

Style and a Brief Stylistic Analysis of the Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra

Hemanta Rajbanshi¹, Bairagi Patra²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Language and Literature, Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar, India

²Research Supervisor, Department of Language and Literature, Utkal University of Culture, Bhubaneswar, India

Abstract: Style is a common word used in enhancing beauty of something. Literary critics always try to find out the special style of an author used in his or her works. Stylistics is such an approach where the critic finds the decorative style of a literary work. Our aim in this study is to make a general perception about what is style and make stylistic analyses of a few poems of Jayanta Mahapatra in particular. The analysis attempts to bring out Mahapatra's distinctly different voice and perception of life.

Keywords: approach, lexical, language, literature, style, stylistics, syntactic

1. What is Style and Stylistics in literature?

Stylistics is the application of linguistic method to interpret the style of language in a particular piece of literature. Whenever we use language, we use it according to our purpose and in this way we choose the words and tones accordingly. According to our purpose of communication, we select the language with its various syntactical and lexical possibilities. It is to be noted that stylistics is not only confined to written language. In spoken or oral language also, it carries the same importance. But, in the study of literature, the critics generally are interested in stylistic study of written discourse. In his book, "Stylistics of Poetry", Dr. D. Gnanasekaran focuses on the history of stylistics in the following way:

"Stylistics has developed during the last seventy years as a complement to traditional literary criticism and has certain affinities with Practical Criticism, New Criticism and other text-centered approaches. Stylistics in the twentieth century replaces and expands on, the earlier discipline known as "Rhetoric". In ancient Greece, the use of language can be mainly seen as an effort to create speeches. Thus we may recognize a practical function of language in political and judicial speeches and an aesthetic function in ceremonial ones. The art of creating speech was called Rhetoric and was taught as one of the main subjects in schools. The aim was to train speakers to create effective and attractive speeches. Another language activity was the creation of poetic works. This process of artistic creation was called Poetics. Its aim was to study a piece of art, and unlike Rhetoric, it focused on the problems of expressing the ideas before the actual moment of utterance.

The work of Aristotle entitled 'Poetics' is considered to be a pioneer publication in this field. His distinction of epics, drama

and lyrics within artistic works is still applicable. The third field of language use was the art of creating a dialogue. The study of creating and guiding a dialogue, talk or discussion, as well as the study of methods or persuasion was called Dialectics. The 'dialogue technique' as one of the most convenient and efficient forms of exchanging experiences and presenting research results was introduced and supported by Socrates. This method is still known in pedagogy as the 'dialogical' or 'Socrates method'.

The development of Stylistics was based on the three sources from which 'Poetics' went its own way and created the field of study known at present as Literary Criticism. Rhetoric and Dialectics developed into Stylistics. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a group of German linguistics, B. Croce, K. Vossler and Leo Spitzer represented the school of the New Idealists. The origin of the new era of the linguistic stylistics is represented by the linguistic emotionalistic conception of the French School of Charles Bally. Bally worked under the supervision of Ferdinand de Saussure in Geneva and after Saussure's death, published his teacher's work, *Course de Linguistique Generale* (1916). Following the publication of a two volume treatise on French Stylistics by Charles Bally (1909), a pupil of Ferdinand de Saussure, interest in stylistics gradually spread across Europe through the work of Leo Spitzer and others. It was in the 1960s that it really began to flourish in Britain and the United States. Traditional literary critics were suspicious of an objective approach to literary texts.

While at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Romance countries were mainly influenced by Bally's expressive stylistics and Germany by Croce's individual stylistics, a new linguistic and literary movement developed in Russia, known as Formalism. The Russian Formalists introduced a new highly focused and solid method of literary and linguistic analysis. This formal method used in linguistics was based on the analytical view of the form and the content of a literary work and was seen as a sum of its stylistic methods. The focus was on 'devices of artistry', not on content. The main representative was Roman Jakobson. Others were J. N. Tynjanov and V. Vinogradov. Russian Formalism originated in 1916, flourished in 1920-1923, and had practically ceased to exist by the end of the 1920s. Notwithstanding its short existence, many ideas were modified and further elaborated. They became part

of Structuralism and can also be found in the works of the members of the Prague School ten years later.

Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, allegiance to linguistic procedures was the primary defining element of stylistics as a discipline and it remained so in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Stylistics continues to enjoy its status as a discipline operating among all the other disciplines from which it historically has drawn both its goals and its methods. From the multitude of linguistic approaches to style, two linguistic schools (The Prague School and British Contextualism) of the twentieth century have thus exerted the most decisive influence on the development, terminology and the state of the art of stylistics. Firmly established in the 1920s, some of the most important proponents are Havranek, Jakobson and Mukarovsky. These linguists have paid particular attention to situation-bound stylistics variation.

2. Definitions of Stylistics

Various critics and authors define stylistics according to their own points of view. Although, there are differences in their presentation of their views, the focus is always the same in all such definitions.

According to Cummings and Simmons, "A work of literature is a text that is valued by its culture, that uses a special language and that affects people with emotions that are valued for their own sake."

They further say, "Our intuition of a literary text comes from the perception however subconscious of these patterns. Consequently, the way to make our attention more conscious is to make the linguistic structure of the text more conscious."

According to David Crystal, "Linguistic is the academic discipline that studies language scientifically and stylistics as part of this discipline studies certain aspects of language variation."

According to another critic, Nils Erik Enkvist, "We may regard stylistics as a sub-department of linguistics and give it a special subsection dealing with the peculiarities of literary texts. We may choose to make stylistics a sub-department of literary study which may draw on linguistic methods or we may regard linguistics as an autonomous discipline which draws freely and eclectically, on methods from linguistics and from literary study."

Michael Short says, "Stylistics is an approach to the analysis of literary texts using linguistic description." Katie Wales observes that Stylistics is the study of style that has the goal "not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text, in order to relate literary effects to linguistic causes where these are felt to be relevant."

In 'Stylistics', says S.K. Das, "literature and linguistics can meet." He again says, "The linguist who dismisses cavalierly the intuitive response of a literary critic as being inaccessible to objective verification or as lacking in vigor, is not likely to contribute to the development of stylistic studies. Similarly, the

literary scholar's bohemian reaction to the linguistic mode will render his critical apparatus clearly inadequate."

There are two main stylistic distinctions: Literary Stylistics and Linguistic Stylistics. Literary stylistics is mainly literary than linguistic which was first practiced by Leo Spitzer and his followers in the 1940s. It is mainly an objective approach and there is no rigid methodology.

In Linguistic approach, linguistic criteria is followed. There are three types of Linguistic approach:

- Approaches that consider style as deviation from the norm.
- Approaches that provides importance on recurrence
- Approaches that focus on a special exploitation of a grammar of possibilities.

Speaking about the stylistic analysis of poetry, noted scholar and critic Partha Sarathi Mishra says, "Literary stylistic analysis provides the readers with the necessary tools to understand the 'aesthetic qualities' of a text by sensitizing the readers to the intricacies of literature. Lexis is often regarded as a starting point for the study of the nature of language and a study of the ways lexical items are patterned in a poem gives the reader valuable clues to the meaning of the poem. Lexical items, their semantic incompatibilities and unusual collocations show the readers how a poet uses language to create a particular effect."

3. Jayanta Mahapatra's Poetry: A Stylistic Approach

This study tries to focus on the unique poetic style of Mahapatra and his effective use of language through his poetry. Here, we try to analyze two poems of Mahapatra which highlights the linguistic devices used to convey a particular theme.

A. *The Hollow Mouth*

Morning mists stagger across the silent fields
Once again. Soon it will be summer.
Are these abstract washes of white
From widows' prayers of last night? Or another
Foggy dawn, waiting to take one
Through the troubles of the world?
A morning when a poet doesn't know
What his words mean. A light of treachery
Begins to glisten on the leaves,
As it changes from instant to instant.
I wonder whether this isn't
Another act of malice by a gentle God.
Perhaps I see his smirk behind the glass
Of his words and that hollow mouth
Whose laughter has mocked so often.
My pain grows empty like the rainbow:
It dances in the skeleton of the rain limp with light.
I taste the air.
I realize more than half my life is over.

The poem carries a note of pessimism, discontent and futility. There is nothing which can attract the poet. He is even not

interested to start the day. He even does not get any satisfaction or fulfillment from the act of writing.

There are lexical items like-morning, dawn, light, and rain. But these lexical items do not reflect the gloomy view of the poem. Instead, these bring a refreshing and invigorating imagery. There are some different items which nullify this freshness. These are night, foggy, misty, limp, pain, mock, smirk, malice and treachery. There are some questions raised by the poet- "Are these abstract washes of white/from widow's prayer of last night? Or another foggy dawn, waiting to take one/through the troubles of the world? Whether this isn't another act of malice by a gentle god?" All these questions indicate a sense of uncertainty and doubt.

Again, the lexical items are related to the various time within a day-morning, dawn, night, light etc. and the other set relates to something life has to offer-pain, smirk, treachery, mock, malice, limp, empty. As the poet points out, passing of day and night is not only a routine work, rather it brings more-light of treachery, smirk behind the glass and grey associations.

The poet's despairing attitude is clearly reflected in the two interrogatives in the first six lines. The fields are silent and it is not something pleasant. It is rather an indication of some ominous silence that lingers while "morning mists stagger".

For the poet, the summer sky is not a source of energy and happiness, rather he compares it as white as a widow's prayer. Again, there is a contrasting image presented through the morning which is not fresh or not a new beginning. For him, the morning is unproductive and puzzling, foggy or misty.

In his book, "The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: A study in style and sensibility", Archana Kumar says in the following way while analyzing the poem:

"In the nominal phrases, a light of treachery, the skeleton of the rain, the nominal heads, light, skeleton have unusual qualifier prepositional phrases. In the phase, a light of treachery, treachery is an abstract noun, but by association with light, it becomes concrete. In the misty morning, light that glisten is a light of treachery. All that the poet finds in the world is treachery, malice, smirk of ridicule, mockery of hollow mouth. Yet he calls the god 'gentle', it is difficult to visualize a benign, gentle god when there is treachery, malice and ridiculing laughter. In such a malicious scheme of world only feeling the poet experiences is pain. "

In the last stanza, the poet uses a deviant expression when he says, "My pain grows empty like rainbow". The adjective complement 'empty' has a clash with the verb 'grow', because a thing which grows cannot be empty. In the same way, the rainbow is also empty of color. It is quite despairing that for the poet, God is malicious and ridiculing.

B. *The Door*

This thing

Wakes me like a hand.
Grass waits
And rock
Takes the wind's place.
Huge door
Drifting
With feet of light
My eyes
Quietly open
Before the nights.

In a journal published by Sahitra Akademi, the poet Jayanta Mahapatra writes an article regarding his perception of the door. The title of the essay is, "Poetry as Freedom: The Door". Here, the poet says:

"There is a door in the heart of man which never opens. Or if it does at times, we are not aware of its opening. When it does, it goes on to reveal another world-a world where time falls away, and space grows; perhaps the self-fills with vastness and light."

The poem, as the poet says, is about the bright side of life where there is optimism. The door always brings light in its back when it is open. The lexical items are-hand, grass, rock, wind, door, eyes and light. All these items show a positive attitude towards life. There are some phrases- 'wakes me like a hand', 'takes the wind's place', 'drifting with feet of light', and 'open before the night's'. All these also speak about an optimistic view of life.

There is a contrasting idea when the poet says that 'rock takes the wind's place'. In reality a rock can never takes the place of the wind. The door is a huge one which is a very optimistic view, but suddenly it changes its meaning when the poet says that it 'drifting with feet of light'. A huge door drifts in the feet of light is quite absurd.

We generally open our eyes before the dawn, but the poet says that his eyes open quietly before the night opens it's. Again here it is a positive attitude towards life.

4. Conclusion

This paper presented an overview on style and a brief stylistic analysis of the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra.

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