

'Wedding in the Flood' by Taufiq Rafat; An In-depth Analysis

Poet's Introduction

Taufiq Rafat (25 October 1927 – 2 August 1998), was a prominent Pakistani poet and author. It is generally accredited that Rafat introduced Pakistani Idioms into English literature. Taufiq belongs to the second phase of Pakistani English Literature in the sense of origin or evolution. Before Rafat's appearance in the literary scene, Pakistani literature was considered as an imitation of British literature. He was one of the towering figures who made Pakistani literature distinct from the British. He wrote many poems and published them into collections. Taufiq Rafat like his contemporaries Daud Kamal and Alamgir Hashmi was the representative of Pakistani culture especially interior Punjab. You can read A Brief History of Pakistani Literature in English for further in depth discussion.

Taufiq Rafat has written many famous poems like, Kitchens, This Blade of Grass, Ducks.

Let's start to interpret the poem to trace the Pakistani marriage culture.

Structure of the Poem

The poem 'Wedding in the Flood' has five stanzas and the narrator changes after every stanza. The poem can be divided into three descriptive parts.

1. Girl's departure and her parents worry
2. The pot licking myth and rain as a tragedy
3. Dowry (Tin Trunk, a cot, and a mirror)

Overview

In this poem, we will find out the Pakistani culture, the economic situation of Punjab, and some of the ironic situations developed by the poet. The poem is rich with images.

First Stanza

They are taking my girl away forever,
sobs the bride's mother, as the procession
forms slowly to the whine of the clarinet.
She was the shy one. How will she fare
in that cold house, among these strangers?
This has been a long and difficult day.
The rain nearly ruined everything,
but at the crucial time, when lunch was ready,
it mercifully stopped. It is drizzling again
as they help the bride into the palankeen (palanquin)
This girl has been licking too many pots.
Two sturdy lads carrying the dowry
(a cot, a looking glass, a tin-trunk,
beautifully painted in grey and blue)
lead the way, followed by a foursome
bearing the palankeen on their shoulders
Now even the stragglers are out of view

The first stanza is narrated by the mother of the bride and she is worried about her daughter's departure. The celebration is slowly going to end. The mother thinks that how her shy daughter will adjust herself to a new house among different faces. The rain has always been an encumbrance

on the day of the wedding. In this poem, it stops at the time of lunch but soon it comes down when the palankeen was ready. It is superstitiously considered that this bride might be licked to many pots. Now the poet throws light on the dowry (a cot, a tin trunk, and a mirror) attractively decorated. The mother of the bride is narrating that four people lifted the palankeen and take her daughter away from her house. Now she is unable to see the slow pace people as well. Palankeen also symbolizes the funeral that picks up by four people. It shows that according to the mother her daughter has been taken away forever.

Second Stanza

**I like the look of her hennaed hands
gloats the bridegroom, as he glimpses
her slim fingers gripping the palankeen's side
If only her face matches her hands,
and she gives me no mother-in-law problems,
I'll forgive her the cot and the trunk
and looking glass. Will the rain never stop?
It was my luck to get a pot licking wench.**

The second stanza is narrated by the husband. The bride's hands are hennaed which makes her husband happy and he thinks if her beautiful hands match her face, he will accept her without any problem. In the last lines, the poet makes fun of her by adding that it was my luck to have a pot licking wife. This stanza shows another picture of our society that in rural areas boy is not let to see his fiancée till marriage. Same here the husband just imagines her beauty by seeing his wife's hands, which are attractive.

Third Stanza

**Everything depends on the ferryman now.
It is dark in the palankeen, thinks the bride,
and the roof is leaking. Even my feet are wet.**

**Not a familiar face around me
as I peep through the curtains. I'm cold and scared.
The rain will ruin the cot, trunk, and looking glass.
What sort of man is my husband?
They would hurry, but their feet are slipping,
and there is a swollen river to cross.**

The third stanza is narrated by the bride herself. The bride thinks about the journey that it is dark inside. It has been raining, by the dint of its fast flow, the roof is leaking. She couldn't speak about it due to shyness. Outside the palankeen there is cold and a scene of horror. She is worried about her dowry and makes fun of her husband. There is a big journey to do and the situation is getting worse.

This stanza also depicts Pakistani culture that on the marriage day bride cannot speak. It is very obvious in interior Punjab and other rural areas.

Fourth Stanza

**They might have given a bullock at least,
grumbles the bridegroom's father; a couple of oxen
would have come in handy at the next ploughing.
Instead, we are landed with
a cot, a tin trunk and a looking glass,
all the things that she will use!
Dear God, how the rain is coming down.
The silly girl's been licking too many pots.
I did not like the look of the river
when we crossed it this morning.**

**Come back before three, the ferryman said,
or you'll not find me here. I hope
he waits. We are late by an hour,
or perhaps two. But whoever heard
of a marriage party arriving on time?
The light is poor, and the paths treacherous,
but it is the river I most of all fear.**

This stanza is narrated by the father of the boy. He complains over the dowry that the bride brings things just for her own use. It would be better if she brings a couple of bullocks and so on. The myth of licking too many pots is again stated by the father of the boy. The party is still on the way to the bridegroom's house. The paths are very difficult and it gets dark everywhere. Plowing is an old tradition of Punjab and it's been shown here by the poet.

Fifth Stanza

**Bridegroom and bride and parents and all,
the ferryman waits; he knows you will come
for there is no other way to cross,
and a wedding party always pays extra.
the river is rising, so quickly jump aboard
with your cot, tin trunk, and looking glass,
that the long homeward journey can begin.
Who has seen such a brown and angry river
or can find words for the way the ferry
saws this way and that, and then disgorge**

its screaming load? The clarinet fills with water.

Oh, what a consummation is here:

The father tossed on the horns of the waves,

and full thirty garlands are bobbing past

the bridegroom heaved on the heaving tide,

and in an eddy, among the willows downstream,

the coy bride is truly wedded at last.

In the last stanza, the poet shows that parents are keenly waiting for the bride while on the other hand, the river goes on rising. In the last lines, the poet shows the scene of the journey towards home. The river gives rise and up in an aggressive way and finally they cross the river and this girl is wedded.

Analysis

wedding in flood is a free-verse poem, describing the two different phenomenon in same light. in Pakistan, monsoon is not an ideal season for wedding. usually dry and a bit cold season is considered best for wedding events. Rafat has juxtaposed rain and wedding event connecting it through Pakistani proverb that rain is caused on weddings and marriage ceremonies by girls who lick pots in the kitchen. the first narrative is of mother of the bride who is grieving over the leaving of her daughter, which is perhaps an indication of typical relationship between a married girl and her parents. dowry holds a very significant importance in Pakistani culture associating with honor and family name in society. the way bride's mother counts dowry items, it indicates the poor materialistic conditions and a kind of rural simplicity attached with far flung rural landscapes. another image of palanquin with a foursome symbolizes the reflection of a funeral, dead body carried by four shoulders. poet kinda relates wedding with death that once a girl is married, she is supposed to be cutoff with her family like she is dead now, concentrating on only her in-laws. next voice which readers come across is the voice of bridegroom. typical youth puzzled by feelings of affection for bride by just imagining her physical beauty and the marital issues of being sandwiched

between mother and wife. he is also shown to be worrying about a little simple dowry, which he might be able to consider if the girl is archetypal submissive wife and daughter in-law. the third narrative is of bride who locates marriage as risky as flooded river by special reference to the ferryman(a reference to Charon, the ferryman who transports souls in under world.ref. to Hades).palanquin's darkness is shown as the darkness of coffin and her cold body is like a dead body. and again a very typical social pressure is making her worry that her dowry will be ruined because of rain. and we see a different attitude towards state of "being married". bride is not excited about her husband or her marital concerns but she is worried about what kind of people she is going to interact with. the second last narrative is of bridegroom's father who is supposedly representative of past materialistic mindset where marriage was a certain permit to earn a lot of economic benefits in form of dowry. here readers come across the simple items which will be in used of bride only. here one thing which is more noticeable is the attitude of common man towards monsoon. usually monsoon results in floods which is very problematic and catastrophic in developing countries like Pakistan. flood is symbolic to sweeping of the arrange marriage tradition which has been erased by the sudden explosion of modernism. everyone dies in flood meeting with the ends they thought of in sexual and economic perspectives, cancelling all the human success and dignity.

Themes

This poem encompasses a variety of themes but the main ones are the the power of nature i.e the river and also it's role and conflict with the routine of the wedding procession; the poem also comments on peoples alternating perspectives on their environment and what is happening around them but however contrasting their oppinions may be they all focus on the dowry, the future of the bride and the worsening weather. Apart from the obvious themes the customs and structure of Pakistani culture form and underlying current throughout the poem giving insight of the structure of this society to the audience. The structure mimicks the rising tension throughout the poem, each stanza builds emphasise on the bride, the torrential monsoon showers and also the characters focus on materialistic desires and concerns despite the despotic power of the rains and river looming throughout. All the tension and build up climaxes in the final stanza making the sinking of the ferry even more sybollic as the river ; as if at the control of cellestial authority consumes the greed,

menace and unnatural emotions that was carried by the procession positioning nature back into its rightful position in control of humanity and all its sins. Nature is an unbanishable element of life. dont have time to comment on language but pick out some striking lines or images of natures power and the thoughts of the characters and also the tie ins with arranged marriage, subservant female etc...

Man proposes, God disposes

Cultural depiction

Flood is symbolic of sweeping the arrange marriage tradition which has been erased by the sudden explosion of modernism. Everyone dies in flood meeting with the ends they thought of in sexual and economic perspectives, canceling all the human success and dignity.

