

LANGUAGE IS A SKIN ON ARUNDHATI ROY'S THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy short into fame on the merit of her very first novel, *The God of Small Things*. The joy of *The God of Small Things* is that it appeals equally to the head and the heart. From its mesmerizing opening sequence, it is clear that we are in the grip of a delicious new voice a voice of breathtaking beauty which is unique in its freshness and beauty. Arundhati Roy has proved herself as a skilled Wordsmith. She appropriates the English language by bringing it under the influence of vernacular.

In *The God of Small Things* with her lively original language, sensitive poetical style, sharp honesty of emotions, Roy keeps the reader absorbed and engaged from first to last. Allegory, symbols, fantasy, magical realism, fluctuating narrative, rapid time-shifts, compelling use of narration and conversational story telling are the tools of her writing. Roy's uses language which is very fresh. The description of events involves the visual, aural, and imaginative seizing of the emotions of the people and she does it with a penchant. Words chosen are from the spoken medium. Most of the language is stark, bereft of musical phrases.

Another recurring linguistic device in the novel is the interpolation of words from Malayalam. These are inducted into the text to revoke regional flavors, the locale of the novel being a village in Kerala. With her lively original language rhetorical devices, linguistic inventiveness, sparkling symbolism, ever fresh similes connotations, intonations, deliberate distortions of diction, magical realism and sensitive poetic style, she keeps the reader glued to her writing from first to last. Her linguistic as it goes through the impressionable, inventive and even mischievous minds and creative imagination of the children. Arundhati's style has been lavishly praised for linguistic innovation

KEYWORDS: Allegory, Symbols, Fantasy, Magical Realism, Fluctuating Narrative, Rapid Time-Shifts

INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy short into fame on the merit of her very first novel, *The God of Small Things*. When she finished the book, which took almost five years, she hoped to get it published by a local publisher in her native land India. Fate thought differently. When she brought the manuscript to an Indian editor, he liked it and saw as marketing potential far larger than Ms. Roy had hoped. *The God of Small Things* has sold over six million copies in England and in translation, a staggering number by any standards!

The joy of *The God of Small Things* is that it appeals equally to the head and the heart. From its mesmerizing opening sequence, it is clear that we are in the grip of a delicious new voice.....a voice of breathtaking beauty which is unique in its freshness and beauty.

The words and poetic stanzas in the book scald the very fiber of the reader and leave him shaken. The story has been webbed together with amazing confidence which overwhelms the reader by its exuberance and verbal virtuosity.

Arundhati Roy has proved herself as a skilled wordsmith. She is a tireless experimenter and designer of words. She appropriates the English language by bringing it under the influence of vernacular. She has used the language with extra ordinary liberty and flexibility, "This continuing process of experimentation has considerably enriched English language and literature." Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a fresh and fine example of this trend.

The art of narration, in fact, comprises an integral part of the prominent, unique and innovative style of the writer. In using the narrative technique in *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati seems to have followed in some way Lawrence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shanly* (1760-67), William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), among others.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* has a number of features to make it a great novel; its linguistic innovations, its intricate narrative technique and the freshness of its imagery. What detracts the orthodox reader momentarily from the novel, puts him off, is Roy's presentation of ugly reality. It is true that an artist's mission is to give a realistic portrayal of society, both pleasant and unpleasant and the reader is not expected to remain insulated from the ugly realities of life.

Her innovative technique present new sensibilities, meanings and dimensions in the Indian novel in English. In *The God of Small Things* with her lively original language, sensitive poetical style, sharp honesty of emotions, Roy keeps the reader absorbed and engaged from first to last. Allegory, symbols, fantasy, magical realism, fluctuating narrative, rapid time-shifts, compelling use of narration and conversational story telling are the tools of her writing.

This is amply borne out even by the Booker citation itself: "Her narrative crackles with riddles and yet tells its tale quite clearly. We were all engrossed by this moving novel."

Among the many remarkable qualities of Roy's book pointed out by the critic are its lush prose, setting and the distinctive voice of the narrator. Roy attaches importance to the style and the narrative skill, the telling of the book comes out emphatically in her interview to Alix Wibur. "For me, language is a skin on my thought and I was thinking of a way of telling it," She fashioned a new language for fiction. Her use of language reminds us of Eliot's use of language in *Rock Chorus* and *Four Quartets*. Take for instance; Ammu's parting from Velutha after the consummation of love, Roy writes: "She moved closer, wanting to be within him to touch more of him. He gathered her into the cave of his body. A breeze lifted off the river and cooled their warm bodies."

Roy's uses language which is very fresh. The description of events involves the visual, aural, and imaginative seizing of the emotions of the people and she does it with a penchant. Words chosen are from the spoken medium. Most of the language is stark, bereft of musical phrases. In the use of elision, language is with out implicative so that readers become onlookers as in *Abhilash Talkies*, "The back-inside smell. Fan shadows, Backs of heads. Necks, Collars, Hair-Buns, Plaits Ponytails (110), The juxtaposition of words sick and sweet into sick sweet' adds an extra dimension to the anguish of the destruction of human beings.

The most striking characteristic of Arundhati Roy's style is her capacity for linguistic innovation. The reader observes linguistic play fullness in operation constantly. One of the ways in which this manifests is in her fondness for

neologism-coining new words, namely nouns, verbs adjectives and adverbs can be produced by different morphological processes.

Arundhati uses different processes to create new nouns. Sometime novel nouns are formed simply by putting together an adjective and a noun without any space between them, as in the following example :-

- And on one side of the drive way beside the old well in the shade of the kodampuli tree a silent blue-approved army gathered in the Green heat to watch. (172)
- She heard (on Sophie Mol's behalf) the soft sounds of the red mud and the hard sounds of the orange laterite that spoiled the shining coffin polish (7).

The suffix, hood, occurring in existing nouns like mother-hood produces a similar noun, divorce hood (45). Some compound nouns are formed by more complex mechanism-changing post-modifiers into pre-modifiers and a deletion of the one or more words e.g. a Car breeze blew (87). This word arises from a longer underlying structure – A breeze which was caused by the movement of the car. On the other occasions new adjective are created by converting a post-modifier, after the deletion some words;

- ...the vice-like grip that she had on the child's Soap slippery arm. The underlying structure is arm (That soap had made slippery)

While the reader enjoys the surprise caused by the neologisms and appreciates the play fullness of these creation, AK Tiwari wonders why they are created. Children delight in using coined words e.g. Chetercock and fighter cock, polson (meaning to butter up someone), sidey (meaning unimportant). The main episodes are seen through the perspective of the children Estha and Rahel. Hence, neologisms seem to be appropriate. Neologisms bring about economy of expression while others are merely playful and produce mine amusement and surprise.

In her handling of English syntax, Roy shows her originality, she has forged for herself a unique reductive style which achieves remarkable degree of condensation and concreteness. In her composition, she often omits the structural words such as auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, sub-ordinators and co-ordinators. The novel also abounds in “elliptical sentences, verbless clauses, and non-finite clauses. The result is a tremendous gain in terms of effect,” In this respect her writing is nearer to that of GM Hopkins and WH Auden rather than any writer of realistic novel.” To quote a couple of examples;

- Just then Rahel saw Velutha, vellya Peppen's son, Velutha. Her most beloved friend Velutha, Velutha marching with a red flag. In a white shirt and mundu with angry veins in his neck (71).
- We also see elliptical sentences. The following examples are worth nothing :-
- Big Man the Laltain, Small Man the Mombati. (88)
- Margaret Kochamma told her to stop it, so she stopped. (141)

With Roy's The God of Small Things Rushdie's wordplay has found a feisty contender. Roy's Kind-school teacher voice (146). 'Bluegrey blueeyes' (146), 'green-for-the-day (187), 'dinner-plate-eyed' (308) are even more idiosyncratic than Rushdie's transliterated compounds.

Both in Rushdie and Roy, the word play is sustained through a supreme command over language and smacks of the same iconoclastic insouciance that is the hallmark of postmodernism.

Another recurring linguistic device in the novel is the interpolation of words from Malayalam. These are inducted into the text to evoke regional flavors, the locale of the novel being a village in Kerala. The often repeated ones are words of endearment 'mol' and 'mon'. Terms of kinship are attached to names eg Vellya Pappen, Margaret Kochamma. These are references to south Indian food eg idly appan, kanji and meen.

Words referring to regional dress and ornaments occur eg mundu, Kavani and there are words like Paravan referring to the lower castes. Similarly, the writer imitates the pronunciation and mannerisms of the Lemon Drink man when he pronounces pocket money as 'porket munny' and runs words together in the question:

Coca-Cola Fanta? Ice-cream Rose milk? An imitation of the Malayalam speakers English accent is produced in the recitation that comrate Pillai's son, Lenon makes of speech in Julius Ceasor.

In the epigraph to the novel, Arundhati Roy quotes a line from Johan Berger; "Never again will a single story be told as of Pappachi and Mammachi, Chacko and Margaret Kochamma, Kochamma and Joe, Ammu and Baba, Ammu and Velutha, Pillai, Kalyani and Lenin, Estha and Rahel and Larry Mc Caslin and so on."

Caroline Moore found the book not only intensely moving but also possessing a rare quality of composition. It is claimed that Roy has forged a unique instrument of the English language. Moore goes to the extent of asserting that Roy's novel displays, "exuberance as well as a freshness and unembarrassed immediacy which are rare in good fiction from this country." India Today, an Indian Journal, rightly calls her the "Princess of Prose". The God of Small Things, says Jason Cowley, "fulfills the highest demand of the art of fiction: To see the world not conventionally or habitually, but as if for the first time."

With her lively original language rhetorical devices, linguistic inventiveness, sparkling symbolism, ever fresh similes connotations, intonations, deliberate distortions of diction, magical realism and sensitive poetic style, she keeps the reader glued to her writing from first to last.

This fact is a healthy pointer to a quality writing rather than mediocre writing in today's age of bulk publication. Thus, the recognition of her work will surely give the much needed fillip to quality writing in the literary world and also successfully meet the expectations of the modern reader.

The book has attracted applauses from several quarters on several aspects of brilliance of the book, "Books like The God of Small Things come only once in the long time and even Roy is unable to tell if she would, and could, write another such novel in future.

Anjali Roy, "Making New words / worlds options for the Indian Novelists in English," Makers of Indian English Literature, ed CD Narasimharah (Delhi: Pen craft 2000) 79.

The linguistic inventiveness of Arundhati Roy has such a wide range that it is difficult to place it in a few convenient categories. Her linguistic as it goes through the impressionable, inventive and even mischievous minds and creative imagination of the children. Thus she joins words as well as compounds, such as, "a vible die- able age" (3) beings in fresh modifiers such as, "dinner -plate eyed" (308), uses unexpected adjectives, as "old boat eyes " (204) "Ammu,s

trying –not –to-cry mouth “ (300) “Sad – About – Joe silence” (173),and “Tennis- trope smile “(329) or omits punctuation marks, as in “ scurrying gyring, buying selling luggage, trundling porter paying children, shitting people spitting, coming going begging bargaining reveration – checking.”(300) Without Verbs, such as “An alarm clock. A read car with a musical horn. A red mug for the bathroom. A wife a diamond. Roy uses many such rhetorical and stylistic device, breaks the words and enjoy their disintegration, as in the following:

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Mohit Kumar Roy (1999:49) calls it “creative play with words”⁴

Mohit Kumar Ray concludes that in the novel “ the words are made to break free of the world's recognized meaning and absolutes into a contempt[ory world of fresh usage and implications so that the full resonance of suggestions in the language is realized. The kind of liberty that Roy takes with spellings, syntax and a sentence patterns reflects a feminine sensibility that characterized and at the same time authenticates the discourse.”(50)

Arundhati's style has been lavishly praised for linguistic innovation. Features of her innovation are reminiscent of similar /identical features in the style of other writers, like jhon Don Passos and more recently Salman Rushdie. In the passage below from U.S. A. by Jhon Don.

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