



RESEARCH PAPER

Deconstructing the Myths: An Analysis of the Selected Short Stories of Tariq Rehman

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ABSTRACT

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The concept of discourse with its power to construct social, political or religious myths is significant in literature and in life. This research aims to undertake a Deconstructionist study of Tariq Rahman's selected short stories to explore the way he deconstructs different established myths of his society with the help of his counter-discourse. Derrida's theory of Deconstruction has been employed for the analysis of his three short stories: Bingo, Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi, and The Dying Wish. It is a qualitative study with a close analysis of the text of the short stories. The analysis shows that Rahman has deconstructed many established myths of his society to provide his readers with objective lenses to perceive reality and be better informed, and to make them get rid of hypocrisy and double standards.

Introduction

Discourse is one of the most influential power tools in the politics of representation or knowledge. Foucault's (1980) link between discourse, knowledge and power clearly shows the way ideologies are constructed in the world. Likewise, Post-Structuralists (Foucault, 1980 & 1972; Derrida, 1967) also emphasize the role of knowledge in achieving and sustaining power. According to them, knowledge is always contextual, fragmentary and partial, but is never neutral. In their view, in order to understand an object, it is necessary to understand the system of knowledge that produced that object. So power is embedded in language. Derrida (1967) took a language in terms of text and criticized the Eurocentric interpretation of a text in the form of binaries. So he suggested that the texts could be re-interpreted and made free from the influence of Western thought based on a legacy of assumptions in terms of hierarchies. For him, all texts permit multiple interpretations and they offer 'differance'

which means their meanings are not fixed and are 'deferred' or postponed. The concept of difference is closely linked to Derrida's theory of Deconstruction which denotes that certainty in the analyses of texts is completely impossible. In that case, texts become important as "there is nothing outside of the text" (p.158). It may offer multiple meanings to one reader and different meanings to different readers in different places and times. Hence, the idea of 'difference' in the deconstruction of texts and the derivation of meanings from it.

In the context of Pakistan along with its socio-cultural norms, literature, politics, and history, the above-mentioned two ideas, that is, Discourse and Deconstruction, are very significant. These institutions are determined through the discursive practices of the people in authority. Pakistani society and history have been constructed with the help of the dominant discourses. All these institutions are significantly termed 'texts' by Derrida. Ideologies are injected into the minds of the public by the people in power. However, writers are also vested with the power to present 'counter discourse', and they are able to deconstruct established myths/discourses. Pakistani writers like Tariq Rahman and Sheheryar Fazli are famous for deconstructing established discourses. Rahman rightly observes, "I had real feeling and compassion for the poor... because I could observe oppression, poverty and suffering...my perennial themes...all around me." (2008, pp. 3-4). His short stories offer counter-discourse to the readers against established propaganda. Therefore, this research paper aims at deconstructing the text of his three selected short stories and finding multiple meanings which they offer, thereby deconstructing the established social, religious or national myths. The theory of Deconstruction had been employed to derive meanings as Derrida rightly observes about Deconstruction that it is "an analysis which tries to find out how writer's thinking works or does not work, to find the tensions, contradictions, the heterogeneity within their own corpus" (1997, p. 9).

Literature Review

Derrida, a French linguist, is well-known for his Deconstruction theory. In the language and literary structures, it is considered contradiction and anonymity. This "Deconstruction" method was created as a counterargument to the predetermined norms and prejudices of Structuralism (Gnanasekaran, 2015). Gnanasekaran (2015) also makes reference to the development of the Post-structuralist literary movement in France in the late 1960s. It is a response to the theory of sign structure and "the structuralist." Additionally, it negotiates the linguistic paradigm of emphasizing texts, writers, and readers. Thus, by publishing the notion of Structure, Sign theory book in 1966, Derrida provided the crucial impetus for the theory of deconstruction. The unconscious dimension of textbooks, rather than the aware or conscious capacity is what Derrida claims a deconstructionist approach. According to Derrida, the text must be used as the in subject and object of investigation (Gnanasekaran, 2015). Tyson (2006) asserts that Deconstruction has advantages over other theories, including Marxism, Feminism, and other socio-political guises for the covert function of ideology in our daily activities. It looks at how language might be more fluid than we typically think.

Deconstruction provides benefits for writing over spoken words and in-text phrases. Derrida considered writing a certain yawning structure and believed that the speech was the sole angle from which to depict it. He believed that whereas spoken language can be lost quickly, written writing had a transmitting ability. According to Derrida, language becomes "arch-writing" when it transforms into a specific type of writing. As a result, Derrida considers written language expressions to be more genuine (Al-Jumaily, 2017). Al-Jumaily (2017) describes numerous techniques to break up a text using the "Deconstruction" paradigm in his paper. Finding meanings from distinctions that contribute to the generation of hidden meanings is one of them. Second, no text has a singular, predetermined meaning. As a result, texts offer new meanings through various readings. This is the main Deconstruction principle that contributes to the development of post-structural critical analysis. Thirdly, whenever a text acquires a strong meaning, it instantly starts to "deconstruct" itself because the presence of one invites the lack of another. This notion emphasizes the text's use of the term "binary opposition." Deconstruction thus dispels the preconceived notions of structuralism (Al-Jumaily, 2017).

Modernism raises issues regarding the eligibility and validity of reason. By this point, man's thinking has dramatically diverged, and this has caused him to depart from the pre-existing norms and laws. These develop into implications that the political and economic actors alike follow. It supports their unfair and harsh justice (Hooti & Torkamaneh, 2011). So the researcher's conclusion that post-structuralist study, that is deconstruction aims at finding multilayered unconventional meanings, is obvious.

Deconstruction is the analysis of a text that seeks to undermine its "logocentric claims." Examining the text's breach within its connotation is what it is all about. It asserts that the text's clearly stated meanings are in conflict with one another. It investigates and clarifies meanings that are absent from the text (Niekerk, 2003). The varied linguistic constructions are what lead to deconstructive statements concerning the ideality of connotation. Therefore, the basic idea of pragmatism might be connected to Derrida's essay. According to Derrida, it is crucial for rhetorical meanings to transfer contradictory meanings to logic.

Since this study is an attempt to point out certain aspects of deconstruction in Rahman's collection of short stories, it is pertinent to review previous work on his short stories. A notable tool for elaborating on the acts, actors, and character identities is the transitivity model of analysis. Ahmad and Khan (2019) illustrate the storyline of Rahman's *Charity* which resonates with the East-West clashes that took place in the enormous *Raja Bazaar*, Rawalpindi. The paper uses reader response as a methodological instrument and postcolonial theory as a conceptual framework to analyze the cultural clash and conflict. The analysis suggests that mutual coexistence and socio-cultural fusion are on the horizon, which would eventually result in a cultural collision in the post-colonial society. Despite the story's premise having a promising beginning, the shifting circumstances in the post-colonial Pakistani setting and scenario caused the two converging cultures-the dominant and the dominated-to split apart. The review of existing research on Rahman's selected short stories shows

that no recognized study has been undertaken on the Deconstruction of established myths in Rahman's short stories, so the present research is meant to fill this research gap through the Deconstruction of hidden meanings in the multiple layers of the selected short stories.

Theoretical Framework

This research aims at undertaking a Deconstructionist study of Tariq Rahman's selected short stories to demonstrate how he deconstructs the different established myths of his society with the help of his counter-discourse. Derrida's theory of Deconstruction has been employed for the analysis of his three short stories: Bingo, Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi, and The Dying Wish. It is a qualitative research, and the method of Textual Analysis has been employed to analyze the data which, in this study, is the text of the selected short stories. A careful coding of related concepts and then interpretation helped in meeting research objectives.

Results and Discussion

Rahman's short stories are effective illustrations of the fact that the authors are able to provide counter-discourse and how they deconstruct the established myths to give readers critical lenses in order to know multiple layers of reality. Following is the in-depth Deconstructive analysis of his selected short stories:

Deconstruction of Bingo

This short story is about the partition of East Pakistan from West Pakistan in 1971. Rahman said in his preface about this event, "To kill or get killed – and especially to kill – in a war which appeared so unnecessary in my eyes was a painful experience" (2008, p. 4). Right from the beginning of the story, the narrator, Safeer, keeps on suggesting the soft-heartedness and easy-going nature of his course-mate in Pakistan Military Academy Tajassur. He is depicted as irresponsible, incompetent and "a sub-human creature" (p. 39) by the narrator. However, his description of Tajassur's personality and his pleasant interaction with others betrays the fact that he was a kind-hearted, friendly and meek person. "His wonderful oral expression in English and wit" (p. 40), his help of other people and his smile for all, and others' liking for him (p. 41) can be deconstructed as his good nature and competence. As Derrida says there is text within a text, so is the case with this bias towards Tajassur is evident from the fact that at several places, he betrays his own stance. He calls Tajassur a "Bingo", "traitor", "Shiekh Mujibur Rehman's ADC", "Marshal and minion" and "the minion of old Mujib" (p. 41) only because he belongs to the East Pakistan Marshal and "his (Tajassur's) land" out of hatred for them. This thing betrays the bias of West-Pakistanis for the East Pakistanis.

In all his discussions with Tajassur, Safeer taunts him for being 'Bingo', 'ungentlemanly' and 'unofficerlike' (p. 41) and almost accuses him regarding the rebel Mukti Bahinis. He thinks himself to be mature and professional and deems Tajassur

childish and foolish (p. 43). However, the ending of the story shows the situation vice versa. Tajassur is proved to be full of 'milk of human kindness' (p.p. 51-52) when he saves Safeer's life and he along with his family becomes a target of the malice and hatred of the West Pakistani people. After their allocation in HQ Eastern Command, both the officers are treated in a biased manner. Since Tajassur's conscience is alive, he tells his seniors rightly, "People are forced to fight when they are exploited and transgressed against, and bravery is good only if it is used in a just cause. If it is used to oppress, it is evil" (p. 44). Though this comment was in the context of the Viet Cong, it can be deconstructed to be applicable on the situation of the East Pakistanis in 1971. They were actually exploited and were forced to retaliate. Rahman tries to deconstruct the propaganda of the West Pakistani politicians who, in order to get power and government, defamed and exploited the people of East Pakistan.

Furthermore, the hatred of the narrator (who belongs to West Pakistan) for the people of East Pakistan is betrayed through the hateful expressions he uses for them: "rebel Bingo troops", "bastards" (p. 45), "Pakistan's enemies", "treacherous race" (p. 46), and "bloody Bingos" (p. 52). His bias is also evident when he says that though he does not know what "the damned six points" were yet he believes that anything attached to "a loony like Mujeeb must have been crap" (p. 45). The counter-discourse comes from Tajassur very effectively when he tells Safeer to see through the "propaganda". He reveals some very bitter facts of history and his explanation serves to deconstruct the myths and propaganda propagated widely by the "hate-filled fat men in Islamabad" (p. 46). These were no doubt the politicians of West Pakistan. He rightly tells Safeer that Bengal was being treated as a "colony by the C. S. P officers", Bengali men were mocked at and maltreated by the army officers, and their wealth had been taken away from them, keeping them hand to mouth (p. 46). He then clarifies that when the Bengalis have risen against this exploitation and tyranny, they are being shot. Even their innocent men and women are being shot and girls are raped. He calls it "monstrous and unjust" (p. 46). He tries to revive the conscience of Safeer, but in vain.

Rahman has raised some important questions in this story which are meant to deconstruct the myths that only Bengalis were at fault. The Major of 'Bangladesh Army' asks Safeer, "Which code of morals asks you to kill people at the orders of an unscrupulous government?" (p. 49). Here, the readers come to know that the tragedy of losing one part of Pakistan was actually caused by unscrupulous politicians. Besides, even Safeer is obliged to think, "But who was in the right?... And was there a right at all?" (p. 50). This question also helps readers question the established national discourse of Pakistani politicians. The Major tells Safeer that the West Pakistani government machinery treated the Bengalis as "colonists, like the French in Algeria and Belgians in the Congo" (p. 49). This comparison clearly brings home to the reader how the Bengalis considered themselves justified in getting 'freedom' from the colonizing government of Pakistan. Finally, the end of this short story again deconstructs the established myths that only the Bengalis were responsible for the division of Pakistan. The murder of Tajassur, the inhuman treatment of Pakistani Army officers with his sister and mother and the final words of Safeer that "Tajassur and his

mother were no longer alive to accuse me” (p. 52), all help the reader to come across the counter-discourse and see through the objective historical facts of 1971.

Deconstruction of Eid-Milad-un-Nabi

If Bingo deconstructs the political myths, Eid-Milad-un-Nabi (S. A. W. W.) deconstructs the religious myths of Pakistani society, uncovering the prevalent religious hypocrisy. This short story unearths the fact that different departments celebrate the birthday of the Holy Prophet (S. A. W. W.) just in order to make their superiors happy but the true spirit of following his practices is completely missing. The Secretary passes the order to the schools to conduct a religious function on the 12th of Rabi-ul-Awal to please the government. The headmasters of the schools get panicky as there would be visits of high officials to check the functions. One of them is the headmaster of a school where Mulla Allah Din is the Islamic Studies teacher and is called “maulvi” and “Kuthmullah” (pp. 221, 222) by others. The text betrays the heartlessness, inhumanity and hypocrisy of Mulla. He is shown to be a “good disciplinarian” (p. 222), but Rahman implies that he was a butcher. Despite being an Islamic Studies teacher and well-versed in the teachings of Islam, he is a man with no softness of heart and acts totally against Islamic values of compassion and kind-heartedness. When he is assigned the duty of teaching Naats to the students, he maltreats them, beats them severely and twists their ears till they bleed. “He loved to command and did it now” (p. 223). One such boy, Rahim Gul, is among those students. The words of a Naat sound wonderful for him, he feels the greatness of the Holy Prophet (S. A. W. W.) and is swayed by the rhythm of singing to such an extent that he feels “the love of the words go into his soul” (p. 224) and he shuts his eyes out of this ecstatic feeling. He is dragged out by Mulla, slapped and beaten severely by him to a bleeding point as he is told by Mulla, “We don’t want closed eyed, shouting mystics... and swaying dancing girls to spoil the discipline of the parade” (p. 224). Mulla’s conduct is totally against that of the Holy Prophet (S. A. W. W.) whose birthday is to be celebrated. Rahman makes it clear that right below from Mulla upward to the headmaster, to the Inspector of schools, to the director to the Secretary, to the Joint Secretary, to the Chief Secretary, to the Prime Minister (p. 224) are only concerned with celebrations of the birthday and no one is concerned with the real spirit of the day, i.e., following the teachings of the Holy Prophet (S. A. W. W.). This meaning can be easily deconstructed from the fact that the daughters of the Secretary will celebrate Eid-e-Milad-Un-Nabi with “new Denim jeans” at a party where there will be music and dancing (p. 225).

When the headmaster comes to know that some other school has decorations with coloured papers and flags, he is rattled for he wants to compete with other schools at any cost. He provides cash, for decorating his school like a wedding venue, out of the fund for “destitute boys and orphans” (p. 225). This fact again deconstructs the myth that Milad was going to be celebrated out of love for the Holy Prophet (S. A. W. W.). It also shows widespread religious hypocrisy. On the day of the 12th Rabi-ul-Awal, the school walls display the verses from the Holy Quran and the sayings of the Prophet (S.A.W.W) but again celebrations are devoid of their spirit. There is a clear disparity

between the words of Mulla and his practices. He delivers a sermon about how kind the Holy Prophet (S. A. W. W) was toward the children, how he looked after the sick, and how he played with the children. When Rahim Gul again starts feeling full of love and ecstasy and shuts his eyes during singing Naats, he is pulled back by Mulla and the story ends with these words, "And the cane was descending on him again and again... The ecstasy had long ago vanished and all he was conscious of was excruciating pain" (p.p. 226- 227). Thus, the text of the story can be taken as deconstructing a religious myth that the Muslims follow the true spirit of Islam in celebrating the Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi and it brings out the religious hypocrisy of our society.

Deconstruction of The Dying Wish

Rahman points out in his preface that one aspect of his work is that it doesn't ignore "the aesthetic and erotic aspects of life" (p. 5). He regards it "the duty of an artist to present life as it is and not to create purged versions of reality" (p. 5) and he presents the erotic simply because it is a part of life. His story, *The Dying Wish*, demonstrates the above-mentioned self-analysis of his work. The story resents Mubeen Ahmad, a clerk having a highly artistic and aesthetic inner self. Society expects a calligrapher like him, who writes the Quranic verses, to be purged of anything erotic and aesthetic. Mubeen Chacha, as he is called by the narrator of the story, is a staunch lover of beauty. However, Bashir and his friend take him as someone who, being a calligrapher, should not even think about beauty. Asfar notices that Mubeen Chacha was fascinated by the nudes in Asfar's studio. In the beginning, he never painted human figures as he regarded it a "sin" (p. 358). But after being a cancer patient, his passion for art, beauty, and the erotic was given a push-up. He tells Asfar that earlier in his life, in his "puritanical slum", he was told that "art was taboo" and that it was not good even to imagine the beauty, not to talk of adoring it. But then out of his "bouts of frenzied creativity", he started painting the female figures with "voluptuous curves" (p. 360). He fell for 'vasokht' (an erotic love-story inverse) and its eroticism.

Then Rahman brings out the "last wishes" (p. 361) of Mubeen Ahmad, i.e., drinking alcohol and enjoying some female beauty. He dies with the stain of Shabana's red lipstick on his lips which she tells Asfar was "his last wish" (p. 362). Asfar wipes the lips of Mubeen Chacha and goes out to inform others about his death. Rahman has deconstructed a social myth through this story that art and religion should be kept together. Society thinks that if a person writes the verses of the Quran as a calligrapher, he will not be having any erotic side. Rahman seems to be coming up with a counter-discourse to the puritans of the society that repressed desires may lead to something explosive. He suggests that art and religion are poles apart.

Conclusion

This is how Rahman deconstructs the established political, religious and social myths/ discourse. Through his counter-discourse, he has tried to cure his readers of the morbidity of hypocrisy and make them aware of reality. He presents an unbiased

and objective picture of life. The Deconstructionist analysis of his short stories validates this observation and thus meets the objectives of this research study.

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