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A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORY
A PAIR OF MUSTACHIOS

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Abstract:

Mulk Raj Anand has achieved recognition as a novelist as well as a short story writer. 'A Pair of Mustachios' is one of his humorous stories. The present paper attempts a stylistic analysis of this story. Language items like pronouns, nouns, verbs, adverbs, etc from the story are identified. They are analysed for their role in the overall understanding of the story.

1. Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand has played an important role in the development of Indian English Fiction. He was a skilled and a versatile writer. He has written novels like *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) etc. He was a gifted story teller. Some of his short story collections are *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1947), *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and Other Stories* (1947), *Lajwanti and Other Stories* (1966) etc. He received awards like International Peace Prize, Sahitya Akademi Award, Padma Bhushan Award and other similar prestigious awards.

'*A Pair of Mustachios*' is a humorous story by Anand. It deals with a funny clash that occurs due to the upturned mustaches of the Seth Ramanand. Anand initially explains the different styles of mustaches, Indians keep and the social status attached to each style. Seth Ramanand twists the ends of his goat mustache slightly upwards like the tiger mustache. Khan Azam Khan is offended by the action of the Seth. The Seth is reluctant to take down his mustache. In the end a deed is signed between the Khan and the Seth. Khan sells everything he has to the Seth. In return the Seth takes down his mustaches. Though the Khan's pride is quelled, he has lost his property. The story thus focuses on the simplicity of the rural folk. The story is notable for its creative use of language and its comic element.

This paper tries to explore the stylistic import of selective lexical and grammatical items in the overall understanding of the story '*A Pair of Mustachios*'. The stylistic categories are based on the model provided by Leech and Short (1981).

2. Stylistic analysis

Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short in their *Style in Fiction* (2007) explain the different aspects related to style in literature. In their third chapter, they have provided a check list of some linguistic and stylistic categories. These categories form the base of analysis for the present short story. Only a few of the linguistic and stylistic categories from their checklist are used here for analysis. Apart from these categories, other linguistic categories having stylistic importance too are considered. The identified linguistic data and its analysis are presented below:

2.1. Pronouns:

*-There are various kinds of mustachios worn in **my** country ---. (173)*

*-For instance, there was a rumpus in **my** own village the other day about a pair of Mustachios. (175)*

The first person pronouns in the above sentences refer to the narrator of the story. He is aware of the various divisions in the Indian society. He knows the connection between the mustache styles and the social status of their owner. They also indicate his firsthand knowledge of the funny incident between Seth

Ramanand and Khan Azam Khan. Later on, the story is narrated in third person.

2.2. Noun phrases with nouns as pre-modifiers:

lion mustache, *tiger* mustache, *goat* mustache, *sheep* mustache, *mouse* mustache etc.

A selection of noun phrases about different mustache styles is presented above. All the noun phrases are pre-modified by nouns referring to animals. The animals symbolize a few qualities. The style of the mustache is a mark of the social status of the bearer. Thus the lion mustache is worn by the aristocrats like kings, generals and other eminent people. The goat mustache is worn by the newly rich traders' class. The sheep mustache is worn by the coolies and the mouse mustache by the peasants.

2.3. Adjectives:

- *resplendant* Rajas, *feudal* gentry, *nouveau riche*

- adjectives used for the Seth: amenable, imperturbable

- adjectives for Khan: tall, middle aged, handsome, dignified, foolish, headstrong

Three sets are presented here pertaining to different characters. In the first set adjectives are used in a general sense to pre-modify the nouns, which refer to different social classes in the Indian society. The adjective in the second set describe the shrewd moneylender. The third set has adjectives used for Khan Azam Khan. They refer to his appearance and also to his mentality. His foolishness later becomes a cause of his reduced status.

2.4. Verbs:

- noticed, raged, roared, shouted

The verbs are specifically used for Khan. He repeatedly notices the upturned mustache of the shopkeeper. It fires his anger. The other verbs indicate his raised temper. This angered attitude of the Khan is contrasted with that of the money lender whose calmness is described as *imperturbable*, in the heated situation. The calmness of the money-lender wins him the bargain.

2.5. Adverbs:

--- *some people, notably the landlord of our village and the moneylender, maliciously say that he is an impostor* ---. (176)

--- *since when have the lentil-eating shopkeepers become noblemen?* 'he asked *surlily*, --. (176)

The adverbs in the above sentences reveal the conflicting attitudes of the characters towards each others. The villagers maliciously feel that Khan is an impostor. On the other hand Khan's question to the landlord reveals his arrogance and hatred.

2.6. Sentences with relative clauses:

- *Then there is the tiger mustache worn by the unbending, unchanging survivals from the ranks of the feudal gentry who have nothing left but the pride in their greatness* --- bits of land. (174)

- *It so happened* --- *who had been doing well out of the recent fall in the price of wheat* --- tiger mustache. (175)

A few sentences contain relative clauses introduced by the word 'who'. For instance, in the first sentence above, the author explains the attitudes of the feudal gentry. The relative clause informs the readers about the present condition of their descendants. The second sentence is a very long sentence through which the author provides details about the money lender Seth Ramanand. The relative clause in this sentence brings to light the shrewd nature of the money lender.

2.7. Rhetoric question:

'*Since when have the lentil-eating shopkeepers become noblemen?* ---. (176)

The angry Khan addresses the question to the Seth on seeing his changed mustache style. It is a taunt intended to the Seth as he has fashioned his mustache like that of the Khan.

2.8. Exclamatory utterances:

- *Turn the tips down to the style proper to the goat that you are!* (176)

-*Bring that tip down!* (178)

-*'You bring that tip down!'* (179)

All the utterances above are by the Khan. They are the angry Khan's orders to the Seth. The different mustache styles indicate the status of their bearers. The money lender has changed his mustache style to resemble that of the Khan. Khan, though in a poor state now, is a descendent of the nobility. He is irritated by the Seth's action to fashion his mustache like that of the nobility. The above listed utterances convey his growing anger and hatred. This anger of the Khan later becomes a cause of his downfall.

3. Conclusions

The humour of the story arises from the clash between the Khan and the money lender. The extraordinary importance attached to the mustaches too creates humour in the story. The first person pronoun used by the narrator, reveal that he has authentic knowledge of the relation between mustache styles and the status of their owner. The pre-modifier nouns referring to animal names create humour. They refer to the stereotypical qualities of the class, to which they are attached. The adjectives reveal the qualities of the characters.

The verbs help in portraying the angry mindset of the Khan. The adverbs highlight the mutual contempt between Khan and the other villagers. The identified relative clauses provide information about the characters. The rhetoric question here is a minor device, and it conveys Khan's dissatisfaction about the Seth's mustaches. The exclamatory utterances are the orders of the Khan to the Seth. He is keen that the Seth should turn down his mustaches.

Thus the selected language samples help in portraying the characters and also their contempt towards each other. Their hatred and the absurd importance attached to the mustaches make it a comic story.

Works Cited

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