

LINGUISTIC EXPERIMENT IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S: THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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Abstract: Arundhati Roy the notable Indian writer in English has proved her writing through the unique work *The God of Small Things* which got Man Booker Prize Award in 1997. This article discusses on the linguistic part of her writing where the author excels in using her literary techniques to support her ideas and to strengthen the situation. She has employed techniques like Repetition and single word Experiment to express more effectively. Though Arundhati Roy has utilized the existing literary devices, yet she has received the great recognition for her innovativeness in style and technique. It is really difficult for non-native writer of English to master over the linguistic devices.

Keywords: Linguistic, innovativeness, techniques, repetition, experiment.

INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy is able to bend the English language to her own purpose for the imaginative and effective expression of the various emotions and ideas. She creates new collocations like “Touchable man”, “Thimble – drinker”, “Coffin – Cartwheeler” (TGST, 135) and compound words. She is a great literary giant in the field of style and heralded a new and entirely original technique in her novel TGST. The readers could find a subject of great controversy both in her theme and technique. The theme deals with the Keralite society, their rites, customs, tradition and patriarchal domination, the consequence of divorce, the child psychology, exposure of the malpractice of Marxism and police administration and above all the confrontation between the god of small things and the god of big things.

In technique and style, it takes the reader away from the world of mere verbal melody and cheap metaphorical structure to the world of architectural pattern and poetic mode. Arundhati Roy's stylistic innovations include use of words, phrases, subject-less sentences, faulty spellings, topicalization, deviation from normal word order, single words sentences, change of word classes, clustering of word classes and a variety of other techniques. The author coins new words and twists language to confirm to the feeling. As a result, the use of broken sentences, illogical statements, unrestricted sprinkling of Italics, bizarre phrases, ungrammatical construction and unconventional rhymes talk of her stylistic approach. For instance, “Stoppit”, “Stoppited”, “lefrightlef”(TGST, 141), “Porketmunny”(TGST, 102), “This way and that”(TGST, 101), “*Did you know how much I missed you*”(TGST, 233).

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The author has tried her best to create such words, phrases intonations and connotations, so that the sound of the words may suggest the sense.

Arundhati Roy's first novel *TGST* is a clever experimentation in style. The author has created a world of both fact and fiction. She has brought out characters is colourful like courageous adults, de-moralized parents, the half-awake Esthappen, Baby Kochamma who "had lived her life backwards"(29), the wife-beating Pappachi, his victim Mammachi. But, it is only Ammu who with all the courage and patience comes out as a fully developed human being, despite her suffering in her life.

Though the Indo-English novel has come to a stay, yet many writers still adopt western sources or quality in their writings. The question here is that for whom is the writer writing whether for himself or herself or for a specific reader. As Fracois Mauriac says, "An author who assures you he is writing for himself alone and does not care whether he is heard or not is a boaster: he is deceiving himself or you"(Contemporary Indian Writings in English, 86). A writer basically writes for the readers to read and so Arundhati Roy writes in a particular style entirely different from the other both male and female Indo-English novelists of this century. The uniqueness of Arundhati Roy lies in her approach to the novel with a linguistic style in a high spirit, which lends a flavour and colour of its own to the entire novel. Her different ways of writing breaks even many of the accepted rules of language.

The novel is crowded with single word sentences, paragraphs, mis-spellings, verbless sentences, repetitions, capitals and sprinkling of Italics and so on. Her linguistic influence in the novel helps the readers to accept the writer's right to poetic license as "the poet's right to ignore the rules and conventions generally observed by the users of that language"(Contemporary Indian Writings in English, 88). In analyzing the language of any literary work, the formal aspects of language of any literary work, the formal aspects of language i.e., both lexicon and grammar have to be dealt with. The same analytical aspect is applied in *TGST*.

Repetition

Arundhati Roy lavishly uses repetition in *TGST* as one of the fundamental devices of intensification. It begins with actual, physical, acoustic repetition for an echoic purpose. For instance,

"He loved them. He loved her (Julie Andrews), she loved him, they loved the children, and the children loved them. They all loved each other"(105).

The author repeatedly uses sentences, expressions and words most effectively. There is a motive behind using this type of technique. This Repetition of words or sentences focuses the reader's attention on the intended theme or topic. It creates a hypnotizing effect on the reader's senses. Here are some of the evidences taken from the text to prove the author's ability in using this technique in a successful manner.

“One corner for cooking, one for clothes, one for bedding rolls, one for dying in” (206-07).

When Velutha sees the twins in Chacko’s house, he has the feeling of his own.

Her eyes, her mouth; Her teeth.

Her soft, lambent Skin.

He drove the thought away angrily. It retired and sat outside his skull.
Like a dog (212).

It is not just words that are repeated but also a structure of sentence. The author presents the wonderful effect by the use of repetition of sentence structure in the quoted below. This situation occurs in the last chapter of the novel where Ammu-Velutha makes biological love in the seashore.

The Scurrying, hurrying, boat world was already gone.

The white termites on their way to work.

The white ladybirds on their way hope.

The white beetles burrowing away from light.

The white grasshoppers with whitewood violins.

The cat white Music.

All gone. (36)

Arundhati Roy has the ability to break one sentence into several small bits and each has a complete utterance. She replaces the commas with full stops and produces the small complete sentences.

“He kissed her eyes. Her ears. Her breasts. Her belly.

Her seven silver stretch marks from her twins”. (337)

The following passage creates a haunting effect, while Estha moves through the vast empty, abandoned factory. And it is the description how Ousa, the Bar Nowl watched Ambassador E. Pelvis walk:

Past floating yellow limes in brine that needed prooding from time to time.

Past green mangoes, cut and stuffed with turmeric and chilli powder and tied together with twine.

Past glass casks of vinegar with corks.

Past shelves of peetin and preservatives.

Past trays of bitter gourd, with knives and coloured finger guars.

Past gunny bags bulging with garlic and small onions.

Past mounds of fresh green pepper corns.

Past a heap of banana peels

Past the label cupboard full of labels.
 Past the glue.
 Past the glue-brush.
 Past an iron tub of empty bottles floating in soap bubbles water.
 Past the lemon squash.
 The grape-crush.
 And back (134).

The Factory was dark inside. The light has emerged through the doors and a beam of dusty sunlight from the skylight. Estha smelled the vinegar and asafetida but he is used to it and loved it. And the above description is all about the factory. When Ammu, Rahel, Estha and Vellya Pappen stand in the Railway station, Rahel cooks at the dead frog squashed on the road. It seems to her like a frog-shaped stain on the road than a frog. And she imagines of Miss Mitton as the frog. So, Vellya Pappen assures the twins with repeating words like “Squashed” and “Universe”.

Squashed Miss Mitten shaped stains in Universe.
 Squashed frog shaped stains in the universe.
 Squashed crows that had tried to eat the Squashed frog shaped stains in the universe.
 Squashed dog that ate the squashed crow shaped stains in the universe. (82)

Arundhati Roy’s repeated use of repetition suggests that she attempts to bring beauty to her style but at the same time, the repeated use of such technique also indicated a poverty of linguistic resources. Some times, it brings also annoyance to the readers. For instance, “Part angry Ammu. Past Rahel concentrating through her Knees. Past Baby Kochamma. Past the audience that had to move its legs again. Thiswayandthat (101)... The Orangedrinks were waiting. The lemondinks were waiting. The melty chocolates were waiting. The electric blue foam leather car-sofas were waiting. The *Coming soon!* Posters were waiting (101).

It is true that the reader is easily disturbed by the above repetition of certain words like ‘past’, and ‘waiting’. It also allows the readers to wonder whether it is a reflection of the inadequacy of her language. The question here is whether Arundhati Roy fails to express the idea or she wants to use the repetition technique often. Roy has purpose in using so because she does it for a purely rhetorical effect. She starts with the word ‘Here’ for the four consecutive paragraphs (203). Thus, she, with a purpose, necessitates a particular type of sentence construction for mere rhetorical effect.

Single Word Experiment

Arundhati Roy’s another favourite linguistic device is the use of single words. It creates a dramatic impact. The author makes dramatic tension by breaking sentences.

She not only breaks sentences but also experiences and events and produces to single word expressions. There are many evidences in her novel to prove her ability of creating dramatic tension in a single word sentences or paragraphs. For instances,

The world, locked out for years, suddenly floated in, and now, Estha couldn't hear himself for the noise. Trains. Traffic, Music. The stock Market (15).

Estha never saw her like that.
Wild. Sick. Sad (159).

From the sea Queen Horist Chacko had bought two red roses that he held carefully.

Fatly.
Fondly (137).

As though she knew he would be there. Waiting.
As though he knew she would come.
He died.
Know (332).

Gate, he thought as he walked of the gate. Gate. Road. Stoves. Sky. Rain (284).

The single words are sometimes arranged vertically. Ms. Indira Nityanandam says, "This stylistic device is eye-catching, but the aesthetic purpose served by it eludes my comprehension".

For instance,

Out.
In.
And lifted its legs.
Up.
Down (293).

Gate.
Road.
Stones.
Sky.
Rain (285).

Blue grey blue eyes snapped open.

A wake.

A Live.

A Lert.

Sleep was summarily dismissed (238).

Kochu Maria watched with her Cake-Crumbs.

The fond smiles watched fondly.

Little Girls playing.

Sweet.

One beach-coloured.

One brown.

One Loved.

One Loved a Little Less (186).

The use of such technique has little relevance to the plot and theme. It does not help in anyway for the progression and expansion of story line. But this type of style only disturbs the smooth run of the novel. In spite of everything, this linguistic device has its own merit of appealing to the reader's mind. Arundhati Roy finds necessary to invent a new word. So, the formation of a new word is known as Neologism. Neologism is not violation of the lexical rule, but at the same time a writer obviously cannot be allowed to possess the total license in the creation of new words. It also accepted that the enlargement of the lexical content of a language through neologism. Because the particular word may become a part of the language with the repeated reading and the usage. It is an essential rule to remember the possible rule in English language like affixation or suffixation to form a new word. For instance, T.S. Eliot has been in the practice of using 'fore' to indicate 'before' in the word 'fore-suffer' (**Contemporary Indian Writing in English, 88**). This word has become a part of the lexicon of the particular language. But Arundhati Roy has utilized neologism for merely single occasion. Therefore, such words cannot be added in the English words stock. For instance,

'Offity' (210).

'Bar Nowl' (193).

'Straightforwardly' (277).

'Thiswayandthat' (107).

'Please to meet you' (212).

The admirable quality in Arundhati Roy is the ability to create new words for the purpose of occasion. This is where she is different from most of the Indian English Fiction writers. From the days of Shakespeare, English writers have been interpolating with foreign languages. The reader is to add a new dimension to the

works. Arundhati Roy has used a sprinkling of Malayalam words but she has applied them for mere mundane purpose. For instance,

“ ‘Ickilee’ (tickle)” (178).

“ ‘Kindo’ (can you see)” (178).

“ ‘Modalai’ (master / owner)” (271).

“ ‘Mittom’ (backyard)” (280).

Breakfast items like ‘idiappams’, ‘Jknaji’, ‘meen’(212).

‘avaloose oondas’ (273). The names of fish like,

‘Pallthi’, ‘Poral’, ‘Koori’, ‘Karmeen’ (203).

Arundhati Roy has the only purpose to use this kind of interpolation is to provide a local flavour of the particular state. The recitation of Mark Antony’s speech (274) with a Malayalee accent strikes the reader to feel a sense of humour. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines ‘register’ in linguistics as “a range of Vocabulary used by speakers in particular social circumstances or professional context”(254). Thomas Hardy’s use of register in his Wessex novels has gained its local flavour. Arundhati Roy also proves her ability for register mixing as found in the conversation between Chacko and comrade Pillai (274-80). There is a lavish use of political jargon and full of artificiality. Aijaz Ahmed writes about another kind of register mixing of “the whole range of relationship like the love between Rahel and Estha”.

Arundhati Roy has displaced her capability for describing passages. This type of usage is really linguistically and aesthetically pleasing as in the Chapters “The History House” and “The Cost of Living”. Ammu’s longing for biological thirst is revealed in the following passages.

Ammu moved quickly through the darkness like an insect following a chemical trail (332). Ammu watches Velutha: As she watched him she understood the quality of his beauty. How his labour had shaped him. How the wood he fashioned had fashioned him. Each plank he planed, each nail he drove, each thing he made, had moulded him. Had left its stamp on him. Had given him his strength, his supple grace (334).

And when Ammu and Velutha have met, the biological union occurs. The author describes it as, “Biology designed the dance. Terror timed it. Dictated the rhythm with which their bodies answered each other. As though they knew already that for each tremor of pleasure they would pay with an equal measure of pain” (335).

The author also has the capacity of describing unusual passages that lead to a violent description of the toilets at Abhilash Talkies and the process of urinating.

Rahel held her handbag. Baby Kochamma lifted her rumpled sari. Rahel studies her baby grand aunt's enormous legs. Years later during a history lesson being read out in school – *The Emperor Babour had a wheatish complexion and pillar – like thighs* – this scene would flash before her. Baby Kochamma balanced like a big bird over a public pot.... Rahel liked all this. Holding the handbag. Everyone pissing in front of everyone. Like friends. She knew nothing then, of how precious a feeling this was. *Like friends*. They would never be together like this again. Ammu, Baby Kochamma and she (95).

The above description of unpleasant things may help to think the reader that the author may try to depict humourously even the nuances of events. It may seem to be unnecessary for some readers but the writer finds necessary to describe even such situation for mere sense of completion or satisfaction. So, Arundhati Roy's usage of linguistic devices may raise different questions among the readers like: What purpose is served? Does the novel gain aesthetically? The review in "The Sunday Times" provides an opinions as "much ado about small things" and in "The Literary Review" as, "an uninhibited and intimately infectious confidence in the power of the English Language". Though Arundhati Roy has utilized the existing literary devices, yet she has received the great recognition for her innovativeness in style and technique. It is really difficult for non-native writer of English to master over the linguistic devices. She receives the sense of appreciation from all the quality readers for the great attempt in her first novel itself.

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