

Binary Opposition and Colonial Hegemony: Structural and Post-structural Study of Tariq Rahman's "The Zoo"

Mubarak Ali Lashari, Komal Ansari, Shahid Abbass

Abstract

Post-coloniality is exceptionally major phenomena in the contemporary world literature and culture. It is more relevant to the cultural and literary paradigms of the people who experienced colonisation and decolonisation. The centuries-old practice of dominance left inerasable marks on the colonised people, their minds, thoughts, culture, language and literature. In this direction, same effects can be found on the identity of colonisers as well. Thus, postcolonial structure is hovering over in the decolonised regions and their cultures as in mimicry, ambivalence, hyberdity, and stereotype identity.

This paper attempts to unfold the internal structures of tension between Centre and peripheral privileges and binaries depicted by Tariq Rehman in his fictional piece 'The Zoo'. Paper incorporates structural and post structural approaches to identify concepts and language where priorities and privileges are fictionalised. The analysis comes up with the findings that colonial hegemony is prioritised and privileged on the cost of marginalised ones. As after decolonisation phenomena, things are not given due rights and significance on merit rather on the basis of Masters and Metropolitan origins and affiliations.

Key words: colonialism, post colonialism, structuralism, deconstruction, hegemony, metropolitan, marginalised, binary opposition

Introduction

The deconstruction of the terminology of the fictional discourse and the colonial hegemony are well unfolding strategies of the masterly discourse and texts to unveil the hidden realities. It helps to explore the things not only in the sense of unequal duality but also in the sense of marginality and hegemonic transition of concepts and ideas. Therefore, fiction is not just a textual discourse or entertaining genre but to find time and space in relatedness factuality. Unfolding this theoretical concept is necessary in terms of some critical thinking i.e. structural analysis and inquiries can be at par. This way can help to find two ways of looking at the creative writing in order to identify the gaps and grey areas in literature and language structures. It is in direction that things do not move in one direction and ideas or not created in space, out of temporal and spatial capacities. Therefore, nobody can think in a free and neutral environment. Thus, how to judge and



discover the hidden lines in the discourse, often remained useful strategy. Postcoloniality, as one of the strategies in literature, is usually considered important point of departure. It lends a hand to find a major historical period of hegemonic scheme and design of domination in cultural studies. By this, many theories expanded and various critical approaches remained helpful so far. In the contemporary world, it remained vintage point not only in itself but also interconnected discourse throughout the cultural description. Therefore, things were seen from different angles and diverse perspectives. This analysis of the story can be in that context and perspective to find out the ideas and resources by the way.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Structural study of language and literature has its origin round about one century ago when Swiss Linguist and philosopher Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913) has propounded the theory of structural linguistics. He very firmly analysed the systems of things around him and society when he experienced the Geneva train from Paris. According to Barry (2002) he brought all the concepts from such experiences to is theoretical incorporation to his field of studies and he gave it the name of structuralism or structural linguistics after the train experience, which moved from Paris to Geneva, day in and day out. According to Saussure's analysis, this train is given the name because of its system, and its peculiar identity is within its system structure. Otherwise, nothing is same and nothing can be identified in isolation. From there, structural studies arose and hovered over almost all the humanistic studies and fields up to the hour.

On the other hand, there emerged another theory in the reaction of structuralism, which also has reached at its pinnacle in the postmodern era that is post-structuralism. Structuralism and post-structuralism are very wide and encapsulate many philosophies under their wings. From that point, the deconstruction is a very significant feature of post-structuralism. Deconstruction is a reading strategy to unfold the things hidden and marginalised.

Besides all generalisations, structuralism and post-structuralism carry its identity uniquely and deeply. Newton (1997) explains the origin of structuralism that "Structuralism rose to prominence in France through the application by the French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, of Saussurian structural linguistics to the study of such phenomena as myths, rituals, kinship relations, eating conventions". From this foundational description, it can be inferred that Levi-Strauss studied the structural systems by applying Saussurian concept to understand the systems. The systems are mostly related to the human social and societal structures. All these structures verily can be found in the weaving form of discourse and literature. In this regard, he further confirms that "literature seemed especially appropriate to a structuralist approach since it was wholly made up of language. Thus structuralist literary criticism tends to emphasise the system of conventions which makes literature possible..." (Newton, 1997:83). From this explication, it is revealed that structuralist approach is much apposite to study the literature, that is literature and structuralist theory are based on language as their basic

system. Language on the other hand, is part of Saussurian study of semiotics. Semiotics systems may well be based on signs i.e. signs of colour, size, signals, mathematics, or others which may convey message to human understanding. Thus, the symbols of language are signs which develop signifiers and from there signified. According to philosopher G.S. Peirce (1839- 1910) “the formal doctrine of signs”, and Saussure in his *Course de Linguistique Generale* (1915) argued that linguistics was only part of a general science of signs, which he called semiology”. Thus, structural and literature both owe their existence from the language signs, letters, phonemes, morphemes and sememes. In this context, we can see the structuralism and literature from structural points of view as part of several other systems and we can see all that within the systems. This is supported by Lashari (2013) that, “structural approach bases on the mutual interrelations and we cannot see things in isolation. Everything in its essence is part of some other bigger structure” (Lashari, 2013: 43). In this direction, we can say that structural approach believes in interrelationship in things which are based on language. Language as a source of relating things and giving meaning is reliable and only source to be depended.

In contrast or reaction to that, or even expansion and agreement to structuralism in some or other ways, post-structuralism/ deconstruction philosophy is sceptical and suspicious to almost all that structural groundings. Deconstruction breaks the unities and parallels of structuralism and digs out the priority and inferiority of the conceptual systems in language. For example, structuralism believes in binary system of the concepts. We know things/concepts from its opposites i.e. white because of black, day to night, near to away etc. (Bertens, 2003). It is here that deconstruction breaks down the system and recognises the privileged and marginalised concepts and shows close proximity to postcolonial hegemony, more specifically, linguistic hegemony and dominance. According to this approach, the signifier does not always have one signifier but there are many signifiers which have been called difference by Derrida (Narang, 2007). It is here that both the approaches differ most widely on the basis of concepts recognition and language dependency. Deconstruction believes that there are no fixed binaries and equally synonyms or antonyms or binaries but there is fluidity of concepts. There, the language and signs can mislead or deceive to recognize the the things signified. In post coloniality, there is always tension between centre and periphery. If binary oppositions are accepted then there is privileged and marginalised concepts of two things. So, there is no structural fixed binary opposition to recognise one thing by other.

In this perspective, this study is aimed to incorporate the mixture or blended approach of structuralism and post-structuralism (its atypical feature deconstruction here) on Tariq Rehman's short story “The Zoo”. The story is exquisitely depicted with the concepts of binary opposition of structuralism and hegemonic application of post-structuralism. Two parallels but with dominant and being dominated, privileged and marginalised, superior and inferior elements, priority and depravity identities are fictionalised very well. Thus, this study is an attempt to unravel the things in entirety and exemplary.

The concept of superiority and inferiority, cultured and savage, educated and illiterate, developed and under-developed, sensible and sensuous and the like are closely and ideologically associated with the concept of colonial representation of less-developed and privileged peoples of the third world. It was the mission of colonisers and occupiers to civilise the people and represent them. Thus, the concepts of privileges and dominance are taken in such context at large. This, phenomenon floated upon the cultures, customs, traditions and literature of the regions which came under the influence. Subsequently, unconsciously, the affected cultures underpinned the priorities and significance in their discourse and texts.

The Short Story and its Story-line

The short story "The Zoo" published in 'Selections from Pakistani Literature, Book Three, Prose' is original English fiction by Pakistani fiction writer Tariq Rehman. Rehman according to Arif (2005) is a prolific writer and linguist. He has published several books on varied subjects including two collections of short stories" (Arif, 2005:193). As author of many books, he has good understanding of conceptual fiction and creative writing in postcolonial sense. The story is based on the elite and aristocratic hegemony of elite class and their hobbies on the price of poor peasants and their livelihood. The story is about Hashmat Ali who comes from Sargodha to work in Lahore in an orchard of Malik Sahib, an elite person. Hashmat Ali is poor from background and here he is employed only to shed his labour and blood. He rents a house of lowest category with lesser facilities and localities. He is not supposed to enjoy the sunshine neither the light of electricity. He is even void of wind glows and other natural blessings created by Master for all the world creatures. On the other side, the luxurious lodging of animals at the personal home of the governor is shown. Even the dwelling conditions of the public zoo and private and personal zoo of the Malik Sahib is shown clearly. The difference is sought between the poor living conditions of the poor people and lavish living of the animals. The reader is forced to ponder over the conditions in binary opposition and mind blowing friction is presented.

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial theory and approach is one of the analysis undertaken for the paper. In this approach, similar and dissimilar ideas and concepts are seen in unparallel positions of the subject and the masters i.e. marginal and centre's tension. For the purpose, theoretically, structural point of view and structuralism, in which, things, ideas and concepts are in binary opposition where one point is identified by the help of other angles. But this structural frame is further decoded and explored by post-structural or deconstruction strategy. This strategy unfolds two unequal positions of centre and periphery, prioritised and marginalised by the Derrida and others' theoretical points. How things are seen and perceived by the dominant and dominated subjects where signifiers have not any one signified as structuralism stands but have many signifieds. There are fluid and floating signified points in the discourse. The story composed and written in postcolonial subjects

have many varied forms of signified concepts in the context of hegemonic thinking. By the help of this framework, the discussion and findings were carried out qualitatively and the conclusion was drawn signifying the historical background of postcolonial phenomena.

Discussion and Findings

The story starts with discussion of Ikram Arif and the secretary where Ikram sahib refuses to give more funds for the zoo, whereas, the secretary argues that he has built lovely place for the imported birds on the expenditure of bears for the zoo. Thus, the story begins with binary opposition of the plight of zoo and lovely built place for birds. Here binary opposition is broken with privileged and marginalisation of indigenous zoo and its animals versus privileged condition of foreign 'imported birds'.

The very next paragraph is unambiguous colonial hegemony and justification that 'but there has to be limit' for the local animals whereas, imported birds and animals are free of this limit as they belong to Centre. Here again the concept of metropolitan city and periphery is signified. Dual financial standard and expenditure is depicted, and duality of policies is exhibited that readers can consciously and unconsciously grasp. The process is on the one hand lengthened and privileges are exhaustively justified on the other hand. The imploring of the employees and the haughtiness of superior authorities are much extended to clarify the bent of colonial hegemonic mind.

By this way, in the initial few paragraphs we can come across the following structural binary oppositions with deconstruction and postcolonial hegemony:

Indigenous/local	Foreign/imported
1. No more funds for zoo	1. Lovely place
2. Funds limit	2. Too much funds inevitable
3. Not lodged properly	3. Lodge in style

Thus, in the context of above table and deconstructed fabrication of the discourse, it is observable that colonial hegemony and postcolonial mind-set is demonstrated. So, when we come across postcoloniality, deconstruction is taking place and when we deconstruct the discourse, postcoloniality is displayed at large. In this context both the theories and approaches give the impression of interplaying.

In the forthwith flow of story, there comes the Austrian firm with outlandish expenses to have animal zoo and all the focus is drawn to the foreign prioritised project by the local rulers and government machinery. It is exquisitely contrasted with the human condition of the people of Pakistan, i.e. Punjab. It is portrayed in the wake of concepts of industrialised Lahore and agriculturised identity people of the smaller cities like Sargodha. The discourse of Lahore and Sargodha is well parallel with modifiers and qualifiers attached to Lahore city and barrenised and deserted dry name of Sargodha like;

Fabulous Lahore, Wide world, it is not village louts like peasants... ('Lahore was fabulous indeed, Chacha Barkat Ali told him, but not for village louts like him'. All the

fabulous identity of Lahore is restricted to capitalistic dominance, the people who are rulers and elite, 'double colonisation'). Here fabulous Lahore is prioritised on the contrast of dull and dry indigenous places and cities. Its metropolitan origin like *wide world*, cultured (like opposite to *village louts* as referred in above paragraph) are owning the cannnotational origin to stereotype identity of colonised subjects by coloniser masters to justify their occupation and exploitation. In the sequence, the industrialised origin and relatednesses are adored and advanced to justify the power relation in the subjugated subjects and territories. *Sargodha, agriculture, labourer*

We can see the contrast, the binary opposition of metropolitan city and agriculture city and their status well portrayed in the lines of the short story. Lahore is fabulous because its industrial city with technological development like with huge *caterpillars of dark titanic trains, milling crowd, apartments, and people in great hurry* etc....

The weighty qualifying terminology loaded with technological register are further undervaluing the local identities and proving the supremacy of the western heavy technological encroachment.

Beside these initial contrast and hegemonic binary oppositions blended with structuralist and poststructuralists built up schema, readers come across the main thematic contrasts between indigenous human condition and imported animals living standard. At this stage, story reaches at its climax of hegemony and postcolonial privileges. The family of Hashmat Ali hails from Sargodha and employed by Malik Sahib to turn his agricultural land into orchard. It is another example of industrialised hegemony over agricultural means of product. Here capital decides the destiny of land and its utility. Hashmat Ali brings along his family; wife Fatima, Children Azmat Ali and Zainab Bibi. Due to their meagre earning and livelihood at Sargodha working as agricultural labourer, he moved to work under capitalist and industrial patronage. At this juncture, story unfolds the significance of poor human fellows and animals of rich, elitist and ruling class. The conditions are pitiable for Hashmat and his family yet they are supposed to have *Sabr and Shukr* (Patience and satiation). But the binary opposition is very significant like the following descriptions.

Living conditions of Animals	Living Conditions of Hashmat and his family
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The next few months were busy at the zoo as the outlandish Austrian firm created appropriate landscape for different types of animals.</i> 2. <i>By the end of the summer there verdant green grasslands for the antelopes, the deer, the wild bison and the zebras. There were tall trees in the giraffe's enclosure which itself had been enclosed into another island-like enclosure....</i> 3. <i>The dens of the lions were in terraced plateaus with groves of trees. They too had a moat round them with drawbridges leading to an inner face.</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>'Electricity is expensive', said the property agent who brought him to see it. 'So the bulb will have to be small one.'</i> 2. <i>Fatima climbed up the stairs to her room. 'It is bit dangerous', she commented when Azmat tripped on a steep worn out step; the landlord should get them repaired'.</i> 3. <i>They were in front of termite eaten door and Hashmat was struggling with a rusty lock. 'Zoo' echoed his wife blankly. Hashmat cursed the locked and Fatima pressed her daughter close. ...the lock opened and the door creaked ajar. Hashmat flung it open and fetid stench of dirty quilts assailed their nostrils. It was dark and cavernous inside.</i>

Even though, they might be given the coaching of religious consolation of reasons of haves and have nots, yet the natural and instinctive hunger and thirst remained unfixed. Even the occupied, colonised and exploited people might be assured to get its reward in life hereafter but the children like Azmat Ali and Zainab Bibi had genuine concerns and questions.

In this context, above comparative juxtaposing concepts bring comprehensible discrimination of rich, elite and mimicking colonial rulers' priorities to their even birds and the starving of the facilities and utterly denied basics of human life to Hashmat Ali's family. It can be said that there is peculiar discrimination with Hashmat Ali by some people/ruler/superior authority but it is the system and structure that matter a lot. The system and structure developed under the patronage of colonial hegemony are not allowing availing the resource of 'electricity and bulbs' and the 'lavish grass' and 'the sun light'. The animals of the mimicking people, supposed to be born superior, are supposed to be superior to ordinary humans. The animals are to be assured all the facilities and resources, whereas, the people are to be frightened to the dangerous houses and buildings. Termite eaten doors are the wasted minds of subjects for the metropolitan ones and rusty locks are the ill fates of the colonised people.

Conclusion

To conclude the above discussion and analysis, the story is great representation of inequity of the classes and categories of the people and the location. It is all the matter of relatedness and association. It may be seen in time and space bifurcation and racial division with reference to subjects and master. Subsequently, the belongingness matters most and prioritised rather than the human and animal coincidence. Although all the best things were done in the name of human rights and human dignity throughout the human history from conquering period to colonisation experiences, yet the systems and structures are not authorized to have equity and equal importance whatsoever. The things can be seen in the perspective of the approach by the points. Firstly, belongingness of the things and relations of masterly centres are given more than due priority as compared to the things of colonised subjects. Secondly, the notions of story-line are not necessarily based on equality and impartiality but on the concept of what comes from outside rather than indigenous origin. Origin of the things matter a lot. Thirdly, comparisons of the elements in the story are not in the sense of same commodity but based on hegemonized commodity with marginalised ones. Finally, the resource availed and used for prioritised and marginalised elements are not equal as animals are given more importance on the lives of Hashmat and the family of indigenous origin. Similarly, the adjectives and the characteristics in language choice are based on the centre and peripheral preference that makes things unequal in deconstruction signified concept.

References

- **Arif, I.edt (2005).** *Selections from Pakistani literature, book three, Prose.* Islamabad: The Pakistan academy of letters
- **Barry, P. (2002).** *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary theory.* Manchester: Manchester University Press
- **Bertens, H. (2003).** *Literary theory: the basics.* London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis group.
- **Lashari, M. A (2013).** *Jadid adbi tanqidi nazrya (Modern Literary Critical Theories).* Sukkur: My publication
- **Narang, G. C. (2007).** *Sakhtiat, pas e sakhtiat aur masharqi shaariat.* Lahore: Sang e meel publications.
- **Newton, K. M (1997).** *Twentieth – century literary theory. A reader.* London: Macmillan press ltd.