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Structural Analysis of Bhattarai's *Sukaratka Paila* [Socrates Footsteps]*

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Abstract

This study aims at analyzing Govinda Raj Bhattaria's novel Sukaratka Paila within the theoretical framework of structuralism. More specifically, this study uses the procedures of analysis called seek-find-lose and seek-but-don't find grammar structure of narratives in which the major characters are studied. The idea is how one character seeks the other, finds him or her and again loses him or her. Bhattaria's novel Sukaratka Paila embeds the structure of romance within the structure of full of irony and the second structure offers realities of the contemporary time when narrator professor Socrates realizes at the end when he sees Ananta's alike body hanging on the ceiling fan of his own room. The promises of living together being the life partners goes in vain for both Ananta and Purnima. Moreover, this study examines the structure of the novel in which structure plays an essential part in a literary work which juxtaposes the plot and other elements of the story to make the narration comprehensible for the readers and also to clutch the meaning which the novelist wants to convey. The prime purpose of the paper is to unfold the underlying assumptions and unconscious regularities of human characters and their experiences based on their behaviors, society and culture. This analysis captures the writer's intention of fabricating the story through its characters, theme and setting. The study reveals that structural reading of a fiction paves the ways for exploring another vantage of point in literary works.

Keywords: Narrative, structure, structuralism.

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Structuralism as a Basis for Reading a Literary Text

Structural approach is one of the fundamental approaches in literary theories. It asserts pioneering grounds for the analysis of prose literature. The basis of structural analysis is developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, a pioneer figure in structuralism, who introduced the concepts such as diachronic and synchronic study, *langue* and *parole*, and (Umma 3) the concept of sign (signifier and signified) in linguistics. It is an analysis of a literary text to uncover the underlying principles that are governing the composition of certain genre. Saussure initiated dynamic concept of structuralism and Strauss, Barthes, Todorov and Culler extended the pavement for the discursive analysis of the discourse from anthropology to semiotics (Taghizadeh 35-36). Thus, the contribution made by different scholars paved the way for analysing literary texts from different vantage points. In other words, structuralism helps in understanding the fundamental structure of any literary text. It is not the field but a method of systematic study that considered structuralism is a way of looking for reality not in individual things but in the relationship among (Celebi 78) others in the same literary space.

For structuralism, the world that we see consists of the two fundamental levels: i.e., visible (surface), and invisible (deep/underlying) (Smith 1). For example, hundreds of sentences in a simple present tense may look different at a surface level, but they all have same (s+v1/v5+o) structure at underlying level. Similarly, hundreds of stories can have similar plots structure at underlying level. However, structure for structuralists is a conceptual system not a physical entity since the three major elements are grounded: wholeness, transformation and self-regulation. Therefore, it studies the overall system of structure rather than the surface manifestation.

Interpretation of the text depends on the underlying structure of the literary text. For structural analysis there should be the systematic analysis of systems and procedures. Every system is the system of the parts but those parts are not independent in themselves. The system formulates the rules and orders to govern the smooth functioning of the parts. Therefore, system is always rule governed in structuralism (Todorov and Weinstein, 136). In other words, a text is a structure composed of its elements. One element is equally important as other within the system. The underlying principles that govern the composition of several stories can be called principles of narrative progression. Structuralism observes itself as a human science whose effort is

to understand in a systematic way for the fundamental structures that underline the human experiences. Therefore, this paper intends to explore governed narrative of the modern Nepali fiction based on structural analysis systematically.

Every literary genre is insightful in itself, but it is not sufficient to generate meaning in structural analysis. It is believed that structuralism brings literature together with language (Taghizadeh 13). Similarly, Bressler considers that it is for studying a language at one particular time in its evolution and how language functions (33). Thus, structural analysis in each literary genre can have multitude dynamism. The literary writing differs in terms of readers, context and culture. Referring to Northrop Frye in structural analysis we come to know that literary text can be analyzed from two different vantage points of the theories i.e., a theory of myth or winter and a theory of summer (Tyson 241). The texts are taken as the mirror of the societies; they reflect the social embodiment, situatedness and existing practices of the societies. The personal experience of author, its intended meaning and overall synopsis of cultural practices are interconnected with the social dimension. Thus, the real world is better than ideal world because it is the world of virtue, plenitude, and realization. It is very interesting to look at the plot raised by an author in novel. The plot can be serious enough or funny, fictional and highly philosophical or spiritual. It requires a successful quest with virtue or a villainous entity to achieve the author's goal.

For the analysis Frye claims that we need to have different lenses to analyze the text (1). The meaning is constructed and reconstructed within the society by the meanings of text; however, text can have various forms: sign, symbols, metaphors, pictures, a big representational colonies, apartment, business and trade houses, shopping mall etc. Therefore, we accept that text may not have meaning rather in readers' repertoire. The meaning is what the reader ought to overcome not just what another intends; and it is all rooted in reader's background, culture and ways of understanding. It is very much crucial to analyze the text in terms of its genre and its embedded internal aspects of complexities of the text. The complexities of the culture are represented through the text i.e., literary and non-literary or fictional and non-fictional, but the ideology and meaning of the text are created with the help of different characters, and their power (Tyson 237). Although, each text has meaning and the meaning is created by the reader based on their profound understanding. That is to say,

this kind of analysis is an ongoing attempt to create and cater a new body of knowledge in linguistic spectrum, thereby, we can imagine that such work can contribute to find out the most useful way to represent the structural system governing literature as a whole.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to unfurl the structural binding of the modern Nepali fiction *Sukaratka Paila* based on the theoretical construct of structuralism. Fictional writings are full of imaginations. Human imagination is one of the liberties that human get by their birth. Each author is liberated in exposing and exploring the issues they like. They are unique in themselves. Their culture, custom, different social practices, socio-economic status, familial background etc. play very significant role because their narratives (experiences) differ from one to another. Therefore, their ways of understanding also differ. Thus, the fiction, here, has been studied in terms of the structural parameters. This study has stressed much on understanding the fictional legacy and connecting the meaning of the fiction relating to the prior structure. In the process of analysis, the research paper has answered the following questions:

- What one character seeks from the other, finds him or her and again loses him or her?
- How and why does structuralism pave the way for reading this text structurally?

Since we believe languages have ‘deep structures’ or ‘substructures’ and those structures are not readily observable, they must be discerned from intensive interpretive analysis of myths, language, or texts. Here, in the study, it has been explicitly analyzed how different ‘deep structures’ express various meanings. It also aims to analyze the fiction through the process of structuralism. In order to meet these objectives and derive a conclusion, the plot, characters, and the overall assets have been used as the tools of analysis of the fiction.

Structuralists minutely examine every affair of the plot in order to discover the fundamental structural units such as unit of narrative progression and narrative operations. It is very viable to study in structural analysis that how narratology functions since the major focus of narratology is to see how the practice of opposite or binary opposition (Tyson 239) takes place. Many scholars including Culler have

figured out that human beings make meaning by structuring the world in terms of two kinds of opposed pairs e.g. 'A is the opposite of B', "-A is the negation of A, is the opposite of -B is the negation of B"(Tyson 224).

The plot formulas are carried out by means of action, or characters (surface phenomena) in a given story. A single character performs a work of two or more separate actants. For example, 'Nick' in *The Great Gatsby*, and 'Ananta' in *Sukaratka Paila*. By the above description, we can understand that the structure of narrative is the same as the fundamental structure of language: subject-verb- object. This basic narrative grammar is generated following the pattern of plot by aligning what Greimas observes as the six fundamental actants into three pairs of oppositions i.e., subject-object, sender-receiver and helper-opponent. For this, the example can be illustrated as "in a simply love story the hero can be both the subject and the receiver and his beloved can be both the object and sender" (Tyson 235-236). For the broader understanding, we need to understand various analogies between the structural units of narrative such as elements of characterization, plot and the structural units of language. Furthermore, it is also observed that story, narrative, and narration interact by means of three qualities which are namely tense, mood and voice. Since 'Tense' incorporates order, duration, and frequency, 'mood' amalgamates distance, perspective and 'voice' includes attitudes respectively. It means, it is interesting to note that tense, mood and voice are all aspects of verbs. So, the structural analysis of the text, according to narratology, is to explore the fundamental structure of unit accompanied with the literary text.

Foundation of the Novel

Replicating the reality of human life during Maoist insurgency in Nepal, Govinda Raj Bhattarai writes *Sukaratka Paila [Socrates' Footsteps]*. The meaning of this modern Nepali fiction is grounded on the context that replicates the Maoist insurgency (1995/6 to 2005/6) in Nepal. People having non-Nepali background may not have experienced the civil war of Nepal; therefore, they may not understand the text. However, the meaning of the text is solely connected to the life and living standard of people who have been confronting in Narphok (a pseudo name) for one of the villages of eastern Nepal. The fact is that, to understand the cultural embodiment captured in the fiction one has to have the cultural understanding, linguistic variations, and geographical divergence that has made the fiction alive. In addition to this, to

understand the overall meaning of this fiction i.e., a piece of literature, we need to understand the structure used or employed by the author. So, while analyzing *Sukaratka Paila*, through structural approach, I have examined the words (types of verbs, figurative meaning deployed by the words, metaphorical entities and so on), the meaning they have in a context and the grammar being used. Thus, this paper sheds the light in the verse of the modern Nepali fiction and provides a huge contribution for the promotion of Nepali literature through structural reading.

The structure has been examined as a whole unit since the meaning of this fiction depend upon the structure in which it is used (Suzanne 7). It focuses on the synchronic relationship of words in the text. Moreover, the plot either be an abstract concept or an issue of structural approach, it consists of action, character, and recognition, thereby; meaning making is visible in literary analysis (Todorov 33). Thus, the setting must be suffused with story adequately. The setting generates a context which helps the characters to act and develop (Grey 28). Furthermore, structure and character are interlocked. The event structure of a story is created out of the choices that characters make under pressure and actions they choose to take, while characters are the creatures who are revealed and changed by how they choose to act under pressure (McKee 106-107). Therefore, it is vivid that the novel *Sukaratka Paila* has also replicated their prior actions of the characters.

Structural Reading of Characters

Sukaratka Paila embeds the structure of romance (if we compare to *The Great Gatsby*: the mythos of summer, the quest) within the structure of full of irony (if we compare to *The Great Gatsby*: the mythos of winter, realism) and the second structure offers realities of the contemporary time when narrator professor Socrates realizes in the end when he sees Ananta's alike body hanging on the ceiling of his own room. The narrative resolves around Ananta's pursuit, attainment, and loss of Purnima. The failed quest between Ananta and Purnima claims a kind of narrative symmetry between the structure of fictional past and fictional present. Their promises of living together go in vain. For the analysis, all the action can be reduced to three verbs: "to seek," "to find," and "to lose".

a. Overall narrative formula

1. Attribute: X lacks Y (Ananta's dream failed)
2. Action: X seeks Y (Ananta tries to get Purnima)
3. Attribute: X lacks Y (Ananta makes several attempts but...)
(Either because X doesn't find Y or because X finds but then loses Y)

b. Seek-find-lose grammar structure of narratives of the major characters along with seek-but-don't find grammar structure.

To add up, the text is structured by a struggle for dominance between two very literary genres *Mythos of Summer* (romance, the successful quest) and *Mythos of Winter* (irony, the complexities of reality) (Tyson 236). Ananta's better relation with Purnima and with the villagers can be compared with the *Mythos of Summer* where at least he had a kind of romance in the village. The genre of romance is overcome by that of irony in the novel since the novelist satirically provokes the realities of the contemporary society. The two aspects of structuralism seem in conflict: its reliance on formulaic description, -derives from its commitment to the kind of objectivity associated with mathematics, and its philosophical grounding as a science of humanity, (Ananta's economic hurdles in life and expectation of the society from him) - requires us to speculate on the relationship between the structural formulas we describe and the world in which we live. However, all the characters including Ananta, Purnima, Gopi, Nisha, Sophiya, Trishana, David, Bikram, Bhaktaman, Chitrakhar, Nilima and Sukarat (Socrates), have been read structurally in the following paragraphs.

Ananta is one of the major characters in the novel, who comes to Kathmandu for his higher studies. During his stay at Narphok, he sought Purnima, found her and lost when he came Kathmandu. He also sought, found and lost his adorable parents and all other family members. The narrative of Ananta's pursuit, attainment and loss of Purnima is accompanied by the narrative of his pursuit, attainment, and loss of the new life he sought when he changed his destiny and came for Kathmandu. He sought escape from the boredom and economic poverty of his life. His seek-find-lose story had two goals: love and social status. Both are lost, of course, when he died (Neither his affair succeeded nor his attainment of study; nor of a better job). Ananta seeks for the success but doesn't find it throughout his life.

Purnima is the character whose overall story linked to the attainment and pursuit of Ananta. It is because Purnima sought Ananta, found him and lost when Ananta left the village Narphok for his higher studies. Next, she sought emotional security, had hoped to get from Ananta but lost him when she discovered he was never going to come back in her life. Similarly, she sought for educational achievement, tried but never got success to pass her bachelor level study from her village. Purnima sought a job, found it in an INGO and lost it when its tenure was over. Finally, she sought alternatives for the life, as a result, involved in Maoist Revolution and gained some kinds of social justice. Purnima sought for her attainment and success but didn't find throughout her life.

Gopi is another most important character that is portrayed a bit successful character in the novel. Gopi sought, found and lost Nisha because he had not said her that he was married. He sought for the master degree from University Campus and achieved it. He found many senior and junior friends such as Ananta, Nisha, Sophiya and Professor Socrates, but mainly lost Nisha. He sought to explore his knowledge and made a social identity but couldn't achieve that. Gopi sought for complete establishment in the life but he couldn't.

Nisha is another important character in the novel, she came for university education at University Campus Kirtipur. She sought, found and lost Gopi when he refused to take her to his home at Chitwan. She sought, found and achieved educational goal. She sought, found and lost the sensitivity to understand the relationship between Ananta and Purnima. Nisha sought, found and achieved the good friend like Ananta. Nisha sought Gopi, and found something with him but didn't get success when Gopi really left her.

Sophiya is another important character who came for university education. Sophiya sought, found and lost all her friends. She sought; found Ananta as one of her the best friends. She sought and found educational achievement. She also sought, found and lost the sensitivity to understand the relationship between Ananta and Purnima. Similarly, Sophiya sought attainment and successful career but didn't fulfill it.

Trishana, next important character, who came for university education, sought, found and lost her friends. She sought and found the educational achievement. She

sought, found and lost the sensitivity to understand the relationship between Ananta and Purnima. Similarly, Trishana sought successful career but didn't fulfill it.

David, another important character who came for university education, sought, found and lost Nepali-ness forever. He sought, found and lost his morality, virtue and discipline when he rushed taking the money of many people to India with a so-called corrupted leader Bikram. Finally, he sought, found the desire of earning money, and got success.

Bikram, is one of most important characters who represent antagonism in the novel. He sought, found and lost the dignity, morality and virtue when he made fraud with his innocent villagers (Bhaktaman and Chitrakhar and also with Ananta). He sought, and found his goal of life i.e., earning money at any cost (cheating, corrupting or either way else). He sought, found and lost the political stance that he had made when he left Nepal after collecting the money from innocent people.

Bhaktaman is one of the most victimized characters who couldn't achieve the success in the life. He sought, found and lost the dream/ways of earning money when Bikram and David misled him. He sought, found and lost all the properties. He sought escape from the boredom and economic poverty of his life. He sought the ways for life but didn't get and invited self-death finally.

Chitrakhar is another victimized character who couldn't achieve the success in life. He sought, found and lost the dream/ways of earning money when Bikram and David deceived him. He sought, found and lost all the properties. He sought escape from the boredom and economic poverty of his life. He sought the ways for life but didn't get. Finally, he invited self-death.

Nilima is also a vibrant character of the novel, who, happened to encounter her adult life with professor *Sukarat* at the university quarter. She sought, found and lost her virginity when she married with professor *Sukarat*. She sought, found her monopoly when she came in the life of professor *Sukarat*. She sought, found and lost her friendly relation of Ananta. Similarly, she sought and found her ways of doing after getting married with professor *Sukarat* and also sought; and found to flourish her dominating attitudes to *Sukarat*.

Narrator *Sukarat* himself is one of the major characters in the novel. His life in Tribhuvan University has been proved as an unsuccessful pursuit. His experience of three decade of teaching but very traditionally involved the pursuit of excitement where he returned empty-handed when he left. Neither is his search for right woman successful. He leaves his hometown to explore his professional identity. His seek-but-don't find pattern seemed to be his unfulfilled search for a purpose in life. Through his narrative, he seemed 'at loose end'. At the age of sixty he was still without modernism in his thought, without a serious love interest, and without a home of his own, still lived in university quarter.

The Structure of Literary Interpretation

It is largely associated with the process of meaning making. The structural systems that govern both the writing and interpretation of literary text is the system of rules and codes, which consciously or unconsciously internalized, that tell us how to make meaning when we read literature. The fact is that structural approach doesn't only limit itself in finding out the different structure in the various levels of the text rather it advocates how the meaning of those literary texts are covered and understood.

The interpretation of the text either in surface or in deeper level, is largely grounded with the basic knowledge of interpretator, socio-economic status, psychological bearing of the readers and so on. Therefore, the analytical codes and systems are different in terms of language, codes and culture. So, to say, American codes are different from Nepalese codes; that's why the literary texts and their interpretation vary from person to person. However, it entails that the single philosophy doesn't prevail all the associated meaning rather it requires angles to see after. That's why; the structure of literary interpretation heavily makes relation with the convention of distance, metaphorical coherence and thematic unity and so on. Thus, it has been examined that the 'langue', the structural system of rules and codes, operates consciously or unconsciously when authors write and readers interpret based upon their repertoire.

Besides that, it is revealed that the traditional quest forms a 'seek-find-lose' grammar even if hero died without achieving the goal of his quest, or attempting to achieve it, the world is transformed by his effort. Moreover, it can be analyzed that the

aspect and the context of any literary text (as cited in Todovou and Tyson 210) consists of an attribute transformed by an action.

- I. Attribute (e.g., the protagonist is unsuccessful) as Ananta in *Sukaratka Paila*
- II. Action (e.g., he sees success) Ananta sees but...
- III. Attribute (e.g., he is successful or, at least, learned something important as a result of his quest) Many people as we readers have realized the importance of his life

Moreover, *Sukarat's* narrative is found rooted in the structure of social realities with irony to the contemporary postmodern philosophy on the structure of romance (Richter 307). The ironic structure associated with fiction (novel) overrode the structure of romance as if to say that romance was no longer possible always in human life almost everywhere.

The structure of irony did not succeed –in eradicating the structure of romance. *Sukarat's* nostalgia for a long innocence, a lost paradise, for the mythos of summer, the genre of romance, reached its climax in *Sukarat's* closing description of a literal paradise in the ways that Ananta's body was hanging on the ceiling or something else. Since Mythos of Summer refers to romance, the successful quest and Mythos of Winter (Tyson 227-235) refers to irony, the complexities of reality. According to Mythos of Winter only Bikram and David got romance and according to Mythos of Summer almost all the characters seem bearing the complexities of reality in their lives. Therefore, *Sukaratka Paila* has a complex structure to analyze. Thus, this grammar reflects a worldview associated with the postmodernist period and with the modern novel's rejection of the traditional seek-and-find quest.

Thus, it has been proven that the main aim of structuralism is to systematize human experiences used in linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology and literary studies and so on. Structuralist criticism doesn't study the structure of an individual item; rather it studies whole thing at a particular time. So, structural approach interjects human realities replicating Mythos of Winter and Mythos of Summer to finding out the structures of literary texts and gives broader conception for the elaboration of the understanding by different characters in the Bhattarai's novel. Therefore, for the structural analysis of any literary genre, our lenses of vision must be either based on the mythos of summer or mythos of winter (Tyson 240-241). The text

can be analyzed concentrating on the governing principles of theory of modes. The pioneer principle of the theory of modes is to reveal the protagonists' power, fictional mode and character type to take action as it compares to the power of their men and to the power of their environment thereby nature and society.

Conclusion

In spite of so many ways and processes, this study employs structuralism as the basis of the analysis replicating a mode of literary denunciation that seeks to investigate patterns and structures of a piece of literary work. Structural reading paves the ways for analyzing a work of literature in a broad manner concretizing on the ideas such as plots, characters and imagery. Rationalizing the prior tenets of Bhattarai's work, this study pinpoints structural approach as the viable approach to examine the structures, and its pattern in terms of the language used in the literary text. To systematize human experience *Sukaratka Paila* fabricates the effect of literary genres and their fictional spectrum along with some prior principles and parameters. Thus, *Sukaratka Paila* replicates grand narrative of human realities and also clutches the meaning which the novelist wants to convey. This analysis captures the novelist's intention of fabricating the storyline through its characters, theme and setting. Bhattarai's novel *Sukaratka Paila* embeds chaotic human realities happened during Maoist revolution in Nepal. In structural analysis, language used in the novel *Sukaratka Paila* is studied synchronically to generate a new body of knowledge. The meaning of a particular piece of literature varies due to the two-layer analysis of the text i.e., deep level and surface level analysis. The derived meanings differ because language is a system of sign. Therefore, from the surface level, the novel replicates Maoist revolution, its origin and necessity for the social transformation. The fiction opens up with linguistic awareness to apply the literary theory in their social assets on the other.

To conclude, structuralist criticism bears the study of the structures within the text amalgamating various notions e.g., sign, symbol and semiotics. This analysis entails all the structural details about the novel *Sukaratka Paila* that paves the way for characterizing and delving deep into the depth of storyline through its structuring pattern. Moreover, the study also reveals that the presentation of story through flashbacks gives it a flow. To sum up, the structural elements help us in understanding the novelist's intension about the contemporary time behind the story. At the end, the

structural analysis of Bhattraï's novel is replicated through seek-find-and lose grammar which is applicable to find out the structures of literary texts and give broader conception for the elaboration of the understanding of the meaning of a fictional genre. Moreover, the structure and the meaning are consciously created by human beings based on sign system in which Norphok has been replicated as a signifier and the overall status of people and their livelihood have been accounted as signified entities. This paper concludes that the meaning of text is not derived in isolation rather it is derived along with wholeness phenomena which are intertwined with their internal structure. Hence, Bhattarai's novel entails that structural reading requires a prior way to understand how the elements of the novel come together and underlie within the structures and how structures work in the fiction. It also entails that structuralism becomes a path for showing discursive realities in narrative spaces.

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