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Analysis of the Novel Twilight in Delhi

Shubhpreet Sandhu
PGGC, Sec 11, Chandigarh

Abstract

Ahmad Ali's novel, 'Twilight in Delhi', according to the author himself, aims at depicting a phase of Indian national life in the context of the dwindling away of a whole culture, symbolising a distinct mode of thought and living. It unfolds a pageant of a period of transition, ushered in by the descent of the Mughal, Muslim, state power and the ascent of the English, Christian, state power in India. The walled city of Delhi, in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth, forms the locale of the fictive universe of 'Twilight in Delhi'. It centres around a Muslims family and its head, Mir Nihal, who is an enthusiastic protagonist of the dying culture of Delhi and virulent antagonist of the emerging hybrid and heterogeneous culture. It threatens to engulf the purity and homogeneity of Mir Nihal's culture, localised within the walled and moat-encircled city. Mir Nihal's destiny and that of the city of Delhi are congeneric in the given situation. Delhi is not only a place where events take place. It is, in a way, one of the dramatis personae of the tale.

The vicissitudes of Mir Nihal's life are presented against the backdrop of the degeneration of Delhi once vibrant culture. Twilight in Delhi is like a kaleidoscope which brings to view the changing vistas of the human context in which the tale is situated. It reveals the subterranean strata out of which the tale grows. It opens and ends on a note of darkness which is a unit of the semiotic syntax of the tale. Darkness is a symbolic concomitant of the metaphorical twilight.

Keywords: Dwindling, Backdrop, Discourse, Interfusion, and Synchronic

Explanation/Analysis

The present explanation undertaken the delineation of the seismological contours of the cultural artefacts which form the basic layers of the structure of 'Twilight in Delhi'. It outlines the conceptual features of the collective unconscious, underlying the articulations of the Indian Muslim psyche. The tour de force of this study lies in analysing the cultural structures and in exploring the system of logic, operating behind the patterns of communication and the emergence of the signification of the discourse. The interfusion of the

cultural discourse and the literary discourse is studied by using the concepts of language, sign and symbol. The exclusive accent on the tracing of the seismological patterns, which emerge from the psycho-social, cultural and metaphysical discourse, into the literary discourse, may be taken as the point of departure for making off the present analysis from the usual sort of literary criticism.

Structuralism, formally, emerged from the 'Theses', presented by the Prague Linguistic Circle to the First International Congress of Slavic philologists, held in Prague in 1929. The theses reveal the traces of the influence and inspiration of Ferdinand De Saussure, the Russian formalists and Roman Jakobson. N. Trubetzkoy is hailed as the illustrious founder of Structural Linguistics by Claude Levi-Strauss, who himself, is the pioneer in expanding the horizons of the structuralistic enterprise. He has employed the tools, forged in the arsenal of structural linguistics, for the exploration of the doctrinal core of Anthropology. It is amply demonstrated in the process, initiated by Claude Levi-Strauss, that the theoretical formulations and methodological appliances of structural linguistics can be harnessed for the analysis and exposition of all areas of human culture. This realisation is based on the contention that culture is, like language, structured as a system of signs.

In this way, structuralism has graduated as an intellectual movement of our times. Formally originating in Linguistics in 1929, structuralism has come to occupy a formidable enclave within the sciences of man. French structuralism has been the rallying force behind the expansion of the structuralist programme. Its French orientation marks the break of the structuralist ethos with the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

In the present analysis, an attempt has been made, by way of adopting the linguistic model, to 'read off' the langue and the parole in the five existentialist situations, in which the text is divided. The signifier and the signified have been identified and defined in the given context. The syntagmatic relations and paradigmatic correlations have been taken into consideration to ply the notion of relational identity for the seismological investigation of the social and cultural phenomena, forming part of the text. The text is studied as a synchronic structure. But the diachronic reflections, too, are taken note of, with a view to demarcating the semantic parameters of the collective behaviour patterns. Finally, the binary opposition is identified in each situation on the assumption that opposition pairs form the basis and condition of the operation of the human mind. They facilitate the production of meaning and organise the human semiotic systems.

The non-linguistic conventional signs are studied on the pattern of the Saussurean notion of the linguistic sign. The arbitrariness, characterising the relationship between the signifier and the signified, is emphasized in order to underline the mutual exclusiveness of the concepts of arbitrariness and innateness in this context. The study of the signs is not confined to code-like situations, in which fixed meanings are attached to the signifier. The positions and inversions of the conventional signs are considered significant because the meanings of the signs are determined by their place in the system. It is the basic premise of the seismological approach that meaning is a matter of context, of system and of total field of communication. Thus, the present analysis is, broadly, situated in the Saussurean tradition of Semiology. The insights which Roland Barthes has brought to bear upon the Saussurean legacy of semiology' in a series of structural analysis

which all aim at defining a number of non-linguistic "languages", have also been taken into consideration in the course of this analysis.

A three-pronged strategy has been devised to analyse the text at three levels i.e. the level of semiotics, the level of semiology and the level of mediation. It aims at extracting meaning from the silent discourse and structuring a parallel meta-text.

The first chapter decomposes the text in order to lay threadbare the formal fabric of the narrative. The five existentialist situations, identified in the text, are christened after the five semantically prominent signifiers. Each situation is posited and described briefly. The signifier is spotted and finally the binary opposition, pre-supposed by the signifier, is identified. The inter linkage of the situations, at the level of the organisation of form, is highlighted.

In the second chapter, the situations are studied at the level of content. They are rechristened after the semantically prominent signified. The sign, brought forth by the union of the signified, is interpreted in the light of the conventions that make the sign a cultural artefact.

The seismological discussion is steered through with the equipment of the post-Freudian existentialist and anthropological psycho-critique. It employs the methodology of the Marxist eclectics. The seismological study makes an in-depth and edged appraisal of the customs rites, ceremonies, pastimes, etiquette, and conventions of collective behaviour patterned responses to diachronic events, social norms, religious reflexes, environmental changes, belief in supernatural agencies, group activities, group traits, communal memories and instances of cross-cultural interaction. The seismological analysis, thus, opens up new perspectives to meaning and reality.

The third chapter takes into account the text's response to the ideological bed of its field of pragmatics. The field of pragmatics of 'Twilight in Delhi' is formed by Muslim metaphysics, theology, culture and the collective unconscious. It involves are mirrored in the feudal mores and milieu of the cloistered Muslim society, localised in Delhi, in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. It is an attempt at relating the living man to the collective heritage of the Muslim Man. Major areas, in which the channel of mediation flows between the text and its associative field, are identified and explored to fix the anchorage of the micro-universe of the text upon the macro-universe of its ideological bed.

The study of non-linguistic sign systems constitutes the main plank of the present analysis. Signs, of their own, do not have any essence. They are defined only by a network of internal and external relations. In this sense, the analysis of signs has structuralist moorings. The study of the systems of relations forms the basis and condition of meaning. It is the pre-requisite of the study of signs. On the other hand, the crucial relations among items, are defined by construing them as signs. This reciprocity determines the inseparability of seismology and structuralism. The identification of the two fertilises the matrix of the present analysis.

The discourse analysis unfolds the basic layers of the ritualistic and ceremonial structures of the triadic threshold of marriage, birth and death. It takes into account the juxtaposition of the structured sets of love and hate, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, pain and pleasure.

An attempt is made to underline the non-linguistic languages of religious reflexes and practices, shared system of beliefs, and the cultic modes and the collective responses to diachronic events. The existential predicament of the protagonist of 'Twilight in Delhi' is placed in the perspective of historical realities. The dialectical interaction between his existence and the historical existence is underscored in this process. The epistemological aspect of signs is harnessed for the disentangling of the tangled maize of his existence and the exploration of his cosmic abandonment in the twilight of his life. Thus, an insight is gained in the heart of his darkness.

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