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MINOR SENTENCES AS STAND-INS OF SMALL THINGS IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study is to understand Arundhati Roy's style to explore the themes working behind her grammatical structures and her experimentation with the English language. This research is qualitative in nature and the data for the present study have been selected through purposive sampling technique from Arundhati Roy's only fictional work so far, '*The God of Small Things*'. The methodology adopted for carrying out the current investigation is based on Leech and Short's (2007) checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories to evaluate a literary text in stylistic terms. The checklist is modified and Muir's (1972) classification of minor sentences is incorporated at grammatical level of the checklist to analyze frequent sentence types in the novel. The results were astonishing as they went against Roy's claim that she does not consciously build this book on any level of discourse. The findings indicated that every word is carefully chosen to convey a particular message. The investigation of sentence types revealed that minor sentences are more frequent as compared to the major sentences and this high frequency of minor sentences in the fictional world of the novel is in keeping with the child language features such as repetition, neologism, and above all innocence. The findings also unmasked how this choice of sentence structure is in keeping with the main themes of the story: breaking bounds and social inequality, caste and class systems. This investigative study will help future researchers to stylistically analyze a fictional work in terms of structure and Narratology.

Key words: Stylistics, style, minor sentences, metaphorical fragments.

1. Introduction

The God of Small Things was published in 1997 and it made Arundhati Roy world famous. The author won Booker Prize for her first ever novel. The reason of such huge fame and acknowledgment was unique language and style of Roy that captivated readers by awe and inspiration till today. Roy focused on non-fiction after *The God of Small Things* and penned down innumerable articles, essays, books on topics like caste discrimination, religious extremism, and environmental issues. She wrote for these and many other social and political issues. One of her interviews with Barasmian (2001) depicts her desire of eliminating boundaries

between fiction and non-fiction because she considers fiction as the truest thing. On international level, she has been awarded many awards for her writing and her selfless social and political activism. The current study is focused on stylistic analysis of Roy's first novel *The God of Small Things*. The objective of the current research is to deeply understand Roy's language and style in her first novel which gained the status of an invented code language around the globe. The present research is limited only to the detailed analysis of minor sentences used by Roy in narrating the tale of forbidden love and grief.

A branch of linguistics that functions as a bridge between literature and linguistics is called stylistics. The focus of the present research is to explain the connection about how Roy's language is essential in creating a particular aesthetic pleasure in readers through stylistic analysis. Stylistics acknowledges a writer's craft by assuming that every word or production on part of the author is a deliberate decision despite its conscious and unconscious nature proposed by the author. This current research will be beneficial in investigative study of Roy's first novel and Roy herself as an artist in this particular regard.

An Indo-English writer whose style and expression is markedly different from all the writers of her age is worldly known by the name of Arundhati Roy. She violates boundaries of English grammar in her pursuit of being distinct from others. She breaks conventions of English language and grammatical rules. *The God of Small Things* (1997) is categorized as both-postcolonial and postmodern. Talib (2002) investigates Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) in the light of postcolonial literature traits. While discussing, Talib (ibid) refers back to Malmkjaer (1999) who stated that English language allows variations on the level of sound and lexis but not on syntax level. Roy plays with English language on syntactic level too by introducing unique breaks in sentences, capitalization and inversions. Roy's second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* meets the awaiting eyes of the whole world after the gap of seventeen years in 2017. This second novel is not poetic and magical as the first one but it is more like a documentary of the real events. It has similarities to the first novel as the mind style of an author does not change but it also carries its differences very well. Roy is an active political and social activist who speaks and writes against the injustices prevailing in human societies especially India.

2. Literature Review

A branch of applied linguistics that functions as a bridge between literature and linguistics is labeled as stylistics. The relationship between linguistic form and the effect it produces in the readers is studied through stylistics. With the help of certain linguistic tools, it highlights the predominant features of a style of an artist or a work of art. Stylistics helps in describing the relation between what languages are used and how a text is analyzed to interpret a particular literary work as a discourse. Therefore, a study of what a piece of art communicates involves a discussion of how it communicates the specific message it intends to communicate. Stylistics highlights a certain text in terms of its distinctive features from other texts. Leech (2007) is of the view that stylistics is a linguistic study of style. It is rarely used for this sake. Mostly, stylistic analysis is carried out to describe the relation between linguistic form and the literary effect. A branch of applied linguistics that serves as a bridge between linguistics and literary criticism is called stylistics and so stylistic analysis can be started from both ends-linguistics and critical.

The God of Small Things (1997), Roy's debut novel is strikingly distinct in its language and style. Many researchers from all over the world investigated different aspects of the novel. Aldama (2004) states that almost all techniques invented by humans are employed by Roy in narrating her tale of forbidden love and grief. The story is capable of adjusting everything from outer world of realities and inner world of emotions. Benoit (1998) studies time patterns of the novel. He employs the term "metatemporal" to describe Roy's temporal arrangements and divisions. The term describes many levels of time narrating many stories simultaneously. This style resembles human mind where different memories from different time spans come and go simultaneously. These are called fragments of the whole.

3. Research Method

Qualitative approach is adopted in the present research to investigate the use and significance of minor sentences in *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy. The qualitative approach depends more on establishing judgments about the text under scrutiny. Literary stylistics is categorized as special sub-type of textual stylistics by Diller (1998). For him, a corpus or discourse consisting of defined linguistic features is termed as stylistics. For the purpose of stylistic analysis of the current research, the checklist of linguistic and stylistic categories proposed by Leech and Short (2007) is adapted. The Muir's categorization of minor sentences is incorporated in the list on the level of sentences. The analysis and discussion of minor sentences falls under the second section of the list proposed by Leech and Short (ibid). This section is composed of nine sub-headings and the selection of stylistic feature (minor sentences) falls under the sub-heading of sentence type.

4. Data Analysis

Minor sentences are defined by James Muir (1972) as sentences devoid of an independent clause but having Predicate element in their structure. These sentences can be labeled as moodless or dependent clauses. According to Muir's (ibid) classification, minor sentences in English language are basically of three distinct types: completive, exclamatory and aphoristic. In the present research, it is maintained that *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy contains high frequency/ number of minor sentences rather than to ordinary regular sentence constructions. For the purposes to prove this point, the number of sentences on pages 202-3 was manually counted. The results declare that total number of sentences on these two pages is 70 and 44 sentences are minor sentences. This form one third of the total sentences which goes in compliance with the claim that the novel has high frequency of minor sentences as compared to normal ones. The whole text is mostly composed of sentences which can be labeled as sentence fragments.

4.1 Completive Minor Sentences

The sentence fragments that complete the context or co-text are defined as completive minor sentences. These might be in the form of answers to questions or additional or situational comments. Their intonation patterns resemble major sentences. Their ability to produce new instances is also a quality of major sentences. Their function is to elaborate relationships with

other parts of the same sentence or with other sentences in the text. Under this vast category, Roy constructs sentences with a playful variety of types.

4.1.1 Metaphorical Minor Sentences

Metaphorical minor sentences are in abundance in the novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997). This sentence type is further categorized into two sub-types: one that is dependent upon other clauses in the sentences to convey its full meaning and the second one is independent of other clauses and can convey its meaning on its own. The presence and abundance of this type of sentences in the text might be due to the fact that the narrator of the story is a child; a 7 year old girl. The construction of sentences starting with like, as though, etc., might be keeping with the child language because children are habitual of drawing comparisons when talking about certain things or experiences. These sentences fall under the category of dependent sentences because these are devoid of any finite verb and are complete only when seen in the light of previous sentences. These are deviant sentences because they deviate from the norms of English grammar rules. These belong to the group of completive minor sentences.

1) *Gloom swallowed the garden. Whole. Like a python. (P: 191)*

In this particular example, “like a python” is constructed as a separate sentence but it is meaningless if it is not considered in the light of its previously connected sentences. The previous sentences play the role of subject to these sentences. Therefore, this and sentences like this are labeled as dependent completive minor sentences.

2) *His feet walked him to the river. As though they were the leash and he was the dog. History walking the dog. (P: 288)*

The second type of completive minor sentences are those sentence which can stand on its own and convey the full meaning potential without being dependent upon previous sentences. Although, the construction of the sentence is that of minor sentence but these are capable of conveying the whole meaning. In the novel, *The God of Small Things* (ibid), such sentences usually appear at the end of paragraphs, as final verdict. This final comment reduces the chance of further communication or comments. The major role of these sentences is to play as intertextual cohesive devices of the text. These are also functioning as a tool in the hands of writer to help the readers imagine what the writer wishes them to imagine. They convey author’s point of view to the readers. These can also be labeled as additional comment to an already discussed situation.

4.1.2 Adjectival Minor Sentences

Imagery is one of Roy’s favourite tools in writing fiction. She provides elaborative details through images. These imaginative details are structured through adjectives. Roy has employed adjectives in different patterns. First, she has employed these in pairs. The pair forms a single sentences; a deviance in English grammar. This structure functions as a final verdict from author’s side by blocking further comments.

- 3) *...Ammu was when she died. Thirty-one. Not old. Not young. But a viable die-able age.*
(P: 3)

The adjectives “old, young, and viable die-able” are structured as separate sentence. The sentences are minor in their essence. These adjectives are helpful in creation of Ammu’s image in the readers’ minds at the time of her death. Some of these images are recurring, coming to the surface time and again in the text. These serve as references for some memory or incident happened in the past. These are like final commentary of the event, no more comments or descriptions could be added. The reader has to accept it as it is.

Another construction of adjectival minor sentences is in the form of units larger than words.

- 4) *When she told him about Joe he had left sadly, but quietly. With his invisible companion and his friendly smile.* (P: 249)

These types of adjectival minor sentences explain the section linked as aforementioned fact. They also highlight the author’s viewpoint about what is being said.

4.1.3 Adverbial Minor Sentences

Adverbial minor sentences resemble adjectival minor sentences in their construction and role.

- 5) *Rahel gave up her job at the gas station and left America gladly. To return to Aye Menem. To Estha in the rain.* (P: 20)

The sentences structured as minor sentences can be joined with the base sentence but the author decides to deviate from the norms of English language. This pattern of minor sentences is helpful in emphasizing the author’s message. This pattern resembles a poem in its structure and sound. This is the reason Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* (ibid) is labeled as poetic prose.

4.1.4 Dependent Clauses as Minor Sentences

Subordinate clauses structured separately from main clauses are also a deviance introduced by Arundhati Roy. In this particular construction, minor sentences are linked to the stem sentences. Their function is to elaborate this previous stem sentence that is also playing the role of subject to one or more dependent clauses.

- 6) *Because the truth is, that only what counts counts. The simple, unswerving wisdom of children.* (P: 218)

4.1.5 Coordinating Conjunctions starting a Fragment

Almost all main four coordinating conjunctions are used by Arundhati Roy in her debut novel: copulative, adversative, disjunctive and illative. She has employed these conjunctions in the beginning of fragments while narrating the story of forbidden love and associated grief. These sentences convey the feeling of listening to a story instead of reading textual lines because speakers use “and” or “but” more frequently in spoken language as compared to written texts. It

is the craft of her story telling that creates magic for the reader and it becomes almost impossible to leave reading without reaching the finishing point.

7) **And Ammu's angry eyes on Estha said. All Right. Later.**
And later became a horrible, menacing, goose-bumpy word. (P: 145)

Copulative coordinating conjunction is used by Roy in this particular illustration to start a new sentence which is against English Grammar rules. These sentences and the types of these emanate a sense of slow coming destruction in the plot of the story and these actually help the readers to prepare themselves to cope with the shock coming with the next unfolding of events or happenings.

8) **But you can't hear screams through earth and stone. (P: 7)**

This particular sentence illustrates how adversative coordinating conjunction is used by Roy to start a new sentence in her style of narrating a story. These types of sentences pose a contradiction between two statements. This particular sentence comes after a statement where Rahel sees Sophie screaming in her grave through imagination. But then she remembers that sound waves cannot travel through earth and stones.

9) **Or at least the name was. (P: 9)**

This particular example from the novel illustrates how Roy breaks all the boundaries of English Grammar and start a new sentence with alternative or disjunctive coordinating conjunction. This usage is unusual and specific to Arundhati Roy's style. This sentence is preceded by a sentence where Rahel observes her father's signature. The language is employed as a tool to present an alternative to names by Arundhati Roy in her uncanny writing style.

10) **Hooded in her own hair, Ammu leaned against herself in the bathroom mirror and tried to weep.**
For herself.
For the God of Small Things.
For the sugar-dust twin midwives of her dream. (P: 224)

Roy also starts new sentences with illative coordinating conjunctions of inference in her ground-breaking first novel. Example 10 is illustrative of this phenomenon. Ammu- mother of twins- realized the destiny of her loved ones and finally moved towards accepting it, by accepting her unfortunate fate and its shadows over the lives of her loved ones. The least she could do was to shed tears over her dismay.

Arundhati Roy employs these conjunctions to start new fragments throughout her novel, either as a separate sentence or as consecutive pattern of sentences. The point of such unusual usage might be to help the readers to imagine what is going on in the story and what is going to happen next. Moreover, it can be emphasize the writer's point of view to convey the message convincingly. These subordinate sentences or subordinate clauses can be joined with independent clauses as

these fragments starting with coordinating conjunctions can also be joined. The subordinate and independent clauses can be structured as a single sentence. But Roy breaks this rule and starts a new sentence with coordinating conjunctions or fragments to bring novelty and emphasis in her style and point.

4.1.6 Noun Fragments Following a Pronoun

Roy breaks another rule of English grammar. She starts a sentence with noun fragments. These fragments mostly come after a pronoun in her narration of ill-fated love. Roy's first novel is full of such fragmented sentences structured as main sentences.

11) Except perhaps that it was a little cold. A little wet. But very quiet. The Air. (P.338)

Names, metaphors and adjectives are disclosed at the end of sentences by Roy in her first novel. Roy seems playful when it comes to English language. She keeps on experimenting new things, keeps on breaking grammar rules, keeps on breaking norms of normal usage. This marks her language and style utterly unique from others. The particular revelation at the end of paragraphs or a sentence seems to be her favorite technique as the novel is replete with such sentences. This style of disclosing particular names or some other thing towards the end of discussion might be useful to arouse curiosity and suspense in her readers about what is going to happen next. The chapter where "History House" is being described is replete with such fragments.

Apart from these instances, there are other types of fragmentary sentences that come under the umbrella term of completive minor sentences. Such as yes/no fragments. These minor sentences are a type of situational comment. These fragments represent a type of discourse that is interconnected.

The sentences comprised of titles are also categorized as minor sentences. Estha composed a story about his mother entitled "Little Ammu". With the passage of time in the happening of events in Roy's story, this title gained the status of a metaphor. Then, after achieving the metaphorical status, the fragment begins to act like a completive fragmentary sentence. Ammu was very little among gods of the society.

12) Little Ammu. (P: 158)

13) Mr. Kurien Maathen. (P: 302)

This fragment introduces another character in the story. This direct and concise introduction of the character compels the reader to halt and recollects who this man was. This particular sentence can be categorized as an introduction which is also a completive minor sentence. The novel contains other such examples too.

4.2 Exclamatory Minor Sentences

These types of sentences bear no relation with the previous or following sentences. These are open class sentences or words. There are three types of such sentences: primary, secondary and verbless equational sentences.

14) Bye-bye! (P: 80)

15) Oh dear! Oh dear oh dear! (P: 153)

These particular fragments are examples of primary and secondary exclamations. Roy structures these as separate clauses. These are illustrative of spoken language, how words collide with each other when language is spoken fluently. Roy is such a magical narrator that she takes care of such minute details as well. She marks them unusual by structuring them as separate clauses as they stand out for little kids in language.

The last type, verbless equational interjections, structured as fragments is more frequent in the narration of Roy's first novel. These types of exclamatory fragments are mostly associated with different developmental phases of Estha's character in the novel.

16) Estah-the-Practical. (P: 200)

17) Estha –the-Accurate. (P: 217)

18) Estha-the-Compassionate. (P: 217)

19) Esthappen Un-known. (P: 156)

4.3 Aphoristic Minor Sentences

These types of sentences can also be labeled as proverbs and these are altogether absent in the story of *The God of Small Things*.

5. Findings and Discussion

The investigator has employed Leech and Short's checklist (ibid) as a tool for analysing data. The frequent and unusual use of minor sentences was investigated by the researcher under the broad heading of 'Grammar' from the checklist. Further, Muir's (ibid) definition and types of minor sentences were followed by the researcher to carry out the investigation. Muir (ibid) classifies minor sentences into three broad types as completive, exclamatory and aphoristic. The analysis reveals how the major portion of the novel under investigation is comprised of completive minor sentences. This type is further sub-divided into many different types: adverbial, adjectival, noun, pronoun, and metaphorical fragments. The second frequently occurring minor sentences are of exclamatory type in Roy's first novel. There are three known types of exclamatory sentences and the reason might be the child narrator of the events of the story. Children use exclamatory sentences more often as compared to adults to express their emotions through language. There are no instances of aphoristic sentences found by the researcher in the novel.

The frequent use of minor sentences by the author might be in keeping with the theme of the novel that revolves around small things: small people, small details, in a world full of big, hypocrite societies, another reason might be the fact that the course of events is narrated by a child. The language of a child often consists of small sentences, broken sentences, exclamations expressing joy or grief and analogies. This is very evident in the language of *The God of Small Things*. The unique language of the novel and breaking of grammar rules might be intentional on author's side for recognizing small people like Ammu, Velutha, and twins by ignoring big

structures and people of the hypocrite Indian society. One other reason for frequent use of minor sentences might be the structural pattern of the novel. The novel has a mnemonic structure based on recurring memories of a child narrator. For this reason, distorted temporal fragmentation of events is also present in the novel. This structural pattern is also in keeping with the frequent use of minor sentences because a seven year old child cannot fluently remember and narrate past events. Roy created a masterpiece in all its angles. Memories in our mind (even in adult mind) can never occur in symmetrical order; they never resurface according to the time of their time of happening. These are always jumbled and haphazard when it comes to time. Roy employs minor sentences by keeping in mind this memory based narration of events. Sentences are fragments instead of complete major structures, thoughts are broken as the memories come and go in portions in mind.

The major portion of the novel consists of minor sentences and these sentence fragments are very useful as a tool to convey structural and thematic coherence. Their occurrence produces a rhythmic cadence in the narration and evolves significance of events through repetition. Another function of these fragments is to link one section of novel or memories to the other producing cohesion among the events. The major function of these sentences is to link the structure to the main theme of the novel. One striking feature of these sentences is that these are different in length. One-word, two-word, or small phrases are frequently observed in the narration that evade a sense of monotony in the novel and create newness in every single instance. Furthermore, child language is usually comprised of sentences starting with like/as, as though, as if; so is the language of the novel. Roy keeps in mind even the minute details when it comes to tell her story of ill-fated love and grief.

6. Conclusions and Future Recommendations

As the previous section of the paper discloses how the high frequency of minor sentences performs the major and basic function of linking the structural organization of the novel to the basic theme of the story about small things and breaking boundaries, it also reveals how this high frequency is in keeping with the child language features such as innocence, analogies, repetition and neologism. Therefore, minor sentences symbolically represent children in a world of big fish. Minor sentences stand for idealism as well, children create their idols to worship and follow in their young age. This justifies the topic of the novel as well, “The God of Small Things”. The breaking of grammar rules and abundance of sentence fragments also relates to the major themes of the novel. This investigative study will help future researchers and students of literature who plan to stylistically analyse a fictional work in terms of structure and Narratology.

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