

DISCOURSE, TEXT, AND CONTENT ANALYSIS OF KHUSHWANT SINGH'S SHORT STORY "THE RIOT"

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Abstract

Keywords:

**Discourse,
Content,
Text,
Point of View,
Dialogues,
Cohesive Devices,
and Context.**

The present paper attempts to point out the role and significance of discourse, text, and content in a short story. It shows how discourse, text, and content mark the cohesiveness of the text and also become a powerful tool in the realization of the various motifs. Here, the efforts are made for both the presentation of matter and manner. Under discourse analysis, point of view, implications of direct and indirect speeches (dialogues) and their role in asserting power relations, reports, comments, attitude, tone, world view and the author's beliefs are taken into account so that transmitting of matter from author /implied author to the reader or implied reader can be better mapped out. Discourse is a very dynamic field having a juxtaposition of content and text in order that the conversation or the interaction can be analyzed to point out the relationship between author / implied author and reader/ implied reader, narrator and implied reader, narrator and character, character and character etc. As far as text is concerned, elements of cohesion at word, phrase, clause, sentence and paragraph levels are discussed in detail. It also includes the role of typography,

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linkers, patterns of nouns and pronouns, lexical cross references that mark the effectiveness of the text. At last, we have content including the elements of plot, setting, character and themes which are realized by understanding the use of language according to context. Thus, altogether, all these present the dynamics of mode and motive based on the various motifs which are dialectical in relationship and hence, their impact can be witnessed easily in the story.

Khushwant Singh being a postcolonial and postmodern writer, dealt with a number of themes which are concerned with his own as well as others' personal, social and political life experiences like the impact of British rule and the division of country into India and Pakistan. Apart from this, Khushwant Singh has artistically merged and presented the reality and illusion in a creative manner in his works. There are several motives which determine not only the motif but also the mode of the short stories. As Khushwant Singh was deeply moved by the riots of partition of India and Pakistan and its effect on the lives of people, he presented the same in his short story "The Riot".

In order to deal with the present short story "The Riot", we have chosen the three elements named discourse, text and content. At first, we have discourse which is a wide term dealing with several definitions and aspects. It deals with the ways in which a text creates a context. At the same time, It is also concerned with the language use in social context. Thus, discourse analysis is an indispensable part which combines in itself both content and text. It is also concerned with the "ideas and how they are articulated" (Flowerdew 1). Here the point of view plays a very vital role in the representation and expression of perspective both internal and external, attitudes, authorial/ non authorial voices, and mind style.

Just next to discourse, we have text which is considered to be a surface structure. It is a “series of sentences linked up to form a continuous and cohesive sequence” (Fowler 45). Here the structure of the sentences, tone, intonation, functional view of language, use of linkers, and cohesive device are taken into account. Apart from this, eye movement, brevity, deletion, typographical elements, rhythm, parallelism, repetition, contrast and logical relationship mark the textual continuity and thus determine the information structure with cohesiveness.

Next in list, we have content which includes plot, theme, character, and setting. Plot is considered an arrangement of actions, theme is the central idea, character is an individual participating in the action both actively and passively, and setting is the aura in which the plot, theme, and character develop.

Now, let's see how the various elements of discourse, text, and content bring out the effectiveness of Khushwant Singh's short story “The Riot”.

Considering the point of view in the short story, it is found that the short story is written in the third point of view where the unnamed/ unrevealed narrator is presented as a partial omniscient who knows each and every character and incident only on the surface level. The story begins with the external perspective. Here the time is presented by using the “spring twilight” (Singh 49). The unnamed narrator remains distanced and does not give any internal view of any event. So, the view point is mostly external where the narrator only comments or describes the things and it is hardly two times such as “Rani fancy lightly turned to thoughts of Moti” and “She (Rani) was disappointed” when the unnamed narrator has used internal point of view (Singh 50). The present short story is marked by the absence of verbs like “feel”, “seem” which help the narrator to present comment/ judgement directly to the character. The same is reinforced by not using the adverbs “probably”, “hardly” etc. Thus, Khushwant Singh is seen as a distanced objective author presenting only the surface view of the events and the characters in the short story.

If we talk about dialogue, Khushwant Singh has not presented even a single dialogue in the present short story. All are statements, comments, descriptions, and reports. Speech part is not

present here. And this lacking of speech indicates that Khushwant Singh has not given any voice to his characters including the narrator. Thus the author is attached with the narrator in the story. What the author knows is also known to the narrator and hence the author takes full control over the information. Without presenting his feelings and thoughts, the narrator/ the implied author achieves the status of objective narrator.

When we look at the attitude of the discourse, we can find that the narrator remains objective throughout the story. He has presented the spring season with a situation of the turmoil riot which is indicated by the barring of house doors, “deserted roads”, closed shops etc. His attitude towards human nature is gloomy and that’s the reason that Khushwant Singh has made a protagonist of the story a “pariah bitch” who is unaffected by the physical turmoil of the riot and also creates a link with other characters of the short story. Instead of presenting the distinct time, Khushwant Singh has presented the season for the representation of time in the short story. From the discourse of the story, it can be inferred that the riot related to the two communities- Hindus and Muslims occurred due to the partition between India and Pakistan. So far as the place is concerned, it is “The town” near by the boarder of Pakistan in Punjab. The author has also presented through the communal riots a kind of hatred among Hindus and Muslims for each other. It is also shown that the love in such crucial hours can be survived at other level which is represented by the love between Rani and Moti. These are the spring season, the place and the situation which merge the two subplots of the story; one is the story of pariah bitch Rani and Moti; the other is the story of Ramzan and Ram Jawaya and at the end both plots are submerged together to bring out the effect of oneness.

Text is considered a larger body and its feature/ quality is chiefly marked by its cohesiveness, which in turn is achieved by various means such as pronouns, pro, linkers etc., as seen in the title of the short story “The Riot” and its association with “the town” and “spring season”. In the story, “Some dogs” becomes “the dogs”, use of “and” connector, use of personal pronoun “her” for “Rani” , and use of “they” for dogs marks the cohesiveness of the text. Use of adverbial phrase / words such as “this time”, “Tonight”, “a little later”, “At last”, “All night and the next day”, “for several days”, “Some months later” etc. mark the time sequence and thus add cohesiveness to the different paragraphs of the text.

Dealing with lexis, we find that the author has used the definite article “the” to suggest the incident already known to the readers. This supposed knowledge/ understanding is marked by the use of lexis such as “the Riot”, and “The fresh Spring twilight”. We also have examples where Rani and the town are given human like qualities as “Rani’s fancy”, and “The town was paralysed”. Use of untranslated word “charpoy” for bed and the use of “goondas” mark the Indianness in the short story. Use of adjective “petrified” with the word “town” makes it livelier under the influence of extended metaphor of “riot”. Next lexical innovation is used in the collocation “rain of suiters” where a comparison is made between rain and the abundance for huge number of dogs running after Rani for her love mate. Though Rani is presented a bitch, yet she is attributed all human like qualities such as she is represented as “unfaithful mistress” raising Rani to the level of humans. This idea is further reinforced by the use of “illicit liason” which marks Rani’s amoral sexual act with someone else.

Apart from this, we have lexis related to the caste and religion as “Rani” is addressed as a “Pariah” bitch. Proper nouns such as “Ramzan” represent Muslim community and “Ram Jawaya” represents Hindu community. Next we have “charpoy” for “cot” indicating Indian household bed. Also it is “Rani” who plays a vital role in combining the two sub-plots together towards the end of the story when Ramzan who after following Moti comes into contact with Ram Jawaya and the tension grows when Ram Jawaya throws a stone at the dogs which accidentally hits Ramzan and hence results into a turmoil incident turning home and shops into ashes.

When we look at the syntactic part, we find that approximately all the sentences are brief which result into adding pace to the reading of the short story. The use of alliteration in the nouns “Ram”, “Ramzan”, “Rani” add musical/ rhythmical quality to the text. The repetition of the lexis such as “spring”, “autumn”, “Rani”, “Moti”, “riots”, “Ram Jawaya”, “Ramzan”, and the repetitive use of personal pronouns maintain the tension throughout the short story. When we look at the parallel sentence structure, we find that approximately all the sentences follow simple past tense in active voice except few sentences being in past continuous and past perfect tense. Passive voice of simple past tense is repeated seven times when there is a talk about town, people

and peace. Activeness is given to all the central characters of the story which also add cohesiveness to the text.

Next we have content part of the short story, which includes the elements plot, theme, character, and setting. Let's begin with plot which is considered an arrangement of actions/ events/ incidents. In the present short story, "The Riot", we have well-knit structure. There is a systematic development of the thought structure. Like all other stories of Khushwant Singh, the present short story also has three parts beginning, middle, and end. In the beginning, we are given the introductory details regarding time, place, and situation. Here the characters such as "Rani", "Moti", "Ram Jawaya", and Ramzan" are introduced. "Rani" plays a vital role in bringing together all the characters of the short story. As shown at the beginning of the story, she is introduced as a street pariah bitch fed up by the shopkeeper "Ram Jawaya" and a beloved of Moti who is mastered by the Muslim greengrocer, "Ramzan". Thus, the beginning is fully developed presenting setting, characters, and the context of the short story. Beginning is followed by the middle where the conflict hinted in the beginning of the short story comes into the scene as "in the spring time, the town was paralyzed with fear of communal riots and curfews" (Singh 50). At the time of riots, Ramzan keeps Moti inside the house and ties him to a cot for safety purpose. In the following way, Rani comes to find Moti and becomes disappointed after not finding him. But when Moti sniffs Rani, he becomes restless and rushes out of the house followed by Ramzan. When Moti finally gets the chance to meet Rani in the street of the Hindu shopkeeper Ram Jawaya, both Ramzan and Ram Jawaya come into contact which somehow takes us to the climax of the story. Towards the end of the story, the climax results into the denouement in which the clash between Hindu and Muslim communities is intensified by the unintentional enmity between Ram Jawaya and Ramzan. This enmity finally ends with the killing of people and burning of houses in which Ram Jawaya's house is burned and turned into ashes. So, the story ends with the main protagonist Rani and Moti who remain united even at the crucial hour of crises. Thus, the story moves on two levels- the sub human level and the communal level dealing with the love of Rani and Moti, and the hatred of Ram Jawaya and Ramzan respectively.

Considering the characters of the short story, we have Rani and Moti, two main characters of the story. Rani, who is a pariah bitch and unaware of its social, and regional boundaries, moves from one place to another without any care and fear even at the turmoil hour of riots. She is presented as a lively and active character with thoughts and emotions like human beings. She is described as a “thin, scraggy specimen, typical of the pariahs of the town” (Singh 49). She is also given the status above the human characters of Ram Jawaya and Ramzan who remain static or flat throughout the story. Being a round character, Rani’s character is developed throughout the story. Rani is fed by the Hindu shopkeeper Ram Jawaya and she meets and consumes love with Moti in autumn and litters in the spring. But when she does not find Moti, she finds another pariah suitor and consummates love with him, who is later hindered by Moti followed by his winning of her favor and finally remains with her towards the end of the riots.

The next important character that we have is Moti who is “cross between a Newfoundland and Spaniel” (49). He is tamed by the Muslim greengrocer, Ramzan. Moti is lover of Rani and plays an active role along with Rani in the development of the story. Moti like Rani is a round character who acts as a cross link between the two sub-plots of the short story. When he is restive at his place at Ramzan’s house, he hears the snarling of other dogs that go after Rani. Then he starts snoring which makes Ramzan tie him with the cot and later on with a ravage effort, he leaps across the road. He is presented as a powerful and dominating figure. When he finds Rani eloping with a black pariah dog, he leaps at him and wins. Towards the end of the story, he is shown accompanying Rani and guarding his broodings after the riots.

Ram Jawaya is a Hindu shopkeeper. He is shown having hatred for Muslims during riots. He is shown as a restless person who spends his nights “keeping watch and yelling back war cries to the Muslims” (51). He always keeps “heap of stone under his charpoy and imposing array of soda water bottles filled with acid close at hand” (51). He spends sleepless night and one day when he finds Moti’s snarling and howling of other dogs, he wakes up, picks up a stone and throws at the dogs which later hits Ramzan which intensifies tension and gives birth to the riots. Ramzan, like Ram Jawaya is a flat and subordinate character in the story. He is a green grocer and the master of Moti. In order to give him a Muslim look, Ramzan has “lopped off Moti’s tail and ears” (48). He feeds Moti till he grows big and strong. Ramzan is a representative of

Muslim community and it is only Ramzan who is given a direct speech as “Murder” by the author which makes him an agent of the following riot.

Coming to the thematic part, we can say that the riot is central theme of the short story which can be witnessed from the very title of the story. The opening scene denotes the impact of riots by the closing of the shops, barring of the house doors and the emptiness of the streets occupied only by the policemen and the street dogs. Riot’s impact can be clearly observed not only in the lives of two human characters: Ram Jawaya and Ramzan but also those of the major characters Rani and Moti. It is due to the riots that Rani becomes disappointed after not finding Moti at his place as he is kept inside by his master, Ramzan. She also gets ready to elope with another black pariah dog. Moti also becomes restless when his master ties him with the cot as a guard from the riots going on outside. It is also seen that even a small sparkle intensifies the fire of the communal riots. Apart from this, hope of love at the intense hour of riots is also represented in the short story through the love of Rani and Moti who remain united and unaffected till the end of the story. Thus fear, companionship, love, anger, and hatred are major concerns of the short story.

Coming to the setting, we can identify time, place, environment both internal and external, and the context of the short story. Here, the present short story is set in the spring season. The place which is presented in the story is occupied by the three different communities “Hindu, Sikh, and Muslims”. The situation is intense as there is no one in the streets except the policemen and the street dogs. All the shops are closed and the house doors are barred from the inside. The people are restless and sleepless in the present moment of riots. They are also ready to answer back when there is going to be a call for the riots. Here, Ramzan represents the entire Muslim community and Ram Jawaya represents the entire Hindu community. Even a small chance meeting between the two communities becomes a cause of riots resulting into the burning of the houses everywhere. At the subhuman level, the hope of restoring harmony between Hindu and Muslim communities is shown by the love of Rani and Moti who cross their communal and regional boundaries for each other to restore connection between the two communities. And at last, it is only the love between Rani and Moti that survives.

Apart from discourse, content and text, the impact of the title can be equally seen in each and every part of the short story. The use of definite article “the” in the title “The Riot” marks the specific incident occurred at a particular point of time with specific significance or is known to all. The title has become an extended metaphor whose impact can be sensed everywhere in the short story. In the beginning, we are given the physical impact of the riot, in the middle, we are introduced to Rani and Moti whose love is affected by the riot which later results in the chance meeting of Ram Jawaya and Ramzan. All this intensifies the tension and gives the story its crises part. In the end, the riot results in the burning and falling of the houses, and the killing of the people.

Thus, we can say the present short story, having a well cohesive structure, presents the various discourse elements effectively by using third person point of view with external and objective quality in order to bring the main tension or the conflict into light. Authorial voice is also marked by the use of only the reports, comments and descriptions. At few places, direct speeches and indirect thoughts are employed by the author making himself distanced. The text of the short story is well structured having short sentences by making use of definite article, anaphora, personal pronouns, linkers etc. It is also marked by the lexical innovation marked by the use of untranslated vocabulary. Collocations, transferred epithet, and personifications have also been used equally. At last, various aspects of discourse and textual elements result in the strengthening of content part by interacting with the themes, characters, plot, and setting of the short story.

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