

Theory into Practice: Narrative Analysis of the Short Story “Municipality and Stray Dogs”

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Abstract

The intention, this study was launched with, was to apply two narrative structure models of Roland Barthes and A. J. Griemas on a short story. For that purpose, the short story titled ‘Municipality and stray dogs’ was selected, which is written by well-known Sindhi short story writer, Khairu-un-nisa Jaffery. The paper finds the models and its implications to the fiction. In this context, through this paper, first of all Roland Barthes’s five codes were analysed and applied on the story, next the model propounded by A. J. Griemas was applied to the story and finally conclusion was given..

Introduction

Narrative has its origin with human existence in the world. When man started to utter something and convey some ideas to others the narrative started taking place. Since, in all the ages and everywhere the narrative has existed in one or other way until the human being reached at the age of literacy i.e. reading and writing. Therefore, it can be said that narrative is an integral part of human communication of experiences.

Up to this age, the narrative art has developed significantly in the form of stories, poetry, novels and in different forms and structures. These forms of narrative have been critically read, understood and interpreted in the field of narratology.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to find the narrative components in the short story ‘Municipality and stray dogs’ written by well-known Sindhi short story writer Khair-un-nisa Jaffery. She is counted as the pioneer Sindhi women writer. She started writing when there were too discouraging elements in the society for women. She is also well-

known feminist writer of Sindhi Language. The short story selected here for narrative analysis was published in the book of selected Pakistani literature by Academy of Letters, Islamabad, Pakistan. The story is translation from Jaffery's Sindhi, the story is basically written in Sindhi. And this analysis is of English version, thus there might be chances of lapsing some cultural codes as translator might have converted cultural elements/words into English words.

The short story is narrated in first person narrator and the narrator explicitly brings herself out to the reader like addressor. However, the aim of narrator is to point the cruel action of the town administration and genocide of the pet and friendly animal dogs.

In this short paper, it is tried to go through the narrative structural models of Roland Barthes and A. J. Griemas. It was tried best to find the implications of the models and application on the short story.

Narratology is the study of narrative structure which examines the components of the language working in the narrative. In it the significantly, the study of the structure of the narrative is carried out. The word *Narrative* is defined in Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary as "(a) a spoken or written accounts of events; a story" and "(b) the telling of a story". (Crowther, 1998). From this definition it can be said that narrative is description of the occurrences in the story and the way it is put into the picture. From this perspective, it can be said that narrative is not only the way of description of the happenings but also the form of structuring those episodes into a format.

Furthermore, above argument is additionally supported by Prince (1982) as, "Narratology is the study of the form and functioning of narrative". In his opinion narratology is the study of outward appearance of the literary or piece of fiction and carrying out of the events in a well thought-out way. In addition to that, Prince opines that even it can be held that the term is new but the discipline is not new and he connects it to the Greek studies of Plato and Aristotle. Moreover, this field developed in twentieth century in the Western traditions. Narratological analysis of the different narratives has attracted multitude of thinkers, linguists and philosophers of different fields of studies, like philosophers, psychologists, psychoanalysts, Biblicists, semioticians, folklorists, anthropologists, and

communication theorists. These studies foreground in different countries and in various fields of specialties.

While speaking about the narratology and its application to the fiction or narrative discourse, several interpretations emerge out. "In the field of narrative discourse, we endeavour to identify the common, near universal principles of text composition" (Guillemette). According to Guillemette, in the narratological study we try to find the principles of texts and its composition, in which the piece of fiction or narrative is woven. The weaving of stories is unfolded and its various links are analysed and interpreted. There can be various models on narrative structure and narrative analysis that can be studied vastly. Among those studies the models of structuralist and then post-structuralist Roland Barthes is very immanent and the narratologist Algirdas Griemas is also significant one.

With reference to Barthesian reading of the narrative structure of the fiction by five codes defined by Felluga i.e. Hermeneutic Code (HER.), Proairetic Code (ACT.), Semantic Code (SEM.), Symbolic Code (SYM.), and Cultural Code (REF.), the story can be analyzed syntagmatically, finding chronological and sequential order in the events of the story and paradigmatically, reversible descriptions. The five codes are briefly defined here.

1. The Hermeneutic Code (HER.) this code of Barthes refers to any element in the story that is not explained and not given sufficient account to the readers. Thus, such elements remain enigma and need explication and interpretation to the end of the story unless its loose ends are tied. These elements are in Barthes's terms 'snares' (Deliberate evasions of then truth), 'equivocations' (mixtures of truth and snare), 'partial answers', 'suspended answers' and 'jammings' (acknowledgments of insolubility). (Ibid).
2. The Proairetic Code (ACT.) this code is termed as the second important principle of the textual narrative structure which creates interest and suspense on the part of the reader. The proairetic code implies to any action on the story that leads to another action imminent action in the story.

These first two codes are termed as the sequential and temporal codes which are syntagmatic. Furthermore, according to Barthes the readerly text is dependent on the first two sequential codes. And the rest of the codes are free of temporal constraints and thus can be studied paradigmatically in the narrative.

3. The Semantic Code (SEM.) this third code is termed as the element in the text which gives the connotative meaning in the text. In this code the lexia are taken into consideration to which the individual lexia are giving connotations. Barthes applied this lexia on the story "Sarrasine" in which the word/name is giving connotative sense of femininity as compared to the "Sarrazin" that gives the meaning of masculinity.
4. The Symbolic Code (SYM.) this code is difficult to distinguish from the semantic code as both overlap each other. "Barthes is not always clear on the distinction between these two codes" (Felluga). However, this code is termed as the elements containing antithetical elements and concepts as Barthes writes, "Every joining of two antithetical terms, every mixture, every conciliation—in short, every passage through the wall of the Antithesis—thus constitutes a transgression" (Miller, 1974).
5. The Cultural Code (REF.) this code refers to any element or sign in the story/narrative that pass on 'to a science or a body of knowledge'. This is defined as the body of knowledge that is shared by the society and refers to 'physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc.' "The 'gnomic' code is one of the cultural codes and refers to those cultural codes that are tied to clichés, proverbs, or popular sayings of various sorts" (Felluga).

In Barthes terms these five codes work like "weaving of voices". These codes not only show the narrative structure but also depict the constellation of the meaning in it for the reader. These codes are widely applied on the narrative fictions and interpreted accordingly (Onega & Ianda, 1996; Kenan, 2002; Prince, 1985 & Allen 2003).

On the other hand, the model of Algirdas Greimas is taking other structural way of narrative analysis. He is less interested in the Hermeneutic and Proairetic codes defined by Roland Barthes.

Algirdas Greimas seeks in his writing to find the "deep structure" of all narrativity. As a result, he is less interested in what Roland Barthes terms the proairetic and hermeneutic codes than he is in the formal elements in a narrative that create implicit (if not always consciously recognized) oppositions (Felluga).

Like structuralists he sees the deep structures of the narrative and analysis according to that structure. His influences on the structuralists include Vladimir Propp's exploration of the deep structure of folklore, Claude Lévi-Strauss's work on the structure of myth and others. Greimas in his narrative analysis is interested in observing the definite illustration of narrativity speaks about the larger text for meaning making (or semiosis). From that, an example can be taken from Propp's actor and actants. Moreover, he is interested to see the deep structure of the subject-object, sender-receiver, and helper-opponent components of the text in the piece fiction. (Kenan, 2002).

Apart of that Greimas's model consists of the four major ways of sense making or reference works, which are confirmed by many theorists according to their own ways. Felluga in his account of Greimas model's application on the sentence 'The road is clear' is given as follow;

1. Extra-referentiality: referring outside of the text to a material reality, even if only an imagined one.
2. Self-referentiality: referring internally to the the oppositions and structures created by any given work.
3. Inter-referentiality: referring to the dialogic context of the speaking individuals and their intentions.
4. Supra-referentiality: referring to a transcendent principle that grounds our faith in the production of meaning.

These four forms of referentiality are multifaceted perspectives of looking at the elements of the text in which reader through his/her deep/underlying structures encounters. In the four references, the first one is concerned with the concepts of looking outside the field and in wider context of the material reality. While, the second referentiality

defines that all the elements contain the self-oppositional structure and underlying negations. Whereas, the third reference is concerned with its dialogic concept of the elements and concepts in which things are not observed in isolation or in individuality but in series of developments of ideas. And finally, supra-referentiality is concerned with the idea of transcendent meaning and faith on the meaning.

Discussion

Introduction of the Story Writer and the Story

The short story selected for narratological analysis is written by Khair-un-nisa Jaffery, a well known Sindhi short story writer. Arif & Khan (2005) give her brief introduction as, "Jaffery (1947-1998) wrote short stories and travelogues. Her collected works have been published as *Moonjho takhleeqi safar* (My creative journey)" (pp. 192).

The short story 'the municipality and the stray dogs' (Jaffery, 2005) is a brief account of the plight of animal dogs and their treatment by the municipal administration. The story is depiction of the bitch, the female dog, and her 8 puppies. In the story the sympathetic tone is shown to the off springs of the dogs for they are also inhumanly treated and poisoned by the municipality without taking pity on the mother of the off springs and their lives. During the course of poisoning the mother is surviving the effect of the poison but that poison enters into the veins of the bitch and mixes with milk that is sucked by the puppies and ultimately all the eight die in front of her.

The story can be seen in two parallel ways of presentation. Firstly, there is account of the narrator who observes all this phenomena and describes the event in the first person narrator technique. Secondly, the account of the mother dog and her eight puppies in different times and different activities is described by the same narrator.

The Five Codes of Roland Barthes

The Hermeneutic Code (HER)

In the story 'Municipality and the Stray Dogs', the title, municipality itself is an enigma. The word 'municipality' is not defined in any way

that what kind of it is, where is it and to which type of administration is it. Moreover, the stray dogs are probably enigmatic elements because until last what happens to them the idea is not clear. The opening of the story is full of enigmatic elements as

It was not so very long when our city was overflowing with stray dogs. Every street you went into, you would find at least four dogs obstructing your path.

In this passage the reader comes across the elements like *long, our city, every street, four dogs...* which in one or other way require some explanations that how long ago, which city and whose city, street, why four dogs and so on. Similarly, some elements are found in forthcoming paragraphs of the story like '*when the majority of people, due to this affection, end up in the civil hospital*'. Likewise, the elements like *affection* and *civil hospital* create some enigmatic sense in the readers. Moreover, the terms like in fourth paragraph '*dog season*', in sixth paragraph '*father*' and in ninth paragraph '*that Friday morning*' create the sense of enigma or unresolved answers of the full understanding.

The Proiaretic Code (ACT.)

The story under analysis is mostly rhetoric of usual happenings that have little say in the plot but just to provide foregrounding for the story. However, it is later part of the story when there is actual plot-knit statement including the action is described as;

Although they spared the puppies, they took no mercy on the mother and they poisoned her.

From here the actual suspense of the story begins until the last when resolution comes up. Next proiaretic code is as '*it tore my heart to see the mother writhing with pain because of the pain*'. In this context, the readers come to understand that something is going to happen to the mother. This tense situation is for a moment released by the description that after that writhing of the mother no damage happened, '*but surprisingly both the children and their mother were looking quite well*'. This course also continues to show this blinking of happening and un-happening like in the next episode, '*again I found*

the puppies playing affectionately with their mother. She however was moaning'. Here once again readers start thinking that something is going to happen to the mother until reader reaches to the resolution, *'the next morning, dreading to see the inevitable, I reached the street. Incredibly, the mother was alive but then I noticed eight dead puppies scattered around her*'. From this final description the result can be had that poisoned milk showed its effects on the puppies because their mother survived the poison and was alive. In the story, although, there is little account of this code yet it is effectually included to show thesis, antithesis and synthesis of the events and occurrences.

In short it can be said that there are actions which are creating suspense for readers to resolution are,

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (a) <i>They started feeding</i> | (b) <i>and poisoned her</i> |
| (c) <i>mother writhing with pain</i> | (d) <i>she was moaning</i> |
| (e) <i>puppies were playing</i> | (f) <i>I reached the street</i> |

And finally the resolution of all the actions or proiaretic codes is *'mother was alive-eight dead puppies scattered around her*'.

The Semantic Code (SEM.)

In this third code the reader come across the story and its elements to find its connotative words and their multitude meanings. In the story, we come across the element *winter season* which gives the peculiar meaning of the country climate and it causes readers to remember the impact of the season. Moreover, the description of biting of the mad dogs is semantically described as, *'They treat everyone in the same manner, bestowing this affection, end up in the civil hospital to have their stomach pierced with needles...'*. In the line the words 'bestowing', 'affection' and 'end up' have connotative meanings, contrary to the lexical or dictionary meanings.

The Symbolic Code (SYM.)

As described above the symbolic code is very difficult to distinguish from semantic code, it is overlapping category. However, the antithetical elements and concepts can be had in the story. Keeping in view that concept, the reader of this short story come consciously or unconsciously come across the ideas of life and death or killing and

surviving. In the story the terms like 'moaning versus playing affectionately'

'Maternal drives versus municipality'

'Mother alive versus dead puppies'

'Maternal love versus anguished body'

'Spared puppies versus no mercy on the mother'

These show antithetical elements which awake the sense of deep structure at the part of reader. Here reader's mind is compelled to think both sides of the elements and concepts depicted.

The Cultural Code (REF.)

Finally, the fifth code of the Barthes's narrative structure model is cultural code in which the body of knowledge accumulating shared knowledge is awakened. Whereas, speaking particularly about the story there is little description of the cultural codes. In this context, the reader comes across the elements like, 'Burqah' which is peculiar dress or veil of Muslim society called *pardah*-oriented society. Furthermore, the concept of *dogs* in typical Pakistani society or in third world countries is un-friendly and rude animal as opposite the Western concept where the *dogs* are pet and friendly animals. Moreover, the concept of 'Friday' is sacred and respectful in an Islamic society in which some cruel actions are avoided to do. Contrary to that, the incident is depicted with reference to Friday just to show emphasis on the cruel action as, 'That Friday morning, it tore my heart to see the mother writhing with pain because of the poison'. Here the connotation of Friday is religious and worshipping day but on that day narrator speaks of the sorrowful happening.

Griemas's Model of Narrative Structure

With reference to Griemas's model of narrative analysis, the readers of the short story 'Municipality and Stray Dogs' can unearth the elements of like subject as 'mother of the puppies' who are feeding her puppies and wants their welfare and life and the object is 'to get rid of'. Similarly, the sender of the action is 'Mother' and the receiver is also 'mother' and the opponent is 'Municipality' who gives poisonous meat

to the dogs in order to get rid of them. And finally, the account of helper and opponent can be defined variously. The municipal administration, its law and civic regulations are opponents to the living of the dogs, the mother dog and her puppies as it's helping power to support it to save that and opponent is the municipal staff of the lives of animals or difficulty to bring it into effect.

Besides above discussion of Griemas's model, if the four ways of sense-making referentiality is applied the story can be rich of the meaningful elements containing the references. In this regard, taking the account of municipality, it can be said that the term has its extra-referentiality concept of administration of a town or city. However, the term may have the static concept yet the noun contains the potentia: to work for the welfare of the town and show responsibility. Similarly, the term 'dog' with reference to extra-referentiality is a wild animal and has many things against the human health and safety. By the same way, the self-referential field the term 'municipality' contains the non-passive and non-irresponsive act of the stray dogs.

In this way, the narrative analysis of a piece of literature may be analysed in various ways in which scores of ideas can be discussed.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the story 'Municipality and stray dogs' in the Barthesian analysis contains the first two codes more emphatically than the rest of three codes. In the first two codes of sequential orders the Proiaretic code is much more logically and meaningfully embedded in the story than the first hermeneutic code which is given less emphasis whereas among the remaining three codes, the Symbolic code is more powerfully prescribed than the two codes.

On the other hand, while speaking about the Griemas's model of narrative structure, it can be said that the subject 'municipal staff' is keen to get rid of the stray dogs in order to secure the health and lives of the people. Thus, they being the 'sender' of poison feed the dogs poisoned meat to the 'receivers' as 'stray dogs'. However, applying the referential-fields numerous elements and concepts of the story can be had in wider context.

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Appendix

Municipality and Stray Dogs

Khair- un-nisa Jaffery

It was not so very long ago when our city was overflowing with stray dogs. Every street you went into, you find at least four dogs obstructing your path.

Their approach is usually the same; that is, to bark at the elders, to bite the children and to stalk *burqah*-clad ladies. During the winter season, they undergo a temperamental change, not just in their excessiveness but psychologically as well. They treat everyone in the same manner best

showing their symbols of love on each one alike. When the majority of people, due to this affection, end up in the civil hospital to have their stomachs pierced with needles and when the hospital staff begins to contemplate the reuse of disposable syringes as a result of their shortage. It is only then that the municipality comes in action.

They start feeding the stray dogs with poisoned meat.

I am talking of the times when it was 'dog season'. This was the year 1984. There was an excess of stray dogs then and may be later on as well. The Municipality was in full action. Every day on my way to the university I would watch the Municipality staff throw poisoned meat in front of the dogs, which would be devoured in seconds. I would witness the whole scene with my own eyes: the dog falling over each other to get to the meat. Then gasping in agony and eventually dying in front of me.

Incidentally, the street we lived in did not have many stray dogs. There was only one female dog that used to keep sitting outside the doctor clinic with her eight new born pups. I never saw her bark anyone eve once. Her puppies surrounded her most of time. Every day while passing them on the way, I would stop for a while to see the mother and children teasing each other. There were always eight puppies, never less or more.

While feeding on their mother milk, the puppies would whimper playfully. She would keep on licking them lovingly and they in turn would hover around the tail. Sometime, when my father and I would come back together and we would see the mother licking her littler, Father would say to me, 'Animals also have a strong sense of maternal instinct. It is the basis for the survival of their offspring in particular and their species as a whole. If you try to touch anyone of the puppies, you will see she attacks you'.

But these maternal drives had no effect on the Municipality staff.

Although they spared the puppies, they took no mercy on the mother and poisoned her.

That Friday morning, it tore my heart to see the mother writhing with pain because of poison. I keep thinking about her. On my way back home I thought she would be in a worse condition but surprisingly both the children and their mother were looking quite well.

In the evening when happened to pass through street again I found the puppies playing affectionately with their mother. She however was moaning. I realized that the poison had begun to take in course, and the thought of the puppies being left alone me.

The next morning, dreading to see the inevitable, I reached the street.

A strange scene awaited me. Incredibility, the mother was alive but then I noticed eight dead puppies scattered around her.

Tears of maternal love trickled down her face and her poisoned milk flowed out of her anguished body.