



## The Point of view in Khushwant Singh's "Posthumous"

<sup>1</sup>A.Madhavi Latha, <sup>2</sup>Dr. N. Madhu

<sup>1</sup>Asst.Professor of English, Mallareddy College of Engineering, Secunderabad.

<sup>2</sup>Asst.Professor of English Gitam University, Visakhapatnam

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**Abstract:** This paper is concerned with the analysis of 'Point of view' in Khushwant Singh's Short story "Posthumous". It makes an attempt to investigate how Khushwant Singh achieves his spatio-temporal, ideological and psychological perspectives through his language. He continuously interferes with the comprehension of the readers by guiding them in terms of locating the places and time through his spatio-temporal perspective. He also influences the feelings of the readers by communicating his ideas through his psychological perspective. He also presents the mindset of his characters by describing the commonly accepted social practices in the society through his ideological perspective. Point of view on spatio-temporal, ideological and psychological planes helps the narrator achieve his purpose effectively. Point of view is a much discussed and rigorously explored area in fiction studies, whether in the stylistics framework or any other framework of literary criticism and theory. Point of view basically refers to the way a story is told, the mode of its narration. Point of view concerns, produces, results in, perspectives on, evaluations of, events and characters. It is about influencing readers to form certain opinions, or not to form certain opinions.

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**Keywords:** Ideological, Psychological, spatio-temporal

**Introduction:** This paper presents the stylistic analysis of the short story "Posthumous" written by Khushwant Singh. Khushwant Singh is a well-known Indian English Writer and a famous essayist. He got well equipped by background, education, exposure and experience to view the Indian scene from a wider angle without any sentimental attachment. He is known more for his books of jokes and his column *With Malice Towards All*. He has penned books on religion, Sikhism, and history of Sikhs and Delhi. He is a man who loves life fully and deeply as is evident in his books. The ironic mode that he adopted also enabled him to look at the human scene with detachment.

### The Summary of "The Mark of Vishnu":

In "Posthumous" the author is ill in bed, and he fancies that he is dead. He is curious to know the responses and reactions of his friends and acquaintances to his supposed death. Perhaps the headline in the *Tribune* would read; "Sardar Khushwant Singh Dead". The obituary notices would perhaps be adulatory and public men of eminence would call at his house to pay their last respects. Wreaths would be laid by ministers and judges on his body. Generous tributes would be paid to the high qualities of head and heart of the departed personality, and his funeral would be attended by large number of people. Thus, his imagination created all kinds of situations, and he visualized a series of scenes of persons consoling his widow and children for their irreparable loss. As this process became operative, he wrote; "I feel very sorry for myself and for all my friends. With difficulty I check the tears which want to express sorrow at my own death." But it actually transpired that the 'Tribune' published only a very brief obituary notice at the bottom of page three, column one about the Sardar. Shafi, the reporter, perhaps tried to settle old scores with Sardar by relegating him to an insignificant place. Lawyer friends of the Sardar, Mr. and Mrs. Qadir, who were expected to call at the house, did not arrive, Mr. Khosla, a pompous bureaucrat and a high court judge, was too engrossed in writing his diary to take much notice of the Sardar's death. So the Khoslas did not appear either. When the imaginary funeral started, the author's inward eye could spot only a few black-robed lawyers, one artist, one communist, and a few others. The hearse was drawn by a bony, brown horse. The lawyers left the procession on the way. The artist and the Communist had had a heated discussion, and they also disappeared. But soon a professor arrived riding a bicycle and tried to console the author's wife by reciting quotations from the Bhagavad Gita "Like a man casts off old garments to put on new ones... So does the soul, etc." Between the professor's two legs, a little dog appeared licking his trousers. The author found that everyone left the hearse and that only the Tonga driver remained to carry out his last journey. The cart driver stopped under a peepul tree and the author, now awake in the hearse, contemplated three alternative courses left open to him. He could either give himself up to the scorching flames with the hope of being reborn in a better world, or escape from the hearse into brothels, or quietly return to his home and his humdrum existence. Since he could not decide on a course of action, he wished to flip a coin to decide. At that crucial point, this fantastic and funny reverie abruptly came to an end.

For the study of Point of View in fiction, in an influential publication on prose composition, the narratologist Boris Uspensky proposed a four-way model (Uspensky, 1973). This model was later revised and refined by Roger Fowler. So it is probably referred as the 'Fowler – Uspensky model'. The four components identified by the Fowler – Uspensky model of point of view are as follows:

- i. Point of view on the ideological plane
- ii. Point of view on the temporal plane
- iii. Point of view on the spatial plane
- iv. Point of view on the psychological plane

The broad compass of the model has proved significant in shaping much stylistic work on point of view because it helps sort out different components in narrative organization.

**Point of view on the ideological plane:** The term ideology has a wide scope of reference. It refers to the matrix of beliefs we use to comprehend the world and to the value systems through and by which we interact in society. It follows then that the concept of point of view on the ideological plane refers to the way in which a text mediates a set of particular ideological beliefs through either character, narrator or author. Indeed, the domain of ideology is so broad that just about any aspect of narrative can be brought within its compass, whether it be a facet of narrative voice like author, narrator, character or person, or an element of narrative ‘preoccupation’ like emblem, theme, motif, and most important of all, characterization.

**Point of view on the temporal plane:** Point of view on the temporal plane, in terms of the Fowler – Uspensky model, is about the way relationships are signalled in narrative. Temporal point of view envelops a whole series of stylistic techniques such as repetition, analepsis (flashback) and prolepsis (prevision or flash forward). It basically covers any kind of manipulation of time sequence in narrative, explaining how certain events might be relayed as remote or distant, others as immediate or imminent.

Temporal point of view is certainly an important narrative category. It seems to be less about focalisation and viewpoint and rather more about narrative structure; it does after all encompass the structural segments and sequential progression of the time-line of a narrative.

**Point of view on the spatial plane:** Spatial point of view is about the narrative ‘camera angle’ and is a device which has palpable grammatical exponents in deixis and in locative expressions. This is often communicated through adverbs like this, that, here, there and so on.

#### **Point of view on the Psychological plane**

Psychological or perceptual view point refers to the way in which narrative events are mediated through the consciousness of the ‘teller’ of the story. It will encompass the means by which a fictional world is slanted in a particular way or the means by which narrators construct, in linguistic terms, their own view of the story they tell (Simpson: 1993).

In this paper, groups of indicators are linked together interpretatively, namely in terms of ‘Spatio-temporal’ ‘Psychological’ and ‘ideological’ viewpoint. To illustrate this distinction, three passages from the short story “Posthumous” are stylistically analyzed below.

#### **Passage – 1**

We regret to announce the sudden death of Sardar Khushwant Singh at 6 p.m. last evening. He leaves behind a young widow, two infant children and a large number of friends and admirers to mourn his loss. It will be recalled that the Sardar came to settle in Lahore some five years ago from his home town, Delhi. Within these years he rose to a position of eminence in the Bar and in politics. His loss will be mourned generally throughout the Province.

Amongst those who called at the late Sardar’s residence were the P.A. to the Prime Minister, the P.A. to the Chief Justice, several Ministers and Judges of the High Court.

In a statement to the press, the Hon’ble the Chief Justice said: ‘I feel that the Punjab is poorer by the passing away of this man. The cruel hand of death has cut short the promise of a brilliant career’ (Singh, 1989: 1).

The narrator’s spatio-temporal perspective is communicated through the adverbials of place and time and demonstrative determiners. We find them in the following lines.

- We regret to announce the sudden death of Sardar Khushwant Singh at 6 p.m.
- He leaves behind a young widow, two infant children and a large number of friends and admirers to mourn his loss.
- His loss will be mourned generally throughout the Province.
- Amongst those who called at the late Sardar’s residence were the P.A. to the Prime Minister, the P.A. to the Chief Justice, several Ministers and Judges of the High Court.
- In a statement to the press, the Hon’ble the Chief Justice said: ‘I feel that the Punjab is poorer by the passing away of this man.

The above lines belong to the context in which the narrator explains the response of the fourth- estate to his imaginary death. The time- when adverbial at 6 p.m. place adverbials behind, throughout the province, at the late Sardar’s residence make us understand the time and place of the incidents of the story. The demonstrative determiner those, which is also a conjunct, gives an anaphoric reference to the people who would attend the funeral of the narrator. Another demonstrative determiner this, which gives a cataphoric reference to the narrator himself, helps the narrator achieve Spatio-temporal perspective.

The narrator's ideological perspective is communicated through the following lines through which he achieves the irony and lets us get into the general viewpoint of the people. We can also get the ideology of the characters through these lines. The people generally speak so greatly when someone dies. These are all routine sentences which reveal the mindset of the people in the society.

- Within these years he rose to a position of eminence in the Bar and in politics. His loss will be mourned generally throughout the Province.
- His loss will be mourned generally throughout the Province.
- In a statement to the press, the Hon'ble the Chief Justice said: 'I feel that the Punjab is poorer by the passing away of this man.
- The cruel hand of death has cut short the promise of a brilliant career'.

The psychological perspective of the narrator is communicated through the verbs of cognition in the following lines.

- We regret to announce the sudden death of Sardar Khushwant Singh at 6 p.m. last evening.
- His loss will be mourned generally throughout the Province.
- In a statement to the press, the Hon'ble the Chief Justice said: 'I feel that the Punjab is poorer by the passing away of this man.

And, the same is achieved through an 'adjective' in the following line.

- The cruel hand of death has cut short the promise of a brilliant career'.

The announcement of Khushwant Singh's imaginary death in the newspaper reveals the feelings and psychological perception of the people through the verbs of cognition like regret, feel in the lines above. The adjective cruel also reveals the perception of the people about death. Death always seems to be cruel to human beings. So by using the word cruel the narrator reveals his perception.

#### **Passage – 2**

I feel very sorry for myself and for all my friends. With difficulty I check the tears which want to express sorrow at my own death. But I also feel elated and want people to mourn me. So I decide to die—just for the fun of it as it were. In the evening, giving enough time for the press to hear of my death, I give up the ghost. Having emerged from my corpse, I come down and sit on the cool marble steps at the entrance to wallow in posthumous glory.

In the morning I get the paper before my wife. There is no chance of a squabble over the newspaper as I am downstairs already, and in any case my wife is busy pottering around my corpse. *The Tribune* lets me down. At the bottom of page 3, column 1, I find myself inserted in little brackets of obituary notices of retired civil servants—and that is all. I feel annoyed. It must be that blighter Shafi, Special Representative. He never liked me. But I couldn't imagine he would be so mean as to deny me a little importance when I was dead. However, he couldn't keep the wave of sorrow which would run over the Province from trickling into his paper. My friends would see to that. (Singh, 1989: 1).

The narrator's Spatio-temporal perspective is communicated through the time adverbials, place adverbials, a deictic verb and a demonstrative determiner. We can find them in the following lines. We see the viewing position of the author through these lines.

- Having emerged from my corpse, I come down and sit on the cool marble steps at the entrance to wallow in posthumous glory.
- In the morning I get the paper before my wife.
- There is no chance of a squabble over the newspaper as I am downstairs already, and in any case my wife is busy pottering around my corpse.
- At the bottom of page 3, column 1, I find myself inserted in little brackets of obituary notices of retired civil servants—and that is all.

The above sentences are narrated through the I-Narrator. The narrator takes the readers with him to look at the surroundings of his house, his wife and the newspaper. We see the place and people through narrator's eye with the help of the Spatio-temporal perspective of the narrator. The time adverbials in the morning and before help us know the time of the incidents. The place adverbials from my corpse, on the cool marble steps, at the entrance, downstairs and at the bottom of page 3 show us the surroundings of the narrator's house and the column about his death in the newspaper. The deictic verb come down shows us the direction of the movement of the story as we move along with the narrator. The demonstrative determiner that gives us the cataphoric reference of what was described till then.

The narrator's ideological perspective is communicated through the following lines in which he achieves irony. We can see the irony in the way the author thinks about the special representative of the newspaper, Shafi. The expression never liked reveals the hostility between the narrator and the news representative Shafi. The lines below reveal the ideology of both the narrator and the character Shafi.

- So I decide to die—just for the fun of it as it were
- It must be that blighter Shafi, Special Representative.
- He never liked me. But I couldn't imagine he would be so mean as to deny me a little importance when I was dead.

The narrator feels angry with Shafi as he did not give a prominent place to the announcement of his death in the newspaper. The lines mentioned above reveal the jealous nature of Shafi according to the narrator which ultimately leads to irony.

The psychological perspective of the narrator is communicated through the verbs of inert cognition, an abstract noun and adjectives in the following lines. The author's feelings are clearly shown through these lines.

- I feel very sorry for myself and for all my friends.
- With difficulty I check the tears which want to express sorrow at my own death.
- But I also feel elated and want people to mourn me.
- So I decide to die—just for the fun of it as it were.
- He never liked me.
- But I couldn't imagine he would be so mean as to deny me a little importance when I was dead.

The narrator could let us get into his consciousness with the help of the verbs of inert cognition like feel, decide and imagine in the above lines. We perceive the psychological condition of the narrator with the help of these words. The abstract noun sorrow and an adjective elated reveal the narrator's viewpoint about his death. By the verbs of inert cognition liked and mean, the narrator makes us understand the mindset of Shafi.

### Passage – 3

Qadir knew his wife well. He told her with an air of casualness, and she burst out crying. Her ten-year-old daughter came running into the room. She eyed her mother for a little while and then joined her in the wailing. Qadir decided to be severe. 'What are you making all this noise for?' he said sternly. 'Do you think it will bring him back to life?' His wife knew that it was no use arguing with him. He always won the arguments. 'I think we should go to their house at once. His wife must be feeling wretched,' she said.

Qadir shrugged his shoulders. 'I am afraid I can't manage it. Much as I would like to condole with his wife – or rather widow – my duty to my clients comes first. I have to be at the tribunal in half an hour.' Qadir was at the tribunal all day and his family stopped at home (Singh, 1989: 2).

The narrator's Spatio-temporal perspective is achieved through the place adverbials and time- duration adverbials in the following lines. We can view the surroundings through the narrator's eyes.

- Her ten-year-old daughter came running into the room.
- I have to be at the tribunal in half-an-hour.
- Qadir was at the tribunal all day and his family stopped at home.

We can understand how and where the characters are. We can also get the time references through the time-duration adverbials in half-an-hour and all day. The place adverbials at the tribunal and at home reveal where the family of Qadir and himself remain the whole day without visiting the bereaved family of the narrator.

The narrator's psychological perspective is communicated through the verbs of inert cognition, an abstract noun and an adverb in the lines below. The narrator could effectively place the readers in the characters' position to understand their process of thinking and feelings. The words underlined below make us understand the characters' psychology very effectively.

- Qadir knew his wife well.
- He told her with an air of casualness.
- Qadir decided to be severe.
- His wife knew that it was no use arguing with him.
- His wife must be feeling wretched.
- What are you making all this noise for? He said sternly.
- I'm afraid I can't manage it.

The inert cognition verb knew reveals the mindset of Qadir and his wife and make us understand their thinking. The abstract noun casualness and the adverb sternly and the verb of inert cognition decided reveal the casual attitude of Qadir about the death of the narrator.

The ideological perspective of the narrator is communicated through the following lines through which we can understand Qadir’s wife’s ideology as an Indian woman. It talks of how a woman feels when she loses her husband. Here, the narrator touched the peak of irony by making us understand that Qadir and his family did not even go to see the narrator’s wife though they talked about it elaborately. And, they remain as usual with their routine, which makes us feel the irony of the situation.

- His wife must be feeling wretched.
- Much as I would like to condole with his wife-or- rather widow-my duty to my clients comes first.
- I have to be at the tribunal

**Table 12. The Grammatical Features in “Posthumous”**

Name of the Grammatical Feature	Number of times it occurred	Percentage
Place Adverbials	10	29.41%
Time-related Adverbials	5	14.70%
Nouns	2	5.88%
Adverbs	1	2.94%
Adjectives	2	5.88%
Determiners	3	8.82%
Verbs	11	32.35%

The story “Posthumous” is narrated in the 1<sup>st</sup> person. The narrator narrates everything from his perspective. In this story, we find the occurrence of verbs in the highest place with the percentage of 32.35%. The occurrence of nouns and adjectives is the same. We can also comprehend that the narrator used ‘place adverbials’ most number of times through which we get his Spatio-temporal perspective. It is also understood that all three passages have the ideological features, through which we can understand the accepted and general beliefs of the people.

From the above analysis, we can see that Khushwant Singh achieves his intended perspective by the effective use of ‘Point of view’ in his story “Posthumous”. One can easily get into the mind of the author or the character by following the ‘Point of View’ meticulously. The successful use of point of view and their desired results on different planes of narration help the reader feel stylistically sensitive to the language.

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