



A Critique of Structural Binary Oppositions in Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*

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ABSTRACT

In this research researcher opt *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elf Shafak. This novel belongs to the genre of Sufiism. An in-depth of the novel allow researcher to find binaries out of this literary text. The researcher also seeks the meanings reflected out of these binary oppositions. In the net shell researcher explore the ideology of structuralism by Ferdinand de Saussure in the novel. The researcher by the work claim that binary oppositions are universal and they provide meaning to their structure. By the close reading of the text researcher conclude that Elf Shafak produce the binaries like east vs west, past vs present, rigidity of character vs flexibility in character and more decently love and spirituality vs materialism. By this entire analysis researcher meet the result that the novel provides to folds of life. It is what the Sufiism. Sufiism is not only associated with white cloth and beard on the face, it is concerned with the internal peace. As one show sophistication in his physical appearance similarly he must contain sophistication in his inner too. The binaries present in the construction of novel create the meaning that it is a best example Sufiism.



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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

After the theory of formalism, it was new criticism, which deal with the study of text with the reference of the text's creator i-e the author of the literary text. That means text is analytically

criticized on the basis of open reading i-e with the association of its historical and contextual background. Then formalism critique the text with close reading of text where critics of formalism considered only to the text. After that Structuralism found its roots, the critics of structuralism by close reading the text analyse the structure of the main plot. The theory of structuralism is actually theory of consciousness that deal with the systematic analysis. It was his view that the only elements necessarily require to explain the conscious experience are sensation and affection. On the other hand, by separating meaning from the facts of experience, structuralism opposed the phenomenological tradition of Franz Brentano's act of psychology as well as functionalist school.

Structuralism is a method of interpreting and analyzing such things as a language, literature, and society, which focuses on contrasting elements or ideas of structure and applying structuralism in order to show how they are technically related to whole structure. This term can be used to refer to two movements which developed independently each other. The first is European and can be categorized as Post Saussure. The main motif of this movement is that terms of a language of all kinds (sounds, words, meanings) express themselves in Saussure's phrase 'as a system; and can only be identified by describing their relations to other terms of the same language; one cannot first recognize the terms of a language because a language is a system of sign that's why one cannot identify expressed elements. The second movement is an American one, got from the work of Leonard Bloomfield and dominated in the 1940s and 1950s. It possess an independent domain of mental events and processes. It is unlike the first movement which exclude the study of meaning from that of grammar and ant corpus in terms of distribution of its expression elements relative to each other.

It is a key concept in structuralism, as a theory of sociology, anthropology and linguistics that state all elements of human culture can only be understood in relation to one another. For instance, a light switch is either on or off, air is hot or cold, mean to say something relation to something else can be left or right. These are opposite's concept which cannot stay together. We often do binary opposition in cultural studies while we explore the relationships of different group of people or of just two characters in respect of their class differences or their physical ability or disability. It marginalizes two different groups which lead to prejudice and discrimination on the behalf of gender, cultural, class and religion.

The Turkish writer Elif Shafaq wrote a novel *Forty Rules of love*. This novel is all about Sufiism, it reflects the life of Mulana Jalal-ul-Din, known as Rumi and his friend Shams. This novel tells two parallel plots that reflects into each other. Both the stories come across two different cultures and about different centuries. One of the story is about a house wife, Ella and the other is about two sufi scholars Rumi and Sham. Ella go through the story of Rumi and Shams, Sweet Blasphemy while story of Sweet Blasphemy taught Ella about love by the Sham's Forty Rules of love.

Research Questions

How an author employs Saussurean binary oppositions in the test of *Forty Rules of love*?

How binary oppositions emphasis meanings in novel of *Forty Rules of loves*?

How the theme of Sufiism is interpreted by binaries in the text?

Research Objectives

- To interpret the use of binary opposition by the author in the text of *Forty Rules of love*?
- To check the binary oppositions that emphasize the meaning in novel of *Forty Rules of love*?
- To analyze the themes interpreted by binaries in the text?

Statement of the Problem

Structuralism claims that binary oppositions are the main concepts to introduce any striking meanings in a literary text. *Forty Rules of love* by a Turkish writer Elf Shafak is a literary Sufiism work. It also contains a huge heap of meanings. Elf Shafak use many binaries in the text metaphorically as well as philosophically. By close reading of that novel, researcher interpret the meanings created by binaries as well as how these meaning create the structure of the whole plot.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provide preview of the study. This preview thoroughly claims that study is pour work that can be debatable and measureable. The philosophy in this study has a direct link with its historical studies. The data of this section provide vital references to claim that text is knitted by binaries.

According to Barry, who assert that any literary text can be understood in the reference of its structure from where of belong to but not in isolation. The critics of structuralism analyze the literary text by interpreting its meanings as well as explaining how these meanings are created (Barry, 2002).

Structuralism deals with a key concept known as Binary oppositions, according to which each element, idea, notion as well as principles can only be understood in relation with their contrasting units and thoughts. These binaries are used to interpret the differences as well as contrasting features between two different groups that based upon different features like, culture, ethnicity, class, gender etc. (Barry, 2002)

It is very common practice to teach any child about language while using thoughts and notions of binaries. For sure while giving the concept of “Darkness” to a child, one must relate it with “light” similarly for good there is bad, for beautiful one use ugly; there is relation of day with night and so on. (Barry, 2002)

As structuralism declares that things and ideas are fragments of a bigger structure, no one can take it in isolation. Similarly binary oppositions are associated with producing a systematic structure by creating the contrasting concepts. Saussure claimed that binary opposition as unit of structure of language that provides meanings to that structure. According to Fogarty, these binaries are structural as well as complementary concepts but not only the contradictory relations. (Fogarty: 2005).

Sufism is an essential element in *The Forty Rules of Love*. Anjum (2014), explores the element of universalism and universal spirituality in the novel *The Forty Rules of Love*. She explores that the unity of mankind is possible through only one element which is love. Religion, time, and place do not matter. She explores that love is the centripetal force for the communion of all human beings. She has found this philosophy, that there is a difference between religions and Sufism. Religion is bound to division; it requires Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians. On the other hand, Sufism is bound to universality; it does not seek any Muslim, Hindu, or Christian. A Muslim like Shams can be Sufi and a Christian like Francis can be Sufi. Sufism has this one thing “a true love.” She says “love has no labels and imparities and its blessings are meant for all.”

Tassa Annisa (2018), in her thesis: *An analysis of hope as reflected in Elif Shafak’s The Forty Rules of Love*, explores the optimistic approach of the novel. The writer says that hope is an element present in this novel. She says, “Hope is the movement from crises to survival.” She found that hope is the main element of the novel. Or we can say, she has found that hope is the main thread of the novel upon which the whole story is woven. She has found the function of hope in the novel. Or in other words, she has found something meaningful in the novel. Like, she has discovered that hope gives people the courage to be creative and innovative in their lives.

Fyaz, (2019) in her article, *Thou Shalt Love: The contemporary relevance of Rumi in Elif Shafak’s The Forty Rules of Love*. A character based study of establishing love as the central theme of the novel and humanity. The article depicted the idea that love is the basic theme of life in general and this novel in particular. Love is related to humanity because, in this article, she says “the journey of love starts from self and goes deeper into humanity”. And the oneness to god and human beings can only be achieved through love.

Shahida Perween (2019) in her thesis, “discourse analysis f Elif Shafak’s novel *The Forty Rules of Love*,” analyzed the novel through discourse analysis. This study mainly focuses on gender discourse. The study reveals that gender roles are not biologically constructed but these roles are given by society to both men and women. This study has analyzed that women are in a lower position in both the 13th and 21st centuries and men are in a higher position than women. But Ella and Desert Rose have broken the walls of stereotypes and changed their position in society. Like in the novel Ella is being suppressed by the male patriarch, her husband, David. But she does not become submissive and can stand for herself. The same is the case with one of the other characters who belong to the 13th century, Desert Rose. She is also being suppressed by the males because she is a concubine and she stands for herself and changes her position in society. So the study also explores that male patriarchy is everywhere and in every age, in the past and also in the present as well, in the east and west. So this study has proved the male patriarchy and female suppression through the dialogues taken from the text. This reveals the thoughts of male and female characters in the novel, which is the basic purpose of this study, discourse analysis.

Sherwni(2020) in her article, explores that even in this chaotic world, people can find peace and happiness. People can be united under the roof of affection, love, and self-discovery. So this article aims to attempt how the writer has depicted the eastern spirituality in the novel by

analyzing the dialogues of Rumi. It also aims to attempt that novel is filled with pure love that has removed differences in society.

Aroosa (2021) in her thesis explores the self-realization of the main characters, Rumi and Ella. She uses Freudian id, ego, and super ego to show the transformation of Ella and Rumi. After studying her thesis, it gives an idea about the power of love. Love possesses the power of transformation in someone's personality; the same is the case with Rumi and Ella. Putri and Sarwoto, in their research article analyze the binary symbols as elements of structuralism. By interpreting binaries in Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke*, researchers found that the play reveals the dichotomies. The play mainly concerned with the importance of binaries i.e. soul/body, spiritual/sexuality, life/death etc. The binaries in the play proved that the plot of the play is directed with the quest of soul and body, which transform the meanings to the characters i.e. Alma and John. A fine line is interpreted between two main characters of the play.

As from above all arguments it states that structuralism has a very vital concept of binaries that are always depicted in the text to understand the meanings of that literary text. Researchers of this study are now going to prove the binaries in the text *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elf Shafak and also interpret how these binaries driven the meanings to the plot of novel and Sufism of characters in the novel.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research is qualitative in nature and utilizes textual analysis by applying a structural approach. The selected novel is examined at length, and textual references embodying the stylistic as well linguistic choices of the writer were collected, analyzed and discussed. This study endeavors to interpret novelist's use of the phenomenon of narrative techniques and how they create an undeniable impact on thoughts and minds of the readers.

Data Analysis

Elf Shafak wrote a novel *The Forty Rules of Love*, in which there are two parallel plots, means it is a story of two binary plots i.e. story of 21st century's characters Ella and Aziz while the other story is a story of 13th century Rumi and Shams in the Aziz's novel *Sweet Blasphemy*. Actually these binaries in the plots create a concept of two binaries of time i.e. past vs present. There is a very sweet conception behind the discussion of past and present that past is a history while present is chemistry. Means that present is compounded out of history; both the past and present have some connection between each other. This connection of binaries of time is well interpreted by the author in novel *The Forty Rules of Love*. "For Every Shams of Tabriz who has passed away, there will emerge a new one in a different age, under a different name" (P: 348). This evident now claimed that present is a result of past. Means the soul and character of Shams wear new mask of Ella. From the creation of binaries of time the creator emphasis on the point that past is privileged over the present because past contain more love and freedom.

The binaries in plot structure depict that novel may contain two stories but the soul and energy of both stories is common. There are binaries in characters of each story as Ella Vs Aziz in 13th century's story, while Rumi and Shams in *Sweet Blasphemy*. In these binaries the

character of Ella is related parallel with Rumi, similarly Aziz is related to Shams. It is evident from the text that Shams love to meet Rumi “Although I was eager to listen to the sermon and dying to meet Rumi” (P: 103) similarly Ella loves to meet Aziz “I’m staying at the Onyx and would love to see you, Aziz” (P: 279). The similarity is the characters show the similarity of theme, in difference to the time.

The novel defines binaries in the personalities of the characters of both stories, creating the effect of binaries in two civilizations. There in the novel two cultures are depicted in extreme level i.e east as well as west. Ella as similar to Rumi represents the eastern figures as they have family and their whole life revolves around their families. They both have extended families i.e Rumi has two sons Aladdin and Sultan, while Ella has three kids Avi, Orly and Jeannette. Elf Shafak was a western writer, and from colonial prospective western writers mainly show eastern culture as primitive and uncivilized. While in this novel author give importance to eastern culture and proved by the help of binaries that eastern culture is full of love, care and life. While in contrasting to the characters of Rumi and Ella, Shams and Aziz on the other hand belong to western culture. These two characters although known for their civilization but also seek knowledge and for that reason they travel to east as Aziz go to Boston to meet Ella while Sham go to Kanoya to meet Rumi. The proceeding narrative describe that both Aziz and Ella bring light and enlightened knowledge to Ella and Rumi. The author of novel by producing this concepts describe that both east and west are just meaning of other. Both the civilizations need each other’s to complete their identities.

The novel *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elf Shafak is a narrative that also defines materialism and spiritualism as binary oppositions. The character from *Sweet Blasphemy* Rumi represents the character of material lover and reflects materialism.

“Sure enough, there was Rumi, riding a horse as white as milk, wearing exquisite amber caftan embroidered with golden leaves and baby pearls, erect and proud, wise and noble, followed by a throng of admirers.” (P.106)

The binary opposite for the material nature of Rumi is the character of Ella and Shams. Actually there is a transformation of materialism to spiritualism. Ella from the novel *The Forty Rules of Love*, meeting Aziz start transform from materialism to spiritualism. She started to live in Konya in another place with Aziz. There the situation was:

“By his bed, she was sleeping on a plastic chair when suddenly opened her eyes and listened to an unexpected sound. Somebody was saying unknown words in the dark. She realized it was the call to prayer coming from outside” (P.346)

These lines define that Ella preferences were now change as her materialism converted in to spirituality. The researchers of this study depict that author in by producing following binaries illustrate the message of spirituality and love by giving preference to spiritualism over materialism.

The narrative of the novel is also filled with much metaphorical binary opposition. “Between two fingers you hold a stone and throw it into flowing water” (P:1). The novel begins with the symbol of stone and water. This create a wonderful ideology that for attaining thrill an energy in life a stone must be throwing in it. Here two binary symbols are used in which flowing

water symbolize life moving in its full zeal and zest while stone is any hardship that come across and provide energy to the life.

As the novel start with very striking conversation that argue toward the nature and properties of two natural entities i-e Lake and river. These introduce that how these two natural entities treats when stone hit each of these. “If a stone hits a river-----nothing unusual. Nothing unmanageable” (P: 1). this line indicate that river like a rigid and still character, in which the hardships not produce any effect. While for lake; “If a stone hits a lake, however, the lake will never be the same again” (P: 1). This line indicate that lake have very flowing nature, that can be changeable, so that when stone hits the lake water it can produce a huge energy in it. This energy change the whole identity of the lake, means the life of flexible character become very innovative.

The other striking metaphor is the death of shams which is defined through wind and cloud. Both the wind and cloud work as binaries and depict the different meaning to the situation. “The wind blew hard, and the moon hid behind a cloud”. This line interprets that moon is all like a God i-e belong to spiritualism and enlightenment. That on the death of Sham all the spiritual powers hid in the fog of clouds. But at the same time wind represents that this situation is temporary, means the fog of absence of spirituality.

Interpretation is also a very wonderful idea produced by the author in the novel. This idea in illustrated by the binaries of Food and Bed; “You owe me. In return for food and bed, you were going to interpret my dreams” (P: 31). This line claimed that dreams are interpreted in the cost of food or bed. Food here interprets the ideology of materialism while bed is for sleeping which represent spiritualism.

The researcher in this section find by close reading of the text of the novel, that author is trying to create an idea of spirituality and Sufism. Elif shafak in the whole text prefer spirituality as an act of Sufiism over materialism as well as freedom and liberty over confinement. So the whole text of *The Forty Rules of Love* is knitted by binary oppositions and creates an ideology of Sufiism.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the text of the novel *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak is constructed out of binaries. These binaries the text leaves no stability in text. The formation of two plots and their development is also predicted out of this instability. According to structuralism, every binary consist of a universal meaning, so in the case here. The binaries in the text collected by the researcher had a meaning. These meanings from the binaries construct a meaningful structure for the novel. There is always a one part in the binaries which have some privilege over the other, so as the case in the text spiritualism over the materialism, past over the present, similarly freedom over the confinements. The main aim of Shafak to write this master piece is to give rhetoric to the western society. Now a day western society is famous for all the material notions i-e money, fame and calculation in living. She thoroughly passed a constructed criticism to the western mode of living life. There is also a significance of Letter “B” in the whole structure of novel. Each and every chapter of novel is started by the letter “B.” This letter is a significant symbol of spiritualism. The final conclusion for the research is that the text of

novel is constructed by meaningful thoughts provided by the binaries. It means that binaries have a direct parallelism with meanings of the structure of any thought, notion, or literary work.

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