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Postcolonial Stylistics in R.K. Narayan's "A Horse and Two Goats"

Dr Mahesh Sharma
Assistant Professor of English,
Faculty of Sabda Vidya,
Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies,
Varanasi, 221007

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Abstract:

The analysis of literature has always been a very challenging task. There are various approaches and tools with which a reader is trained to dig deep into the textual space. However, the linguistic and the stylistic innovation adopted by different writers during different ages add another layer of difficulty for the readers. Writers in postcolonial societies like India, use various stylistic strategies to represent sub-varieties of English which are often class-marking and class-determining, with interesting socio-cultural implications. A better understanding of the author's style certainly helps the reader understand and appreciate not only the language but also the milieu and ethos in which the writer is producing the text.

The first part of the paper aims to establish different types of styles used by the writers. Thereafter, it establishes the connection of the importance of stylistics for the writers of postcolonial countries. The second half of the paper analyses R. K. Narayan's short story "A Horse and Two Goats" in view of the innovative stylistic deviation.

Keywords: Postcolonial Stylistics, Defamiliarization, New Literature in English, Multilingualism, R. K. Narayan.

Style is how language is used to communicate with the world. Several authors and critics have defined the word style, and they can be characterized by their features of definitions, some of which include "style as an expression of personality",ⁱ "the dress of thought",ⁱⁱ "craftsmanship", "point of view", and "content and style as inseparable". Each author has their unique style, which may be called the writer's/author's idiolect. Each person's style can be studied at the lexical level and the level of syntax. However, it is essential to note that an author can use more than one style. Sometimes it becomes so baffling to see the growing variations in one writer's style that it becomes impossible to designate the works to one author at a time.

So, it becomes imperative for the readers to get a sound knowledge of different styles and the way it affects the reception of the texts. Among various other styles available, there are three concepts of style that I will be discussing here: the psychological theory of style, the organic theory of style, and style as a matter of choice.

Psychological Theory of Style

Can the writing be equated with the writer himself? The way we understand the psychological theory of style works at various levels. At one level, the author seems to appear as a product of his age, on another level, authors represent their own personalities, liking, disliking, agendas, ideological leanings etc. The authors appear to be the style they adopt and vice-versa. Comte de Buffon sums up the whole phenomenon by calling it "style is the man" in his Discourse on Style. But doesn't style change and don't authors adopt various different styles? How do we distinguish it? Every writer has a signature style that constitutes themes, diction, syntax, collocation etc.

Professor Fowler makes a distinction between style and language. According to him, each individual has his style of addressing different people (22). Nevertheless, he says that language distinguishes each style from the other. An author's style can vary at three different levels- the first style may be different from work to work probably written within a particular time period; it can be different within work itself; finally, style may differ over a period of time the author's first writing might be drastically different from his last. This variation in style is known as the psychological theory of style.

The adjectives in English literature like Shakespearean, Miltonic, Kafkaesque etc., definitely say something about the author. But the author's style is also governed and controlled by profession, gender, nationality, educational background, culture, and historical background and even gives us a glimpse of their upbringing. The psychological theory of style promises to reflect the author's mind and incorporates various contexts and paraphernalia that might have given birth to that writer and is a style in a particular temporal-spatial setting. The style also grows with more writing and with a period. The style is also affected by the adoption of new ideas where sometimes writers abandon whatever they have written previously, whether it is their philosophical standing or thematical choices. If we read Roland Barthes's works, we can immediately sense a difference in style between his early writings and later writings.

The most intriguing aspect of this approach is to learn how to distinguish two writers based on their styles even if they are from the same country- like Wole Soyinka and Chinua

Achebe; pioneering contemporaries- Virginia Woolf and James Joyce; one corrects the other- Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot etc.

The Organic Theory of Style

Unlike the classical concept of style, which primarily considers matter and manner as separable, the organic theory of style builds on the idea that matter and manner are inseparable. In other words, in the organic theory of style, an author's style grows hand in hand with his thought in the shape of Aristotelian organic unity. The thought and the style grow together. The organic theory of style can also be analysed only when we consider the text in its totality, not bits and pieces. Different writers adopt different ways of writing. Some writers spend a lot of time thinking about the theme like Milton did before writing *Paradise Lost*, while some write in such a way that the end product is only possible when the combined effort of content and form coils together.

The poet-critic S.T. Coleridge was the first person to propose this theory of style. Since the approach emphasizes matter and manner, the writers take care of this aspect well. It is only after the content has been put down that later, the writer can analyze and understand their form of writing. Ironically, Coleridge is notorious in the history of English Literature for producing incomplete work to achieve the degree of innovative style; he used to keep himself highly intoxicated. Sometimes writers merely represent the pressure of their era to meet the demand of style; at other times, they deliberately make the style so complicated.

For New-critics, it is in poetry that there is an ultimate unity between form and content. Any attempt to explain a text that undergoes a paraphrasing phase was considered "heresy of paraphrase",ⁱⁱⁱ especially while dealing with poetry. Poetry is a composite of metaphors, unusual grammatical structures, phonetic significances, symbolic/ figurative meanings, metonyms, similes, etc., that can be understood mainly through experience. Once the attempt to dismantle the structure to comprehend the meaning is carried out, it splits experience and expression. As Cleanth Brooks says: "the poet's unique linguistic and imagistic features are reduced to non-essentials and dispensable stuff... metaphor is the poem" (Indra 21). The organic theory of style and style as the dress of thought have contrasting features, i.e. the former is monistic as matter and manner are inseparable. At the same time, the latter is dualist because form and content can be separated. While stylistics and New Criticism deal with language in literature, their perspectives and approaches vary drastically.

Style as a Matter of Choice

Among all the various types of styles which I have discussed so far, the issue of style as a choice becomes very challenging to explain. Do writers choose to follow and formulate over the years a certain kind of style? Is it affected by the educational, cultural, social and economic background the writers come from? Or there are actually other factors which influence the criterion of choice for the author? For example, it is more than a matter of choice for R.K. Narayan to adopt the kind of style he was famous for. Moreover, his capacity to grow and surprise the readers with every publication provides very good examples of defamiliarization of style.

The term choice can take us to the linguistic dualism of *langue* and *parole* as developed by Saussure.^{iv} In this linguistic theory, *langue* is the whole archive of language, while *parole* is the individual, subjective expression of *langue*, characteristic to each individual depending on his choice. The choice could also vary according to the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic linguistic axes. The individual is free to choose the syntax of his sentences and interchange words within the same part of speech. Choice does not end there. The writer is free to pick from the vast resource of language at his disposal without being limited to any linguistic community, any register and can even decide to coin new words.

However, not all selections of words could be called style. When a writer chooses to use a certain style, that style can contradict the usual pattern in which they write; hence, the output can be pretty surprising for the readers. At other times writers choose experimental methods of writing, which pose a different challenge for the readers to understand.

For example, when we discuss modern writers, most of the writers seem to exhibit an innovative style of writing. Yet, their style is different from each other. Even the closely associated styles of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot can also be distinguished from each other. The same is the case with the unique styles of writers like Virginia Woolf or James Joyce. It depends on the author's choice of how they convey the meaning in discourse. Kafka addressed the same issue differently with this unique style where the nightmarish, dark, gloomy style tried to capture the alienation of the modern man. After getting a sense of the different types of styles, now it is essential to locate it in the broader context of Postcolonialism in general and Indian Writing in English in particular.

Postcolonial Stylistics

In straightforward terms, postcolonial stylistics is the linguistic study of the literature of postcolonial societies. To understand the characteristics of postcolonial stylistics, first, we

will have to undertake a quick survey of postcolonial societies and the way the English language is used. The postcolonial societies form a sense of brotherhood because they share a violent past of colonization.^v Countries like India, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand and many other countries of Africa and Latin America gained their freedom from the British or European colonizers after a long fight.^{vi} The fall of the empire posed a challenge in front of these societies to clean their own identity. Literature played a crucial role in asserting the duality of postcolonial identity, characterized by mimicry, hybridization, ambivalence and innovation.^{vii}

The notion of postcolonial stylistics is very relevant, especially in the countries where postcolonial writings were written in English. In societies like India, the Indian authors not only chose to write in the colonizers' language but also expressed the unique and distinctive values and characteristics of their own culture and society in English. As Bill Ashcroft et al. explain in their seminal text *The Empire Writes Back*:

In order to focus on the complex ways in which the English language has been used in these societies, and to indicate their own sense of difference, we distinguish in this account between the 'standard' British English inherited from the empire and the English which the language has become in postcolonial countries. Though British imperialism resulted in the spread of a language, English, across the globe, the English of Jamaicans is not the English of Canadians, Maoris, or Kenyans. We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, English, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world. For this reason the distinction between English and English will be used throughout our text as an indication of the various ways in which the language has been employed by different linguistic communities in the postcolonial world. (7-8)

Writers in postcolonial societies like India, use various stylistic strategies to represent sub-varieties of English which are often class-marking and class-determining, with interesting socio-cultural implications.^{viii} Whether it is the chutnification of the English language in the novels of Rushdie; Sanskritization in the novels of Raja Rao; the Punjabi tones in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand or Khushwant Singh; the different techniques of defamiliarization have worked simultaneously on the level of innovation and subversion at the same time. It is through the linguistics and stylistics variations like glossing, neologisms, fusion, clipping, untranslated words, calques, code-mixing and code-switching etc. that the writers in India have appropriated the Englishness of the English language.^{ix}

Though the English language is foreign to India, as a postcolonial society after 1947, India has adopted this language as a medium of communication in all the regions. However, English came to India in the 19th century by Christian missionaries even before the British rule and has developed a new corpus of Indian literature written in Indian English with its own terminology and idioms. With the creativity of the Indian writers, English is modified in different regions adopting stylistic influences from the regional local languages. This corpus of literature known as "Indian English Literature" or even "Indian writing in English" is defined in the book *A History of English Literature* written by M.K Naik as "literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality (10)".

Indian English literature presents a variety of themes such as cultural, social values, religion, tradition, and history, both at the national, regional and proficiency levels. It has seeped into the Indian tradition where today there is the rise of a distinctive style of writing in English, which we call Indian Literature in English. As Shashi Tharoor in his book *The Great Indian Novel* says, "The most distinguishing feature of Indian writing in English is that it has acquired a certain self-confidence as a genre because there is a whole generation for whom there is no need to feel self-conscious about the use of this language or the kind of stories we tell in it (8)".

Because of the long presence of English in the Indian subcontinent, many Indian words have been incorporated into the lexicon of Indian English. Some notable examples are jungle, shawl, veranda and bungalow. Indian English is not only different from the International standard of English but is also different at the phonetic level because of the absence of some English phonetic sounds in Indian languages. To prove my point, I would like to analyze the stylistic innovations in R.K. Narayan's famous short story – "A Horse and Two Goats".^x

Critical Analysis of "A Horse and Two Goats"

Short stories written by Indian writers in Indian English are abundant. One such example is R K Narayan's *A Horse and Two Goats*. The story is located in a village of south India which is distant yet lively - Kritam. Apart from the Big House, all other houses in the village are small huts. There is a small grocery shop in the village where everyone in there goes shopping. Once upon a time, the village was situated along the road that went towards the town but because of the construction of the highway, the village goes moved further away inwards and lost all its prominence. Hardly anyone knew of its existence because of its secluded location.

In brief, the story goes as follows. One day Muni a poor villager took his two goats to graze during which the old man sits in the shade of a terracotta horse. One day an American come there while he is sitting and wants to buy that horse. The American who speaks in English and Muni who speaks in Tamil try to make conversation. The turn-taking in the conversation takes place without any of them understanding the other. Finally, whereas the American gives the old man a hundred rupees for the horse, the old man thinks that he has bought his two goats and has finally gotten rid of them. While he is at home with his wife recounting the story of how he had come to earn that amount, the two goats come back. On seeing the goats, however, his wife does not believe the story and believes that he stole the money.

After analyzing the story in depth we observe that it is recounted in the third person by an omniscient narrator whose perspective is objective and external because he does not judge or comment on the characters or the event. Some of the themes present in the short story are the clash of cultures, wealth and poverty; between the American (West) and Muni (East); knowledge and ignorance as evident in the conversation between Muni and the American.

Muni looked reflective at the end of this long oration and said rather feebly,

"Yes, no," as a concession to the other's language, and went on in Tamil, "When

I was this high" he indicated a foot high "I had heard my uncle say..."

No one can tell what he was planning to say as the other interrupted him at this

stage to ask, "Boy, what is the secret of your teeth? How old are you?"

The old man forgot what he had started to say and remarked, "Sometimes we too

lose our cattle. (18)

The horse in the story has a great significance in the narrative capturing the ambivalence of both the cultures- the Indian and the American. While "discussing" the sale of the horse, Muni remembers and recounts the birth of the avatars because he sees the horse from a religious perspective as being the last incarnation of Lord Vishnu as Kalki and recounts the stories from the Ramayana. While the American who is well educated possesses several books

in his living room, who has come to India "to look at other civilizations" does not seem to be looking at India for what it is but as an ornament, a typical orientalist perspective. Although Muni tries to explain the significance of the horse statue, it is only a living room decoration for the American. The language barrier does not allow him to interpret Muni's words, nor does he seem interested to understand.

As this story is written in English by an Indian writer, several words and phrasal structures have been added from the Indian language, particularly Tamil. Several lexical categorizations can be made, for example, eatables such as Dal, curry leaves, gingelly oil, bhang, drumstick sauce, Pongal; names of Gods and Goddesses like Vishnu, Kalki, Shiva, Bhagwan. At the structural level of the language, phrases such as "packing case" signifying a book to pack things in, "apply for admission to swarga", "dhobi-washed sheet", meaning sheets to be washed by the washerman or laundryman, "khaki clothes" connoting clothes worn by the police, especially in colonial India, "hold him" meaning 'catch him', "Parangi language" signifying foreign language, "Parangi" or foreigner, "every bright half of the month" indicating the period when the moon is waxing, "red man" denoting a white man who has turned red because of the heat.

In this story, we can also see how R.K. Narayan creates humour by depicting cultural and linguistic differences. To start with, Muni has no knowledge of English apart from 'yes' and 'no', which he uses to respond to questions asked by the 'red-faced man'. When the American approaches the horse, he cries "Marvellous!" twice to which Muni responds with confusion and fear, not understanding what exactly the foreigner meant. When the American hands Muni his card, he thinks that this man in khaki has come to arrest him, and if he ran, he would be shot. When the man offers him a cigarette, he is happy to receive it but blows the fire out of confusion as soon as the American lights the lighter.

Neither of the two understands what the other is saying except through gestures, pointing fingers in directions, and looking at physical objects like the card. In the process of this "conversation", their personal life, cultural difference and intellectual competence are revealed only to the reader because they are unable to understand each other. This makes the conversation humorous to the readers. When Muni does not respond to the man's questions, the foreigner sticks to the slow speech which works both as mockery and ignorance of the white man. This expresses incredulity that Muni cannot speak English or refuses to do so because of some "religious or spiritual scruples". By saying so, he seems to exotify the lives of the Indians where religion and spirituality drive them to behave illogically. Language in this story is connected to colonialism as English seems to appear as the language of the colonizers alone.

The fact that Muni could not have access to English due to his caste, and his encounter with the American, indicates the disadvantage to those who don't know the language and can be rewarding in the global economy to those who are proficient in English.

So he went on, all in the chaste Tamil for which Kritam was famous. (Even the worse detractors could not deny that the famous poetess Avaiyar was born in this area, although no one could say whether it was in Kritam or Kuppam, the adjoining village.) Out of this heritage the Tamil language gushed through Muni in an unimpeded flow. He said, "Before God, sir, Bhagwan, who sees everything, I tell you, sir, that we know nothing of the case.

If the murder was committed, whoever did it will not escape. Bhagwan is all-seeing. Don't ask me about it. I know nothing." A body had been found mutilated and thrown under a tamarind tree at the border between Kritam and Kuppam a few weeks before, giving rise to much gossip and speculation. Muni added an explanation "Anything is possible there. People over there will stop at nothing."

The foreigner nodded his head and listened courteously though he understood nothing. (22)

As a contrast to the linguistic lack of proficiency in English as observed above, proficiency in one's own culture is highlighted through Muni's knowledge of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, which he expresses through his story of Kalki. Although Muni was the poorest of the poor in the village, he prided himself on the few possessions he had, such as the two goats, the drumstick tree under whose shade he lived and consequently became his and, finally, his knowledge of the Kalki story.

Analyzing the name of the village Kritam which in Tamil means 'coronet' or 'crown', is a significant allusion to the "jewel in the crown" stolen by the British during the colonial years. The author uses dramatic irony by establishing a contrast between the small size of the village and the lofty name.

In this story, English plays a significant role in class marking and class determining. As discussed above, the village's limits and limitations are reinforced by the caste system marked by Muni, a Shudra, the lowest rung of the caste system. They could not be educated and learn English because it was only limited to the upper caste, the Brahmins. Muni feels relieved from the humiliation of being the "poorest fellow" belonging to the lowest rung of the caste system in comparison to others in the village, only with the allure of the highway on the outskirts of his location. The whole commercial act happens outside of the village, almost on the outskirts, signifying the out-of-place existential situatedness for both Muni and the foreigner.

Notes:

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- ⁱ De Buffon, Georges-Louis Leclerc. "Discourse on Style." *The Writer's Art*. Harvard University Press, 2013. 277-287.
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- ^v Innes, C. Lyn. *Postcolonial Literatures in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- ^{vi} Bassnett, Susan, and Harish Trivedi. *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. Routledge, 2012.
- ^{vii} Crowley, Patrick, and Jane Hiddleston, eds. *Postcolonial Poetics: Genre and Form*. Vol. 2. Liverpool University Press, 2011.
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- ^{ix} See Kachru, Braj B., ed. *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*. University of Illinois press, 1992. and Kachru, Braj B. "World Englishes: Approaches, Issues and Resources." *Language Teaching* 25.1 (1992): 1-14.
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