



Article : A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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ABSTRACT :

‘For me language is a skin on my thought and was thinking of way of telling... I wrote it... the way an architect designs a building’, says Arundhati Roy about *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*, the Booker Prize Winner novel in 1997. The present paper is an attempt made to analyze Roy’s experiments with language. It assesses the linguistic deviations in Roy’s use of literary language. The novel is remarkable for the linguistic innovations about which Shomit Miller says, ‘the book uses language in a way that is rare... very rarely do you get someone who can tear apart the rules and give you something that is fresh and not pretentious’.

Introduction :

‘Roy stretches the English language in all directions’, says Rosemary Dinnage in the New York Review of Books. ‘With extraordinary linguistic inventiveness, Roy funnels the history of South India through the eyes of seven year old twins’, Gillian Beer, chairwoman of the Booker judges said. ‘The story she tells is fundamental as well as local; it is about love and death, about lies and laws. Her narrative crackles with riddles and yet tells its tale quite clearly.’ Arundhati Roy twists and reshapes language to create an arresting, startling sort of precision.

In *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*, Roy uses a variety of English and that’s why she is successful to communicate to the world the culture she represents. The beauty of her novel lies in the use of Indian English and the varieties of techniques she uses. Roy uses English, which very often deviates from the standard conventions- use of words and sentences from regional language, the use of capital letters, use of italics, subjectless sentences, topicalization, faulty spellings, single word sentences, change of parts of speech, clustering of adjectives, nouns and deviation from normal word order etc.

Keywords :

Indian fiction, narrative style, linguistic innovations.

USE OF WORDS AND SENTENCES FROM REGIONAL LANGUAGE :

Roy uses Malayalam, the regional language of Kerala, her native state. There is also the coarse Kottayam dialect of Malayalam. The first Malayalam word is 'Veshya', inspector Thomas Mathew retorted Ammu saying that Kottayam Police didn't take statements from Veshyas or their illegitimate children which mean Prostitutes. The word 'Punnyan Kunja' used for Reverend Ipe which means 'Little blessed one'. The word Mundu Dhoti is of Malayalam. Murlidharan, a level-crossing lunatic counted the numbers-onner, runner, mooner, mean one, two, and three. The phrase, 'Ruchi Lokathinde Rajavu' refers to comrade K.N.M.Pillai's unsolicited contribution which became a permanent feature on the Paradise Pickle, labels. It is used as the literal translation of 'Emperors of Realm of Taste' Malayalam slogan uttered by workers- Thozhilali ekta zindabad means 'workers of the world unite'. The title of the Kathakali performances, Karna Shabadham means Karna's Oath, Duryodhana Vadham means the death of Duryodhana. Madivo and mad aayirkkum means must be enough. There are the words and phrases like ivodya means here, Modalali means landlord. Poda patti means 'go dog'. Eda Cherukka means 'Ay! Fellow', Orkunnillee means 'don't you remember?'. Chacko saar vannu means Mr. Chacko has come. Ickilee means 'how sad' Kando means 'can you see?' Sundherikutty means 'beautiful girl' Meeshas means 'moustaches'. Ramho maduram means very sweet. The other instance of Malayalam words are found in the closing page of *The God of Small Things*: Naaley means Tomorrow. There is a use of Malayalam kinship terms like 'Kochamma,' 'Pappachi' and 'Mammachi,' 'Chachen,' 'Chetan and Cheduthi,' 'Ammaven,' 'Appoi and Ammai', and 'Ammachi'; and also words like 'Mon' and 'Mol'. 'In Malayalam, Mol is Little Girl and Mon is Little Boy.

Other Malayalam words are items of apparel or ornament such as 'mundu', 'chatta', 'mundu and kavani', and 'kunukku earrings', as well as items of food that are of special appeal to the Malayalee palate like 'chakka vilaichathu', 'kappa and meen vevichathu', 'idi appams . . . kanji and meen' and 'avalose oondas'. Words, like 'chenda', 'koojah', and 'mittam', are also used without any special effect to draw the reader's attention to them.

Comrade Pillai uttered mostly in Malayalam: “Ayyo, Rahel Mol... Orkunniley?” and “Orkunnundo?” are addressed directly to Rahel, while “Ayyo paavam” is used to express his false commiseration with Estha’s condition. Comrade Pillai’s addressing his wife as “Edi Kalyani” reveals his love to her. Another prominent use of Malayalam is by Adoor Bhasi, the ace-comedian of Malayalam films.

There are also the lines from folk songs like:

Enda da korangacha, Chandi ithra thenjadu. It means ‘Hey Mr. Monkey man, why’s your bum so red?’

‘Pandyill thooraa poyappol nerakkamuthiri nerangi njn’ means ‘I went for a shit to Madras and scraped it till it bled’. Theeyem, Thithome, Tharaka, Thithome, Theem, pa pera-perra-perakka Thaiy thaiy thaka thaiy thaiy thome. These are the lines of Malayalam classical dance.

There are also lines from the popular film song. (Film Chemmeen)

Pandoru mukkuvan muthinu poyi. Pandinjaran kattathu munji poyi. Aray athi pennu pizhachu poyi. Avaney Kadamma kondu poyi.

These lines mean ‘Once a Fisherman went to the sea. The west wind blew and swallowed his boat. His wife on the shore went astray. So Mother Ocean rose and took him away. There is also a popular Malayalam song appeared in the novel-

| | | |
|-----------|--------|-----------|
| Koo-koo | kokum | theevandi |
| Kooki | paasum | theevandi |
| Rapakal | odum | theevandi |
| Thalannnu | nikum | theevandi |

By using Malayalam words, phrases and lines from folk songs and film songs, Roy creates a typical Kerala background in the novel. The substitutes of these words, phrases and songs with their English counterparts might fail to create the cultural background of Kerala. Thus English is defamiliarized by Roy to the burden of the indigenous culture by embedding Malayalam words.

USE OF ITALICIZED WORDS, PHRASES AND SENTENCES :

Roy uses diversity in the application of italics. Non-English words which are italicized include those in Malayalam as well as the French “Et tu? Brute?”, the Hindi ‘chhi-chhi poach’, and the Tamil ‘Rombo maduram’; expressions in

Malayalam, such as ‘Ruchi lokathinde Rajavu,’ and its literal translation of ‘Emperors of the Realm of Taste’; the logo of the pickle factory--‘Paradise Pickles & Preserves’; The children’s extraordinary habit of reverse reading, of words as seen reflected in a mirror, is also given emphasis in a similar way: “ehT serutnevda fo eisuS lerriuqS. enO gnirps gninrom eisuS lerriuqS ekow pu.

In short, The names of books, films, newspapers, dictionary, theatre, pickle products and dictionary meanings are also italicized. The slogans, quotations, dialogues are also italicized. Roy uses words, phrases, sentences and also parts of songs in italics. “I have seen jewels one of which is my Koh-i-noor, from her grandfather’s will.”

The priest’s funeral songs at Sophie Mol’s burial are also italicized: ‘We entrust into thy hands, most merciful father the soul of this our child departed. And we commit her body to the ground earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.’

The Epitaph on Mol’s tombstone is also in italics. ‘Dust to dust to dust to dust to dust A Sun beam Lent To Us Too Briefly’.

The innermost feelings of the speakers are also given in italics-‘How could she stand the smell? Haven’t you noticed, they have a particular smell, these, Paravans?’

By using the technique of italicization, Roy tries to reveal the characters and objective narration. She uses this conventional technique quite freely to differentiate herself as a novelist from others.

USE OF BRACKETS :

Another device reflected in *The God of Small Things* is a use of bracketing . In the first chapter itself, Rahel’s life after the death of her mother is briefly narrated by using bracket. The second use of parenthesis shows the sorrow experienced by Chacko and Mammachi at the death of Sophie Mol. There several incidents given within brackets are part of the narration.

The description of a lady at Sophie Mol’s funeral is in bracket- ‘an old lady Masquerading as a distance relative (whom no body recognized) but who often surfaced next to bodies at funerals. (a funeral junkie? A latent necrophiliac?) Put

cologne on a wad of cotton wool...!’ The description of the feeling of Rahel when Sophie Mol’s coffin is lowered also in bracket . “Rahel heard (on Sophie Mol’s behalf) soft round of the read mud and the hard sounds of the orange laterale that spoiled the shinning coffin polish.” .

The explanations in the brackets are all the more evident in the depiction of popular Malayalam folk as well as film songs. The discourteous-sounding lines of the boat song that Estha sings in the pickle factory are rendered alternately in the native language and in English:

Enda da korangaxha , chandi ithra thenjadu?

(Hey Mr. Monkey man, why’s your bum so red?)...

Later, the same technique is used by the paralyzed Kuttappen while shouting repeatedly in his desperation: Pa pera-pera-pera-perakka (Mr. gugga-gug-gug-guava,) Ende parambil thooralley. (Don’t shit here in my compound.)

Roy uses the technique of brackets in *The God of Small Things* to explain her own point of view, to make the narration effective and to show the innermost feelings of the characters.

USE OF REPETITION :

In *The God of Small Things*, there is use of verbal repetitions and antithesis. Words, phrases and sentences are frequently repeated.

Repetition of determiners:

“One corner for cooking, one for clothes, one for bedding rolls, one for dying in”

Repetition of prepositions:

Past floating yellow limes...Past green mangoes...Past glass casks of vinegar with corks...Past shelves of pectin and preservatives...Past trays of bitter gourd...Past gunny bags...Past mounds of fresh green peppercorns...

Repetition of negatives:

“No miles stones marked its progress, No trees grew along it, No mists rolled over it, No birds circled it.” Apart from these repetitions, Roy uses variety of repetitions. For example:

‘In the lobby, the orange drinks were waiting, the lemon drinks were waiting, the melty chocolates were waiting, The Coming Soon! Posters were waiting’...

Squashed Miss Mitten-shaped stains in the Universe, Squashed frog-shaped stains in the Universe, Squashed crows ...in the Universe...

Shutup or Getout. Getout or Shutup.

Went where they went, stopped where they stopped.

Nothing mattered much. Nothing much mattered.

Prepare to prepare to be prepared.

So small God laughed a hollow laugh, and skipped away cheerfully...He whistled, kicked stones

‘I love repetitions... because it made me feel safe. Repeated words and phrases have a rocking feeling, like a lullaby. They help take away the shock of the plot -- death, lives destroyed or the horror of the settings -- a crazy, chaotic, emotional house’, says Roy.

USE OF SUBJECTLESS SENTENCES AND SINGLE WORD SENTENCES :

Roy employs the device of subjectless sentences also. “...Not when Mammachi died,” and “Not when Chacko immigrated to Canada”. She also uses a word instead of sentence. “A stranger”, “ Swollen”, “Noxious”, “Wild”, “Sick”, “Sad”, “Rain”, Rushing inky water”.etc.

COMPOUNDING OF WORDS:
Roy uses compounding to serve special purpose.

“Ammu’s trying-not –to-cry mouth”, “Chocko- the – comrade”, “Chocko - the - management”, “Clear- as- glass kiss”, “Bottom less- bottom less feelings”, “Part-time-happiness”

FAULTY

Another technique deliberately used by Roy is faulty spelling.
Amayrika= America
Angshios= anxious
Verrry= very
Hell-oh= hello
Orlways=Always
Mint=Minute

SPELLINGS:

REVERSAL OF THE ORDER OF LETTERS :

To create comic effect, Roy uses the technique of reversal of the order of letters.

One Spring Morning Susie Squirrel Woke Up. enO gnirpS gninroM eisuS
lerriuoS ekoW pU.
Satan in their eyes. nataS ni rieht seye.
There are also the words in the reversal mode.
Politeness=ssenetiloP
Obedience=ecneidebO
Loyalty=ytalayoL
Intelligence=ecnigilletnI
Courtesy=ysetruoC
Effeciency=ycneiceffE

USE OF WORDS INDICATING COLOURS :

The beauty of Roy’s narration is strengthened with the use of colour-denoting words.

Red bananas, A blue church sky, blue glass bottles, The sea was black, The spume vomit green, A thin red cow, yellow maps, black suit, Moss green.

CLUSTERING OF ADJECTIVES AND OTHER WORD CLAUSES :

Roy uses this device very often in this novel. There are sentences like: “the baby clutched his index figure while he conducted his insane, broken, envious, torch lit, study”

Or

“ He felt the shaming, churning, leaving, turning sickness in his stomach”.
Effeciency=ycneiceffE

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