

A Stylistic Analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

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Abstract

Stylistic devices and grammatical deviations have been liberally employed by novelists and poets to bring in certain specific effects in the minds of the readers. Arundhati Roy in her novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* employs these devices liberally to bring in the same effects. This article explicates some of the deviations and devices employed by Roy. This is not an exhaustive detailing of the devices, but a mere snapshot of the conventions flouted and deviations deliberately induced by Roy.

Key words: Arundhati Roy; Stylistics; Simile; Metaphor; Short sentence; Repetition; Paralleism

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INTRODUCTION

Stylistic variations include use of words, phrases, unconventional use of italics and upper case letters, sentences without subject and verbs, topicalization, deviation from normal word order, single word sentences, repetition and parallelism, change of word classes and so on. Similarly, at the lexical and syntactic levels, some authors indulge in creation of new forms, and grammatical patterns, words and phrases, coinages, hyphenated new words, compound adjectives use of figurative languages such as similes, metaphors, personifications. Arundhati Roy has been a powerful literary figure who has never hesitated to attempt such linguistic deviations, starting

from her *The God of Small Things*. Her 11-month old novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is no exception to this, where Arundhati is at her best in using stylistic devices to bring in the desired effect. The impact of any passage rests not just on the authors' deviation of internal structure, but from her stylistic variations. This paper is a stylistic analysis of Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the novel which revolves around the complex themes of marginalisation of the Hijra community, civil war and war-related crimes, terrorism and the politics of terrorism and around the following characters: Anjum the Hijra, Tilo the Rebel, Musa the so called perceived terrorist, and Saddam.

Paul Simpson, "Stylistics is interested in what writers do with and through language...." (98). *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* appears to bring the base human emotions to the fore, in all their entirety and dimensions. Generally, any logical rearrangement or disarrangement of grammatical patterns is supposedly expected to rob the prose of its aesthetic value and thematic significance. However, in the hands of Arundhati Roy, the emotions get a loaded dimensions and depth and the theme, an extra dose of richness, significance and emphasis. The following paragraphs highlight some of the stylistic deviations employed by Roy to serve purposes.

1. REPETITION, PARALLELISM AND CONTRAST

Repetition, parallelism and contrast are used quite effectively as rhetorical devices and Roy cascades them fittingly and effectively the novel. While parallelism refers to the use of repeated patterns in separate parts of a sentence for creating emphasis, repetition of grammatical or syntactical patterns of a pattern creates further emphasis, multiplying attention to each part referenced and thus the power of sentence. Arundhati Roy exploits these

devices to the fullest extent and uses them intermittently in the narration. One best example of this can be seen in the following words in the novel.

Anjum waited to die
Saddam waited to kill
And miles away, in a troubled forest, a baby waited to be born. (92)

Before moving from Anjum's and Saddam's story to that of Tilos, and as an attempt to tie together the lives of her major characters, (which might otherwise appear fragmentary and episodic), Roy employs parallelism and repetition effectively in the above lines. Arundhati Roy ties up the first part that describes Anjum's journey (and partly Saddam's life) very effectively through the above lines which expressively reflect Anjum's despair, Saddam's bid for revenge and the start of Miss Jebeen the second who is waiting to tie the different lives of characters together. The interplay of parallel grammatical structures and the repetition of the verb "wait" in its past tense lend an air of drama and a sense of half-closure to one part of the plot. The readers can clearly discern a kind of interaction or reticulation between grammatical and rhetorical elements. This manipulation of grammatical and rhetorical elements on Roy's part seems to be a deliberate attempt to evoke an emotional impact in the readers, who are left with no choice but to seamlessly shift focus along with the author herself.

Use of personification in the phrase "troubled forest" screams for our attention, which refers to the political and religious turbulence in various parts of India and most importantly, in Kashmir. In yet another place, Roy well pictures Anjum's state of mind after she recalls the nightmarish incident where she is close to being butchered, but is let go because she is a Hijra and killing a Hijra would mean inviting bad luck, (which the saffron clad men "festooned with pooja threads" (62) would not want to bring upon themselves). Anjum was aware of the fact that the inhuman butchers did not spare her due to the pangs of conscience, but for their own selfish reasons is well brought out in the following lines:

"She knew very well that she knew very well that she knew very well".

Repetition is again used to describe the countless number of homeless people "Sleeping bodies of homeless people lined their high, narrow pavements, head to toe, head to toe, head to toe" (96) is a fine rhetorical rendering bordering on the lines of poetry (41).

Similarly, the use of alliteration and the unusual sentence structure of fronting used by Lulla who is pictured as trying to sow hatred in the minds through his inflammatory and eloquent speeches to the public also call for our attention:

"*The Mussalman, he doesn't like the other*"
His faith, he spreads through Terror" (41)

When Musa goes into hiding after the fear of being persecuted and being a branded terrorist, choosing to

show his head only to ensure his bare survival and in this mission, he is described as someone who neither failed nor succeeded completely. The use of parallel structure is being effectively used in the following lines

"He did not always succeed. Nor did he always fail".
(345)

"life went on...death went on ... and the war went on."
(324)

"In Kashmir, throwing a man's own bio data at him was sometimes enough to change the course of his life. And sometimes it wasn't". (329)

2. USING NOUNS AS VERBS

Using nouns as verbs is yet another feature Arundhati Roy enjoys using in some parts of her narration. In addition to giving a linguistic freshness to the narration, these features also lend a lexical contour by connoting the general indifference and apathy with which the common man responds to events around him. In Khwabgah, which is Anjum's "haven", for example, the dead bodies are "warehoused" (58), where post their burial, they these dead bodies contribute to the "richness of the soil" and the "unusual lushness of the old trees". The graves become "double-deckered, like the buses in Srinagar..." (p.319) when they run short of space and they become as common as the "multi-storey parking lots" (Ibid).

Ideally, these issues should be evoking feelings of disgust, revolt and pity. Arundhati Roy's use of such nouns and verbs, instead, effectively expose the trivialization of human lives and episodes of deaths, which are reduced to yet another chore. Yet another place where Roy uses the noun as verbs is when she describes the way Anjum brings up the child. The stories Anjum recites to put Zainab to sleep become "childproofed", referring to Anjum's filtering of themes in the stories. Similarly, the language Urdu, in this novel, becomes "ghettoized" (15), referring to the degeneration of the status of the language. Further, there are quite a few instances in places where the author chooses to narrate the horrid tales of the Kashmiri men being victimised by the army. Such stories which should shake up qualms of any citizen's conscience and deserve to be etched in history as reminders of crime, merely degenerate to items of news and are "archived" (327). The use of verb here clearly connotes the apathy of the perpetrators and witnesses of such crimes, who reduce such crimes to pieces of news items which barely evokes any sympathy.

3. INNOVATIVE USE OF ADJECTIVES, PRONOUNS AND UNUSUAL COLLOCATIONS

The innovative use of adjectives and pronouns and unusual collocations are other features that draw our attention.

While referring to Anjum's graveyard, Roy describes the older graves as becoming "elaborate" and the recent ones as "rudimentary" (58). These adjectives are unusual attributes of a graveyard, which generally denotes death, and are suggestive of the growth (or life) the Jannat guest house was transforming itself into. Yet another character Razia has an "un-memored, un-anchored mind" (22). The feminist in Roy finds a very strong expression in the lines the use of compound adjectives such as "woman-with-a-husband" speaking to a "woman-without-a-husband" referring to Ankita and Tilo, clearly bring out the feminist voice in her. While graveyards generally denote places of death, this graveyard becomes home, rather a "place of predictable, reassuring sorrow, -awful, but reliable" (66), taking on a totally different connotation. It is also referred to as the "funeral parlour" (79) and "The Place of the Falling people" (79) where Anjum uses the noise from TV to "steady her mind" (68).

Even in the very beginning of the novel, while beginning to capture Anjum's transformation of wanting to be a woman, Roy makes effective uses of pronouns in both their nominative and possessive case in the following line:

"He wanted to be her". (18)

4. USE OF SIMILES AND METAPHORS AS RHETORICAL DEVICES

In the graveyard, Anjum lives "like a tree" (1), feels the grip of the ghosts of vultures "like an ache in an amputated limb" (1), rattles through the gilded chamber "like a fugitive absconding from herself". Further, she is described as spending a lot of time watching TV reports telecasting "bomb blasts and terrorist attacks" "proliferating like malaria" (42). Whenever people hurl insults and abuses at her, Anjum lets them "blow through her like a breeze" (1). The unusual similes used by Roy call for compulsory attention. The cameras whirl and click "like a worried bear" (327).

Ahlam Bhaji is described as "floating regally" like a "filthy queen", which is paradoxical as well (59). Newton's army is described as spreading the tentacles of communal horror "with the fastidiousness and proficiency of bloodhounds" (62). One cannot miss out on the subtle reference to Zainab's growth from a girl to a rowdy woman. The Mouse who originally absorbed "love like sand absorbs the sea" gradually transforms into a rowdy woman, thus being called the Bandicoot (32). While referring to Miss Jebeen, Roy uses capitalises The B in Bandicoot and M in the Mouse to refer to the bandicootian qualities the growing mouse Jebeen had taken on itself.

5. SHORT SENTENCES

Short sentences structures are used very effectively some times in between sentences and at times, at the end of the

sentences to get the attention of the readers, particularly in those places when the narrator is swept by the intensity and emotions of the perceived cruelty. When Saddam's father is butchered by a mob with a crowbar, the apathy and the indifference of the helpless crowd recoiling in fear is well brought out by Arundhati Roy in these short sentences, which are cryptic, still dramatically effective in conveying emotions

"Everybody watched them. Nobody stopped them" (89), referring to the incident when the mob kills Saddam's with a crowbar, as he recounts it to Anjum, which reflects the upper limits of human callousness. When the Hijras are made to run for their lives "in blind horror, like ghouls, through the darkness", Roy describes the episode as

"It was nothing, but still it was something". (35)

In yet another place, while referring to the moral policing on women which demands that the Muslim women dress appropriately, the feminist in Roy finds a clear expression in the following lines:

"Women of course

Of course women. (321)

When the riots take over Kashmir and disrupts the normal life in the valley, short sentences structures are yet again used effectively:

"Tourists flew out. Journalists flew in. Honeymooners flew out. Soldiers flew in". (314)

"In some countries, some soldiers die twice". (318)

Other deviations employed by Roy include treating a subordinate clause as a separate sentence, as evident in the following lines. "But everyone who was not Hindu. Which included of course the citizenry of Shahjanabad" (87). Usually the emphasis techniques suggest that the main idea of a sentence be placed in the main clause. Here, Roy deviates the norm. The subordinate clause instead of being subordinated to the main clause, is given as a separate sentence punctuated with a full stop.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, this article is not a complete analysis of Roy's novel. However, a mere cursory study of these features offers interesting insights into how skilfully Roy has used these devices in her work. If not anything, the points discussed in present paper would provides both the teachers and students with the required tools to explore some of the distinctive features of language.

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