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Examining the Images and Symbols in Abhi Subedi's Poem "Soft Storm"

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Abstract:

This article explores the images and symbols in Abhi Subedi's poem "Soft Storm" from a sociopolitical perspective. The study interprets this poem's highly allegorical, paradoxical, symbolic, and philosophical signs, symbols, and images that reflect power politics. The poet has presented everything symbolically and ironically. The poet disseminates the sociopolitical messages through the metaphorical presentation depicting modern society's deteriorated condition. The paradoxical language often bothers general readers and most scholars from other disciplines. The images and symbols reflect the adverse situations of the modern world and suggest the necessary steps for amelioration. This poem is as complex as T. S. Eliot's poem "The Wasteland." The main findings Subedi's poem reveal that the number of homeless children is increasing as it is a result of an anarchic and undisciplined world. The poet envisions the absurdities of tumultuous times with a touch of compassion. The research tries to answer the research questions - Why are metaphorical and allegorical meanings ambiguous? Can general readers grasp the underlying meanings of Subedi's poem? This research paper interprets the depth of meanings and frees a society with a significant departure from traditional power politics. The soft storm signifies the softness of power politics as the system is weak. The study employs the theories of Chandler's semiotic and Mead's symbols.

Keywords:

Ambiguous, images, paradox, semiotics, symbols

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考察阿比-蘇貝迪 诗歌"软风暴"中的图像和符号

摘要:

本文从社会政治角度探讨了阿比-蘇貝迪 诗歌"软风暴"中的图像和符号。该研究解释了这首诗的高度寓言矛盾, 象征和哲学标志, 符号和图像反映权力政治。诗人以象征和讽刺的方式呈现了一切。诗人通过描绘现代社会恶化状况的隐喻来传播社会政治信息。自相矛盾的语言经常困扰一般读者和大多数其他学科的学者。图像和符号反映了现代世界的不利情况, 并提出了改善的必要步骤。这首诗和T.S. 艾略特的诗《荒原》一样复杂。"蘇貝迪 的诗的主要发现揭示了无家可归儿童的数量正在增加, 因为这是一个无政府主义和无纪律的世界的结果。诗人以一种同情心来想象动荡时期的荒谬。该研究试图回答研究问题-为什么隐喻和寓言意义模棱两可? 一般读者能掌握苏贝迪诗的潜在含义吗? 这篇研究论文解释了意义的深度, 释放了一个与传统强权政治显着背离的社会。软风暴意味着强权政治的软性, 因为体制薄弱。该研究采用了钱德勒符号学和米德符号的理论

关键词: 曖昧、影像、悖論 符號學 符號

1. Introduction

This study explores the underlying meanings of images and symbols presented in Subedi's poem "Soft Storm" which is highly satirical, philosophical, and paradoxical. The poet, with a touch of compassion, contemplates the absurdities of tumultuous times. As "the glorification of the absurd meant the destruction of all established order through derision and provocation" (Winner, 2015, p.170). The poem "Soft Storm" also indicates this reality, as there have been anarchic activities everywhere and the established order has been destroyed through derision and provocation. People's frustration and destructive minds reflect their vicious and devastating world wars. Similarly, the poem connotes "*The Waste Land*, which depicts how the whole of European civilization has become spiritually bankrupt, leading to gross degeneration in social values and ethics" (p. 103). It is observed not only in European civilizations but also in non-European civilizations. Spiritual bankruptcy is common in the modern world and indicates the pitfalls of the contemporary world - the West and the East. Similarly, Subedi's poem portrays gross degeneration and deteriorating human relationships.

The horizon of this poem "Soft Storm" is beyond one's imagination, and it is not limited to those homeless children who roam around the Thamel area; rather, it connotes the several absurd things of the modern world.

The existential reality of becoming logical entities are the states of being, which are timeless and fixed, and there can also be no system for the existing

individuals, who always stand in the throes of becoming. (Sharma, 1993, p. 277)

The mercilessly beaten man for no reason by other people is an illogical and unsystematic, inexcusable activity. The modern world prefers illogical and unsystematic things as they are tired of systems and orders.

Their enjoyment is in disorder rather than order. Thus, positive, pure thought can never capture modern people's minds, but disorder and chaotic activities attract them.

The images and symbols of the poem are presented paradoxically, and one cannot comprehend them. For example, students are not habituated to understanding the meaning of the image of 'crocus flowers' growing over stones. Crocus flowers symbolize the children and stones of their mothers. The homeless children who live around the Thamel area do not have their own identities, though they are flowers. After birth, mothers abandon them in public places. Some kind-hearted people rescue and rear them, but not all of them receive this opportunity. The grown-up street children then take care of them. Ultimately, they also become street children. In this context, Oscar Wilde (2021) states, "I have many beautiful flowers, 'he said; but the children are the most flowers of all" (p. 197). Children are the most beautiful flowers in the world, as they are solutions for tomorrow. However, the schooling of these children is beyond the imagination. Such beautiful flowers do not have vessels but decay in the street. For instance, Steve Jobs, who owned the Apple Company as a CEO, would also have been a street child if his parents had abandoned him and had not been adopted

by his social parents. There may be several Steve Jobs among street children. Who cares?

Thus, Subedi's "Soft Storm" is a highly satirical or ironical poem in which he presents the degenerated and deteriorated sociopolitical situation of the modern world. One group badly suppressed the other groups in the case of more power. One seemingly innocent man was mercilessly beaten for no reason in front of his family. This event symbolizes social conflicts and deterioration and depicts sociopolitical phenomena. Birhan and Christopher (2024) claim that violence, discrimination, and deterioration of social cohesion are common manifestations of these conflicts (p. 11). Civilized and developed countries are not untouched by this reality. Subedi's poem satirizes the chaotic and anarchic conditions of Nepali politics, and has universal implications. This study was based on these research questions: Are paradoxical, satirical, ironic, and philosophical meanings complex for readers in general? How do we interpret these meanings?

The number of competent English teachers in remote colleges is insufficient. In some colleges, teachers avoid this poem because they feel it is difficult to teach students.

The images of a forlorn child carrying transistor radio trying to find his mother, homeless children, crocuses growing over stones, moon, gale, tearing roofs, seamless city, bat-bearing trees, unwedded gardens, protruded rocks, transistor radio, violent history, mercilessly beaten man, no sensible times, bruised human lips, human times, rain tears, rainbow, silent stones, mad times, stone growing flower and flower growing stone, lamppost, deforested land, rhododendron blooming in winter, songs of the sad birds, ripples, and uneasy lake have been philosophically presented. Turmoil and bad cultures are increasing rapidly, and people are becoming selfish, corrupted, arrogant, and inhumane. The soft storm symbolizes a weak authority that cannot control mishaps in modern society. As the poem is highly satirical, it depicts the chaotic situation of society through the aforementioned images. Society has been polluted in such a way that discipline or social norms have become a hindrance and disturbance to modern men. The flower grows five inches taller in one night, meaning that the number of homeless children is increasing rapidly. After all, homeless children become members of society. The speaker witnesses a man who has been beaten by a gang of young boys in front of his family, and his face is bruised and full of blood. This shows that powerful people always torture powerless people. A boy who has carried transistor radio looks for his mother. His mother symbolizes his history and identity. In the modern world, the mother is no longer a mother, and the son is no longer a son.

Chandler clarifies that "semiotics is far more than a method of textual analysis" (p. xvi). In several interpretive writings of all genres, the authors used

semiotics as a method of textual analysis because they can tell highly philosophical things through images. If words disseminate limited messages, images disseminate unlimited messages. The phrase 'soft storm' is paradoxical as 'soft' never fits as an adjective before 'storm.' It is quite contradictory that the terminology is not grammatically suited. This is symbolic of the fact that modern men do not strictly follow society's grammar. Modern people enjoy violating established norms and values, as *avant-garde* writers do. The military metaphor of an *advance guard* identifies artists and writers whose innovations in style, form, and subject matter challenge the artistic and aesthetic validity of the established forms of art and literary traditions of their time. The avant-garde has a positive intention of changing the world for a better one, but what is going to happen by creating several street children? Is this world going to become like Eliot's 'wasteland'? The poet has presented two major images: 'flower' and 'stone' though there are multiple images and symbols in the poem. The flower image indicates the child and the stone image indicates the mother. Unwanted babies are abandoned under bridges or dumping sites when they are born. The fathers and mothers of these children were not socially excused. For the sake of safety, they abandoned innocent and unspeakable babies. Such unwanted births are the result of rule violation. Therefore, this image creates the image of a 'wasteland' the dystopia. This is what one can read in Subedi's poems.

A symbol has multiple meanings although it is considered a universal discourse. For example, a 'nose ring' indicates women and a 'moustache' does to men, but it may not be sufficient in the case of Newar women who do not wear nose rings. Similarly, Rai, Gurung, Magar, and Limbu do not have bushy moustaches like the Brahmins. The images, signs, and symbols appear to have been generated in one way by the majority of people. These images suggest that several turmoil and bad cultures are increasing rapidly, and people are becoming selfish, corrupt, arrogant, and unkind. The 'soft storm' image symbolizes the weak authority that cannot control the mishaps that exist in society.

According to the Hindu belief system, Lord Ganesh is concerned with several things such as heralding a good thing. "Ganesh is typically associated with a variety of symbolic items and figures. Ganesh can be seen holding a hatchet, which symbolizes the cutting away of illusions and false notions, as well as the cutting away of past deeds and *karma* when one achieves enlightenment" (Miller, 2015, p. 57). Ganesh is a symbol of the starting point for anything. He had to be offered anything at the beginning of the programme. His name symbolizes this starting point. The hatchet carried by Ganesh symbolizes the cutting away of illusions and false notions. Humans are trapped in illusions and false notions most of the time. So, he suffers a lot. Illusions and false notions are always

problematic. Reality and truth are rarely available in falsehood.

2. Literature Review

Chandler's semiotic theory is the study of the signs, symbols, and signification that writers use to make their literary texts rhetorical, metaphoric, and philosophic. Symbolic interpretation is one of the most powerful tools for analyzing images, symbols, and signs in text. Semiotics may stand as an umbrella term to cover all underlying meanings through different gestures, colors, pictures, images, and signs, which represent different meanings according to context. Signs, symbols, and images have deeper meanings than mere words. The horizons of semiotics and words are incomparable. At this point, Daniel Chandler opines, "Semiotics is concerned with everything" (p. 2). This is not limited to a single sector. It traverses everywhere. Chandler claims, "Semiotics is perhaps best thought of as a way of looking at the production of meaning from a particular critical perspective" (p. 3). The stones or rocks that Subedi uses in his poem are semiotics. Several meanings can be generated from this. This depends on the person's critical perspective. Therefore, "semiotics is an unavoidable form of philosophy. Nothing can be known outside semiosis" (Chandler, 2007, p. 69). This is why most writers use semiotics, through which they disseminate several messages to the public.

Symbol theory, or symbolic interactionism theory, was developed by Mead (1938). The difference between semiotics and symbols is that the former is complete and the latter is part, even if it cannot be ignored. Norbert Elias (1991) states, "One can clearly distinguish between data which are symbolic representations and those which are not" (p. 7). There are two types of data: symbolic and non-symbolic. Symbolic data are metaphorically presented as a lover can say to his beloved that she is his heartbeat. A lover or beloved symbolizes complementary parts. However, when one says that you are helpful, it is non-symbolic. Further, Elias clarifies, "This world consists of two different universes, one of which is characterized by the code-word 'nature,' the other by that of 'history' or 'culture'" (p.11). In a traffic control system, even dummy traffic police alert road users, such as drivers or riders, because this is a semiotic or symbolic representation. "We refer to the meaning of a thing when we make use of the symbol. Symbols stand for the meanings of those things or objects which have meanings" (Strauss, 1956, p. 199). Pictures, colors, and different images represent different meanings. Every symbol represents a type of language. A symbolic language is more complex than a language expressed by words. So, "what is implied in language, otherwise language as significant symbol would disappear" (Strauss, 1956, p. 222). The symbol contributes to sustaining language. After all, "symbol is a universal

discourse" (p. 224), though some negligible variations may take place. For example, the pig symbolizes Baraha and Lord Bishnu represents Hindus, whereas it is otherwise in Muslims. This was how the confusion was created. Jean-François Côté (2015) states, "The significant symbol is then the gesture, the sign, the word which is addressed to the self when it is addressed to another individual and is addressed to another, in the form to all other individuals, when it is addressed to the self" (p. 23). In the poem "Soft Storm," crocus flowers, stones and rocks, ripples, a rainbow, a minuscule sky, and an uneasy lake are significant symbols that represent different meanings according to the individual interpretive skill based on expertise. For instance, a flower stands for softness and beauty as momentary; stones and rocks for unkind, cruel people, and permanency; ripples for time; a rainbow also for a momentary object; a minuscule sky for individual lifestyle; and an uneasy lake for a maze or labyrinth of life that appears and disappears.

3. Methods and Materials

This research is qualitative, based on document analysis, as a tool to conclude the discussion. However, this study is fully based on library studies and employs the semiotic interpretation theory of Chandler and the symbol interactionism theory of Mead (1938). The images found in the poem are presented symbolically. Chandler opines, "One of the things that attracts me to semiotics is how it supports my enjoyment of crossing the 'boundaries' of academic disciplines, and of making connections between apparently disparate phenomena" (p. xvi). Writers can freely use symbols to entertain and confuse their readers. Creating confusion is an indirect business in academia. This makes readers more critical thinkers. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols in general, but has multiple meanings. Images and symbols have deeper meaning. Lee (2019) clarifies, "The first function of a symbol is its stimulation to action" (p.46). Images and symbols are more than mere words. The meanings of words can be limited, whereas symbolic meanings are unlimited because "what the several images are, and what they represent" (Plato, 2017, p. 11) depends on the person's interpretation. Meaning is the product or creation of a philosopher and scholar. Meaning deviates from time to time; the same symbol may not always work for the same meaning. Symbol theory focuses on how communication creates thoughts, self-concepts, and community. Symbolic theory can also be addressed as symbolic interactionism theory. Thus, these two theoretical tools have been used to analyze Subedi's "soft storms." The researcher used the abovementioned keywords to find the literature necessary for the discussion. Most researchers have used libraries and e-books available as sources. There are some opinions of senior professors and scholars mentioned in the study.

4. Results and Discussion

This study interprets the underlying meanings of the images and symbols of the poem to enhance academia and tries to prove that this course is not suitable for Grade XII students. The poet uses symbols throughout the poem: Symbolic meaning is hidden. Subedi's "Soft Storm" is a highly satirical poem that presents Nepal's sociopolitical situation. Nepal has suffered from this problem for centuries. The problem is not much different between systematized and developed countries. Subedi satirizes the chaotic and anarchic conditions of Nepalese politics. Symbolic interpretation can go into the depth of meaning, whereas surficial interpretation may just educate the masses superficially. The crocus flowers and stone represent two opposite forces: positive and negative. These semiotics have multiple meanings: This study attempted to interpret the images used by poets. This paper interprets the images and symbols of Subedi's poem "Soft Storm." The poet uses the image of the moon skidding down (Line 10) at night, which indicates the Virgin Mary or Kunti (according to Hindus) that "the Sun is used as a symbol of Christ and the Moon for the Virgin Mary" (Churchward, 1910, p. 128). Anyway, Subedi did not use the image of the sun but only the moon. The mother of the forlorn child is still a virgin in society.

4.1 Textual Analysis of the Images and Symbols of "Soft Storm"

The phrase 'soft storm' is paradoxical, as the storm is never soft or cheese is hard. It is similar to soft stone, hard cheese, a hill-sized giant rat, an ant-sized little elephant, cold fire, and hot snow. This soft storm is an image of weak authority, perhaps in Nepal. The storm is never soft but becomes soft and soft. Subedi has presented several images and symbols that are difficult to understand, even for highly scholarly figures and university professors. Poetry is a complex genre of literature. On the other hand, the poet seems to have used such images and symbols deliberately, so that common people do not simply comprehend them. The most striking images are of the 'crocuses' that grow over the stones, symbolizing the street children and their biological mothers. Subedi recites:

I became a soft storm
When I saw a forlorn
carrying transistor radio around the neck.
run around wailing
to find his mother
in corridors of violent history (Lines 37-42). (p. 242)

The speaker becomes a soft storm when he sees an abandoned child in sentimental mood. Who abandoned that child? He had been carrying a transistor radio to forget his pain by listening to songs. However, the pain did not decrease. He runs around crying to find

his mother, stone, history, identity, and corridors of violent history. Stone symbolizes multiple meanings, such as stubbornness, as it is a female characteristic. The stone is a firm mother. So, Albert Churchyard (1910) says, "a stone or tree is a symbol of the mother" (p. 126). History is written by victors and not by victims. There are several motherless/identity-less and history-less people worldwide. Who guarantees their identity? However, this question is not answerable. The problem lies in the characterless people who have inexcusable social relations because of which unwanted babies are born and thrown out to die. What is wrong with unspeakable babies? Why did they suffer? Moreover, the poet presents another heart-rending scene for homeless children.

«I became soft when homeless children are in Thamel cried with hunger under bat bearing trees of Kesharmahal» (Lines 22-25).

The poet became helpless looking at homeless and hungry children roaming in pursuit of food under the bat-bearing trees of Kesharmahal. Including children, bats are also hungry as humans have destroyed their habitats and food sources, and they seem to have been lamenting. Looking at the pathetic conditions rampant, the speaker inherits the soft:

«I inherited the soft
when the sky grew like a crocus.
over stones and
became five inches taller
That very night» (Lines 5-11).

The crocus flower is a simile symbolizing street children. "A symbol is nothing but the stimulus whose response is given in advance" (Lee, 2019, p. 41). The speaker or the storm became soft, not because of incapability but because of the fear of hidden power. This hidden power is a form of corrupt people. The crocuses grew five inches taller overnight, indicating the rapid growth of the births of unwanted babies. Who was responsible for this? Characteristics of people. The number of sugar dads and moms has been increasing in our society. There are some poor people whose obligation to abandon newborn babies may be negligible. The stone has several meanings, such as disheartedness and permanency. "First in the valley of the Nile, or that of the Tigris and the Euphrates, or perhaps in China, the events in the heavens and the achievements of monarchs were transcribed on stone or bricks for later men to read" (Mead, 1938, p. 494). Love and security from a mother are always permanent, so the child is seeking his mother, although she is unlikely to appear. Now, the speaker says:

«when I returned
from the melee
where ceremony
dances with mad steps

on unweeded gardens
growing around protruding rocks» (Lines 27-32).

The term 'unweeded gardens' is mentioned in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Act I, Scene 2) to indicate the child's deserted life. His life is similar to that of an unweeded garden. "Tis an unweeded garden that grows to seed" (Shakespeare, 2008, p. 54). The 'forlorn child' mentioned in the poem seems to compare his world to a decaying, unweeded garden, as Hamlet did. The speaker sees the brawl and returns to his/her destination. On the way back home, he also sees ceremonial mad dances treading on unweeded gardens of history. To make the flowers bloom, regular weeding is a must, or the flower plants wither and die soon. Weeding and irrigation are simultaneously necessary. Weeding means rooting out unnecessary shrubs from the garden and making the flower plants shrub-free. However, symbolic meaning refers to the life of homeless children. The social parameter seems to have deteriorated in such a way that it was beyond one's prediction. Lee (2019) contextualizes "the significance of the social process of experience and behavior in which it arises" (p. 43).

Now the speaker talks about people's idle activities. One seemingly innocent person is mercilessly beaten without reason, as this is an insensible time:

«I became a soft storm
When I saw a man
beaten mercilessly
for no reason
before his family
by nobody for no reason
in no sensible times». (Lines 43-49)

The speaker witnesses the brawl in which an innocent person is mercilessly beaten. In front of his family, for no reason. Humanity's sensitivity seems zero in modern man, but they love "speaking in the language/of posters and politics" (Line 12-14). People enjoy speaking political languages but do not know the grammatical language or break the grammar of society most of the time. This poem depicts a modern scenario. Aggressive nature is a common characteristic of humans in the modern world. Why has this trend increased? One man did not treat the other man as a man. The following stanza concerns the idleness of power in the modern world, especially in Nepal:

«I became soft
since you gave words, but did not listen to them.
gave storms, but did not wait to see Leela.
over the silent stone». (Lines 61-66)

The government makes a law very effective, but this law cannot work because there is anti-disposal reverse power somewhere. The government is corrupt and

trackless. Therefore, they cannot control sociopolitical chaos. Justice seems functionless and is on the verge of extinction. This is why the implementation was weak or weakened.

The concerned body gives words to its followers, but does not want to see their performance. This is because humanitarian grounds have dried. After all, words were given rather than work. The storm means unquestionably with unavoidable power and can fly anything in no time, but the problem is that "storms have loitered/in narrow lanes (Lines 70-71). It is only the flower growing over the stone, but vice versa, "stone growing in flower" (Line 90). These lines, "history rushing under the lamppost/and over deforested land" (Lines 92—93) symbolize meaningless works to do. There is no lamp but only the lamppost to guide the sojourners in the dark, and there is no cultivated land to germinate new plants. It has just been like the 'wasteland' of Eliot.

This man is not on track for several reasons. Currently, there is no difference between bedtime and roadtime. Nighttime is not bedtime for modern people. Most modern people have been distracted. This is what we have found in nature. Subedi mentions, "rhododendron blooming in winter (Line 96) instead of blooming in spring. This indicated that everything was trackless. Looking at this disorderly anarchism, the poet recites these lines, "Mother earth telling of the tumults/in the songs of the sad birds" (Lines 97-98). The songs of the sad birds are not songs, but laments. This lamentation is not of the birds, but of the mother earth. Mother Earth seems to have been badly tired of these adversities. The following last stanza of the poem shows that the poet is disappointed and frustrated when looking at the adverse situation of the modern world, where there is heating and cheating. Heating means urging and praising somebody, but praise has no positive meaning.

«But in these hard times
I want to melt like a rainbow."
My soft storm in your minuscule sky.
my soft storm
dances in ripples
of my uneasy lake». (Lines 101- 106)

The speaker makes it clear that modern time is a hard time in which it is challenging for one to adjust. Therefore, he wants to disappear like a rainbow in the tiny world, dancing like ripples of an uneasy lake. How can the contexts of stone-growing flowers and flower-growing stones be made understandable and comprehensible to general readers?

Crocuses are flowers that give beauty to all, but the problem is that they have been discarded as waste materials. The child wants to listen to the radio, although he seems to expect his mother's history. Thus, the mother is a symbol of the origin, history, and identity. Once the mother is identified, the child hopes

to find his/her father. However, there is no one who helps him gain his identity. Therefore, he cried.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The study was carried out to interpret the highly philosophical meanings of the images and symbols used by Subedi in his poem “Soft Storm.” This paper focuses on whether the syllabus prescribed by the Curriculum Development Center is appropriate for general readers or teenage students at the intermediate level. The poem is not reader-friendly. The philosophy mentioned in this poem is at a very high level. The theme of the poem is highly paradoxical, philosophical, satirical, and ironic. The poet depicts a sociopolitical situation as power politics become soft. Highly rhetorical and metaphorical images, symbols, and signs depict degenerated modern society. Anarchic disorder is a modern characteristic. Subedi’s deforested land and Eliot’s wasteland reflect modern people, who are dry, selfish, corrupted, and deserted. This is because the students were not habituated to reading this type of text. Students cannot perceive this philosophy based on rote learning. However, this does not fit the nation’s target. Nor is this a matter of concern for science and technology students. Several major English students in the colleges were nominal. Their school-level backgrounds were simple. They have learned to crawl in school and cannot fly at college level. Some genuine students may understand this text, but the majority do not. Therefore, this course was not appropriate for such students. Course designers must counsel experts. This seems to have been like feeding a chick with a pumpkin. There is a context in which the flower crocus grows over the stones. How comfortable is it to convince or motivate science students?

Limitations and Further Study

This article limits the discussion to the analysis of the symbols and images of Subedi’s poem “Soft Storm.” It has interpreted philosophical, allegorical, and ironical meanings so that readers from other disciplines such as medicine, sports, and forestry can also comprehend the poem. This poem can be interpreted through the argument of alienation and fragmentation of the modern age because of machines and access to internets.

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Conflicts of Interest

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