



## Stylistic Narratives in Indian English Literature: A Critical Study

**Prof. (Dr) Jagdish Batra**

Professor Emeritus of English  
SRM University Delhi-NCR, India.  
Email: [drjagdishbatra@gmail.com](mailto:drjagdishbatra@gmail.com).

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Prof. (Dr) Jagdish Batra

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### Abstract

The controversy surrounding form versus content has been hogging literary studies since Plato's time. While the early critical theories revolved around biography, history, even nationalism etc., the 20th century saw the emergence of psychological and realistic theories in evaluating content. On the other side, the Formalists and the New Critics stressed the value of diction in poetry. Come the Marxists and the focus shifts to content mainly in fiction due to their emphasis on social structure and process. Even as the Marxist influence is still strong in academia, not all subscribe to this view as it impinges upon the question of authorial autonomy. Surprisingly, in Indian poetics, much more stress can be seen on the stylistic elements than on the content which is subjected to minimalist guidelines of a generic nature. In these times, it has been observed that literary works which have a uniqueness in terms of form or style have won considerable readership and awards. The focus of the present paper is to examine different specimens of such stylistic works and bring out their uniqueness which makes them win laurels, and also to explore the extent to which form or content influence each other in them.

Keywords: Form vs. Content, Indian Fiction, Indianism, Narratology, Indian Poetics.

### Introduction

Literature is enjoyed by one and all in various versions – oral, written, digital, and screen. There are, as anyone would know, two aspects of literature – one is the thematic aspect which deals with the subject and the other is the stylistic. Language is indeed the vehicle that

advances the story in a novel or the sentiments in a poem. The words in a language are put in a particular order to create sense and meaning, except while using the literary device of anastrophe in poetry. Several sentences create a paragraph, and several paragraphs, when put in a certain order, create a narrative. Now, when the language is foregrounded through

innovative use and when narrative style has a novelty about it, these lend the literary composition a distinguishing mark and even have the potential to turn it into a classic. The use of the word 'stylistic' is taken from popular parlance here to mean a literary work that is different from the run-of-the-mill works in respect of its linguistic and structural aspects. Basically, the paper focusses on the use of language as 'deviation from a norm', as Katie Wales (372) notes, which depends on writers' choice as also the requisites of the genre, situation, register, etc. The progression of style into stylistics, after the advent of structuralism, due to slant towards scientific study of language use or what is referred to as linguistic stylistics based on statistics of word forms is not the guiding force of this paper.

In the context of Indian English literature, it would be just to emphasize the point that it has made a mark through stylistic features, and in it, this genre has drawn from indigenous tradition of oral literature. Besides, the spirit of syncretism that has been a key marker of life in India since times immemorial has helped. This became evident when in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, English was introduced as a medium of instruction by the British colonial rulers, and scholars like Raja Rammohan Roy actively espoused the cause of English education. In the initial phase, therefore, we see what is now referred to as the Imitative Phase of Indian English poetry which was closely followed by poetry based on Indian epical tales.

### **Content versus style**

But before we come to it, let us trace in brief the history of the clash between content and style. After the mimetic perception of literature as in Plato and Aristotle and the moralistic view as in Aristophanes and Philip Sidney, style was rated high by the neo-classicists in the 18<sup>th</sup> century English literature. Alexander Pope's famous lines in his "An Essay on Criticism": "True wit is nature to advantage dressed/ What oft was thought but never so

well expressed" underlined this concern. Later, the Romantics disputed this line of thinking. However, the sharp focus on form came from the Aesthetic Movement which ran counter to Victorian moralism and was inspired by Walter Pater in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with his slogan "Art for Art's Sake". The Aesthetes declared art as autotelic; to them, its purpose was not didactic but only artistic so that what mattered was the beauty of form only. (Habib 496, Dahiya 224-27)

For the Russian formalists like Roman Jakobson, who made their presence felt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the prime concern was 'literariness' which was interpreted by Vitor Shklovsky as 'defamiliarization' and by Jan Mukarovsky as 'foregrounding' of language. Formalism rested on the internal structure, pattern or elements of a literary work which meant rhyme, rhythm, figuration, motifs, and other ancillary factors like the syntax, structure, narrative styles, etc. Mention must also be made of Vladimir Propp, a folklorist, who applied formalist principles to study folklore and fairy tales and identified basic patterns of these stories, and thus, advanced the cause of form over content. (Ryan 1-10, Abrams 114)

On the other hand, in America, among the New Critics, while Cleanth Brooks focused on the paradoxes of language, John Crowe Ransom urged: "emphasis of criticism must move from historical scholarship to aesthetic appreciation and understanding" (Habib 622). The New Critics looked upon a poem as an artifact made up of different constituents like the parts of a chair, which when joined together, gave it the shape of a chair. For the structuralists, content issues from form. It must be pointed out here that the Formalists as also New Critics focused only on the internal structure and overlooked external factors like author's biography, historical detail, etc.

However, Chicago Critics in America looked upon content as cause and form as effect. This finds favour with the Marxist school that

opposed formalism and took up the relationship between man and society as also history. The psychoanalytic approach which came later, gave "central importance, in literary interpretation, to the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious mind. They associate the literary work's 'overt' content with the former, and the 'cover' content with the latter, privileging the latter as being what the work is 'really' about and aiming to disentangle the two" (Barry 100)

In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, poststructuralist thinkers have brought focus back on to language again. While Jacques Derrida deconstructs text to show how a text is a free play of meanings within language, Roland Barthes believes it is the language that speaks and not the author who is dead and gone, leaving the text in the hands of the reader to interpret it. (Lodge 145-50) The concepts of sublime aesthetics so loved by the modernists have been termed as 'language games' by the high priest of postmodernism, Jean-Francois Lyotard. Even Baudrillard's discourse operates through language which is widely accepted as constituting reality! (Lodge 404-12)

Language, thus, is once again at the centre-stage of literary debates, but before we begin our exposition of various linguistic styles, the writer of these lines would like to submit that he has refrained from using some of the strategies in assessing stylistic features of a work, as for example, close reading that got the shot in the arms with the arrival of New Criticism or Practical Criticism, wherein one could select at random one or more passages and submit them to close reading. Besides, this approach has limitations as stated by Leech and Short: "The features which recommend themselves to the attention in one text will not necessarily be important in another text by the same or a different author" (74). Also not taken up for analysis are the elements like versification, figures of speech, imagery, symbolism, etc., as even though these lend grace and beauty to a composition, open up a wide enough area that would not be dealt with in the

limited space of this paper. Then there is the stylistic methodology merging into statistical when it comes to counting the number of nouns, verbs, adverbs or the class nouns, etc. used by an author in a particular work. It seems that the only purpose that this painstaking approach serves is to mark the stylistic signature of the author, and is somewhat on the lines of forensic science! Indeed, "There is no direct relation between statistical deviance and stylistic significance: literary considerations must therefore guide us in selecting what features to examine" as Leech and Short 70 assert.

### Language use

Coming now to the practical application of style in literary texts, we take up fiction as it is the most dominant form of literature in the world today. A narrative, as we know, comprises of words in a language. A fictional work marked by foregrounding of language and an off-beat narrative form is also taken as a stylistic work. The foregrounding of language happens through what Viktor Shklovsky called 'defamiliarizing'. In his celebrated essay "Art as Technique", in which he states that "The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (Malik 19). And for this, various means like phonetic or grammatical parallelism, onomatopoeia, use of foreign words, innovative imagery, figures of speech, rhetoric, etc. are used. In fact, Indian poetics too lays great stress on the stylistic aspects of literature. A number of theorists from Bharatmuni of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to Khemendra of 11<sup>th</sup> century AD has conceptualized *alankara*, *dhvani*, *riti*, *vakrokti*, etc. Besides, as Indologist Kapil Kapoor avers: "If we review the primary texts of literary theory from Bhamaha [6<sup>th</sup> cent. AD] to Anandavardhana [9<sup>th</sup> cent. AD], we find that each text has a different definition of literariness and has different focus – it is figures of speech or lexical mode or *rasa* or *guna/dosa* or *dhvani* or language of literature and typology of literary forms" (22).

**Nativization:** The use of proper diction versus common language in poetry became a topic of debate between the legendary Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge. Wordsworth was, to begin with, a votary of the language used by common people. That is what he propounded in his preface to the 1800 AD edition of the anthology *Lyrical Ballads* that he jointly published with Coleridge. However, the discussions that followed with Coleridge had its effect so that he amended the words "a selection of language really used by men" to "language near to the language of men" in the 1802 edition. At stake in our times, however, is the realistic representation as far as possible of the world and even though not all subscribe to the use of common man's language, words from native languages are frequently used to bring in the element of realism.

This type of representation began early on in India. The use of native words can be traced back to one of the great trio -- Mulk Raj Anand -- who, even as others did it sporadically, went the whole hog Indianizing English in this way. One frequently finds Hindi words like *Jamadar*, *sepoy*, *havildar*, *huzoor*, *khaki*, *nirvana*, etc.; translations of Hindi phrases like -- illegally begotten, rape-sister, son of a swine, eater of your masters; and transliteration of Hindi words denoting exact pronunciation, such as in his novel *Untouchable*, he notes: *laften gorner* for Lieutenant Governor (51), *gentreman* for gentleman (17), *bungla* for bungalow (21), *motucars* for motor cars (20), etc. This strategy eminently succeeded in evoking the local flavour in his fiction and must have amused English readers who were his target audience. Author and journalist Khushwant Singh too is famous for such usages. Thus, swear-terms like mother-fucker, husband-eater, (17, 19), etc. or entire sentences like 'Oye badmasha, you will never desist from badmaashi!' (38) (Hey scoundrel, will you never desist from your evil deeds?) occur in his acclaimed novel *Train to Pakistan*. Transliteration of native words like *Hai-hai*, *toba-toba*, *wah-wah* also indicate the use

in Hindi of doubling of a word to lay emphasis. In this, the great trio, viz., Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao provided a model which has been followed by the majority of novelists. A positive outcome of this approach has been in that in place of creating amusement, the words/terms from Indian languages are understood now by a larger number of people in the world.

**Mimetic to the core:** Nissim Ezekiel, a renowned poet, published a bunch of poems under the tell-tale title "Very Indian poems" which have a strong dose of Indianism in that the speaker is adamant about speaking in English even though he has poor grasp of the rules of grammar which make him a laughing stock. Here is an example:

I am standing for peace and non-violence.

Why world is fighting fighting

Why all people of world

Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,

I am simply not understanding. (22)

Talking about fiction, we find novels which may not have the quality of a classic, yet these have added to the corpus of stylistic fiction. Aravind Adiga's Booker-winning novel *The White Tiger* faithfully represents the simplistic mind of a chauffeur in simple English. Similarly, Anurag Mathur, a bureaucrat by profession and writer by choice, starts his acclaimed novel *The Inscrutable Americans* with an epistle by a newly migrated Indian in America, in language that clearly reflects the inept command of English language coupled with impact of native way of writing letters in Hindi which would send any outsider into guffaws of laughter:

Beloved Younger Brother, Greetings to Respectful Parents. I am hoping all is well with health and wealth. I am fine at my end. Hopig your end is fine too. With God's grace and Parents' Blessings I am arriving safely in America and



finding good apartment near University. Kindly assure Mother that I am strictly consuming vegetarian food only in restaurants though I am not knowing if cooks are Brahmins. I am also constantly remembering Dr. Verma's advice and strictly avoiding American women and other unhealthy habits. I hope Parents' Prayers are residing with me. (Mathur 9).

This paper is not meant to single out India in terms of nativization of English, which as the linguist Braj B. Kachru points out, is a "linguistic debate across cultures" in many Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines etc. and should be accepted as "part of our local pluralistic linguistic heritage" (10-11). "This is a natural process in the context of language contact and is traditionally labelled 'convergence'. This process of nativization is evident in phonology, lexis, syntax, and in a variety of acculturated speech acts, discursive strategies, and very effectively in literary creativity across Anglophone Asia" (207). This natural process beats the "academic terrorism" (Wilentz qtd. in Kachru, 237) which got reflected in canon formation and imposition of certain type of English language as the standard one, ignoring the local usages and literary traditions.

Representation of language of a character takes an interesting turn in Kiran Desai's Booker-winner *The Inheritance of Loss*. Here is an example of perfect mimesis of a cook telling about the qualities of his son who is a chef in America:

"What can he make?"

"Banana friter pineapple friter apple friter apple surprise apple Charlotte apple Betty bread and butter jam tart caramel custard tips pudding Rumtump pudding jam roly poly ginger steam da tepuddinglemon pancake egg custard orange custard coffee custard strawberry custard trifle bakelaskamangosuff ..." (72)

And it goes on for full ten lines!

Words jumbled up this way represent the speed with which a waiter vocalizes the menu, though here the intent is to impress the listener about the skill of the cook's son to prepare a variety of dishes. Another purpose is served in a metaphorical strain when the renowned author and Kiran Desai's mother, Anita Desai in her novel *Fasting, Feasting*, refers to an old couple as "Mama Papa" to show that what mom said, papa concurred. At other places, you find "Papa Mama" to show the reverse situation. This simple joining of the two class nouns shows mean how the two move and think in unison whether it is the mama taking the lead or the papa doing so!

The great Indian novelist of the initial phase, Raja Rao -- best known for his observation in the Preface to his novel *Kanthapura* that Indians cannot and should not write like the English and that one day Indian English will evolve like American or Irish English -- uses language that is capable of revealing the local culture very effectively but which may amuse readers no end. Look at the manner of addressing people with sobriquets: Corner House Moorthy, Gold-bangle Somanna, Nose-scratching Najamma, Waterfall Venkamma, Post office Suryanarayana, Fig-tree house people; One-eyed Linga, Jack-tree Tippa, and so on. It is the location of the individual habit that forms the suffix.

Of course, embellishments like wit and humour and figures of speech like pun, irony, sarcasm, personification, etc. add to the charm of a narrative. A number of authors in Indian literature are known for it even though no good novel was ever bereft of it, particularly when the novel is a voluminous one. In Indian literature, Kiran Nagarkar has a style that reminds one of P.G. Wodehouse. The overall comic tone is reflected in Upamanyu Chatterjee's fiction, particularly in *Mammaries of the Welfare State*. Humour-soaked fiction is always a winner; just one instance here: In *The Inheritance of Loss*, we are introduced to Uncle Potty's parents -- Mater and Pater -- leading a flamboyant life in

London but somehow, they land up in an ashram in India. As to what they learnt there, the reply is simple: "Starvation, sleep deprivation," mourned Uncle Potty, "followed by donation. Proper dampening of the spirits so you howl out to God to save you" (205)!

### Studying narrative

Coming to the narrative part in fiction, we know that the examination of the text beyond a sentence or two takes us into the domain of narratology. The simplest definition of narrative given by M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham is: "a story, whether told in prose or verse, involving events, characters and what the characters say and do" and narratology is the concern "with the general theory and practice of narrative in all literary forms" (182). Although many Russian Formalists and almost all New Critics were riveted on the analysis of poetry, there were some Russian Formalists, viz., Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovsky, who took up the study of fiction, in which they analyzed narratives and identified strategies which had been used for long in plot construction even in the myths and folklores. Through their concepts of 'fabula' (raw story) and 'syuzhet' (plot), -- further refined by Tomshvesky -- provided a new insight into literature that went a long way and developed the area of narratology. Mikhail Bakhtin highlighted the "the novel's peculiar ability to open window in discourse from which the extraordinary variety of social languages can be perceived [...] and can become an active force in shaping cultural history" (Holquist 72). Thus, study of narrative gained momentum and now a hefty the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Throey* would give hundreds of terms related to narratology!

One can't miss out on the great novelist Raja Rao, whose autodiegetic novel *Kanthapura* features a garrulous rustic woman, Achakka, who makes superb use of the rhythmic oral tradition, complete with digressions and circularity of narrative. This circularity is a

hallmark of Indian classical texts like *Panchtantra* wherein you find story-within-a-story. Achakka's garrulity is represented in a 70-line long sentence: "Nobody knows how large it is or when it was founded... Skeffington Bungalow" (48-49) which describes how the villagers were roped in to work at the Skeffington coffee estate owned by a white man. This is an apt indicator of the rustic woman able to speak non-stop for the length of time that it takes to read the sentence. Seen from another angle, a long sentence forces us to slow down our reading in order to grasp the meaning of its many parts, and once it is done, we feel a sense of joy at having solved, say, a complex mathematical problem! Here of course, the prize is understanding the thought process going on in a rustic mind.

There are many authors too charted new courses in linguistic and narratological style. G.V. Desani's carnivalesque, comico-philosophical novel *All About H. Hatterr* (1948) would easily win him the label of a literary maverick. According to a critic, it "outdoes Bakhtin in its carnivalesque heteroglossia, running riot with the language of the colonial masters in a manner that even Salman Rushdie would be proud to equal" (Chaudhury 1). The novel was published in 1948 in London and was acclaimed by respected critics like T.S. Eliot. It sold out in two weeks and was republished in 1950. The novel's protagonist is a tragi-comic anti-hero who is looking for philosophy of life like Pangloss does in Voltaire's novel *Candide*. Linguistic flourishes, humour of character, circularity of narrative are some of the hallmarks. "Hatterr's romp from one catastrophe to another debunks everything - from philosophy to psychoanalysis, literature to religion, morality to masculinity - engendering a hedonistic celebration of all that is politically incorrect" (Chaudhury 1). It begins with a 'Digest' of a few lines which is not an indicator but a deviation from the main theme of the chapter! Desani's eccentricity is writ large and begins with the cover page:

Warning!

Improbable, you say?

No, fellers.

All impossibles are probable in India.-  
H. Hatterr

The book indeed is full of improbable language mix. There is the spoken English

"Gosh sakes, how naivety canya get!

And he spits out nerts: gives me the low down!

Aw cats, the senators would mind! It would be unfair to holy Russians, nyet? The British public opinion would resent this-s-way, yee-a! The Herald Tribune would object that-a-way, aye!" (90).

The novel is a fine specimen of what critic Natwar Singh says "non-English English". Here is the plate on the coffin of the protagonist, described by a dead Hatterr himself, for whose funeral have arrived Leonardo da Vinci, Goethe, Gauss and Beethoven and Dante with his eyes downcast and sobbing":

*'Mailed cash on delivery to Westminster Abbey. H. Herterr, Esqur (Mississippi), D Litt (Oxon and Moskva, Oxford, PA), Member Academy (France, Tokyo Royal), Hon. M.D London, Dr (Bulgarian Gramatikata), Dr (Uniwersytet Polski), DR. Theologiac (Bagdad, Salerno, Montpellier, High A Sophia, Heidelberg ...'* (90-91). (Italic font style used in the text)

And it goes on for another ten lines!

It's a novel that makes readers breathless through its comic-serious take on various matters. In our times, the thread was picked up by none other than Salman Rushdie, who has, in his own words, done the 'chutnification' of language as well as of history in his novels, beginning with the celebrated *Midnight's Children*. Considered an icon in the genre of postmodern fiction, Rushdie must be quoted to show his preference for linguistic as

also narratological uniqueness. One can trace in him traits like "magic realism, intertextuality, meta-fictionality, extravagant farce, multi-mirrored analogy and a potent symbolic structure, the idea of reality as provisional and partial, the presence of deconstructive markers and practices etc." (Rajagopalachary 1-2). He flummoxes the readers with his awesome grasp of different languages and cultures. As if his umpteen references to the classical masters of yore like Shakespeare, Aeschylus, Sophocles, et al wasn't enough in the novel *The Golden House*, he revels in references to popular films too, as for him the distinction between the high and the low culture stands obliterated:

As I stared at Vasilisa Golden silhouetted against a window beyond which lay the winter waters of the Hudson she looked to me like one of the goddesses of the screen [...]. I thought of Ornella Mutti bewitching Swan in Schlöndorff's film of Proust; of Faye Dunaway as Bonnie Parker with her sensually twisting mouth captivating Warren Beatty's Clyde Barrow; of Monica Vitti in Antonioni shrinking erotically against a corner and murmuring *No lo so*; of Emmanuelle Béart clothed in nothing but beauty in *La belle noiseuse*. I thought of the Godardettes Seberg in *Breathless* and Karina in *Peirrot le fou* and Bardot in *Le mépris*, and then I tried to rebuke myself, reminding myself of the powerful feminist critiques of new wave cinema, Laura Mulvey's 'male gaze' theory ... (177).

One could, of course, accuse Rushdie of trying to bamboozle the reader with his verbal pyrotechnics, but surely the reader is taken along on a tour of attractive visual images before being dumped into the pit of a serious theory!

A narratological feature that surpasses overt abundance of allusions is the covert intertextuality. Language sometimes reminds

you of some other author, as after reading the following sentence, one recalls the cat in Eliot's Prufrock poem: "In the Gandhi Café, a little after three years from the day he'd received his visa, the luckiest boy in the whole world skidded on some rotten spinach in Harish-Harry's kitchen, streaked forward in a slime green track and fell with a loud popping sound" (194). The lines in the Prufrock poem refer to the cat that "Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,/ Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains/ Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,/ Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,/ And seeing that it was a soft October night,/ Curled once about the house, and fell asleep." (13).

While in most fiction, we find third person narrative, there are some exceptions like Sahitya Akademi award winner Janice Pariat's *The Nine Chambered Heart* who uses mainly the first and second person pronouns throughout the novel – something uncommon. Here is a sample:

We are talking about tuna at the table.

I think it's ridiculous there's such a thing as sustainable fishing. That's why we have farms, I explain. [...]

You are livid.

'That's not the point.' You say.

Then what is, I ask. I'm rather enjoying how annoyed you look.

I'm told there is a larger picture I'm ignoring.

I think there's a silent insinuation that I'm stupid. (I'm hurt. I'm the youngest here, but I know I'm not stupid.) (85)

The only Booker winner Hindi novelist Geetanjali Shree's translated novel *Tomb of Sand* uses short but crisp syntax that is a take on colloquialism and yet, it has certain richness of a classical work about it. No wonder then, it went on to bag the Booker which was the first for a Hindi novel translated into English. While

classic novels tax a reader's mind with their rich language and guarded style, this one is easy on the mind. The only drawback is that too much of anything is bad. An example:

"Their room. In a corner of the house. Their bed. In winter. Thick quilt. Hotwater bottle. Woollen cap. The cane still hanging from its hook. The cup still sitting on the teapoy by the bed, with no water in it. When he was alive, this was where he placed his teeth at night. In the morning, he'd reach first for the teeth, then for the cane" (16).

It very much looks like impressionistic representation of a scene – very real, very mundane like a dialogue, but powerful enough to stir the imaginative faculty of the reader.

**Circumambulation:** The syntax used by Arundhati Roy too provides an impressionistic glimpse of characters whose thoughts are captured in stream of consciousness mode including free direct or indirect thought types. (Wales 164). Kiran Desai is a step ahead in this in her masterpiece *The Inheritance of Loss*, wherein the use of language is crisp at times; at other times, the sentence launches on a trajectory encompassing a lot of detail, as if taking a detour. An example of how she ropes in a chunk of the visual world in a sentence even while describing a momentary act:

"NO speak English," he [Biju] always said to mad people starting up conversations in this city, to the irascible ornery bums and Bible folk dressed in ornate bargain-basement suits and hats, waiting at street corners, getting their moral and physical exercise chasing after infidels. (267)

The syntactical style in narrative goes beyond its technical import. According to Herbert Read, while short sentences convey an impression of speed and therefore are suited to the description of action, long sentences are indicative of deliberation and solemnity. Besides, the



complex sentences suit complex ideas and feelings. (Read 35). Thus, the style followed by Geetanjali Shri would indicate a shifting gaze at the paraphernalia in the room. Also it would signify the power of observation of the onlooker, even if it would be confused with that of the writer!

Narrative can be couched in an attractive poetic style also. Acclaimed novelist Shashi Deshpande writes in rhythmic prose which has a rare balance and beauty. In her case as also in case of Anita Desai, the stylistic marker of stream of consciousness and monologues finds ample illustration. These techniques of representing thought do not only let us have a peep into the writer's thinking but also absolve the author from any insinuation of insincerity if any turnaround happens in the character's thoughts leading to an unexpected action later, as the stylisticians Leech & Short aver in their analysis of Charles Dickens' fiction. (339).

Leech and Short (227) also mention that the anticipatory constituents in a sentence bring in an element of suspense. Again, rhetorical questions, according to Quirk and Greenbaum (200), function as forceful statements. This, of course, is nothing new; after all, rhetoric was taught in Aristotle's Greece as the art of persuasive oratory except that the rhetoric of yore was a prescriptive art, whereas modern stylistics is descriptive. (Hough 1-4).

Postmodernism got reflected as a stylistic hallmark, as Barry Lewis notes: "In literary terms, postmodernist fiction itself became perceptible as a kind of 'style' and its characteristic techniques and themes came to be adopted without the same sense of breaking new ground" (170). *The Golden Gate* that won Sahitya Akademi award 1988 is, contrary to usual norms, in verse form, comprising of thirteen sections with a total of 590 Onegin Stanzas, named after the 1833 Russian classic *Eugene Onegin* by Pushkin. In fact, Pushkin was Seth's inspiration as acknowledged by him. At places, the sonnet form shows leisurely use

descending to the level of limerick. Here is the first stanza from this book:

To make a start more swift than weighty,  
Hail Muse. Dear Reader, once upon  
A time, say, circa 1980,  
There lived a man. His name was John.  
Successful in his field though only  
Twenty-six, respected, lonely,  
One evening as he walked across  
Golden Gate Park, the ill-judged toss  
Of a red frisbee almost brained him.  
He thought, "If I died, who'd be sad?  
Who'd weep? Who'd gloat? Who would  
be glad? (Sonnet 1.1)

### Conclusion

What then, is the significance of style vis-à-vis content is put out lucidly by the American novelist Ellen Rooney in the following words: "the work of formalism is to resist the application of 'theoretical themes' as master codes that reduce every text (whatever its provenance) to an illustration of theory itself" (2000: 31). While not aiming to defend the 'illustration of theory' at the cost of other features in a creative work, it must be admitted that form is important because it distinguishes a creative work from the subject-specific study or other disciplines on the whole. Ulka Anjaria, in her introduction to the anthology *A History of the Indian Novel in English* stress the same point when she notes that "by reducing the literary history to study of different themes, we forget the genre, form and aesthetics, rather than reduce literary works to expressions of their age, something that the writers of other disciplines do better" (2015: 2).

All the novelists quoted in this paper for their stylistic or narratological uniqueness have brought laurels to Indian English literature. There are many more who may or may not have attained prominence equal to the aforesaid

novelists, but who have tried their hand at stylistic innovation which seems to count in the reckoning of the jury also. It will be noticed that in the majority of cases, these are the novels with stylistic narratives which have won **awards** at the international level. This is not to suggest that stylistic innovation alone ensures recognition or that every novel with such a feature has won an award. Surely, the stylistic angle lends a distinction to a work but in the absence of a worthwhile theme and corresponding treatment, the style alone cannot work wonders. A professor has rightly commented: "It increases our understanding and enjoyment of literature. It also sensitizes us to the subtleties, nuances and beautiful aspects of linguistic side of literature. [...] A judicious use of stylistics can help students to understand and appreciate literature and can enhance their literary, linguistic and communicative competence" (Patil 48).

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**Dr. Jagdish Batra** is Professor Emeritus of English, SRM University, Delhi-NCR. Prior to this, he has held positions as Professor and Dean (Languages), O.P. Jindal Global University, Principal and HOD (English) in different colleges. He has some four decades of teaching and research experience and has guided 50 research scholars. His areas of specialization are Indian English Fiction and Culture Studies on which he has presented papers at and chaired many international conferences in India, Europe and South-East Asia. Recipient of several awards and a former Rotary Study Exchange Scholar to USA, Prof. Batra has published ten books, 70+ research papers, and a number of general articles.