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**A LEXICAL ANALYSIS OF KHUSHWANT SINGH'S SHORT STORY:  
*MR. KANJOOS AND THE GREAT MIRACLE***

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**ABSTRACT**

Studies of literary texts can be more fruitful if linguistic methods are employed. Linguistics has various sub-branches. Each branch has its own target area of language, and its own methods. This paper investigates the use of a lexical approach to study a literary text. Khushwant Singh's short story '*Mr. Kanjoos and the Great Miracle*' is selected for the study.

**Keywords:** linguistics, lexical approach

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

Linguistics studies language. Literature is one of the different domains of language use. It can be beneficially studied using linguistic tools. A linguistic analysis of any literary work is a functional one. There is a long time opposition from the critics for use of linguistics in the study of literature. The linguists have supported the fact, while the critics have opposed it. Roger Fowler in his paper *Studying Literature as Language* explains the opposition in detail. In the paper he refers to the controversy between him and the scholar F.W. Bateson over the issue. Fowler cites the following remark of David Lodge:

One still feels obliged to assert that the discipline of linguistics will never replace literary criticism, or radically change the vases of its claims to be useful and meaningful form of human enquiry. It is the essential characteristic of modern linguistics that it claims to be a science. It is

the essential characteristic of literature that it concerns values. And values are not amenable to scientific methods (81).

In the above statement Lodge explains the difference between the two disciplines. Fowler lists two causes which led to the question of application of linguistics to literature. Both causes are briefly summarized below:

- i. There is misunderstanding on both sides about the meaning of 'linguistics'. Critics overlook the fact there are different linguistic theories. Each has its own characteristics. An opinion about the applicability of a particular linguistic theory over the text in hand may not be true of another linguistic theory. Also the followers of one linguistic theory are unwilling to accept the benefit of another linguistic theory over the text under study.
- ii. The second misunderstanding concerns the 'modus operandi' of linguistic methods. The

different linguistic models have their own aims and methods to achieve them.

It can be inferred that the critics oppose linguistics due to inadequate understanding about linguistics. There is misunderstanding about the methods of linguistics. Linguistics has various approaches which study different areas of language. For instance 'Phonetics' studies the sounds and tone patterns. Grammar studies the rules by which words, phrases and sentences are combined. Each branch of linguistics has its own aim and method to reach them. Fowler himself answers the question 'Can linguistics be applied to literature?'. The solution he suggests is:

The solution is, it seems to me, to simply theorize literature as language, and to do this using the richest and most suitable linguistic model (84).

Fowler's answer is that literature should be studied as language. For this purpose a suitable linguistic model should be used. This paper supports the view that linguistics can be fruitfully applied to literature. The field of linguistic has different sub-branches. The choice of the model should be based on the nature of the data in hand. This paper uses a lexical approach to study the short story *Mr. Kanjoos and the Great Miracle* by Khushwant Singh. Lexical items are identified on basis of the parameters given below. They are analyzed for their function in the story.

**2. The Lexical Approach:** The word 'approach' has several meanings. The *Cambridge Dictionary* explains the word variously. One meaning of the word is a way of considering or doing some activity. The word 'approach' here is used in this sense. By lexical approach it is meant here as an approach aimed at the scrutiny of the lexicon in the selected text. Paul Simpson in his *Language through Literature* explains lexicon as:

The general term which is normally reserved for the 'pool' of words which forms the basis of any language is the lexicon. Like most technical terms in linguistics, this one is derived from Classical Greek: from *lexis* 'word' into *lexikon* inventory of words (33).

'Lexicon' then is simply the pool of words in a language. The English 'lexis' or words are not a homogeneous mass. It is organized in various ways. Scholars have provided elaborate explanations of the divisions of words in categories. Simpson explains the division of words as content and grammatical words. Content words carry the meaning. Nouns, adjectives, verbs and adjectives are the content words. The grammatical words form a small but separate class of words. They are shorter in length compared to content words. Articles, prepositions, pronouns etc belong to this category. He has also explained the relations among words. These relations are briefly explained below:

**i. Synonyms:** Synonyms are words with same denotative meaning.

**ii. Homonymy:** It is explained as a "*---process, where different words converge into same form, while preserving their original meaning, is known as homonymy and the words involved are referred to as homonyms*" (69).

**iii. Polysemy:** In this process a metaphorical extension of sense of a word occurs. Words extended in this way are known as polysemous.

**iv. Antonymy:** is explained as 'semantic oppositeness'.

**v. Hyponymy:** It is slightly different from synonymy. While synonymy deals with sameness of meaning, hyponymy deals with inclusion of meaning or sense

The role of vocabulary in literary texts can be a fruitful line of enquiry. Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short in their *Style in Fiction* provide a checklist of linguistic items to analyze in literary texts. Their checklist contains items pertaining to lexis, grammar, figures of speech and cohesion and context. Only the part of Leech and Short's checklist about lexis is given below:

1. General: is the vocabulary simple or complex? formal or colloquial? descriptive or evaluative? general or specific? How far does the writer make use of the emotive and other associations of words, as opposed to their referential meaning? Does the text contain idiomatic phrases or notable collocations and if so, with what kind of dialect or register are these idioms or collocations associated? Is there any use of rare or specialized vocabulary? Are any particular morphological categories

noteworthy (e.g. compound words, words with particular suffixes)? To what semantic fields do words belong?

2. Nouns: Are the nouns abstract or concrete? What kinds of abstract nouns occur ( e.g. nouns referring to events, perceptions, processes, moral qualities, social qualities)? What use is made of proper names? Collective nouns?

3. Adjectives: Are the adjectives frequent? To what kinds of attribute do adjectives refer? Physical? Psychological? Visual? Auditory? Colour? Referential? Emotive? Evaluative? etc. Are adjectives restrictive or non-restrictive? Gradable or non-gradable? Attributive or predicative?

4. Verbs: Do the verbs carry an important part of the meaning? Are they stative (referring to states) or dynamic ( referring to actions, events, etc.)? Do they 'refer' to movements, physical acts, speech acts, psychological states or activities, perceptions, etc? Are they transitive, intransitive, linking (intensive), etc? Are they factive or non-factive?

5. Adverbs: Are adverbs frequent? What semantic functions do they perform (manner, place, direction, time, degree, etc)? Is there any significant use of sentence adverbs (conjuncts such as so, therefore, however; disjuncts such as certainly, obviously, frankly)? (Leech and Short, 60-64).

Keeping the objectives of this research in mind following lexis based categories are decided for analysis of the selected short story:

- Lexical relations among words
- Word categories explained in Leech and Short's checklist

### 3. The Analysis

The lexical categories in the story are:

#### 3.1. Nouns

- i. indicating Indian Names: Mr. Kanjoos, Mrs. Kanjoos, Bhooki Kanjoos, Buddhu Sen
- ii. indicating places: club, hotel corridor, Germany, Embassy

3.2. Adjectives: generous, competent, thoughtful, club-goers, pretty

3.3. Lexical relations

3.3.1. Hyponyms: Drinks- Whisky, beer, champagne, fruit-juice, coffee

Eatables- chapatti, porridge, eggs, bacon, sausages, fish, fruit, sandwich, meat patties

3.3.2. Antonyms: generous x kanjoos, small x large, Hindu x non-Hindu

3.3.3. Synonyms: kanjoos, mean

3.4. Verbs

3.4.1. related to Kanjooses: drained, invite, excused, gone, talk

3.4.2. related to Singh: stood, ordered, signed, order

3.5. Pronouns: I, He, She, They

3.6. Auxiliary: 'Would'

i. Mr. Kanjoos *would* wander into the corridor like one who had lost something and approach one of the hosts at the door with an honest query; --- (172)

iii. A few minutes later Mrs Kanjoos *would* wander in the corridor looking as lost as her husband had been before her and approach the host; --- (172)

iv. A few minutes the two children *would* come in looking for their parents. (172)

3.7. Auxiliary verb: *had*

i. --- I have had the invitation to have pot-luck extended to me many hundred times. (169)

II. On the other hand the Kanjooses have had pot-luck many times with me. (169)

III. Although I haven't had a meal with the kanjooses, I ---. (170)

It is a humorous, yet realistic story. Singh knows the Kanjoos family since three decades. It is a miser family. They enjoy at the cost of others. Many a times in the club, Singh has to sign for the drinks they have together. Many a times they have dined at his residence. However, he hasn't got an opportunity to dine at their home. The story has two parts. In part one Singh narrates the cunningness of the family at the club. He is a frequent victim of their miserliness. The second part of the story is in Germany, where they go for an international conference. Mr. Kanjoos manages to employ his wife as a secretary of the delegation. In Germany the family manages to thrive due to their cunningness. They enjoy free meals. Finally they are able to marry off their daughter Bhooki kanjoos to a diplomat without any expenses and at the Indian Embassy on Fifteenth of August.

Set one has two sets of nouns. The first set of nouns contains Indian names of the characters. They refer to the family members of the Kanjoos

family. The word 'Kanjoos' is a Hindi word and it means miser. Their actions reveal the Kanjooses to be extreme misers. The word 'bhooki' is also a Hindi word and it means hungry. The girl approaches people just before lunch, under the pretext of seeking advice. People offer her lunch, for listening to them. The word 'Buddhu' means 'idiot'. Buddhu Sen has fallen prey to the machinations of the Kanjoos family. The names are suggestive. The second set of nouns in set one relates to the various places in the story. These places are the club, the hotel, the Embassy etc. These are the places where much of the action of the story occurs. Hence the place indicating nouns convey the settings of the different scenes of the story.

Set two is a lexical set of adjectives. The adjectives describe Kanjoos family. They are regular club-goers. Mr. Kanjoos has frequently invited author for 'pot luck', hence he refers to him as generous. The invitation hasn't materialized over thirty years. Mrs. Kanjoos is referred to as very competent woman. The fact that she manages to marry off her daughter free of cost is a proof of her competence. The couple drops in at the author's house just before dinner. They dine at his home. He calls the couple as 'thoughtful'. It can be inferred that the adjectives 'generous', 'thoughtful' and 'competent' are used in an ironical sense.

Set three explains relations among some words in the story. The first set is of homonyms. Food and drink items in a homonymous relation are listed here. The different kinds of drinks and a variety of eatables are the obsession of the family. Some words are in antonymous relation with one another. The first is between generous and kanjoos. It is humorous that Mr. Kanjoos always speaks of generosity, but he is kanjoos as his name suggests. The next opposition is between Hindu and non-Hindu. The marriage of Bhooki and Buddhu is decided on fifteenth of August at the Indian Embassy. Singh and others wonder how this Hindu wedding will occur in a non-Hindu climate. Mrs. Kanjoos through her skills accomplishes this surprising act. The last two words 'kanjoos' and 'mean' are synonymous. Both of them mean miser.

Set four is a set of verbs. It has two sub sets. The verbs in set one are related to Mr. Kanjoos.

He drains his tumbler of whisky. He invites Singh for a dinner at his home. There are three drinking encounters between Singh and the Kanjooses. The last three verbs describe Mr. Kanjoos's escape when the bill arrives. First time he excuses himself to go to the lavatory. The second time he goes to make an urgent phone call. The third time he is talking to a friend. The actions conveyed by the verbs suggest that Mr. Kanjoos is a miser. He escapes the scene if he has to pay. The second set of verbs relate to Mr. Singh. The verbs are stood, order and sign. Every time they have drinks together. It is Singh who has to pay. Thus Singh is a regular victim of the Kanjooses.

Set five contains some pronouns. Singh is a participant character in the story and a frequent victim of the miserliness of the kanjoos family. He is also an observer, who relays the behavior of the 'Kanjooses' to the reader. When narrating personal feelings or actions the first person pronoun 'I' is used. When narrating the activities of the kanjoos family the pronouns 'He', 'She' or 'They' are used accordingly. Set six contains some sentences having the auxiliary 'would'. The Kanjooses have a strategy to enjoy the parties where they are not invited. The sentences in the set convey their activities. The auxiliary 'would' suggest the repetitive nature of their activities. Set seven contains some sentences having the auxiliary 'had'. Singh knows the Kanjooses over years. He was invited by them many times. The invitation has never materialized. Contrarily they had pot-luck with him many times. The auxiliary 'had' expresses this background to the Singh and Kanjooses relation.

**4. Observations and Conclusions:** The Lexical data consisted of nouns, adjectives, verbs, pronouns and auxiliaries. The relations among words were of synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy. The nouns indicating the Indian names express the qualities of the characters. The place indicating nouns convey the setting of the story. The adjectives express the qualities of the Kanjoos family. Some of the adjectives are used in an ironical sense for the characters. It results in humour. The verbs related to Mr. Kanjoos reveal his character. He escapes whenever the bill arrives.

The verbs related to Singh reveal that he always has to pay the bills when they have drinks together. The first person pronoun conveys the personal feelings and actions of Mr.Singh. The third person pronouns allow him to narrate the activities of the Kanjooses. It is a character oriented story and it focuses on the Kanjooses. The auxiliaries 'would' and 'had' have a special function. The use of 'had' suggests that the Kanjooses have dined with him frequently. However, he has not been able to do it even once with the Kanjooses. The auxiliary 'would' suggests that the Kanjooses repeatedly enter and enjoy parties where they are uninvited. The lexical relation of hyponymy suggests the obsession of the Kanjooses, which is food and drinks. The relation of antonymy reveals the paradox of the situation. Mr.Kanjoos always talks of generosity, but he is a miser like his name.

The nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns, auxiliaries and the lexical relations help understand the character of the Kanjooses. They are cunning and a miser family. They have a knack to enjoy at the cost of others. It is concluded that the lexical study of a text can fruitfully help in understanding some of its aspects.

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