been analyzed in the data analysis.

#### **1. BAK (April) 13th – Chapter No 01**

Paragraph No 1-1-2 sentences

On Bak 13th, twelve months ago, the rusty iron gates of the walawuwe opened slowly. Throughout the year the gates remained closed and padlocked by old Loku, the gardener.

#### **2. BAK (April) 13th – Chapter No 01**

Paragraph No 3

My mother-in-law sits erect upon her ebony throne in the verandah. The chair having been brought out for the occasion from the dark drawing room within, is richly carved and upholstered in a faded, red brocade.

3. BAK (April) 13th – Chapter No 01

Paragraph No 8-3-4 sentences

When she addresses them her voice is thin, imperious, falling like raindrops upon a poor parched earth. She expects those who hear it to drink it in, for it would have to last them until the next year when once more the gates of the Maha Walawuwe will be open to the public

4. BAK (April) 13th – Chapter No 01

Last Paragraph- 1-5 sentences

My mother-in-law, Adelaine rises like a queen after holding court. She goes into the house followed by her son and daughter and old Lucia Hamy carrying the betel tray and giraya. From the watching crowd I hear a snigger, then a laugh. It is both bold and rude. Lucia Hamy closes the doors of the walawuwe.

5. BAK (April) 30th – Chapter No 03

Paragraph No 10- 2-3 sentences

She bears the English name Adelaine because such was the custom of the people at the time when the British ruled Ceylon. English names were favoured then.

6. VESAK (May) 18th – Chapter No 05

Paragraph No 07- 2-4 sentences

Many new servants, other than Kusuma, had been tried since I came to this house. There had been Seelawathie with the dark, daring eyes and huge knot of hair. She had left within a week for she had been caught speaking to a man near the rusty gates. Then there had been Leela who had been sent away because she forgot to stand up when Adelaine entered the room....

7. VESAK (May) 23rd – VESAK FULL MOON DAY- Chapter No 06

Paragraph No 10- The last sentence

As we go down the estate road I see the young man with the nylon shirt waving, to Lal, but he does not wave back

## 23. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. BAK (April) 13th – Chapter No 01

Paragraph No 1- 1-2 sentences

On Bak 13th, twelve months ago, the rusty iron gates of the walawuwe opened slowly. Throughout the year the gates remained closed and padlocked by old Loku, the gardener.

It is better to have an idea of Sri Lankan terminology used in the novel before analyzing the figurative language has been used. Those specific words have come through these quotes. In this quotation, the word walawuwe refers to the house of the feudal family. When it comes to English it gives the meaning of mansion.

According to the initial introductory sentence, the novelist says about the gates of the walawuwa and how it was opened at last year. According to the narrator, the walawuwe has rusty iron gates. At once, one can argue that rusty iron gates as an image used in this sentence. Indeed, it is an image for everybody since a vivid imagination starts to be created in the reader's mind when these three words are uttered. But, this is mostly a symbol to show the pride of the walawuwe. Before moving along that line, it should be explained as an image.

The word gate has been modified by two adjectives called rusty and iron. Gates are of course different kinds where bamboos, timber, iron etc. Gates of the people differ in the Asian countries according to their economic strength. If the person is a farmer or a poor most probably his gate is a timber or bamboo. He or she must have been a wealthy person to have an iron gate in the Asian region. But, this walawuwa has iron gates. It means they are wealthy people. Foreign readers need to be very careful with the word walawuwa since it has a deeper meaning where those who live inside the walawuwa are high cast people. Therefore iron gates of the walawuwe gives two information where people inside the walawuwe are wealthy and high class.

The beauty of punyakanthe wijenaike comes with the next adjective rusty. Iron gets stain when it is not moved for a long time. When iron is opened to water for a long time also this can be happened. Novelist says that iron gates are rusty. It gives an impression where these gates are hardly ever opened. It is because people inside the walawuwe don't tend to have connections with the people at outside the walawuwe (Throughout the year the gates remained closed and padlocked). For that, two matters can be caused where their giant property and high class. Therefore iron gates are rusty. That shows their hollow dignity which comes out from their property and class.

This idea is enforced further by the word slowly. However, the gardener of the house happened to open this gate on 13th of Bak. Bak is the Sinhala name for month of April. 13th and 14th of Bak are the most important dates for Sinhala and Tamil people in Sri Lanka because they celebrate their most important cultural festival on these couple of days which is called Sinhala Aluth Awurudda. People celebrate this festival by sharing their good thoughts and sweets among their relatives. It is a time of being to home by home with sweats and gifts.

On that day what happens in the walawuwe is reciprocal. While poor people open their gates anybody, people who belong to walawuwe are not willing to do so because they think

that they are more privileged than the poor people since they inherited a hereditary legacy and a high class. This shows the hollow dignity of people inside the walawuwe and that is why this gate is opened slowly, even in the most important date of the year. By the word slowly, novelist very beautifully expresses their unwillingness to move with the poor people. It is because of hollow dignity. That has been depicted figuratively.

To an extent, the iron gate symbolizes the pride of the feudal family. In a country like Sri Lanka, the size of the gate shows their social states and if the gate is constructed as a big metal one the people inside that house tries to show that they are rich and noble. Once they are rich and noble, doubtless they become pride of themselves. In the case of gate of the walawuwe, the same thing has happened.

## 2. BAK (April) 13th – Chapter No 01

### Paragraph No 3

My mother-in-law sits erect upon her ebony throne in the verandah. The chair having been brought out for the occasion from the dark drawing room within, is richly carved and upholstered in a faded, red brocade.

The success of novelist has relied on her symbolical representation. In this quotation she has emerged a very powerful symbol to show their dignity. Ebony throne is a symbol to show the dignity of the feudal family. In a piece of literature, symbols always stand for some other thing. Throne is a must needed object in the king's council. That is reserved only for the king to listen for the voices of the people. The king gives solutions for their problems by comfortably sitting on this seat. Therefore this seat is very prominent and it possesses all the royal dignities with it. The novelist has used that word to show the dignity of the mother-in-law of the narrator. She was given that royal dignity by the word throne. Therefore it is highly symbolical. It composes an idea where her mother is ruling the whole village. She has not stooped only by mentioning the word throne. Further that throne has been described as much as possible. For that, she has used the word ebony. In the poem Raven, Edgar Alan Poe has used the word ebony to show the pride of the bird Raven. In the same way the novelist has used the word, ebony, to show the dignity of this mother-in-law. When a piece of furniture is a color of thick black, it has an antique quality. That enhances the quality of throne and it enhances the dignity of mother-in-law as the same way. Another information is provided to enhance the quality of chair. That is richly carved. When the carvings are there, doubtless that furniture has a more value rather than the others. Further, the author has described the piece of cloth covered the chair. This cloth is a brocade and Oxford dictionary defines it as a type of thick heavy cloth with a raised pattern made especially from gold or silver silk thread. According to that definition, even the covering cloth of the throne has made out of silk or gold. The novelist sharpens the quantity of dignity by giving more information. Therefore symbolical representation has given a crystal light to this quotation.

## 3. BAK (April) 13th – Chapter No 01

### Paragraph No 8- 3-4 sentences

When she addresses them her voice is thin, imperious, falling like raindrops upon a poor parched earth. She expects those who hear it to drink it in, for it would have to last them until the next year when once more the gates of the Maha Walawuwe will be open to the public.

This quotation is highly figurative and it is consisted of simile, image and metaphor respectively. This is a golden example to show the hollow dignity of the feudal spouse in the family. Punyakanthe wijenaike has used a thickly decorated figurative language to portray the idea of hollow dignity in this quotation.

First of all she has given a simile where her voice is thin, imperious, falling like raindrops upon a poor parched earth. The voice of mother-in-law has compared with the raindrops. In between falling and raindrops she has put the word like. Hence the idea of simile is clear. Therefore it is going to be a comparison between her voice and raindrops.

Then the author has crafted a powerful image where a poor parched earth. An imagination of deserted barren land comes to the reader's mind without any hard effort. This image and the earlier simile figuratively perform together to show the proud deportment of the mother-in-law. It is merely a hollow.

Her voice is sharp. One can vividly feel this sharpness of her voice by thinking of a scene where raindrops fall into a deserted harsh land. Raindrops sink into the earth in a sharp way since the ground is dry. This dryness shows the poverty of these people. The word imperious possesses the hollow dignity of the mother-in-law. Raindrops are metaphorical in the next line because the author has put as She expects those who hear it to drink it in. Hence the poor people must drink her voice of raindrops. What the author has tried to say through this full statement is the hollow dignity of this woman. She spread it over these innocent people without a single thought of their poverty. She has been injected this matured dignity by her wealth and cast.

At last in the same quotation, the author has used the term Maha Walawuwe. Walawuwa itself is a mansion according to the Sinhala meaning. English meaning for Maha is Great or giant. Again the word Maha has been used to show the dignity of this walawuwa. To give a huge Emphasis on that term author has used capital M for the word Maha.

#### 04. BAK (April) 13th – Chapter No 01

Last Paragraph- 1-5 sentences

My mother-in-law, Adelaine rises like a queen after holding court. She goes into the house followed by her son and daughter and old Lucia Hamy carrying the betel tray and giraya. From the watching crowd I hear a snigger, then a laugh. It is both bold and rude. Lucia Hamy closes the doors of the walawuwe.

One of the William Shakespeare's plays, Hamlet comes to the mind when above lines are read since it has a setup of king's council. Adelaine is like Gertrude, the queen of king Claudius. She has taken a much of pride within her. One can create a mental picture of a palace hall after reading this whole paragraph as follows.

Adelaine, the narrator's mother-in-law, is the queen of palace and she has had her daily court in the king's council hall. Now she has left the hall and his royal son, Lal, and daughter, Manel, follows her. Lucia Harny, the devotee servants of the walawuwe performs the duty of king's official. This mental picture can be guessed since few words where Adelaine rises like a queen. A powerful simile has been placed to give the comparison between queen and Adelaine. Queens are respectful and everybody is supposed to be praised her. Therefore Adilaine is also no exception. The dignity of Adelaine has been emerged.

But, writer has wanted to show that the dignity possess by the Adelaine is a hollow. So that, she has used From the watching crowd I hear a snigger, then a laugh. It is both bold and rude. Even though crowd is silenced at the presence of feudal family, when they go back people snigger at them. It gives the idea that this dignity is a hollow for the people. Further writer wants to show that people strongly reject this dignity. Therefore the quality of the laugh has mentioned as bold and rude. People intolerance on dignity shows from the word rude and bold is for strong rejection of feudal dignity.

#### 5. BAK (April) 30th – Chapter No 03

Paragraph No 10- 2-3 sentences

She bears the English name Adelaine because such was the custom of the people at the time when the British ruled Ceylon. English names were favoured them.

According to this quotation author tries to show the root of the Adelaine's dignity. Adelaine has a proud on her name because it is an English name. The practice of the eastern countries is the acceptance of whatever things comes from British. They think that having an English name is a matter of dignity. Adelaine is also same and her name has been a hollow ornament to show her pride to public.

#### 6. VESAK (May) 18th – Chapter No 05

Paragraph No 07- 2-4 sentences

Many new servants, other than Kusuma, had been tried since I came to this house. There had been Seelawathie with the dark, daring eyes and huge knot of hair. She had left within a week for she had been caught speaking to a man near the rusty gates. Then there had been Leela who had been sent away because she forgot to stand up when Adelaine entered the room....

Hollow dignity of the feudal family within the walawuwe premises is very strong. Everybody inside the walawuwe possesses this dignity and that is common even for the servants. Even though servants work for walawuwe they are not in a position to have connections with the outsiders. If it happens people in the walawuwe think that that is a shame for the walawuwe because it has a dignity. But according to the author's clues it is merely a hollow. The funniest incident was given in the last sentence of the above paragraph. It shows the powerfulness of cast system in 1960. Though it is a funny for 21st century at that time it was

a social issue. Low cast people has to be stood up at a presence of high cast nobleman. That has gained dignity for the nobles. That was the social practice at that time. That is why Leela lost her job. But writer's inclination on this issue is it has to be avoided since all human being are same.

#### 7. VESAK (May) 23rd – VESAK FULL MOON DAY- Chapter No 06

##### Paragraph No 10- The last sentence

As we go down the estate road I see the young man with the nylon shirt waving, to Lal, but he does not wave back

This quotation shows the difference in between a proud feudal family member and a simple villager. In this occasion the author has used the character of Lal to attack the hollow dignity of the feudal system. In a context of a village all are friendly and they are always ready to share their day today things with others. But Lal, the son of Adelaine is the other way around since they have been poisoned by the hollow dignity. Since that they do not at least have a smile with villagers even on the way. Even though this innocent villager salutes Lal ,he doesn't care it since he is an ideal son of hollow dignity.

## 24. CONCLUSION

The novel Giraya has been written to portray different Sri Lankan social issues in 1960. Hollow dignity of the Sri Lankan feudal System in 1960 is one of the issues has been addressed by this novel.

Feudal system at that time suppressed the poor people at a larger length and they were considered as the mere servants of the system. Since these family members are rage out of their dignity, poor people were their victims. They have spread their hollow dignity on poor people in many ways. This was all around at that society and that has been depicted in this novel as an experience of a middle cast women. She has sarcastically discarded the hollow dignity of these feudal family members and Adeliene, Lal, Lucia Hamy and Old Loku are the characters which show the nature of the hollow dignity of feudal system. Among that Adelaine has been often used to show the proposition.

When she expresses the proposition of this research paper, the novelist has shown her capability of using figurative language by using symbols, images, similes, and metaphors. These all figures of speech have been performed in a combinatory way to reveal the ultimate reality of the hollow dignity of Sri Lankan feudal system. The basic emphasis of the author has been given on symbolical representation and sarcasm has also given a minor



contribution. But, at the end of the day *Giraya* is a combinatory masterpiece of symbols, simile, images and metaphors.

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