



An Exploration of the use of Religious and Cultural References in Ashok K Banker's *Slayer of Kamsa*

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ABSTRACT: -

Ashok K. Banker's "*Slayer of Kamsa*" is renowned for its sophisticated use of religious and cultural allusions. This paper will investigate how Banker employs these allusions to enhance the story, develop nuanced characters, and make important points. In "*Slayer of Kamsa*," Banker makes use of religious and cultural allusions that are clear in the plot, characters, and environment. The narrative's protagonists are shaped by the ideals and worldviews of their diverse cultural and religious upbringings, and even the characters' identities have special significance in Hindu mythology. The personalities of "*Slayer of Kamsa*" are significantly shaped by cultural and religious allusions. Relying on Hindu mythology, the hero, Shri Krishna, is characterized as a divine being. This characterization gives him an aura of dominance and strength that corresponds with the audience's religious convictions. The allusions help to develop deep, complicated characters and evocative explanations of the setting for the novel. Also, they give the tale additional depth and meaning that compel audiences to interact with the book in various ways. A complex and realistic environment is skilfully created using allusions, giving the narrative credibility and significance to the religious and cultural traditions from which it has been derived.

Keywords: - Myth, Mythology, Religion, Culture, Krishna

Introduction: -

The story of Shri Krishna, the eighth manifestation of Lord Vishnu, is recounted in Ashok K. Banker's "*Slayer of Kamsa*," from his birth through his triumph against Kamsa, his persecutor, and uncle. This text is one of eight in Banker's "Krishna Coriolis" series, which covers many facets of Shri Krishna's existence and legend. Using religious and cultural analogies, which give the narrative an additional dimension, is one of Banker's narrating techniques that stands out in "*Slayer of Kamsa*." The usage of religious and cultural allusions in "*Slayer of Kamsa*" will be examined in this article, along with how it affects the novel's actual effect. Banker frequently mentions Hindu gods and their mythology throughout the novel, which gives the story more realism and complexity. Banker depicts Shri Krishna as the personification of *dharma*, duty, integrity, and equity and demonstrates how he does so. Together with religious allusions, Banker also uses a variety of cultural allusions in "*Slayer of Kamsa*" to give readers a view into Indian customs and culture. The novel illustrates the value of community and family in Indian culture. Shri Krishna is shown as having a strong attachment to his friends and relatives and is constantly willing to defend them against destruction. The real significance of "*Slayer of Kamsa*" is significantly impacted by the employment of religious and cultural themes.

Religious References in Ashok K Banker's *Slayer of Kamsa*: -

Indian mythology strongly influenced Banker's "*Slayer of Kamsa*," and there are constant references to different gods, goddesses, and myths throughout the story. Lord Vishnu's manifestation as Shri Krishna is among the book's most critical religious allusions. Shri Krishna is regarded as the eighth embodiment of Lord Vishnu, who, in Hindu mythology, descends on earth whenever there is an imbalance between the good and the bad. According to Banker, Shri Krishna is a powerful deity prophesied to vanquish Kamsa, the ruler of the Mathura demons, and bring harmony back to the earth. Banker frequently mentions Hindu gods and their myths throughout the novel, which gives the story more realism and complexity. The idea of "*Dharma*," a crucial component of Hindu philosophy, is one of the essential religious references in "*Slayer of Kamsa*." According to Banker, Shri Krishna represented *dharma* and was created to bring peace and tranquillity to the universe. The book examines several facets of *dharma*, including duty, righteousness, and justice, and demonstrates how Shri Krishna exemplifies these traits. The principle of "*Karma*"—which alludes to the notion that every deed has repercussions and that one must bear the repercussions of their actions—is another significant religious allusion in the book. As Devaki says to her father: -

'You underestimate your powers, Father. I am sure you can control him even now. He is nothing more than a spoilt child running amok. Too long has he lived as he pleased, done as he willed, without care for dharma or karma. It is time he was checked. And you alone can do it.' (Banker 33)

Banker uses this idea to show how Shri Krishna's actions will lead to his success, whereas Kamsa's actions cause his defeat. The story demonstrates how Shri Krishna's good *karma* aids him in defeating his adversaries and how Kamsa's bad *karma* eventually catches up with him.

The novel contains numerous religious allusions because it is based on the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. The book covers Hindu mythology and symbolism as the protagonists interact with gods and partake in crucial to the faith's ceremonies. The subject of *dharma*, which is the concept of carrying out one's responsibility in existence, is also explored in the novel. As Vasudeva explains to Devaki: -

***'We are people of dharma, Devaki. Taking up arms to defend ourselves is something we do only as a last resort. Violence only begets more violence. Ahimsa is the only way to peaceful coexistence.'* (Banker 48)**

The text also makes mention of numerous religious rituals and activities. For instance, Devaki and Vasudeva's families execute a puja, or devotional rite, to congratulate the pair when they get wedded. The Hinduism-based practise of yoga, which is significant in terms of spirituality, is also mentioned in the book. Banker's description of these customs and ceremonies highlights the significance of culture and community in Hinduism.

Cultural References in *Slayer of Kamsa*: -

In *Slayer of Kamsa*, Banker also uses cultural allusions in addition to religious ones. The book, for instance, is replete with representations of Indian cuisine, attire, and building styles. Readers are drawn into the novel because Banker employs these cultural allusions to generate a rich and realistic setting. When readers are brought to ancient India, it also aids in creating the scene and offering an explanation for the story. The cultural allusions made by Banker aim to emphasise the value of culture in Hinduism. The vast and multifaceted theology of Hinduism is closely entwined with Indian culture. Banker's novel can bring awareness to this relationship and give the book a genuine feel by incorporating cultural allusions. Because of its authenticity, readers are more likely to find the book significant and current. As Banker writes: -

***'...The sacred flame, symbol of Agni, the god of fire, flared up brightly as a purohit, one of the many priests who oversaw the arcana of traditional rites and customs, tossed a ladle of ghee onto the chaukhat...'* (Banker 5)**

The importance of marriage in Indian society is shown in Ashok K. Banker's *Slayer of Kamsa*, which heavily emphasises this subject. The procedure for selecting a partner, the value of family in a wedding, and the difficulties that partners encounter in their marriages are all topics covered in the book. The concept of an arranged marriage is one of the crucial topics of *Slayer of Kamsa*. The practise of arranged marriage, when relatives heavily influence the choice of a mate for their kid, is widespread in Indian society. As King Surasena, the father of Vasudeva, organizes their nuptials, this practise is described in the novel. As Banker writes: -

***'A peace accord Is a piece of parchment sealed with wax and signets. A wedding is a union of families sealed with frolic, food, and love. Ministers and politicians preen and pose at the former and everyone tries to claim credit, even those who have not contributed at all. At a wedding, everybody has the time of their life and each person deserves equal credit.'* (Banker 175)**

Despite his early reservations, Vasudeva eventually accepts the notion of an arranged marriage, and his relationship with Rohini indicates the advantages of this type of marriage. According to Hindu legend, Vasudeva was a monarch from the Yadava kingdom, and Devaki was his daughter. Vasudeva and Devaki chose to get wedded after falling in love. Unfortunately, before they could wed, Kamsa, Devaki's cousin and the king of Mathura, overheard a premonition that stated Devaki's eighth baby would slay him. Kamsa incarcerated Devaki and Vasudeva and slaughtered their initial six kids to stop this prediction from coming true. A wonder occurred when Devaki fell pregnant with their seventh infant, and the kid was transferred to Rohini, Vasudeva's second wife. That was Balarama, who would grow up to play a significant role in Hindu mythology. The wedding of Devaki and Vasudeva is depicted in *Slayer of Kamsa* as a risky and challenging love affair. When Kamsa finds out about their engagement, he gets furious and kills any children they have. Devaki and Vasudeva decide to wed, notwithstanding this danger, displaying their devotion and affection for one another. Because it introduces readers to India's rich and diverse cultural heritage, the novel also fosters cultural knowledge and comprehension.

The book aids viewers in comprehending the complexity of Indian society and the value of multiculturalism by referencing various ethnic practices and ideologies. The significance of caste in ancient Indian civilization is yet another significant cultural allusion in the text. Banker uses the figures of Kamsa and his troops, who are portrayed as warrior class members, to illustrate the intricate caste system of ancient India. Banker emphasises the economic and social inequalities that prevailed in ancient India via his depiction of caste, in addition to the challenges posed by people who tried to escape the restrictions of their caste. As Jarasandha says: -

***'There are other terms for those who fall between varnas: Vandi, for a son begotten by a Vaisya man upon a Kshatriya woman; or Vamaka, which means the same. Or the Kshatriya tribes currently known as Atirathas, Sutas, Ayogas, Vaidehas, Swapakas, Pukkakas, Ugras, Nishadas, Tenas, Vratyas, Chandalas, Karanas, Amvasththas ...'* (Banker 138-139)**

Folklore and Mythology: -

Much of Ashok K. Banker's *Slayer of Kamsa* is based on folklore and mythology. Hindu myth and folklore are extensively used in Banker's rich and intricate story to involve the readers in the milieu of ancient India actively. The involvement of a broad variety of mythological entities and creatures is one of the main elements of folklore and mythology in *Slayer of Kamsa*. These mythological entities originate in Hinduism and are frequently portrayed as solid and deadly entities with unique physical and magical prowess. For instance, Rakshasas, a class of demonic beings, play a significant role in the

story and act as Shri Krishna's and his comrades' primary foes. *Rakshasas* are depicted by Banker, emphasising their physical prowess and mystical abilities, making them fearsome foes for Shri Krishna and his allies. As Banker depicts the character of Kamsa: -

'There was something different about the man that went beyond just the physical muscularity. It was as if Kamsa had grown years in the few months he had been absent. Not that he had aged. If anything, he seemed more vital and vigorous. It was an overall drawing in of energies, a focussing of psychological and physiological strengths, a sharpening and a tightening.' (Banker 183)

Incorporating numerous Hindu gods and goddesses is a significant component of the folklore and mythology in *Slayer of Kamsa*. By stressing their various characteristics and duties throughout the Hindu pantheon, Banker depicts these deities in a sophisticated and multifaceted perspective. One of Hinduism's main deities, Lord Vishnu, is depicted as the universe's restorer who assumes different avatars, or manifestations, to defend the planet from destructive spirits. Shri Krishna, who serves as *Slayer of Kamsa's* protagonist, is the most well-known of these incarnations.

In *Slayer of Kamsa*, Banker also extensively uses a variety of traditional tales and legends from Hindu mythology. These tales frequently have strong and brave heroes, villains, supernatural beings, and entities that have a significant role in the story. Banker establishes a sense of cohesion and linkage between India's old myths and legends and his creative work by weaving these folktales into his interpretation of the *Mahabharata*.

Impact of Religious and Cultural References in Ashok K Banker's *Slayer of Kamsa*: -

The novel is more genuine and accessible to individuals who are acquainted with Indian culture because it tends to make use of religious and cultural themes. Audiences are transported to the time and location of the novel by the writer's vibrant and accurate depiction of India, which bears some resemblance to festivals, clothes, cuisine, arts, and entertainment. The book's cultural allusions contribute to the created sense of location. Based on the cultural background provided by these aspects, the reader may more easily picture the scenes and characters in the novel. The reader is given a mental picture of the celebration when the Holi festival is described, and the usage of colour is used.

The book also examines the significance of cultural values and beliefs in Indian society. For instance, *karma* is interwoven throughout the narrative since the protagonist's choices are impacted by his conviction that the results of his acts will be felt in the future. The work also emphasises the significance of family, community, and honour, fundamental Indian cultural values. The story's connections to religion and culture also draw readers in on a profound level. It aids audiences in comprehending the characters, their intentions, and the history and contemporary setting of the novel. Audiences can relate to the protagonists and take an interest in their journey thanks to this greater involvement with the narrative.

Conclusion: -

In conclusion, Ashok K. Banker's *Slayer of Kamsa's* use of religious and cultural allusions is crucial to the book's popularity. The novel skilfully combines mythological and cultural allusions to tell a compelling narrative that enthralls readers. The analogies strengthen the narrative's realism by giving readers an understanding of the location and time in ancient India. They examine cultural values and beliefs and impart religious importance and foster intercultural competence. The book investigates Hindu mythology and symbolism by using religious allusions. The book's cultural allusions help create a powerful connection to the locale and genuineness. They also examine cultural ideals and tenets, underlining the significance of Indian current cultural emphasis on the family, community, and integrity. Audiences are transported to the time and location of the novel by the author's accurate representation of India, which incorporates allusions to festivals, clothes, food, art, and music. These allusions have a significant effect because they draw readers in and make them care about the characters and their adventures profoundly. Introducing readers to India's cultural diversity and richness helps foster cross-cultural awareness and comprehension.

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