

APPLICATION OF RONALD BARTHES' FIVE CODES ON ZAIB-UN-NISSA'S *THE BULL AND THE SHE DEVIL*

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Abstract

The paper aims to explore Roland Barthes's five codes from structural theory on the short story *The Bull and the She Devil* (1958) written by one of the pioneers of Pakistani fiction writers, Zaibunnisa Hamidullah. This research paper analyzes the selected short story qualitatively by applying the five codes. Through textual analysis, the research paper substantiates that the short story has all the five codes, which are the hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic and cultural codes. The selected short story is chosen for multiple reasons. This short story is not that lengthy which makes it easier for the readers as it propagates its ideology in precise word limit and it is enigmatic for the readers as it is full of suspense. The short story contains suspense, symbolic and cultural references. Most importantly, *The Bull and the She Devil* (1958) represents Ghulam Qadir and Shirin as binary oppositions as they have different personalities and opposite mindset and a balance is created through the contrasting personalities of Shirin and Ghulam Qadir. Also, the interpretation of the short story by applying Barthes's codes gives an insight into the theme and structure of the text. The significance of this research is that it will broaden the critical study horizons on Hamidullah's work.

Keywords: Barthes' Codes, Zaibunnisa, The Bull and the She Devil, Textual analysis

Introduction:

Structuralism is regarded as an "intellectual movement" which originated with the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss in France in the 1950s. This intellectual movement revolved around the idea that things need to be considered in the context of the larger structures they are part of. A prominent French literary critic, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) is considered as a post-structural theorist. He worked on his book *Mythologies* by examining modern France as a cultural anthropologist. Post-structuralism maintains that language is not fixed, it has an unstable nature. There can be more than one meaning of a single word. So multiple interpretations can be given for a single literary text. Roland Barthes renounces the conventional way of interpreting a literary piece. He asserts that "a text (narrative) is a galaxy of signifiers which can produce multiple meanings by the participation of the reader in a meaning producing phenomenon (Barthes 1974)." He came up with a theory that involved five codes, through which one can comprehend a single literary piece into multiple interpretations. This study applies Roland Barthes' five codes on Zaibunnisa Hamidullah's short story *The Bull and the She Devil*.

Zaibunissa Hamidullah is a notable Pakistani writer and journalist. She is considered as one of the first female journalists in South Asia. She was born in Calcutta in 1921. She started writing when she was just a child. Due to her father's village and her husband's posting in small Punjab towns, she observed the rural life closely. Her contact with rural life influenced her writing which includes her fiction and poetry. She has the honor of becoming editor and publisher of *The Mirror*. The magazine got banned because it discussed political issues quite fearlessly. Zaibunissa challenged the ban and won, which also makes her the first Pakistani woman to do so. She is also regarded as a pioneering Pakistani feminist writer. Her work focuses on the suffering and struggles of Pakistani women. Her most acclaimed work is her collection of short stories *The Young Wife and Other Stories* (1958). Her work greatly influenced the society of that time as she dealt with the subject matters which were regarded taboo such as harsh and repressive societal values.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The Bull and the She Devil (1958) is a story that centers upon two major characters, Ghulam Qadir and his wife Shirin. Setting of the story is rural Punjab. The story focuses on the issue of sexuality, oppression of women and domestic violence which was considered courageous for a woman to write about such issues in a patriarchal Pakistani society. Hamidullah allows her readers to the mental process of her characters. She writes the short story in a subtle style as the story deals with plenty of taboo issues without being too explicit. Ghulam Qadir has been portrayed as a typical Pakistani man who cannot see anything beyond the pattern set by patriarchy. He is a peasant and owns a bullock for ploughing. Ghulam Qadir gets married to a beautiful woman, Shirin and when the story begins, three months have passed since they got married. Amna is the village match maker describes Shirin as a sweet woman "as supple as a reed and will sway to your slightest wishes" (44).

There are two other characters, Qadir's elder brother and nephew who live with Shirin and Qadir. As the story begins, reader comes to know that after getting married, Ghulam Qadir is not that happy rather he is troubled and aggressive. He wants to control and possess his wife. He considers himself as a "master" and calls her "She Devil" (43).

Though Ghulam Qadir has owned the body of his wife several times but he is unable to control and possess his wife's tender and soft manners. He wants to win her heart too. So he becomes frustrated and thinks of his wife again and again with hate. Also, he takes out his anger on Shirin and his bull. He calls her 'Shaitan' and "She Devil" due to her irresistible charms and sweet nature and develops a good bond with Qadir's elder brother, nephew and bull. When Shirin smiles at others with a tender look in her eyes because she has a soft and charming nature that makes her take care of everyone, even Ghulam Qadir's bull, so a doubt is created in his mind which brings chaos in everyone's life. Ghulam Qadir gets jealous how sweetly Shirin talks to everyone.

One day Gul Mohammed and his son Allah Wasaya go to the city to purchase fertilizer, the thought of Shirin being all alone in the house fills Ghulam Qadir with hot desire. So he gets back home early to be with Shirin. To his dismay, Gul Mohammed and Allah Wasaya are back from the city. Allah Wasaya comes to inform Ghulam Qadir that the bull has gone astray. He goes in search of bull and Shirin too follows him. The bull does not pay attention to Ghulam Qadir's sermons but it was Shirin who was able to control the unruly bull through her soft words. This incident makes him hate Shirin and his bull. His expectation of being alone with Shirin does not go the way he planned which enraged him so much that he forgets to tie his bull. Therefore, the bull runs off again and does not pay heed to Ghulam Qadir's shouting. As he was not able to control the bull, people of the village started giggling. Shirin once again controls the bull. Ghulam Qadir feels ashamed in front of the whole village. In a fit of fury, kills his brother and nephew and injures Shirin and jumps into the well.

1.2 Research Questions

This paper aims to explore following research questions:

1. How five codes of Roland Barthes are exhibited in *The Bull and the She Devil*?

2. How binary oppositions operate in *The Bull and the She Devil*?
3. How does the cultural code highlight patriarchal norms of Pakistani society?

2. Literature Review:

This section will discuss the scholarly research carried out on Zaibunnisa's *The Bull and the She Devil* (1958) and it will be followed by work done on Roland Barthes's five codes. The short story has been analyzed through multiple perspectives that will be discussed briefly in this section.

Waseem Hassan, Sadia and Faraz Ali Bughio (2017) have analyzed the short story by applying stylistic analysis. They have used Leech and Short's model to conduct stylistic analysis. Their paper concludes the fact that Zaibunnisa through her writing style which is peculiar and finely drawn, deals with a "taboo subject" (21). Their research discusses lexical and grammatical categories, figures of speech and cohesion and context (27). All these categories contribute in developing the theme of the short story. Also, it highlights the role of patriarchy in our society.

Sana Imtiaz explores "Femininities and Sexualities" in *The Bull and the She Devil*. Imtiaz employs Mernissi's framework for her study. Her paper focuses on the regulation of sexuality that satisfies the protagonist, Ghulam Qadir as a man, and when he fails to control that sexuality, he commits suicide (389). Patriarchy and societal norms teach Ghulam Qadir to treat his wife as a submissive being. Imtiaz's work draws the inference that due to the gender roles in our society, men are not allowed to see women having authority and power. So Imtiaz uncovers the gender politics (394).

Azan Khalid has worked on exploration of Lacanian Psychoanalytic perspective on *The Bull and the She Devil*. He uses Lacanian Psychoanalysis to uncover the issues related to the character of Ghulam Qadir when he murders his wife at the end of the short story. One of the motives behind murdering his wife is cultural because Ghulam Qadir lives in a patriarchal society. Khalid also discusses the mirror stage of Ghulam Qadir's character that too becomes a motive for murdering his wife. The mirror stage reflects a lack in his past, more specifically in his childhood (qtd. in Khalid).

Zia Ahmad investigates the representation of women after Pakistan came into being in the short fictional works of Hamidullah and Abbasi. He argues that women are "doubly colonized postcolonial subjects" as women are firstly colonized by the colonizers and then by men in our society and they are still trying to fight for their freedom and basic human rights (99). To uncover this ideology, Ahmad applies Postcolonial Feminist Theory. According to Ahmad, *The Bull and the She Devil* highlights the complex psychology of Ghulam Qadir, due to which his wife suffers. Ghulam Qadir thinks that if he is in love with his wife, then it is a form of enslavement. Ahmad also talks about violence and suppressed sexuality in Pakistani villages (102).

Sabah Zaib Ghulam and Mustafa Mashori have applied Roland Barthes's five codes on Shahraz's story *A Pair of Jeans*. Their paper is in fact a post-structural analysis of *A Pair of Jeans*. They are of the view that the short story has words and dialogues with multiple meanings and they also explore modernism vs. traditionalism (171). The five codes assist reader to see the short story in a new light.

Malik, Zaib and Faraz Ali Bughio have applied Roland Barthes' five codes on Bina Shah's *The Optimist*. Their research relies on text based analysis and highlights that all five codes are present in the selected short story and provide a deep exploration of the structure and theme of the short story.

This paper focuses on the application of Roland Barthes's five codes on *The Bull and the She Devil*. Through the above discussion, it becomes apparent that the short story has not been analyzed through this perspectives which highlights the significance of this paper.

3. Methods of the Study

: This research is qualitative in nature and based on textual analysis. The analysis follows literary analysis demonstrated in Barthes's book *S/Z* that was published in 1970. This book is two hundred pages long and it revolves around Balzac's story *Sarrasine*. In order to show the method of analysis, the story is divided into 561 lexies'. 561 units of meaning are arranged in categories by using five codes as Barthes considers these as the basic structures of all narrative (Barry 151). Though this paper does divide the short story into lexies. The selected short story is analyzed to investigate binary oppositions, symbols, cultural references and enigma that are Roland Barthes' five codes.

Discussion and Analysis:

Application of Five Codes on *The Bull and the She Devil*:

The Hermeneutic Code:

It refers to enigmas or puzzles. This code discusses those elements of a text that are mysterious and which make the reader curious to know or understand them. So the reader gets curious to know why a particular incident or event is happening.

The title of the short story, *The Bull and the She Devil* contains an element of mystery in itself. When the reader looks at the title, it puzzles him/her. Certain questions arise in the mind of the reader that why the story is entitled as *The Bull and the She Devil*, who is 'the bull' and who is 'the she devil' in the title. Also, the reader wonders about the genre of the story, is some supernatural element involved? The puzzle is solved as the story progresses, Ghulam Qadir calls his wife, Shirin "the she devil" (42). When Ghulam Qadir sees the reflection of a girl in the water, he utters, "shaitan" (42). The reader gets puzzled by thinking, who is this Shaitan in the story. It arises suspense and then the reader becomes curious to know about 'Shaitan and she devil'. The short story has plenty of mystifying elements. As the story begins, Ghulam Qadir quenches his thirst by drinking water from the bucket. After drinking water, he utters that this water has quenched his thirst only from the outside, not from the inside (42). It compels the reader to think what kind of thirst he has from "the inside." So the truth about Qadir's thirst becomes a mystery for the readers from the beginning of the story. When Ghulam Qadir looks into the darkness of the well, he gets excited as his eyes "glittering" (42). Reader gets curious to know the reason for Ghulam Qadir's glittering eyes. As he looks into the water, "she stared back at him" (42). He feels haunted by that 'she.' It puzzles the reader who thinks about this 'she' and her existence, is she a supernatural being? A ghost? Or a figment of Qadir's mind? As her identity is not known to readers yet.

Moreover, the reader is not sure till the end whether Ghulam Qadir will commit suicide or not. So the text is tangled with enigmas.

The Proairetic Code:

The Proairetic code refers to the major structuring principle that builds interest or suspense on the part of the reader or viewer. So it is basically the actions which come out as a result of suspense. This code applies to any action that implies a further narrative action. The cumulative actions constitute the plot events of the text. It is also called the code of actions. Through this code, reader's center of attention is actions as it becomes a sequence of actions and reactions that arises reader's interest.

The selected short story contains several actions and reactions which upraise suspense. The action begins in the short story when Ghulam Qadir expresses his hatred for his beautiful wife Shirin. The reader does not expect such bitterness from a newly married man. When Ghulam Qadir says, "Curse her, curse her" (42), the reader is intrigued what will happen next. The scene sets the stage for other actions. "He thought of her again and again with hate," (43) prepares the reader for the coming disaster. When Qadir notices that "she [Shirin] was cold to his caresses," (45) it leads to his anger. When Ghulam Qadir forgets to tie his bull, and it strays once again, it alarms the reader that something awful is about to happen. He beats his wife and kills his brother who attempts to rescue Shirin and then kills his nephew, which leads to his own suicide.

The Cultural Code:

It is also known as the referential code (Barthes 20). It refers to the elements that give common knowledge. It pertains to those cultural codes that are tied to clichés, proverbs or popular saying of various sorts. It tends to point out our shared knowledge.

The Bull and the She Devil contains several cultural references. For instance, “Lungi” (42) which highlights the rural Punjabi culture. The names of the characters- Ghulam Qadir, Shirin, Allah Wasaya, Gull Mohammad, all represent cultural references and most specifically call attention to village culture and their traditions. Moreover, words like “Duppatta, Neem, Hookah, Falsa Sherbat, Lassi, Lota, Motia” contain Pakistani culture references. In the short story, all the action is done by Ghulam Qadir and Shirin is passive, the reader sees Shirin through the eyes of Ghulam Qadir, it hints at the oppressed condition of women in our culture and it also exhibits how deeply patriarchy is interwoven in our everyday life. Ghulam Qadir represents typical thinking of men in a patriarchal society as he thinks that his wife exists just for him, “Yes, it was for him that she cooked, for him that she worked, for him that she existed” (43). So this thinking of Ghulam Qadir makes him see himself as a master, “He was her master” (43). Shirin is Qadir’s companion but he does not realize that as he just wants to dominate her. His inability to come up to his standard of manhood makes him cruel. To him, his bull, lands and wife are the same things. He does not consider his wife who can have her own choices. Qadir considers Shirin as “his woman” and “to possess her was his one object in life now” (43). When he claimed her night after night, Shirin was just a “body” for him, nothing more than that. He uses her body to ease his repressed desires as sexual desires have always been treated as a suppressed subject in our culture. Another element that is commonly found in our culture is jealousy. Men get jealous and possessive of their women which leads to unhealthy relationships. The short story under discussion highlights Ghulam Qadir’s jealous nature when Shirin talks to his elder brother, nephew and even his bull in a soft and sweet way. It does not even occur to him that she is not giving any special treatment to his brother, nephew and bull but is in her nature to be soft towards other people as well as animals. But Qadir’s jealousy blinds him so much that he begins to think that Shirin talks to him in an expressionless manner while she talks to others, her face becomes soft and sweet. He thinks “for even this four legged creature [bull] ... was spoken to in sweeter accents than any she had ever addressed to him” (44). This highlights Qadir’s insecurities. Though he has quenched his physical thirst by using Shirin’s body, he still feels that Shirin is “cold” (45).

This reveals our cultural norm that female sexuality is always suppressed while males have every right to assert their sexual desires in order to maintain his manliness. He wants to be the king of Shirin’s heart. It represents another insecurity and hunger of Ghulam Qadir, this hunger torments him even more as he wants to dominate her completely, not just her body but her heart too, “He wanted her to desire him” (46). Qadir wanted re-assurance from Shirin that he possesses the “whole of her” (46). When his own bull does not listen to him, and listens to the tenderness of Shirin in front of the whole village, it hurts his ‘manliness’ and in order to appease his manliness, he beats his wife in front of the people to show that he is the ‘master’. Ghulam Qadir is of the opinion that his has turned turbulent because of his wife and thinks that his brother and nephew have been bewitched by his wife (48). Hence, Ghulam Qadir suffers from inferiority complex. He wants everything to revolve around him. He could not bear the fact that Shirin possesses female power because of her qualities as woman. Ghulam Qadir is narrow-minded and not mature enough even after getting married as he still thinks in extreme terms. On the other hand, Shirin suffers due to Ghulam Qadir’s inferiority complex. She remains silent throughout the short story. She does not show any kind of resistance when Ghulam Qadir insults her and beats her. When he drags her in front of the whole village and beats her with a stick with great force, even then Shirin does not cry. Thus, Shirin represents every woman in Pakistan who has been a victim of domestic and emotional abuse.

The Semic Code:

This code is also known as the connotative code (Barry 151). It refers to those elements that give some additional meaning or suggestive meanings. It is often found in characterization. This code is related to the theme as well. Characters and setting guide the reader to understand the theme of the text.

In the selected short story, Ghulam Qadir uses the word “master” repeatedly. The word “master” implies that Qadir wants to possess Shirin. It also exhibits the fact that he is treating his wife as a property, not as a living, breathing human being. Ghulam Qadir’s view of being the master, trains him to see his wife submissive. This indicates the theme of the short story as well as oppressed condition of the women in our society.

The Symbolic Code:

It is also termed as antithetic code (Barthes 19). This code is somehow like the semantic code but its function is deeper. It refers to those elements that give opposite meanings and have polarities. This code highlights the “contrasted elements of the text by which the reader tries to organise the reality (Barry 151).

The short story under discussion illustrates the binary oppositions as it is based upon opposites. Story revolves around two major characters, Ghulam Qadir and Shirin, who both are completely opposite to each other in their approach towards life and in terms of their personality. Their nature is colliding as one is sweet and one is not which eventually becomes unacceptable for him. Shirin is as “sweet as the scent of the champak” (44) but Ghulam Qadir is full of hatred, rage and obsession. Ghulam Qadir is described as a man who is really rough and unrefined in his manners. For instance, Qadir drinks water directly from the bucket (42). His appearance has also been described as disorderly as his hair has been “unruly” (42). When the water trickles down, he does not bother to wipe it, which once again establishes his character as a man who does not really pay attention to cleanliness and his appearance. Ghulam Qadir has a violent nature which is evident from the beginning of the story as he bursts into fury and “clenched his fist” (42) and picks up a stone and throws it at her reflection. He spits in disgust when Shirin’s image keeps on coming to his eyes and mind. On the other hand, Shirin is pretty, soft and slender. She has a soft and persuasive accent. She has black hair that flow gracefully around her.

Selected short story also contains binary oppositions like patriarchy and women oppression, hatred and sweetness, composure of Shirin and rage of Ghulam Qadir, all these binary oppositions indicate themes of the short story as well.

Ghulam Qadir and Shirin as Binary Oppositions

Ghulam Qadir	Shirin
a. A Conventional Pakistani ‘Man’	Typical Pakistani woman
b. Chauvinistic	Kind
c. Active (doer of the action)	Passive (receiver)
d. Coarse, rough, uncultured	Soft, Sensitive
e. Jealous	Tender

Conclusion:

In conclusion, with the help of above discussion, The Bull and the She Devil manifests five codes of Barthes. The analysis gives an understanding of the structure and subject matter of the story in a new dimension. The text raises reader’s curiosity through the use of certain words and plot progression. The plot of the short story is based upon polarities: male and female, opposite personalities of Ghulam Qadir and Shirin. Also, there are several references to Pakistani culture, norms and traditions. Thus, Roland Barthes five codes can undoubtedly be traced in Zaibunissa’s *The Bull and the She Devil*.

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