



Structuralistic Analysis of the Poem “The Stone Chat” by Taufeeq Rafat in perspective of Binary Opposition

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Abstract

The aim of this research study is to apply Structuralism (a Linguistic movement related to scientific study of words as signs) as a theoretical framework on the poem “The Stone Chat” by Taufiq Rafat, a prominent Pakistani poet. The study focuses on, presenting Structuralistic analysis (relation between sign and signifier) of the selected text, as proposed by the Swiss Structuralist, De Saussure. Besides, this paper particularly is a textual analysis of a Pakistani piece of poetry by application of linguistic concept of binary opposites (paired opposite) as proposed by a Linguist Levi-Strauss (a linguist) in his book *Structuralist Anthropology*, (1950). The searching of text for binary oppositions is the targeted endeavor of this study with the focus to analyze how far they are skillfully and contextually positioned in this poem. Hence, the researchers intend to focus on the antithetical forces and binary ideas present in the text. The close textual analysis of the poem is aimed at in this context, since *The Stone Chat* has antithetical ideas in abundance. Furthermore, the proposed study underhand, focuses upon bringing to foreground the syntagmatic relation (concept of chain) between signifiers as they are employed in linguistic framework or pattern of this poem. Besides, to the fact how text (signifiers) acts and reacts (contradicts) to its linguistic framework, this paper aims to analyze the variations in tone, attitude and thinking perspectives of speaker in the poem. Furthermore, the close textual analysis, descriptive and interpretive methods as research techniques have been utilized in this study. This research study is likely to contribute to fields of Linguistics, Literary theory and Pakistani literature as a distinct genre.

Keywords: Structuralism, Sign, Signifiers, Binary Oppositions, Juxtaposition, Linguistic Units, Syntagmatic Relation

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction of Structuralism

Before going into detail textual analysis of this poem, a brief review of what structuralism school of study is pertinent. The term "structuralism" is a belated term that describes a particular philosophical/literary movement or moment. The term appeared in the works of French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and gave rise, in France, to the "structuralist movement." Influencing the thinking of writers such as Louis Althusser, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, as well as the structural Marxism of Nicos Poulantzas, most of whom disavowed themselves as being a part of this movement.

1.2 Ferdinand de Saussure and Structuralism

The origins of structuralism connect with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure on linguistics, along with the linguistics of the Prague and Moscow schools. Much of the most influential Structuralistic writing today derives from the work of the great Swiss Linguists, Ferdinand de Saussure (Strickland G12). Saussure as a Structuralist, proposed language as a system or structure by calling it a signifying system. In his view, any system, made up of signs (sound image), signifiers (spoken word), and signified (concept/things) is a 'semiotic or signifying system' and the relation between sign and signifier is arbitrary. Strickland in this regard has talked about sign system by quoting Benvinsite, “One can therefore imagine a Science which studies the life of signs in the heart of the life of the society, which would form part of social psychology in general: we will call it Semiology” (from the Greek Sign).

Furthermore, Saussure has talked about Syntagmatic and associative relations system among words. For him, within language system and units, strong relations are likely to occur or operate. The most important relation between linguistic units according to him is Syntagmatic relation which deals with relations formed by words within a chain...linear relations between units and words. Hence, signifiers are understood in terms of their linear linkers.

In brief, de Saussure's structural linguistics propounded three related concepts (Blackburn, S 2008).

- a. De Saussure argued for a distinction between langue (an idealized abstraction of language) and parole (language as actually used in daily life). He argued that the "sign" was composed of both a signified, an abstract concept or idea, and a "signifier", the perceived sound/visual image.
- b. Because different languages have different words to describe the same objects or concepts, there is no intrinsic reason why a specific sign is used to express a given signifier. It is thus "arbitrary".
- c. Signs thus gain their meaning from their relationships and contrasts with other signs. As he wrote, "in language, there are only differences 'without positive terms'" (Baskin. W 1959).

1.3 Proponents of Structuralism

Proponents of structuralism would argue that a specific domain of culture may be understood by means of a structure—modelled on language—that is distinct both from the organizations of reality and those of ideas or the imagination—the "third order" (Deleuze, Gilles. 2002). In Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, for example, the structural order of "the Symbolic" is distinguished both from "the Real" and "the Imaginary"; similarly, in Althusser's Marxist theory, the structural order of the capitalist mode of production is distinct both from the actual, real agents involved in its relations and from the ideological forms in which those relations are understood.

Blending Freud and de Saussure, the French (post) structuralist Jacques Lacan applied structuralism to psychoanalysis and, in a different way, Jean Piaget applied structuralism to the study of psychology. But Jean Piaget, who would better define himself as constructivist, considers structuralism as "a method and not a doctrine" because for him "there exists no structure without a construction, abstract or genetic" (Piaget. J 1968).

2. Introduction of Taufeeq Rafat and his Works

Taufeeq Rafat is one of the most important, creative and versatile Pakistani Poet. He has been called an Asian Romantic by the critics because of abundant use of romantic elements and imagery in his poetry. Taufeeq Rafat was born on August 7, 1927 in Sialkot and died on August 2, 1998 at the age of 71. His work influenced other Pakistani Poets and he is credited with the introduction of the concept of a Pakistani Idiom in English Literature. He also conducted poetry workshops which influenced other younger poets (Wikipedia). Nasreen Niyamat, a student of literature from Riffah International University has quoted Muneeza Shamsie who has talked about Pakistani poets in her essay Complexities of Home and Homeland in Pakistani English Poetry and Fiction. According to her:

"The universal nature of Islamic philosophy has meant that many Pakistani English writers have perceived themselves in International terms, yet identified with Pakistan. They are linked to trends in Anglo American Literature too. So, we have a body of work, created by myriad of influences. Perhaps that cultural synthesis is identity. This cultural synthesis is also evident in Rafat's poems" (256).

Sajjad Hussain (2009) reported in The Nations Newspaper that how an occasion of launching ceremony of a book by Taufeeq in Lahore, the creative writers and intellectual's labeled the legendary poet Taufeeq Rafat as the second Ezra Pound of Pakistani Poetry (n.d). The title is enough to justify the contribution of Rafat to Pakistani poetry in English.

2.1 Why the Poem "The Stone Chat"

Hence, the selected poem "The Stone Chat" by Taufiq Rafat...a founding father of Pakistani poetry is a poem from his selection of the poetry entitled Arrival of the Moonsoon (1985). The basic theme of this poem is the search for lost identity and flow of time which does change everything beautiful in man's life. As in words of Amara Raza: "The poem examines the resilience of the local stone chat and the way it adapts to its surroundings as a metaphor for the poet's search of identity" (pg: 08). Besides, the poem also describes cultural erosion and importance of roots of culture in nation's history. As further said by Shamsie: His poems are full of cultural insight. But here in this research paper, the researchers have attempted to analyze this particular poem in new dimension. From Structuralist perspective, the form/ text /structural pattern of the poem is to be analyzed or taken into account, since it is rich in poetic images.

3. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and has an exploratory design that probe into the literary poem "The Stone Chat" by Pakistani poet 'Taufeeq Rafat' in perspective of binary opposition. The research design of this paper is qualitative in nature. Furthermore, the close textual analysis and descriptive and interpretive methods as research techniques have been utilized to do textual analysis of this poem. While secondary sources are different articles on representation of structuralism and literary review of Taufeeq Rafat.

4. Implementation of Structuralism on the poem "The Stone Chat"

Now, taking the very title of this poem "The Stone Chat", the reader enters into realm of signifiers. This dominant signifier will wrap up in itself the successive signifiers which the poem will unfold in the course of the study. The very title signifies or refers to two contrary states of affairlife and death as stone-chat represents the end of life by the name of person printed on the epitaph who once used to be a living person, now lying dead....(in the context of taking stone chat as an epitaph on tomb stone). Throughout the poem, the speaker has expressed dual state of experiences.....his journey from immaturity to maturity, from ignorance to reality using binaries (opposing ideas or images) by juxtaposition of dark and positive, constructive and destructive forces and images of life.

This binary opposition sets the dramatic opening of the poem by the speaker saying: The beautiful is beautiful anyway,

so why embellish it with word (pg: 140). Here the signifier beautiful signifies a conceptual image of beauty which the poet has formed in the canvas of his mind. It might be a natural phenomenon, a female figure, an artistic representation of beauty or reality. But here, he is thinking of beauty related to prime/youth as the prevailing images of the text manifest, which needs no elaboration according to him for it in itself is sufficient to define its aesthetic value as beauty needs no artificial ornamentation. Now, how this signifier 'beautiful' is going to be contrasted with its binary opposite ugliness (as to be found in variety of signifiers in this text), the later part of the poem will unfold those signifiers conveying concept of ugliness very forcefully. Furthermore, the Structuralist's emphasis on changing view shifts in thinking- patterns is also marked right in the very next line (it might be gap in thinking in stylistic term). When the poet says: "The eye too long used to green and fruitful movement is parched" (pg: 140).

From the previous line to upcoming line, a sudden shift in thought- pattern of the speaker/ personae can be noticed. It seems just stating the basic idea, the speaker has now converted his thoughts, feeding upon the other myriad of images (signifiers) coming next, just to talk about contrasting state of affairs he is experiencing. The signifier 'green and fruitful movement' (referent of bounciness/prosperity) in the above stated line, is immediately juxtaposed by poet's being parched (parchment...evoking image of dryness and thirst). The signifiers green and fruitful signify spring of one's life where everything is in lush abundance, showing prosperity and ripeness. It means the eye which was used to looking at luxurious, prosperous side of life is now void of sensation and color. The state of satisfaction has lost and gone were the days of prime and youth. So, in the syntactic linear order, the juxtaposition of antithetical (binaries) ideas has been expressed by the poet. In words of Raza, A (2003):

"Taufiq Rafat's poetry is characterized by an indigenization of the English language and rhythm, through the examination of local events, people and images. The co-existence of creative and destructive forces bondage and freedom, as well as a descriptive delight in the local flora and fauna are the only some of the various themes found in his poetry".

Taking into account the above written view regarding nature of Taufiq's poetry, and going with the application of structuralistic analysis, the thread of signifiers needs to reconnect again. So, the signifiers coming in the next line like: "For a desert beneficence seeking subtleties where none seems to exist" (pg: 140) further strengthens this utilization of binary opposites. The word desert finds its signified in pointing towards a barren, sandy area, where no water, no activity of human life can be traced. But how can a person strive to find subtleties (finding positive connotations) in such a barren region!

And Jhelum's eroded hills where the personae in the poem has stopped to take relief presents before us another set of binaries. He means to take relief from tiredness of journey and fatigue amongst the stony hills of Jhelum. There is no doubt, the speaker in this context, emphasizes opposite realities, conditions (destruction and survival) and ideas which seldom do occur in routine life patterns.

Taking into view the previous lines, the words like 'desert' and 'the eroded hills' (both as images of destruction) link back to signifiers of 'green and fruitful movement' of the previous line. In fact, the speaker is not only using contradictory words, but also thinking in contradictory terms. He is contrasting, comparing, two states of affairs....difference from his youth to coming into contact with old age where all things of past glory, freshness, youth, beauty, prosperity have changed towards destruction, ugliness, decay and death....which is the ultimate reality of life. The change is from bounciness to the feeling of thirst and craving.

To encode his transformation from his youth to that of a middle age, he has taken help of contrary images. From binary images used by Taufiq Rafat following antithetical ideas are to be found in this textual analysis: There is a shift from maturity to immaturity, from youth to age, from constructive forces to destructive forces, from unawareness to awareness, from immaturity to maturity, from non- adjustment to adjustment, from state of ignorance to knowledge and from past to present.

In binary context, since the signifiers (words) are taking the position of objects, to be viewed and looked at by the speaker of the poem, the position of the personae would be none other than that of a subject (object-subject) which in itself is a binary opposite code. It would be no exaggeration to say that the personae himself is thinking in term of binary opposite codes pattern. Perhaps it is because of the expression of poet's own self as...'Surfeit has cloyed my vision' (pg: 140) another binary opposite. In reality, too much feeding upon luxuries of life has blinded him to the remaining beauties of life.

According to Strikland: "It is the function of linguistics entities in contributing to the constitutions of meanings that determine whether or not they exist" (pg: 17). So, one task of Structuralist school of thought is also to find out how, primary images and events are related to each other in the work and when differ what do they signify then...and how can the elements of the work, words, parts, stanzas reveal difference to each other.

Owing to this, we can see the action of the poem is shifting back and forth in realm of poet's mind, from present to past then again to past. Going ahead, next the speaker, while continuing his observation of his surrounding, talks about 'they always remind me of village crone' (signifier of old age). Here the shift of tone from vegetated world to humanistic world can be noticed. It lines again with binary opposite of 'fruitful movement' signifier of the starting lines. Now, this is the appropriate time to go back to link signifier 'beautiful' to its binary opposites which have been present till this part of the text such as parched, desert, eroded hills, village crone etc all stand in opposition to the main signifier

'beautiful'...even the phrase 'why embellish it with words' mocks at the speaker's lack of knowledge since beautiful things need no embellishment.

The self-negation of poet in the coming line: "To understand this waste I must try and know myself, as I must once have been and become, and become, why even I have to become...that stone-chat there" (pg: 140) seemingly has the same repetitive signifier but its positioning at different places give it different meanings representing at the same time past become, present become, and the future become....the position which the personae wishes to take.... This become<become<become sign will take the position of binaries also (since according to Structuralist's meanings are to be located within text). The shift in the speaker's thinking pattern can also be noticed in this line. Like stream of consciousness, time movement from present to past in a cyclic position, then back to present again is very active in the screen of poet's mind. Kant Immanuel has stated in context of beauty and vision of surfeit:

"That wild in its appearance quite irregular beauty, is only pleasing as a change to one whose eyes have become surfeited with regular beauty. But he need only to make an experiment of passing one day in his pepper garden to realize that once the regularity has enabled the understanding to put itself in accord with the order that is its constant requirement, it poses an irksome constrain upon the imagination."(89)

Throughout the poem, there is ambiguity regarding nature of stone chat whether it is an inscription on grave or a bird with its vibrating tail. The later part of the poem presents image of bird with its vibrating tail, which at once bursts into joyful song even though he has less sufficient amount of terrace of wheat to take as food. There was nothing favorable to him even then he is willing to survive by calling that place his own. The negative capability in relation to poets own identification with the bird is evident here

In the later part of the poem, the binary opposite like 'no color background' is juxtaposed by 'various shades of grey'. 'The riot of color' signifier can further be taken as an opposite to 'a slap of sunlight.' These set of signifiers are used by personae to talk about state of hope and hopelessness, optimism and pessimism and finally presentation of old age and youth as the main thematic strand of the poem. There would be no exaggeration to say that personae himself is being contrasted with the bird here, who is inhabitant of the place where, wheat as food is less in number, even then he is singing joyfully, being eager to survive in his contented lot. Here that bird has been presented as contrasting figure with the poet himself. From taking its binary opposite, the persona himself has not reached that state of satisfaction which that bird is experiencing. Who in his own words.....has learnt to distinguish between various shades of grey, till the neighborhood is a riot of color?

Interestingly, various shades of grey as dominant signifier in this context in itself contains opposing color imagery as it contains, blackish grey, smoky grey, whitish grey...though all contribute to thematic link of conveying old age scenario.

Even the very last line of the poem is supportive of this ever changing shift of contradictory tone of the persona. Besides, a linear chain of signifiers manifesting syntagmatic relation is not to be found anywhere as beautifully as here: 'and a ragged patch of wheat sufficient cause to be mellifluous about'....a patch of white-'mellifluous'(binaries) sufficient. In his words "And the ragged patch of wheat sufficient cause to be mellifluous about" (pg: 141)

The thematic framework of the poem as a coherent whole is evident as all images combined together, correspond to the idea of poet's sense of loss, his being void of freshness of life. His descriptive magical power is in accordance with his apt use of imagery.

5. Conclusion

In this research study, the researchers have tried to analyze a piece of poetry by a Pakistani poet in the light of Structuralism. To this end, a particular concept of binary opposition by a famous Linguist Levis Strauss has been taken to apply on the theoretical framework of this text. All the binary images introduced in the text have been analyzed and discussed accordingly in light of structuralism to contextualize the idea that this text is full of contrary images. Furthermore, how these images serve as antithetical signifiers to link up to the basic thematic concern of this piece of poetry has also been focused upon in this qualitative research study.

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