

**Elegant System and Fake Appearance in R. K. Narayan's
"An Astrologer's Day"**

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Abstract:

An elegant system is a type of linguistic phenomenon, where the candidate is connected in a discourse, which uses various elegant systems to get the desired conclusion. Often, they try to protect the face, the public self image, of their counterparts. They also try to take advantage of the use of certain special elegant systems. The self gets dominated by some verbal or non-verbal actions. It can be done deliberately or sometimes it is done by mistake. Elegant systems are used when one wants to save the self and wish to create a healthy social relationship. This research paper will try to focus and highlight this feature of elegance in R.K. Narayan's "An Astrologer's Day". "An Astrologer's Day" is a short story and it was part of the collection - "An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories" by R. K. Narayan.

Keywords: Elegance, Elegant systems, Dominance, Cheat, Fake appearance, Justice.

"An Astrologer's Day" is a short story and it was part of the collection - "An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories" by R. K. Narayan. R.K. Narayan is considered one of the eminent writers of Indian Writing in English along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. It would not be a stretch to call them leading figures of Indian Writing in English. It should also be noted that while writing a short story, Narayan is aware of the broad trend and tendencies of his contemporary time. "Narayan focuses on senses to find materials for his study. He opens his eyes and ears to look for stories. He also tries to find a companion and their stories in his journey by trains, trams, buses, in the streets of Mysore and Madras." (Kumar, 2)

M. K. Naik argued: "If Indian Writing in English is the Cinderella of literature in English, Indian drama in English has dependably been, alongside criticism, one of the twin Cinderella of Indian writing in English". (Naik, 1977)

Narayan follows the classic structure of short stories, which has a distinct beginning, middle, and an end. Narayan's "An Astrologer's Day" follows a journey of a man, who pretends to be an astrologer. He has no authentic knowledge about astrology. He is a proficient charlatan. He deceived his customers with his rhetoric and mannerisms. He wears a bright turban, and smears sacred ash, to appear mysterious to attract customers.

But one day he ran into a man, whom he supposedly killed in a drunken brawl, years ago. He fatally injured the man during his fight. He was afraid that he might have killed him. He ran away from the village and started his career as a swindler by pretending to be an astrologer. The man whom he injured tried to find him for a long time. Ironically he came across his supposed murder, who was in the guise of an astrologer. He asks the astrologer about his assailant in order to take his revenge. The astrologer uses his rhetoric to convince him that he doesn't need to take his revenge as his assailant has already died. The man gets convinced and feels both satisfaction and relief. The astrologer also feels the burden of his guilt lighten after seeing the man alive. He feels a sense of relief that he didn't commit a murder. He does not have to live in fear anymore.

This paper analyses this short story through the lens of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1978). This study will focus on the discussion between the astrologer and his customers in the short story "An Astrologer's Day". This study will use discourse analysis method for analysing the short story. The use of elegant systems will be examined in the context of how the "face" of the listeners are dominated or protected.

Narayan very well describes the crafty ways in which the astrologer surpasses his work and endeared to his gullible customers in the following words:

"He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customer. But it didn't seem to matter at all. He said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice and shrewd guesswork." (The Joy of Reading Literature, 3)

The word 'elegance' is traditionally associated with being tactful, sincere, humble, while dealing with other people. The word 'elegance' as a linguistic term, is associated with the systems used by the speakers in order to protect the "self" and the "public self-image", of the target audiences, or for nurturing social relationships with them. The idea of "face" is associated with managing the expectations everyone wants to be fulfilled by others. If any statement becomes a threat to this self, it is summoned as a face-threatening action. Definite systems are followed by the speakers to avoid such situations.

These systems are as follows: Bald on-record systems usually do not try to decrease the risk to the listeners' face. Direct and graceful communication can be used to subtly reduce actions which could threaten someone's dignity. This approach can often shock or embarrass the recipient, which makes it more appropriate for contexts where the speaker has a close bond with the listener. The listener can be a family member or close relative.

Positive elegant systems aim to reduce any potential threat to the listener's positive "self-image". These are designed to create positive feelings in the listeners. The interests, or belongings of the listeners are typically employed in scenarios where the listeners are a little familiar with each other. These strategies for positive politeness also hedge and avoid conflicts. These also include the expressions of friendship, solidarity, and compliments.

Negative elegant techniques tend to focus on the listener's desire to avoid imposition. These techniques are designed to reduce any potential discomfort or embarrassment. These

methods create a higher likelihood of awkwardness compared to more direct styles like bald on record techniques and positive elegant techniques. The negative face stands in for the need for independence. There is a possibility that the narrator may provide the listener with an option to opt out, thereby utilizing distancing strategies such as apologies.

Off-record (indirect): The last refined strategy employed by Brown and Levinson is the use of indirect language. This approach hints at the message, without the speaker's direct appearance to impose it directly. For example, someone using this technique might say, "Wow, it's getting cold in here,". It hints at the listener and suggests that it would be appreciated if the listener were to adjust the thermostat without directly making that request.

In his book, *The Adventure of Criticism*, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar cites the meaning of criticism from a well-known word reference as "Criticism is the art or demonstration of evaluating the nature of literary or artistic work by an examination of its benefits and deformities".(Iyengar,1962)

Rene Wellek states "the present, age might be genuinely viewed as the time of criticism". (Wellek,1963)

Linguist Robin Lakoff (1973) has outlined three key principles of politeness. These are : "avoid imposing, provide choices, and create a positive impression on the recipient." (Lakoff,1973)

It has been attributed:

"This story goes on to show how past can actually affect the present and future of one's life. The astrologer had committed a folly by getting into a quarrel when he was a drunk youngster, the result of which changed his entire path of life." (Archana)

The astrologer has achieved sufficient experience in order to understand his customers' concerns and needs through his careful observation, consistent practice. He uses common phrases about human challenges like issues related to money, marriage, and love. He uses his rhetoric to instil the belief that he has comprehensive and complete knowledge of their problems in his customers. These methods both fascinates and reassures them. Their blind faith in him makes his work easier. It helps him in earning his livelihood.

For example, he tells one customer, "In many ways, you are not getting the fullest results for your efforts". (Narayan 3) In this instance, the astrologer tries to lessen the pressure on the customer. He highlights the source of his distress. His distress comes from not achieving his goals despite his efforts. This conversation allows the customer to achieve a sense of hope for the future. We try to achieve this goal in our own way and we also want to safeguard the dignity of our listeners as well. There is another such example. "The astrologer tries to influence another client by asking if there is any woman in his family who has negative feelings towards him." (3)

He offers a range of probable solutions to his customers about their various household issues. Almost 90 percent of them easily fall for his trickery and gladly pay his fees. There is such an instance in this segment. He tries to build rapport with his client by presenting many options which may assuage their difficulties. The astrologer has a straight forward communication strategy. It avoids any potential threats to the client's sense of self.

The client feels that they are confiding in a friend and not to an astrologer. It fosters a social bond which amplifies the effectiveness of their interaction. In this section, the astrologer tries to manipulate one of his clients by using his cleverness and his rhetoric. "He tells the client that most of his troubles were because of his impetuous nature and the position of Saturn in his chart." (3) Here, he conveys that he is more than just an astrologer. He wants to portray himself being as close as a friend. He tries to show solidarity. He tries to assert that he understands all the problems in his life. He speaks very firmly. He does his best to avoid any suggestion which might hint at his random assumptions. This approach is almost like a marketing tactic which any businessperson might employ to win over their customers.

The astrologer tries to engage in lengthy conversations with his customers. These conversations help him in gaining more opportunities to offer them various options that might address their problems. He tries to pinpoint their problems by employing multiple methods. He continues his efforts until clients eventually interrupt him.

The creative genius of Narayan creates a real-life picture before the eyes of the readers. It has been rightly commented:

"R.K. Narayan does not portray the photographic reality; he rather represents reality which is artistic...Narayan depicts a kind of realism which is something more than a reportage; he grabs the Indian mind fully with all its superstitious comprehension of life, its gullibility, its bewildering contradictions and its sarcastic comic irony." (Swain, 2002)

The story begins with the astrologer's efforts to maintain a professional manner with his clients. It furthers both social and professional relationships. It also aims to safeguard their personal well-being through his elegant methods. But the narrative shifts when he comes across a man he supposedly killed in his youth in his village. The man was saved by a passer-by. He wants to take revenge on his attacker aka the astrologer:

"Upon arriving at his shop, the astrologer tells the man that he looked really exhausted. He convinces him to sit and take rest and doing so might be beneficial for him." (Narayan,4) Initially, the astrologer couldn't recognize him. He treated him like any ordinary client. As usual, he resorts to deceptive tactics. He employs sophisticated negative techniques to avoid any confrontation. He offers the client a chance to sit down and talk. This also conveys a sense of camaraderie and a friendly attitude. But, the client became very agitated as he was hunting for the man who tried to kill him.

He ignores the offer and shouts the astrologer, , “You call yourself an astrologer?”

(4) At that point, the astrologer recognizes him and tries his best to politely show him the way out quickly. The client, who wants to avoid conversation with anyone, employs off-the-record techniques to communicate his frustration. He tries to convey his fatigue, which stems from the hunt for his assaulter, who fatally injured him. “Irony is defined as the use of words with humorous or sarcastic intent. Here the intended meaning sharply contrasts with the speech.”

(Scott, 1967) When the astrologer discovers that his client is the person whom he intended to kill years ago, he changes his approach. He refuses to accept his money and tells him that he is getting late. He is not used to face such challenges. As time progresses, the astrologer returns and says, "Leave me today. I will speak to you tomorrow." This illustrates his ability to adjust his methods according to the situation. Here, he finds himself in a precarious situation. He tries to finish his conversation quickly. He ignores the client's expressions and uses straightforward communication techniques.

This approach is very similar to a psychiatrist, who are adept in identifying signals from their dialogue. This creates an illusion of authenticity. “The story reveals that very quickly he realizes what went wrong. He would charge three pies for each inquiry. He would avoid speaking until the other person had talked for almost ten minutes.” (Pillai,1990)

Towards the end of the story, the astrologer concocts a story of a violent encounter. During this encounter, he assaulted a man and threw him into a well to escape from the attack. But, he conceals the fact that he, himself, is the assailant and would-be murderer. The customer leaves after being relieved under the assumption that his assailant is dead. This indicates that "An Astrologer's Day" can be analysed through the assistance of elegant techniques. It shows that the astrologer skillfully employs various methods to reach his goals. We can also apply the elegant techniques in our everyday conversations to achieve our desired outcomes. Additionally, it is very important to share this knowledge with students. It can help in enhancing their awareness of these elegant techniques and it can improve their communication skills.

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