A POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE OF ARUNDHATI ROY’S

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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ABSTRACT

Most literature in English today does not speak for the official London based language. The way of writing of English literature is based on the writer’s own country’s culture, traditions, ethos etc. Indian English is a socio-linguistic reality and an accepted linguistic code these days. It is different from standard English since the Indian looks at the world in a particular way which is very different from that of the native speakers of English. Using of the English language in this novel is sometimes apart from rules and regulations. Roy makes use of her English language in her own style as making new compound words, phrases, structure of sentences, mingling with colloquial tongue etc. Sometimes she employs the language in a childish way for describing the children’s world. This paper analyses the impact of postcolonialism on Roy’s writing the novel The God of Small Things.

KEYWORDS: Arundhati Roy, The God of Small Things, Postcolonial Discourse

INTRODUCTION

The postcolonial, cross-cultural texts establish a “postcolonial variety of English” (Chakraborty). Postcolonial literature, especially Indian Writing in English is different from native literature because of the impact of the backdrop of local culture, hybrid identity and wayward dialogue which force the author to write in a different form. They depict the local situation to shape the writing in consonance with the existing reality. Sometimes postcolonial authors adopt colloquial language for describing the characters and situation to show the originality of the colonial impact to the readers. For this reason they never mind about the rules and regulations of English language. Their use of language and style are marginally different from other writings. The readers can find the impact of postcolonialism in the novel The God of Small Things which Arundhati Roy has employed in the form of different style and language as well as other postcolonial text.

SUMMARY

In The God Of Small Things, Arundhati 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 departs 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” (Prabhavati).
The English used by Roy in *The God of Small Things* is particularly combined with colloquial Malayalam language. She uses the names of the characters in Malayalam as Ammu (mother), Kochamma (honorable woman), Mammachi (grandmother), Pappachi (grandfather), and Mol (young girl). She does not give any particular name to her main characters. Her diction also reveals the postcolonial theme that breaks rules and regulations by using such new compound words like "dustgreen" and "mossgreen" (1), even sometimes she has used the compound words or single phrase for a paragraph like “As for Rahel” (15). She has combined two words as one for example “Whatisit? Whathappened?”(6) for making them more effective and describing the child world to the readers. She has handled the language techniques in her own way to forge a clear image in the minds of readers. She proves to be a master of English expressions even though English is not her first language. The work is very imaginative that describes people, places and events very vividly. In an interview she said that

Language is a very reflexive thing for me. I don’t know the rules, so I don’t know if I’ve broken them. As a very young child my mother gave me a book called Free Writing and we were encouraged to write fearlessly. The first coherent sentence I ever wrote, which is actually in this book, was written when I was five. It was about an Australian missionary who taught me. Every day she would say, ‘I can see Satan in your eyes.’ So, the first sentence I ever wrote was: ‘I hate Miss Mitten and I think her knickers are torn.’ (http://www.india50.com/arundhatI.html)

There are no linguistic rules and regulations in her writings. She does not even bother about syntactical order of the sentence. This novel contains single word sentences and paragraphs, which apparently seem to be non-English. The words given below are the example of single word paragraphs

Flying. Whightless.(98)
Entered.
Loved.(78)
Wild. Sick. Sad. (159)
Up.
Down. (293)
Gate.
Road.
Stones.
Sky.
Rain. (285)
Roy’s yet another important element of her own language style is non-verbal sentences. The readers can find such verbless sentences in many places, not only in a particular chapter or place but also the whole novel. The novel contains innumerable verbless sentences such as:

1. Not when Mammachi died. Not when Chacko emigrated to Canada. (12)
2. Up two steps. Down two. Up one. (98)
3. Very much less. (113)

Her another language style is using telescoped words which is a form of new words by combining two or more terms into one, like:

- Thiswayandthat (107)
- Ofcourseofcourse (109)
- Finethankyou (145)
- Bluegreyblue (238)
- Pleasetomeetyou (212)

Another stylistic device of Roy is her use of repetitions and antithesis. Words, phrases and sentences are frequently repeated. Arundhati Roy ironically has used the word ‘red’. Usually red colour is associated with, some danger. When Estha is leaving the dark auditorium, he is led only by the red light. Roy repeats the colour of the light to help the readers to imagine the impending dangerous situation. Even when the family enters into the cinema hall, Roy says

- They had to rush up the red steps with the old red carpet. Red staircase with red spit stains in the red corner. (97)

- 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…(193)

This novel includes many poems without obvious sense. They seek to evoke the childish mind and its reflection of the environment around. The use of rhymes in these poems shows the ambition of the author to get closer to a child’s mind:

1. Rubadub dub (Rahel thought),
2. Three women in a tub,
3. Tarry awhile said Slow. (96)
I’m Popeye the sailor man dum dum
I live in a cara-van dum dum lop-en the door
I’m Popeye the sailor man dum dum.
Up two. Down two. Up one. Jump, jump. (98)
Fast foster flies: –
Never let it rest
Until the fast is faster;
And the faster’s fest. (104)

Chakrabarti gives a vivid definition for the colonial discourse that “the colonial discourse of power envisages the twin processes of subversion of the culture of the colonised and imposition of the coloniser’s language upon the latter. A section of writers of the erstwhile colonies wants to subvert these twin processes by a post-colonial discourse of language which has an abrogative stance. Post-colonial writers in many diglossic societies like Africa and India forge a language in cross-cultural texts which not only seeks to assert a new power of creativity, but to give the language a distinctive look” (Chakrabarti163).

The style of this novel is a hybrid of English and Malayalam. Roy makes use of Malayalam words and expressions to provide a linguistic experience in a multicultural space. Malayalam is the regional language of Kerala, her native state. There is also the coarse Kottayam dialect of Malayalam such as:

paratha (114,116)
soo-soos (106)
Eda cherukka (101)

She attempts to familiarize the Indianess of her novel with the readers. To bring in local colour in the social behaviour of the Kerala Syrian Christian Anglophiles and those who imitate them, she uses Indianised words and phrases in aplenty. This novel would have been less Indian and far less amusing. Arundhati Roy absolutely confined herself to the Westernised Syrian Christian character whose English approximates the standard English variety. Comrade K.N.M. Pillai represents best the Indianised English man with his peculiar expressions and self-dramatization. He is an average Keralite with a master’s degree whose social status and cultural difference from the westerners is betrayed through his conversation. The peculiar feature of Indian English is the use of present continuous tense in the place of the simple present. Mr. Pillai’s conversation is filled with this wrong usage. He asks Chacko: “What is the news? How is your daughter adjusting?” (273) “He’s standing first in class. This year he will be getting double promotion” (275) “still in planning stages, I suppose? Or expecting? (130)


Comrade Pillai utters mostly in Malayalam: ‘‘Aiyyo, Rahel Mol... Orkunnile??’ (128) and “Orkunnundo?” are addressed directly to Rahel, while “Aiyyo paavam” (131) is used to express his false commiseration with Estha’s condition. Comrade Pillai’s addressing his wife as “Edi Kalyani” (273) reveals his love to her. Roy has used these Malayalam words without any footnotes.

When Rahel tells Pillai about Larry or Lawrence whom she had married and divorced, his reaction is well-described: “Die-vorced? His voice rose to such a high register that is cracked on the question mark. He even pronounced the word as though it were a form of death” (130). It is significant to note that the word divorced is pronounced in a way that it is in two parts “die and “vorced” with a hyphen in between. The picture, tone, attitude and everything are brought before the reader’s mind.

As a postcolonial country, people of India are always fascinated by English language. When they speak in English, they make themselves appear as westernized people as with Baby Kochamma who suddenly acquires a strange new British accent when introduced to Margaret and Sophie. She wastes no time in showing her knowledge of Shakespeare—but ironically it falls flat on Sophie. She said Sophie Mol was so beautiful that she reminded her of a wood-spirit, of Ariel.

‘D’you know who Ariel was?’ Baby Kochamma asked Sophie mol. ‘Ariel in The Tempest?’

Sophie Mol said she didn’t.

‘Where the bee sucks there suck I?’ Baby Kochamma said.

Sophie Mol said she didn’t.

‘In a cowslip’s bell Lie’?

Sophie Mol said she didn’t.

‘Shakespeare’s The Tempest?’ Baby Kochamma persisted. (144)

Seven years old twins, Estha and Rahel’s behaviour remain incomprehensible. Interestingly the incomprehensible and threatening character of the adult world seems to be linked with the English language. The children refer to English words in the dictionary; they pick up language as used by adults and try to make sense of it, a process which can be observed in Roy’s excessive usage of capitalization. Rahel repeats her mother’s insistence to “Jolly well behave” (148) and her uncle’s lecture on “Things that are possible in Human Nature” (118) while Estha thinks that it is “Best to Be prepared” and that “Anything can Happen to anyone” (267).

On the other way, the reader can notice her use of telescoped words — two or three words dovetailed into each other; ‘leftrightleft’ (141), ‘Pleasetomeetyou’ (212), ‘bluegrayblue’ (238).

Apparently these compressions are among the many subversive licence traken by the post-colonial writer to break away from the standard English, but in some cases they also relate to the mood of the speaker or the tone of the context in which they are used. Roy takes liberty with syntactical formations. To give an example;
Margaret Kochamma told her to Stoppit.

So she Stoppited. (141)

Apart from these inventions, Arundhati Roy uses unusual capitalization, brackets, faulty spellings, slang words, use of italicized words, phrases and sentences, reversal of the order of letters and substitution of small case letters with upper case letters. The Booker Committee has described “Roy as an architect in literary circle moulding language in all shapes and sizes as was never done before at least in the Indian literary context” (Surendran). There can be no reluctance to declare this prestigious novel of Arundhati Roy as a milestone in the development of postcolonial Indian English Fiction.

REFERENCES