



STYLISTIC DEVICES EMPLOYED IN R.K.NARAYAN'S SHORT STORY, "AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY": A BRIEF ANALYSIS

Dr. S. Chelliah

Professor , Head & Chairperson, School of English & Foreign, Languages & School of Indian Languages, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.

Abstract

This paper at the outset, introduces the very concept of 'Style' and discuss how R.K. Narayanan demonstrates a classical restraint in using style without any excessive or melodramatic overtones. In his creative world,

R.K. Narayanan underplays the human emotions with ironic detachment and classical restraint where his fictional style greatly employs carefully selected words in its order and perfection. This article substantiates the fact that his style is adequately geared to render an exactly realistic world as one sees and feels it.

The very concept of style is said to have its origin in classical rhetoric. Truly speaking, as an art of persuasive speech, 'rhetoric' encompasses such five aspects as elocution, invention, disposition, memory and delivery of which 'elocutio' or 'style' is the primary one. To define 'style' is somewhat difficult because since the time of the origin of classical rhetoric, attempts have been made by many classical rhetoricians to define 'style' but none has given a precise and straight-jacketed definition for it. However, a careful study of the different theories postulated by various schools of criticism regarding the concept of style brings home the common notion about style as "the dress of thought". The exponents of the school namely Puttenham are of the view that 'style' is something ornamental but not integral to the content/matter. For the Romantics, there is no dichotomy between form and content. According to Newman, 'style' is "thinking out into language". In the words of Come de Buffon, 'Style is the man'. But linguists of various schools like structuralism and Russian Formalism hold the view that language is the raw material of all literary works and so a systematic study of linguistic patterns is a 'sine qua non' for literary analysis. In short, it may be said that 'stylistics' is nothing but an innovative attempt in the explication of literary texts. Geoffrey N. Leach and Micheal H. Short define stylistics as a linguistic study of style" (P13)

Since stylistics makes a systematic study of literary style, its function is almost similar to that of literary criticism. Stylistics and literary criticism are complementary to each other. By making a complete description of linguistic elements in a literary text, stylistics enable the literary critic to substantiate his opinions firm sly and clearly. "It (Stylistics) provides a basis for aesthetic appreciation by bringing to the level of conscious awareness features of the text otherwise only accessible to trained intuition" (Widdowson 159). The aim of stylistics is not only to describe the formal features of a literary text but also to bring out their functional significance. The most important tools that can be used by stylistics are lexis, syntax and phonology. Lexis includes both content and structure words. Nouns, adjectives, main verbs and adverbs are 'content words' and others like articles, pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions are 'structure words'. The word 'syntax' has the Greek origin which means 'together-arrangement'. While syntax deals with the arrangement of words in a sentence, phonology is concerned with the organisation of the speech sounds. (Phonemes) in a particular language.

Besides lexis, syntax plays a vital role in Stylistics. With the introduction of Transformational generative approach to the study of literary texts, a great deal of attention is bestowed on the use of syntactic structure. English being a language "where grammatical functions are mostly defined positionally, 'syntax' form an important element of meaning" (P1). Dealing with stylistics, its purpose and also the tools used by it in the interpretation of literature, it seems appropriate to find out how literary works could be subjected to a stylistic analysis, for which a few of R.K. Narayan's share stories have been chosen.

R.K. Narayan has produced a good number of short stories of which "An Astrologer's Day and other stories", "Lawley Road", and "A Horse and Two Goats" are widely known to the reading public. He started his career by writing sketches and stories to popular journals and periodicals. Most of his short stories appeared in the Sunday Columns of the Leading daily 'The Hindu'. No doubt, Narayan's writings reveal the typical South Indian life in microcosm. He weaves his stories around the experiences or incidents that he comes across in day-to-day life. Unlike Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, who have wielded their pens to bring about social and political awareness in the people, Narayan is content to deal with commonplace themes like family, school, home, marriage, money, greed etc., by providing gentle irony and humour. As K.R.S. Iyengar has put it, ".... he would like to be a detached observer, to concentrate on a narrow scene, to sense the atmosphere of the place to snap a small group of characters in their oddities and angularities" (P360).

Neither the existing social evils like untouchability or the exploitation of the poor, nor the contemporary political situation hardly provide any raw material for his writings. This does not mean that Narayan is unaware of these problems, but what interests him more is the comic side of life rather than its serious or darker aspects. Narayan seems to think that mirth is also



an essential ingredient of life, the absence of which causes no thrills but chills. One cannot but have a hearty laugh when one reads the gullibility of Gurunayak at the hands of a fake astrologer (An Astrologer's Day), the trick played by Dasa to pacify the members of the family (A snake in the Grass), the annoyances and anxieties of the owner of a road engine after he has won it as a lottery prize (Engine Trouble), the fabricated account made by Swamy of Samuel's violence (Father's Help) and the like. Even the characters are also drawn from different walks of life, mostly from lower stratum of society, Thenappa, the postman, Dasa, the servant, Velan, the gardener, Kali, the coolie think and act like true humble human beings. His stories often begin in the mode of journalistic writings. The stereotyped beginnings such as 'Long long ago, there was' are no longer preferred by him. But in keeping with the ancient tale tradition, he introduces the 'Talkative Man' as a narrator in some of his stories (e.g. Engine Trouble, the Tiger's Claw etc). The influence of western fiction can be seen in is elaborate descriptions. Whatever the thing, be it a street, or a garden or a school, Narayan describes it in such a vividness as is often found in the stories of Guy De Maupassant. Occasionally, the features of a beast fable are noticed in the stories of 'Attila', 'The Tiger's Claw' where the animals are made to feel and behave like human beings. But at the same time, Narayan eschews explicit didacticism in the stories. Another feature that can be observed from his stories is that most of Narayan's stories end on a happy note after the traditional type. Of course, exceptions are there (eg. Eswaran etc). Thanappa in 'Missing Mail', the astrologer in 'An Astrologer's Day', Rama Rao in 'out of Business' Leave a sigh of relief at the end and despite the tension, they had experienced before. Apart from theme and technique, Narayan's stories have their distinctive style. As Shiv K Kumar says,

"It is style that sustains a story.
Style is not just the outer garb worn
By a story – it is the meaning itself" (P xi)

Each writer chooses words/phrases and patterns suitable to his purpose. It is this choice which characterizes one's style. Narayan finds a greater degree of flexibility and adaptability in English language. He says:

"English has proved that if a language has flexibility, any experience can be communicated through it, even if it has to be paraphrased rather than conveyed, and even if the factual detail is partially understood" (P 22)

Without much experimentation with language, Narayan seems to have communicated his experience affectively by choosing simple and direct expressions. Neither the vernacularized English idiom of Raja Rao nor the swear words of Anand are found in the stories of R.K. Narayan. His English appears more British than that of other writers. However, Narayan occasionally uses a few Indian words like coolie, rupee, anna, dhoties, pongal, Deepavali etc and also makes literal translation of certain Tamil expressions (ghost, house, holy smoke etc) to bring Indian consciousness into the stories. Sometimes, when he does not find an exact English equivalent to express his idea, he brings in a new phrase by blending both the English and the native words like umbrella dan, coconut payasam etc. Further, the syntactic simplicity that can be noticed in the narration and dialogues of Narayan's writings attracts the attention of even an average reader of English fiction Narayan never alters the usual word order of a sentence except for producing a special effect of course, there are broken constructions or minor sentences in some of his stories, but they are used to provide an informal or dramatic effect.

In the story, "An Astrologer's Day", there is an astrologer in a busy town. His appearance as well as his knack of dealing with people's problems attract a considerable number of people every day. In his youth, the astrologer was a simple villager. A criminal act committed by him makes him leave the village and settle in a town, where he has posed as an astrologer. One day when he is read to wind up his business, a new client approaches him in a challenging mood. Challenges and counter challenges run high and at last an agreement is settled between them. Soon the astrologer begins his prayer and the other strikes a match to light his cheroot. In the light of the match, the astrologer identifies the other as 'Guru Nayak', his old enemy, and feels shocked. He wants to get rid of this unwanted client and so makes preparations to leave the place. But when the stranger presses him to stay on and answer his question, the astrologer cleverly tricks the other into believing that his enemy was run over by a lorry long back. After advising his client not to travel southward again, the astrologer returns home and sleeps peacefully that night.

Unlike a descriptive piece, a narrative discourse makes greater use of verbs and adverbs. Other than this, in the story 'An Astrologer's Day', there are 286 nouns like shells, bundle, forehead, ash, head, turban, road, hardware, trunk, arm, annas, wrist, match light, well, stranger, wife, child, as 'concrete Nouns' and outcome, analysis, question, silence, heaven, prayer, benefit as 'abstract nouns' and 167 action verbs like opened, spread out, flanked, Hacked, transacted, flung, escaped, crushed, cheated etc. The lexical items mentioned here throw light on the astrologer, his appearance, his paraphernalia, the locality where he transacts his business, and the way he deals with the customers. While certain concrete and specific expressions like forehead, vermilion, friednuts, bring vividness and immediacy to the narrative, words like cheroot, chest, scar, well, lorry etc., take the action forward. The abstract words like practice, guesswork, pause, prayer, silence etc., suggest the shallowness



of the astrologer and also the strategy practised by him to satisfy the clients. Further the words like arguments, challenge, pact indicate a certain tension in the people here. The verbs like stop, dragged, shivered, pushed etc., not only take the action forward but also create an ambience of drama in the drama in the narrative. Expressions like vermillion, anna, jiggery, coconut, cheroot, junk etc., convey Indian flavour in the story.

In the very first sentence of the narrative, the third person pronoun 'he' is used without giving any reference to whom it applies. It is only in sentence (II) that a specific reference (astrologer) is given to the word 'he', cataphoric reference (forward looking) like this is a stylistic device which is exploited by writers to create suspense. Further the writer indulges in personalized style by making expressions like 'our friend (astrologer) felt piqued' ... 'for even the wildest of us loves to think that he (astrologer) has a forbidding exterior'. The personalized style creates a rapport between the narrator and his audience. The main attraction in the astrologer is his striking appearance rather than any talent in him. This is presented through a simile:

- a) "Good Fellow!" he bared his chest to show the scar.
- b) "When shall I get at him? he asked in the next world".
- c) I hope atleast he died as he deserved "Yes", said the astrologer. He was crushed under a lorry. The other looked gratified.

Rhetorical questions like (1) "You call yourself an astrologer" ? (2) "A Knife has passed through you once" produce dramatic effect. The sense of guilt of the astrologer is expressed metaphorically in 'I thought I had the blood of a man on my hands all these years'.

The most frequently used class of adverbs is that of manner like punctually, vaguely, ruthlessly, carefully, badly etc. Both adverbs and conjunctions' serve as sentence linkages like punctually, yet, or, and etc., one can also notice registral variation in the expressions like Bombay ice-cream, Delhi Almond, Rajas' Delicacy etc., These expressions serve as attention-catching devices which indirectly help the business of the astrologer. Further most of the adjectives refer to physical attributes. i.e painted forehead, dark whiskers, green shaft, cowrie shells etc. All these contribute a lot to create a realistic atmosphere in the narrative. Sentence elaboration is made mainly by co-ordinate and subordinate conjunctions. There are more than 50 co-ordinate conjunctions in the story like and, or, but etc as against 29 subordinate conjunctions eg 1. His forehead was resplendent... and his eyes sparkled... 2. We drank, gambled and quarrelled badly one day 3. If you find any answers satisfactory, will you give me rupees? Co-ordination is also achieved by using colon and semicolon (Punctuation marks) like "or he questioned: 'Is there any women in your family... toward you?'. Moreover, co-ordination without explicit conjunctions produce dramatic intensification, for example, 1. He charged three pies per question, never opened his mouth till the other... ten minutes. 2. The other sat down, sucking his cheroot, puffing out, sat there ruthlessly.

Co-ordinate structure is a narrative device, and a large number of it brings a sense of immediacy and informality to the narrative. Another striking feature in Narayan's stories is to begin sentences such as the following with co-ordinating conjunction to produce a dramatic effect.

1. But that was not to be
2. Or he gave an analysis of character.
3. And then you were pushed into a well nearby in the field.

Phonological features like a few onomatopoeic expressions-hissing gaslight, the light of a flare crackled, puffing out, cars hooted etc – are found in the narrative structure to create dramatic effect. All these features contribute to provide a realistic touch to the narrative.

To conclude, the analysis of the narrative shows the writer's predilection for concrete and specific expressions and also for more number of co-ordinate structures. Moreover, a sense of irony and a touch of informality are reflected in Narayan's narrative. Narayan demonstrates a classical restraint in using style without any excessive or melodramatic overtone. In particular, his use of adverbial forms of time and place vitally reinforce the situational irony in the story. As his creative world mostly underplays the human emotions with ironic detachment and classical restraint, his fictional style greatly employs carefully selected words. Even the syntax is in its impeccable order and perfection. Though his stylistic mode appears to be monotonous and seems colourless, it has intrinsic quality of lively irony and genuine, probing delight into human nature. As his themes render average" life, his style is adequately geared to render an exactly realistic world, as one sees and feels it. This is the outcome of the stylistic analysis of his creative world.



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