

A case study of the novel *Siddhartha* from the perspective of intertextuality

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Abstract:

This article argues for intertextuality as a critical and analytic method for reading literary texts. To develop this argument first a critique on structuralism and deconstruction has been presented. Secondly, it has been pointed out that both these theories are not adequate because both of them take their departure from a linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure which is not sufficient to understand the nature of text, author and the society in which they take place. It has been argued on the contrary that the idea of dialogicality proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin does seem helping us better to resolve the issues which cannot be tackled by both structuralism and deconstruction. The idea of dialogicality gives birth to intertextuality which, as a suggestion, should be adopted for literary and critical practices. In the end part of this article a case study of the novel *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse, a German writer, has been presented to make the idea of intertextuality clear and forceful.

The author as a supreme being

The romanticists were of the view that an author has a sublime personality who is able to transcend the very environment in which she has been put to grow. As having superior personality the author is able to bring down reality to ordinary people (Belsey 2002). As the author is more sensitive than ordinary human beings so she is capable of perceiving the ultimate meaning and true understanding of the world. However these romanticists lack of the idea that language which a writer uses for communication exists prior to her existence. They ignored the fact that language puts certain constraints too thick to cross through them.

Quest for a centre

Ferdinand de Saussure, a swiss linguist, in early twenties, tried to show language as a part of social semiotics, the act of meaning making. In this theory he presented the major idea of a sign. He proposed that the sign consists of a signifier and a signified (Saussure 1986). The combining process which brings these two parts into a whole sign works under the principle of arbitrariness. What it means is that there is no positive relationship between a signifier and a signified. He tried to show that a signifier refers to sound or word image whereas a signified to actual image of a 'thing'. He also proposed the idea that both the signifier and the signified work upon the principle of differentiation; it means that a signifier exists in the chain of other signifiers. Similarly a signified exists in the chains of other signified. For instance a signifier, let's say cat, exists in English language because of other signifiers such as bat, chat, etc. A cat is a cat because it is not a bat or a chat. In other words, something is something because it is not another thing. This theory of language left great influences on social sciences (Edgar 2006). In anthropology, for instance, we see Claude Levi Straus tried to find out the central point around which the different myths base themselves. It was the force of this Saussurean model which compelled Levi Straus to say that the center of myths is no centre. In other words no centre is also a centre! In literary theory we find structuralists who developed their approach based on the same notion of centre derived from Saussurean model of language. They put their effort in finding out an abstract system which could define all instances of literary work. Actually Saussure divided language into two parts such as langue and parole. By langue he meant an abstract system of language independent of actual use. The second part parole refers to actual use of language by actual speakers of a given language. In the same vein, structuralists tried to develop an abstract system of literature (Eagleton 1983). Once again, like the romanticists they escaped the actual nature of language in use.

The centre collapsed

It was Jacques Derrida, a French thinker and literary critic, who pointed out that the abstract ideal arbitrary link between signifier and signified, is not there anymore (Derrida 1978). He argued that the structuralists misunderstood Saussure in their focus on langue and missed the idea of parole i.e. the actual use of language. He argued that in actual use of signs we often find that there is only a chain of signifiers referring not to signified objects but to more signifiers. In one of his well known articles, *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences*, by citing Levi Strauss, he tried to argue that any act of interpretation was just an interpretation leading not towards a definite centre because such thing did not exist in the realm of signs which was just a play of signifiers. On the contrary to structuralists, he tried to propose another methodology which is called deconstruction. The idea behind this methodology of interpretation is that text is based on contradictory claims and a critic job is to point out those contradictions. Again in deconstruction we find another extreme like structuralism where at one side there is a focus on extreme decentralism whereas on the other side on extreme centralism respectively.

Actually there is an inherent problem in Saussure's theory of language where he divides it into langue and parole. On the basis of abstract system of langue he tries to establish the ideal and perfect relationship of signifier and signified which does not exist in actual instances. Both the structuralists and the deconstructionists seem to be missing the point which is that Saussure bifurcated language into two groups for analytical purposes as it is comparatively easy to study abstract phenomena without indulging in the intricacies of actual use which is too messy and too problematic. There is a strong need of an idea which can make us see language, communication and existence of human beings in a simultaneous way if we want to escape different kinds of extremity.

Dialogic nature of human existence

Language is dialogic by nature, argued by Mikhail Bakhtin. He proposed that language cannot exist without community (Holoquist 2001). Language and community are intrinsically interlinked. He refuted the abstract theory of language presented by de Saussure. He contended that dialogic nature of language points towards the dialogicality of human existence. In his life time, an individual has to face different and multiple worldviews, ideas, beliefs. In the complexity of these phenomena he has to find out a way to quench her thirst of understanding her existence. The condition of such multiple and contradictory views is realized in the realm of language. Thus language does not remain as a unified structure available for an individual speaker who uses it according to his own ease. The use of language does not come through a linear process. To use language means to participate in a dialogue where every utterance responds to previous utterances and does generate future utterances.

The dialogic notion of language gave birth to the idea of intertextuality coined by a French literary critic Julia Kristeva being inspired by the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin. Julia Kristeva, however, utilized this idea of intertextuality in the perspective of psychoanalysis (Kristeva 1986). It was Lacan who proposed that the emergence of language in the life of infant child creates a split when he starts to differentiate between I and other objects around him. Before the emergence of language there is no such feeling of separation. On the basis of this pre-emergence and post-emergence of language, Julia Kristeva proposed the idea of semiotic and symbolic. By semiotic she meant the pre-emergent language different from symbolic language i.e. post-emergent language. She contended that in the writings of modern writers we could find out semiotic language undermining symbolic language. Whereas Bakhtin saw dialogic nature of language and human existence in socio-political terms, Julia Kristeva saw the same phenomena in psychoanalytical terms where human psyche has to confront two types of languages i.e. semiotic and symbolic.

From the above discussion it can be argued that the actual problem which lies in structuralism and then in deconstruction is that they took their models for literary analysis from linguistic theory. The need, instead, is to see the nature of human existence occurring in the domain of space and time. There is a strong need to understand the multiplicity of human psyche and dynamicity of the relation of individual and society. Man is not a whole both in his psychological as well as social terms. If we keep on putting our struggles to achieve the central point around which remaining things revolve then we have to face the challenging notion of a centre-less centre. If we try to define the world in terms of nature and culture then, like Levi Strauss, we have to solve the enigma of incest taboo which does not fit in either of these terms. But it does not mean that both of these competing theories of textual analysis are completely wrong. Rather they provide some insights with the help of which we can understand other parts of the picture.

Before analyzing a text, it is better to seek answers of two to three questions. Why does a text producer produce the text? What is the relationship between a text producer and the society bound to time and space? What is the

role of language in both text production and text consumption? From structuralists we realize that there is a quest for a centre with the help of which we can understand the whole structure of a certain phenomenon. However, from deconstructionists we find out that there are always some gaps which throw doubts on the notion of centralized structure. Like taboo of incest relation, things cannot be separated into either and or terms. Now where should we go? I think we can get benefits consulting the notion of dialogicality proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin.

Dialogicality

In this idea of dialogicality we can see process of de-structuring and re-structuring working together simultaneously. We can also see the dialogic relation between society and an individual where both affect and are affected by each other (Pechey 2007). We can also find the answer to the role of language in the process of text production and consumption as well.

The idea of dialogicality seems to propose that life is like a stage where individual actors enter and exit after performing their roles. A society with its social structures already exists prior to the existence of the individual being. If the individual finds harmony in her social living then she spends her life and if not then she tries to resolve disharmony in order to reach at harmonious condition. It is the point where the role of language in general and the text in particular comes in. The individual being in a condition of social disharmony tries to cope with different notions and ideologies. She wants harmony in her life as a disharmonic life is unbearable with both psychically as well as socially. What she does is a creative work. She tries to bring different conflicting ideas into a whole and harmonious one. For this whole process she uses language which is one of those social forces that affect human beings living in a society. If that creative harmonious whole reaches at the societal level then it becomes the harmonious order for the whole society. But as this whole is the mixture of multiple contradictory notions so there is always gaps left behind which can be traced out. In this way gaps again get shape into contradictory ideas and thus the process of dialogicality keeps on going.

Actually the formalists identified this phenomenon in the concept of defamiliarization but they could not comprehend it completely. They could not grasp the point of dialogicality of life. All human effort is to go towards a unified whole which comes through following conventions. The moment this convention is lost people go into the situation of dilemma. In order to adjust with new situation, belief system, identity system, they work with past and present and in the result of working these two dimensions, the third dimension takes place. Harold Bloom found this state of dilemma in terms of Oedipus complex where an author seems to be in conflict with her predecessor (Bloom 1997). But again this is not the whole picture. The present author has to face the situation of dilemma. The activities, belief, worldviews etc, of her predecessor are different from the world in which the present author lives. He cannot follow the tradition as it has come to the point where it is no more sufficient. The world has changed now and now it is full of many contradictions against which the tradition is not potent enough to face them. The existence of the individual forces her to find out the solution of such contradictions. Here language is the only tool with the help of which she can work with past and present and adjust the balance of her life by creating a 'harmonious' work of art.

Now the question of tradition and an individual here arises. In analyzing a work of the individual author it should be kept in mind that she is writing in a certain tradition. The focus of analysis should not be just on single text. We have to see what themes, structures, characters are found in tradition and how the present author deal with this tradition in the changed circumstances of her present time. How different authors of present time deal with their situation of dilemma and as the result of such dealing what kind of changes take place. I think in this way we can be able to see the relation of a text with socioeconomic and political forces which do influence the condition of the society and the culture in which the individual author lives her existence; moreover we can also see the role of literary texts in influencing the tradition.

Intertextuality

From the above discussion we can conclude that the idea of dialogicality can help us a lot in our understanding of textual production and analysis. Through this we get the notion of intertextuality where a text is no longer independent but rather it is dependent upon other texts whose authors and origins are no more there. Through intertextuality we can try to find out the sources through which the author has tried to reach a 'central point' in her work as well as those gaps which point out towards the failure of her attempts. Roland Barthes says that now the author is dead. We should not assume some origin of the text because this notion of origin belongs to the myth of filiations. He describes the text as:

...woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages (what language is not) antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The intertextual in which every text is held, itself being the text-between of another text, is

not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the ‘sources’, the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas.

(Barthes, 1977a: 160)

But such endeavors also put some ‘moral’ obligations upon us. Is it necessary to find out gaps in each and every voice and text or should we select some and leave others for the benefit of human beings? This is the question which I keep open ended. In the following part pages I have tried to analyze the novel *Siddhartha* as a case study for the idea of intertextuality.

In a dialogic nature of human existence if you want to find out a centre which you may find out but remember that it is a creative one not inherent. And if you go to find out contradiction in this dialogic nature of human existence you can find out too but remember it is not the whole picture. No matter how much you keep on insisting the centre less universe people will not stop to find out the condition where they can satisfy their quest for harmony and stable order so that they can live a discontented life psychically as well as socially. Carl Jung says, “Man cannot stand a meaningless life (Jung 1960)”. Foucault says in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, “I have now no difficulty in accepting that man’s languages (langues), his unconsciousness, and his imagination are governed by laws of structure (Foucault 2008)”.

Case Study: analysis of the novel

In the novel *Siddhartha*, the protagonist is seen being caught by the same issue of responding to different contradictory notions. Being the son of Brahmin in a Hindu family he is supposed to learn the scripture telling him that he is the part of Om. He is supposed to believe according to the doctrine of his religion that Om lives in him and he can feel it through his self. But Siddhartha feels that he has got just words telling him nothing except more words. What does it mean by Om, self, Atman; where Om dwells? If it dwells in his self then why he cannot feel it. We find him caught in the basic issues of origin, time and being (Hesse 2004):

Were the gods not creation, created like me and you, subject to time, mortal? For whom else were offerings to be made, who else was to be worshipped but Him, the only one, the Atman? And where was Atman to be found, where did He reside, where did his eternal heart beat, where else but in one’s own self, in its innermost part, in its indestructible part, which everyone had in himself? But where, where was this self, this innermost part, this ultimate part? It was not a flesh and bone, it was neither thought nor consciousness, thus the wisest ones taught. So where, where was it? To reach this place, the self, myself, the Atman, there was another way, which was worthwhile looking for? (*Siddhartha*, p. 4)

We can realize that from this point the whole story revolves around the way ‘worthwhile looking for.’ How can we find ultimate meaning, goal, self, being or answer whatever name we use to describe that desire of responding to different basic questions of life? We see that Siddhartha with his friend Govinda, also a son of Brahmin, leaves his home to find the answer of his questions. Both of them live for a quite long time with Samanas, the ascetics practicing to control senses by torturing their bodies through different ways. After being disillusioned by these ascetic practices both of them leave the cult of Samanas to listen to the teachings of Buddha about whom they heard that he is the person who has attained eternal nirvana and bliss and lots of people are taking refuge under his teachings. We also know that Govinda decides to become the disciple of Buddha, whereas Siddhartha, being disillusioned by teachings and words, says good bye to his friend and moves on to the city. Before entering the city he suddenly realizes that he has been doing totally wrong. He has left his home for the sake of finding his true self but through ascetic practices he has been trying to kill that very self. At this point he finds a flaw in the methodology he has employed to find ultimate being, ultimate meaning, Om, Atman. That ‘false’ methodology guides him to transcend his senses for reaching his goal. But he realizes that this methodology does not go very far. For a moment you can get rid of your senses but ultimately you have to come back to them. You cannot escape from them totally and forever:

What is leaving one’s body? What is fasting? What is holding one’s breath? It is fleeing from the self, it is short escape of the agony of being a self, it is a short numbing of the senses against the pain and the pointlessness of life. The same escape, the same short numbing is what the driver of an ox-cart finds in the inn, drinking a few bowls of rice-wine or fermented coconut-milk. Then he won’t feel his self any more, then he won’t feel the pains of life any more, then he finds a short numbing of the senses. When he falls asleep over his bowl of rice-wine, he’ll find the same what Siddhartha and Govinda find when they escape their bodies through long exercises, staying in the non-self. (p.15)

The assumptions adopted by romanticists that we should transcend ourselves to find final and absolute meaning seem to be challenged here. Siddhartha realizes at this point that he should consult with his senses. The ultimate meaning lies within him so why should he not go and take help from his senses? Therefore, he enters the city life, full of sensual and worldly activities. In this city he finds a teacher, Kamala, a courtesan, who teaches him the art of love and lust. In the city he, with the help of Kamala, meets a merchant, Kamaswami with whom he learns how to deal in business life. In the beginning of this period he remains aloof from all these worldly pursuits but after a passage of time he indulges fully in them. First he does not care about money but later on he becomes like other people running after money. In the end of this phase in which he realizes to take help from his senses in order to find final meaning of life, he almost forgets the purpose of his life i.e. he forgets his quest. His senses leads him too far that now he has become a kind of slave to them. He acts according to the laws of his senses. However, he does not seem to be satisfied with such kind of life. He wants to get rid of it but where should he go now? In the first phase of his quest for final meaning he has tried to overcome his senses. He could not accept Buddha's teachings as he had already discarded them while living with his Brahmin family. Seeing senses as a source of meaning he consulted them but these very senses had made him their slave. In the world of senses he even forgot the very purpose of his life i.e. finding Atman, final meaning. As being disgusted and frustrated of such life as devoid of any meaning and quest he, now, tries to commit suicide. We can say that Siddhartha at this stage of reading the text of life has decided to quit it as he cannot find any methodology helpful in reaching its final meaning. While on the very verge of his quitting this text of life, a mysterious voice coming from his inner being i.e. intuition stops him committing such kind of foolish act. He, now, decides to act upon his intuition coming from his inner being:

Then out of remote areas of his soul, out of past times of his now weary life, a sound stirred up. It was a word, a syllable, which he, without thinking, with a slurred voice, spoke to himself, the old word which is the beginning and end of all prayers of Brahmans, the holy "Om", which roughly means "that what is perfect" or "the completion". And in the moment when the sound of "Om" touched Siddhartha's ear, his dormant spirit suddenly woke up and realized the foolishness of his action. (P.82)

Here Om means perfection which is attained through living the intertextual phases of the text of life. The final meaning of this text cannot be grasped unless it is analyzed in the light of various other interconnected texts. These texts are themselves original but at the same time connected to each other. If one really wants to get perfection i.e. the final meaning of the text of life then one has to live through all these interconnected texts combining themselves into one text of life. If you analyze them as separate you would get the partial but not full meaning of this text of life. After living and finishing one text you should not think that the text of life has come to an end. There are, on the contrary, still other texts which you have to read and live fully. At this point, Siddhartha has realized this fact and now he is happy for this realization. He should continue his journey as it has not come to an end. It is only one of many interconnected text. Some parts are still missing, waiting to be explored by the reader-traveler Siddhartha.

I had to pass through so much stupidity, through so many vices, through so many errors, through so much disgust and disappointments and woe, just to become a child again and to be able to start over. But it was right so, my hearts says "yes" to it, my eyes smiles to it. I've to experience despair, I've had to sink down to the most foolish one of all thoughts, to the thought of suicide, in order to be able to experience divine grace, to hear Om again, to be able to sleep properly and awake properly again. I had to become a fool, to find Atman in me again. I had to sin, to be able to live again. Where else might my path lead me to? It is foolish, this path, it moves in loops, perhaps it is going around in circle. Let it go as it likes, I want to take it. (p.87)

The path going to the final meaning of the text of life is not straight and linear. It is circular; the reader-traveler has to move among different texts. Sometimes he might be despair in the sense that he has to start from the very beginning because of some text which contradicts the supposed final meaning of the text of life. When he has covered all these different texts then he is able to look at them from above. He now in a sense has transcended them. He cannot be overwhelmed by the meaning taken from just one text. He now is able to analyze them in the very light of all these different texts:

With a thousand eyes, the river looked at him, with green ones, with white ones, with crystal ones, with sky-blue ones..... Love this water! Stay near it! Learn from it! Oh yes, he wanted to learn from it. He wanted to listen to it. He who would understand this water and its secrets..... would also understand many other things, many secrets, all secrets. (p.92)

Here the river symbolizes the text of life having different dimensions and aspects need to be covered up if one wants to really understand it. The paradox of this text is that it changes yet at the same time it remains the same; its changing nature does not change. Although every time it is new yet paradoxically it is same. New babies born, old men die yet life remain the same. Schopenhauer once said that man does not die because he lives in the form of his children. We think the sun has set but it does not as it shines at another place. If one does not understand this simultaneous nature of the river i.e. the text of life, one lives in a narrow world, ignorant of other texts existing simultaneously.

In the following pages of the novel Siddhartha meets his son whom he wants to keep with himself so that his son would not live a life of Sansara, worldly life. Siddhartha wants him to become like himself, living away from the 'vices' of the world. His son on the contrary, does not like his idea and he hates his father controlling him not to live in the world. Vasudeva points out Siddhartha's narrow-mindedness which is unwilling to see beyond the patterns of just single way of living. Siddhartha wants his child to learn and read just one text of many texts of life. Vasudeva urges Siddhartha to remember his own father who, like Siddhartha, wants him to stay and live with Brahmans way of life. But at that time Siddhartha wanted to go beyond that because he was not satisfied. The same drama of life is occurring now again but with different characters. Siddhartha now is playing the role of his father and his son playing that of Siddhartha.

We are unable to see the same situation because we are trapped in the illusion of time. Our suffering and happiness do exist because of this illusion. The moment a child is born, its parents are very happy because they do not realize that one day their baby has to die. Siddhartha, as a reader-traveler, at this point also does not realize that time is just an illusion. He should consult with river, the text of life, as is suggested by Vasudeva, the old ferryman. Only the text of life, where all texts merge in one another, can solve the narrow-mindedness of his behavior. Only reading this text, where all texts exist simultaneously, he can surpass the illusion of time. We see all his narrow-mindedness, all his suffering, all his illusions, melt after reading this text of life:

Siddhartha looked into the water, and images appeared to him in moving water.....
the image of his father, his own image, the image of his son merged, Kamala's image also appeared and was dispersed, and the image of Govinda, and other images, and they merged with each other, turned all into the river, headed all, being the river, for the goal, longing, desiring, suffering, and the river's voice sounded full of yearning, full of burning woe, full of unsatisfiable desire. For the goal the river was heading, many goals, the waterfall, the lake, the rapids, the sea and all goals were reached, and every goal was followed by a new one, and water turned into vapour and rose to the sky, turned into rain and poured down from the sky, turned into a source, a stream, a river, headed forward once again, flowed on once again. But the longing voice had changed. It still resounded, full of suffering, searching, but other voices joined it, voices of joy and of suffering, good and bad voices, laughing and sad ones, a hundred voices, a thousand voices. (p. 121)

It was not the case that Siddhartha before it did not hear the voice of the river. He did but did not listen to the voice of the river attentively. Now he has done it and that is why he is able to listen to 'a single word, which was Om: the perfection' (p.122). Om, the perfect meaning, consists of thousand voices existing simultaneously and merging with one another. Only the illusion of time and space makes one not to perceive the intertextuality of the text of life. But the reader traveler like Siddhartha can comprehend this phenomenon and because of this comprehension can find the final, perfect meaning of this text of life which does lie in the realm of intertextuality.

Conclusion

Recaptulating, we have tried to show that the idea of intertextuality can help us understanding the actual nature of the text. Through this we can try to avoid the difficulties and challenges faced by other models of literary analysis. It helps us to bring together all those different factors which have been avoided in other models owing to so called justifications. It is a fact that the application of this model is not as simple as we have tried to present here. However the basic idea is that in order to understand the actual nature of the text, there is a need to understand the nature of language in use. We should take insights from those theories of language which try to see language contextual terms.

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