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Social Disparity and Rhetoric: The Use of Language as Tool to Uphold Superior Status in Mehtab Mehboob's Short Story 'The Web'

Abstract:

Since human beings started using language consciously, the language became greater weapon for people to create and maintain identity and power. In social fabric, language mainly used as a tool for fabricated dominance and different strata of society enjoyed its disposition. For that, rhetoric tool is of great impetus. Rhetoric is defined by various sources differently. "Rhetoric (Greek rhetor 'speaker in the assembly') Rhetoric is the art of using language for persuasion, in speaking or writing; especially in oratory"[1]. By this reference, rhetoric as linguistic tool worked powerfully.

In this paper, it would be tried to explore the words with their classes showing social disparity by the use of rhetoric. First, the connotations of the words would be determined to judge the instilling sense. Then those words would be categorized in word classes at linguistics levels with functions. Afterwords, the words would be analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to clarify the verbal rhetoric. Finally, the results would be drawn to see the thematic relationship of words and their social connotations in creating social disparity and status-quo.

Key words: *Social Disparity, Status Quo, Rhetoric, Syed, non-Syed status, Language Identity, Power.*

Introduction:

Rhetoric, which comes from Greek word rhetor means 'speaker in the assembly', is the art of using language for persuasion, in speaking or writing. Rhetoric is the art of using language to communicate effectively and persuasively. It involves three audience appeals: logos, pathos, and ethos, as well as the five canons of rhetoric: invention or discovery, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Along with grammar and logic or dialectic,

rhetoric is one of the three ancient arts of discourse. From ancient Greece to the late 19th Century, it was a central part of Western education, filling the need to train public speakers and writers to move audiences to action with arguments. Contemporary studies of rhetoric address a more diverse range of domains than was the case in ancient times. While classical rhetoric trained speakers to be effective persuaders in public forums and institutions like courtrooms and assemblies, contemporary rhetoric investigates human discourse writ large (Aristotle, 1994)[2]. It is in this sense that rhetorical devices create certain effects and impacts in the audience/readers in order to have desired goals.

Literature is considered the significant tool to decode the structure of contemporary culture or society or historical background. It, on the one hand is mirror to the society, and is the tool of defining things in specific perspective and giving identity, on the other. In this context the author or writer writes novel, short story or composes poetry that decodes the fabric of society. In that, the materialization of disparity, consciously or unconsciously, direct or indirect, positive or negative, art for art or art for life's sake, is inevitable. Thus, it is considered the reflection of the thinking, behavior and attitude of the society and people, directly or indirectly. In that perspective, in which it is said, if someone wants to know the norms of a society and its values he may go through the literature of the social order. In that context the paper tries to find out the rhetoric of the society as the significant and authentic artistic expression of the issues of the people in which they are living and behaving with one another in the name of a kind of superiority or stereotyping of the underprivileged people and social status. In this context, the Sindhi literature is teeming with such issues and questions concerned with social disparities and societal quandary.

On the other hand the device of rhetoric is a tool of inculcation of the values for different purposes. It is often used in the context of political speeches or oration to impress the people and get their support. Similarly, it is also seen in the context of religious sermons and discourses to fortify andreinforce the faith

of the religion in the believers suggesting them to clutch the path of the religion accordingly.

But it is little considered that the art of oration or repeated discourse does work in the social order to justify the social status and disparity among the people. Literature is the thing that can reveal that kind of fabric working in the society. Therefore, little critical analysis was carried out to find the rhetoric or discourse within the domain of the literature that defends or attacks the dogmatic conduct.

Literature Review

Mehtab Mehboob is well known fiction and prose writer in Sindhi literature. She is mostly known by her short stories, which are full of depiction of the social predicaments and inequalities generally and the depiction of the women in particular. She has published several books and is the recipient of the Writer's Guild Award (1971) for her volume of short stories 'Chandi joon taron' (چاندي جون تارون) and was also awarded by the Academy of Letters for her travelogue, 'Rahon Chand Sitara' (راهون چنڊ ستارا)(1993). She is also well known for her sketches of literary figures and her travelogues. (Pakistan Academy of Letters, 1994). She is still writing good things to preserve her observations and expression of her artistic faculty. She is calculated as first rate short story writer in female writers. She has written many stories concerned with social fabric and social disparity.

In order to know the fabric of the society in literary expression, the idea of knowing rhetoric is very much pertinent. Rhetoric is defined by various sources differently. From the definition given above, it is obvious that the art of oratory or using rhetoric in order to persuade the people goes back to Greeks. It shows the old pattern of influential writing or speaking. Thus the same thing is followed to this day for persuading people. In addition, Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary defines it as,

1. The art of using language in an impressive way, especially to influence people in public speaking.

2 Speech or writing that sounds important and impressive but is often insincere or exaggerated (OALD, 1998).

From these definitions, it can be seen that rhetoric is used as a tool to influence people and impress them to inculcate the idea of social status. Not only rhetoric is tool to over emphasize but it is often insincere and is deceiving. That's why, the status-quo is repeated to maintain the position by rhetoric as defined as repetition that is;

..the recurrence in narrative of images, ideas, situations, kinds of characters. Repetition is one of the surest signs of the meaningful. If you are stuck trying to interpret a text, one good question to ask yourself is: what is repeated in this narrative? Theme and motif are terms commonly used for this kind of repetition in narrative. (Abbott 2002)

In this context, the much sought way to judge a text or writing is to find the recurrence of some images, ideas, situations and characters. Accordingly, the recurrence in the fiction or literature and its text is surfacing or exposing the social behavior of a society. This notion is further justified as, "Rhetoric is the study of effective or persuasive speaking and writing, especially as practiced in public oratory" (Crystal 1992)[(4)]. That is why the social fabric in the society is made effective and persuasive by the specific groups, having vested interests. Taking advantage of the rhetoric and recurrence of the status-quo the strata of the society is maintained and made breathing by those people. Therefore, by this weapon the dominance echelon upholds the power. It is further validated as, "The rhetoric of narrative is its power. It has to do with all those elements of the text that produce the many strong or subtle combinations of feeling and thought we experience as we read" (Abbott 2002). Hence, the reader in the text and people in the society subdue before that persuasive power and subdue ahead of its rhetoric. In that context, rhetorically speaking and writing turns to become a power because everything, even may seem so trifle and minute, has significant effect and power. It is defined by renowned deconstructionist critic Barthes as, "Everything in [the text] signifies…Even were a detail

to appear irretrievably insignificant, resistant to all functionality…"(Barthes 1982). Roland Barthes in above lines emphasizes on the signifying of the text as an element of sending message as kind of locutionary to illocutionary and to perlocutionary forces in the famous speech act theory and the concept of signs defined by Ferdinand De Saussure. These theorists in their linguistic analysis defined the use of language as sign and source of meaning making clarify the importance of language as tool. It is further categories in Greek or Aristotelian (1994) concepts that rhetoric is furthered instilled by three elements i.e. logos, ethos and pathos. Logos here is concerned with the appeals related to logic, reasons and order of the rhetorical devices. While, ethos is concerned with the effects based on credibility, beliefs, authority, source-power and character. Finally, pathos is concerned with impact of emotions and feelings which are created by the rhetoric used by the orators (in writing or speaking). The above classical rhetorical devices were used by the influential people in old times and nowadays are used as the tool of textual or discourse analysis. The three basic rhetorical appeals must work together to build a strong argument.

Discussion

The story 'The Web" is a story of a woman who is gripped in various ideas of disparity between Syeds اهلبيت and non-Syeds' status. She has a web of such confusing ideas that whether Syeds are superior and Non-Syeds are inferiors and on what grounds. Thus the story is developed based on the title of the short story 'The Web' جار. So, she has such a web of confusing ideas and views. She on the one hand, to much extent, is proud on being a Syed or the wife of a Syed, on the other she also has the cogitation of Syed-girlsor as they are called Bibis پاک بيبي who not finding their matches within limited Caste or specific community are restricted to marry outside the community who are non-Syed, عجمي/جٹ يا جٹّيون thus inferior to them. Not only the phenomenon of marriage but also occurrence of social congregation and the behaviors in the mentioned community such as, non

-Syed girls or women can not sit on the cot or chair in front of Syed-women or Bibies.

It is well defined as "Genealogy has long been recognized as one of the most important and authoritative organising principles in Muslim societies. Expressions of genealogy have over the course of history taken particular forms and performed important functions in Muslim societies…"(Savant and Felipe, 2014). According to them the genealogical connection and organization have been considered as the most important as well as powerful tool in the Muslims societies. It further says, "The Prophet's family tree, including his ancestors, descendants (the sayyīds or sharifs (سيد ۽ شريف and adoptive clients (mawāli) , موالي has provided an important paradigm, underwriting dynastic arrangements, providing access to patronage and supporting power brokers and mediators" Ibid. It is this context that the concept of Syed سيدزاده/اهلبيت is upheld as superior without verification or even to put a question on the origin but to believe blindly in the downtrodden people and the societies. In such society the short story 'Web' is written.

All this is said and emphasized in such a way that maintaining of this social difference seems so integral part of social brought up of Syeds and non-Syeds. Let's have a glimpse from the story: 'Khadija! You sleep there, in the veranda, on the floor,' said Bibi Sain.' This is how the logos or logical reason is established.

Khadija is a non-Syed girl working at Syed-houses i.e. she is in service of Bibis, Syed-women. Thus she has no right to sleep on any cot, couch or sit on a chair. On the other hand they (Syed-women) sleep or rest on the costly cozy beds. It is described as

'She gave Khadija a dirty look and in abhorrence went back to her bed, cosy on the latest foam mattress.'

From the above two descriptions, as in the first description, is expressed that non-Syeds are only to use floor for the sleeping and the Syeds or Bibis are born to sleep on the comfortable beds such as in the second example, the social disparity is

observed superficially. She is commanded to sleep on the floor as she is inferior human to them. If any non-Syed is not doing in the specific subservience way she is violating the sacred way of Syeds. In such happening, they are treated very harshly as it in this description:

'At this, she had harshly admonished the girl—'Look, you can't sit on a charpoy in my presence.' The girl had shuddered, and then sat on the floor.'

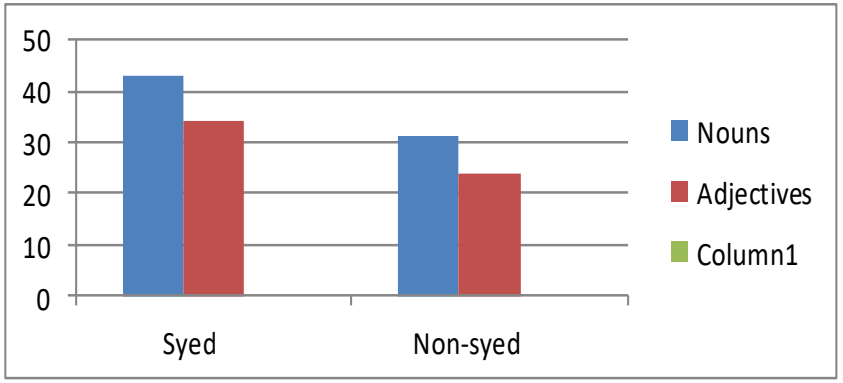
So, if mistakenly any non-Syed sits on the chair or charpoy in the presence of Syeds they are admonished and punished. They are considered profane or irreverent by doing so. There is not only these kind of rules of sitting but also other things are necessary such as it is essential for non-Syeds that when they come they should touch the feet of the Syed master or mistress, which is evident from the following description;

'In future, when you enter, touch the feet of the Bibis. You are not a child. It seems you know nothing about stately living, nor has your mother told you anything about it.'

From fanciful rhetoric of prestigious-ness of Syeds it is justified by the community that the training of non-Syeds to subdue and touching feet of Syeds are integral part of humanly or in their words stately living. This Syed and non-Syed status is said rhetorically in order to ordain their position and continue the status-quo. This status of being a Syed used as a noun and an adjective relating to them and non-Syed and their adjectives are uttered again and again, the number of those categories are defined in the following table.

Category	Nouns	Adjectives
Syed	43	34
Non-Syed	31	23
Total	74	57

Table showing the nouns and adjectives describing social disparity.



From the above table and chart it is seen as a matter-of-fact that the aforementioned social disparity or status-quo is maintained by the metaphoric way. From the table it can be judged that nouns relating or defining *Syeds* used in the story are more than the non-Syeds i.e. 43 to 34. Following that the adjectives defining Syeds are in larger number than the non-Syeds i.e. 31 to 23. Not only there is the disparity of numbers of nouns and adjectives but also there is serious concern of those nouns and adjectives which are negative in theme relating to the non-Syeds rather than Syeds.

For examples adjectives defining Syeds are '*sain, peer, blessed, Syed Bibis, Hakam Bibi, Begum Sahiba, Syed ladies, Shah, Headman, pious, murshids, peer father, superior, different*…etc. these characteristics are repeatedly uttered with great deference to show their status and social position. On the other hand, non-Syeds are given the characteristics which give negative or inferior connotations such as, '*poor girl, maid-servant, puzzled, rustic, creatures, dirty, house-sweepers, these people, ummaties, non-Syeds, servant, mistresses, inferior, slave*,….' These characteristics are time and again said to make them realize that those creatures are senseless, or feeling-less to have humanly characteristics. Therefore, the privileged community considers them as their servants or born to serve them in this worldly life if they wish to be forgiven in the life hereafter.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that, the use of language, especially rhetorically is most effective and influential. It works on the reader or listener to pursue the doctrines and canons. This phenomenon is portrayed in the short story 'The Web' that such webs are controlling the society and maintain the status-quo of the specific class or community. Although, obviously it is not grasped as to what is indoctrinated but the internal structure is aimed to strengthen the disparity. Syed and its higher status is maintained on the cost of down-casting other commons calling them non-Syeds or inferior to them. Thus, the rhetoric or recurrence of words and its delicate use time and again is f greater importance. It all happens with the social training of respect, authority by using the device of logos that the logic of respecting Syeds as the lineage of the Holy Prophet and touching their feet is prerogative and obligatory. It maintains the status that the people who observe this would be blessed one in the sense of ethos. Ethos is maintaining the authority and credibility of the lineage and the pathos is created to be blessed ones and have a good fortune ahead based on the feelings and emotions on the part of the masses. Thus, this short story is one token to observe the social disparity on the basis of the Syed as the symbol of social discourse prevailing in the Muslim societies and populace. It can well be seen in the other kinds of literary discourses as well as social conditions by various discourses in order to establish the impact of the discourse.

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