

Language in indian writing in english essay



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Language in Indian Writing in English I am here to present on the topic 'Language in Indian Writing in English'. Basically I will be talking about the usage of language, the writing style, of blending language and culture and my analysis of it in the text - The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy. The story of the Indian English novel is really the story of a changing India. There was a time when education was a rare opportunity and speaking English was unnecessary.

The stories were already there- in the myths, in the folklore and the umpteen languages and cultures that gossiped, conversed, laughed and cried all over the subcontinent. India has always been a land of stories, the demarcation between ritual and reality being very narrow. The Indian English novel erupted in the fiery talks of Henry Derozio, the spiritual prose of Tagore and the pacifist dictums preached by Gandhi. With the coming of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K.

Narayan, the Indian English novel had begun its Journey. Now to talk about Indian Writing in English Christopher Rollason defines Indian Writing in English as " original creative writing produced in English by Indian writers or writers of Indian origin, resident or expatriate, for whom English will normally be a second language but who have in all probability been educated, even within India, in English-medium schools and universities, and are likely to write English more fluently than any native Indian language.

This very particular set of conditions, inherited from the Raj but carried on beyond Independence to the present day, in no way makes these writers any less Indian: in most cases they are representing the lives, conversations and

thoughts of Indian characters who more often than not are presumed to be speaking and thinking not in English at all, but in a plurality of Indian languages. " The use of English by Indian authors has always been to suit their tastes and needs. Raja Rao, the author of *Kanthapura* famously argued in 1938 for using English, but an English adapted to an Indian conditions.

He said " English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up - like Sanskrit or Persian was before - but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can only write as Indians... our method of expression... will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. The use of English language in Indian writing has been different for different authors.

If we look at the works of Rushdie, Gosh, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy and other Indian authors writing in English we will note that their writing styles are different. Salman Rushdie fascinates critics with his ' chutnification' of history and language as well. Amitav Ghosh dabbles in postcolonial realities and Vikram Seth fuses poetry and prose with an air of Victorian grandeur. Women writers explore old wives' tales, condemn exploitation and try to make sense of the fast changing pace of the new world.

Kamala Das explores women's plight in India and the world and others like Shashi Deshpande paint characters who blame their own complacency for their sorry condition. Arundhati Roy, on the other hand, begins her story without a beginning and does *Things, one cannot help but be drawn into the story that Roy has created, wondering, with each succeeding chapter, what*

could possibly happen next. There are questions about who these characters are; where the plot line is going; and what the missing details are that the author has purposefully left out, taunting the reader to hurriedly move forward.

Even the setting of the story is alluring with its freshly conceived scenery, unusual town names, striking tropical flora and fauna, as well as the strange social customs. The storyline twists around unsuspecting corners, as the narrator takes readers into the dark depths of the characters' souls. And even though, after reading this book, one might sense the quality of writing of this gifted novelist, it might take a second, and maybe even a third, reading before one can actually pay attention to the underlying style that makes this novel so invigorating to read.

The God of Small Things is not written in a sequential narrative style in which events unfold chronologically. Instead, the novel is a patchwork of flashbacks and lengthy sidetracks that weave together to tell the story of the Kochamma family. The main events of the novel are traced back through the complex history of their causes, and memories are revealed as they relate to each other thematically and as they might appear in Rahel's mind, the main protagonist of the story.

Although the narrative voice is omniscient, or all-knowing, it is loosely grounded in Rahel's perspective, and all of the episodes of the novel progress towards the key moments in Rahel's life. This non-sequential narrative style, which determines the form of the novel, is an extremely useful authorial tool. It allows Roy a great deal of flexibility as she chooses which themes and

events are most important to pursue. The author is able to structure her book so as to build up to the ideas and events at the root of the Kochamma familys experience.

One of the first elements of Roy's writing that readers confront as they begin this novel is her creative vocabulary " creative in the sense hat she makes up new words. In the first pages, for example, Roy uses the words " dust green trees" and later portrays a smell as " sick sweet. " Two things happen when she puts two words together like this (which she consistently does throughout the novel). First, she captures the attention of the reader. There are no such words as " dustgreen" and " sicksweet," which her reader's will immediately realize, and yet they will know exactly what the author has intended by using such new words.

Secondly, the words not only make sense, they describe the objects they are referring to with uch greater depth than most single adjectives and metaphors could possibly do, and the author accomplishes this with minimum verbiage. " Dustgreen," for instance, is used to describe both a color and a condition, and with this one inventive word, Roy gives her readers a fully sensual image. Dust is gritty and dry, like the weather she is trying to depict. So in using a word such as " dustgreen," Roy helps readers not only to visualize the setting but also to feel it.

A similar double sense is created with the word " sicksweet. " Readers not only can taste and smell it; they can feel it in the it of their stomachs, Just as Rahel and Estha feel when they think about the world that Roy has created for them in her novel. The sweetness of the odor has attracted these

characters to explore their world; but the consequences and the reactions of their world have made them sick. Thus, these “ double words” are more than the sum of their parts. They are not just two words haphazardly added together, but rather expressive words.

Other examples of combining words appear when the narrator pulls readers into the funeral of Sophie Mol, a flashback that occurs at the beginning of the novel. When a baby bat climbs up Baby Kochamma’s sari, making the woman scream, Roy provides her readers with a sample of the noises of confusion in the congregation, which she represents with the words: “ Whatisit? Whathappened? ” and “ a Furrywhirring and a Sariflapping. ” With these new words, readers are given a complex picture of the bewilderment that is occurring inside the church. Not only do these words refer to sounds, they also provoke a sense of movement.

Again, Roy creates vibrant descriptions in using her newly conceived words. It is as if she has captured a whole movie scene, filled with motion and sound, with just a minimum set of syllables. There is another form of creative vocabulary that Roy makes up. This one reflects children trying to make sense of the adult world through little bits of information that they receive. Language is a construct and children defy the rules of this construct. For instance, again at Sophie Mol’s funeral, the protagonist Rahel attempts to repeat words that she has heard during the religious ceremony.

But in a child’s world, not only is it hard to grasp the full meaning of language; it is also sometimes difficult to take hold of the full word. So in repeating the Biblical quote that refers to the body decomposing and

returning to the dust from whence it came, Rahel tries to mimic the priests. But instead of saying "dust to dust," she says: "Dus to dus to dus to dus to dus." This is what the words sound like to her. And by Roy using this phrase (as well as other similar, child interpretations throughout the novel), she places her readers inside the mind of the very young.

Readers thus are provided with a different view of reality, one that is seen through the eyes of her young characters, children who must face some very tragic circumstances very early in their lives. Rahel, in this instance, cannot fully comprehend death, so she repeats the priests' words as best she can, twisting her tongue around them, attempting to make a kind of song out of them, hoping that eventually the phrase might help her understand. "Sophie Mol died because she couldn't breathe," Rahel believes. "Her funeral killed her. And it is Roys creative use of language that makes readers not only mentally visualize what is happening inside Rahel's mind but to feel the confusion, the struggle with her conflicts, and the great challenges that confront her. Another corollary example can be found in R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* in the instance where Swami attempts to write a letter to Messer Bins, where instead of writing Willard Junior, he writes Mord June-ear" In the middle of the story, the narrator shines more light on Roy's understanding of how children perceive the world through language that they do not fully understand.

While the family is awaiting the arrival of Sophie Mol and her family at the airport, Estha and Rahel are misbehaving. Their uncle suggests that their mother deal with them "later," a word that plays with Rahel's mind. "And Later became a horrible, menacing, goose-bumpy word. Lay. Ter. Like a

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deep-sounding bell in a mossy well. Shivery, and furred. Like moth's feet. "

This passage sums up the foundation upon which Roy has built her literary vocabulary, her creative construction of language for this story. It explains why she is so focused on language, especially when dealing with her youngest of characters.

Roy is sensitive to the distorted world that children must plow through, hoping to find their time how powerful words could be for children. Even when words are not fully comprehended, or at least not identified with proper dictionary meanings, they are felt. Words for children have more than sound; they have lives of their own. And the tone of them can be frightening. Roy knows that sometimes words that children hear are creepy, furry insects. Other times they are slimy wells that threaten to swallow all who hear them.

One more way that Roy adorns her story is through the use of poetic images which are as colorful as the tropical paintings of Paul Gauguin. The author obviously does not paint with oils to do so but rather with vibrant words, such as when she is describing the first raindrops of the monsoon season when she writes: Slanting silver ropes slammed into loose earth, plowing it up like gunfire. " The first component that makes this sentence so beautiful is the alliteration with the letters, which sounds slippery just like the rain she is portraying.

Then there is the overall image of hard raindrops falling on the dry earth. The rain is so hard and the earth is so dry that when the water first hits the dirt, dust flies up into the air as if the earth is being shot at. This sentence is

poetically powerful on many different levels. But besides creating an image, it also provides a psychological reference. Rahel has just returned in Ayemenem as the narrator describes this scene. Change is in the air as the edge of the monsoon season pushes the dry weather away. But there is also a sense of danger presented here.

The author uses the word "gunfire" in her metaphor, as if a warning is being given. The timeframe of this novel is contorted, moving from the present to the past and back again, over and over again. So when the above sentence appears in the story, the damage to Rahel has already happened; but the reader is still in the dark because the story has just begun. So the warning is not given for Rahel's sake but for the reader's. It is as if the author is alerting the reader that this is not going to be an easy, entertaining story.

There are many events that will be hard to take, and Rahel's return is but one of the markers for these difficult changes. There is another passage that serves a dual purpose. It appears on the first page of the novel. The narrator is describing the landscape as the monsoon season begins. "Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom." Here there is another reference to great change, as dried out branches that once looked like a fence are now blossoming and thus fading into the rest of the vegetation around it.

Whereas fences normally stand out as rigid boundaries, in this instance the boundary itself becomes part of the garden. Besides creating a poetic image, Roy foreshadows a theme that will prevail throughout the story, one in which boundaries between sex, race, social status, and rational and irrational reality will cease to exist. As a matter of fact, the whole first chapter

provides a foreshadowing of the rest of the novel. Roy either cleverly hints at events that will come, or else she completely throws her readers into very specific events but only gives readers quick, short glimpses, teasing them forward.

Examples of how Roy gives hints and glimpses into the future of the novel include her reference to the “ Orangedrink Lemondrink Man” and her mentioning that he did something to Estha; but she does not say what that was. And Roy describes Rahel as being “ brittle with exhaustion from her battle against Real Life,” although readers have no idea what this battle entailed. Then later in the first chapter, Inspector Thomas Mathew toys with Rahel’s mother, Ammu, when she taps. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. ” There is a lot suggested in this phrase.

First there is the superior stance of the inspector. There is also the sexual overtone. And then there is the reader’s curiosity, which is aroused by questions such as why has Ammu gone to see the policeman? And why is he intimidating her? Then shortly after this encounter, Ammu says: “ He’s dead. ” Readers do not know who has died nor what all these passages mean. Roy is fully aware of keeping her readers in the dark, but she does not worry about the confusion. The author does not rush to fill in all the gaps. This is because she is a profoundly confident and creative writer.

Indian history and politics shape the plot and meaning of *The God of Small Things* in a variety of ways. Some of Roy’s commentary is on the surface, with jokes and snippets of wisdom about political realities in India. However, the novel also examines the historical roots of these realities and develops

profound insights into the ways in which human desperation and desire emerge from the confines of a firmly entrenched caste society. Roy reveals a complex and longstanding class conflict in the state of Kerala, India, and she comments on its various competing forces.

For example, Roy's novel attacks the brutal, entrenched, and systematic oppression at work in Kerala, exemplified by figures of power such as Inspector Thomas Mathew. Roy is also highly critical of the hypocrisy and ruthlessness of the conventional, traditional moral code of Pappachi and Mammachi. On the opposite side of the political fence, the Kerala Communist Party, at least the faction represented by Comrade Pillai, is revealed to be much more concerned with personal ambition than with any notions of social justice.

In addition to her commentary on Indian history and politics, Roy evaluates the Indian postcolonial complex, or the cultural attitudes of many Indians towards their former British rulers. After Ammu calls her father a "shit-wiper" in Hindi for his blind devotion to the British, Chacko explains to the twins that they come from a family of Anglophiles, or lovers of British culture, "trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps," and he goes on to say that they despise themselves because of this.

A related inferiority complex is evident in the interactions between Untouchables and Touchables in Ayemenem. Vellya Paapen is an example of an Untouchable so grateful to the Touchable class that he is willing to kill his son when he discovers that his son has broken the most important rule of class segregation "that there be no inter-class sexual relations. Nearly all of

the relationships in the novel are somehow colored by cultural and class tension, including the twins' relationship with Sophie Mol, Chacko's relationship with Margaret, Pappachi's relationship with his family, and Ammu's relationship with Velutha.

Characters such as Baby Kochamma and Pappachi are the most rigid and vicious in their attempts to uphold that social code, while Ammu and Velutha are the most unconventional and daring in unraveling it. Roy implies that this is why they are punished so severely for their transgression. The many types of love in Roys novel, whether they are described as erotic, familial, incestuous, iological, or hopeless, are important to the novel's meaning. However, Roy focuses her authorial commentary on forbidden and taboo types of love, including Ammu's love for Velutha and Rahel's love for Estha.

Both relationships are rigidly forbidden by what Roy calls the " Love Laws," or " The laws that lay down who should be loved, and those who break them are brutally punished, desire and desperation overcome the Love Laws at the key moments of Roys novel. One interpretation of Roys theme of forbidden love is that love is such a powerful and uncontrollable force that it cannot be contained by any conventional social code. Another is that conventional society somehow seeks to destroy real love, which is why love in the novel is consistently connected to loss, death, and sadness.

Also, because all romantic love in the novel relates closely to politics and history, it is possible that Roy is stressing the interconnectedness of personal desire to larger themes of history and social circumstances. Love would therefore be an emotion that can be explained only in terms of two peoples'

cultural backgrounds and political identities. Laura Carter, in her critical essay on *The God of Small Things*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006 says " by the author's own admission, she does not attempt to define what modern day India is or what it means to be Indian.

What she does do so aptly, is to weave a subtle tale of circumstances that collectively, permanently shape and form the lives of her characters, leaving an indelible mark that no doubt will be transferred, one generation to the next. " I would like to close my seminar by strongly opposing what Laura Carter says because according to me and the analysis that I have done, I find *The God of Small Things* to be an excellent representative of India, being Indian and its culture. The use of language although not completely free of the English heritage is Roy's own.

Roy's writing is not only an answer to the politically motivated post - colonial movement but it is also strongly guided by an impulsive streak of creativity. She tells her story the way she wants to relate it to her reader's. And she does it in a language that suits her characters' minds. And it is her confidence, creativity, and poetic style that make Roy's writing so refreshing, make her story so enticing to read over and over again. With all the techniques that Roy uses, he creates her own distinct style of writing which at times has been compared to that of Rushdie's by her critics but still remains her own.

Kshithi Bhanu Singh | Ind English St. Stephen's College Bibliography 1. *The God of Small Things*, By Arundhati Roy, 1997 2. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post - Colonial Literatures*, By Bill Ashcroft, Gareth

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