



RESEARCH PAPER

Unveiling Characters Through Colors: A Critical Study of Sorayya Khan's *Noor*

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ABSTRACT

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This present research focuses on the symbolic interpretation of colors in Sorayya Khan's *Noor* and the interplay of characters' mind and environmental setting through the figurative language of colors. The use of color symbols is a vital tool to lay bare the psychological state of characters. Colors govern the plot, themes, and diction through the complexion of characters and objects. The undertaken research is non-empirical, qualitative in nature and the data has been analyzed through the content analysis methodology. In addition, the researcher finds more ways of interpretation of characters through the language of colors in Khan's novel. Furthermore, the detailed study of the language of colours suggests the future scholars of literature and linguistics to interpret colours at the symbolic levels in other literary texts to highlight their figurative and emblematic meanings

Introduction

The vernacular of literature may be communicated through verbal as well as nonverbal modes of communication. Color symbolism imparts an explicit significance to literature to portray a deeper meaning; more than what is apparently painted at the surface level. Colors are manipulated in literature through title, character's complexion, material and nonmaterial objects, in material as by flowers, buildings, dresses, flowers, heavenly bodies and in nonmaterial colors, we extract the metaphorical relevance of colors through the lens of psychology as thoughts, dreams, desires and aspirations may be colored or colorless. All colors more or less have their psychological interpretations, e.g. 'red' with passion and 'white' with purity, 'black' color may be fused into mystery and racism, pink color reflects feminism and girlishness, along with 'blue' that is the

color of peace, and 'gold' can be associated with aristocracy, prestige, wealth and sophistication. Sorayya Khan quintessentially exercises colors to paint massacre, rape, and corruption along with extortion and excesses committed by the Pakistani army. Khan has made effective use of numerous credentials associated with colors in her debut novel *Noor*.

Literature Review

Sorayya Khan's article "The silence and forgetting that wrote *Noor*" highlights the interviews that she conducted in Pakistan from the people who participated in 1971 war. She suggests that silence and forgetting cannot be termed into negative terms rather sometimes it might be linked with the healing process. While dealing with silence at societal level she says that "It's the way we behave as a society as a whole, the pauses and oversights in our conversations, the easy way most of us have of overlooking or talking around things that are too wrenching to discuss" (Sorayya, 2015, p. 122). But some people remain connected with it, especially the soldiers, who share their experiences of fighting during the war.

Farah Ishtiyaque situates the novel *Noor* (2003) in a historical perspective. She also holds the opinion that unequal distribution of wealth between both parts of Pakistan led to the bafflement between the two countries and they were engaged in "destruction, death, arson, loot, carnage, migration, dislocation, molestation, abduction and rape" (Ishtiyque, 2015, p. 302). Thus, the novel provides foregrounding insight into the rifts between Pakistan and Bangladesh that left indelible imprints of violence.

Moreover, Sadia Riaz Sehole in her article "Landscape: Psychological, geographical and cultural nexuses" traces the literature of different landscapes as how the South Asian writers explicit the indigenous and universal taste in their texts. Through the comparative study of Sorayya Khan's *Noor* and *Lady Coupe* by Anita Nair and records the psychological traits of characters and impinges of geographical landscapes. Furthermore, she says: "Thus, *Noor's* drawings become a means of portraying the psychological landscape of the characters. She brings to the forefront to the characters themselves" (Sehole, 2003, p. 68). In this way, *Noor's* paintings and different landscapes are impetus to look into characters' minds.

The above study gives insight to understand the critical study of Sorayya Khan's *Noor*. The novel provides interesting reading in understanding the historical aspects that took place between Pakistan and Bangladesh and led to the civil war. Besides, the researcher also observes how history is connected with the present and survives forever in minds. As the whole literature review does not comprise any work on *Unveiling Colors: A Symbolic Study of Noor*, the study will explain the symbolic significance of colors by the textual analysis of the prescribed novel.

Material and Methods

The present research is qualitative in nature and it undertakes the task of critical and textual reading of the prescribed novel. As the primary focus of the researcher is on understanding the symbolic interpretations of colors with relation to the characters and objects specifically, the researcher will observe the text through the content analysis as it will help in the interpretation of colors and their symbolic meanings.

Conceptual Framework

A symbol serves more meaning than what a person, thing, situation or an action may present through their literal levels. Sometimes, an author suggests clues and meanings through his/her text and the reader can find them through the symbols that are found in a work of literature (Ghiotto & Wijanarka, 2016, p. 56)). An active reader is required to interpret symbols with some cautions. Firstly, the story itself should give a clue that is extendable to symbolic interpretation. The clue can be observed by "emphasis, repetition, or position of the word" (2016, p. 56). Secondly, the meaning of a literary symbol is also dependent upon the context of a text. Thus, it implies that the whole context of a word serves to interpret the meaning of the word taken as a symbol. Thirdly, in order to be symbolic, the symbolic word must be represented by more than what is printed in a literary text and it must suggest some explicit meanings. Fourthly, symbol may have more than one meaning and it may also have cluster of connotative meanings which are to be carried and understood by the context of the story (Arp & Johnson, 1998, p. 289).

While defining colour, John Gage views that it "is the attribute of visual experience that can be described as having quantitatively specifiable dimensions of hue, saturation and brightness" (1999, p.11). Colours have long cognitive debate since antiquity. Tonal variation in a scene supplies most of the information. *Basic Color Terms* (1969) by Brent Berlin and Paul Kay bridged the gap among the physics of colour, neurophysiology of colours, anthropology and the symbolic dimensions of colours. They regard that: "color categorization is not random and the foci of basic color terms are similar in all languages" (Berlin & Kay, 1969, 10). It means that colours have their universal cognitive meanings. Moreover, "all languages encode between two and eleven basic colour terms (black, white, red, yellow, green, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange, and grey), which occur in a more or less fixed order, such that all languages have terms for black and white, and languages with three terms have black, white, and red" (Hemming, 2012, p. 311). In this way, it is easy to comprehend how colours share their universality and their cognitive importance is unified.

However, it is also suggested that the understanding of a literary text essentially requires the discernment to explain symbols. Monica Federica Ghiotto postulates that color is a powerful visual code that gives a deeper meaning to interpret signs. She gives the example of a map that it would be difficult to

understand if a map is without colours, it will create ambiguity and confusion. Thus, it helps to correctly interpret an object that we observe. Likewise, she suggests that green color connotes nature, desire and fertility whereas white indicates purity, elegance and accomplishment. Moreover, gold colour is associated with luxury, royalty and prestige as it is used in jewels, royal crown and coins (Ghiotto, 2015, p. 15).

Thus, it is proven that color symbols provide more information in order to understand different moods, gestures and expressions. In addition, some colours like white, red and black share the universally shared sense and meanings. However, colour symbols can be explained variably from culture to culture. They might be explored by the context of a text and according to the moods of the writer and reader. Besides, colors are crucial in the understanding of nature, function, culture and context in the fields of linguistics, literature, and psychology. Sorayya Khan exuberantly employs colors through her title of the novel *Noor*, the complexion of the protagonist, the other characters and a number of colorful objects to explain her characters' psychology. In this way, in the light of the conceptual framework, the researcher will explain the moods and thoughts of the characters in the novel.

Results and Discussion

Psychological Significance of Colors in *Noor*

Noor is one of the perfect archetypes of psychology in literature. At metaphorical level, the novel itself might be 'Noor'; a guide to be virtuous through showing a morbid picture of society, their mental conflicts with which they strive and the dark psychology of the people in how they promote gender biasness and prejudice between the patriarchal hierarchies of male vs. females. As Noor splashes colors on her painting board, Khan also paints the whole novel through the language of colors. Noor is a denizen where everyone can see and idealize an improbable, a past that is lost and a future that cannot be grasped and deciphered.

Noor As A Color and Character

The character of Noor itself is painting a board where Khan brushes all the brute realities of her cyclone of 1970, partition between Pakistan and Bangladesh, the situation of the women in that era. Noor becomes the incarnation of chaos but she also becomes symbolic for spreading light. The dampness of colors speaks louder rather than the glamour that would have been as her name reverberates. The writer compares the ding of Nanijan's hair with Sajida's dark complexion. At first, she only compares but, later on, she withstands the view for serious debate. When she was at school, she was called *Kohl-ki-larki* at which she aspired to be buried in the hill of coal and become their insult. The black complexion has ever since been used as to show peripheries and marginalized, socially, politically and economically handicapped people in general. The black color is predominantly persuasive in the whole texture of the novel which has been deliberately used by

Khan to put a direct contrast to the title Noor. "Noor" means light, intuition, imaginary land, a spacious pack of heavenly bliss, the image of God, but this happiness, the image of God etc. are entirely out of the horizon of the novel. The thoughts swelling in the mind of Noor, lead a lay man in the world of chaos and turbulence. The black color is adhesively adjacent to racism found among all societies. Putting the sense of blackness in the protagonist and the sufferer Noor, it overwhelmingly captures the idea of misbehavior of God, who is actually society in the postmodern times. Her character becomes derogatory in a sense that she is all black, as if bathed in coal. Even the sclera of her eye is entirely black, leaving no room for being in good looking at any rate. "Sajida stared at the strange girl, her color was richly dark" (Sorayya, 2003, p. 10). The texture of her eye is velvet with spread big black eyes that aggravates the bleakness of her character. This bleakness is the interior of a female's soul as seen by the male chauvinistic society, this is the difference between the appearance and reality, as how a woman is and a how she is seen through the lens of a patriarchal society. The black color has not been shown by men in the whole novel but by men. The girl's implacable white teeth look far larger than her mouth could afford highlights the repulsiveness of the texture of her body. Her long thick hair is colored by the combination of orange and pink. Psychologically speaking, orange is the color of rust and hair is the epitome of female being. Now, this female being is rusted by the patriarchal cults. The mingling of pink color with that of orange is crucial to the fact that pink is a girlish color that shows softness of womanly nature, immaturity and silliness of the female creature, that is to say, she is unable to let her mind grown in the world of fools and constraints. People have the idea of deriving meanings out of colors as they think of Noor, in a word, Noor looks stupid. It is critical to scrutinize that all the symbols and semiotics in connection with Noor's, color, personality and morphology are directly opposite to what her name "Noor" reverberates, ironical and oxymoron. Moreover, Sorayya says that "Noor, simple as she might have been, was devoted to the vastness and complexities of colors" (p. 42).

The Symbolic Meanings of Purple, Red, Green and White Colors

The path of Noor is tainted with colors and smudged by the hues of chaos, secrecy, creativity of individuals, security, material wealth, patience and passion simultaneously. In the opening lines of the book the words, "purple passed slowly" (p. 9) opens up new vistas of thoughts and imagination in the novel relating it to the magical realism. Thus, the semiotics of colors inaugurates the book till it is boomed onto some serious issues.

Red color collaborates with the feelings of passion, sex, revenge and anger. This revenge is perhaps being taken by the hands of colonialists from ecological objects, walls, buildings, and all parts of nature. This is the condition of the postmodern female. The reference may lead us to the misdemeanor against females in the patriarchal orders of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi society.

Green color is associated to self-reliance in a positive sense and possessiveness in a negative sense. It is also the epitome of nature and jealousy. Hussein fingers towards colorful green peas which are packed with web showing that the green motherland is occupied and controlled. It conveys the feeling of suffocation in various prospects of life as green is the color of life as well. On the other hand, this web is the web of colonial powers or foreign domination spun by the hands of enemies or internal struggling powers against the civil authority. Sajida recalls her childhood as being the shade of green landscapes. Green color, in semiotics, is the hue of self-reliance and possessiveness; the possessiveness of their character, lands, feelings, atmosphere all lush and fresh. Possessiveness is a negative feeling, and the word 'possessiveness' shows the nature of outer forces, that would come and grab all necessary objects of one's life in order to expand their territories and sooth their panting aspirations to gain more.

Khan has deliberately described the white color to show the feelings of purity that Noor wants to enjoy and it is the desirable feeling in the female strata. This color is highly argumentative signifying the completeness, protection, purity, innocence and all that is missing in Bangladesh and Pakistan in general and the whole world in particular. White color is essentially related to purity and completion, but, this purity is contaminated and the completion becomes half in a way that a woman gets no protection in her four walls. White color is the sign of innocence, which gets no place in the world of Noor. White pearl's buttons are jagged from her neck to the bottom, fashionably designed, showing the pretensions of purity and completeness in a woman's strata, which is entirely ironical in the face of fact. The girl's implacable white teeth look far larger than her mouth could afford highlights the repulsiveness of the texture of her body. Noor's meal-bowl was of white porcelain, meaning that her purity was just to be eaten and not safe at any rate.

The Symbolic Significance of Black, Grey and Blue Colors

Black color infers the meaning of hidden feelings, secrecy and mystery. The dampness of colors speaks louder rather than the glamour that would have been. This color represents the complexion of the characters and objects when the writer compares the ding of Nanijan's hair with Sajida's dark complexion. At first, she only compares but, later on, she withstands the view for a serious debate. When she was at school, she was called *Kohl-ki-larki* at which she would think of better burring herself in a mountain of coal and become their insult.

The black complexion has been used to show peripheries and marginalized people both socially and economically. The black color is predominantly persuasive in the whole texture of the novel which has been deliberately used by Khan to put a direct contrast to the title *Noor*. "Noor" means light, intuition, imaginary-land, a spacious pack of heavenly bliss, the image of God, but this happiness, the image of God etc. are entirely out of the horizon of the novel. The thoughts swelling in the mind of Noor lead a lay man in the world of chaos and turbulence. The black color is adhesively adjacent to racism found among all

societies. Putting the sense of blackness in the protagonist and the sufferer Noor, it overwhelmingly captures the idea of misbehavior of God, who is actually society in the postmodern times. Her character becomes derogatory in a sense that she is all black, as if bathed in coal. Even the sclera of her eye is entirely black, leaving no room for being in good looking at any all. "Sajida stared at the strange girl, her color was richly dark" (p. 10). The texture of her eye is velvet with spread big black eyes that aggravates the bleakness of her character. This bleakness is the interior of a female's soul as seen by the male chauvinistic society, this is the difference between the appearance and reality, as how a woman is and a how she is seen through the lens of a patriarchal society. The black color has not been shown by men in the whole novel but by men.

Grey color speaks about the hypocrisy prevailed in the society, because, grey color is neither closely black, nor essentially white rather ambivalent. So the idea of ambivalence throws the reader in the game of push and dodges as how women were hanging at the time. They were being treated and oscillated in their decision, whether about their marriages or any rituals. They were never allowed to take part in any of the decisive tasks of their personal or domestic lives.

Blue color is the color of peace, loyalty, integrity, but it has been compounded with the word, 'cold' meaning that the peace is congealed and the integrity is frozen, loyalty is dismembered and mutilated at the hands of so called rulers, and guards of nations in forms of wars, killings, mutilation of innocents, the prevailing disgusted emotions, grudge and cunningness, as described further, "The faucets were stained with age, the red for hot and blue for cold buried under gray sediment" (15). Noor leers towards her blue colored gift and thinks of it akin to the blue sky of Islamabad. Blue color is associated to peace, integrity and loyalty, the credentials which are missing in the society. However, blue is also the color of frigidity and conservativeness and these colors are associated with the personality of Hussain, who being conservative disregards Noor and disregards all her social prospectus which ought to have been enjoyed by Noor in the hands of her father. Now, the blue color is integral to complexity and intricacy, insomuch, it props the favor of Noor and goes against it. This intricacy of the color blue is apparent through the words, "Noor, simple as she might have been, was devoted to the vastness and complexities of colors" (Noor, p. 42). Noor becomes immune to the blue color for its vastness and depth, as associated to the sky and the ocean, both unfathomable. Noor cries to write on the blue crayons which are soon brought by Nani Jan. Noor's screams are paced into slow on finding the blue colors to paint. This is how the impact can be extracted that the power of speech and expression that Noor in particular and the whole female hierarchy in general wants, must be on a vast, unfathomable and deep canopy in order to pour out the deluge of their thoughts on a massive object. As Khan puts it, "Noor stopped immediately and began again to fill sheets of paper with single color, slowly and deliberately, without missing a spot" (42). First, Sajida is hypnotized by the selection of blue color by Noor and later on by the uneven shadings. The contrast

of shading and blue color shows the vicissitudes and ebbs of thoughts working in the cauldron of Noor and the hallucination of Sajida shows how much a woman is reluctant to go forward and work in the narrow belt of speech freedom.

Symbolic Importance of Orange, Yellow, Pink, Brown Colors

Orange is associated to social communication, optimism, and pessimism conveying the negative connotations. Nonetheless, the wall of the toilet is so repulsively described with derogating colors when the novelist exposes about its walls; dull, not white, a muted orange, full of cracks and starks. Besides, Sajida tries to shade herself in order to avoid the clumsy light of full yellow from the fair bright sun. It is remarkable that light always retards the psychologically sick and morbid persons. Moreover, Pink is a girlish color that shows softness of womanly nature, immaturity and silliness of the female creature, that is to say, she is unable to let her mind grow in the world of fools and constraints confines herself within the four walls. Sajida stitches Noor's dress of pink color, as pink color is the epitome of girlishness and immaturity; it means that girls are stitched in their immaturity eternally. It conveys the feeling of suffocation to be stitched in a pink colored costume. Noor's name is also associated with pink when Khan tells, "Noor's name was pink like her dress across the hard white frosting" (p. 39). It is the manifestation of how Noor was thrown into the swamp of immaturity where she was struggling more and more to save her identity.

Conclusion

The present research has delved into textual analysis of Sorayya Khan's *Noor* to explore the meanings of various colors used in the text. Khan has depicted the character's nature, feelings and responses through colors. The text portrays that each color is representative of some specific instinct/reaction. The 'red' color vividly depicts the feelings of passion and enthusiasm. On the other hand, Khan has used the black color depicting individual's dispositions relating to the mystery as well covert feelings. At one instance, Sajida's dark complexion is named as 'black coal' which alludes to the racist and derogatory remarks toward her. All such castigating statements in the text have not been put directly but represented through various colors. In this way, the author intends to highlight the social biasness and radicalization through colors. In the same vein, pink color is associated with the feminist feelings. It is worthy to note that the titles as well as the most influential characters in the text are females. Pink color represents the psyche and coquette behavior of the female characters. Blue color denotes the peaceful environment, progress and tranquility that are observed once the Bangladesh war of independence is over. Furthermore, gold color represents the feelings of aristocracy and sophistication. Hence, the colors in *Noor* have depicted the emotions of war, peace, massacre, rape, corruption and turbulence in an eloquent manner.

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