



RESEARCH PAPER

A Structural Manifestation of Barthes's Five Codes in Hussein's *Another Gulmohar Tree*

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ABSTRACT

The current paper aims to explore the manifestation of Roland Barthes's Five Codes in the novella *Another Gulmohar Tree* by Aamer Hussein. The analysis of the novella is qualitative, and the theoretical framework of Five Codes by Roland Barthes is applied. Moreover, the methodology of Textual analysis by Alan Mckee is opted for the analysis of the text. The study results showed that all five codes, which are hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural codes, are present in the text. As a result, the codes play a role in enhancing the effect of the structural knitting of the novella. This research also features important writing techniques of Barthes to overcome the issue of ill-structured short stories. In the end, the study highlights Aamer Hussein's talent in creating a novella that contains important ideas and themes.

KEYWORDS Five Codes, Roland Barthes, Structuralism, Textual Analysis

Introduction

Structuralism as a literary movement started in 1950 with a major contribution from Levi Strauss in France. In the *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, structuralism is defined as, "the theory of structuralism, is the product of a system of signification or code (q.v.). The relationships between the elements of the code give it signification. Codes are arbitrary (all signs are arbitrary), and without them we cannot apprehend reality." (Cuddon, 2012). This arbitrary nature of the words is deduced from the symbolic meanings. The meanings are not related to the form or structure of the words, but the underlying meaning of the words is based on experiences. Moreover, the movement of structuralism gained popularity with the basic and major work of Levi-Strauss. As Levi-Strauss stated, "It is made up of several elements, none of which can undergo a change without effecting changes in all the other elements." (Strauss, 1963). The structure of the text is taken collectively to understand the effect of the different words. This effect will be generated by all the elements, whether the text's themes, plot or semantic value. The work of Roland Barthes as a structuralist and post-structuralist theorist also paved the way to explore the avenues of this movement. Barthes took the movement from the study of elements to the study of the whole text. His five codes of reading the text, such as proairetic, semantic, hermeneutic, symbolic, and cultural codes, devised a new lens to explore a text and to understand the underlying meaning of the text.

Aamer Hussein, a Pakistani writer, wrote a novella, *Another Gulmohar Tree*, in 2009. The novella describes the love story of a Pakistani writer and his English wife, Lydia. Both met in London while Usman, the protagonist, was delivering a speech. Here she notices him. The novella is written in fable style, where two stories are going on at the same time. The novella starts with fables and describes Usman, a frog, a crocodile, and Rokeya. All

these tales are then connected to the main story of Usman and Lydia. The different characters in the fable are revealed in the later part of the main story, and they represent all characters and their part in the story. The song of Usman for his friend Frog in the first part shows his yearning for his lost happiness and Rokeya returning the frog to Usman is the representation of getting back what was lost from Usman.

Moreover, the story revolves around two main characters, Usman and Lydia. They both met as strangers in London, where they both carried the burden of broken relationships and loneliness. The main story of Usman and Lydia (Rokeya) develops in a way where Lydia comes to Pakistan to meet Usman and they both get married. In their married life, Lydia who converts to Islam and adopts a Muslim name on the day of marriage is shown where she creates love for her new home which is Pakistan and how she deals with the new identity and the cultural identity assimilated by the adoption of a new culture, which is that of Pakistan. Moreover, Usman is also shown to yearn for his identity and the historical grandeur of his identity and now tries to see the happiness and creation of a new cultural identity made by both of them in Karachi. This is represented through the introduction of a symbol of the Gulmohar Tree, which is not a native tree and is a symbol of foreign people having a new cultural identity that is adjusting and blooming in the indigenous soil of Pakistan.

Furthermore, the writer having a hybrid background provides another important aspect of the story of the novella. He has got two identities, one from the subcontinent and the other from London. As mentioned in an interview, "Aamer Hussein describes himself as 'a third-generation Karachiite,' because he, his father, and paternal grandfather were all born in Karachi" (Chamber, 2011, p.75). He got his English identity when his father moved to London, "permanently in 1968" (Chamber, 2011, p.75). Thus, being a diasporic writer, he skillfully structured the process of cultural identity, which transforms through the past and flourishes in the present.

Literature Review

The theory of structuralism in literature started in 1930 with the work of Jakobson, Mukarovsky, and their colleagues. They were the proponents of the whole over a single unit. The idea behind their work is that it should be considered as a whole structure in the structuralist study of the literary text. The different elements combined to form the piece of literature and their relationship should be studied as a whole. This is done to understand the overall structure and the meaning of the text under study. As mentioned,

"The approach to literature which they advocated rested on the simple proposition that the individual work should be treated as a 'structure', by which they meant the sum of the interrelations of its different parts, and that the significance of these parts could not be considered outside their relationship with the whole" (Robey, 1976, p. 108).

The importance of structuralism in literature can be seen in the fact that it brings both literature and language closer. It is stated in a dictionary, and it says, "As applied in literary studies, structuralist criticism views literature as a second-order system that uses the first-order structural system of language as its medium and is itself to be analyzed primarily on the model of linguistic theory" (Abrams, 1993, p. 280). This importance can be seen in the fact that it describes both language and literature as primary and secondary structural systems. In which the second order is analyzed by the first order to understand the proper meanings of the text. Thus, the importance of both systems is prevalent in the structuralist approach. They are taken as a whole to identify the major theme or messages behind the main work of the literature.

According to Smithson, the movement of structuralism can be seen as a literary movement of structure analysis. This analysis can be done synchronously to assess the meanings of the text below the surface. Meanwhile, this analysis also clarifies and identifies the relationships between the different internal structures of the text. Resultantly, in maintaining the overall meaning and message of the literary writing. (Smithson, 1975, p. 151). Moreover, Piaget describes structuralism in terms of “whole, element and their relationship” analysis as he stated, “it is neither the elements nor a whole . . . , but the relations among elements that count. In other words, the logical procedures or natural processes by which the whole is formed are primary, not the whole . . . or the elements” (Piaget, 1970, pp. 8-9). This description of structuralism does not specify the importance of elements or wholes but the overall relationship of these elements in any text.

Taghizadeh, in an article, states that structuralists are more interested in unravelling the deeper meaning of the text. The deep study of the text is achieved by understanding the text’s grammar and the narrative secrets under analysis. This type of understanding can unfurl the relationships of certain patterns in the text to understand the major patterns running throughout the text. This fact is stated in the article written by Taghizadeh; it states, “the text is no longer a unique and autonomous object, and the author’s intention is not the same as its overall meaning, for meaning is determined by the system that governs the author” (Taghizadeh, 2013, p. 288). In addition, the subject matter of structuralism is described by Sarma, who states, “Structuralism studies all social and cultural phenomena, including folk or fairy tales, myths, literary texts, advertisements, films, fashions in clothes, patterns of social decorum and so on” (Sarma, 2004, p. 210). Thus, all these avenues can be a subject matter of structuralism and can be taken as the data to explore its structural patterns.

Claire Chambers (2011), in his article, *A Comparative Approach to Pakistani Fiction in English*, has seen the importance and the emergence of English fiction writers. The writers have opted for the English language as a source of conveying their ideas. Aamer Hussein, being one of such writers, has also been made a part of it. The language used by the writer can be seen as the tool that manifests the importance of Muslim identity. Meanwhile, the article through intertextuality, also focuses on the convergence of ideas from Muslim writers from different parts of the world, such as South Asia, Arabia and Africa’s writers. The voices combine and form the unified voice of the Muslim Ummah.

Moreover, in an interview with Aamer Hussein, the novella is shown as something which shows the importance of the past in creating the present. As mentioned, “The relationship between the Pakistani writer and his translator-painter-illustrator wife allows Hussein to explore Urdu and English languages and artistic traditions, mixed-heritage relationships, and tensions precipitated by colonial history” (Chamber, 2011, p. 79).

Material and Methods

The present research is qualitative, while the methodology opted to study the novella is of textual analysis. In addition, Roland Barthes’s five codes are used to understand the structure and the meaning of the different patterns running in the novella’s text. Textual analysis is done to describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in *Another Gulmohar Tree*. Data is collected from the text by note-taking. The researcher took notes of relevant words, sentences and passages from the text and analyzed them. To understand this methodology, it is important to understand the concept through the views of different theorists. Theorists have defined text, its purpose and how to do textual analysis in research. Text is something written and carrying any

meaning as described by Mckee, "A text is something that we make meaning from" (Mckee, 2003, p. 4), or it is an "educated guess," according to Mckee.

In addition, the production of any text can be for different reasons, and to dig out the meaning from that text is the main purpose of doing textual analysis. As mentioned by Frey and his colleagues, "textual analysis serves three purposes in which researchers ascribe meaning to the text, understand the influence of variables outside the text, and critique or evaluate the text" (Frey et al., 1992). Besides, the mediums through which the texts can be gathered are as follows: "Textual analysis is a method of study utilized by researchers to examine messages as they appear through a variety of mediums. The data generated for textual analysis can come from documents, films, newspapers, paintings, web pages, and so forth" (Smith, 2017, p. 1). The fields where it is used are described by Smith: "Although textual analysis is used heavily within the field of communications, it is a transdisciplinary method that is also present in a number of the social sciences and humanities, including sociology, psychology, political science, health, history, and media studies – to name just a few." (Smith 2017, p. 1).

Moreover, the five codes of Barthes paved the way to understand the interpretations of the text. Roland Barthes provided his famous five codes in his book *S/Z* and applied these codes to the novella *Sarrasine* by Honoré de Balzac. In analyzing the novella, he divided it into five different categories or codes. The proairetic code, hermeneutic code, semantic code, symbolic code and cultural code.

Hermeneutic code shows the enigma, mystery or riddles in the text. As it is mentioned, "by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed" (Barthes, 1974, p. 19). The proairetic code majorly identifies the action. The actions are in sequence and pave the way for the story. These actions keep the interest of the readers and all the actions collectively build up the plot of the story. Moreover, the cultural codes are mainly composed of our shared knowledge in the text. As mentioned, "Cultural codes are references to a science or a body of knowledge; in drawing attention to them, we merely indicate the type of knowledge (physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc.) referred to, without going so far as to construct (or reconstruct) the culture they express" (Barthes, 1974, p. 20). Semic code is the connotative meaning of the text. They are responsible for understanding the additional meanings of the words. Through this code, a reader can understand the main themes of the story. Lastly, the symbolic code of the text identifies the antithesis of the text. The poles or the contrasting ideas in the story, provide a deeper understanding of the story. Hence, by applying the theory of five codes, the text of the novella is assessed.

Results and Discussion

The Hermeneutic Code

This code applies to the story's enigmas and mysteries. First, the novella's title raises the reader's curiosity about the type of flower stated in the book. Other sorts of flowers are common but this one may be unfamiliar to readers. As soon as the novella begins, the title captures the reader's interest and prompts them to look up what the novella is about. By the end of the novella, it is revealed that Gulmohar is an alien tree that is not native to Karachi yet thriving there. As mentioned, "She was surprised to find that, like herself and so many other inhabitants of her adopted city, the gulmohar, which appeared to be rooted in this soil, was a transplant" (Hussein, 2014, p. 62). The novella is written in a fable style, beginning with fragmented short stories. The stories about the tree, the singing frog, a deer, and the land of crocodiles create mystery for the readers as they

think about the importance of these short stories. This mystery creates the urge in the readers to further study the story with a mindset of 'what is next?'

A scene in the story in which Lydia sails to Karachi with all of her anxieties of acceptance and rejection in a new land adds to the intrigue for the readers. The readers, till the end of the novella, try to assess whether she will get united with Usman, and will ever be accepted by the people or the land that does not have a good past with the Western world. As mentioned, "On the boat, during the fortnight that it took to sail to Karachi, she'd often wonder: how welcome would a pale foreigner be in a country that had only recently rid itself of the unwanted presence of her kind?" (Hussein, 2014, p. 58). This mystery is resolved at the end of the novella when it is revealed that she happily accepted the new land, and even the marriage was a successful venture for both of the main characters.

The Proairetic Code

This code is referred to as the code of actions. Throughout the novella, there are several actions and reactions of the characters. For example, the action of the farmer when he took his daughter to the land of crocodiles. This action resulted in a reaction when the entire family went there. They were quite happy in that land where everything was green and their daughter was a queen there. As mentioned, "Your sister is the commander's bride. She sits in a green gauze dress on a swing of gold with her baby in a golden crib beside her" (Hussein, 2014, p. 15). As a reaction to this action of the daughter being given to the land of crocodiles, the parents also followed her to the river and they were happy there.

Another instance from the text shows this code is activated when the action performed by Rokeya, which was to give 'bread and milk' to the frog, created another action. The action of narrating the story by the frog, when he told Rukeya about the aunt of Usman, a wicked lady. This action of telling the story helps in the progression of the story and readers now understand it, as it unravels the actions of the wicked lady as well. The frog told Rukeya, "She said: You'd try to buy my boy from me with coins of gold, would you? I followed him here yesterday and saw your games, witch. I gave him opium so that he'd sleep the sleep of the dead" (Hussein, 2014, p. 27). The action of Usman to give coins daily to the aunt made her doubt his mode of earning and in return, the action of harming the frog happened in the novella. Meanwhile, the action of Usman in delivering a speech at an event inspired Lydia to know more about him. As mentioned in the text, "Lydia, in the audience, was moved by the passion with which the Pakistani speaker, articulating his country's position" (Hussein, 2014, p. 36). In addition, Usman's action of leaving his parents at the age of twenty-one was an action on his behalf that resulted in more reactions in the novella. Such as the arrival of Lydia to Pakistan, his marriage with Lydia, the birth of children and a new beginning of his life.

The Cultural Code

This is the referential code. This is the shared knowledge of the story's readers and writers. In this type of code, the readers share a common knowledge of cultures where certain words, proverbs and practices are a part of one's culture. Readers can easily identify this code if they have a common understanding of the culture. These codes are used throughout the book, revealing the writer's cultural background. For example, the Urdu language in the novella excerpts indicates to readers that the writer and the knitting of the story have subcontinent roots. Such as the Urdu name of the journal '*Kal, Aaj aur Kal*' (p. 69), meaning Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, the use of the word '*Mai Rasulan*' (p. 73)

shows the influence of the linguistic culture of any country where 'Mai' is used for an old woman. In addition, the historical culture of the writer is also revealed in the event of the 'Jalianwala massacre' (p.42). It shows the writer, and the reader can both share and understand the main reason for quoting this event. By mentioning this event, the colonial past is highlighted and how the people of the subcontinent survived.

Another cultural code of the Eastern culture can be seen in this excerpt where the institution of marriage is highlighted. The institute where both Groom and Bride are mostly wedded by the word of their parents, within the family, and without proper consideration of their age and their upcoming responsibilities. As mentioned in the text, the first marriage and failed marriage of Usman took place when he was very young. As mentioned, "Usman was eighteen when his father found him a bride, within their extended family" (Hussein, 2014, p. 41). In addition, the cultural practices of combining two incompatible humans by force is also hinted at in the text: "Usman's wife and he were never compatible – they could barely spend time together without Usman becoming aware of her disdain, and Naimat Bibi of his indifference" (Hussein, 2014, p. 41). Resultantly, there is an unexpected parenthood and traumatic experiences for the children in their future. As mentioned in the text, "They became the parents of twin sons within fifteen months" (Hussein, 2014, p. 41). This code clarifies that culturally the important decision of marriage is often taken with some ill practices.

Moreover, another cultural code can be seen in the novella, where the male standards are very high. Usman, being a husband to a foreigner and a woman who has not grown up in his homeland, tries to always correct the language of his second wife, Lydia (Rokeya). As it is mentioned despite "Usman's severe standard" (p. 83), Lydia tried to assimilate the Eastern culture well. In addition, the cultural setup of Eastern men is also hinted at in the novella. Eastern men would expect the highest form of devotion from their partners. The devotion where they are important at any cost, they will not notice the sacrifices of the women. The cultural code shows this cultural mindset of the Eastern men that they do not differentiate between love and responsibility; both are important aspects of life. If a woman is trying to balance both, then why is the mindset of a man stuck on a point that maybe he is neglected somehow? As Usman at one point thinks about Lydia, "Rokeya, until she became a mother, had placed him above all else; now he came second to their children, for whom she showed an almost feral devotion, reading to them, playing with them" (Hussein, 2014, p. 100). This cultural mindset is also portrayed in the novella and Usman at the end accepts the sacrifice of Rokeya.

The Semantic or Semic Code

These codes, as stated earlier, provide the connotative meanings of the text. They can reveal the themes, characters and the setting. The setting of the novella *Another Gulmohar Tree* is very important and provides additional knowledge about the themes of the novella. The setting is London and Karachi. One is home for one character, while a foreign land for another character and vice versa. The themes of transnationalism, cultural hybridity, third space, migration, diasporic identity and the idea of belongingness are highlighted in the novella through the text's development. All the themes are one by one described by the semantic code of the text. First, the concept of home in cultural identity is the source of happiness and protection for the migrants. As in the novella, the character of Lydia will attain this happiness by accepting Karachi as her new home. There is some tension as well in the mind of the character while arriving at the sea city, which is a common phenomenon that can be seen in the migrants. The fear of acceptance, whether they will be accepted in that place or not. As mentioned in the text in her journey, "how welcome would a pale foreigner be in a country which had only recently rid itself of the

unwanted presence of her kind?" (Hussein, 2014, p. 58). This mental recognition of foreign land and 'unwanted presence' is also seen in the character of Usman. He, while leaving London, was also concerned about this strangeness. As the text mentions, his loss of home long ago shows the displacement which was experienced by this character twice. As Usman mentions his fears,

What awaited him in the seaside city he had chosen as his home, he, a man who had no home because he'd lost his birthplace long ago and never learnt to belong anywhere else, what would he do with his life in that open city teeming with strangers like himself? (Hussein, 2014, p. 50)

This continuous tension and attachment to the home, which is missing in the lives of the main characters, provides the base to develop a 'third space', the space which will be regarded as their own home. The home in which they choose to live after marriage. Thus, here in the text, there is development of this home which is the city of Karachi. Before their acceptance, it was home to Usman only 'other city'. Meanwhile, the character of Usman also feels this pain of strangeness when Lydia visits Karachi; he accepts that he has to provide that sense of affiliation to her as she once gave her when he was in London. They feel this strangeness where you attach to fill the gap of the others who are strangers in a place because these strangers will reach out to one another out of their shared experiences, not out of curiosity or pity. As mentioned by Usman in the text, "a stranger, in this city of strangers and oddly lonely like himself, had reached out to him, not out of any sense of pity or even curiosity, but in search of a companion to talk to" (Hussein, 2014, p. 51).

Thus, this tension of 'belongingness' of home created a new place where both characters started their life to get a sense of home. This is mostly the dilemma of the migrants, where they try to create their own space to feel attached to a certain demographic limit and not be seen as strangers. As "they built their little hilltop home" (Hussein, 2014, p. 62). The creation of a new home is inhibited by a lot of other foreigners as well. This gathering of all the migrants in one place somehow provides the 'sense of belongingness'. The symbolic coming of the migrants and the enrichment of its soil can be seen by the inclusion of the Gulmohar Tree in the novella as Lydia notices it in the surroundings of this seaside city. As, "She was surprised to find that, like herself and so many other inhabitants of her adopted city, the gulmohar, which appeared to be rooted in this soil, was a transplant" (Hussein, 2014, p. 62).

Another theme or element which is seen flourishing in the text is the creation of a new identity by the migrants. This identity will be the mix of two cultures. The mix will be rationally accepted by the migrants and will be assimilated to create a new identity for the migrants. At the start of the novella, Usman is shown in an attire which is a blend of two cultures. He was delivering a speech in London when Lydia noticed this, "He was in national dress, a long black coat with a high cropped collar" (Hussein, 2014, p. 36), while the inclusion of another cultural trait is seen in his shoes, which is described by Lydia as "were laced and Western" (Hussein, 2014, p. 36), while his language was also something which Lydia noticed was rich, as it is mentioned, "His English, she'd noticed when he gave his speech, was syntactically adequate and quite rich in vocabulary" (Hussein, 2014, p. 37). Meanwhile, his Urdu was also up to the mark: "The extreme polish his Urdu had acquired in Delhi" (Hussein, 2014, p. 43). This formation of unique characteristics by the migrant to be apt in both languages is the creation of this new identity, which is possessed only by the migrants. As mentioned by Usman in his adoption of language in his comment, "You don't choose the language you write in, it chooses you" (Hussein, 2014, p. 46). Thus, all the

connotative and suggestive meanings and themes of the text can be seen in the semantic code.

The Symbolic Code

The symbolic code of the text refers to the elements which are in contrast to each other. They are helpful to understand the deeper meaning of the text under study. For example, the character of Lydia can be seen in contrast to the character of Usman as she by sheer hard work and passion strives and adapts to the new place. She also creates another identity by converting her name, dress code, language and religion to form her own unique identity. As the text mentions, "I, Rokeya, accept. He couldn't conceal his surprise: the new name, the ease with the words. He hadn't asked her to convert" (Hussein, 2014, p. 61). By changing her dress code, she "changed her foreign clothes for local apparel" (Hussein, 2014, p. 67). Lydia's ease of switching between two languages also helps her identify her unique identity. As mentioned, "Rokeya using an English word when she couldn't find the right one in Urdu" (Hussein, 2014, P. 76). All these instances and her love for the "local embroidery," art and language show her new identity that she consciously adopted and assimilated to feel a pertinent being in a certain time. This consistent hard work and passion are weak in the character of Usman, as he doubts that maybe he is now second to Lydia and maybe things are dying.

Another contrasting element in the novella is the ongoing tension between the past and present in the formation of a new identity. There is always this haunted past, which is seen in the formation of cultural identity, the element of history, which is also hybrid for the migrants is shown when the characters make allusions to the history of the colonized era. The elements which deconstruct the ruling of the whites on the locals through this, the hybrids make their place in the present and are hopeful of a bright future, as both of the characters are shown to be hopeful for the future. As the character of Usman is shown to have a knowledge and taste of the Subcontinent's great writers as mentioned, he "randomly acquainting himself with the great works of Urdu and Persian, immersing himself in the verses of Momin, Meer, Ghalib, the classic epic and romantic poems of Ferdausi, Jami, Nizami and Ameer Khusrau" (Hussein, 2014, p. 40). This ongoing nostalgia of the past and present is also helpful in understanding the underlying meaning of the novella that there can be a better future if both are streamlined. Hence, the binary of past and present can also be seen through this code.

Moreover, the other binaries highlighted are Home versus Foreign, Belongingness versus Loneliness, Colonizer versus Colonized, Transplant versus Native, and East versus West.

Conclusion

In conclusion, looking at Aamer Hussein's novella *Another Gulmohar Tree* through Roland Barthes's five codes—hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural—helps the readers to understand the story more deeply. The hermeneutic code gets readers curious about the meaning of the Gulmohar tree, making them eager to find out why it matters in the story. The proairetic code shows us the important actions of the characters, like how Usman and Lydia interact and make choices that develop their relationship. The cultural code highlights how the characters deal with their different cultural backgrounds and traditions, and how these affect their identities. The semantic code reveals themes of moving between cultures and the challenges of finding a place to belong, as we see Lydia trying to adjust to her new life in Karachi. Finally, the symbolic code illustrates the contrasts and binaries in the story, such as the differences between the past and the present,

home and foreign land, weak and strong, and east and west. This analysis shows that Hussein skillfully combines all these elements to create a rich and meaningful story. *Another Gulmohar Tree* explores not just love, but also the deeper issues of identity and belonging in a world that is always changing, highlighting the challenges faced by people as they navigate different cultural experiences.

Recommendation

The present research recommends that aspects of writing techniques can be gauged in literary writings. The five codes of Barthes to understand the deeper meaning of the text are useful ways to understand complex ideas and themes in shorter texts.

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