

## Localization of English in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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**Abstract:** Literatures in English produced today do not conform anymore to the official London based language. Personal choice as well as the writer's own culture, traditions, ethos etc. has come to influence the way how English literature is written today. Indian English is a socio-linguistic reality and has come to be an accepted linguistic code today. It is different from Standard English since both view the world from different angles and different perspectives. Many Indian writers in English especially of more recent origin tend to move away from the rules and regulations that govern the English language. Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* makes use of the English language in her own style such as making new compound words, phrases, sentence structure, many words mingling to suit the colloquial tongue etc. She sometimes uses the language in a childish manner to describe the children's world. The paper argues that Roy uses the English language in her novel *The God of Small Things* to the local context.

**Keywords:** Arundhati Roy, *Small Things*, localization, Standard English, colloquial tongue, compound words, sentence structure.

### Introduction

The British colonization of the world in many ways led to the introduction of the English language to its colonies. In the post-colonial period, writers of the once colonized countries have expressed the imperative need to help change the colonized world by rewriting their history, telling their own stories, waging a battle of the mind with colonialism by re-educating readers. Language is one of the many important issues for societies that have undergone colonialism. The English language being absorbent and flexible has come to form many variants of the original depending on one's culture, traditions, locations, ethos and the characteristic of the language spoken etc. What came to be accepted as Indian English is one such variant of the Standard English language. Again within what is called the Indian English, there are variations and adaptations depending on different regions, languages, cultures, racial differences that the Indian subcontinent is made of. These Englishes have their own special and distinctive regional flavor or characteristics. Roy in *The God of Small Things* brings the English language very close to the local Malayalam dialect. How people tend to speak, pronounce, or use the English language to suit them on various occasions. She seems to have thoroughly enjoyed taking the liberty to mould the English language to fit in any size, shape, situation, occasion, feelings, dealings etc. Stretched them, contracted them, cut them, joined them, deleted some, and omitted some to find them suitable to the writer's choice and the local Malayalam dialect

which in turn has given the world altogether a beautiful novel.

Roy's writing is indeed a fine example of post colonial writing. It is a product of the colonial encounter between the conquering masters and the conquered subjects. When the colonial encounter takes place, many changes in the various fields of life do happen. Intermingling of cultures, classes, food habit, the mindset and especially in case of language take place. Language is something very dynamic. It undergoes so many changes with time due to both seen and unseen factors. The colonial masters exercised their mastery over the colonized people using the English language or what is also known as Standard English. But this language of the masters became so varied in tone, form and usage when the locals began to use it for their communicative purposes. In a large country like India, the English language has many variations depending on the region and the language spoken there.

The once colonized people responded to the colonial legacy by writing back to the centre. This came about as indigenous people became educated and began to write their own histories, their own legacy according to their understanding rather than mere replication. They used the colonizer's language for their own purposes. Abrogating it totally or appropriating it. Language functions as a medium of power, and Roy's writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the particular place. Arundhati appropriated the English language to the maximum by moving to

the furthest point from the set conventions and rules.

### Localization of English

Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*, uses a variety of English to communicate to the world the culture she represents. As Prabhavati (2001) opines that "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, subject less sentences, faulty spellings, single word sentences, change of part of speech, clustering of adjectives, nouns and deviation from normal word order etc." Her work is a rare specimen of a fine craftsmanship.

English is particularly combined with the local colloquial Malayalam language in Arundhati's *The God of Small Things*. Most of the names of characters in the novel bear Malayali names, such as Ammu (mother), Kochamma (honorable woman), Mammachi (grandmother), Pappachi (grandfather), Mol (young girl) and Mon (young boy). But her main characters do not have any particular name. This namelessness could be to emphasize on the smallness of their existence or the triviality of their very existence. Roy's diction clearly indicate the post colonial issue that breaks rules and regulations by using compound words like "dustgreen" and "mossgreen" (Roy, 1997, p. 1), sometimes she even uses compound words or single phrase for a paragraph like "As for Rahel" (Ibid, p.15). She also combined two or three words as one for example "Whathappened? Whatisit?" (Ibid, p.6) for making them more effective in describing the real child world to the readers. She has handled the language techniques in her own way to forge a clear image in the minds of the readers. She has proved to be a master of English expressions even though English is not her first language. Great imaginative power is exercised in the work that describes people, places and events so vividly.

Roy's use of italicized words, phrases and sentences laid stress on them in the given context. The reader is made to think twice before moving on to the next sentence. Too many appear in the book. Only a few examples are quoted from the first few chapters:

'...*Estha's sandwiches, that Estha ate-.....Them...They...They'd be.*' (p.3) *Tap, tap.* (p.8) *An average student, or Satisfactory work...Does not participate in Group Activities...* (p. 11) *...inside...allowed* (p. 12) *...that look meant...that personal despair....* (p. 19) *They might even steal their present back, ...She. She might steal her present back.* (p. 29) *Yes, it was him.* (p. 32) *...my*

*factory, my pineapples, my pickles.* (p. 57) *...divorced...love...intercommunity* (p. 45). *Smallest Man the Varicose Veins* (p. 90). *Had he seen her? Was he really mad? Did he know that she was there?...Old...Drownable in* (p. 92). *Like friends* (p. 95). *Slow Kutty. Fast Verghese. And Kuriakose. Three brothers with dandruff* (p. 96). *...they Identified most with* (98). *Excitement Always Leads to Tears* (p. 98). *Porketmunny* (p. 102)

The writer makes use of the italicized words, phrases and sentences to emphasize on the importance of the words in the given contexts. They are expressive of the image or the amount of emphasis these words and expressions carry with them in the given situations.

In an interaction after launching her book officially at the British Council, New Delhi 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.'" (Roy, 1997) When language occurs to her spontaneously, the shift and changes must have come very naturally depending on the changing situation and thought.

As she has said, Roy does not seem to follow any linguistic rules and regulations in her writings. She does not even bother about syntactical order of the sentence. The novel abounds in single word sentences and paragraphs, which apparently seem to be non-English. Some examples of single word paragraphs in the novel are given below:

*Flying. Weightless.* (p.98)  
*Entered.*  
*Loved.* (p.78)  
*Wild. Sick. Sad.* (p.159)  
*Slimy. Warty. Croaking.* (p.187)  
*Up.*  
*Down.* (p.293)  
*Gate.*  
*Road.*  
*Stones.*  
*Sky.*  
*Rain.* (p.285)

Some examples of single word sentences are: *Der. Downs* (p.105). *Old* (p.92). *Once* (p.91). *Feathers. Mangoes. Spit* (p.82). *Ever...* *Thirty-one* (p.3). *Steady. Wild. Sick. Sad* (p.159). *Solvent. Thin* (p.248). *Trapped* (p.239). *Click. Pickled. Grey...Spare* (p.222). *Smashed...Still* (p.216).

These are a few examples, many more single words that make a full sentence occur in almost all the chapters.

Another important feature of Roy's own language style is non-verbal sentences. The readers can find such verb less sentences in many places, not only in a particular chapter or place but in the whole novel. There are innumerable verb less sentences such as:

Not when Mammachi died. Not when Chacko emigrated to Canada. (p.18)  
Up two steps. Down two. Up one. (p.98)  
Very much less. (p.113) He and She. We and Us (p.237). With me...Less damp (p.234). For herself. For the God of Small Things. For the sugar-dusted twin midwives of her dream (p.224).

Another language style of Roy is using telescoped words which are a form of new words by combining two or more terms into one. These uses pertain to the prevailing way of the language being spoken by the English speaking local people whom Roy is familiar with. There is no particular stress on any syllable with no pauses. All words are pronounced in the same tone. Some examples are like:

Thiswayandthat (p.107)  
Ofcourseofcourse (p.109)  
Finethankyou (p.145)  
Bluegreyblue (p.238)  
Pleasetomeetyou (p.212)  
Longago (p.263)  
Esthapappychachen (p.212)  
Veluthapappychachen (p.213)  
Sandpapering (p.214)  
Firstcousins (p.151)

Another removal from rules of the language is the use of shortened sentences as and when she pleases. These sentences or phrases as they appear to be are loaded with meaning and is more suitably used to describe the desired action, condition or situation in an effective manner. Some such sentences in the first chapter of the text are:

Thirty-one. Not old. Not young.  
But a viable die-able age (p.3). Free funerals . Satin-lined. Brass handle shined (p.4). Sicksweet (p.6). Trains. Traffic. Music. The Stock Market (p.15). Unbearably precious(p.19). To return to Ayemenem. To Estha in the rain. Into the rain (p. 20). A stranger. Swollen. Noxious (p.21). Lipstick. Kohl. A sly touch of rouge (p.21). As per their books (p.30). Rain. Rushing, inky water. And a smell...Like old roses on a breeze (p.32). Preserved. Accounted for (p.32).

Another stylistic device of Roy is her use of repetitions and antithesis. Words, phrases and sentences are frequently repeated. The word 'red'

is ironically used by Arundhati repeatedly. Red colour is usually associated with some kind of danger. When Estha leaves the dark auditorium, he is led only by the red light, signifying some kind of a danger at hand. The red colour of the light is often repeated to prepare the readers imagine the impending danger. When the family enters 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.* (p.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...*( p.193).

In the above lines, the word 'past' is repeated many times. The fast movement of the action seems to suggest the fast approaching tragedy that is to follow.

Roy has coined new words, expressions which conjure up vivid images and adjectives freely as it fits her and the local English speaking people. Nearly all pages abound in new words a particular language speaking community is likely to use based on the particular language spoken in the region. Loaded with local tone, pronunciation, expressions etc. Some of them are:

Gentle half -moons (p.3) die-able (p.3) child-sized (p.4) coffinwood (p.5) hymnbook-holding arm (p.5) dullthudding (p.7) sad hips ...bare bodied (p.6) re-Returned (p.9) thunderdarkness (p.10) yellowly (p.12) Gulf-money houses (p.13) outdoorsy (p.13) vinegar-hearted(p.15) sliding-folding door ( p.29) fishswimming sense (p.30) ...rings of neckfat ( p.79)...skyblue December day,...( p.79) divorcehood (p.44) Father Mulligan-less (p.45) It had been the *What Will Sophie Mol Think?* Week (p.36). *Drownable* in (p.92) fan-whirring, peanut-crunching darkness (p.98) It smelled of breathing people and hairoil (p.98-99) sweetsinging complaints (p.99) foamleather car-sofa(101) dirtcoloured rag (p.101) unfriendly jeweled bear (p.102) gristly-bristly face contorted...Quarter-boiled (p.104)..an air-hostess's heart trapped in a bear's body (p.111) dinner-smelling sea (p.123) hemmed in by humid hips (p.139) Foreign Returnees...dreams redreamed (p.141) fetched her, scoldingly...Thimble-drinker...Coffin-cartwheeler (p.141) 'Ex-daughter'...easy to understand laugh (p.143) unable to cope with see-sawing changes (p.146) throbbled with delicious anticipation (p.147) He kissed her bluegreyblue eyes, her entomologist's

nose, her hatted redbrown hair (p.147). The room was rank with fungus and disuse (p.155). To be borrowed and returned. Like library books (p.156). An Estha-shaped hole in the Universe (p.156). car doors slamming, getting-outedness (p.172). The brooding, storm-coming sky (p.195). She had died a coughing, spitting, aching, phlegmy death (p.206). afternoon-mare (p.217) 'Has Chacko Saar's Mol come?' (p.209) Touchable Policemen...Deadlypurposed (p.304). Mossgreen. Earthbrown. Crumbleblack (p.307). ...Touchable cunning (p.308). Hideous grief...Love Laws (p.328)...Chacko's proud, tennis-trophy smile (p.329).

The novel also contains many poems without obvious sense. They seem to 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. Some examples are given below:

*Rubadub dub* (Rahel thought),  
*Three women in a tub*,  
*Tarry a while said Slow*. (p.96)  
*I'm Popeye the sailor man dum dum*  
*I live in a cara-van dum dum*  
*I op-en the door*  
*And Fall-on the floor*  
*I'm Popeye the sailor man dum dum*  
 (p.98)  
*Fast faster fest*  
*Never let it rest*  
*Until the fast is faster*,  
*And the faster's fest* (p.104).

Children's ways of describing situations are beautifully captured in the following lines:

Esthappen and Rahel said: 'Because you're our Ammu and our Baba and you love us Double.'(p.149) At another instance, Estha said: 'Thang God,'(p.154) with a wrong spelling for 'Thank' as it is often pronounced by children. Words spelled as it is often pronounced by children in the novel are: novembre for November, bote for bought, coberd for cupboard, whanted for wanted, feest for feast, bananana for banana etc. In this regard, Chakrabarti, (2004, p.163) opined that "[W]riters 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" (Chakrabarti, 2004, p.163). The style in the novel is a hybrid of English and Malayalam. Roy localizes English language in the novel. She 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:

*Poda patti!* (p.90)  
*Paratha* (p.114 & 116)  
*Soo-soos* (p.106)  
*Eda cherukka* (p.101)  
 'Kandoo, Kochamma'  
 'Sundarikutty' (p.179)  
*Aiyyo, Mon! Mol!* (p.208)  
 Kuttappa (p.210)  
*Avaney kadalamma kondu poyi* (p.220).  
*Modalali Mariakutty* (p.257)  
*Kochu Thomban*  
*Vellya Thomban* (p.228)  
*Esthapappychachen Kuttappen* (p.227)

Actually, Roy in her novel gives ample space for the local using much of the local language in an increasing globalized world. She attempts to familiarize the Indianess of her novel with the readers. To bring in local colour in the social behavior of the Kerala Syrian Christian Anglophiles and those who imitate them, she uses Indianized words and phrases in plenty. Without all these Indianized words, phrases and expressions, the novel would have been far less amusing. She absolutely confined herself to the Westernised Syrian Christian character whose English approximates the standard English variety. Differing from this set of people, comrade K.N.M. Pillai represents the best 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. He uses a peculiar feature of Indian English. We witness the use of present continuous tense in place of simple present tense. Mr. Pillai's conversation is filled with this wrong usage. He asks Chacko: "What is the news? How is your daughter adjusting?" (p.273) "He's standing first in class. This year he will be getting double promotion" (p.275) "still in planning stages, I suppose? Or expecting? (p.130)

The utterances made by comrade Pillai are mostly in Malayalam: "Aiyyo, Rahel Mol...Orkunnilley?" (p.128) and "Orkunnundo?" are addressed directly to Rahel, while "Aiyyo paavam" (p.131) is used to express his false commiseration with Estha's condition. Comrade Pillai addresses his wife as "Edi Kalyani" (p.273) to show his love and affection to her. Roy has used all this local words and expressions without any footnotes. This in a way compels the reader to find out for him/herself the specific implications and meanings and thus fusing them to the English language.

During the same conversation, 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 it cracked on the question mark. He even pronounced the word as though it were a form of death" (p.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 evoked, the tone of the speech, attitude of the speaker and everything else are brought before the reader's eyes.

Being a country once colonized by the British, the people of India are always fascinated by everything English: English language, English habits, English dress etc. When English is spoken, they make themselves appear as Westernized people as is the case with Baby Kochamma who suddenly acquires a strange new British accent when introduced to Margaret and Sophie. She wastes no time in showing off her knowledge of Shakespeare which ironically falls flat on Sophie. She said Sophie Mol was so beautiful that she reminded her of a wood-spirit, of Ariel. The following is an extract from the text:

*'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. (p.144)*

Estha and Rahel, Ammu's seven year old twins' behavior remains 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" (p.148) and her uncle's lecture on "Things that are possible in Human Nature" (p.118) while Estha thinks that it is "Best to Be prepared" and that "Anything can Happen to anyone" (p.267). Capitalization abound in the text. Here are a few more that occur in the first chapter of the book:

...when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was For

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Ever,.....as Me....., as We or Us.( p.2).  
 ' ...Orangedrink Lemondrink Man...' (p.2)... ..showed Rahel Two Things .( p.5) Thing One...Thing Two...( p.5-6) ...Too Briefly meant For Too Short a While. (p.7)...the June Rain (p.10)...a Sitting Down sense.( p.18)...Capable of Anything.( p.29)

The reader can also notice Roy's use of telescoped words. Sometimes two or three words are dovetailed into each other; 'leftrighthleft' (p.141), 'Pleasetomeetyou' (p.212), 'bluegrayblue' (p.238). These compressions are among the many subversive licence taken by the 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 the liberty with syntactical formations. Examples can be taken from the text;

The red sign over the door said EXIT in a red light. Estha EXITED. (p.101)  
 Margaret Kochamma told her to Stoppit.  
 So she Stoppited. (p.141)

#### Conclusion

The novel witnesses too many shifts and changes with the English language and its uses. There is no limit to the flexibility of the language. Roy uses it as it pleases her. Apart from the inventions mentioned above, she uses unusual brackets, faulty spellings, slang words, reversal of the order of letters and substitution of small case letters with upper case letters etc. The Booker Committee has rightly 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, 2007). The novel of Arundhati Roy is indeed a milestone in the development of Indian English Fiction. She has appropriated the English language and made it to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience, or, as Raja Rao puts it, to 'convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own.' (Rao, 1938, vii). (Empire Writes Back, 38) Roy in using the English language, with its power, and the writing with its signification of authority, has wrested it from the dominant European culture to the local culture as she see it.