The Narrative in Munshi Premchand's Short Story, *The Shroud (Kafan)*: A Poststructuralist Analysis

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the much applauded short story The Shroud by the renowned writer, Munshi Premchand (1880-1936) in the light of Roland Barthes's post-structuralist model of narrative analysis. The rationale behind the selection of this short story can be ascribed to its progressive discourse, thematic verisimilitude in the discursive practices of British Raj, its contextual semiosphere and above all its never-ending fame in the literary circles. Besides containing the experimentation of interestingly vital linguistic and literary devices, it has been considered a phenomenal literary specimen textured on various but essential narrative patterns which have received scant attention of the critics. With reference to this context we have tried to locate how Subalterns speak through their narrative which can be named as 'Chamar Narrative' in the Colonial as well as feudal India. This paper, on the one hand, critically analyzes the formation and function of the five Barthesian codes: proairetic, hermeneutic, semic, symbolic and cultural. And, on the other hand, reveals how intertwining and intersection of these narrative codes contribute towards the constitution of a coherent text as well as demonstrate how the decoding of a socially constructed text let the meaning flow out exhaustively and effectively.

Key Words: Post-structuralist Narratology, Barthes' narrative codes, narrative discourse, culture, colonialism, peasant narrative, economic determinism, Subaltern, Progressivism

1. Introduction

In the late twentieth century, the application of modern and contemporary critical approaches to literature has become widespread especially with regard to modern literature. David Lodge (1980), for example, has analyzed *A Cat in the Rain* by Earnest Hemingway. Robert Scholes (1982) has applied three semiotic approaches propounded by Genette, Todorov and Barthes to the study of *Evelin* by James Joyce. Similarly, Fredric

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Jameson (1983) has interpreted Conrad's *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo* by invoking Greimas's semiotic square. Raymond J. Wilson III (2011) has applied Barthes' Codes on James Joyce's short story "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" from Dubliners--a story which has been criticized for being "chaotic" when analyzed from the traditional methods of criticism. But when it is subjected to the analysis based on Barthes' codes, the story reveals both an overall structure and an intricate detailed sub-structure of twelve scenes. Despite this tendency to concentrate on writers of the last two centuries, some semioticians have focused their attention to ancient and medieval writers, including Ovid, Petronius, Boccaccio and Chaucer. The core objective of this practice has been to demonstrate the effectiveness of the application of certain semiotic approaches in facilitating the practical criticism by addressing the fictional text from different angles. The present study is a humble endeavor in this direction. The model we wish to apply on *The Shroud* by Munshi Premchand exemplifies how post-structuralists have approached the text. Out of the set of available theories we have selected the post-structuralist model of five codes presented by Roland Barthes in his book S/Z (1974). But let us first discuss the notion of "model" in general.

2. The Use and Value of Models

According to Bucher (1990), "models are well defined theoretical apparatuses which explicitly delimit their objects of analysis, describe their methods of procedure and specify the results to be expected if the theory is applied correctly" (p. 26). Models thus have at least three essential qualities. They are: mimetic (because they represent or imitate aspects of a given original); reductive (because they only select certain relevant aspects of the whole); and subjective (because of the analyst's individual choice of the perspective and the method) (Bucher, 1990, p. 27).

From this point of view, no model can ever pretend to be equal to the original which it represents, nor can it ever claim to be true in an unhistorical sense. Although models are inherently subjective, they have to satisfy certain normative methodological requirements. From a scientific point of view, models have to be: inter-subjective and verifiable (through a precise delimitation of the corpus and the specification of the methodological principles); consistent, i.e. conforming with these

methodological principles; free of contradictions (they must not admit any contradictory conclusion), and complete (they have to take account of all the elements and relations which have been selected as relevant) (p. 28).

In addition to these methodological requirements, the practical usefulness of a model can play a part in its evaluation. Models have to resemble their originals otherwise they may be useless. Bucher (1990) sums up that the usefulness of the models could be indicated in vague terms such as the following: "good" models are descriptive; "better" models are descriptive and explanatory, and "The best" models are descriptive, explanatory and prognostic (p. 29).

3. Barthes' Structuralist *versus* Post-structuralist Approaches to Narrative Analysis

Roland Barthes' approach towards narrative analysis comprises two phases. In the earlier phase, he advocates structuralist conception of narrative analysis and lays the theoretical groundwork for a science of literature in his seminal essay *"An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative"* (1977a). Encompassing the ideas of Saussure, Roman Jakobson, and other noted linguists Barthes's focuses on revealing the importance of language in writing—the notion overlooked by old criticism. Taking his general orientation from Émile Benveniste and borrowing specific concepts from Vladimir Propp, Algirdas Julien Greimas, and Tzvetan Todorov, Barthes (1977a) proposes a three-tiered model for the analysis of the narratives. The model consists of narration (top level), Actions (middle level), Functions (bottom level). He thinks that a narrative can be broken into 'functional units', whose function is determined not by their literary or pictorial form but by what they contribute to the meaning of the narrative as a whole. Narratives, according to Barthes, are constructed from four types of functions; 'nuclei', 'catalyses', 'indices' and 'informants'. The first two are elements of emplotment - they determine the direction and movement of the story-line. The other two contribute to the mood and meaning of the story but without changing the plot. Roland Barthes (1972) deems structural analysis as a "reconstitutive activity "that aims at manifesting the "rules of functioning" (the 'functions') of an object" (p. 214). Jean-Marie Benoist (1978) explains the structural analysis as under:

An analysis is structural if, and only if, it displays the content as a model, i.e., if it can isolate a formal set of elements and relations in terms of which it is possible to argue without entering upon the significance of the given content. (p. 8)

Thus in structural analysis, the "individuality of the text is compromised in favour of the scientific search for patterns, systems and structures with the definitive goal of discovering the universal structure that underlie all narratives thus cancelling out the author" (Klages, 2006, p. 48-49). Structuralist literary theory ignores the specifity of actual texts and treats them as if they were like the "patterns produced by iron filing moved by a magnet"— the result of some impersonal force or power not the result of human effort (Klages, 2006, p. 48).

3.1 Transition from structuralism to post-structuralism

Under the influence of Kristeva's intertextuality, Derrida's Deconstruction, Barthes deconstructed his own conceptual grid and gave "freer vein to his literary intuition" (Dosse, 1997, p. 57). In his well known work, *S/Z* (1974) which marks a shift in Barthes thinking from Structuralism to post-Structuralism, Barthes affirms that the structuralist dream of finding an all-encompassing narrative structure which could be applied to all texts was 'illusory',' too reductive' and 'fixed'. He considered structuralism to be tainted with questionable perspective because this "Sisyphean effort led to the negation of differences between texts (Dosse, 1997, p. 57). Contrary to historical and structural analysis, the textual analysis practised by Barthes in S/Z, focuses on the reader's role in producing meaning. He stresses the idea that literary texts contain multiple and shifting connotations, and are, therefore, open to a number of possible interpretations. Post-structuralist criticism, unlike structural criticism maintains that for a signified, there can be a number of signifiers. Murfin and Ray (2009), describe the post-structuralist state as under;

Post-structuralists …reject the possibility of … "determinate" knowledge. They believe that signification is an interminable and intricate web of associations that continually defers a determinate assessment of meaning. The numerous possible meanings of any word may lead to contradictions and ultimately the dissemination of meaning itself. (p. 299-300)

In his essay, 'The Death of The Author', Barthes (1977b) states:

> …writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing (as quoted in Newton, 1988, p. 120).

According to Klages (2006), the post-structuralist model is based on the following assumptions. First, that all truths are relative, all supposedly essential constants are fluid and language determines reality. There is no such thing as definitive meaning. There is ambiguity, fluidity and multiplicity of meaning especially in a literary text. Second, that the structure of language itself produces reality. We can only think through language thus our perceptions and comprehension of reality are all framed and determined by the structure of language. In post-structuralism language speaks us. The source of meaning is not an individual's experience or being but the sets of oppositions and operations, the signs and grammars that govern the structure of language. Meaning does not come from individuals but from the system that determines what any individual can do within it(p. 50).Third, things we have thought of as constant, including our notion of gender identity, national identity etc, are not stable and fixed but are fluid, changing and unstable. These qualities of identity are not innate essences but are socially constructed. Fourth, everything one does or thinks is in some degree the product of one's past experiences, one's beliefs, one's ideologies: there is nothing like objectivity (p. 50).

Thus, Barthes presents his post-structuralist model of narrative analysis in his book S/Z (1974). He undertakes a micro analysis of Balzac's 1830 Novella *Sarassine* by applying the narrative codes and their interplay and presents the plurality of meaning in Balzac writing. He identifies a group of codes: hermeneutic (pertaining to the disclosure of truth), semic (describing significant features), symbolic (referring to the architecture of language), "proairetic" (referring to action and behavior) and cultural. These codes include syntagmatic and semantic aspects of the text. The syntagmatic aspects relate to the internal relationship between different parts of the text whereas the semantic aspects relate to the aspects of the text related

to the outside world (Scholes, 1985, p. 156). Thus the codes led him to define the story as having a capacity for plurality of meaning. It shows his desire for limitless writing. There is never an end to the text. For Barthes active/author and passive /reader relationship need to be redefined by readers rewriting the written text or a plural text allowing for many possible voices and paths (Dosse, 1997, p. 59). Like all the post-structuralists and the Deconstructionists, Barthes (1977b) gives importance to the context of which the text is a product. At the end of his essay, 'The Death of the Author', he says: "…it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (as quoted in Newton, 1988, p. 123). The apparently rigorous method, drawn from the strict system of coding radically broke with the first period of structuralism: for the plural text there cannot be any narrative structure, grammar or logic to the story (Dosse, 1997, p. 59).

4.   Barthes Five Codes

Before proceeding on to the Barthes' five codes let us first refer to the definition of code and text in Barthesian terms.

4.1   Definition of code

In general, a code is an "agreed transformation or set of unambiguous rules, whereby messages are converted from one representation to another" (Sebeok, 1985, p. 465) but according to Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory, code for the reading of narrative can be defined as "loose set of rules by which a person identifies and interprets the essential components of a narrative text" (Herman, Jahn & Ryan, 2005, p. 66).

According to Barthes (1974), a text is the "broken or obliterated network" and the code is a perspective. The code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures... they are so many fragments of something that has been *already* read, seen, done, experienced: the code is the wake of that already (p. 20). Contrary to the traditional critical metaphor of "formal structure" to describe the text, Barthes employs two metaphors "braid" and "network" which picture textuality as an interweaving of codes-intertextual quotations –which run through it often concurrently and disharmoniously. These codes produce the "noise" and the "volume" of textuality. A text is then a "stereographic space" where codes "intersect" (Barthes, 1974, p. 21). In his book S/Z Barthes (1974) defines the text as under:

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In the ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without anyone being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning, it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one [...] for the plural text, there cannot be a narrative structure, a grammar or a logic. (p. 6)

In order to explain the code in which Premchand's short story is framed, let us now first refer to Barthes' five codes.

4.2 The proairetic code or code of actions

The proairetic code gives narrative its potential to organize a story as a linear sequencing of events occurring in time. The proairetic code "principally determines the readability of the text" (Barthes, 1974, p. 262) and is the basis of structural analysis. This code distributes events in sequence only as a succession of effects. Since proairetic code only connotes sequences, it does not distinguish between the *kernal* or *satellite* status of events, nor does it combine micro sequences together in macro sequences to form a macrostructure. Rather it delimits the textual zone of discrete and multiple sequences: sets of actions that begin and end continue and stop in time (Cohan & Shires, 1988, p. 120).

This code includes all actions in the story, and, therefore, it often includes the whole story. All actions in a story are syntagmatic as they all begin at a given point and end at another. In a story they interlock and overlap but they are mostly completed at the end (Scholes, 1974, p. 154). The proairetic code applies to any action that implies a further narrative action. Barthes (1974) calls it "the main armature of the readerly text" (p. 255) as it refers to the other major structuring principle that builds interest or suspense on the part of a reader or viewer. Suspense is thus created by action rather than by a reader's or a viewer's wishing to have mysteries explained. Unlike some traditional critics, such as Aristotle and Todorov, who would look only for major actions or plots, Barthes (in theory) sees all actions as codable, from the most trivial opening of a door to a romantic adventure (Scholes, 1974, p. 155).

4.3 The hermeneutic code or code of puzzles

The hermeneutic code is the code of narrative sequence. It refers to those elements in a story that are consciously rendered inexplicable and puzzling for the reader, raising questions that demand explication. It determines a

particular expectation of a narrative on the part of a reader, for it raises the basic question: what will happen next in the story and why? Most readers look for this code in story after story, to find the ground of meaning for events and characters. In other words, it plays on the reader's yearning to explore answers to questions raised by the text. In certain kinds of fiction such as detective stories the hermeneutic code dominates the entire discourse. A crime is exposed or postulated and the rest of the narrative is devoted to answering questions raised by the initial event. The full truth is often held back in order to increase the effect of the final revelation of all diegetic truths.

In examining "Sarrasine" Barthes names ten phases of hermeneutic coding, from the initial posing of a question that will become enigmatic to the ultimate disclosure the mystery. Since readers are generally not satisfied by a narrative unless all "loose ends" are tied. The intention of the author in this is typically to keep the audience guessing, arresting the enigma until the final scenes when all loose ends are tied off and closure is achieved. Barthes(1974), locates eight different ways of keeping the riddle alive without revealing its solution, including what he terms "snares" (deliberate evasions of the truth), "equivocations" (mixtures of truth and snare), "partial answers, "suspended answers" and "jammings" (acknowledgments of insolubility). As Barthes (1974) explains that "the variety of these terms (their inventive range) attests to the considerable labor the discourse accomplish if it hopes to arrest the enigma, to keep it open" (p. 76).

Like the code of actions, the code of enigmas is a "principal structuring agent of traditional narrative" (Scholes, 1982, p. 100). Together with the code of actions it is responsible for narrative suspense, for it plays upon the reader's desire to complete, to finish the text. Barthes (1974) at one point aligns these two codes with "the same tonal determination that melody and harmony have in classical music" (p. 30). A traditional "readerly" text tends to be especially "dependent on (these) two sequential codes: the revelation of truth and the coordination of the actions represented: there is the same constraint in the gradual order of melody and in the equally gradual order of the narrative sequence" (p. 30).

The cultural code, connotative code and the symbolic code which tend to work outside the constraints of time (p. 30) and are, therefore, more

properly reversible, which implies that the instances of these codes are not necessarily read in chronological order to give meaning to the reader.

4.4 The cultural code or the reference code

The principal function of this code is to provide a text with "cultural frames of reference: a heterogeneous mix of intertextual citations on the already said, the maxims of truth circulating through a culture and accepted as the given knowledge of common sense" (Cohan & Shires, 1988, p. 128). The cultural codes tend to point to our shared knowledge about the way the world works, including properties that we can designate as "physical, physiological, medical, psychological literary, historical, etc" (Barthes, 1974, p. 20). Under this heading, Barthes groups "the whole system of knowledge and values" invoked by a text. These appear as "nuggets of proverbial wisdom, scientific, truths, the various stereotypes of understanding which constitute human reality" (Scholes, 1974, p. 154). In brief, cultural code constitutes the text's references to things already "known" and codified by a culture. The reference code constitutes a general category of the many culture codes which speak through us and to us whenever we use language. Barthes sees traditional realism as defined by its reference to what is already known. The axioms and proverbs of a culture or a subculture constitute already coded bits upon which novelists may rely (Scholes, 1982, p. 100).

4.5 The connotative code or semantic code or semic code

The connotative codes point to any element in a text that suggests a particular or additional meaning by way of connotation .The themes of the story make up the connotative code (Scholes, 1982, p. 100). By connotation Barthes means a correlation immanent in the text, in the texts; or again, one may say that it is an association made by the text-as-subject within its own system (Barthes, 1974, p. 8). In other words, Barthes marks out those semantic connotations that have special meaning for the work at hand. In Barthes *S/Z (1974)* "Sarrasine" is associated with "femininity" because of the word's feminine form (as opposed to the masculine form, "Sarrazin"). The question of femininity later becomes an important one in Balzac's story about a man's love for a castrato that he, at first, believes to be a woman.

According to Scholes (1985), under the connotative code we find multiple codes. In reading, the reader "thematizes" the text. He notes that certain

connotations of words and phrases in the text may be grouped with similar connotations of other words and phrases (p. 100). A seme is a particular semantic unit of connotation which produces "flicker of meaning" (Barthes, 1974, p. 19). It is a connotator of persons, places, objects of which the signifier is the character (Barthes, 1974, p. 190-191). The proairetic encodes actions, the minimal units of a story whereas the semic encodes traits, the minimal units of character. While the proairetic groups the events in a sequence that can be generically named according to the effect which the events produce as their collective signified, the "semic repeats identical semes which traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle on it as a generic characteristic of semic grouping (such as reckless, talkative, arrogant)" (Barthes, 1974, p. 67).

4.6 The symbolic code

The symbolic code is based on the notion that "meaning comes from some initial binary opposition or differentiation whether at the level of sounds becoming phonemes in the production of speech; or at the level of psychosexual opposition through which a child learns that mother and father are different from each other and that this difference also makes the child the same as one of them and different from the other (Scholes, 1982, p. 101). The symbolic code functions as a "deeper" structural principle that organizes semantic meanings, usually by way of antitheses or by way of mediations between antithetical terms. In a verbal text the symbolic opposition may be encoded in rhetorical figures such as antithesis, which is a privileged figure in Barthes's symbolic system. A symbolic antithesis often marks a barrier for the text. As Barthes (1974) writes, "Every joining of two antithetical terms, every mixture, every conciliation—in short, every passage through the wall of the Antithesis—thus constitutes a transgression" (p. 27).

To conclude, collectively these five codes function like a "weaving of voices," (Barthes, 1974, p. 20). The codes point to the "multivalence of the text" and to its "partial reversibility, allowing a reader to see a work not just as a single narrative line but as a "constellation or braiding of meanings." The grouping of codes, as they enter into the work, into the movement of the reading, constitute a braid (*text*, *fabric*, *braid*: the same thing); each thread, each code, is a voice; these braided—or braiding—voices form the writing" (Barthes, 1974, p. 160).

5. Application of Barthes' five Codes

The following is an application of Barthes' five codes to aspects of *The Shroud* by Premchand.

5.1 The proairetic code (code of actions)

The narrative discourse of the present story revolves around the motives and actions undertaken by two characters; the father, Gishu and the son, Madhav, ranging from trivial actions such as "they sat silently by a burnt out fire" to decisive actions such as "flouncing and dancing in intoxication." The story opens with miserable situation; "at the door of the hut father and son sat silently by a burnt-out fire inside the son's young wife Budhiya lay in labor, writhing with pain" (1a, L 4). The action takes a fatal turn and it is not Budhiya but the *Chamar* father and son who take central role of the narrative. To strengthen the content of the plot the action of the story remains hindered as both father and son show catastrophic reluctance to stand up and go inside to see her or call the doctor.

> Ghisu said, "It seems she won't live. She's been writhing in pain the whole day. Go on-- see how she is."
>
> Madhav said in a pained tone, "If she's going to die, then why doesn't she go ahead and die? What's the use of going to see?"
>
> ..."Well, I can't stand to see her writhing and thrashing around." (1a, L 5-9)

Premchand was fully acquainted with the peasant, the lower middle class and the middle class. He was acquainted with their struggles, temptations and weaknesses, their hopes and fears, their innate and deep religiousness. The mind of the peasant was an open book to him and he understood their every heart-beat. Every aspect of peasant's life is described in his stories (Suharawardy, 1945, p. 189).

Both of the characters listen to the pangs of Budhiya but a ruthless silence overwhelms their hearts to take any kind of action. "It is the dehumanizing and debasing irony of circumstances, in the words of Gopi Chand Narang (2002), which has deprived human being of the prick of the guilt and conscience; and consequently, a silent ruthlessness plays a vital role in destroying the process of socialization" (p. 152). The triviality of their

futile actions is evident from their "pulling out a potato and peeling it" on the face of a woman writhing in pain but neither of them goes inside:

> Madhav suspected that if he went into the hut, Gishu would finish off most of the potatoes. He said, "I'm afraid to go in."
>
> "What are you afraid of? I'm here, after all."
>
> "Then you go and see, all right?" (1b, L, 14-17)

Their ruthless action is further put in the spotlight:

> Pulling out the potatoes, they both began to eat them burning hot....Both burned their tongues repeatedly.... they both swallowed very fast, although the attempt brought tears to their Eyes... (1c, L. 38-45)

No major action takes place until they both finish eating and later cover themselves with their *dhotis* and go to sleep right there by the fire as if "two gigantic serpents lay coiled there." But Madhav's wife Budhiya is still moaning. The next action starts when they find Budhiya dead due to absence of attention and medical treatment. Since they have no money, they have to arrange it to perform her last rituals.

> Madhav came running to Ghisu. Then they both together began loudly lamenting and beating their breasts. When the neighbours heard the weeping and wailing, they came running. And following the ancient custom, they began to console the bereaved.(2a, L.4-6)
>
> Father and son went weeping to the village landlord (2a L-10).
>
> Ghisu fell prostrate on the ground, and said ... (2a L.15)
>
> Willingly or not, he pulled out two rupees and flung them down. (2a l.26-27)

After grabbing money from the *landlord sahib* and the village people, the code of actions inches forward as they beg from house to house and succeed in collecting five rupees. The delineation of the callousness of both the father and the son is further revealed as they finally reach the market to buy coffin:

> ... They kept wandering here and there in the market, until eventually evening came. ...The two arrived ... before a wine-house... they went inside.... Ghisu went to the counter ...bought one bottle of liquor, and

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some sesame sweets...they both sat down on the veranda and began to drink. (3a L.12-20)

The code of actions moves toward the climax as they get into the wine house and celebrate the glory of their victory over the existing social order:

More than half the bottle had been finished. Ghisu ordered ... Madhav ran over and brought everything back on two leaf-plates. Both then sat eating puris... (3b L.17-18)

After drinking a number of cups in a row both of them become elevated. The code of action reaches its climax as they become fully intoxicated:

And both, standing there, began to sing, "Temptress! Why do your eyes flash, temptress?" These two drinkers, deep in intoxication, kept on singing. Then they both began to dance-- they leaped and jumped, fell down, flounced about, gesticulated, [strutted around]; and finally, overcome by drunkenness, they collapsed. (3e, L.15-18)

The code of action remains suspended until Budhiya passes away. The reluctant husband and the shameless father remain paralyzed outside the hut around fire but do not bother to take her to doctor or even go inside to see her but the code of action is maximized as they move from shop to shop to buy a lighter king of shroud. And even later we see them eating, drinking, dancing and singing which demonstrates how money triggers action in the story. The code of action intensely highlights their hunger as well as their innate desire to appease it, be it even for a day.

5.2 The Hermeneutic Code

The opening scene of the story raises a few enigmatic questions as to why the husband does not take care of his wife writhing in labor pains. Why isn't there any other woman from the family to take care of her? But soon we come across another enigma when Gishu says:

Ghisu said, "It seems she won't live. She's been writhing in pain the whole day. Go on-- see how she is."

Madhav said in a pained tone, "If she's going to die, then why doesn't she go ahead and die? What's the use of going to see?" (1a L.6-9)

This enigma about this heartlessness and indifference is partially resolved as the narrator delineates the character of the father and the son as being

"indolent and shameless slackers" and their marginalized status in the society:

> ...Theirs was a strange life. Except for two or three clay pots, they had no goods at all in the house. Covering their nakedness with torn rags, free from the cares of the world, laden with debt-- they suffered abuse, they suffered blows too, but not grief. They were so poor that without the smallest hope of repayment, people used to lend them something or other... (1a, L. 26-29)

But still the enigma about the Budhiya's status and role in their lives remains obscure until the Omniscient narrator reveals Budhiya's role in their lives:

> Since this woman had come, she had laid the foundations of civilization in the family. Grinding grain, cutting grass, she arranged for a couple of pounds of flour, and kept filling the stomachs of those two shameless ones. After she came, they both grew even more lazy and indolent; indeed, they even began to swagger a bit (1b L.3-7)

As we become aware of the role Budhiya had played in the life of her family, the callousness of father and son again becomes unintelligible. After eating potatoes they both go to sleep *"coiled up like giant serpents"* by the fire without considering who will take care of her. But the next morning she slips away. A feeling of suspense is created about the reaction of the father and the son to her death but, quite contrary to our expectations, they start lamenting and bewailing, creating another enigma as to how will they arrange money to perform the last rituals especially the shroud.

> But this wasn't the occasion for an excessive show of grief. They had to worry about the shroud, and the wood. Money was as scarce in their house as meat in a raptor's nest. (2a, L.7-9)

After grabbing money from the Landlord Sahib they reach the market but Gishu hesitates to buy a fine type of shroud and poses further sceptical questions:

While the body is being carried along, night will come. At night, who sees a shroud?"

"What a bad custom it is that someone who didn't even get a rag to cover her body when she was alive, needs a new shroud when she's dead."

"After all, the shroud burns along with the body."

"What else is it good for? If we'd had these five rupees earlier, we would have given her some medicine." (3a. L. 6-11)

Another enigma is created as they arrive, by chance or deliberately, in front of a wine house.

For a little while they both stood there in a state of uncertainty. [Then Ghisu went to the counter and said, "Sir, please give us a bottle too."] *Ghisu bought one bottle of liquor and some sesame sweets.* [After this some snacks came, fried fish came]. And they both sat down on the verandah and [peacefully] began to drink. (3a, L. 17-21)

In this state of elevation they pose different questions which mainly surround religious scepticism, caste system in Hindu Society and the economic exploitation of the lower caste groups.

Ghisu said, "What's the use of wrapping her in a shroud? After all, it would only be burned. Nothing would go with her." (3b, L.2-3)

... Madhav said, "It's the custom of the world-- why do these same people give thousands of rupees to the Brahmins? Who can tell whether a reward does or doesn't reach them in another world?") .

"Rich people have wealth-- let them waste it! What do we have to waste?"

"But what will you tell people? Won't people ask where the shroud is?" (3B L3-9)

"When she asks us, there, why we didn't give her a shroud, what will you say?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"She'll certainly ask."

"How do you know that she won't get a shroud? Do you consider me such a donkey? ... (3c, L 14-17)

Ghisu grew irritated. "I tell you, she'll get a shroud. Why don't you believe me?"

"Who will give the money-- why don't you tell me?" (3c, L. 23-24)

If she doesn't go to Heaven, then will those fat rich people go-- who loot the poor with both hands, and go to the Ganges to wash away their sin, and offer holy water in temples?" (3e, L. 3-5)

Finally, we see them ecstatically singing and dancing in intoxication:

Then they both began to dance-- they leaped and jumped, fell down, flounced about, gesticulated, [strutted around]; and finally, overcome by drunkenness, they collapsed. (3e, l16-18)

The story abruptly ends here without tying up a loose end about Budhiya's shroud and her last rituals. Similarly a few more questions, scattered over the story, perplex the readers such as if Ghisu really had nine sons, why don't we hear anything at all about the others? Why would any village family have given their daughter in marriage to the awful Madhav? And if other villagers lived close enough to hear the funeral's "weeping and wailing" and come running, why did nobody hear Budhiya's shrieks and cries during her prolonged agony of labor and death? And above all, why did an admirable woman like Budhiya have no support network among the other women of her neighborhood? Since she worked in the village grinding grain for other families, her pregnancy must have been apparent. Her need of help in her terrible, isolated situation should surely have evoked compassion and support from other women in the locality.

5.3 The cultural code

Since *The Shroud* is a cultural story, the cultural code is easy to apply. The story abounds in many references to cultural and religious codes. The title of the story "the Shroud" is a cultural code as it refers to white cotton burial sheets, used by Muslims and Hindus for the deceased. Similarly, the word *"Chamar"* refers to untouchable caste group in the north India, who are often associated with tanning. Since Premchand himself belonged to the North India, he has depicted the marginalized people in his story and

has referred to Brahmins, members of the upper caste society, sarcastically as being the exploiters.

> ...If she doesn't go to Heaven, then will those fat rich people go-- who loot the poor with both hands, and go to the Ganges to wash away their sin, and offer holy water in temples?" (3e, l3-5)

Similarly, *Bhagwan* refers to the Supreme Being who controls the fate of the people.

> "I'm thinking, if a child is born-- what then? Dried ginger, brown sugar, oil-- there's nothing at all in the house."

> "Everything will come. If Bhagwan gives a child-- those people who now aren't giving a paisa, will send for us and give us things. (1b, L22-24)

Both Gishu and Madhav wait impatiently for death of Budhiya who was moaning with labor pains but Premchand tries to trace the roots of this callousness in the society this family of Chamars lives in.

> A society in which those who labored night and day were not in much better shape than these two; a society in which compared to the peasants, those who knew how to exploit the peasants' weaknesses were much better off-- in such a society, the birth of this kind of mentality was no cause for surprise. We'll say that compared to the peasants, Ghisu was more insightful; and instead of joining the mindless group of peasants, he had joined the group of clever, scheming [tricksters](). (1c, L. 1-6)

Similarly, hearing the *weeping and wailing* of Gishu and Madhav on Budhiya's death the neighbours rush to console the bereaved which refers to an age old custom in Hindu culture. The mention of shroud and wood for the last rituals refers to typical culture of villages in north India. Gishu's pleading for some money from the Landlord and later their act of collecting money from the whole village further highlights their low position in Indian culture. Besides this the mention of *dhoti, chilam, sindur, puris, chutney, sweets, ascetic, Heaven, sers* woods for burning remind us of typical Indian culture. Moreover, the Ghishu's mention of ghost-witch refers to cultural as well as religious code.

> Go see what shape she's in. We'll have the fuss over a <u>ghost-witch</u>-- what else! And here even the exorcist demands a rupee-- *from whose house would we get one?" (1b L.11-12)

In South Asian folk tradition the appearance of a *ghost-witch* is a dangerous possibility when a woman dies prematurely and in a state of strong and unsatisfied desire. A woman who dies in childbirth would be very likely to become a hostile ghost who would linger in such a guise, lurk in certain trees, and leap out to attack passers-by at night. The best thing to do then would be to hire an exorcist, and get rid of it. Premchand touches upon the religious beliefs of the Hindus. Gishu, after eating to the full, gives the rest to a beggar standing nearby and says:

> Take it-- eats your fill, and gives her your blessing. She whose earnings these are has died, but your blessing will certainly reach her. (3d, L.14-15)

> ...Ghisu consoled him: "Why do you weep, son? Be happy that she's been liberated from this net of illusion. She's escaped from the snare; she was very fortunate that she was able to break the bonds of worldly illusion so quickly." (3e, L. 10-12)

The consideration of life as "a snare" and death as "a liberation" from the worries of this word is typical of Hindu and Muslim religions who believe in the world hereafter. In a nutshell, the story is embedded in Indian culture as it is replete with multiple references to it.

5.4 The connotative code

The dominant connotative code exposes imperial discriminatory policies, Hindu religious hypocrisy and political and economic exploitation of the low caste people, the untouchables, who are denied the basic human rights and are forced to live a parasitical life. It is also bitter but important to know that the story was written in the colonial era. The discourse of enlightenment and illumination had little to do with the lives of the low caste people. The privileged were those who directly or indirectly served the imperial policies and ideology. In such hostile circumstances, the women of the dispossessed sections of colonial India were doubly colonized and consequently doubly marginalized. Budhiya's exemplary fate does vividly illustrate these "political imbrications of race and gender" (Gandhi, 2005, p. 83).

The predicament of a subaltern woman has been critically analysed by Gayatri Spivak (1988) in one of her thought-provoking essays titled "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In this essay, she addresses the way the Subaltern "woman" as subject is already positioned, represented, spoken for or constructed as absent or silent or not listened to in a variety of discourses. Her speech is already represented as non-speech (Davies, 1998, p. 1009).Throughout the narrative discourse of the story, there is no voice of Budhiya, the one whose death pledges utter merriment of Gishu and Madhav. We also hear her painful cries but they are meaningless in the world of adverse circumstances where relations are determined by material gains. Ironically her silence is symbolic and meaningful. The writer knows she will not be heard, and that is why she faces unspoken and unheard death. This has been the destiny of a subaltern woman in the colonial and feudal India.

The discourse of the *Chamars*, indeed, is a bitter satire on the discourse of enlightenment in India. That is why Premchand visualizes a comprehensive peasant paradigm in opposition to colonialism, and urban middle-class perspectives (Bushan, 2010, p. 1).As a matter of fact, the family of *Chamars* has been abandoned by the whole village and the writer, realistically, sees these *Chamars* through the eyes of their village. Categorically, we realize a vivid and thought-provoking line of demarcation between the *Chamars* and the rest of the village community. Since *Chamars* and the *Shoodars* have little space in the whole text of any society, their status in the community has been established with negative context.

It was a family of Chamars, and notorious in the whole village... (1A L.13)

In the present story, Premchand's covert criticism on prevalent class distinction in Hindu society is evident from his characterisation of Gishu and Madhav.

> Covering their nakedness with torn rags, free from the cares of the world, laden with debt-- they suffered abuse, they suffered blows too, but not grief. They were so poor that without the smallest hope of repayment, people used to lend them something or other. When peas or potatoes were in season, they would dig up peas or potatoes

from the fields and roast and eat them, or break off five or ten stalks
of sugarcane and suck them at night. (1a, L.27-31)

Premchand continues accentuating the plight of peasantry, economic disequilibrium, and their exploitation in the hands of the rich. He himself has been an active member of progressive movement which believed in uncovering the social issues without any interference of metaphysical machinery. This movement was essentially influenced by teachings of Karl Marx, Frederick Angels as well as Russian Communism or Leninism. Since both the Hindus and the Muslim cultures have been governed by the discourse of fate, predestination and determinism, a few progressive writers stepped forward to see their issues through the prism of economic determinism; a philosophy deeply embedded in Marxist stance. It is what Marx says:

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of the men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (Marx, 1859, p. 45)

Before Premchand, Hindi novel revolved around magical tales of deception, entertaining stories and religious themes. The Hindi tradition scantily and superficially gave space to the description of village life as in the period before the 'Premchand's era' (1918–1936) in only three novels—Bhuneshwar Mishra's Gharau Ghatna (Household Event, 1893), and Balwant Bhumihaar (1901), and Mannan Dwivedi Gajpuri's Ramlaal (1917)—there was description of village life. But even though the setting may be rural or semirural, the depiction of the problems of the peasants was difficult to encounter" (Coppola, 1986, p. 22). Premchand became the flag bearer of this new literary consciousness (Chauhan, 2010, p. 68) that blended idealism and realism with the Indian themes, issues and worldview in this western form and consequently joined the Progressive Movement. He vocalized his progressive stance in his presidential address in 1936. According to him:

Our artist wanted to hold on to rich people... and it was the aim of art to give expression to their joys and sorrows.... Mud huts and ruins were not worthy of his attention. He considered them beyond the

pale of humanity. And if he ever mentioned them, it was to deride them. It was to laugh at the villagers' rustic clothes and behaviour; their incorrect [sic] pronunciation of Urdu words and their misuse of verbal expressions were the butt of his unremitting sarcasm. That they too are human beings and have hearts and aspirations, this was beyond the imagination of art." (Coppola, 1986, p. 24)

The progressive writers like Sajjad Zaheer, Aziz Ahmad, Sibte Hassan, Ahmad Ali, Malik Raj Anand, Ali Sardar Jaafri, Rasheed Jahan, Mumtaz Sheereen, not only resisted against the imperial doctrines but also introduced new themes and techniques of literature (Das, 1995, p. 87). Premchand believes that the "objective of poetry and literature is to further intensify our perceptions; but human life is not limited to the love of the opposite sex" (Sahitya Ka Udeshya, *Kuch Vichar*, p. 9). Elaborating sea change in literary taste among the contemporary readers, Premchand appreciates their tilt towards realism as under:

> Now literature is not only a means of entertainment but has some other objective too. Now not only does it narrate the story of union and separation of the hero and the heroine but also discusses the issues related to life and attempts to provide their solutions... it is integrated in those issues that influence the society and the individual.("Sahitya Ka Udeshya." *KuchVichar* pp. 10-1)

In the present story, the candid confessions of the writer apprise the reader with this Marxist argument; the being of these tramps is the outcome or the sum total of the social norms or attitudes which they experience in their daily lives:

> A society in which those who laboured night and day were not in much better shape than these two; a society in which compared to the peasants, those who knew how to exploit the peasants' weaknesses were much better off-- in such a society, the birth of this kind of mentality was no cause for surprise. We'll say that compared to the peasants, Ghisu was more insightful; and instead of joining the mindless group of peasants, he had joined the group of clever, scheming tricksters... (1c, L. 1-6)

The writer also narrates some painful facts concerning the attitude of the village women folk over Budhiya's death. Shedding a few tears over a

dead body not only exposes indifference on the part of the village women community but also accentuates the social status of Budhiya. She is a *Chamar* and will be taken as *Chamar* even after her death. That is why the writer has consciously evaded idealizing the moaning of village women over her corpse:

> The sensitive-hearted women of the village came and looked at the body. They shed a few tears at its helplessness, and went away.

The symbolic flashback about the "grand festivities" further aggravates their hunger, as well as highlights their present condition. Moreover, it refers to the change in the values of society in the modern times when people have become quite parsimonious in spending on the poor.

> Enjoying the story of these grand festivities, Madhav said, "If only somebody would give us such a feast now!"

> As if anybody would feast anybody now! That was a different time. Now everybody thinks about economy-- 'don't spend money on weddings, don't spend money on religious festivals!' Ask them-- what's this 'saving' of the poor people's wealth? There's no lack of 'saving'. But when it comes to spending, they think about economy!" (1d, L. 17-23)

Their hesitation to buy lighter kind of shroud connotes religious scepticism of the lower class Hindus:

> "So let's buy a light kind of shroud."

> "Sure, what else! While the body is being carried along, night will come. At night, who sees a shroud?"

> "What a bad custom it is that someone who didn't even get a rag to cover her body when she was alive, needs a new shroud when she's dead."

> "After all, the shroud burns along with the body."

> "What else is it good for? If we'd had these five rupees earlier, we would have given her some medicine." (3a, L. 4-11)

After having spent the money they feel no moral scruples:

> Both then sat eating puris, with all the majesty of a tiger in the jungle pursuing his prey. They had no fear of being called to account, nor

any concern about disgrace. They had passed through these stages of weakness long ago. (3c, L.1-3)

... Bhagwan, you are the knower of hearts-- take her to [Heaven](#)! We're both giving her our heartfelt blessing. The feast I've had today-- I haven't had its equal in my whole life!" (3c, L.7-9)

It seems as if the duo was strongly reacting against their marginalised position in society:

Ghisu grew irritated. "I tell you, she'll get a shroud. Why don't you believe me?"

"Who will give the money-- why don't you tell me?"

"The same people will give it who gave it this time. But they won't put the rupees into our hands. And if somehow we get our hands on them, we'll sit here and drink again just like this, and they'll give the shroud a third time." (3c, L. 23-27)

Premchand further questions the economic exploitation prevalent in the society as well exposes the religious hypocrisy of the Brahmins. Both the father and the son, whom the village translate as meaningless tramps, reflect very thought-provoking ideas regarding the funeral rites. It is, unquestionably the discourse of cynicism, sarcasm, iconoclasm, rebellion and above all the resistance which is ignored by Gayatri Spivak. The subaltern in the present story, 'The Shroud' not only resists the forces of exploitation, but subverts dominant social mores and traditions to gain an advantage over the master class, forcing them to shell out money which they wouldn't have otherwise in ordinary circumstances. This glory of victory is attenuated by the realization that the subaltern in turn is also an exploiter of the woman in the family, who in life and death is used for sustaining self-interests of the males of the family (Banik, 2009, p. 180).

The present short story can be studied from the point of view of internal and external colonisation too. The plot of the story does not have scope for external colonisation, but its indirect influence is definitely observed. Premchand exposes the socio-economic deprivations of the dispossessed sections of the colonial India not by the colonial rulers but by feudal India itself yet his condemnation of the feudal and caste system is not "explicit or interventionist".Premchand's social and realist mode recreates the lived

reality of the subalterns exposing pretensions and complacencies of dominant, feudal and patriarchal social mores (Banik, 2009, p. 181). Focusing on the internal colonization, Avadhesh Kumar Singh in Godan: Vaadke Dayre Mein yaVaad se Pare states:

A glimpse of internal colonization is found in the material and natural resource exploitation by the upper caste, Mahajans, Zamindars and Government Servants. Those colonizing within the country are such parasites that they collect tax and fine the people on behalf of the government, and in the process, keeping a part of it for themselves which they spend on exhibition that raises their social standing or raises their false prestige. These people are like eagles that prey the bird not for themselves but for others. They work as the cunning agents of the colonizers and in this process earn some commission for themselves. Though not depicting colonialism as a direct part of the plot, the novelist reveals the various influences of colonialism on the lives of the Indians. (p. 196)

And this thesis is very much evident from the discourse of these characters that transgress and subvert the established moral and ethical values:

Ghisu said, "What's the use of wrapping her in a shroud? After all, it would only be burned. Nothing would go with her."

Looking toward the sky as if persuading the angels of his innocence, Madhav said, "It's the custom of the world-- why do these same people give thousands of rupees to the Brahmins? Who can tell whether a reward does or doesn't reach them in another world?"3b

"Rich people have wealth-- let them waste it! What do we have to waste?" (3b L, 2-8)

And, above all , the extraordinary final scene at the wine-house in which the whole human condition seems to be held up for reflection in the light of pie-in-the-sky longings, bread-on-the-ground cynicism, touches of compassion, absurdity, and the wild mood swings of intoxication. The scene becomes a stage for Ghisu and Madhav's last drunken dance, under a sky full of coldly brilliant stars, before an audience of desperately poor peasants, as they sing about a murderous beauty and the glance of her eye. Then, of course, they pass out, ending the story abruptly and depriving us of any final authorial interpretation.

The whole wine-house was absorbed in the spectacle, and these two drinkers, deep in intoxication, kept on singing. Then they both began to dance--they leaped and jumped, fell down, flounced about, gesticulated, [strutted around]; and finally, overcome by drunkenness, they collapsed.

The story also reveals the dehumanizing effect of poverty. While Madhav's wife, Budhiya, was screaming and thrashing in pain, Ghisu and Madhav kept sitting. They couldn't get medicine, neither a quack, for everything needs money and they were neck deep in debt already. Yet, they knew, the society which refused them money now would help, if a child was born or Budhiya died. So they sat still waiting for either of the two to happen. With Budhiya's death they rushed to the Zamindar for help for Budhiya's cremation. Notwithstanding his detestation, the Zamindar couldn't but offer him a sum of two rupees, because 'he knew it was not the right moment for giving vent to his anger or meting out punishment'. Decorum of civility demanded that he helped a man in need for cremating his wife. Ghisu was shrewd enough to propagate this largesse showered on him by the Zamindar to collect more from the villagers.

5.5 The symbolic code

The whole story symbolizes a pathetic situation of India during the colonial regime. In this sense, the story communicates at two levels. At surface level, it communicates abominable callousness of two characters-the father and the son whereas at the deeper level it presents different symbolic significations. Budhiya's character symbolizes that helplessness in the environment of stagnation and passiveness which is felt in all those cultures and civilizations whose inhabitants are suffering in the hands of ruthlessness colonizer dictatorship. Budhiya is embodiment of this suffering; doubly colonized and marginalized Indian low caste woman who has no role in the society but to gratify the physical desires of man in Indian society. Even Premchand's conscious reluctance to give voice to Budhiya is symbolical of marginalized position of *Chamar* woman in the Indian society. Nowhere in the whole story do we find a single expression or word from Budhiya's mouth. Even, in her death, she fulfils the greatest desire of these two "shameless slackers" and brings them a lot of food.

Both Gishu and Madhav symbolise Indians utterly indifferent to the miserable condition of Budhiya. The indifference and stagnation on their part means the utter callousness and hostility promising deprivation and exploitation of the downtrodden. Budhiya's death is, textually, the death of a woman, but the writer has deliberately presented her pregnant with the Indian future- a baby. Gishu and Madhav do feel pain over the 'heart–rending screams' of Budhiya writhing in pain but this passive reaction on the part of her husband and father in law not only goes against the cultural values of that particular society but does reflect collective consciousness of Indian masses over the loss of present as well as the future of India. Roasting potatoes appears as more sacred against the taking of any action for the life of a woman who has spent a whole year with these *"slackers"* and socially outcaste males.

Similarly and ironically, Budhiya's death brings moments of utter joy and merriment for these men, the kind of joy they have never experienced through out their miserable days and nights. They abandonment of Budhiya by her husband and father in law has serious symbolic implication for us, as it reflects the putrefying Indian culture. The elite abandon the middle class and the middle abandon the poor, consequently the *Chamar* males ruthlessly leave their females in the lurch. The cult of destitution and deprivation continues at the relentless loss of humanity and resultantly the entire syllabus of cultural values loses its practical worth and becomes like a conditional sentence in the grammar of humanities. In such moments, the echoing doctrines of metaphysics have little and meaningless effect on human sensibility. According to Shashi Bushan (2010), although Ghisu and Madhav abandon the "peasant's *dharma"* the peasantry is ever ready to help them cremate Budhiya's body. In fact, it was peasantry's conservative morality that allows Ghisu and Madhav to flout the moral code of society and make merry (p. 1230).

This family of *Chamars* is also symbolic of an untouchable caste group in Indian caste division who are looked down upon in the society and are denied even the basic human rights. Gishu and Mahdav's procrastination in choosing shroud for the dead wife is symbolic of the religious rights denied to them.

"What a bad custom it is that someone who didn't even get a rag to cover her body when she was alive, needs a new shroud when she's dead."

"After all, the shroud burns along with the body."

"What else is it good for? If we'd had these five rupees earlier, we would have given her some medicine." (3a L. 7-11)

For Premchand, the primal opposition in Indian society is male *versus* female and *Brahamin versus Chamars*. In *"The Shroud",* a family of *Chamars* is set in opposition to the people belonging to other caste in the village and in the society at large. Ghisu and Madhav, father and son are set in opposition to Mahdav's wife in different respects. Both Ghisu and Madhav are *"notorious slackers"* in the village:

If Ghisu worked for one day, then he rested for three. Madhav was such a slacker that if he worked for an hour, then he smoked his chilam for an hour. Thus nobody hired them on. (1a, L.13-15)

On the other hand, Mahdav's wife lays the *"foundations of civilization"* in the family and does all the household like grinding grain, cutting grass, arranging a couple of pounds of flour, and keep on filling the "stomachs of these two shameless ones who have grown even more lazy and indolent". This opposition is further highlighted as Madhav's wife, Budhiya is writhing with labor pains but her husband is callously waiting for her to die:

Madhav said in a pained tone, "If she's going to die, then why doesn't she go ahead and die? What's the use of going to see?" (1a L, 8-9)

Both keep on eating potatoes outside the hut in which Budhiya was moaning with labor pains but neither of them goes inside not because of being soft heartedness enough to bear her miserable condition but out of fear that whosoever goes inside the room might not get potatoes on return. Moreover, the title of the story has a symbolic value as well. The *Shroud* symbolizes death as well as emancipation for Budhiya, a *Chamar* woman, from the drudgery of life in a family where she is treated mercilessly by the whole family. Despite feeding her husband and father-in-law she doesn't even get medical treatment in her last moments.

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Ghisu consoled him: "Why do you weep, son? Be happy that she's been liberated from this net of illusion. She's escaped from the snare; she was very fortunate that she was able to break the bonds of worldly illusion so quickly."(3e L, 10-12)

But this shroud symbolizes feast and gratification of gluttony of Ghisu and Mahdav.

"Yes, son, she'll go to Heaven! ...even while dying, she fulfilled the greatest desire of our lives. (3e L.1-3)

...Madhav too laughed at this unexpected good fortune, at defeating destiny in this way. He said, "She was very good, the poor thing. Even as she died, she gave us a fine meal."(3B L.13-15)

Even the names assigned to these characters are symbolic of their abbreviated position in the society. Ghisu as a nickname (Meaning worn-out) sounds sarcastic and contemptuous rather than friendly. Similarly Budhiya (Meaning an old girl) symbolizes her true identity in the society.

6.   Discussion

In his pioneering study of codes, Barthes (1974) specifies how these five codes can shape a reader's movement through the text. Initially recognizing the text as narrative, a reader will then apply proairetic code the text's actions, the referential code to connect the text's world to the adopted bodies of knowledge, the semic code to organize its characters and characterizing details, the symbolic code to connect the text to larger structure of signification, and the hermeneutic code to follow the text's development of narrative suspense (Herman et al., 2005, p. 66).These codes are interlacing braids or strands that continue to overlap each other to constitute a coherent and well established network of their own called a text. Barthes simply unlocks the text, disentangles its constitutive strands and allows it expand along coded avenues of meaning" (Ribière, 2008, p. 49). Moreover, "each code is one of the forces that can take over the text (of which the text is the network), one of the voices out of which the text is woven just as each note has its place in the composition" (Barthes, 1974, p. 21).

Barthesian codes are not fixed and final rules for the evaluation of a piece of art, they, on the contrary, focus on the ways and means of 'structuration'

of a text. There is a clear space for some other codes because the plurality of interpretation cannot rely heavily just on four or five codes. Indeed, it was this spirit of the plurality of interpretation which forced Barthes to depart from the structuralist interpretation of the text.

Barthes himself claims, although entirely derived from books, these five codes... appear to establish reality, "Life" (Barthes, 1974, p. 209). Thus these five codes provide intriguing suggestions as to how fiction manages to give reader a sense of life. Critics regard S/Z as an original work of art which-- however brilliant in it—did not contribute to the ongoing flow of theoretical discourse. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983) speaks of how different readers would apply Barthes's codes differently to a given text: so the problem of uniformity keeps cropping up (p. 14). Another critic Catherine Belsey (2002) calls S/Z a "polyphonic critical text" and it is impossible to summarize adequately, to reduce to "systematic accessibility" (p. 97) she calls Barthes' principle in S/Z "anarchist" and deems the whole imitation of its critical method(s) as impossible (p. 97). Similarly, Robert Scholes (1974) comments that "there is something too arbitrary, too personal and too idiosyncratic" about this method." (p. 155) and even argues about the mention of only five codes, "five is not a magic number" (p. 156).

According to Raymond Wilson III (2011), Barthes is protected by his statement itself that the five major codes predominate in the structuring of literature because he leaves open the possibility that other codes might be noticed that he doesn't detail in S/Z (p. 88). In an interview, he said, "Admittedly I don't know if this selection has any theoretical stability; similar experiments would have to be done on other texts to find out" ("On *S/Z*," 74). Chatman (1979) adds a sixth metacodic code by which the text signals, the reader infers, and the culture suggests which codes are appropriate for a given text, paratextual material (titles, book, Jstore sections) and mode of presentation (film homly billboard, etc.) function in this metacodic way (as cited in Herman et al., 2005, p. 66-67). Keeping in view this space for interpretation we can add an important code –code of irony to the analysis of the present story. In irony words do not have the same meaning as appears on the surface; their objective is to point sarcastically to some painful aspect of unseen reality or some tragedy inherent in the situation (Narang, 2010, p. 85). In his article titled

"Premchand as a short story writer: Using irony as a technical Device," Gopi Chand Narang has observed irony as a significant factor which intensifies and catalyzes the action of the story. He has focused on the devices of irony employed by the writer in understanding the 'structuration' of the text of the story *Kafan*. The important forms of irony are verbal, situational and tragic. Verbal irony is related with the utterance of a character, when someone says something and the meaning is otherwise in reality (Cuddon, 1999, p. 430). There is a distinct strain of this kind of irony in the story under discussion. Since much of the text is marked with 'intrusion of the writer', we come across sarcastic statements about these characters which denote a bitter irony in their lives:

> If only the two had been ascetics, then they wouldn't have needed any exercises in self-discipline to achieve contentment and patience.

Eventually, after the death of Budhiya, they present themselves as the most tender-hearted and compassionate men in the village and rush to the village landlord for some financial assistance. The discourse they use can be termed and observed as the most popular one for the exploitation of the others, which means to lie and do it shamelessly.

> Ghisua fell prostrate on the ground, and said with tear-filled eyes, "Master, I'm in-great trouble! Madhav's wife passed away last night. All day she was writhing in pain, Master; we two sat by her bed till midnight. Whatever medicines we could give her, we did. But she slipped away. Now we have no one to care for us, Master-- we're devastated-- our house is destroyed! I'm your slave. Now who but you will take care of her final rites? Whatever money we had at hand was used up on medicines. If –20- the Master will show mercy, then she'll have the proper rites. To whose door should I come except yours?"

Similarly, when they feel free from the destitution, their minds go through a sea change. They are transformed into some unburdened and relieved beings, for the money with them is the power which speaks through their tongues. Since both of them escape their social responsibilities religiously, they become rationalist, searching lame excuses justifying their ruthlessness.

"Sure, what else! While the body is being carried along, night will come. - At night, who sees a shroud?"

"What a bad custom it is that someone who didn't even get a rag to cover her body when she was alive, needs a new shroud when she's dead."

"After all, the shroud burns along with the body."

After verbal irony, we encounter another form that is tragic irony which is seen as the subtlest of the ironical manifestations. The verbal irony is closely entwined with situational irony resulting into tragic irony which is his essence of the present story *Kafan* (The Shroud). In fact, the whole structure of the short story is based on irony. It is through meaningful sentences such as these that Premchand exposes the seamy aspects of human life. Therefore, the pattern of irony plays a significant role in the organic whole of the story.

Moreover, answering Catherine Belsey's (2002) complaint that system cannot be adequately described, Wilson suggests that the five code system is quickly and easily described. Barthes uses the term action code for explaining the significance of seemingly random action. This might be puzzling when we realize that enigma code also involves action. Undoubtedly, keeping in mind the potential overlapping, Barthes calls the action code the proairetic code. Similarly he calls the reference code the cultural code in order to clarify not to make the system "anarchic" and random. Robert Scholes admits that difference exist between a connotation and a cultural reference. He ascribes the main difficulty not to an "inherent incoherence" in Barthes' system, but because Barthes' system involves us "precisely in distinguishing among thing that we have been contented to lump together before" (as quoted in Wilson, 2011, p. 89).

Thus, the application of Barthes' post-structuralist model of narrative analysis to Premchand's short story the Shroud reveals a structure and thematic implications that careful readers of Premchand intuit, but which conventional analysis-such as plot analysis—cannot verify. Unlike the traditional and structuralist models of narrative analysis the post-structuralist model integrates numerous features of a narrative than just its plot and structure. It offers a unique blend of narratology, literary semiotics, thematic interpretation, text theory and literary criticism.

7.   Conclusion

Models are necessary for our understanding of reality. They are also an expression of human creativity (Barthes, 1964, p. 218). If a TEXT is of prime importance in linguistic communication, we should not give up trying to understand and analyze it by means of adequate models. A critical evaluation and comparison of different models may finally lead to more insight into the phenomenon of TEXT itself as well as into the creative activity of Man producing meaning in and through stories. Cognitive and semiotic approaches to text like Barthes' do indeed have a promising future. Although theoretical basis of Barthes' post-structuralist model is weak, its practical usefulness and applicability is beyond doubt. Barthes' model can lead to a kind of interdisciplinary approach to a text which could counteract certain dangerous trends of overspecialization in modern research. It can provide useful insight into one of our most important ways of creating meaning, as well as into the process of telling and processing stories. Thus, it may contribute to a better knowledge of Man himself, and this justifies our hope and wish that narratology should make further progress. The present study in narratology was intended to be a small but useful contribution to the progress desired.

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