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## Formalist reading of Moor's Last Sigh

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### Abstract

*This paper aims at analyzing the novel, Moor's Last Sigh, from the formalist perspective. It has been argued that meaning is expressed through the analysis of multi plot form of the novel. The duality of the plot can have multiple layers of meaning. The Formalist understanding would take the double layer character of Mr. Raman Fielding, usually called as Main duck, and his speeches which destroyed the secularity of a diverse country, India. His paradoxical speeches enflamed communal tension first in India's most populace multi-cultural and multi-religious city Bombay and later spread like fire to the whole country.*

Key Words: Formalism, Paradox, Irony, Metaphor, revolutionary, Communalism,

Metafiction, Post-colonialism, and post-modernism.

### Introduction

One of the first schools of thought of the twentieth century – Formalism took the relatively simple, though at the time quite revolutionary, position that what a work of literature is about – its content – is related to how to how it is put together – its form. One of the major schools of literary study in the twentieth century – Formalism – took the relatively simple, though at the time quite revolutionary, position that what a work of literature is about – its context – is related to how it is put together – its form. We could not fully know and grasp the meaning of *The Moor's Last Sigh*(1996) if we do not attend to the way it is constructed as a double plot in which the old Moor, Sultan Mohammad Boabdil of Spain, died in one plot while a



new one is born in the other. The form of the dual plot is required for the meaning of the novel to be fully enunciated. According to this Formalist approach – usually associated with American new critics – Form is an essential component of content.

Besides the general outline, there are multiple layers in the novel which form the basis of the Formalist understanding of the novel. The Formalist understanding would take the double layer character of Mr. Raman Fielding, usually called as Mainduck, and his speeches which doomed the secular fabric of a diverse country, India. His paradoxical speeches enflamed communal tension first in India's most populace multi-cultural and multi-religious city Bombay and later spread like fire to the whole country. The original Mainduck who spread the venom of communalism was a Bombay based cartoonist called Bal Thackeray, and later the founder of Shiv

Sena, a Hindu communal group. In *The Moor's Last sigh* there is the theme of hatred or communalism – where Main duck represents the agenda of hate and his followers are the representatives of communalism. This agenda led to bloodshed of the minorities. His words are flexible because he uses religion as a tag to polarize the mob for his own vested interests. Aurora Zogoiby is shocked to see the real face of Raman Fielding in the following, “What she had not foreseen was that Mainduck – now a full time communalist politician, one of the founder's of ‘Mumbai's Axis,’ the party of Hindu nationalists named after the mother – goddess of Bombay, which was growing rapidly in popularity among the poor – would return to the attack.”(MLS 208)

Regardless of whether we think form expresses content or content is an expression of form, all of us have probably been trained to read literature as formalists simply by



virtue of having learnt how to read literature at all in the first place. That is, we learn to read by attending to the way meaning inheres in the formal features of a text. How has Rushdie's use of postcolonial and postmodernist devices like magic realism, subversive hilarity, and metafiction argued the objectivity of history? In other words if the way a story is told determines what it is about, then a change in the mode or procedure of storytelling can open up new possibilities of content. Similarly Rushdie's description about the Moor of Spain opens up several resemblances with historical personages of Indian history. The formalist understanding of the novel can be also drawn from the Camoens's words wherein he says, "I have seen India's beauty in that crowd with its soda water – water and cucumber but with that God stuff I got scared. In the city we are for secular India but the village is for Ram." (MLS 56) The

motif of the religious pun "Village is for Ram", suggests two meanings, one hidden or implicit, the other explicit. Such linguistic duality is at the origin of the political crisis in the novel. The explicit meaning of the term is that the religious business, particularly Hinduism, is confined to the low walls of villages which cannot pose any threat to the heterogeneous, secular life of city. While as the implicit meaning refer to a serious and disastrous spread of communalism and Hinduism which will doom the bliss full and busy life of city into bloodshed and 'gundaraj', where the secular and minorities will have to, "us will have to lock doors." (MLS 56)

*The Moor's Last Sigh* incorporates different modes of speech through the narrator's adoption of a character's point of view, through embedded commentary on the fictional events, through the use of irony and parody. Arura's art is the perfect example of

the embedded depiction, “These ‘Portraits of Ayxa’ are ominous, lowering works...there recurred the twin themes of doubles, and of ghosts. A phantom – Ayxa haunted the garbaged Moor; and behind Ayxa/ Aurora, at times, hovered the faint translucent images of a woman and man. Their faces were left blank.”(MLS 304) The painting poses questions about the identity of the faces which were left blank by the artist. The ‘faint translucent images of woman’ might also be that of Uma, Moor’s love, who with the course of time ditches Moor. The less visibility of the image may also suggest that of moor’s mother Aurora who dies, leaving behind the heart broken son.

Literary language uses complex tropes and images such as metaphor, symbol, irony, and paradox to generate secondary meanings that cannot be rendered in simple, straightforward denotative speech. A formalist analysis of the character of

Moraes will reflect him as a metaphoric character. His birth, physical deformity, quick ageing, family, and love all have symbolic significance. He is a hybrid blend of Christian, Jewish, and possibly Arabic Muslim ancestry, he belongs to a demographically tiny minority. India is also a country where multicultural and multi-religious communities like Christian, Jewish and Muslim live together. His rapid growth is a metaphor for post independence, in terms of population and development, also in terms of the quick weakening of the secularism. India’s independence and growth

And the Moor-figure: alone now, motherless, [...] sank into immorality, and was shown as a creature of shadows, degraded in tableaux of debauchery and crime [losing], in these last pictures, his previous metaphorical role as a unifier of opposites, a standard- bearer of pluralism,

ceasing to stand as a symbol [...] of the new nation, and being transformed, instead, into a semi-allegorical figure of decay.(MLS 303)

#### Works cited

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