

Forced Signified of “Beard” in “I Am Malala”

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Abstract

This study has pointed out the use of word “beard” in the book “I Am Malala” by Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb. Theory of sign and signifier by Ferdinand de Saussure has been applied on the text for analysis. This topic is important as beard has been considered sacred and respectful in many religions of the world but it has been represented as a sign of stigma and terrorism when associated with the Muslims by the western media. Malala nourishes the same views and through the data analysis it has been investigated that beard has been used as a signifier of terror, horror and terrorism.

Key words: *Beard, sign, signifier, Ferdinand de Saussure, theory of sign, Malala’s book*

Introduction

Beard has always been a sign of greatness, strength and grandeur in the religious and ethnic importance. In history, we find many great men, kings, writers, hunters, philosophers, artists, politicians and Messengers of God with beard. It was an important sign of masculinity and strength for men at the start of civilization. It was an essential part of men’s personality belonging to any religion or locality.

Malala Yousafzai is a young Pakistani girl who lived in Swat, Pakistan. She became a sign of literary movement for girls when she appeared on the media for the first time with her diary. Later on she raised voice for girls’ education and was shot by the Taliban. She was saved from that shot in her head and was taken to the Britain for her treatment. There she recovered fully and gain international fame for being so young an activist.

After her recovery, she wrote a book “I Am Malala” with Christina Lamb. Its full title is “I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban”. This book is an autobiography of Malala. She has written the story of her getting shot by the Taliban and her escape.

In this study, the focus has been given on the use of word “beard” by Malala in her book. She has used it with different meanings. So through semiotic analysis and context these meanings have been found out that how she has used this word in her book. This shows her perspectives and philosophy of life as well as her loyalty with the religion.

Literature Review

“The literal definition refers to the hair which grows on the face naturally (i.e. the sides of the face and the chin)...The beard is a part of the male anatomy which beautifies, gives respectability and adorns the man.” (Allamah Murtada al-Baghdadi) Beard is considered

obligatory and holy in many religions of the world including Islam, Jewishism, Christianity, Sikhism, Hinduism, etc. Every religion has special respect for the beard.

In Islam the growing of beard is wajib (mandatory) for all the male people. But all the four scholars of Islam are of the view that shaving the beard is “Haram”. It is an act of disobedience to Allah and His Messenger who have expressed in clear words as in the words of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), “Closely trim the moustaches, and spare the beard.”[Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others]. And to obey the Holy Prophet is to obey Allah as the words of the Holy Quran are, “He who obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah; and as for those who turn away: We have not sent you as a guardian over them.” [An-Nisa 4:80](Al Jibaly M.)

Sikhism is one of the world’s major monotheistic faiths, dating from the late 15th and early 16th century CE (AD). (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010, pp. 3) Beard is a considered a sign of dignity, respect, virtue and obligation in the Sikh religion. All the male members of their nation have to fulfill this obligation. They cannot cut their beards throughout their lives. “All initiated Sikhs are required to wear their articles of faith, the turban and the Five Ks, at all times. These are physical articles of faith and most Amritdhari Sikhs believe that they cannot be replaced by symbolic replicas.” (ibid) Among these five Ks one is “Kesh: hair, which is regarded as a gift from God, kept uncut, and always covered.” (ibid)

Jews have faith in Torah and follow its teachings and cutting of the hair of beard are prohibited. There is “specific Torah prohibition” for the cutting of beard. This prohibition shows that there is special respect and place of beard in Jewish society. Therefore, all the methods for the cutting of beard are considered very ill. The cutting of beard is a sin in Jews “since the punishment for this sin is very terrible.”(Gross R. S. Y. pp. 15)“The sight of beard is reminder for the young to respect their elders. A white beard inspires repentance.” (Gross R. S. Y. pp.15)

Christians have faith in the Bible and the teachings of the Christ. They have two points of views regarding beard. According to the Old Testament, shaving is sin and it is obligatory to have beard for male members of the religion. And according to the New Testament, shaving is not a sin. But a man with a beard is considered a respectable and dignified person and is respected in the Christian society. (Sielaff D. 2007, pp. 4)

All the religions have specific place and respect for the beard. But it can be seen that after the incident of 9/11 only the beard of the Muslims is considered as a stigma. Beard has been associated with terrorism and has been represented as a sign of terrorism by the American and the Western media. In the book “I Am Malala” beard has been presented by the author through the lens of the west and America.

Methodology

The focus of this study is the use of word “Beard” in the book “I Am Malala”. This word is a sign and has been used in different contexts having different signifiers. The theory of sign by Ferdinand de Saussure has been used to get the meanings.

Ferdinand de Saussure is a Swiss linguist and is renowned as a founder of modern linguistics. He takes linguistic unit as having “double entity”. Saussure has used the terms sign, signifier and signified. Sign is the linguistic unit and it is composed of signifier and signified.

The signifier is the form or shape that the sign takes and the signified is the concept or idea that it keeps or represents. So sign is the outcome of the combination of signifier with the signified.

In this study this theory of sign and signifier has been applied to investigate different meanings associated with the word “beard”. Beard is a sign that has been used many a time in the book. It has been used in different contexts as different signifiers. Through analysis of these signs different signifiers have been pointed out. The word “beard” has been used by the author in the book for eighteen times. Those chunks from the text have been selected where this word is used.

Data Analysis

The word “beard” has been used for the first time on the page 10. Here she is describing a man who was waving the van to stop it. This man is depicted as “a young **bearded** man in light-colored clothes had stepped into the road and waved the van down”. Here beard is used as a sign to signify it as a person whose identity is ambiguous, probably a terrorist. So he got into the van after stopping it and for Malala. Later on he shot her and her friend Shazia. (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 10)

For the second time this sign has been used on page 23 of the book. The lines are, “For a while his Muslim identity seemed more important than anything else in his life. He began to sign himself ‘ZiauddinPanchpiri’ (the Panchpiri are a religious sect) and sprouted the first signs of a **beard**. It was, he says, a kind of brainwashing. He believes he might even have thought of becoming a suicide bomber had there been such a thing in those days.” Here in context it can be seen easily how this signifier is associated with the signified that represent terrorism, act of brainwashing and becoming of suicide bomber. (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 23)

Next this sign is used in the line, “*Baba* had grown soft and white-**bearded** in his old age and I loved going to visit him in the village.” Here the sign represents an old man with a white beard and it signifies respect and reverence. (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 34) “They were forcing men to grow **beards** as long as a lantern and women to wear burqas.” (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 38) Here this sign signifies enforcement of Islamic laws on the others. It is the presentation of a concept and signifier that the western media has about Islam and Islamic laws. As in the context she is complaining to her father about the cruel laws especially for the girls.

Next she moves further in her concepts and signification of this word and she gives details of their looks and outfits. “These were strange-looking men with long straggly hair and **beards** and camouflage vests over their shalwarkamiz, which they wore with the trousers well above the ankle.” (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 59) This is the stereotype image and sign of being the Taliban. And this signifier signifies the terrorism, suicidal bombing, shooting others to death and cruelty. The signification in this context remains strange as she attributes the beard to the persons who are strange-looking and the word camouflage adds to the real identity of the Taliban and their intentions.

She has described them as people who are savage and deprived of bath and barbers. Next she presents a character Fazallulah whom she thinks was wise in the beginning. “He said men should keep their **beards** but give up smoking and using the tobacco they liked to chew.”

(Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 59) Here it is presented as a signifier of religious obligation and purity. But she portrayed this character as a liar and corrupt Mullah when she said, “Fazlullah thundered, and if people didn’t stop they would again invite the wrath of God. Mullahs often misinterpret the Quran and Hadith when they teach them in our country as few people understand the original Arabic. Fazalullah exploited this ignorance.” (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 59)

She narrates the traits of this character more by pointing out his routines “The most popular part of his show came every evening when he would read out people’s names. He’d say, ‘Mr. So-and-so was smoking *chars* but has stopped because it’s sinful,’ or, ‘Mr. X has kept his **beard** and I congratulate him,’ or, ‘Mr. Y voluntarily closed down his CD shop.’ He told them they would have their reward in the hereafter.” (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 60) Here the signifier of beard in the conversation signifies the reward in the life hereafter.

For the eighth time this word is used spoken by Sufi Muhammad as “‘If someone can show any example in history where Islam allows a female madrasa, they can come and piss on my **beard**,’ he said.” Here she is narrating the incident where her father was trying to persuade this person that girls should get education and even teach in the schools. In this attempt this answer is presented by this Sufi. Here slang word is associated with beard. This signifier here signifies immoral and inappropriate use of this word in place of a challenge when the claim is at stake. (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 62)

She tells more about the deeds of the character “Fazalullah who closed beauty parlors and banned shaving so there was no work for barbers. My father, who only has a moustache, insisted he would not grow a **beard** for the Taliban.” (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 62) Here the signifier is signifying the forced implication to be adopted by the Taliban. So she presents her father who was also forced to grow beard. (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 62)

She moves further and narrates some more deeds of Fazalullah who has established a setup for his administration. She describes “**bearded** figures in turbans burning TVs and computers” in the markets. (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 66) It can be analyzed that she has specifically described ‘the bearded figures’ destroying and damaging the property of others. The signifier signifies the terror and destruction, sign of distortion for the society and individual property.

Malala also depicts “The Taliban targeted not only politicians, MPs and the police, but also people who were not observing purdah, wearing the wrong length of **beard** or the wrong kind of shalwarkamiz.” (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 69) Here this signifier signifies the cruelty of Taliban who targeted those persons who do not have the right length of beard according to them. Whenever this sign is associated with white, it signifies respect and dignity as she describes in this line, “The senior elder was a white-**bearded** man of seventy-four called Abdul Khan Khaliq who had been one of the Queen’s bodyguards when she had visited Swat to stay with our wali.” (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 72)

“In our case it happened to be a white-**bearded** militant called Sufi Mohammad.” (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 86) Here the context is peace treaty between Taliban and the people of Swat that has allowed the girls to go to school in fully covered veil. This sign is

associated with white but it presents here a mocking signified. This sign is used with the word 'militant' to signify the tendency of a bearded person with terrorism and militancy.

A scene is depicted by the author that she watched in the mobile. "It was a shocking scene. A teenage girl wearing a black burqa and red trousers was lying face down on the ground being flogged in broad daylight by a **bearded** man in a black turban." (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 87) A man is presented with a beard who was torturing a teenage girl. This sign is used as a signified of terror, horror and torture.

The author has narrated a story of Bin Laden's discovery as a man discovered through the X-ray vision 'a very tall **bearded** man, pacing round the compound'. (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 107) Here also the sign signifies terror and horror in the moment of crisis.

An incident of the firing on Zahid Khan by Taliban is narrated by Malala. "Zahid Khan was bleeding so much it was as if his white **beard** was bathed in red." (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 116) Beard signifies here reverence, respect and honor while the phrase 'bathed in red' signifies his reverence and piety subjected to death and punishment.

"On a kiosk was a poster of crazy-eyed men with **beards** and caps or turbans under big letters saying wanted terrorists. The picture at the top of a man with a black turban and **beard** was Fazalullah." (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 120) These lines are very important and present the signifiers that the author means to present. A poster is depicted with a picture of a man with turban and beard and that man is a wanted terrorist. So beard here is again a signifier of terror, terrorist and terrorism associated with the people most wanted.

Final use of this sign by the author is after her getting shot by the Taliban. She describes the different opinions by different newspapers. "All sorts of stories were made up, particularly in the Urdu press, such as one that claimed I had criticized the growing of **beards**." (Yousufzai M. & Lamb C. 2013, p. 132) The last usage of the word signifies Malala's concern over the accusation as she is depicted as the one who is against growing beards. The underlying meaning of the phrase was to shake her off the charge for getting so much critical of beards in general.

Conclusion

Beard is a sign of dignity and masculinity in all the societies of the world. A signified can be used as having different signifiers. The association of signified with the signifiers is different according to the contexts and situation in the different societies. So the sign 'beard' is used as having different signifiers. Malala has used it mostly as a signifier of terror, horror, terrorism and terrorist. It is associated with evil. Although beard is a sign of respect in all the religions as described before, yet in this book the Muslims having beard are presented as signifiers of terrorism and evil. This is misrepresentation of Islam and Islamic values attached with the sunnah of our Holy Prophet (PBUH) 'beard'. This representation by the author is one-sided and prejudiced. Islam is a religion of peace and it condemns killings of the innocent people and also suggests great punishments for such criminals. Only a minority of people have been involved in such activities having 'beards'. It is wrong to associate such signifiers to the respected and honored religious signs. So 'beard' should not be taken in such meanings as by the authors of this book, nor should such signified be stereotyped as she did almost.

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