

Experiencing Phonaesthesia in the Novel *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract - *The present paper is an attempt to investigate how phonology plays an important role in giving that extra edge to the text. The author uses sound mechanism to make the reader hear what is happening. There is deliberate arrangement of phonemes, sound patterns, preference of certain specific consonants over others to suit the context.*

Keywords - *Phonology, sound, pattern, phonemes, consonants, context.*

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Although not much can be said about a written text at the phonological level, it is difficult to ignore this aspect. This is concerned mainly with the oral literature and less with the written one, but what can one do when there is an author-architect like Arundhati Roy, who deftly uses every linguistic level to not only present the design of a building, but also focus on all such moves to convey the desired meaning.

Phonology is all the more important when it seems that not only does a reader see the text but also hears it as though there is a storyteller who is orally narrating things. It is a sort of oral presentation done in front of the reader to whom the events are both visible and audible. Unlike most of the other writers Roy's writing leans towards the spoken form and this is precisely the reason that phonology becomes worth investigating. To Roy, since writing is like practicing architecture, the arrangement of phonemes, the sound patterns, preference of certain consonants over others to match the overall meaning of the message are the factors to be explored. Every phonological move is a journey from the surface to the deeper level and so every repetition or innovation/deviation is meaningful.

However, since the writing system is in many respects a system for representing the sound pattern of speech, a further source of phonological effects is graphology particularly in the evocation of a character's style of speech in dialogue. (Leech and Short 132) And because of this in the text that strikes the eye, their explanations can be given phonologically.

Graphology can assist the presentation of dialog.

There is one such example from H.G. Well's *History of Mr. Polly*:

Oh come on then, all the LOT of you, cried Uncle Jim.

This example is from Chapman's *Linguistics and Literature*. (36)

Though there is not much to look for regular phonological aspects like Stress, Length and Pitch in prose as it is in poetry, but taking a broad perspective the stress can be studied at the lexical words like nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, against the grammatical words like prepositions, auxiliaries, articles and pronouns, which are usually unstressed.

... Word stress in spoken sentences allows

the shift of implicative emphasis to almost any item, which is to be prominent and contrasted with other items. (Chapman 36)

Graphology aids this process. For instance, in the novel Ammu reprimands her children for disobeying her in public:

... and I **mean** this, **EVER** disobey me in public ... (148)

So with this yardstick, sentences/phrases like "... wore backless blouses ... smoked long cigarettes ... learned to blow perfect smoke rings." (40), are fully stressed as all the words are charged. When Mr Hollick covets his manager's wife, Ammu, he first threatens to fire him and then lays his cards on the table. Here the stress is both on the grammatical word, an auxiliary, and the lexical word, an adverb.

This is first followed by contrastive stress on an auxiliary verb not usually stressed:

"Well actually there **may** be an option ...", (41) This in turn is followed by extra-emphasized adverbial:

... you're a very lucky man ... such an attractive wife ...

an **extremely** attractive wife. (42)

So graphological aid of italicization is taken for words that normally are not stressed, and those that carry stress, are also italicized in bold for that extra stress.

Phonology not only includes the normal information about the arrangement of sound pattern, alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, elision, apocope, and aphesis etc., but with a slight support from graphology the other features like loudness, whispering and mimicry can also be presented on paper.

An example of assonance that gives an indication of what was going on inside the minds is when the *posse of Touchable policemen* go after Velutha:

Hairy fairies with lethal wands ... Dark of Heartness tiptoed into the Heart of Darkness. (306) The repetition of the sounds /ai/ and /a:/ plus the lexical item *tiptoed* are enough indicators for what these *Servants of the State* were about to do.

The above assonance of the *Touchable policemen* is manifest into consonance, when the inner planning is actualized outside on the body of an innocent, *Untouchable*:

His skull ... fractured... his nose and ... smashed ... face pulpy, undefined ... The blow ... split open his upper lip ... broken six teeth, three of which ... embedded in the lower lip ... four of his ribs splintered, one pierced his left lung ... the blood on his breath bright red ... his lower intestine ruptured and haemorrhaged ... his spine was damaged ... paralysed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control ... both his knee caps were shattered. (310)

The end sounds alveolars /t, d/ of the verbs and the adjectives are an excellent example of consonance.

Speech distinctions are shown through misspellings and mispronunciation. First in the order is a phonological alteration called **assimilation**. At one point, Roy uses *Thang God* instead of the normal **Thank God**. (154)

Likewise the mispronunciations, the accents and the speech distinctions between various characters are presented phonologically. Phonological deviations are also there where one phoneme is silenced or where one phoneme, though not usually there, is put in for specific reasons:

the primary ... is economy ... to save time, to avoid the monotony ... we mispronounce too, because we anticipate sounds, because we mix sounds up, because we leave them out, because we blend them, because they suggest similar combinations, because

we are in a hurry, because we can get along with something less than distinctness. (Goldberg 202)

A good example of this is when Estha utters, *When eggzackly* (324), for **when exactly**, he is using the term as spoken in a hurry.

Chacko also mispronounces the lexical item *locus standi*: *Ammu had no **Locusts Stand I** and being a daughter she had no claim to their parents' property.* (57)

The actual term is **locus standi** and the addition of /t/ and /s/ though seen in print are not pronounced. This could be due to the principle of Epithesis ... the addition of an extra consonant to the end of the word ...

There is a case of transposition of sounds: they are frequent between an **s** and a **stop**, or between **l** and **r**. There is a case of metathesis: Roy does it with **r** and a **stop d** in the lexical items *redly dead* in the sentence:

Rahel saw that her eyes were redly dead. (31)

A prominent feature of Roy's phonological tactics is that the weaker, reducing and disappearing things are given voiceless sounds, whereas those hard, noisy and conspicuous ones are expressed by voiced sounds. And indeed there is an underlying struggle between the rich and the poor, between the strong and the weak, between the upper class and the lower class, between the touchable and the untouchable, between the ruling class and the ruled, between imperialism and Marxism, and perhaps between the center and the periphery. Accordingly, Roy juxtaposes the voiceless and the voiced sounds. There are many examples:

The river shrinks but the Black crows gorge on bright mangoes. (1)

Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously ... but there is only ... whisper and scurry of small lives. (1)

Alliteration serves the dual purpose of reinforcing the degree of identicalness between similar terms like: *May/month, Red/ripen, wind/water* etc. It also relates non-similar terms like *PWD/potholes, wild/whisper, scurry/small, killer/corpse*, etc. on some ground by giving them similar sounds.

"... alliteration can draw attention to meaning. If two words that are already commonly related are also related by sound the effect is striking." (Cummings and Simmons 11)

There is a good example of onomatopoeia when there are *two clicks to close the suitcase*.

Click. And click. (114)

The violin-shaped box *closed like a suitcase*. (183)

Apart from these Roy also uses verbs that are intrinsically onomatopoeic. For instance, the *slanting silver ropes slammed* ... (1)

Laughter rambled through the Arrivals Lounge ... (143)

In the novel there are sounds that seem to match the context; Roy matches and differentiates the contexts with the sounds. Perhaps she wants the readers to look at the things from her angle. For instance the very first line of her novel starts with nasal sounds: *May in Ayemenem is a hot brooding month*. (1)

Apart from the individual sounds there are consonants in pairs that convey "sound symbolism": (Crystal, *Encyclopedia English Language* 250) For instance the pair /sn/ conveys unpleasantness in snake, snag, snip etc. When Ammu's father flogs her, destroys her gumboots with her mother's pinkish scissors *the scissors make snicking scissor sounds*. (181)

After the deed *there is sea of twisting rubber snakes*.

And he *would sneer at when Chacko came to the table*. (67)

Mind your own business' Ammu snapped, (85)

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