

A glance at cultural semiotics of determinism and free will in the fifth chapter of Sa'adi's Bustan

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ABSTRACT

The method of reading the literary texts, including poetry, has been the focus of attentions since long ago and there are various critical approaches in regard of the issue one of which is cultural semiotics. The question is how cultural semiotics can lead to a better reading of poetry? The article assumes that it is through adopting a novel approach that patterns can be attained guiding the readers to the symbolic system of the poems recited by Sa'adi. The determinism and free will symbolic system imbedded inside a given semiosphere leads to the discovery of the cultural signs and poet's beliefs and results in the corroboration of production and reproduction of the literary works enables the researchers of poetry to interpret and analyze the signs and figure out new results.

Keywords: cultural semiotics, Sa'adi, determinism, free will, poetry.

Introduction

Sa'adi is a prominent poet following the Iraqi Style of poetry reciting. He is a contemporary of Persian Salghurids era. Salghurids were in fact the slaves of the Seljuq court. And, the most famous of the Salghurids was Atabak Sa'ad ibn Zangi who died in 1200. Sa'adi has his pseudonym drawn after Atabak ^[1]. According to Atabak's conciliation with the Mongols in the thought of maintaining peace in Shiraz and Pars territories in the then era, the kingdom was kept safe against intrigues ^[2]. The present study deals with a number of signs and symbols from the fifth chapter of Sa'adi's Bustan. Cultural semiotics is a novel approach in the contemporary world based on the characteristics of which one can reach to a type of new recognition and analysis of the literary works. It is through

underlining the patterns put forth in this approach that the symbolic system of a poem can be obtained. This means reading the poem through the lenses of this approach causes the corroboration of the literary works. Cultural semiotics deals with theorization in the area of culture from symbolic perspectives. There is cohesion in this realm and one can always bear witness to the text production as the struggle arena between "self" and "other". There are various patterns in this approach the substantial part of which was proposed by Luthmann School ^[3].

It is with the emphasis on this approach that the symbolic system of Sa'adi's poems can be especially dealt with as a part of cultural signs.

Determinism Symbolic System in the Fifth Chapter of Sa'adi's Bustan:

In Saussure's opinion, symbols do not possess independent value and their values depend on their differences with the other signs and symbols ^[4].

The selection of a special symbolic encoding system can get one close to a social group and separate from another. Choosing a symbolic encoding system unique to oneself, every poet demonstrates s/he is close to a social group or similar to it in

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certain cultural attributes so as to provide his or her audience with a better description of the related class. This is very much close to what has been carried out by Sa'adi in *Bustan*, getting himself close to determinism thoughts. Through creating adjustment and moderation in his poems, Sa'adi is seeking for tranquility and stress-relieving. In Shamisa's mind, all Sufi followers of Iraqi Style are determinist (the defeat of the protagonist in the fifth chapter of *Bustan* by Mongols signals determinism). The cultural-philosophical growth of the communities is reflected in the literature [5].

The cultural signs given in the fifth chapter like satisfaction, determinism, inability, star, fortune, luck, death, effort, will, fate and predestination are all unravelling an encoding system the objective of which is transferring a prevalent cultural mindset. The title of the fifth chapter in itself, i.e. "in satisfaction", speaks of an outstanding cultural sign that is somehow the origin of appellation in the cultural semiotics. The terms "key and door" in the following verse are cultural signs because they are outlying the circle of nature and included in the culture realm. The use of the term "key" alongside with "victory" (collocation axis) conveys a cultural concept and the same rule also holds in the use of the term "key" with the term "conquer":

"The key of victory if is not in one's hand, the door of conquest cannot be broken by the use of arms" [2].

Amongst the signs of determinism thoughts in Sa'adi's poems, it can be pointed out that the human's efforts and endeavors are fruitless:

"What is the use of exerting force by one's claw of effort when the arm of success does not assist?"

In the poet's opinion, the human's attempt can become effective in case it is supported by the "divine aid", meaning that divine aid is a culture and anything against it should be considered as "non-culture". In other words, all the signs on the collocation axis of a semiotic system constitute a culture by which the poet induces his or her intended concept.

The effect of fortune on success is amongst the predominant cultural concepts of the then epoch because the poet exercises care in choosing a name for the hero so as to posit a cultural name, "Bakhtiyar" (meaning a person who is assisted by luck):

"He was a shining star, his name was 'Bakhtiyar'; his throne were strong and he was a wealthy person"

The struggle between two cultural beliefs, i.e. determinism and free will, in the symbolic system practiced by Sa'adi is amongst the other issues that have to be taken into account. Struggle occurrence is inevitable since the culture realm is a symbolic one and the information presented therein are not fixed rather they are accumulated and reproduced. The battle between determinism and free will is the fight between mankind and the world of stars and the combat between the human beings and predestination is of the same type. It is at this point that the symbolic system is formed meaning that signs like ring, star, determinism, claw and so forth enter the realm of culture. Resultantly, in the poet's idea, submission to determinism and predestination is a culture and quarrel with it is an anti-cultural

act. In Sa'adi's opinion, the human's destiny is determined before s/he is born and one cannot change it. "Pen" is a cultural sign that is inserted into culture alongside with terms like "misery" and "good luck":

"The pen has been run to determine our misery or good luck while we have been still in the womb" [2]

Determinism is the governing thought in Sa'adi's mindset. He seems to have been frightened by the confrontation with an "other culture" (free will) so he continuously repeats the rendering of "one, once upon a time ..." and, due to the same reason, his verses are replicated constantly with new codes while all of them associate one thought, to wit determinism. Narrations like "the physician and the Kurd" in *Bustan* are expressive of such a belief. The important point is that the poet realizes the encounter with an "other culture" as horrible and intends to constantly repeat "one, once upon a time" and move towards his own reproduction of choice. The encodings are different in their domain and origin. One cannot understand the text unless the encodings are comprehended. For example, the encodings in the fifth chapter of *Bustan* are rooted in determinism thoughts of the poet's beliefs meaning that the rising place of such encodings are these same beliefs and they are different with the encodings introduced in the poems by Mowlavi or Hafiz because they differ in where they arise. Members of a culture are familiar with the encodings [6] and the readers of Sa'adi poems as the individuals sharing a culture should also become familiar with the encodings used by him in his poems so that they can reach a better understanding because cultures are areas wherein various discourses come across one another. So, the discourses of the different poets are important in the production of the texts and their poems and the signs they create.

Conclusion:

The cultural concepts governing an epoch of the history can be recreated through consideration of the literary works. The natural foundations are under the control of the mankind by the assistance of symbolic systems and this part of the nature which is called culture has also been dealt with by "cultural semiotics" [7]. Since poetry is part of the secondary pattern-building systems like clothing, art, religion and so on, it is changeable because the secondary patterns are continuously changing and the cultural relations are also subject to constant changes and things are cleared off the collective memory but they are not completely destroyed. That is because the cultural mechanisms are strong. In authors' mind, it is perhaps due to the same reason that a novel style appears in every period of Persian poetry and poets featuring novel words and themes and various encodings enter the scene.

The historical memory of the culture governing Sa'adi's era denotes a sort of determinism that can be criticized and the poet does his best to confirm it. The possibility of macro-level and dialectic conversation should be provided not only in Sa'adi's poetry but also in every other poem so that the textuality likelihood, paratext production and recognition can be

heightened. It means that there should be an active dialogue-based space so that the literary text can be produced or reread.

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