

Narrative Analysis of The Short Story *The Optimist* (2007) By Bina Shah

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Abstract

Current study is based on the textual analysis of the short story. The purpose of this study is to analyze arranged marriage, its challenges and after consequences on the lives of characters by applying model of narration propounded by Labov¹ and Waletzky (1967). The study shows that the writer has justified story with her narrations. The conflict of arrange marriage is portrayed in a realistic way through the narrations of Adnan and Raheela. From the very beginning Adnan seems happy from the marriage and his narrations also follow optimistic approach. His behavior and tone of utterance show his affectionate feelings for Raheela, while Raheela detests Adnan. She shouts and cries against this marriage. She uses the words 'stupid, foolish and bastard' for Adnan. The writer has used the phrases according to the nature of characters, their roles, their circumstances and situations. Moreover, the narrations portray reverse role of the girl and the boy. Adnan, does day dreaming like girls to get married and make bright future in England while Raheela makes fool to Adnan and returns back to England.

Keywords: narrations, shouts, optimistic, getting married

Introduction:

The word narrative is taken from Narratology which is the branch of Structuralism (Peter Berry)². The concept of Narratology was first propounded by TzevanTodorov (Jofi and American)³. Narrative is the spoken or written account of story and events. Narrative is comprised of a story or stories based on plot, events, characters, actions and dialogues (Memon, Khoso and Shah)⁴. For Narrations, narrative statements are useful to narrate the series of events, circumstances and incidents of a story. In narrative the analysis of stories is done at two levels; first story shares personal experiences of individuals and confers their subjective responses to those events in story and second it shows writer's way of using different devices and tools to construct specific sense of meaning (Michael Bamberg). PeterBerry⁵ believes narrative analysis observes that how meanings are made and constructed and how those meanings convey certain messages to others.

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In narrative, narrations of different individuals are analyzed. Narrative observes that how individuals express themselves, which dialogues they are using and which actions do they take. According to Michael Bamberg⁶ narrative sees that how things come into being and why things are the way they are. Hence, narrative analysis is to analyze narrations of story that how different dialogues and conversation of story are structured and how those narrations convey particular meaning. Narrative analysis assists to look deeply at the different ingredients used for the construction of story such as plot, themes, dialogues, vocabulary, terms, coinage and some other means. Therefore, different situations and incidents of the story are narrated in the narrative.

Oliver L. Kimberly⁷ has the view that narrative analysis is the best source for describing human experiences and actions. People give meaning to their lives by telling different stories. In this regard, present research is based on the short story *The Optimist*⁸ by Bina Shah. The research is conducted at macro level. In macro level Labov's narrative model is applied.

Baida Faisal Al-Araji and Sarab Khalil Al-Azzawi⁹ think macro level in narratology is related to the topic, main plot, theme and the gist of a text.

Research Questions

1. How Arranged Marriage challenges lives of Characters in the short story *The Optimist*¹⁰ by Bina Shah?

Labov's Model of Narrative Analysis

Current research analyzes the short story *The Optimist* at macro level. Labov's model of Narrative analysis is used for Macro analysis of the study. In this regard, Labov and Waletzky collectively wrote essay in 1972. In this essay initial steps for narrative analysis are discussed. Labov presented six parts for the narrative analysis; *abstract*, *orientation*, *complicating action*, *evaluation*, *result or resolution* and *coda*. These six parts are also known as Labovian six parts for the narrative analysis.

The first narrative category of Labov's Model is *Abstract*. According to Labov *abstract* is an initial clause in a narration that reports the entire sequence of events. *Abstract* answers the question what is this story about in a nutshell? *Abstract* is an optional part of narration. For labov *abstract* provides sequence of events at the start of narration. Johnstone¹¹ says *abstract* seems as a summary of a narration. This summary is mostly provided briefly in the beginning of narration so that curiosity can be created among readers/ listeners. Sometimes *abstracts* of written narratives are summarized in their titles as well¹². Liaquat Iqbal, Irfanullah and Farooq¹³ believe *abstract* gives an idea about the story rather than happenings of the story. It leads readers to know the theme of a story. Second category of Labov's model of Narrative analysis is *Orientation*. An *orientation* gives information of time that when did the event happen. *Orientation* discusses the place of the events. It also introduces characters and their initial behavior¹⁴. *Orientation* gives answers of who, what and when. It shows setting and location where actions take place¹⁵. *Orientation* introduces characters of the story, reveals timing of the events and discusses location of narration. It deals with narrator(s), the characters, time and place¹⁶. Third category of Labov's model of Narrative analysis is *complicating action*. *Complicating action* discusses tension in the narration. Through *complicating action* readers are kept busy. *Resolution* is the fourth category of Labov model

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of narrative analysis. In *resolution* tension is released and audiences are set free. *Resolution* answers the question what finally happened? *Resolution* brings final results of story. *Evaluation* is the fifth category of Labov model of narrative analysis. In *evaluation* narration is evaluated and assessed. It shows worth of a narration. It tells readers and audience the purpose of narration¹⁷. *Coda* is the sixth category of Labov model of narrative analysis. It is optional like *abstract*. *Coda* shows end of a story. In *coda* narrator goes back to a story and repeats those events where from story was started. *Coda* reflects purpose of a story¹⁸.

Literature Review

The research of Mahmood and Sibtain¹⁹ on the short story *The Optimist* shows that marital matters such as selecting life partner, sending proposals and accepting proposal are done by groom, his family and bride's family. In all this process, bride does not have right to express her choice, she is just supposed to follow her parent's decision. So, the marriage of Raheela and Adnan is without the compatibility of couple. Therefore, Raheela rebels and takes daring and bold actions as compared to Adnan. Other studies of Rafique Memon, Muhammad Hassan Khoso and Syed Razaque Amin Shah²⁰ show that short story is the best source to show several years of Adnan and Raheela's lives in a short space of the text. While the study of Waseem Hassan Malik, Sabah Zaib and Faraz Ali Bughio²¹ finds five codes of Roland Barthes²²; *the hermeneutic code, the Proairetic code, the semantic code, the symbolic code and the cultural code*. In hermeneutic code mysterious, puzzled and unexplained ideas are highlighted, while symbolic code depicts binary concepts in a text and cultural code presents common knowledge. Hence scholars of this article have found all of these five codes from this short story. The authors have intellectually analyzed the story by highlighting some words such as "Shalwar kamees, nikkah, purdah, henna, silk dress and heavy set of jewelry " to represent Pakistani culture and words such as "Drug me" represent hatred of Raheela for Adnan in mysterious way.

Research Methodology

Present research is based on macro analysis. Therefore, for the macro analysis Labov's model of narrative analysis is applied. By looking at the nature of the research present study is based on textual analysis and close reading of the short story *The optimist*. Textual analysis is the best source to find out, to explore to observe and compile the relevant text of the study. Textual analysis is an educated guess where single text is interpreted and analyzed through different perspectives by numerous readers and multiple meanings are extracted out. Textual analysis is useful to justify the topic through the related text, chunks, sentences, quotes and sayings²³. Klaus Krippendorff²⁴ has the view that textual analysis assists to see who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect. On the other hand, close reading is the essential part of textual analysis. It is deep, profound and intense reading of the text²⁵. Close reading analyzes how the text conveys meanings, main concepts, motifs and themes. Thus, for the current research the researcher has focused on the text of the short story *The optimist* reads it and analyzed it in the light of Labov's model of narrative analysis. Therefore, for the analysis of the novel, the researcher has chosen different paragraphs, sentences, quotes, passages, themes and sayings relevant to the topic and analyzed them in the light of the theoretical framework of Labov's model of narrative analysis. In this regard various logics,

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reasons and justifications are presented to justify the position of the topic. For the analysis of the study two sources are used Primary and Secondary. The original text of *The Optimist* short story is the primary source for the accumulation of data in the research, while relevant articles, journals and reviews are used as secondary sources.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Analysis of Macro levels of Labov's Model of Narrative Analysis from the short story The Optimist (2007) by Bina Shah

1. Abstract

For the macro analysis of the short story Labov's model of Narrative analysis is used. In Labov's model of narrative analysis first category is of *Abstract*. According to Labov *abstract* answers the question what is this story about²⁶. Similarly the story begins with the narration of Adnan with the capital pronoun "I", where Adnan refers to himself. He narrates hatred feelings of Raheela for himself. He politely tells in the very first sentence of the story that Raheela expresses her hatred feelings for him in the marriage hall as he says "I know Raheela does not love me. She chose to tell me this on the day of our wedding in Karachi. The moment our Nikkah was signed she said that she hated me"²⁷. This harsh and rude statement of Raheela clears that she wants to destroy happiness of Adnan that is why she chose to reveal her contrary feelings on the very moment of her Nikkah. She knew Adnan likes her but Adnan did not know her feelings and not even he thought that her newly married bride will dislike like him and will never accept him as a husband. Various narrations of Adnan show him as a traditional husband who always tries to win the heart of his wife. Adnan tolerates Raheela's harsh and rude behavior so that she can adjust at home and in his life. Adnan's perceptions regarding Raheela and her behavior are continuously optimistic. He persistently tries to win Raheela with his love, care and attention. He believes "he was born in July, the sign of Leo the optimist"²⁸. Contrary to this, Raheela's narrations are unconventional. She continuously dislikes Adnan. Her narrations show that she wants to take revenge from Adnan for being married forcefully with him therefore; she criticizes Adnan and says "I can't stand the sight of you, Adnan. I'm only doing this to make my parents happy. I'll be back in England before the year's out."²⁹ This sentence seems as threat as well as warning for Adnan that his wife would not stay with him for whole life.

Orientation

Second category of Labov's model of narrative analysis is orientation. It discusses characters, location, time and place of narration. Two different families are depicted in the story. Adnan's family lives in Pakistani while Raheela's family is in England and they have British nationality. Adnan and Raheela are cousins. Story and its different events move from Pakistan to England. During that different places and location are discussed. From the very first sentence of Adnan it is cleared that the marriage takes place in Karachi as he says "she chose to tell me this on the day of our wedding in Karachi"³⁰. This quotation describes that function of marriage takes place in Karachi, Pakistan and bride and her family had travelled from Britain to Pakistan for this marriage. Later on family environment of Adnan is depicted when he shares his feelings of love with his parents after the dinner as Adnan says "I sat down with my parents one evening after dinner...I've decided I want to get married"³¹. This narration of

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Adnan shows freedom of the boy to select life partner. Contrary to Adnan's freedom to select life partner Raheela is forced to marry the boy whom she dislikes. Hence, Raheela's narration begins in England. From the start of her narration it is shown that she returns back to home from work as she says "Raheela is that you home already? Yes, Mum, it's me I had just come in from work, Knackered... My mum was in the kitchen making parathas with spinach and potatoes my favorite dish"³². Raheela's mother seems as a house wife who does all home chores and remains busy in the kitchen. The above narration contains Urdu word parathas. So, the writer amalgamates English language with Urdu word as well. The above quotation also shows two women simultaneously and their different role as the mother is house wife and daughter works somewhere. So, it can be said after getting marriage women have to stay at home and take care of it. The quotation also represents frank relation of mother and daughter at home as well. This frank and cheerful relation is broken after deciding forceful marriage of Raheela with Adnan. Same broken relation of family is depicted in the airplane when Raheela and her family are on the way to Pakistan. During this whole journey of eight hours no one utters any single word to each other. It shows side effects of forceful marriage. Blood relations are kept at distance to make new relations.

Moreover, the environment of England at club is also shown. Raheela goes to club for drinking purpose and dance as she says "I'd gotten drunk on gin and tonic at the club"³³. Raheela starts drinking after her forceful relation to Adnan. She joins club and involves herself in bad activities in anger.

In the end of the story Pakistani airport is also discussed at Raheela's parents' departure.

2. Complicating action

Complicating action is the third category of Labov model of narrative analysis. It focuses on the main tension of the story. The main issue in the story is arranged marriage decided without the concern of the British girl Raheela. Her parents accepted proposal of Adnan without the agreement of Raheela. Farook, the father of Raheela says "They proposed and we accepted"³⁴. This sentence urges Raheela, a very bold and courageous girl to raise voice against the decision which is taken without her approval. So she reacts violently and rejects the proposal of Adnan she says "I didn't want to get married that I loved England that I didn't want to go Pakistan and marry someone I didn't know". At that time she also breaks tea-cup which was in her hands and spray of blood spattered there. She shows hatred for Adnan and calls him stupid and bastard. Despite all this reaction of the daughter Pakistani parents convince their girl for the marriage. The very Asian society and their perceptions regarding marriage are depicted that no matter where ever these people reside they cannot change their mentality regarding marital decisions as the mother of Adnan says "It didn't matter to any of us that Raheela lived in Leicester, a city somewhere in the north of England. No matter how many years her father had spent in that city, he was still one of us underneath. He and his wife would have made sure to raise their daughters in proper Pakistani fashion, even if they lived in England". It shows Asian families thinking to raise their daughters. They can leave Asian boundaries but are not ready to give permission to their daughters for selecting life partner. Marriage decision is taken by parents there is no involvement of the daughter for selecting life partner. It can be witnessed when Raheela shows her disapproval for the proposal of Adnan and asks from her parents that how they can accept the proposal without

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her concern at that time her father reacts hardly and says “There is no question of asking you. Get those stupid western ideas out of your head”. Hence, it is proved that selecting life partner is the western idea for Pakistani parents' perspectives. That is the reason Raheela is not allowed to ask any question about Adnan's proposal. Once parents have accepted the proposal then it is duty of the girl to marry with that person no matter either she likes that person or not. In case if the girl does not agree then Asian parents start perusing the girl. Raheela calls Pakistani parents persuasion as stronger than any drug. Her mother weeps day and night and makes realize to the daughter that she is doing something bad by rejecting this proposal as she says “please beta, try to understand this is the best thing for you. We wouldn't lead you wrong. We're your parents'. We love you. We want the best for you”. Father of Raheela threatens her “to lock me up, to force me to quit my job if I didn't listen to him”. This narration presents parents psyche that whatever decision of marriage they have taken for their girl that is the best decision. Therefore, the girl has to follow footsteps of her parents otherwise she would regret. Due to all these compulsions Raheela involves herself in bad activities she starts smoking and dance in the club. She used to spend most of her time out of the home in order to avoid her parents. She also sleeps with English boy and loses her virginity as a rebellion. One day her sister Nahid informs her that their mother had got heart attack because of Raheela's disapproval for marrying with Adnan. In that condition Raheela just had the option to get married with Adnan. Therefore, after the recovery of mother Raheela and her family start journey for Pakistan for the marriage as Raheela says “two months later I was on a plane to Pakistan with the rest of my family, to become my cousin Adnan's unwilling bride”.

4. Resolution

Resolution is the fourth category of Labov model of narrative analysis. In *resolution* tension is released and readers/audiences are set free. In the story Raheela takes bold and daring step against arranged married settled by her parents. As she already worn Adnan “I'll be back in England before the year's out”³⁵. So, after one week of the marriage Raheela and Adnan accompanied the parents of Raheela at the airport for the departure of England. At that time Raheela betrays Adnan and goes back to England with her parents as Adnan says “back to England, across all those miles of desert and ocean”. Hence, Raheela directly rejects forceful marriage with Adnan and takes one step forward. This shows contrary impact of forceful marriage where nobody is happy neither husband nor wife. Both pull each other's legs due to parent's wrong decisions.

5. Evaluation

Evaluation is the fifth category of Labov model of narrative analysis. In *evaluation* worth of a narration is told. The purpose of the story is that marriage should not be decided without the agreement of girls. Girls should have right to select their life partner. In the case of Raheela if she was not happy from the proposal of Adnan then her parents should not have forced her. Pakistani parents forcefully did the marriage of Raheela and Adnan but Raheela rebelled against the marriage and became part of unlawful activities. In the last she also disregards marriage and does not give proper respect and esteem to her husband as she was supposed to give him but she leaves him alone in Pakistan. Hence, this marriage seems as futile and

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useless where wife is not even ready to behave gently with her husband. She every time finds opportunity to get rid of Adnan.

6. Coda

Coda is the sixth category of Labov model of narrative analysis. *Coda* shows end of the story. This story ends with the optimistic approach of Adnan along with rebellious actions of Raheela. Adnan thinks positively even after his wife has left him alone at airport and betrayed him. Adnan is hopeful and does not believe on bad luck. He hopes that one day he will win Raheela if she gives him one more chance. He says he will leave his job of travel agency, will leave his parents alone and will do the job of driving taxi and will work on petrol pump as well in England for Raheela, he just wants to make happy to Raheela and love her. He extremely expects from his wife that she love him and accept him. In this way his life will be completed.

Thus, all of the six categories of Labov's model of narrative analysis are present in the story. The story starts with the main plot of forceful marriage takes place between Adnan and Raheela. The girl is unhappy and shows her feelings of loathsome to the husband on the very moment of nikkah. There are three narrations uttered by Adnan and Raheela. Two narrations first and third are by Adnan, while middle one is uttered by Raheela. From the first narration of Adnan it is cleared that the marriage takes place in Karachi. Later on Raheela's narration clarifies that she lives in England with her family. From Raheela's narration different places such as club, hospital and plane's environment at England is depicted. Then in the last narration, Adnan elaborates his marital life that his wife is unhappy from him and he also describes Pakistani trends after getting married such as new couple goes for visiting relatives and enjoys breakfasts, lunches and dinners. So, the main issue in the story is of arranged marriage decided by elders without the consent of the girl. Resultantly, the girl becomes rebellious, loses her virginity, starts smoking, dancing and even does not remain sincere and faithful with her husband, who loves her with the very core of his heart. This issue is resolved without any fruitful result. The girl leaves Adnan and returns back to England so that she can enjoy her freedom. The moral lesson of the story is that girls should be given right to spend life according to their likes and dislikes and they should not be forced to marry with those people whom they do not like. Hence, the right to select life partner should be given to girls so that they can spend marital life happily and remain sincere and faithful with their husbands. The story ends with optimistic thinking of Adnan. Adnan forgives his wife and thinks positively for his future and wishes to again unite with Raheela.

Discussion

No doubt previous studies helped researcher to look at the selected story from new perspective. As the research of Mahmood and Sibtain³⁶ shows that in our society it is groom and his family who is valued more as compare to bride. While current study also shows that groom is considered superior as compared to bride. He is the one who chooses life partner and his choice is valued as well. But the study also presents new understanding of our society regarding arranged marriage. The research shows anger, irritation and annoying behavior of the girl who is forced to get married with the one whom she even does not know. She bitterly stands against forceful marriage but is compelled in front of her parents and gets married to

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the boy for short period of time to make her parents happy. But story's structure and narrations show that every time girls can not sacrifice their choices, dreams and wishes for the sake of marriage. There are many girls who can raise voice against those brutalities and gain their due rights. Same is the case with Raheela in the story. Another study conducted by Memon, Khoso and Shah³⁷ is about time analysis presented through the short story. This research shows that short story is the best source to present several years of Adnan and Raheela's lives in short span of time. Similarly, present study shows the impact of short story, its words and actions. After reading this short story one is completely stuck and thinks that who should be blamed for unsuccessful marriage of the couple either parents of Raheela or Adnan and his family. The story shows contrary role of the girl and boy as well. Mostly girls do day dreaming for life partner and plan for bright future while boys accept reality of the world and do not think deeply to win the hearts of girls but in this story Adnan does day dreaming more and plans for bright future in England as well while Raheela practically takes the action and leaves him alone in Pakistan.

Conclusion:

All of the above findings and discussion show that the short story *The Optimist* revolves around macro levels of Labov's model of narrative analysis. The story is based on the three narratives of Adnan and Raheela. Two narrations are narrated by Adnan first and third one while second narration is by Raheela. These three narrations contain Labov's six categories of narration such as *abstract*, *orientation*, *complicating action*, *resolution*, *evaluation* and *coda*. From the very title and first paragraph of the story the concept of main story is given then the environment of England and Pakistan is shown very clearly that how people live differently in both of the countries and how their thinking varies. Later on basic issue of the short story is narrated. The narrations of both Adnan and Raheela show that Raheela is unhappy from the new relation of getting married and she filters her feelings of hatred to Adnan at different timings. Raheela clarifies her groom that she is getting married under parental pressure otherwise she is unwilling bride of Adnan. This issue is resolved when she leaves Adnan at airport and returns back to England. The reason is she likes England and British life style. She hates Pakistan and Pakistani people. Therefore, she was not ready to get married with Adnan. In the end of the story she rebels and did whatever she wanted to do. From all this broken and shattered relation between Adnan and Raheela it is explained that marriage should be arranged between those people who are willingly ready to accept each other. Otherwise there is no benefit of getting marriage. As the very concept of marriage is happiness and couple should spend a peaceful and comfortable life. This thing is not witnessed from the couple of Adnan and Raheela in the present story. The relation of Raheela and Adnan seems as one side relation. Raheela disregards this relation, its only Adnan who wants to continue the relation. Regardless of all these realities Adnan recalls Raheela and her behavior after her departure at air port and forgives her and thinks positively in the end of the short story, although, he does not get real happiness which he wanted to achieve from his marital life.

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³²*Ibid*, 172

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³⁶*Ibid*, 2020

³⁷*Ibid*, 2018