

The study of Daud Kamal's *A Remote Beginning* from the perspective of Stylistics

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Abstract

The paper aims at evaluating the text of Daud Kamal's A Remote Beginning: one of the poet's key poems from the perspective of the three levels applied here stylistically. Daud Kamal is one of the most prolific Pakistan's English poets whose sublime art remained to be unnoticed during his life. The poet has a distinctive style of art. Kamal may be categorized to be one of the great mystic poets as his art seems replete with the flavor of Sufism. He focuses on spirituality and the mysticism and spiritual deadness are his recurrent themes. Moreover, Being a rural poet, his poetry overflows with Imagery; mostly natural imagery. His art is rightly understood to be enchanted by the world renowned Imagists like W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. His poetry emanates a unique colour of history and past. Strikingly he composes in fragments. The given poem would be analyzed on the three major levels of Stylistics: Pragmatics, phonological, and morphological levels. The exploration is an attempt to unfold concealed meanings and thematic layers in the selected piece of art for understanding of readers and researchers. The poet's style is laden with imagery, symbolism along with simplicity of language. The focused poem unveils the conflict of the past with the present, optimism emerging out of pessimism, and the nostalgic memories of the poet etc. The analysis will be an addition to the understanding of the poem from the given thematic explanation.

Keywords: Conflict, Imagism, Mysticism, Native symbolism, Nostalgia, Phonological, Morphological and Pragmatics Level.

1. Introduction

Literature is a multidimensional and multilayer phenomenon as it portrays life which is too complex and divergent to be explained in concrete and definitive meanings. The language itself is too an intricate tool in the hands of an artist to shape his/her abstract notions and imaginations into words. To

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know and unfold concealed aspects, themes, motifs and meanings of a language in a piece of literature, here comes the vital role of stylistics. Stylistics is a scientific study. Leech and Short (1981:13) also describe Stylistics as the linguistic study of style. Style is here understood as, “ the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose, and so on” (Leech & Short 2007: 9) and as ‘the linguistic characteristics of a particular text’ (Leech & Short 2007: 11). Widdowson (1975:4) throws light on stylistics as follows:

"By ‘stylistics’ I mean the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation and I shall take the view that what distinguishes stylistics from literary criticism on the one hand and linguistics on the other is that it is essentially a means of linking the two.....stylistics, however, involves both literary criticism and linguistics, as its morphological make-up suggests: the style component relating it to the former and the ‘istics’ component to the later."

1.2 About the Poet and his rank among the world’s Poets

Daud Kamal one of the most prolific Pakistan’s English poets whose sublime art remained to be unnoticed during almost of his life. Kamal has an individualistic, unique distinctive style of his poetic art. Its uniqueness lies in his style of writing it in fragments. His major themes are rustic and pastoral in nature like Wordsworth. Being a feeling and compassionate poet, Kamal’s pen writes against the brutality and injustice of royals and kings. It is not out of place here to mention that his poetic art reflects the miserable plight of the humble, oppressed by their kings. Some of the critics name this attribute of his art as the Marxist tendency. His poetic art sometimes becomes the strong voice of the oppressed segment of the society. This exclusive feature of the poet runs through his poems. In the poem “An Ancient Indian Coin” he voices against the despotism of lords against the wretched. One of the beautifully written lines here goes like this :

*“The king’s hunting-dogs are better fed
than most of his subjects*

Kamal’s art mirrors mostly the sense of loss and spiritual dearth in the face of cruelty and cultural chaos. Reverberations (1970); his first book is the translations of Ghalib: the classical Urdu poet. His poems in English are as follows:

A Remote Beginning (1985)

Recognitions(1979)

His posthumous works contain

Rivermost (1992)

Before The Carnations Wither (1995)

A Selection of Verse (1997)

Besides, the poet translated the renowned Urdu poets Like Ahmed Nadeem Qasimi, Faiz Ahmad, Ahmad Faraz and Munir Niazi, with the title of , *Four Contemporary Poets(1992)*.

Kamal may be categorized to be one of the great mystic poets as his art mostly conveys the Sufism. He focuses on spirituality and the mysticism and spiritual deadness are his recurrent themes. Moreover, Being a rural poet, his poetry overflows with Imagery; mostly natural imagery. His art is rightly said to be enchanted by the world renowned Imagists like W.B.Yeats and Ezra Pound. His poetry emanates a unique colour of history and past. He never remains oblivious to connect the past with the present. That is why; his poetic art sometimes gives a nostalgic hue in which the poet feels missing something deadly.

2. Literature survey

Leech (1961) contends that style is a mode in which something is written, spoken or performed. Moreover, Leech and Short (1981, p.10) state that style has no conflicting meaning, rather it denote the way or manner in which a language is used by a person in a given framework, for a given reason and so on.

Another outstanding works Like Chapman & Clark(2014), Turner (1973),and Wright & Hope (1996) are deemed the first dictionaries on Stylistics. These works contain the theories concerning stylistics. On the other side of the picture, these works don't provide a comprehensive study of stylistics; they deal only some particular subjects and aspects of the discipline.

The notable contribution of stylistics is to provide an objective analysis of a literary piece. As Kumar states, "Language oriented theories try to develop an objective methodology of analysis and interpretation by focusing on the literature entity independent of an author's intentions"(1987:40).

Bradford (1997:1) contends that stylistics is an obscure subject dealing with style .He mentions, "an elusive and slippery topic every

contribution to the vast, multifaceted discipline of literary studies will involve an engagement with style”.

The word “Style” is not an easy to define (Wales 1989:435), it is a slippery and cumbersome term. The cumbersomeness of the word lies with readers how to understand it. The theorist has listed commonly understood traits of style which are too delicate to understand.

3. Discussion and Analysis of the Poem, “ A Remote Beginning”

3.1. Exploration from Phonological Perspective

The study focuses here on the sounds and literary devices implied by the poet concerning phonology. Phonology is the branch of linguistics which deals with system of sounds in language. Phonology is concerned with two types of devices in a literary piece e.g. Sound devices and literary devices.

More specifically to say, Sound devices are used by an artist in order to create musicality and auditory imagery. For investigation of sound devices in Kamal’s poem, it is key to explore the devices like rhyme, alliteration, Consonance, Assonance, repetition, affixes, Similes, Metaphors and personification if are used in the given poem.

The poem consists of four stanzas, having five lines each. The free rhyme scheme runs throughout the poem, it shows free flow of imagination and ideas of the poet which are also relevant to the major theme of the poem. It is a contrastive comparison of two binary like pessimism versus optimism, uncertainty versus certainty, past versus present etc. As there is no limit of nostalgic ideas in a mind of a person while comparing his/her present with past memories so does the rhyme scheme of it.

Some of the notable phonological devices used by Kamal in “ A Remote Beginning” are as follows

3.1.1. Consonance

This night <u>t</u> oo will collapse	consonance of word “T”
under <u>i</u> ts own weight <u>t</u>	the use of “ T”
<u>l</u> ike <u>a</u> ll the others	alphabet “ L” makes consonance here

3.1.2. Assonance

that came before. “a” is used here assonance,

3.1.3. Alliteration

Use of alliteration “C” is evident in the second last line of the poem,

come circling back

3.2 Exploration at the level of Pragmatic.

At this level, the poem, “A Remote Beginning” will be analyzed from the perspective of pragmatics –one of the key subfields of Linguistics. Pragmatics explores how context contributes to meaning. “It addresses expression at the level of utterances, which can range from one word to a lengthy discourse. It works at the level of meanings and how other people comprehend those meanings”.(Iqbal, 1914,p.150).

The Tone of the poet is nostalgic and depressing; he seems to be under the dark. The spell of uncertainty is still overshadowing his mind. That is why, he starts the poem, “This Night”, means that like so many other nights, this night will disappear. The use of Night symbolism denotes the ambiguity and uncertainty of time and period. Nothing can be traced out from past or passed-away moments. The poet portrays the real human mood as in the conflicting responses while in tense or tough situation. He is looking for optimism out of the utter pessimism. He hopes that “This Night” will no longer persist. It will soon be evaporated. As is the first stanza ,

*This night too
will collapse
under its own weight
like all the others
that came before*

3.2.1. Paradox

The skillful use of paradox increases the readers’ interest in the poem. It is similar style like that of John Donne’s in which two heterogeneous things, notions etc. are tactfully assimilated together. It is very beautifully obvious in the very title of the poem, “A **Remote Beginning**”. Usually an **end** is supposed to be **remote or far**, not the **beginning**. The beginning is done to get end long after. But here it is quite paradoxical title to see beginnings as remote thing. The whole idea of inheritance or uncertainty of the past has been

comprehensively compacted in the paradoxical title of the poem i.e ‘A Remote Beginning’.

Moreover, the idea runs through the whole last stanza can be referred here the best instance of a stunning use of paradox.

Dreams blossom

only in wakefulness,

Both, Dreams and wakefulness are opposite things, but paradoxically one cannot be realized without the existence of the other. So the poet weaves two paradoxical, opposite notions together by saying that dreams only can be flourished in wakefulness when no one can think of dreaming.

3.2.2 Rhetorical Questions

Lastly in the segment of Pragmatics, the poet makes use of rhetorical questions in the third stanza as a best tool to make the reader believe in the subject. The self-answered questions run through the whole stanza of the poem. It is as follows:

*Where will I find
my true inheritance?
In the mad calligraphy of trees
or a clear plunge into
the pool of many betrayals?*

3.3. Morphological Level

In this segment of the study, the word formation, its structure and construction are examined. Morphology studies word derivation, formation, its grammatical category etc. “It involves “word derivation” in which words form from the words ,”word inflections” in which grammatical category of a word changes within syntactic category of the word and details about smallest unit morpheme”.(Huma , 1994,153).

3.3.1. The list of morphemes used in the poem is as follows

Free	Bound	Root
This	Its	<u>Its</u>
Too	Others	<u>Others</u>
Will	Trees	<u>Trees</u>

Where	Into	Into
In	Dreams	Dreams
Only	Circling	Circling
All	Beginning	Beginning
My	Mourners	Mourners

3.3.2. Affixes

The poet used affixes which are visible in the use of words as follows

Feature + less
Day + light's
Wake +fullness
Circle +ing
Begin +ing
Mourn +ers

4. Conclusion

The study aimed at evaluating the text of Daud Kamal's A Remote Beginning: one of the poet's key poems stylistically. The major end of the study was to explore concealed meanings through the use of different stylistics levels applied here. More specifically saying, the poem was analyzed on the three major levels of Stylistics – phonological, Pragmatics, and morphological. At the first stage, the poem, "A Remote Beginning" was analyzed from the perspective of pragmatics –one of the key subfields of Linguistics. Pragmatics explores how context contributes to meaning. Next was Phonological level: For investigation of sound devices in the poem, it was very significant to explore here the devices like rhyme, alliteration, Consonance, Assonance, repetition, affixes, Similes, Metaphors and personification. The last but not least was the investigation of the poem from the morphological perspective. In this segment of the study, the word formation, its structure and construction were examined. The poet's style was replete with imagery, symbolism along with simplicity of language. The

focused poem unveiled the conflict of the past with the present, optimism emerging out of pessimism, nostalgic memories of the poet etc. The analysis was an effort to be an addition to the understanding of the poem from the given thematic perspectives.

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Appendix

A Remote Beginning

This night too
will collapse
under its own weight
like all the others
that came before.

After the demolition squad:
a featureless crowd
of professional mourners,
premature archaeologist,
daylight's petty thieves...

Where will I find
my true inheritance?
In the mad calligraphy of trees
or a clear plunge into
the pool of many betrayals?

Dreams blossom
only in wakefulness
and all our shadows
come circling back
to a remote beginning.

Daud Kamal