

A Semiotic Analysis of Rokeya's "Sultana's Dream": A Tartu-Model Approach

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Abstract: Tartu model is a very significant approach in semiotic analysis. It plays an important role to analyze a text. Text functions could be defined as "its social role, its capacity to serve certain demands of the community which creates the text" (Lotman & Piatigorsky, 1978 : 233). In the original version of the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School (TMSS), it concerns the opposition of culture to non-culture and many other binary terms. This early versions as well as the later, semiosphere is substituted for culture. Semiosphere is an abstract model in which semiosis occurs. This paper proposes two concepts of TMSS, namely 'Text' and 'Semiosphere' in analyzing the selected text 'Sultana's Dream'. This article provides a semiotic analysis of the texts and non-texts of Sultana's culture and Ladyland's culture depicted in Rokeya's "Sultana's Dream" and describes the Semiosphere in the Ladyland as a result of the development of dynamic direction of culture.

Keywords: TMSS, Text, Semiosphere, culture, Sultana's Dream

1. Introduction

Semiotics is generally regarded as an approach or method for analyzing the text. The term 'text' in semiotics refers to any collection of signs which conveys a meaning (Chandler, 2002). According to the initial writings of Lotman, Uspenskij, and their colleagues, as well as to the systematization of the system by Posner 'Text' here appears as that which is going in and out of 'culture'. In semiotics, a system of interpretation is considered to be a 'text'. Another theoretical concept that is important for the development of semiotic studies in TMSS is semiosphere, an abstract model which allows semiotics of culture to reach a new perceptive of an overall analysis of dynamic processes.

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Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain was the first and foremost critique of patriarchy in Bengal (Hossain, 1988; 2005). Her *Sultana's dream* illustrates the sequence of dreams for a social transformation. In fact, this text was written much ahead of its time and through it maintained interest with its radical approach (Chakrabarty, 2014). The story of *Sultana's Dream* shows the non-text of the culture prevalent in the society of that time in the form of text and the attempt to create a new semiosphere in the culture.

This paper is organized into the following sections: with an introduction in section 1, section 2 describes the theoretical concepts of the Tartu Model of text and semiosphere; section 3 describes the methodology, with the analysis and discussion in section 4, and concluding remarks in section 5.

2. Theoretical Concepts of TMSS: the Tartu School Model

The Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School is a scientific school of thought in the field of semiotics that was formed in 1964 and led by Juri Lotman. International handbooks use alternately three terms: the Tartu-Model, the Moscow–Tartu, the Tartu–Moscow, and the Tartu School (Salupere, et al. 2013). TMSS defines text based on its meaningfulness, authority, and cultural functions. These functions are connection points between a text and its wider cultural and historical contexts and its dynamic aspects. Finally, the concept of semiosphere, in which semiosis occurs, would drive a holism perspective, avoiding the tendency to analyze the discrete text in its individuality (Nazaruddin, 2019).

2.1 Text

The wide use of the word 'text' in cultural semiotics is anticipated in semiotics generally: everything 'included' with a system of interpretation in particular is considered a 'text'. In an earlier article, Lotman (1978 : 233) claimed that "a text is a separate message that is clearly considered to be separate from a 'non-text' or 'other text'"; "A text has a beginning, end, and specific internal organization". According to the Tartu Moscow school theses (1973 : 38):

The text has integral meaning and integral function... In this sense it may be regarded as the primary element (basic unit) of culture. The relationship of the text with the whole of culture and with its system of codes is shown by the fact that on different levels the same message may appear as a text, part of a text, or an entire set of texts.

In the conception of the Tartu school, cultural semiotics is concerned with creating a model that is clearly held by any member of a culture (Figure 1). It is generally assumed that, in the general case, members of any culture will consider themselves insiders, while people of other cultures will consider themselves outsiders. Inside, life is orderly and meaningful; Outside of that it is chaotic, disorderly and impossible to understand. In this situation the 'text' may not exist in the external culture: however, there is at least the possibility of converting the 'non-text' arrival from the outside into the 'text'. According to Lotman the non-text of a society can be a text by going through mechanism of by text generation, exclusion, inclusion, translation, accumulation and exchange of information and repertory of text's process.

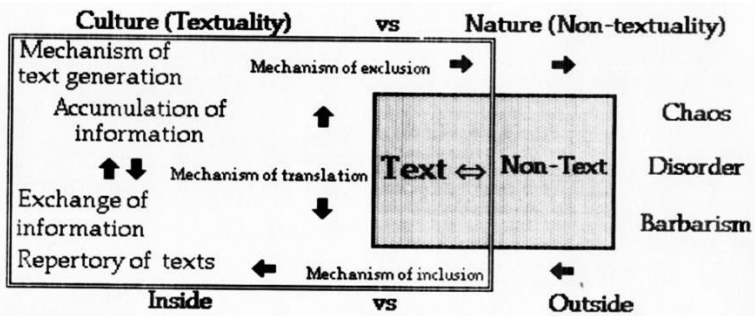


Fig.1. The Tartu school model (Sonesson, 1998:84)

More generally, non-texts are excluded by the diverse methods of exclusion existing within the culture; or these are obtained by the process of inclusion, but in a distorted way. In due course, however, the synthesis of many deformed texts can give rise to new methods of interpretation that make it possible to understand them within culture; Even in a generational process that allows culture to create its own kind of lessons that only exist in an outside culture (Sonesson, 1998).

Lotman proposed three other functions of text besides its function as the carrier of message, namely creative, poetic and memory functions.

Explaining the creative function; Lotman has given examples via many kinds of translation actions, such as the fact that one text could be translated in many different ways and modalities and resulting in different texts in the same target language. The second function is poetic which is mostly dealing with literary text. It concerns not merely with the message of the language, but more importantly with the message about the language, a language that has switched its interest from message (content) into message carrier (language). The third function of text is memory, by which a text would preserve the memory of its previous contexts. Only the important experiences or facts for the given culture would be preserved as text, while many other unimportant facts would be forgotten. Thus, every text raised not only from the remembering process, but forgetting as well. The function is point of connection between a text and a wider cultural context, or between addressee and addresser of the text. In this notion, a certain type of text could fulfill different text functions (Lotman, 1990).

2.2 Semiosphere

The concept of semiosphere was first published in the 1984 article "On the Semiosphere", in the issue of TZS, which was devoted to the concept of dialogue as the basis of semiotic systems. In this article, Lotman mentions for the first time a specific semiotic continuum, which is filled in semiotic models located at multiple levels of a multilevel layer. (Lotman 2005: 206). This concept has marked the basic idea of Lotman, also has distinguished his semiotic thinking with Peirce, Morris and Saussure traditions. Lotman proposed the concept of 'semiosphere' as semiotic space, an abstract model in which semiosis occurs and outside of which semiosis cannot exist (Nazaruddin, 2019). Lotman coined the term semiosphere from Vernadsky's (1926) concept of the biosphere. While the biosphere comprises 'the totality of living things and the biological totality, the semiosphere is the semi-space necessary for language to exist and function.

In Lotman's descriptions, the semiosphere is a space enclosed by a boundary, but this boundary has often no geographic existence (1977 [1970]: 229-30). Occasionally, Tartu semiotician also defines the products of semiotic culture and therefore all cultural codes and texts as a semiosphere, for example, when he states that semiosphere is the result and the condition of culture development. The boundary that separates and filters by means of translations from an external sphere

into the codes of the internal semiosphere, also constitutes the identity of a semiosphere. The semiosphere requires a chaotic external sphere and constructs this itself in cases where this does not exist (Lotman 1984; 1990). Whenever Lotman speaks of culture in this way, meaning culture in general, he often interprets general models of social and cultural life in metaphors of space. According to this theory, metaphors are semicircles that represent mental images through verbal signs. Since space plays such an important role in Lotman's theory, the metaphors of his own culture as semiotic space can thus be read as self-referential (Nöth, 2006; 2014). Thus the term has also been associated with multiple concepts in the semiosphere that are related to the semiotics of culture and have gained new relevance in the context of the dynamics of cultural development.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this article is to provide a semiotic analysis of the selected text *Sultana's Dream*. This qualitative study is based on a textual analysis process. Firstly, it presents an overview of the story and secondly, the selected text has been analyzed according to Text and Semiosphere, two concepts of TMSS.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 *A Short Introduction of the Story*

"*Sultana's Dream*" is a short story written by Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain, published in the *Ladies Magazine* in 1905. As soon as the title goes, the story opens in a dream sequence. A girl named Sultana once noticed a woman in her house, with whom she befriended and treated her as Sister Sara. Sara invited her to come out of her room, where a new culture was waiting for them. This sequence of dreams presents many images, which were unimaginable for women when Begum Rokeya was writing. She mentioned that Sultana had reached a place called Ladyland where women did not live behind purdah¹ or living in Zenana². In Ladyland, women control worldwide as societies live in

¹ "Purdah, also spelled Pardah, a practice introduced by Muslims that involves the seclusion of women from public observation (including veils) by means of concealing clothing (Chakrabarty, 2014)

² Zenana system was prevalent in Muslim culture, where women were confined within specific places that were out of sight of men.

peace and prosperity through the invention of their solar ovens, flying cars and cloud condensers, which provide abundant, clean water to the people of Ladyland. Women were engaged in scientific work and they were free to move without any restriction. Rokeya noted that Ladyland did not consist of any police or prisons because all the men were inside Mardana³ (opposite of zenana). Therefore, as Sister Sara described, since people actually commit crimes they live inside the house, there is no need to take such action. Thus, "Sultana's Dream", although it happened in the sequence of dreams, the author shows the inner dream of herself of breaking all barriers in the culture related to women (Chakrabarty, 2014).

4.2. A Semiotic Analysis of 'Sultana's Dream'

According to the text analyzing concept of Lotman, all the elements through which communication can be established within a particular culture are their text and anything outside of culture, that is, that which is not prevalent in culture, is non-text. The functions of text can be defined as the desire to meet specific needs in a social role. Text has an integral meaning and an integral function. Text presents a specific communication message with the whole culture and its code system. Text refers to something that exists within a culture. That is, anything outside of one's own culture is considered chaos, barbarisms, disorder. As the culture changes with the passage of time, the non-text of the culture becomes text, and the text becomes non-text. Giving that sign to the model (fig 1) means that text can be converted to non-text as well as non-text can be converted to text.

In this story, the idea of two cultures is found at the same time, one is the culture of Sultana and the other is the culture of Ladyland. As seen in the culture of 'Sultana', men have the right to freedom of movement and education, which was only imaginary for women. At the same time, the men of Ladyland are being branded as shameful. In Sultana's patriarchal culture, all the communications that were used as text were different ways of oppressing women like as the practice of veiling for women and socially, women are determined to be timid and shy. Conventional texts and non-texts in Sultana's and the Ladyland's culture can be shown below.

³ Mardana is an idea coined by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. It is an unreal space where men are recommended to live just as women live in zenana (Hossain, 2005; Subramanian, 2013).

Table.1: List of texts and non-texts in the cultures of Sultana and the Ladyland

Sultana's culture		Ladyland's culture	
Texts	Non-texts	Texts	Non-texts
Women locked inside the house	Women's right to move freely	↔	Women's right to move freely
Men's right to move freely	Men locked inside the house	↔	Men locked inside the house
Men's social and political rights	Women's social and political rights	↔	Women's social and political rights
Men's empowerment	Women's empowerment	↔	Women's empowerment
Women are timid and shy	Men are timid and shy	↔	Men are timid and shy
	To conduct scientific research by women	↔	To conduct scientific research by women
	Discovery of pharmaceutical technology	↔	Discovery of pharmaceutical technology
	Scientific technology in agriculture	↔	Scientific technology in agriculture
	Use of solar energy	↔	Use of solar energy
	Eco-friendly urbanization	↔	Eco-friendly urbanization
	Air travel in the sky	↔	Air travel in the sky
	Artificial precipitation	↔	Artificial precipitation

The non-text issues of the culture of that time in the story 'Sultana's Dream' are shown as a text of culture. Because in that society women were kept locked inside the house and they were deprived of social and political rights. At that time, only men were allowed to enjoy these rights in the society. This story shows the empowerment of women as a non-text in the social culture. As a result, the non-texts of Sultana's culture are shown as the texts of Ladyland's culture. For example,

women's right to freedom of movement, women's empowerment, women's social and political rights, air travel, the discovery of medical technology, the use of solar energy, scientific technology in agriculture, eco-friendly urbanization etc. In this case, some texts of the culture of Ladyland are specifically mentioned, such as the fact that men are locked inside the house. In Sultana's culture, women are confined inside the home and the cultural sphere of Ladyland has become more dynamic and promising due to the fact that women has social and political rights and independence. Here the immense potential of women in culture is highlighted by changing the roles of men and women in the two cultures.

For example, women's participation in politics, running the state, conducting scientific research, discovering medical technology, using solar energy, flying cars in the air - these were things outside of culture which we can identify as non-text or nature. And the idea prevalent in the culture is that men, instead of women, are confined inside the house and doing physical work inside the house has been shown as text. Issue of solar energy was unknown in the conventional society of that time. Even the issue of air travel in the sky in the Bengali semiosphere was a non-text of culture. The flying vehicle described in "Sultana's Dream" is presented as follows:

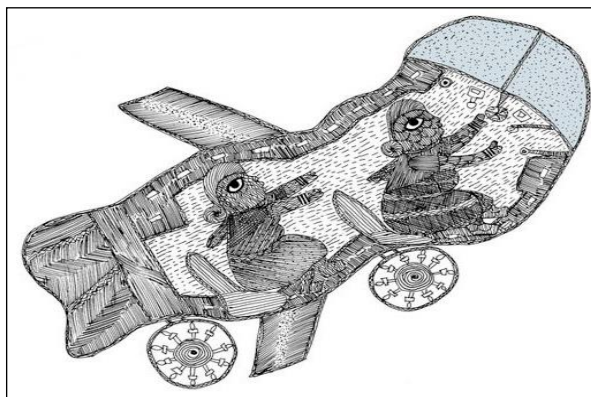


Fig 2: flying vehicle of Sultana's dream⁴

⁴ Flying vehicle. Illustrations by Durga Bai for 'Sultana's Dream.' Original Edition (Hossain, 2005). <https://www.ladyscience.com/features/feminist-visions-science-fiction-utopia-rokeya-hossain> > Date visited 30.08.2020

Just as different texts become non-text in the chronological order of cultural progress, the subject of non-text airplanes is prevalent as a text in modern culture. In the Bengali society of that time, the idea of flying vehicle was not a familiar text in the culture. But nowadays it is a text. At the same time, many texts of Sultana's culture have been shown as non-text of Ladyland culture. For example, the empowerment of men, the cowardly nature of women, the issue of women being confined inside the home etc. In this case, artificial precipitation has been shown in the form of culture text of Ladyland, it is non-text in Sultana's culture as well as non-text in modern culture. However, it can be said that at some point along with the dynamics of culture, it is also likely to make its debut as a text. These non-texts can be converted to text through various mechanisms. Text can be generated from other society's custom, superstitions, social law and so on. Text can be generated from other society's custom, superstitions, social law and so on. According to Lotman (2009), we can describe the process of linguistic assimilation of texts borrowed from other cultures:

1. Firstly, there is a reciprocal adaptation between the imported text and the culture received, resulting in translation and adaptation.
2. An idea develops in the "Sultana's Dream": the culture in which these texts were bound cannot be truly realized; they will find their true perception of the culture they adopt. In this context there is a growing enmity in culture that has relayed the texts.
3. New texts are completely dissolved in the adoption culture, which begins to create its own texts based on the cultural code of the synthesized texts.

We can see in the story "Sultana's Dream" that everything written here takes on a certain cultural significance, which becomes a text. According to Lotman, we can replace the notion of decoding the text of "Sultana's Dream" with the term of communication. We can describe the prevalence of texts in culture and relationship between text and reader, although a typology of various complementary processes: (1) communication about addresser and the addressee, (2) communication between listener and cultural tradition, (3) communication with reader, (4) Textual communication with the reader, (5) communication

between text and cultural tradition (Lotman, 2002:88). The use of the term communication in textual analysis means a semiospherical shift before the concept was born. As much as it is possible to understand texts in different ways, it is also possible to analyze this understanding in various ways (Torop, 2005). Lotman describes creativity in the article "Culture as a subject and object for itself" based on Ilya Prigogine,

The main question of semiotics of culture is the problem of meaning generation. What we shall call meaning generation is the ability both of culture as a whole and of its parts to put out, in the "output", nontrivial new texts. New texts are the texts that emerge as results of irreversible processes (in Ilya Prigogine's sense), i.e. texts that are unpredictable to a certain degree. (Lotman, 2000: 640)

Lotman's process of assimilation was chronologically transformed into the ideal semiosphere described in the earlier culture "Sultana's Dream". The author created an abstract semiosphere in "Sultana's Dream" so that only within such a space is it possible for communication process of new information to be realized. A semiosphere is a place where we are 'immersed' whenever we talk or communicate. Here Ladyland is a space enclosed by a boundary of women like fairy tales. These boundaries often have no geographical existence because they may be imaginary boundaries. These boundaries often have no geographical existence because they may be imaginary boundaries. The places, characters, and story in the semiosphere are metaphorical assumptions of cultural values.

As an isolated structure, each semiosphere has a 'core' and a 'periphery'. Like every semiosphere, Ladyland's semiosphere has boundaries, represented by bilingual translatable numbers: translating external communications into internal language. Due to these boundaries, a semiosphere can communicate with other semiosphere. Thus, borders unite two semiosphere, as well as separate or divide them (Lotman, 2005). The boundaries of the semiosphere allow semiosis or dialogue to take place more actively, allowing the semiosphere of Ladyland to translate external messages into internal language and communicate with another semiosphere. To bind the semiosphere of the "Sultana's Dream" with diachrony and synchrony to organize the memory, the transformation systems made it a very effective system that was connected to a new concept of culture. Bogusław Żyłko (2001) emphasizes, from Lotman's point of view of

evolution, that the concept of semiosphere indicates a transition from static to dynamic analysis, and that the basis of this transition is to understand the relationship between omnipresence and diversity. There is also a shift from stable to dynamic thinking towards perception (Torop, 2005). There is a dynamic transfer of text to the concept of semiosphere that allows the semiotics of culture to arrive at a new perception of holism, an overall analysis of the dynamic process.

The story depicts two different semiosphere in parallel at the same time. In the story Sultana is amazed at the dynamics of Ladyland, an abstract Semiosphere model. We have a specific field that has the mark assigned to the adjacent space. Only in such a place is it possible to process communication and create new information. Basically the Semiosphere that goes into the story is a metaphorical space because entering the new semiosphere, it is seen that women are at the utmost of progress through education. The metaphors in the story are based on the context of women's right to education, scientific research, innovation of new technologies etc. Here the author had tried to build her imaginary semiosphere with the help of metaphors as a symbol of women's physical and mental abilities. Rokeya's Sultana's Dream points to a specific boundary of the semiosphere, a spatial model for interpreting culture.

5. Conclusion

Mentioning the culture of the author at that time, it can be said that women were deprived due to various superstitions and cultural constraints. In due course, however, the fusion of many distorted texts can give rise to new methods of interpretation that make it possible to understand them within culture; even in a generational process that allows culture to create its own texts only from existing outside cultures. In Sultana's Dream, we can see a new mechanism of interpretation of texts and the diverse methods of exclusion of non-texts existing within the culture. In the story, the author draws a semiosphere where women are free from religious and social prejudices and established as a single entity in culture. The Ladyland is a semiosphere of realm of imagination. The author seeks to create a new semiosphere in the culture by subconsciously identifying non-text as text on women's rights. She described Ladyland's semiospheric cultural space as well-organized and safe, and the conventional culture

as chaotic. In conclusion, it must be said that the concept of semiosphere brings with it the semiotics of culture again with its history, as it also brings with it applicational cultural analysis in relation to the history of culture and the latest developments in culture. These acquaintances determine the place of the semiotics of culture in the science of studying culture. It is not paradoxical that semiosphere studies semiosphere and culture studies culture. This is because it occurs in the single semiosphere of human culture, and every attempt to describe culture from any scientific point of view proves to be a self-description of culture at a different level. We can also be part of the creativity of culture by creating culture therapy (Torop, 2005). In Sultana's Dream, the author created a new semiosphere in search of a new dynamic culture. We see it as a result of the development of culture in modern times.

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