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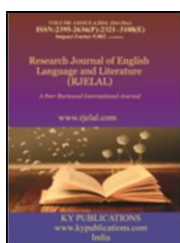
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LANGUAGE AND STYLE IN SHOBHA DE'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Shobha De is one of India's top best-selling authors and a super achiever. She gave new definition to the mass market bestseller with her writing and all her books have remained perennial favourites with readers over the years. She began her career in journalism in 1970. Since then she has founded and edited three popular magazines- Stardust, Society and Celebrity. She is one of India's most widely read columnists. All of her books have topped the charts, and have been phenomenal best sellers. Her novels have been translated into multiple Indian and international languages. In fact, four of her books are course material in the University of London. With her breakthrough, bold and highly individualistic style she is able to say things interestingly and with the courage of conviction in a language uniquely her own. She is credited with introducing 'Hinglish', a heady, irreverent mix of Hindi and English that spoke to readers in an entirely new way. This paper is an attempt to focus on De's individualistic style as found in her novels. Keywords: Language, Hinglish, Journalistic style, Slang, Mixed language.

Introduction

"Language is seen to be a system with sub-languages, self-generative, impregnated with culture and power-systems."

Language no longer remains a simple and stable tool of expression. Commenting on the use of English Language in recent Indian English fiction Sunanda Mongia writes: "English in the Indian novel ranges from the functional of Anita Desai, to the Americanized language of Bharati Mukherjee, to the formal British of Amitav Ghosh and the far more common, the Indianized, 'Hinglish', Zenglish, Pinglish."

The ever-growing variety and magnitude of Indian-English fiction in recent years is the result of a rapid growth in the field of publicity and mass media. The intervention of popular art forms like television, films, advertisement, print media and

computer generated image has projected the view that, "Communication is through a common visual language." A significant aspect of Shobha De's fiction is her use of a typical language and style. The analysis and evaluation of her language and style reveals her serious concern with human communication and interpersonal relationships. Throwing away the conventional use of pure and standard language, De has changed, moulded and added of her own to the existing forms and uses of English language. She is the pioneer in the use of mixed language—English laced with Hindi. Since her 'Stardust' days, she has popularized a form of English that is the natural outcome of extensive contact between English and the Indian vernaculars.

De's language marks emerging trends exhibiting social fragmentation and the impact of popular art forms like films and print media on life and literature. The language found in De's novels

may not have become a common phenomenon among the masses yet it forms a part of the speech behavior of certain sections of society. It gives an indication of the emerging trends among the younger generation of Indian cosmopolitans like Bombay. In this context, Sunil Sethi's comments point out the nature of the social group that tends to use this language, "Aged between 15 and 35, they (Punjabi or Gujarati Yuppies) now constitute a whole urban generation, who say fuck quite easily, probably do it a great deal, but while remaining plugged into the latest foreign videos continue to devour the latest Stardust and Society." De's concentration on the life and behavior of such people also shows how the people under the impact of media have started using a language variant that deviates from the traditionally accepted norms of speech.

The different language styles presented in Shobha De's novels include:

- i) Journalistic style
- ii) Aphoristic style
- iii) Conversational style
- iv) Informal & Colloquial style
- v) Picturesque style
- vi) Mixed language style

Journalistic Style

De's journalistic style does not involve simple narration of incidents. It includes certain elements that enhance the fictional charm of her narratives. Her repeated reference to women's activities related to their interest in cosmetics and efforts to look gorgeous mark the style of women's gossip magazines. De's association with magazines as an editor seems to have impacted her style in her fiction. For example, in her novel *Socialite Evenings* Ritu's getting ready before going to a party has been described in detail, "She loved to watch herself dressing. She would lavish at least an hour-and-a-half before a party going through the whole routine—a leisurely performed bath, may be a shampoo, a face scrub with some imported grains, feet and hands scrub with a pumice stone, a good rub with a fluffy towel, deodorant, perfume, and then the short but effective makeup routine". (*Socialite Evenings* p. 109)

Aphoristic style

De's use of humorous and witty statements makes her style aphoristic. These statements break the monotony of simple journalistic reporting. Sometimes they provide a hint about the nature and attitude of different characters. These aphoristic statements from her various novels, for example, carry startling views and have the potential to shock the readers to attention, "Marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about" (*Socialite Evenings* p.68) . "Men just feel terribly threatened by self-sufficient women." (*Socialite Evenings* p.69) "Men, like dogs, could be conditioned through reward and punishment" (*Socialite Evenings* p.87). "Divorce isn't such a dirty word anymore" (*Socialite Evenings* p.173). "Mediocre women used sex as a bait" (*Snapshots* p.49)

Conversational style

The conversational style employed by De provides easy and quick reading. Instead of devoting long passages to the descriptions of various incidents, scenes and the expression of thoughts and feelings of different characters, De has used conversational style to make things simple and vivid. The dialogues inserted within descriptive and narrative passages provide a dramatic effect to the narrative. For example, instead of the narrator presenting Githa Devi's thoughts about Kishenbhai's involvement with Aasha Rani, it is Githa Devi herself who has been made to speak about it, "But surely, Kishenbhai, you didn't think I knew about your feelings for Baby? Does she feel the same way? I don't mean to hurt you, but even supposing I believe you are sincere towards my daughter does she have a future with you? Can you... will you... make her your wife? ...We'll wait and see. Theek Hai?" (*Starry Nights* p.99)

The employment of conversational mode provides the novelist an opportunity to capture the speech habits of different characters. Apart from their individual linguistic idiosyncrasies, it also reveals the involvement of multiple points of view and facilities to make the fictional narrative interesting.

Informal & Colloquial style

The presentation of the life and behavior of a social group having a very close interaction marks

the **informal** nature of De's style. This style ideally suits women's gossip. The repeated discussions about modern, liberated women's fantasies, thoughts, tastes, views and concerns take place in a casual, light and non-serious tone. The balance between the content and form is achieved with the calculated use of a style free from embellishments of a highly sophisticated or literary style. De's deployment of a simple style also shows the intimacy among different characters, particularly women. For example, see a woman expressing her discontent with her domestic life to her close confidant. It marks the way women share their feelings and domestic problems with their close friends:

I look after his mother, his home, his needs, why shouldn't I expect something in return. If I didn't fulfill him in bed—he'd look elsewhere. Maybe go to a prostitute. (Socialite Evenings p.87)

Trouble is, I love the man. Call me a doormat, a slave, a victim, anything. But I feel hopeless and helpless. It is as if I've forgotten what pride is...or even was. He can and does trample all over me. (Sisters p.497)

De brings out the nature of relationship between different people through the use of **colloquial** style. It further highlights the absence of any formality governing relationships within the social group. The following example illustrates the informal nature of the relationship between the speaker and the listener:

Love-shove is OK jaar... Be like me—pretend. Call your husband 'darling' at least in front of his friends. Pamper him in public. Press his feet sometimes. All this works like jaadu. But you're useless jaar. (Socialite Evenings p.87)

Picturesque style

Shobha De is also good at describing scene or setting. She is careful in choosing appropriate details which cumulatively present the picture before the reader. It brings De's style closer to descriptive than reflective nature of language. Therefore, her language is replete with concrete nouns and images. A view of Karuna's family

background is provided with the help of details about concrete things:

"The rexine sofas, the distempered walls, the flies lying all over the house, the cheap plastic tray and tea cups, the little brass Budha and disproportionately large Qutub Minar or the mantelpiece, the embroidered table-cloth and curtains without pelmets" (Socialite Evenings p.35).

Similarly, the descriptions about persons are presented through sensual images instead of simple adjectives of quality. "She had feral looks—cat-like, amber eyes, a full mouth and dusky skin" (Socialite Evenings p.39).

Mixed language style

Shobha De's concentration on the depiction of life and behavior of the people working in showbiz and belonging to wealthy socialite circles marks the use of a mixed language corresponding with the speech habits of these people. Her pioneering effort since her Stardust days marks the emergence of a contact language between different categories of people. It shows how the people belonging to different cultural and ethnic groups communicate, transgressing the limits of a standard code. The coming close of the people from different backgrounds, particularly in the film industry and cosmopolitan cities like Bombay, results in the use a language variant for practical purposes. All these people are not well versed in English or standard Hindi. The wealthy educated film stars and aristocratic people having public school background can use English as a medium of speech. The 'low class' subordinate staff and minor artists speak Hindi or any other vernacular. Consequently, certain linguistic expressions from their languages gain wide acceptance and become an essential part of the language used by the people who come in a close contact with them. In order to capture the authentic speech behavior of these people De makes extensive use of mixed language. The linguistic expressions that form a part of the language used by these characters range from Hindi words mixed with English and some words directly taken from Hindi. Sometimes Hindi sentences, that have become a feature of these people's speech due to their repeated occurrence, also appear in De's novels.

There are numerous examples of such words and expressions like, Abe saale, Chalo chhodo, doodh ke jaisi gori, hero-log, baap re, etc.

An interesting example of her language can be observed in 'English laced with Hindi,' as used by a professional in the film world: Myself Kishenbhai, producer, actually speaking, assistant producer. Madamji, I'm on look-out for new talent. Actually I'm knowing everybody...all big-big producers, hero log, heroines, everybody... South Indian girls are good. No khit-pit, no faltu nakhras. (Starry Nights p.7).

Her fictional narrative also mark an extensive use of slang and the use of Hindi words and sentences mixed in English. The sprinkling of words from other regional languages like Marathi and Gujarati is also a significant feature of the speech behavior of the people. There are several examples of such expressions in De's novels like-ghatan, bewada, dikra, theplas, medhu, kawala. Similarly, the words changed, deformed and abbreviated like 'diff' for difference, 'info' instead of information and D.O.M instead of dirty old man mark convenience and intimacy of the concerned social group. The natural response, to the use of such kind of idiosyncratic language, of common readers of De's fiction can interestingly be expressed in Maya's comments about Nikhil's language in *Second Thoughts*:

Nikhil's language stumped me. I wasn't used to this kind of English. I didn't know what this brand was called. It was a mixture of film dialogues, MTV slang and Hollywood movies. It sounded far too smart for someone like me, who'd been indoctrinated into using a strictly conventional idiom, the sort of English our teachers in Calcutta expected students in England to use—formal, grammatical and somehow lifeless. (p.105)

Conclusion

In spite of an altogether different, unconventional and strikingly variant language used by De's characters we cannot reject it as something imaginary, totally unrealistic and having nothing to do with the social reality of the contemporary life. The language used in De's novels is unmistakably

colloquial and startling, but it is reasonably specific, apparently belonging to a particular section of society. It forms a part of the language of the people in the film industry and high class socialite circles. The words and expressions used by different characters help create an image of life in Bombay, particularly in the film industry. Thus, the style employed by De in her novels suits the fictional purpose of giving expression to the life and behavior of the people in the showbiz informing high levels of cultural mix and the emergence of a younger generation of urban society fed on media created images.

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