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LANGUAGE AS AN AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Afia Bashir

Introduction: Language is an expression of man in words. It is a semiogenic process which helps man to understand himself and the world. Language has limitless uses. Its shades of meaning include indicative, emotive and symbolic. Since man is a thinking animal, he is a talking animal too and he has to exploit language to its fullest possible extent.

As we know human beings through their psychic infrastructure emit, feel and project certain kinds of communicative behaviors, which are rooted in their interaction with the world of outward appearances, which is translated by the language. Hence, there are different facets of language one of which is language as a means of aesthetic experience

This paper will start with the reflection and analysis of the notion of the “language as an aesthetic experience.” It will first trace its origin in the suggestion that language is not merely a means of communication but a medium of understanding as well. It does not merely convey mental contents but also arranges and even shapes them. Whenever the encoder engages a sophisticated structure, he enters the field of aesthetics. The aesthetic use of language is valuable because it brings to

IJL (Interdisciplinary Journal of Linguistics) Vol(4)

consciousness within a temporal sequence of events, complex situations and ideas. It brings attention to itself as a mode of expression that has to do with “a more open-ended world, breaking apart the solidified dogmas that ideologies seem to hanker for.” Given their appeal to different dimensions of human psyche, aesthetic use of language illicit a broad range of responses. While it provides information, it is also the most heightened form of language use. To appreciate the term aesthetics of language we must unpack our own preconceived assumptions in order to be more understanding of the uses of aesthetics of language to a new place that serves the variety of topics discussed above.

As there are differences in the cultural norms of the different communities, there are bound to be differences in the aesthetic norms as well. To fill in these cultural differences and to bridge these gaps and to get the ideas across, writers coin new words and expressions, which we call *innovations* or *coinages*. These innovations give a new flavor to the writing, which set apart these writers from the native writers of English and this is accomplished by the process of Decolonization which these writers employ in their creative writings. To elaborate this point further we may cite few examples:

- (1) *spoiler of my salt* (Untouchable) for *namak-haram*;
- (2) *may the vessel of your life never float in the sea of existence* (Coolie) for *tera bera gark ho*;
- (3) *may the fire of your ovens consume you* (Coolie) for *bhatthi me ja*).

These are the examples of what may be termed *ornamental style* and are restricted to Indian English creative writing. Instead of using the Indian expressions the writer has translated the Indian terms to English in order to dilute their harshness. These words or expressions are used as a stylistic device for creating contextually and linguistically typical Indian plot and character types. The representation and interpretation of the collective experience are influenced by the personal as well as community perception within one and the same society. The factors are compounded by the different levels of ambition, courage, and capabilities. To illustrate this point further, let us take an example from R.K. Narayan’s *The Dark Room*. ‘After food she went to her *bench* in the hall and lay down on it, chewing a little *areca-nut* and a few *betel leaves*,... (Pg: 6). Savitri hovered... watching every item on his *dining leaf*... (Pg: 2) .Savitri gave him a *tumbler* of milk...’ (Pg: 2). ‘I will do this *tiffin* business myself’ (Pg: 10.) .She went to the *worshipping -room* lighted the *wicks* and *incense*, threw on the images on the *wooden pedestal* handful of hibiscus, jasmine and nerium and muttered all the *sacred chants* she had learnt from her mother years ago. She *prostrated* herself before god, rose, picked up a *dining leaf* and sat down in the kitchen’ (Pg: 4). All the italic words are translations—they have been used by the writer to express the aesthetics of Indian reality. They create a typical atmosphere by

virtue of the fact that they are totally incongruent to the English native culture. They evoke the oriental culture of long afternoons spent at home by women, siestas, chewing betel leaves; offer food which was had on plantain leaves; it brings to mind incense and flowers and sacred chants.

There are instances where pure English equivalents of native words are present but native forms are still used. We have an English equivalent *veil* for the word *purdah* but the range of aesthetics that the word *purdah* evokes is large and cannot be related to its English equivalent *veil*, which is totally incongruent to the English native culture. The device of translation is also used for creating the local color as well as to add a distinct native Indian flavor. For example, Raja Rao's images such as *lean as an areca nut tree*, *helpless as a calf*, *as good as kitchen ashes* and *as honest as an elephant* are typical of the Indian context and are part and parcel of day to day conversation.

Role of Metaphors in Aesthetic Language: Metaphors have both explanatory and aesthetic roles to play. Their explanatory function is to aid in conceptual clarification, comprehension or insight regarding a concept or thought. However the boundary between aesthetic and explanatory use of metaphor is admittedly vague. It is against this background that the role of metaphors in aesthetic language should be placed.

Originally, metaphor was a Greek word meaning "transfer". The Greek etymology is from meta, implying "a change" and pherein meaning "to bear, or carry", thus the word metaphor meaning "carrying something across" may suggest many of the more elaborate definitions below:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a comparison between two things, based on resemblance or similarity, without using "like" or "as" 	most dictionaries and textbooks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the act of giving a thing a name that belongs to something else 	Aristotle
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the transferring of things and words from their proper signification to an improper similitude for the sake of beauty, necessity, polish, or emphasis 	Diomedes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a device for seeing something in terms of something else 	Kenneth Burke
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another 	John Searle
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a simile contracted to its smallest dimensions 	Joseph Priestly

In language, a metaphor is a rhetorical trope defined as a direct comparison between two or more seemingly unrelated subjects. In the simplest case, this takes the form: "The (*first subject*) is a (*second subject*)." More generally, a metaphor describes a first subject as being or equal to a second subject in some way. Thus, the first subject can be economically described because implicit and explicit attributes from the second subject are used to enhance the description of the first. This device is known for usage in literature, especially in poetry, where with few words, emotions and associations from one context are associated with objects and entities in a different context. Metaphor comprises a subset of analogy and closely relates to other rhetorical concepts such as comparison, simile, allegory and parable.

A metaphor, according to I .A. Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), consists of two parts: the tenor and vehicle. The tenor is the subject to which attributes are ascribed. The vehicle is the subject from which the attributes are borrowed.

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players
They have their exits and their entrances; ---- (William Shakespeare .As You
Like It, 2/7.)*

This well known quote is a good example of a metaphor. In this example, "the world" is compared to a stage, the aim being to describe the world by taking well-known attributes from the stage. In this case, the world is the tenor and the stage is the vehicle. "Men and women" are a secondary tenor and "players" is the vehicle for this secondary tenor.

The metaphor is sometimes further analyzed in terms of the ground and the tension. The ground consists of the similarities between the tenor and the vehicle. The tension of the metaphor consists of the dissimilarities between the tenor and the vehicle. In the above example, the ground begins to be elucidated from the third line: "They have their exits and their entrances." In the play, Shakespeare continues this metaphor for another twenty lines beyond what is shown here - making it a good example of an *extended metaphor*.

The corresponding terms to 'tenor' and 'vehicle' in George Lakoff's terminology are target and source. In this nomenclature, metaphors are named using the convention "target IS source", with the word "is" always capitalized; in this notation, the metaphor discussed above would state that "humankind IS theater."

Functions of Metaphors:

Metaphors Enliven Ordinary Language: People get so accustomed to using the same words and phrases over and over, and always in the same ways, that they no longer

know what they mean. Creative writers have the power to make the ordinary strange and the strange ordinary, making life interesting again.

Metaphors are Generous to Readers and Listeners and Encourage Interpretation:

When readers or listeners encounter a phrase or word that cannot be interpreted literally, they have to think--or rather, they are given the pleasure of interpretation. If you write "I am frustrated" or "The air was cold" you give your readers nothing to do--they say "so what?" On the other hand, if you say, "My ambition was Hiroshima, after the bombing," readers can think about and choose from many possible meanings.

Metaphors are More Efficient and Economical than Ordinary Language : By writing "my dorm is a prison," you suggest to the readers that you feel as though you were placed in solitary, you are fed lousy food, you are deprived of all of life's great pleasures, your room is poorly lit and cramped--and a hundred other things, that, if you tried to say them all, would probably take several pages.

Metaphors Create New Meanings: Metaphors allow one to write about feelings, thoughts, things, experiences, etc. for which there are no easy words; they are necessary. There are many gaps in language. When a child looks at the sky and sees a star but does not know the word "star," she is forced to say, "Mommy, look at the lamp in the sky!" Similarly, when computer software developers created boxes on the screen as a user interface, they needed a new language; the result was *windows*. In poems, one often tries to write about subjects, feelings, etc. so complex that there is no choice but to use metaphors.

Metaphors are a Sign of Genius: Aristotle in *Poetics* says, "[T]he greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor." It is "a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars."

Creative Ways to Use Metaphors:

Metaphors can be used:

as verbs

The news that *ignited* his face *snuffed out* her smile.

as adjectives and adverbs

Her *carnivorous* pencil carved up Susan's devotion.

as prepositional phrases

The doctor inspected the rash *with a vulture's eye*.

as appositives or modifiers

On the sidewalk was yesterday's paper, *an ink-stained sponge*.

Indian writers in English have explored this resourcefulness to a full extent. To elaborate our point further let us take some examples from Rushdie's novels:

Rushdie's metaphor usage is innovative and coherent. There are several examples of super ordinate, controlling metaphors, sustained throughout the novels, such as the children born at midnight in the novel *Midnight's Children* (who are said to be handcuffed to the history of India), the pickle jars also in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Other metaphors are part of sustained image sets, in which metaphors are mixed with the concrete and literal in semantic sets.

...my mother Aurora was *snow-white* at twenty, and what fairy tale glamour, what *icy* gravitas was added to her beauty by the soft *glaciers* cascading from her head... (*Moor's Last Sigh*, 12)

...the huge stilt-root of the mangrove trees could be seen shaking about *thirstily* in the dusk, sucking in the rain... (*Midnight's Children*, 361)

The embarrassment of her daughter's deed, the *ice* of this latest shame lent a *frozen rigidity* to her bearing. (*Shame*, 139)

While every good metaphor, according to Quintilan, has direct appeal to senses, Rushdie's are particularly sensuous, often down to earth, even brutally and nastily so. Terms denoting food, flavor, tasting, and eating, etc. occur frequently, and have an aesthetic value. In *Midnight's Children* the narrator says of himself that he has been "a swallower of life" (*Midnight's Children*.) For example:

...and those *blazing* days of their *hot pepper* love (*Moor's Last Sigh*, 113.)

...never one for a quiet life, she *sucked in* the city's hot stench, *lapped up in its burning sauces*, she *gobbled its dishes up whole* (*Moor's Last Sigh*, 128.)

Fragrances as well as stench are recurrent metaphors in Rushdie. Thus, noses and smells play a particularly important role in *Midnight's Children* which are very important aesthetically; the narrator/hero is possessed of a special nose, which even smell emotions.

...and smelled the scent of danger blaring like trumpets in my nose (*Midnight's Children*.)

In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie has selected quite a few significant myths from the *Ramayana* and used them under the garb of subtle metaphors to crystallize his ideas into tangible images. The myth of Ravana is the first such metaphor. Secondly, the high ideals engendered by Rama and Sita are beautifully used metaphorically to tackle the grave question posed by the Sabarmati case. The affair between Commander Sabarmati and Homi Catrack is explained through the metaphorical presentation of the love of "Rama and Sita" (259) and the entire Sabarmati case

(Nanavati Case) gives a glimpse of the mixture of myth and cheap tricks of Bombay cinema: "In the Sabarmati case, the noble sentiments of the Ramayana combine with the cheap melodrama of the Bombay talkie..." (262). The legal case of Commander Sabarmati poses great questions in the Rashtrapati Bhawan where his advocate has appealed for pardon. Mythical past and democratic system contend with each other:

...is India to give her approval to the career... is India to give her approval to the rule of law, or to the ancient principle of the overriding primacy of heroes? If Rama himself were alive, would we send him to prison for slaying the abductor of Sita? (264)

The metaphor is presented with exactitude to highlight the novelist's ethical and moral viewpoint.

Similarly, the metaphor of Shiva, operating as an extended metaphor in the novel, is used for Shiva-the-character who is modeled on "Shiva, the god of destruction, who is also most potent of deities, Shiva greatest of dancers, who rides on a bull, whom no force can resist..." (221). Apart from his destructive function, which has already been mentioned he stands for procreative function also:

Shiva the destroyer of *Midnight's Children*, had also fulfilled the other role lurking in his name, the function of Shiva-lingam, Shiva-the-procreator, so that at this very moment in the boudoirs and hovels of the nation, new generation of children begotten by *Midnight's* darkest child, was being raised towards future (444-41).

The metaphorical reference to the *Mahabharata* war explains the topsy-turvy conditions of social and political life in India in the early years after Independence. Mary's belief in the rumor of Mahabharata war happening in Kurukshetra and the place where an old Sikh women witnessed "the chariots of Arjuna and Karma" and truly wheel marks in the mud" (245) amply prove that post-Independence turmoil of India was reinforced by her mythical past, and the shadows of great war over recent Indian probably indicate future failure of Indian political and social set-up leading to all-pervading chaos like the aftermath of the Mahabharata war.

The most important myth form the *Mahabarata* occurring in the form of metaphor is that of Brahma, which supports the very structure of *Midnight's Children*; Saleem's imaginary friends assembling and forming a conference in his mind is metaphorically described as the "dreamweb" of Brahma. Saleem asks:

Do Hindus not accept – Padma - that the world is a kind of dream; that Brahma dreamed, is dreaming the universe; that we only see dimly through that dream-

web, which is Maya... If I say that certain things took place which you, lost in Brahma's dream, find hard to believe, then which of us is right? (211)

The kind of imagery, metaphor and symbolism used by the decolonized writers gives English language a distinct tang. 'Commotion preceded her like a band of langurs' (*Fire on the Mountain*, 107), ...putting her into a flutter of shrill thanks that carried all the way up to the gate like the cackle of an agitated parrot' (*Fire on the Mountain*.) The symbols that are employed to express the aesthetics of Indian cultural enrich the English language and impart to it a lot of mystery and supernaturalism. For example, '... and one day she beckoned me near and placed in my hand a small stone lingam', a symbol of fertility (*Nectar in a Sieve*, 18.)

In *The Dark Room* Narayan takes us to the small office of the Insurance Company situated in a South Indian middle class town; with Markandaya we are shown the very poor farmers in a South Indian village and in Desai we meet the graceful Nanda Kaul in Kasauli. The atmosphere evoked takes us right into the nature of the place. In *Fire on the Mountain* we see the heat. 'The sunlight thickened No longer languor, it turned to glue. Flies, too lazy for flight, were caught in its midway web and buzzed languorously. Voluptuously, slowly unsticking their feet and crawling across the ceilings, the window panes, the varnished furniture. Inside, the flies. Outside, the cicadas. Everything hummed, shrilled, buzzed and fielded till the strange rasping music seemed to material out of the air itself, or the heat.' (*Fire on the Mountain*, 22)

All these examples highlight variability in language activity in the sense that language is used not only as a communicative strategy but also as a means of aesthetic expression.

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