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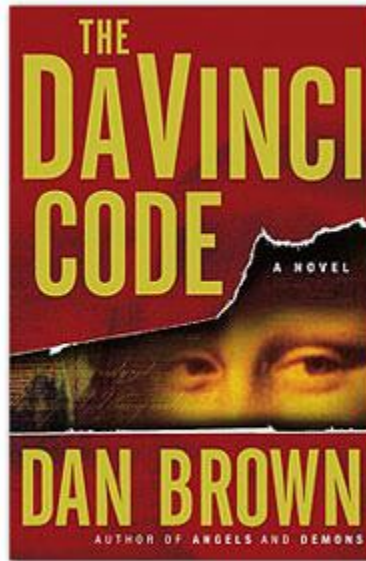
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Theoretical Perspective of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*

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Introduction

There is a close relationship between society, culture and religion, which mutually influence each other. A person's religious experience (the experience of the Divine) helps him or her to

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become a socially and culturally righteous person. Similarly, the social and cultural practices of a person affect his or her religious faith and the practices associated with it. This kind of influences is perceivable in literature too.

A literary text with social, cultural and religious traces tends to affect the reader's outlook on society, culture, religion and the belief-systems. In this regard, literary theory plays a pivotal role in the interpretation of a literary text, and in enlightening the readers to have a better comprehension of the text. Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, abounds in controversies which have challenged the divinity of Christ and thus the Christians' socio-cultural beliefs that include faith in Christ.

Dan Brown, in his attempt to fuse the elements of history and fiction together in *The Da Vinci Code*, distorts certain religious facts and beliefs that are embedded in the Holy Bible. This distortion has in fact wounded hearts of numerous staunch believers who have experienced Christ as God in their personal lives. In this regard, the novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, is an eye-opener to the fact that one should be very cautious while blending fiction with reality in a work of art. Creative imagination should proceed without hurting the religious sentiments of people which may affect their socio-cultural beliefs and practices.

Protest against *The Da Vinci Code*

Ever since the movie version of Dan Brown's controversial novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, was released, a storm of protest battered mildly in the West, and fiercely in the countries like India against the screening of the film. The rationale behind the protest is the controversial scenes which allege that Jesus, the centre of Christian faith, was very much like a mortal and got married to Mary Magdalene, begetting a daughter.

The controversies presented in the novel can be looked at from a theoretical perspective.

This paper is an attempt to analyze the novel in the light of a few elements of literary theories like Postmodernism, New Historicism and Deconstruction. It also seeks to provide a solution to the controversies with the method of the Hegelian dialectic.

1. From the Perspective of Postmodernism

Theoretically, postmodernism refers to the collapse of 'metanarratives' of Western history. In critical theory, and particularly postmodernism, a metanarrative, which is sometimes known as a master or grand narrative, refers to an abstract idea that is thought to be a comprehensive explanation of historical experience or knowledge. The prefix 'meta' means 'beyond' and it is used here to mean 'about'. A narrative is a story.

Therefore, a metanarrative refers to a story *about* a story that encompasses and explains other 'little stories' within totalizing schemes (<http://www.reachinformation.com/define/Metanarrative.aspx>). It claims to be above the ordinary or local accounts of social life

(<http://sociologyindex.com/metanarrative.htm>). In this regard, the Holy Bible is believed to be the metanarrative with regard to the life and divinity of Christ, the establishment of the Church, information about Mary Magdalene, etc.

Metanarrative and *The Da Vinci Code*

According to J. B. Hixson, “To the extent that *The Da Vinci Code* seeks to unravel the metanarratives of Scripture, it is welcomed in the postmodern milieu” (<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/2004ii/hixson.pdf>). Postmodern literature is a literature of outrage at modernism’s ideological bad faith. As explained by Leslie Fiedler in his essay, “Cross the Border – Close the Gap”, unlike modern literature which catered to only high academicians, postmodern literature catered to the masses. In this sense, *The Da Vinci Code* also can be considered a postmodern work as having a mass appeal. More than forty million copies of it have been sold, and it has been published in more than forty languages.

2. *The Da Vinci Code* - From the Perspective of New Historicism

According to Stephen Greenblatt, the distinguishing feature of New Historicism is its openness to the theoretical ferment. That is, it is open to different theories, and it denies the logical order in history. In this way, there is a hint at a New Historicist idea in *The Da Vinci Code*, wherein Dan Brown through the character of Teabing says, “...history is always written by the winners. When two cultures clash, the loser is obliterated, and the winner writes the history books—books which glorify their own cause and disparage the conquered foe...By its very nature, history is always a one-sided account” (270).

The novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, claims to contain the new elements of history which are in the form of controversies. For instance, the Christians strongly believe that the Holy Bible was written by human beings under the influence and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and hence, it is a product of God. But Dan Brown, in his *The Da Vinci Code*, contends that “the Bible is a product of *man*...Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book” (250-251).

There is no belief that the Bible fell magically from the clouds. This statement of Dan Brown is perhaps apt to create an exaggerated tension in an imaginary tale, but it is not based on any such belief recorded in the writings of Church Fathers or others. To the Christians, Jesus is God and is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. But Brown argues that “by officially endorsing Jesus as the son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable” (253).

The Holy Grail, according to Christian belief and traditional legend, is a sacred object which is most often identified with the dish, plate, or cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper and is said to possess miraculous powers. In short, it is the cup or pot used by Christ at the Last Supper (<http://www.enotes.com/waste-land/q-and-a/what-significance-holy-grail-why-necessary-modern>

[-200797](#)). But Brown in the character of the protagonist, Langston, claims that the Grail literally means the ancient symbol of womanhood, and the Holy Grail symbolizes the sacred feminine and the goddess. The power of the female and her ability to produce life was once sacred. Since it posed a threat to the rise of male-dominated Church, the sacred feminine was demonized and called unclean. It was man who created the concept of original sin. Woman who was considered sacred giver of life was believed to be an enemy (258).

Another controversy pointed out by Brown is the idea about the establishment of the Christian Church. The Holy Gospels affirm that it was Peter who was directed by Jesus to establish the Church: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Matthew 16: 18). But Dan Brown argues that it was not Peter but Mary Magdalene to whom Christ gave directions to establish the Christian Church (268).

The most striking controversy is the account of Christ. Brown asserts that Jesus got married to Mary Magdalene who was the Holy Vessel. Magdalene was the chalice that bore the royal bloodline of Jesus which is the source of the most enduring legend of all time – the Holy Grail (270). The Church, in order to defend itself against Magdalene’s power, perpetuated her image as a whore and buried evidence of Christ’s marriage to her. Since Magdalene was the womb that carried Jesus’ royal lineage, the Priory of Sion, a secret brotherhood founded by French king Godefroi, seems to worship Magdalene as the Goddess, the Holy Grail, the Rose and the Divine Mother (274-275).

A Paradox

All these controversies can be considered to be a few elements of New Historicist way of looking at a narrative. There is a paradox in the presentation of these controversies. Before the opening of the novel, Dan Brown argues that “all the descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate” (1). But he claims on his website that “his books are not anti-Christian, as he is a Christian himself, and says of his book *The Da Vinci Code* that it is simply ‘an entertaining story that promotes spiritual discussion and debate’ and suggests that the book may be used ‘as a positive catalyst for introspection and exploration of our faith’” (<http://www.thelostsymbolandbrown.com/biography>).

Brown’s statement is paradoxical to his novel. If he says that he is a Christian, it means that he believes in the divinity of Christ and the teachings of the Holy Bible. This paradox is an ample example to substantiate that the claims and controversies made by Brown in the novel *The Da Vinci Code* are fictional and are not true.

3. *The Da Vinci Code* - From the Perspective of Deconstruction

The novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, can also be perceived from the perspective of deconstruction. For instance, the relationship between the signifier and the signified, according to the theory of deconstruction, is arbitrary. In this sense, the theory of deconstruction is applicable to *The Da Vinci Code*.

If Christ, the central figure of Christian faith, is taken to be ‘the signifier’, the people’s faith in the divinity of Christ can be considered ‘the signified’. The novel, *The Da Vinci Code* questions the relation between the signifier (Christ) and the signified (the people’s faith) and adds a new signified, i.e., the allegation that Christ was a mortal and He led an ordinary life and begot a child. For the strong believers of Christ who have experienced him in their life with the eyes of faith in the form of inner healing and miracles in their life, the claim (the new signified) put forth by Dan Brown becomes arbitrary and meaningless. The experiences of a believer spring from faith. They can only be experienced and cannot be experimented.

4. Hegelian Dialectic as a Solution to the Controversies of Dan Brown

Hegelian dialectic consists of ‘being’ (thesis), ‘nonbeing’ (antithesis) and ‘becoming’ (synthesis). Belief in God can be taken to be the state of ‘being’. This faith may have been infused into the individuals at childhood by parents, religion and the like, and not by one’s own conviction. Therefore, such kind of faith is an immature faith. In the course of life, the individuals may doubt the existence of God because of the experience of pains, difficulties, frustrations and failures in life and may even give up their faith. This lack of faith in God can be taken to be ‘non-being’ (antithesis). Later, their experiences become mature when they realize that the pains of life are meant to purify their life. Consequently, they may regain the faith in God, and all their doubts about God may get submerged in their faith. As a result, their faith in God becomes mature, stronger and unshakeable. This is the process of ‘synthesis’ or ‘becoming’.

In fact, Dan Brown’s novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, is a test to the faith of the Christians. If people are persuaded by the controversies of Dan Brown and give up their faith, their faith in God and in the divinity of Christ is shallow and immature.

For those who have experienced God in their life, the controversies promoted by people who desire to become popular will only strengthen their faith. This is same with regard to Dan Brown’s novel, *The Da Vinci Code*.

For those who have really experienced Christ and have witnessed His love, mercy and healing power, the allegations and controversies put forth by Brown against Christ will be meaningless and will serve as means of strengthening their faith in him.

A true faith transcends the confinements of controversies, sufferings, trials and tribulations. The history has many examples to show that people, who have a strong and unshakeable faith in God and walk in the path shown by him, not only find meaning in the trials, tribulations and frustrations of their life but also experience happiness and peace, miracles and wonders in their life.

Conclusion

Thus, Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, has great scope for literary discussion from the viewpoint of literary theories. The theoretical perspective of this novel exhibits the fact that it has been written in the garb of true history to entertain readers, twisting historical records and facts to create tension in the story narrated. It also enables the readers to differentiate between fiction and reality, grounded in spiritual significance of personal experience as well as well documented historical sources.

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