

An Indian English Poem: The Use of Stylistics in Innovative Teaching

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Abstract: This paper attempts to demonstrate the appreciation procedure of a poem through its critical textual analysis. The stress of the textual scrutiny is on the use of lexical items in a poem. Word classes like adjectives, pronouns and other content classes are analysed in terms of their length, sound pattern and structural design and in respect of the grammatical features like articles, tenses and others. The balanced and parallel constructions and the rhymes are studied minutely. The poem 'Father Returning Home' by Dilip Chitre is a comment on the dull, drab routine of an alien in the city life of Mumbai. This idea is conveyed through the use of the length and completeness of the lines. Various devices have been mathematically assessed in order to display the use of Stylistics in literary appreciation. The paper brings out the fact that mechanics of stylistic analysis enhance the pleasure of enjoying a poem. It is a practical lesson that uses the art and science of stylistics.

Keywords: lexical items, stylistics, appreciation, balance, parallelism, structure-length, rhyme, imagery, symbolical suggestiveness, critical analysis, textual scrutiny.

Stylistics is a branch of modern linguistics “devoted to the detailed analysis of literary style or of the linguistic choices made by speakers and writers in non-literary contexts” (Baldick 215). Stylistics makes a rigorous and systematic study of the language of a text and enables a reader to appreciate its meaning in its totality. But this basic assumption is often questioned by critics of stylistics. Gower opposes any literary stylistic analysis of literature and he “considers it to be too mechanistic and cerebral in operation and maintains that instead of helping readers appreciate literature, a stylistic analysis actually impedes the whole process of reading and appreciating literature” (Misra 47). But Gower's criticism of the use of literary stylistics in the study of literature is difficult to accept because the analysis of the different parts of a literary text following a literary stylistics model is never an end in itself. On the other hand it enhances the appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of the text. Literary stylistic analysis offers the necessary tools to understand the aesthetic qualities of a text. Lexis is considered 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 offers the reader valuable clues to the meaning of the poem. Stylistic analysis enhances our appreciation of the artistic quality of the poem. The present paper attempts to make stylistic analysis of 'Father Returning Home' by Dilip Chitre.

FATHER RETURNING HOME

My father travels on the late evening train
Standing among silent commuters in the yellow light
Suburbs slide past his unseeing eyes
His shirt and pants are soggy and his black raincoat
Stained with mud and his bag stuffed with books
Is falling apart. His eyes dimmed by age
Fade homeward through the humid monsoon night.
Now I can see him getting off the train
Like a word dropped from a long sentence.
He hurries across the length of the grey platform,
Crosses the railway line, enters the lane,
His chappals are sticky with mud, but he hurries onward.
Home again, I see him drinking weak tea,
Eating a stale chapati, reading a book.
He goes into the toilet to contemplate
Man's estrangement from a man-made world.
Coming out he trembles at the sink,
The cold water running over his brown hands,
A few droplets cling to the greying hairs on his wrists.
His sullen children have often refused to share
Jokes and secrets with him. He will now go to sleep
Listening to the static on the radio, dreaming
Of his ancestors and grandchildren, thinking
Of nomads entering a subcontinent through a narrow pass.

(Dilip Chitre 60-61)

This poem is one of the Bombay poems by Dilip Chitre. The poet explores here all the strata of passions and sufferings caused by urban experience. He tries to search for relations in the reality full of intense unrelatedness. He presents a complex image of an individual who is pitted against the actual sterility and decay. The vast emptiness and meaninglessness is the impact of the speedy life style of urban life. This poem is an illustration of the fatigued monotony and consequent boredom. This is the daily experience of the commuters of local trains in the city of Bombay. The story of the father- figure is candidly representative. The theme of alienation as a typical Bombay experience becomes clear at different places in the poem. It offers a dull and gloomy vision of a commuter who has to return willy-nilly to stale food and sullen family. The father has no enthusiasm or zest in living life at the end of the dull routine of a day. He lives a mechanical life. Every action of the father is mechanical. It becomes doubtful whether he is a living being or a mechanical artifact or an emotionless automation. From the point of his

starting for home by the local train to going to sleep as the full circle of terrible boredom comes true. This poem offers a dreary vision of typical middle class life in Bombay.

1. **Repetition of Lexical Items:** The first reading of the poem presents the repetition of the some items of the English lexis.

Words	Lines
1. train (twice)	1,8
2. mud (twice)	5, 12
3. he (five times)	10, 12, 15, 17,21
4. his (ten times)	3, 4(2), 5, 6, 12,18,19,20,23
5. him (thrice)	8, 13,21
6. now (twice)	8, 21
7. hurries (twice)	10, 12
8. book/s (twice)	5, 14
9. I (twice)	8, 13
10. eyes (twice)	3, 6

2. **Semantic Connections of the Lexical Items:** The lexical items which have close semantic connections in this poem can be grouped as under:

- Kinship in the family: father, children, ancestors, grandchildren
- Train Journey: Train, commuters, suburbs, platform, railway line
- Day-Time and climate: Evening, humid, monsoon, night
- Domestic Objects: Home, tea, chapatti, toilet, sink, radio
- Colour terms : yellow, black, grey, brown, greying
- Personal Articles: Shirt, pants, soggy, raincoat, bag, stuffed, chappals
- Adjectives: Soggy, stuffed, sticky, stand
- Physical parts of the body: dimmed(adj) eyes(n), brown(adj) hands(n), graying(adj) hairs(n)

3. **Deviations in Syntax and so in Semantics:**

My father travels on the late evening train

Standing among.....

..... falling apart.

The late evening local trains in Bombay are literally stuffed with commuters of which the 'father' of the speaker is one. The commuters are silent as they do not talk with each other. The father is also silent. Nobody is there who communicates with him. The word 'standing' suggests the terrible rush in the train. The word 'silent' initially indicates the theme and element of alienation which runs throughout the poem. The experience of being cut off from the world outside him is spelt in the silent suffering of the patient helpless commuters. The father all alone among the crowd of fellow commuters, returns home exhausted

almost benumbed. The colour adjective 'yellow' suggests something unhealthy in the atmosphere and this unhealthiness is extended further in the remaining lines of the poem. Not only the tongues but the eyes are also inactive. He is so habituated with the routine scene of the suburban areas outside the compartment that he never looks at them. There is no link between his eyes and the suburbs. This too, is a kind of alienation.

4. **Parallel Construction in the Poem:**

My father travels.....

a) *Suburbs slide.....*

Both the sentences suggest that the 'father' and the 'suburbs' are moving. Their directions are totally opposite to each other. Both of them are not moving themselves, but the train is moving. They do not have their own will to move but an external power makes them move. The following lines describe the physical appearance of the father. His shirt and pants are heavily soaked with water because of the rainy season. His black raincoat is stained with mud. His stuffed and stained bag is falling apart. This suggests that not only the 'silent commuters' but his personal article such as his bag - is falling 'apart'. This is a subtle suggestion of the central theme of alienation of this poem.

5. **Suggestive use of Language:**

His middle-class appearance is reflected through every detail.

His eyes dimmed by age

Fade homeward.....

... From a long sentence.

His eyes are already made weak by time and age. Perhaps he looks in the direction of his home in the hope of getting some sustenance. Here, the tragedy of the dim eyes has been heightened by the humid monsoon night. At this moment the speaker sees that his father gets off the train 'like a word dropped from a long sentence'. This simile suggests that even language, which is a means to connect, fails. Omission of a word renders the sentence meaningless. Similarly, life in the city like Bombay becomes meaningless without a rapport with humanity. Moreover, sentence is a network of relationships. Like a dropped word, the father is also severed from the network of relationships.

He hurries across.....

.....reading a book.

6. **Appropriate Adjectives :**

Constant hurry and worry is the chief feature of the life in the highly industrialized city. Bombay stands as a representative of this type of cities. First, his dimmed(adj) 'eyes' fade homeward, now his feet are rushing homeward. He walks fast to reach home,

crosses the railway line. The colour term is an adjective 'grey' is indicative of the dullness. The old platform(adj) reinforces the sordidness of the father's existence. He does not care even about his chappals sticky(adj) with mud. But what is he going to do at home? Is the home ready to welcome him with a smiling(adj) face? Is he going to have a fresh(adj) meal? The answers to these questions are in the negative. He has come fast to his (?) home in the hope of some relief but here the weak tea and a stale(adj) chapati are waiting for him. The expression 'weak tea.... Stale chapati' tells much about the non-nourishing(adj) food of the old(adj) man. He does two things at the same time. He reads a book perhaps to divert his attention from the 'weak' tea and 'stale' chapati. This book also must be stale like the chapati because so many times in his routine life he must have read the same book. Eating is a routine too. It has become a mechanical act. The images 'the weak tea', 'the stale chapati' and 'brown hands' spell effete existence and contribute to the urban motif.

7. **Balanced Constructions:** The balanced constructions are noticed in lines.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| (a) He hurries across the length | (b) (He) crosses the railway line. |
| (c) (He) enters the lane. | (d) He hurries onward |
| (e) I see him drinking weak tea. | (f) (I see him) eating a stale chapati. |
| (g) (I see him) reading a book. | |

8. **Symbolical Value attached to 'Toilet' and Droplets:**

He goes into the toilet.....

.....greying on his wrists.

The father finds toilet as the best place to ruminate on life, particularly on man's loss of rapport from the world made by himself. But how long will he sit there? After a while, he comes out and washes his hands with the cold water. The speaker sees that 'a few droplets cling to the greying hairs on his wrists. This line (line 19) is full of significance as 'a few droplets of water' and 'greying hairs' suggest that the life of the father is about to come to an end. A few droplets of water - a few days of his life are left behind. And in the last days of his life he is trying to find out some sort of anchorage at home in the family. Does he get it?

9. **Lack of Communication:** A Characteristic Feature of Modern Life.

His sullen children have

.....secrets with him.

His tragedy is further deepened at home when he realizes that his children belong to a different world altogether. He cannot establish a rapport with the most communicable persons like children. There is a drift between the two generations. The children 'often' have refused to share not only the light but also

the serious matters with him. The word 'often' has been emphasized in this line. What is the way out, then?

10. Suggestiveness of Meaning in Words:

He will not go to sleep

Listening to the.....

.....through a narrow pass.

Finally, the father goes to bed. He wants to talk to his children but they do not. He has no chance to listen to any living being, because in the train there were 'silent' commuters and at home, there are sullen children. So, he listens to the talk of the machine - the radio which is a way of 'one-way' communication. He cannot talk with the radio but passively listens to it. But what does he listen about? He listens to the atmospherics - that is the harsh sound created by some disturbance in the atmosphere in the radio-waves. The sound is suggestive of 'sound and fury, signifying nothing' - reflection of the old commuter's existence. Even the inanimate thing like a radio is not willing to talk with him in a soothing voice. Harshness of experience is an organic part of his life. Harshness is his fate.

11. Realistic Reflection of Modern Life through Words:

He dreams of his 'ancestors' and 'grandchildren'. Both of them are not present. Man dreams of the things which he does not possess but wants to possess. 'Ancestors' stand for the 'past' and 'grandchildren' for the 'future'. When one cannot bear the harsh and unwanted reality of the 'present' he tries to psychologically linger in the past or the future and desires to take flight from the reality of the present. Alienation is complete - even in the subconscious. Dreams stand for hopes — future stands for hopes. He always thinks that if not the children, at least his grandchildren will talk to him. Moreover, he thinks of the nomads entering this country through a narrow pass (perhaps it is the Khyber Pass) through which the Aryans are thought to have come into India five thousand years ago. The father suffers a destiny similar to that of the nomads who wander from place to place. The father is nothing but a modified nomad. Mentally, he goes far off in the past and at the very end of the boundaries of this subcontinent. Actually, he is related to nobody — not even with his children. They are attached with him mechanically through circumstantial compulsions and are repelled because the urban air creates in them a strong reaction of unbelonging. Today's 'children' will become the 'fathers' of tomorrow and there will be a constant circle of 'fathers' returning-home by the same local train, in the same alienated condition of mind. When the father goes to sleep without communication with the members of the family, it must be a pathetic experience for him, particularly, when he tries in vain to entertain himself by

listening to the 'static' on the radio. Both his waking and dreaming are soured by the same awareness of a hiatus that widens forever. He intensely knows that life is full of nothingness and there is an illogical connection between the things. He knows only about living somehow but does not know the purpose of his life. The picture of Bombay as revealed in these lines is of a total loss of rapport. One more notable feature of the poem is that it stands aloof from sentimentality despite its tender subject.

12. **Physical and Psychological Aspects of Poem:**

There are two stanzas in this poem. Each of them consists of twelve lines. There is no deliberate rhyming scheme in them. The poem has nine sentences. Four out of these nine occur in the first stanza and remaining five in the second stanza. The first section describes his travel from the starting to the station where he detrains and the second section describes his actions at home. Apart from this, the section is more related with his inner world of both at the home and his psyche. The first section is the physical aspect of his alienation and the second is the psychological aspect of the same.

13. **Structural Pattern of the Length of Lines:**

The minimum number of words in the lines is six and the maximum is eleven. Eight-word lines dominantly occur in the poem. The following chart makes it clear :

Words	Lines
Lines of six words	3, 16, 23
Lines of seven words	7, 11, 14, 15, 17
Lines of eight words	1, 2, 6, 9, 13, 18, 20, 22
Lines of nine words	5, 8, 10, 24
Lines of ten words	4, 12
Lines of eleven words	19, 21

14. **Use of Parallelism:**

Parallelism is one of the salient features of this poem. The following constructions make it clear:

- a) His shirt and pants are soggy.
- b) and his black raincoat stained with mud.
- c) and his bag stuffed books.
- d) His chappals are sticky with mud.
- e) His eyes dimmed by age
- f) He hurries across the length
- g) (he) crosses the railway line
- h) (he) enters the lane
- I) he hurries onward
- j) I see him drinking weak tea.

- k) (I see him) eating a stale chapati
- l) (I see him) reading a book.
- m) Listening to the static on the radio.
- n) dreaming of his ancestors and grandchildren /
- o) thinking of nomads entering a subcontinent.

15. End-stopped Lines and Enjambment:

Most of the sentences end with the end of the lines (line No. 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 19 and 24). Only two sentences are completed half way through the line No. 6 and 21. Notably, in the sixth line his bag is 'falling apart' and in the twenty first his children have 'refused to share jokes and secrets' with him. Something has been cut half way through. The bag stuffed with books stands for the physical tie and the sullen children represent the psychological ties of relationships. But there is something wrong with both of the ties. Both of these ties (the bag and the children) have been carried by him over the years but now they have been cut off from his life. Again his alienation has been skillfully suggested through these two lines (6 and 21). Even the lineation and the construction of the sentences contribute to the unity of the poem.

16. Use of Punctuation Marks:

Next to the full-stops the other major punctuation marks are the commas. Eleven commas occur in them. Most of them have been used in the parallel constructions. We have seen that there are nine sentences in this poem because there are nine full-stops. Normally, the full-stop is considered a completion of a sentence. Apart from the nine sentences, there are two more sentences in the poem which do not have a full-stop but they are, by all definitions, complete sentences. The first three lines consist of these two sentences. We can frame them as follows:

- a) My father travels on the late evening train standing among silent commuters in the yellow light.
- b) Suburbs slide past his unseeing eyes.

The poet has not put full-stops at the end of these two sentences. This is a graphological deviation which suggests that the local train, the silent commuters, his father, the suburbs and the unseeing eyes are so closely related with each other that even the formal punctuation marks like full-stops and commas cannot separate them from each other. 'Man-made' is the only hyphenated word in the poem.

17. The Use of Articles:

There is a dominant occurrence of the definite article which suggests that everything has been known by establishing an identity with them. Everything suggested by the definite article

is an inseparable part of his daily routine life. This suggests unvarying definiteness of urban experience. There are fourteen definite and eight indefinite articles in the poem.

18. Tense:

Most of the poem is written in the present tense. Other forms of the tense have also been used by the poet. Let us see the following constructions:

- a) My father travels.....
- b) Suburbs slide past
- c) His shirt and pants are soggy.....
- d) His black raincoat (is) stained with.....
- e) His eyes dimmed by age fade homeward.....
- f) Now I can see him
- g) He hurries across.....
- h) (He) crosses the railway.....
- I) (He) enters the lane.....
- j) His chappals are sticky....
- k) he hurries onward
- l) I see him.....
- m) He goes into the toilet.....
- n) he trembles at the sink.....
- o) A few droplets cling to.....

Apart from these constructions there are other types also :

- a) bag stuffed with books is falling apart... (present continuous)
- b) sullen children have often refused... (present perfect)
- c) He will now go to sleep... (simple future)

The simple present is the 'timeless' present. The actions and things shown by the simple present are permanently attached with the father. It is his routine life. Perhaps, there is no change in them over the years. He travels in the same style, his appearance is the same, his bag is always stuffed with books - every action of the father has his own style and stamp on it.

The present progressive in (a) above shows a temporary action of falling apart of the bag. The present perfect in (b) suggests the frequency of refusal by the children. Expression of frequency answers the question "How many times?". The adverb 'often*' supplies the answer to this question. On many occasions the father had tried to share jokes and secrets with them but in vain. Now the refusal has become their permanent habit or perhaps the father has stopped to communicate with them already thinking of their refusal. Perhaps their refusal has been taken for granted. The future tense in (c) is linked with this idea. The father is sure of the loss of rapport with the children and there is no way out for him. So, the speaker is sure that the father 'will go' to sleep. The alienation has come full circle.

19. The Use of Pronouns:

The third person singular pronoun occurs five times, third person singular possessive pronoun occurs ten times and 'him' occurs three times (see : repetition chart). The first person singular pronoun occurs twice. The I is of the speaker in the poem, and the poem begins with the first person singular possessive pronoun 'My father'. The 'I' observes every action of the father, but further he says 'his sullen children' in line twenty. Does he not consider himself his father's 'child'? Moreover, the speaker's aloofness has been reflected in the expression like 'Now I can see him...' or 'I see him drinking weak tea'. It suggests that the 'speaker' also is alienated from his father or vice versa. Apart from this, there is another meaning in the expression 'His sullen children'. Standing aloof from the affair at the home, the speaker categorizes the children under the heads of 'sullen children' and perhaps, 'unsullen children'. We can derive that he does not include himself among the 'sullen' ones because he is an unsullen one. But this argument does not solve the problem of communication because nowhere in the poem it is mentioned that the 'unsullen' children share jokes and secrets with the father. The alienation remains unshattered at all the levels.

20. The Use of Non-finite '-ing' clauses:

The poem is full of non-finite '-ing' clauses. Non-finites have no operator, and most of them have no conjunction or subject. The following such constructions are found in this poem:

- a) standing among silent commuters
- b) getting of the train
- c) drinking weak tea
- d) eating a stale chapati
- e) reading a book
- f) coming out he trembles
- g) water running over
- h) listening to the static
- I) dreaming of his ancestors
- j) thinking of nomads entering

There are two to-infinitive clauses in line No. 15 and 21.

- k) He goes into the toilet to contemplate...
- l) He will now go to sleep...

The non-finites do not have the subject or person or number. Does it not show that the use of non-finites also has concord with the thread of alienation in the poem? Because, in a way, these verbs are also alienated from the subject, person or the number.

21. The Colour-adjectives:

The colour-adjectives yellow, black, grey, brown, greying suggest something unhealthy, gloomy, and leading to death and destruction.

22. The Use of Indian words:

Use of Indian words is one of the chief features of this poem. The following Indian words occur in line No. 12 and 14 :

- a) *chappals* - (often plural) sandals made of leather, rubber or plastic.
- b) *chapati* - a small flat round piece of bread, usually rolled out and baked over a griddle.

There are recurring **doublets** in the poem: Shirt and pants, jokes and secrets, ancestors and grandchildren.

23. Phonetics:

There is a dominant occurrence of the nasal sounds /m/, /n/ and /-ng/ in the poem. The following lexical items make it clear :

Line No.	Words
1	My, on, evening, train
2	Standing, among, silent, commuters, in
3	unseeing
4	and, pants, and, raincoat
5	stained, mud, and
6	falling, dimmed
7	homeward, humid, monsoon, night
8	Now, can, him, getting, train
9	from, long, sentence
10	length, platform
11	line, enters, lane
12	mud, onward
13	Home, again, him, drinking
14	Eating, reading
15	into, contemplate
16	Man's, estrangement, from, man-made
17	coming, trembles, sink
18	running, brown, hands
19	cling, greying, on
20	sullen, children, often
21	and, him, now
22	Listening, on, dreaming
23	ancestors, and, grandchildren, thinking
24	nomads, entering, subcontinent, narrow

24. Rhyme Scheme in the Poem:

Though there is no deliberate or arranged rhyming scheme, some lines rhyme with each other by chance. In the first stanza line No 1, 8 and 11 (train, train, lane) and line No. 2 and 7 (light, might) rhyme with each other.

In line No. 22 and 23 only the last syllables of 'dreaming' and 'thinking' rhyme with each other. The same is the case with line No. 14 and 17 (book, sink).

The poet has followed the convention of beginning each line with a capital letter.

25. Stylistics: A Tool of Poetry Analysis

It is indicated through this stylistic analysis how linguistic description always has a link with the interpretation of a text. A comparison of this poem can be made with Sylvia Plath's, 'Daddy' and Theodore Roethke's 'My Papa's Waltz'. This will be a literary exercise. Literary stylistics is different in approach, technique from Linguistic stylistics. Both the approaches and techniques a teacher will have to master in order to teach poetry innovatively through the use of Stylistics. This is how stylistics is an effective tool of studying, understanding and appreciating a poem as the present paper has demonstrated in the case of Dilip Chitre's poem 'Father Returning Home' on the theme of alienation in the dull, soggy, stained, boring routine of modern urban life in a city like Mumbai.

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