

An Analysis of Metaphoric Symbol “Tree” in Myanmar Poem “Pyin Ma Ngote Toe” and Russian Poem “The White Birch”

Win Pa Pa Aung*

Abstract

This paper compares two poems each describing a “tree” which endured the strike of the war and revived again when an appropriate time came. Myanmar national poet Min Thu Won’s poem “Pyin Ma Ngote Toe” (the Old Stump) and Russian poet Alexandrovich Vasilyev’s poem (The White Birch) are selected for analysis and comparison as they are similar in a way that both were composed after World War II and, the miserable images of the war and the appearance of each tree before and after the war are perfectly described. The descriptive method is used to compare how the salient features of these two trees in the respective poems symbolize the hard time during the war and the revival of nature as they came about to life again. The students of Russian specialization can be expected to appreciate the aesthetic value of nature and life thereby being able to embrace the historic and cultural beauties of the two countries through their learning and enjoyment of such a genre of literature as poetry.

Key Words: tree, poet, poem, war, revival

Introduction

Myanmar national poet Min Thu Won was born in 1909. He attended University in June 1929. His earliest poems were published in College magazine in June, 1930. He got Bachelor Degree in Literature from Oxford University in 1939. In 1950 he was awarded the title “Wanna Kyaw Tin”. He composed many great poems. Among them, “Pyin Ma Ngote Toe” (The old tree stump) which was composed after World War II was a famous one. Russian poet Alexandrovich Vasilyev was born in 1911. He studied acting in Moscow in 1926. After doing different kinds of jobs, his interest was led to the composing of poems and became immersed in the creation of poems in 1931. His earliest poems appeared in Moscow Newspapers and Journals in 1931. Most of his poems were about native land and nature. His renowned poem “Белая Берёза” (The White Birch) was written after World War II.

Aim

A Russian and a Myanmar poem are compared in order to investigate the symbolic appearance of the ‘tree’, its reflection to the war in literature, to explore the themes through similar poetic devices and foregrounding to understand the poem and to know similarities between the two poems. The aim of the paper is to help the students of Russian specialization to enjoy and appreciate literature and cherish the cultures of the two countries and the literatures of the two languages thereby being able to create the poems of their own contributing to the welfare and prosperity of their country and their people.

Data and Method Used

Based on the poem, “Pyin Ma Ngote Toe” (The old tree stump) by Min Thu Wun, the subject in Russian poems was reached and the poem “Белая Берёза” (The White Birch) was

* Lecturer, Department of Russian, Yangon University of Foreign Languages

chosen. Both of them were analyzed in terms of their similarities, differences and values and attributes.

Research Questions

1. What is the significance of each of the two poems?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the two poems?
3. How does the teaching of poems to the students of Russian contribute to the effective learning of the language?

Literature Review

Min Thu Wun's poem "Pyin Ma Note Toe" (The old stump) was analysed and praised by several writers. Mg Khin Min (Da Nu Phyu) noted that the unpleasant rigid sounds "ဖု-ထစ် - ရွတ်-တွ" reflect the ugly appearance of the rough stump. The combination of the sounds "ကွေး-ဆွေး-ဖေး"၊ "ပါး-ကြား"၊ "မောက်-ခြောက်-ယောက်"၊ "ကြုံ-အုံ"၊ "ဖြစ်-တစ်"၊ "ခံ-လျံ" are also spectacular. When it tells about the good fortune of the tree, the pleasant sound "ကြွေ-ဝေ-လေ"၊ "တွင်-ဆင်-သင်" are used. It means that the context of the poem is well pictured by the suitable phonological pattern. Chit Naing (2012) mentioned that this poem tells a story not only about a tree but also about a nation which endured the tough time and revive again. He assumes that the way the poem is ended with the sentence "What a good man you are!" implies the citizens of Myanmar who were under suppress during the war, but never felt discouraged and tried their best to step forward to the bright future. This is obvious that the poet wants to encourage the heroic mind and bravery in Myanmar people.

Dr. Tilalar's note about this poem is that this poem tightly associates with great ideology and the concept of the poet. Annstar's note on "The White Birch" of Vasilyev is that the poem is aimed to encourage the love for native land and willingness to protect it. The poet wants to explain that the true peace is a result of serious hardworking and strong resistance. Odessitka defines that thematically, the poem is about how a tree suffers because of war, the defeat against the war, its situation after war and its victory. Metaphorically, the poem implies how the mother land was wounded, how it was saved and how the patriotism cultivates the peace in native land.

"Pyin Ma Ngote Toe" is about an old stump which transforms into a beautiful verdant tree. Pyin Ma is a species of Lagerstroemia native to tropical southern Asia. The terms "Pride of India" or "Queen Crape Myrtle" are used to name this tree. This tree can be found anywhere in Myanmar and it is beloved by Myanmar people. In the poem, the old Pyin Ma stump stands alone on the hillock. Its shape is uneven, bruised and wrinkled like a big old vulture. The hollow curved trunk is occupied with an old termite mound. There is a damaged helmet setting in the cracked ground of the hillock. That old stump evidenced the war, was attacked by the termite's colony, was cut by the knife, was dried by the sun and was blown by the win. However, it didn't surrender to all of these enemies. When the new spring comes, the new leaves appear and it forms a young appearance along with gentle breeze. The poet noted "What a noble man it is".

The birch tree is the national symbol of Russia. It can be seen anywhere in Russia and it is used as a theme in several art forms; proeses, poets and paintings. The poem "The White Birch" uses this birch tree as a main theme to represent whole native Russia and Russian people. The poem can be summarized as follows. The poet still remembers that the poor white birch was wounded with shattered pieces of bombs. The chilled juice was running like tear on

its crippled bark. The guns rumbled behind the forest, powdered smoke swirled. People defended the capital, saved a birch near Moscow. And early in the spring, white birch was again dressed up in new foliage, and she began to decorate the earth. From then on, he invariably says: “No more offense to native Russian birch”.

Findings and Overview

Before the Second World War the southern part of the University Avenue in Yangon was filled with beautiful gardens, yards with seasonal plants and flowers. After the war the poet was walking there and noticed the existence of an old stump, which was once ugly and leaveless, bearing new leaves and becoming alive. In the same sense “The White Birch” poem was composed to glorify Russian people’s hardship during war and their victory. Myanmar people assume the tree as their cultural value and attribute as trees provide the people with everything; the beauty, nature, food, shelter, clothes, tools and medicine. Traditionally it is believed there are spirits guarding the tree and it is inappropriate to disrespect a tree. Till now there are some rituals to worship and give offerings to the tree.

Russian people believe that “trees” are wiser than human. Tree is a symbol of wisdom in Russian culture. The nature of a tree: leaves falling, new leaves appearing, bearing fruits, new generation being born, perfectly pictures the “life”. To kill a tree is as sinful as to commit a murder.

The old stump’s bruises, wounds, wrinkles are compared with the land which suffered from the war. The shape of a smashed helmet in the split hillock reflects the cruelty of the war. The old termite’s mound in the old tree trunk is featuring as ruins of the nation. Withered leaves and new leaves symbolize the resurrection of nation which was once destroyed by the war.

In “the White Birch” poem the bitterness of the war was described with the phrase “tree juices falling like tears”. The miserable image of the war was painted by using the words “gun”, “smoke”. Scattered pieces of bomb shell on the bark are telling how the nation was suffering from the war. The new leaves reappearing in spring tell about the revival of the native land after war.

Myanmar national poet Min Thu Wun composed poems which portray strength of life. Among such poems, Pyin Ma Ngyot Toe is a well-known one. It was composed in 1949, and it was a poem which gave strength during the Independence Period. According to Takatho Win Mon, the poem Pyin Ma Ngyot Toe is a specifically well-known poem by Min Thu Wun. Man’s vigor, man’s courage and man’s ability are best described in the poem which is thus well-liked for that purpose. As regards the emergence of the poem, Takatho Win Mon said: “Myanmar was seriously wounded by the World War II. The University of Yangon also suffered the same attack. When the university was reopened after the War, Min Thu Wun came again to the university. Then, he witnessed the wounds of the war everywhere around the university. Pyin Ma Ngyot Toe was born out of the experience felt by Min Thu Wun when he arrived back at the university. When Min Thu Wun himself saw the Old Stump, he felt the same as Myanmar and her people who had suffered the bitterness of the war, and when he saw the Old Stump bearing new buds and leaves as spring entered, he wanted the people of Myanmar and Myanmar itself to revive struggling against vicissitudes of life without surrendering anything. The poet said: “Wow! What a great old stump! May our Myanmar enjoy the same situation as the tree does changing into new leaves for joy! May our nationals become good again from their bones broken, their ears being hard of hearing, and their eyes being blind! With this wish, I composed this poem Pyin Ma Ngyot Toe.”

In this way, Min Thu Wun's good-will he felt towards the country and the people becomes vivid.

He wished for the war-struck Myanmar to flourish again. It is learnt that his wish reflected the war-struck Old Stump, and the theme was thus well-suited. It portrays the fact that a soldier's helmet existed on the broken ground, the dried condition of the old stump struck by the war could be discerned, Myanmar became a war zone just after she had gained her independence. It was composed through the use of the old stump, the vulture, the crack in the ground, and the situation around the surroundings.

The poet composed the poem in four stanzas through the use of four-word structure in the same way as contemporary colleagues did. He applied 4-3-2 and 4-2 rhyme schemes. The 4-3-2 rhyme scheme conveys the state of continuity smoothing the sounds. This rhyme scheme displays the slow and steady situation in which the old stump would revive again with new leaves. In the same way, the poet's mother land of Myanmar would rise again sometime in the future as assisted by her people standing on their own feet together in unison. The 4-2 rhyme scheme represents the rapidness of the happenings. Likewise, the changing state from the war zone to prosperity would soon emerge in a quick manner. The rhythm of the poem is also found to be in line with the substance. In the poem, brief tones were mostly used in the first three stanzas. Therefore, the unpleasant appearance of the old stump suffering the hardships of the war becomes vivid. In the fourth stanza, moderate tones were used more than brief ones indicating the fact that a variety of difficulties were well overcome and victory was gained at last as supported by the smooth flow of sounds used in the stanza.

In the poem Pyin Ma Ngyot Toe, the old stump struck by the war signifies a variety of man's sufferings and difficulties, bitter experience of being struck by natural disasters and the attacks of the war. The state of the old stump bearing new fresh leaves as spring comes while putting up with the vicissitudes of life is like a good man becoming victorious against the vicissitudes of life. In the same way, all the people of the country of Myanmar were given encouragement, strength and vigor with the knowledge that if they could successfully put up with the vicissitudes of life like the old stump, they would one day enjoy the fruits of success and achievement like new fresh leaves. As regards the use of words, those relevant to the substance are found to have been used. In mentioning the state of the old stump facing a lot of hardships, such words as the vulture, loosened skin, and the ripened weakly oldness made the reader visualize the unpleasant, disappointing and discouraging state of the old stump. However, despite all the unpleasantness, the use of the expression that the youth-like appearance of the old stump seen in the breeze looked like a good man gave a feeling of vigor against loss but victory. This poem is one of the poems which are the most prominent and the most effective in giving strength of life to the reader. Relevancy to the substance, relevancy to the structure of the poem, use of symbols and imagery, and use of easy-to-understand and vigor-giving words and expressions are found to be used in the poem.

Conclusion

Both of these poems have the same historical background, which was based on the situation after World War II. The structure of these poems is similar in a way that firstly the poems are initiated with the description of the miserable state of the trees. And then the situation escalates quickly and the new transformation of the trees is introduced. Here, the "spring" plays the important role. When the spring comes, the new leaves reappear, which means the "hope" comes together with the "spring". It is also notable that both of the trees usually bear new leaves at the same season around March and April. The warm season is related

to the “Sun”. In both culture the „sun“ is a symbol of “new day”, “new life with lots of hope”. The appreciation on the native land is evident at the end of both poems. The “tree” in both of these poems not only symbolizes the native land which withstands the hardship during war and survive, but also metaphorically implies the life a person who suffer a lot from the strike of the bad fortune, yet endure it and try to revive no matter how hard it is. Based on the example of the “tree”, these two poems teach the readers about love of the native land, optimism during bad time, hope which can lead to the whole new life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to the Research Committee of YUFL, for the encouragement. I am also grateful to Dr Kyi Shwin, Rector, Yangon University of Foreign Languages, Dr Mi Mi Aung, Pro-rectors, and Dr. Myint Myint Maw (Professor and Head of Korean Department), Daw Soe Soe Yee (Associate Professor, Head of Russian Department), and all the teachers who gave support to me in writing this paper successfully.

REFERENCES

Myanmar Language

Chit Naing .(2012). *sa pe ye tha ni 2*. Retrieved April, 6, 2020, from <https://data.bitmyanmar.info>> PDF

Khin Min, Maung (Danubyu).(2011). *An Introction to Semantics*. Yangon; Seik Ku Cho Cho Press.

Wikipedia.(2019). Wikipedia : Min Thu Won Poem. Retrieved , April 5, 2020, from https://my.wikipedia.org/wiki/Min_Thu_Won

Russian Language

BUGAGA.RU (2013, Sep, 20). *Interesting facts about trees*. Retrieved April, 10, 2020, from <https://BUGAGA.RU>>. int..Интересны факты о деревьях

Sergey Vasiliev, Alexandrovich (1953). *white birch Retrieved*. April, 15, 2020, from www.Sovmusic.ru/Person.php?idperson=55