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STYLISTIC ANALYSIS: A SELECTED PASSAGE FROM ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

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ABSTRACT

Stylistics, a branch of applied linguistics, studies the relationship between linguistic form and literary functions of a text. It is an exercise in describing *what* use is made of language and *how* does the textual data analysis relates to the interpretation of a particular literary work as a piece of communication. To show how stylistic analysis of a text works in practice, a selected passage from Arundhati Roy's *The God of small Things* was analysed and interpreted. The analysis shows how a close study of the language of the text leads to a greater understanding of its meaning and style i.e. to a greater appreciation of the text as a work of literature. As stylistics occupies the middle ground between linguistics and literary criticism, we can start the analysis from both points of view – linguistic and critical. The two activities are viewed here as distinct but complementary. In my paper, linguistic details were analysed first to work towards a better literary appreciation. The analysis of the selected passage successfully brought out the theme and the style of the text. The use of italics, capital letters, parenthesis, hyphenation, deviant spelling, fragmentary and one-word sentences, double adjectives, striking similes and metaphors etc. authentically captures the child sensibility in its true light. Arundhati Roy moulds the language to suit her purpose of the depiction of the inner workings of a child. Indeed, she is able to give us the illusion of direct experience of a child by her use of affective language.

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Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics which studies the relationship between linguistic form and literary function of a text. It brings out the stylistic features of a work or writer using linguistic tools. It is simply an exercise in describing *what* use is made of language and *how* does the textual data analysis relates to the interpretation of a particular literary work as a piece of communication. Thus, an understanding of *what* literature communicates necessarily involves an understanding of *how* it communicates i.e. in *what* way it is significant from

other texts. According to Leech "stylistics, simply defined as the (linguistic) study of style, is rarely undertaken for its own sake, as an exercise in describing *what* use is made of language. We normally study style because we want to explain something, and in general, literary stylistics has, implicitly or explicitly, the goal of explaining the relation between language and artistic function". (Leech & Short, 2007: 11)

To show how stylistic analysis of a text works in practice, I propose to examine one passage

selected from Arundhati Roy's *The God of small Things*. My aim will be to demonstrate how a close study of the language of the text leads to a greater understanding of its meaning and style i.e. to a greater appreciation of the text as a work of literature.

One of my reasons for choosing the passage is that this passage is important from the point of view of stylistics as well as theme. The extract shows Roy's circumlocutory style which may be considered as a reflection of the child's way of experiencing and saying things. Such and other techniques such as the use of italics, capital letters, parenthesis, hyphenation, deviant spelling, fragmentary and one-word sentences, enable Roy to depict the child sensibility in its true light.

As stylistics occupies the middle ground between linguistics and literary criticism, we can start the analysis from both points of view – linguistic and critical. The two activities are viewed here as distinct but complementary. My technique will be to begin with linguistic details to work towards a better literary appreciation.

SELECTED PASSAGE

In a purely practical sense it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem. Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house-the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture-must be resurrected from the ruins and examined. Preserved. Accounted for.

Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story.

Still, to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem is only one way of looking at it.

Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendency, before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before three purple-robed Syrian Bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the

sea, with coiled sea serpents riding on their chests and oysters knotted in their tangled beards. It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.

That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be love, and how.

And how much. (*The God of Small Things*, pp 32-33)

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

The above extract is the concluding passage of the first chapter, "Paradise Pickles & Preserves" of the novel. As it is the concluding passage, it carries the meaning of a continuation of thought. An event X--unidentified and unknown- has happened in the preceding stanzas which is not stated here. A lurking sense of the event – when and how it happened – remains in the consciousness of the narrator. Here, the writer further describes the time of the event. The tone of the passage is argumentative. It also gives a sense of unpredictability and uncertainty.

1. LEXICAL FEATURES

a) Nouns

The passage describes the beginning of an event. So, proper nouns and collective nouns – **Ayemenem, Malabar, Calicut, Kerala, British, Dutch Ascendency, Marxists, Zamorin, Syrian Bishops, Portuguese, Christianity**– which indicate passage of time are used frequently. Thus, the narrative moves in time. However, the actual time of the occurrence of the event is not stated directly, rather it is described obscurely.

Abstract nouns indicating time –**hours, days, years, lifetimes** – are also used. The abstract noun **Love Laws** is here foregrounded acting as a proper noun. It makes the reader to focus on this foregrounded word for the interpretation of the passage.

b) Adjectives

Quantitative adjectives such as **ones, few, little, three, whole** and referential adjectives such as **practical, ordinary, new** are used.

The adjectives with the participle form – **salvaged, burned, charred, singed, scorched, bleached** – indicate perfective aspect i.e. a sense of a past event that brings about this change. These

adjectives lend the visual and descriptive quality to the narrative.

c) Adverbs

The adverbs carry the meaning of the narrative. Adverbials precede the independent clauses in the syntax and hence they are foregrounded. In fact, a study of the adverbs highlights the argumentative tone of the passage.

Adverbs of degree –**purely, probably, perhaps, suddenly, equally, actually, really** – develop the idea from probability to assurance even though the note of confirmation is not achieved here.

Adverbs of time such as **when, ago, long before** and the repetitive use of the lexis **before** indicates that the unstated event X is an age-old event that recurs again and again. Hence, it emphasizes the ever-recurring phenomena of History.

d) Verbs

Verbs are frequent in the passage. Both dynamic and stative verbs are used. Dynamic verbs indicating physical action or movement –**came, floating, riding, seeped** – are used. Verbs which could involve agency are deprived of their active meaning by being used in the passive participle form –**resurrected, preserved, smashed, reconstituted, arrived, murdered, knotted**. These verbs along with the stative verbs –**loved, lay, looking, made, imbued, become, argued**– emphasize the ambiguity of the narrative.

The use of the modals –**can, could be, must be, should be, would be** – are remarkable. These verbs emphasize the note of probability and likelihood. The various arguments presented in the passage are only suppositions are also drawn from the modal verbs as they only predict.

2. GRAMMATICAL FEATURES

a) Sentence Length

The sentence begins from a height and slopes down gradually and further moves to a peak in sentence (4). Suddenly, it slopes to the lowest level and after that brevity marks the narrative. However, it moves up to a peak in sentence (14) with fluctuations in the preceding sentences. Finally, it slopes down slowly and gradually and ends with the final brevity. (The progression of sentence

lengths in words is: 22-10-12-34-1-2-7-4-9-21-13-5-20-30-23-13-11-3).

The effect of the short sentences is very powerful. It gives the sense of abruptness and immediacy.

The placing of the adverbial at the end of the sentence emphasizes incomplete thought and a sense of wonder. On the whole, the narrative is comprehensive even though the manner of narrating the event is indirect and encircling.

b) Sentence Structure and Complexity

Anticipatory complex sentences are used. Linguistic innovation is also found. Ellipsis of predication and ellipsis of subject and operator take place.

Predicate clauses beginning with the relative pronoun **that** and adverbial clauses beginning with **before** are frequently used signifying the circumlocutory style.

Adverbial clause or phrase precedes the main clause and short sentences are used.

One word sentences are also found. Verbs, phrasal verbs and adverbials act as sentences.

c) Pronouns

There is the repetitive use of the cross-reference pronouns **its** and **that**. **It** is used here in two ways – as a pronoun (6 times) and as an argument indicator (4 times). As an unaddressed pronoun whose antecedent is someone or something, the lexis **it**, gives a sense of obscurity and vagueness.

The demonstrative pronoun **that** is used for cross reference. But, in this passage, it is to be treated as a separate grammatical element, not simply an occurrence of the pronoun **that**. In fact, it is used as an argument indicator. The relative clauses beginning with **that** signify argumentative and roundabout expression.

3. FIGURES OF SPEECH

a) Simile and Metaphor

Simile and metaphor serve to animate and humanize what is inanimate. Christianity **arrived** and **seeped**. The abstract idea, Christianity, gains concreteness and thus personified. Further, the spread of Christianity is likened to the seeping of tea from a teabag. Concreteness is also lent to the abstract noun **hours**. Parallelism is drawn between

the few dozen hours and the salvaged remains of a burned house.

b) Schemes

The repetitive use of the stop consonants - /p,b,d/- intensify the hard and argumentative tone. Rhythmic parallelism takes place, such as, **long before the Marxist came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendency, before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut.**

Alliteration is also to be noted –**resurrected from the ruins, conquest of Calicut, found floating, sea-serpents, Love Laws, bleached bones.**

4. COHESION AND CONTEXT

The definite article **the** is an alternative device of cross-reference, less ambiguous than the indefinite article, as it is accompanied by a noun identifying a previous reference. Since the function of **the** is to identify something which is contextually known to be unique, it tends to signal continuity on a contextual, rather than textual level. The writer makes pretence of shared knowledge with the reader, who by implication is already familiar with the events. As the definite article specifies or particularizes the thing denoted by the noun, the context may be provided from outside the text or from inside the text. The outside context may be in the form of the physical environment or what the narrator thinks that everybody knows.

In the passage, the context is provided more from outside the text –**the Marxists, the British, the Dutch ascendency, the Zamorin's conquest, the Portuguese, the sea, the bleached bones.** Specification is also established from inside the text –**the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture, the laws.**

When abstract nouns indicating time are brought on the scene, they are introduced by indefinite articles, **a few dozen hours, a day.** This makes them stand out as unfamiliar against the familiar events. Thus, the sense of obscurity of the time of the event is heightened.

5. INTERPRETATION

From the study of the selected passage, we can observe the particular style employed by Arundhati Roy to enrich her narrative. The passage reveals her circumlocutory and descriptive style

which may be considered as the reflection of the thought processes of the child narrator and her way of experiencing and seeing things. The use of adverbs which signals probability and uncertainty may also be treated as an attempt to give us the illusion of the direct experience of a child's mind.

The phrase **Love Laws** has a cohesive function. It is a cohesive linker to the internal as well as the external context. As an internal cohesive linker, it has both the cataphoric and anaphoric reference. As an external cohesive linker, it links the whole narrative to the external context i.e. the world outside. The relationship between "text" and "the world" is heightened by it. Laws govern human civilization. The rigid norms of society are conveyed though the phrase Love Laws, which is defined in the narrative as **the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much.**

The allusions in the narrative –**Dutch Ascendency, Zamorin's conquest of Calicut, Vasco da Gama, Syrian Bishops, Portuguese** – also link the text to the external context. It further reflects Arundhati Roy's technique of using allusions to enrich her narrative by association and to give it depth. The clause, **things can change in a day,** has also a cataphoric reference and serves as the internal cohesive linker. Use of capitals, fragmentary and one-word sentences is also observed.

To conclude, Arundhati Roy's use of language is an extraordinary achievement. To give us the illusion of direct experience of a child, Roy turns out to affective language. She moulds the language to suit her purpose of the depiction of the inner workings of a child. Her use of reverse-writing, deviant spellings, combining of words, fragmentary and one-word sentences, capitals, italics, parenthesis, double adjectives reflect the thought processes as well as the special rhythm of the working of the child's mind. The defamiliarising quality of her prose, her metaphorical exactitude and striking similes enable Roy to win the coveted Booker prize.

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