

Structural and Coherence Analysis Towards The Renunciation

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Abstract: While many researchers have paid attention to Rabindranath Tagore's poems, few have analyzed his short stories, still less on a specific story, like *The Renunciation*. The fiction critiques the caste system of Hinduism and portrays a unique female character. This paper proposes that structural and coherence analysis can assist in a better appreciation of the story. The disruption of the timeline emphasizes the importance of a series of events occurred in the past. Coherence relations within them are established and analyzed so that the caste system's role as the origin of perpetuating tragedy among Hindus is explicitly revealed. The blank in the timeline along with the nightingale which appears throughout the novel indicates the plight of women in Hindu society. Analyses in this paper provide argumentation for views proposed in previous studies, namely Tagore's firm stance against the caste system and his empathy for suffering women, from a new angle. It also demonstrates the feasibility of linguistic theories' appliance to the field of literary criticism.

Keywords: Tagore, *The Renunciation*, Coherence relation, Caste system, Female Aphasia.

1. Introduction

In 1913, as English translations of Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali poems won him the Nobel Laurel for Literature, he became the first non-Westerner to be awarded this prize [1]. Despite the household reputation as a lyric poet and a devotee of beauty, his excellence in providing a realistic picture of what he observed via other literary forms ought not to be overlooked [2]. Whilst only a few researchers have analyzed Tagore's short stories as a whole, still fewer have focused on a particular one, let alone as unknown as *The Renunciation*. Though not renowned, it is worth analyzing because it is not only representative of Tagore's criticism of the Hindu caste system but also portrays a female image that lacks actions of resistance, different from the usual ones created by him.

This paper hypothesizes that structural and coherence analysis based on Indrani Deb's English translation of *The Renunciation* can serve as auxiliary argumentation for existing points in Tagore's short stories and consequently fill in a gap in this field [3]. A key assumption is that analysis towards the text itself would lead us to a better understanding of it since discourse relations and complex structures are proven to affect the interpretation of utterances [4].

The paper proceeds as follows. In Sect. 2, a summary of the narrative is provided and former studies are reviewed. In Sect. 3, Tagore's criticism of the caste system of Hinduism in *The Renunciation* is proposed. To motivate this proposal, the paper examines its temporal structure to

extract the important part and deals with coherence relations within it. Coexisting Result and Parallel Relations are notice-worthy. Sect. 4 includes discussion about how and why a special female image is depicted. The function of a blank in the timeline and the setting of the nightingale are explored respectively. Finally, a conclusion is drawn in Sect. 5. Coherence relations mentioned in this paper are based on Kehler's definitions, which are listed in the footnotes [5].

2. Summary of the Narrative and Previous Studies

The Renunciation is set in a Bengali society where the caste system of Hinduism prevails -- people are rigidly stratified according to their caste: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra and the lowest group 'Dalit', and a couple from different castes is forbidden, otherwise the caste of the family would be tarnished by such 'unholy marriage'. The narrative features conflicts resulting from and resulting in the Hindu caste system. The key topic is whether the protagonist renounces his wife or caste.

The protagonist, Hemanta, was a Brahmin, while his wife, Kusum, was a Sudra who pretended to be a Brahmin. Another character is Pyarishankar (Shankar for short) who incited Kusum to forge her caste. He used to be a Brahmin until dumped from his caste by the community at the instigation of Hemanta's father Harihar. In a spirit of revenge, he brought about Hemanta's marriage to corrupt the caste of his sworn enemy's family. It ends with Hemanta's renunciation from his Brahmin caste.

Databases including ProQuest, Sage, Springer Link, Project MUSE and JSTOR are searched for previous studies on *the Renunciation* or Tagore's short fiction. No existing paper has been found discussing this narrative singly, while Tagore's short stories as a whole have been analyzed by several scholars in the last century. They either studied the literary works in combination with Tagore's personal experiences or simply provided rather subjective appreciation without much evidence. Their findings on the topic are also relatively general. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on a specific work of Tagore, *The Renunciation* in this paper, and pay more attention to the text itself. Theories of discourse relations may assist in the interpretation.

SDRT (Segmented Discourse Representation Theory) is used to fulfill the analyses, in which discourse structures are modeled into graphs made up of two types of semantic discourse units (DUs): elementary discourse units and complex discourse units [6,7,8,9]. An EDU is the most basic element as it often contains only 1 eventuality state or event [10]. A CDU consists of several EDUs or corresponds to many paragraphs or even pages of text. Coherence Relations appear as labels for edges between nodes representing DUs. Each edge may have more than one label [11].

3. Criticism of the Caste System of Hinduism

Choudhurinoticed Tagore's discontent with the Hindu society ridden by backward conventions [12]. Critics such as Thompson pointed out that born in a family closely related to the Brahmo Samaj, which is known for liberated humanism, Tagore accordingly deviated from the rigid caste regulations of the patriarchal Hindu religion in his life, as well as his works [13]. *The Renunciation* could be good proof as its major conflicts and events have countless ties with the caste system of Hinduism.

In this section, proposal is made to achieve a deeper understanding of Tagore's criticism of the rotten caste system. A global analysis of the temporal structure, as Hobbs and Violi have done to *Slyvie*, is developed to discover the author's emphasis [14]. It is thought to be helpful because both *Slyvie* and *The Renunciation* set the order of events differently from that of telling. The emphasized part is further examined in micro analysis by establishing its inner coherence relations.

3.1. Disruption of the Timeline

The main thread of *The Renunciation* happened in 5 days and is told in 4 parts, covering events that took place at 3 times. The corresponding relationship between them is illustrated in Table 1. The absolute timeline contains 5 days. Part 1 takes place in ‘*the first full-moon night of the month Phalgun*’. ‘*The night had not yet passed*’ in Part 2 so the plot progresses on the same day. Part 3 opens with ‘*As soon as the sleepless night had passed...*’, and thus occurred on the second day. Part 4 skipped to the fifth day as ‘*It was the fifth night after the new moon.*’ As for the narrative timeline, the story begins at Time 3, namely the present. Then, in Part 3, it traces back to Time 1 when ‘Hemanta was far at school in Calcutta’ and Time 2 when ‘Hemanta was of college-going age’. Finally, it turns back to Time 3 for an ending.

Table 1: The Relationship between 3 Times, 4 Parts and 5 Days

Absolute Timeline	Day 1		Day 2	Day 3-4	Day 5
Story Section	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3	...	Part 4
Narrative Timeline	----> Time 3 ---->			----> Time 3 ---->	
			Time 1 ----> Time 2		

Part 1	π_a	Kusum's Sudra caste was revealed.		Result		Violated Expectation	
Part 2	π_b	Hemanta should renounce Kusum.	π_a		π_b		π_d
Part 3	π_c	Hemanta's dialogue with Shankar				Explanation	
Part 4	π_d	Hemanta renounced his Brahmin caste.			π_c		

Figure 1: A Global Structure of the 4 Parts¹

The continuity of the narrative timeline is disrupted by flashbacks in Time 1 and 2 in Part 3. Putting behind Day 3 and 4 (to be discussed in Sect.4), the paper extracts one main DU from each part and draws a graph of the global structure as in Figure 1. As flashbacks in π_c explain how the troublesome situation in Time 3 came into existence, and thus the coherence relation between π_b and π_c is Explanation, a typical subordinating relation [7]. Subordination allows us to skip the subordinate parts and move on coordinately to hierarchically higher situated materials while graphing, yet it doesn't necessarily implicate a lower importance of the subordinate. If DU2 is subordinate to DU1, then the communicative goal of DU1 can't be reached before that of DU2. The processing of DU1 should give way to the subordinate DU2 [15].

With SDRT and the theory of subordinating DUs above, the disruption of the timeline has been converted into the Explanation Relation between π_b and π_c and can be viewed as a subordinate structure to call for a stop at Part 3, where readers may find out the radical origin of conflicts before they move to Part 4 and finish their reading. Tagore deliberately jumped out of the main timeline to stress the vital importance of Part 3. From another aspect, the amazingly great deal of the length devoted to Part 3, greater than Part 1, 2 and 4 altogether, also shows the emphasis Tagore laid on it, consistent with what we reached by means of linguistic theories.

¹ Result: Infer P from the assertion of S1 and Q from the assertion of S2, where normally $P \rightarrow Q$.

Explanation: Infer P from the assertion of S1 and Q from the assertion of S2, where normally $Q \rightarrow P$.

Violated Expectation: Infer P from the assertion of S1 and Q from the assertion of S2, where normally $P \rightarrow \neg Q$.

3.2. Karma of Hatred and Avenge in the Caste System

Given the importance of Part 3, micro analysis of it is worthwhile. As Hobbs stressed that our view of the world may be simplified by recognizing coherence relations, Part 3 is separated into more detailed DUs and a graph is accordingly drawn to demonstrate coherence relations within them in Figure 2 [16]. Events narrated in Part 3 can be categorized into π_e (The origin of Shankar's hatred against Harihar in Time 1) and π_f (Shankar's action of avenge in Time 2). Two non-conflicting relations hold between the two CDUs. The Result Relation is obvious to recognize, and the Parallel Relation can be established as both of them 'had their origin in the caste system and were carried out through the caste system'. To dig it even deeper, DUs subordinate to π_e and π_f are further analyzed. π_e holds an Elaboration Relation with each of π_1 , 2, 3 and 4, while π_f has likewise relation with π_1' , 2', 3' and 4'.

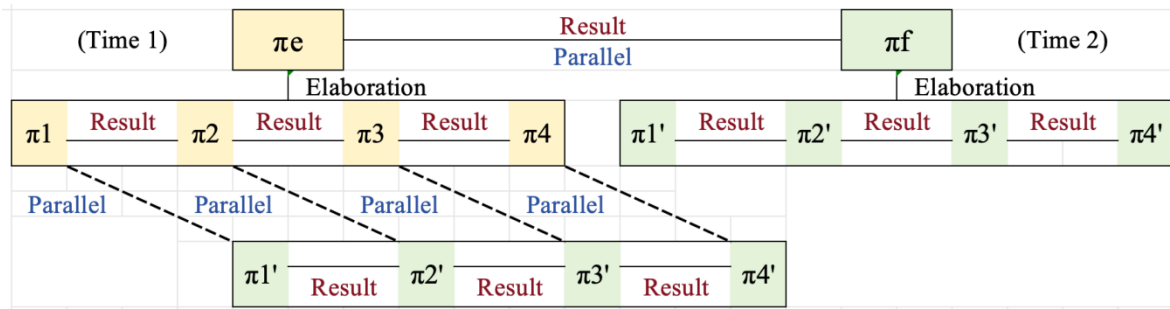


Figure 2: Result Relations and Parallel Relations within Part 3²

π_1 : Shankar's son-in-law was dumped from the Brahmin caste by Harihar.

π_2 : His marriage with Shankar's daughter became unholy.

π_3 : The caste of Shankar's family was tarnished.

π_4 : The marriage of Shankar's nephew became unholy and thus broken.

π_1' : Kusum was passed off as a Brahmin's daughter.

π_2' : Kusum and Hemanta formed an unholy marriage.

π_3' : The caste of Hemanta's family was tarnished.

π_4' : The marriage of Harihar's daughter would become unholy and thus broken.

Result Relation and Parallel Relation are found within these subordinate DUs. Result Relations can be easily perceived. As for argumentation of Parallel Relations, the shared properties are listed: $p_1(\pi_1-\pi_1')$: a person without Brahmin caste, $p_2(\pi_2-\pi_2')$: an unholy marriage of a Brahmin and a non-Brahmin, $p_3(\pi_3-\pi_3')$: the tarnish of a family's caste and $p_4(\pi_4-\pi_4')$: an unholy thus broken marriage.

Result Relations connect every subordinate DU in the graph closely to another. π_1 had a ripple effect on π_2 , 3 and 4. They altogether formed the origin of hatred which resulted in the action of avenge, where π_1' had a similar ripple effect on π_2' , 3' and 4'. We could accordingly imagine how Kusum's hatred would bring about a new round of avenge if she were actually renounced. In this case, hatred and avenge would move in cycles, which is surprisingly similar to the concept of Karma in Hinduism.

If we focus on the Parallel Relations, a radical common p' can be extracted from of p , p_1 , p_2 , p_3 and p_4 , which is 'the caste system of Hinduism'. Everyone involved fell victim to the caste system of

² Elaboration: Infer $p(a_1, a_2, \dots)$ from the assertions of S_1 and S_2 .

Result: Infer P from the assertion of S_1 and Q from the assertion of S_2 , where normally $P \rightarrow Q$.

Parallel: Infer $p(a_1, a_2, \dots)$ from the assertion of S_1 and $p(b_1, b_2, \dots)$ from the assertion of S_2 , for a common p and similar a_i and b_i .

Hinduism (see Figure 3), regardless of which caste they belonged to, and would be caught by the circulation of hatred and revenge like karma, which is ironically a generally acknowledged notion among Hindus.

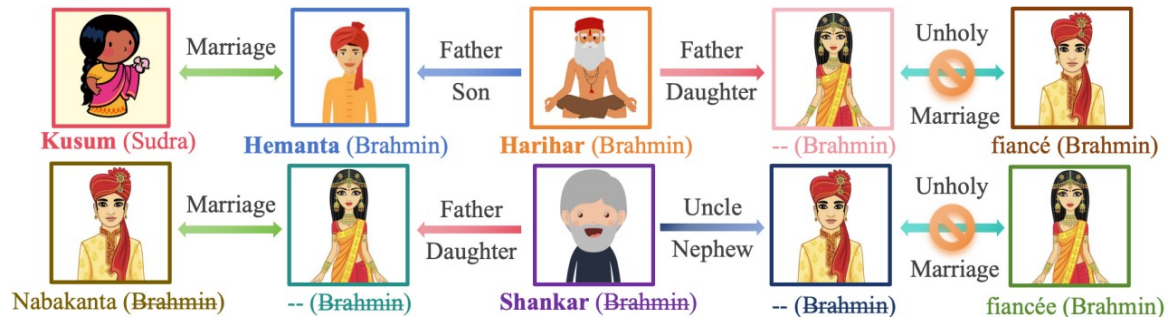


Figure 3: Victims of the Caste System of Hinduism

4. A different Image of Women

Suffering women had been at the centre of the canvas throughout Tagore's more than sixty years of literary activity [12]. Bose argued that he dealt with social evils which oppress women, e.g., arranged marriage, dowry customs and the ban on inter-caste love [17]. His female images are usually longing for literacy, which acts as a key to women's liberation [18]. They are usually endowed with more fascinating and livelier characteristics than those of men [12]. However, dissimilar to other female images, Kusum seems to have nothing to do with resistance or being educated. She remained passive from start to finish, waiting for men to determine her fate.

In this section, the paper explores Tagore's skills and motive in portraying a female character who is absent from half of the narration and seems to lack a sense of struggle. First, a two-day blank in the timeline is noticed. Then, the nightingale which runs through the fiction is discussed as it possibly reveals the psychology of Kusum.

4.1. Blank in the Timeline

Table 2: Blank in the Timeline

Timeline	Day 1		Day 2	Day 3-4	Day 5
Reader's perspective	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3-Dialogue between H&S	?	Part 4
Kusum's perspective			???		

Imaginative engagement facilitates readers' emotional participation in a fictional text [11]. When we look back on the absolute timeline, the continuity is destroyed as Day 3 and 4 are left out. This deliberate blank provokes an imaginative process, inspiring readers to fill in the gap by themselves. They may wonder how Hemanta came to the resolution to renounce his caste instead of his wife. Empathy with Kusum may arise when they recognize that the blank is even larger from Kusum's perspective (see Table 2). Unlike the readers, Kusum was not only confused in Day 3 and 4 but also ignorant of Hemanta's dialogue with Shankar in Part 3. Readers go through an emotional experience in which they feel how suffering Kusum had been when waiting for a judgment by her husband since Day 2 and consequently consider how powerless she was. Tagore used what remained unsaid with deftness to portray an image [17].

4.2. The Nightingale and Female Aphasia

Tagore addressed women's psychology rather expertly [17]. In addition to the man-made blank in narration, the singing nightingale which appeared throughout the fiction assists in depicting the heroine. The development of the nightingale corresponds with her experiences: Part 1 opens with '*The song of a sleepless, tireless nightingale filtered through the thick leaves...*' when Kusum newly got married and ends with '*The song of the nightingale floated in with the southern wind, but no one could hear it now.*' she failed to confess her real caste in advance. At the end of Part 2, '*The nightingale had not stopped singing...*' when Kusum confronted her husband's anger and answered his inquiry calmly. Throughout Part 3, she only appeared in the dialogue between two men. The absence of the nightingale echoes that of Kusum. At the end of Part 4, '*No bird was singing.*' when she was waiting in silence for her husband to pronounce the judgment.

The thread of this nightingale functions as the heroine's interior mood swings, bringing readers straight into her heart and discovering how much she suffered. Such an image as Kusum has significance in reflecting women's aphasia and revealing that the social situation, the backward caste system in particular, precipitates innumerable helpless women who are deprived of the ability to strive for themselves due to high-caste men's domination of home and community. Tagore, troubled by misery and injustice caused by the senseless customs of Hindu society, showed sympathy for the victims in his works [12]. While Kusum is kept in silence, the nightingale sings for her.

5. Conclusions

This paper aims to achieve a better understanding of the novel via structural and coherence relation analysis. From the disruption of the timeline, the emphasis on what happened in the past is discovered. Then, the paper traced back to discuss coherence relations within these events. Coexisting Result and Parallel Relations led us to the conclusion that all conflicts in the story originated in the caste system of Hinduism. The blank in the timeline and the nightingale revealed the intricate challenges and conundrums that women have historically faced within the context of Hindu society. Such tragedy as described will be perpetuated as long as people stay under the restraint of the backward caste system. The analysis proved beneficial for a better appreciation of *The Renunciation*. It provides an argumentation of Tagore's firm stand against the caste system and his sympathy for suffering women from aspects different from that of previous scholars.

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