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## **Structural Analysis of Text for a Deeper Understanding of Semantic Depth**

**Sudha Mishra**

Amity University, Gwalior

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### **Abstract**

As the essential prerequisite in understanding literature, the foremost step is to be acquainted with the language used as the means of literary expression. Then again, while studying or scrutinizing language, one should consider literature as a reference for the way language is used. It is for the reason that both complement each other. Saussure said that language is "a system of pure values which are determined by nothing except the momentary arrangements of its terms." From the point of view of structuralism, all texts, all meaningful events and all signifying practices can be analyzed for their underlying structures. Such an analysis would reveal the patterns that characterize the system that makes such texts and practices possible. This paper attempts to establish that a structural analysis of a text can help in unfolding the hidden layers of semantic depth. Two poems by A. K. Ramanujan, a Short Story of Khushwant Singh and a novel by Arundhati Roy have been taken as a text reference for the analysis.

### **1. Introduction**

In order to have a deeper understanding of a literary text, and to unfold the implicit meaning which is not visible on the surface reading, one has to undergo a scrutiny of the various structural elements of the text. The first stage of such an analysis is graphology. According to Leech (1969, p.39) "It refers to the whole writing system: punctuation and paragraphing as well as spacing"<sup>i</sup>. It deals with the methodical arrangement, structure and punctuation in the sentence, and includes, among other features, foregrounding, ellipses, hyphens, contracted forms, special structures, periods and pauses like the full stop, the colon, the comma, the semicolon, the question mark and the dash, special effects by the use of capitalization, lower case letters, small print, spacing variations, italicized letters etc.

The second stage of analysis is Phonology that is the study of sound systems and the difference of meanings in a language represented through sound system. Peter Roach (2000) described phonology as the way "phonemes function in language and the relationship among the different phonemes"<sup>iii</sup>. Phonology explains the patterns in which speech sounds are ordered in English into a scheme. Phonology basically deals with the sound patterns, the rhyming scheme and

pronunciation of words in the sentence. Phonological devices are: rhyme elements, alliteration, consonance and assonance.

The next stage of the analysis is Morphology. According to Mark and Kirsten (2005, p.1) "Morphology refers to the mental system involved in word formation or to the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed". Morphological stage studies the production of new words by adding prefixes and suffixes to the root words.

Lexico -Syntax, the next stage, is the specialized use of vocabulary in a language and sentence construction i.e. sequencing of words to make phrases and sentences. It includes unusual or inverted word order, omission of words and repetition.

## 1. Study of the Selected text

### **Text1 – "No Man Is an Island" and "A Leaky Tap after a Sister's Wedding" Poems by A. K. Ramanujan**

Ramanujan's poetry is remarkable in its structural aspects. He is a master of creating marvelous pictures by dint of his superb technique. The way he deploys imagery, symbols and other rhetorical devices in his creations is par-excellence and strikes the most distinctive note in Indian English Poetry. He is remarkably original in his art; creating his own style and structure and imparting an all new hue to his verse.

A poem is a symbolic account written in such a language and form that the surface meaning is just a small portion of the whole or oblique meaning. It generally has condensed language yet deeper layers of meaning. Though the mode of expression is the concrete language, it spring out from inexplicable sources concealed beneath layers of the rational mind. Ramanujan's poems entail several layers of meanings; each word he uses is chosen with great care, to further the intended meaning in minimum possible lexical use. Each word has something to reveal beyond the literal surface meaning.

The poem '*No Man Is an Island*' can be analyzed, for example, for the layers of meanings entailed in each word. In this poem, Ramanujan uses the famous quote by John Donne that occurs in his "Meditation XVII", wherein Donne emphasizes a person's connections and dependence on other people and his/her environs, and that man is innately not designed to be alone. But Ramanujan, on the contrary, tries to establish just the opposite of this, and says that man, in modern context, is instinctively self sufficient and detached from the world. Man, according to him is a single entity that does not need to associate with the world for his survival. Though a man may, at times, get into temporary association with other people, who are as independent and alienated as he is, yet this momentary connection does not deny his self sufficiency.

The transference of meaning is entailed even in the title of the poem, 'No Man Is an Island'. The title apparently seems to affirm Donne's quote, but a closer look reveals that he is actually disapproving it. The capitalization of the verb 'Is' gives it an emphasis, and applies a sense of negation to the title. The title thus says 'No! Man is an island'. Though there is no comma or exclamation mark used, may be because of Ramanujan's general propensity to omit punctuation marks, yet the deviant punctuation employed here serves the purpose of emphasis. The poem is full of metonymy; most of the functional words used are symbolic of man's detachment and indifference.

**The entire island:  
an alligator  
sleeping in a mask of stone.  
A grin of land  
even on good days; on bad,  
the ocean foams in that mouth.<sup>iii</sup>**

The word 'island' signified man who exists in his singularity and self sufficiency; alienated and unaffected by the rest of the world. 'Alligator' again is a symbol of self sufficiency. 'A mask of stone' further adds to the meaning of insensitivity and coldness. 'Grin of land', on the one hand, stands for the curved periphery of the island symbol, and on the other hand it symbolized the self contented attitude of man, who is happy in his solitude. On bad days the ocean (the surroundings and the other men) foams in the mouth. 'Foam' relates to turbulence and anger through which the world tries to affect the man.

**Certain small sea-birds are said  
to pick its teeth  
for yellow crabs and jelly-fish.**

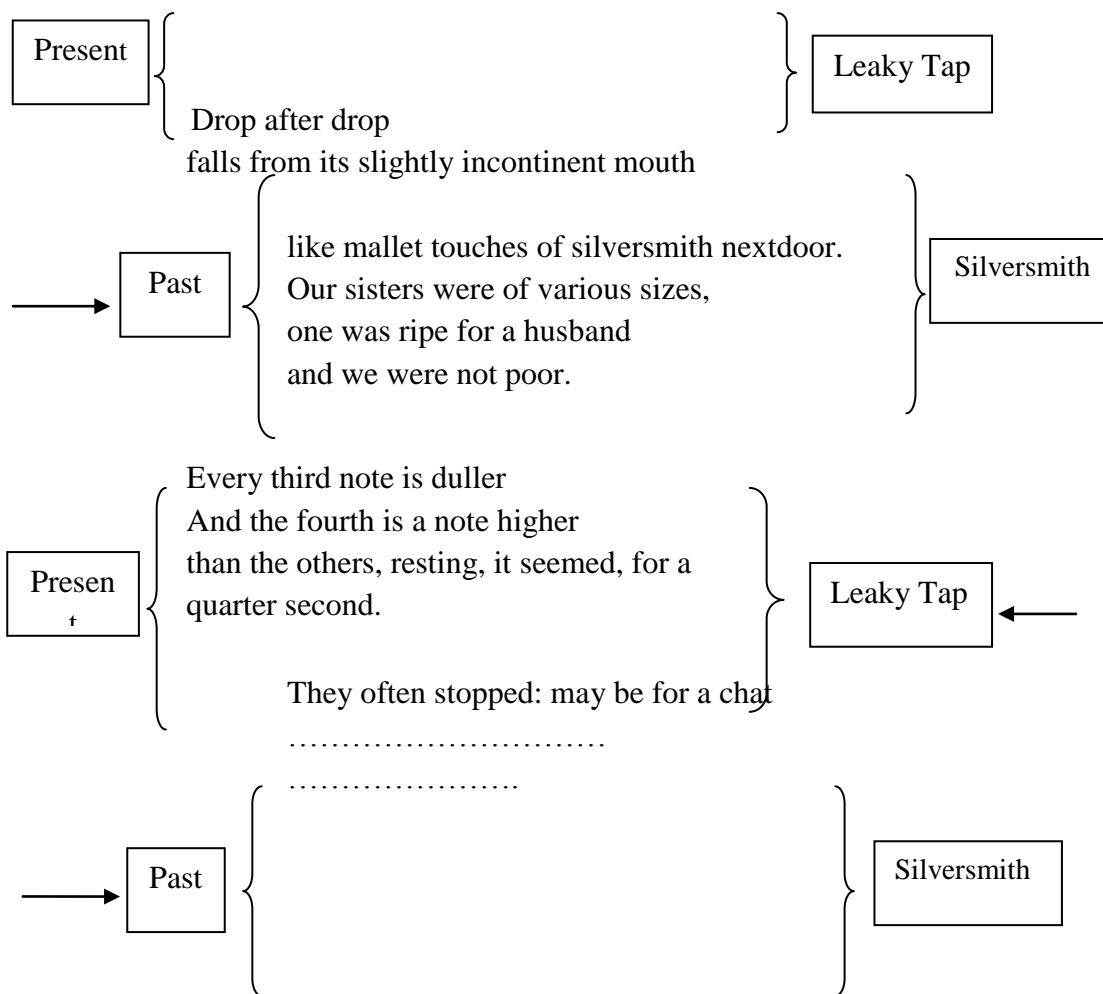
The use of 'sea-birds' is again metonymic, as it connotes autonomy and independence. Other people, who are as autonomous and independent as the speaker, may 'pick its teeth', or help him cleanse himself of the 'yellow crabs and jelly-fish', which are the worldly reminiscences on man. The concluding lines are further reinforcement of the title – self sufficiency and autonomy of man.

**But this man,  
I know, buys dental floss.**

'Dental floss' is a metaphor for cleansing or purification. Though men join hands momentarily for carrying out a task, but this should not question their self-sufficiency. 'Dental floss' here signifies that man is well equipped to rinse himself of all impressions of his environs – the turbulence, stress, agony, or even the happy experiences.

The poem '*A Leaky Tap After a Sister's Wedding*' presents an apt example of Ramanujan's structural adroitness. The poem carries two parallel images simultaneously: one of the leaky tap and the second of the silversmith next door working for poet's sister's wedding. The image of the tap is created in present tense whereas that of the silversmith is in past tense as the wedding ceremony is already over and the poet is imagining the sound of the silversmith's mallet next door. The stanzas beautifully present an alternating contrast of two images and two tenses at the same time with apt use of spacing. The lines for the 'TAP' and its sound in 'PRESENT TENSE' are left aligned whereas the lines for the SILVERSMITH' and the sound of his mallet in 'PAST

TENSE' are indented one space. The poet is nostalgic and his mind is obsessed with the preparations of the marriage that were going on in the house for a long time.



Every action that he brings in is described with photographic description, with the manner in which the action is done, the place of occurrence, the frequency of it, the time or duration for which it happens as well as the purpose of doing. He attaches a numbers of predictions regarding the purpose of the action and lists all the options of adverbials of reason in a series, all coordinated with the conjunction 'or':

- **They often stopped maybe [for a chat / with a buyer,] / or [a dip into patchwork pouches for betelnut / and tobacco,] / or likelier still [to lay / little silver nest-egg under the mat]**

The above lines carry adverb phrases of purpose – ‘for a chat’, ‘a dip into patchwork pouches for betelnut’, ‘to lay little silver nest-eggs under the mat’ have been coordinated using the conjunction ‘or’. The long running coordination of the three phrases imparts the poem the pace in reading, and more importantly, gives it a conversational tone.

Towards the end a minor sentence is used to foreground his final wake-up from the hallucination:

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- **But no.**

That was no silversmith nextdoor  
working for my sister's wedding.

Here Ramanujan frames a sentence with a conjunct 'But' and the adverb 'no' which, as per the traditional grammar, is absurd. But he uses it in order to put a peremptory negation to all guesses in the previous lines. It highlights the effect of nostalgia on the poet's mind that is obsessed with the memories of her sister's wedding.

Ramanujan uses onomatopoeia as a phonological device to bring home his desired effects. He mimics the woodpecker's sound, thus making the description more expressive and interesting.

- It is a single summer woodpecker  
peck-peck-Peck-pecking away

Moreover, the poet creates beautiful audio-visual effect by establishing a correlation between the pitch of the mallet sound, the water drops and the pecking of the woodpecker. Every third sound of the mallet is duller and the fourth is higher than the others. It gives a sound pattern like high-high-dull-high and to create a similar image the poet uses small-small-capital-small pattern in the woodpecker's sound.

## **Text 2 – “The Voice of God” Short story by Khushwant Singh**

The most remarkable feature in the stories of Khushwant Singh is the expression of very subtle irony. It is sometimes expressed by a sentence expressing different thing than what is said. It also arises from a discrepancy between the expression and realization. Even sometimes the character and situation as seen are different from what they mean. Khushwant Singh's work is representative of both verbal and situational irony.

In his story “The Voice of God” Ganda Singh, a chief of dacoits and thugs, wins an election with his power and his relations with Mr. Forsythe, an English deputy commissioner, defeating Baba Ram Singh, one of his rivals in the election, a devoted worker among poor peasants who called himself a kisan. The last comment in the story shows deep irony and humour, **“The people had spoken. The voice of the people is the Voice of the God”<sup>iii</sup>**. Here the disbelief and hypocrisy of the people is shown by the ironical comment.

Khushwant Singh displays his skill at 'Indianisation' and 'hybridization' at its best when he, at the lexical level, employs some words from Hindi and Urdu dialects. At the foremost glimpse, the most appealing characteristic of his language is the abundant intersperse of English with Hindi, Panjabi and Urdu words throughout his prose-work, and this multihued sprinkling offers an oriental flavor to his work. Some examples of such words are; 'kisan', 'zenana', 'coolie', 'janta', 'kala nag', 'phannyar', 'krait', 'sahib', 'zaildar', 'toba-toba', 'lambardar', 'charpoy', 'gharreeb purrwar', 'memsahib' and many more.

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He employs this technique perhaps for two precise reasons: firstly, to locate his fiction characters in various cities of India and Pakistan; and secondly, to subvert the English language into a language best suited to express the sensibility of Indian readers. The author uses English to transcribe the experiences of a non-English speaking peasant community.

A phonetic analysis of the text shows Khushwant Singh's adroit use of repetition in order to impart a verse-like musical feel to the text, and to render vivacity to the conversation

- If you eat, I will eat. If you don't, I will not either.
- They cannot escape from God. No one can escape from God.
- What had to happen has happened.

### **Text 3 – “God of Small Things” Novel by Arundhati Roy**

God of Small Things is a novel, though written entirely in English language, moves around characters who do not natively speak the language, and thus Arundhati Roy takes up numerous techniques like wide-ranging use of sentence fragments, and playful construction of words, in order to help the reader view the things from the perspective of characters that are not altogether at ease in the dominion of English. This outstanding work by Arundhati Roy stands as a remarkable example of the postcolonial exploration and alteration of the English language to suit the need of the plot.

High frequency of adjectives is one of the most perceptible characteristics that mark the distinctiveness of *The God of Small Things*. Through the employment of very dense adjectives Roy's language acquires verdant, sensual, vibrant and elaborative flavour. Adjectives are so plentiful in the novel that almost every noun in a paragraph is modified by at least one adjective.

- “With cool stone floors and dim walls and billowing ship-shaped shadows, plump, translucent lizards lived behind old pictures, and waxy, crumbling ancestors with tough toe-nails and breath that smelled of yellow maps gossiped in sibilant, paperly whispers.”<sup>iii</sup>

Figurative use of Adjectives is visible very repeatedly in the novel. Here are some examples with “like” form metaphors: Generally the structure for such adjective forms used by Roy is:

/Adj/ /Adj/ /noun/ + /verb phrase/ + /Adj/ /Adj/ /noun/ + /prep/ + /adj/ /noun/

- It was a circular, sloping patch of ground, with a steep gravel driveway – looping around it. (p. 16)

*The God of Small Things* bears a unique sensual appeal because of the very dense application of affective adjectives in depiction of the milieu as well as in the portrayal of characters. The character depiction by Roy is so vivid that they come alive to the readers naturally and the detailing of the surroundings so precise that the reader feels the colours, temperature, air, the flora and fauna, so on and so forth.

- “May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The River shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen.

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Jackfruit burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun.” (p.1)

A Structural analysis of Arundhati Roy’s sole piece of fiction *The God of Small Things* reveals her peculiar sentential features when she deliberately breaches the established linguistic rules to create the desired effect in her text.

The novel is replete with minor sentences. Roy conspicuously uses fragments in the form of small sentences that catches the reader’s eye.

- He began to look wiser than he really was. Like a fisherman in a city. With sea-secrets in him. (p.13)

- Gently. *Tap, tap*. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered. (p.8)

Subordinate clauses are semantically allied to the main clause, but Roy separates them with a period and tries to present these dependent clauses as individual sentences.

- And more recently, the inevitable rumor that he had become a Naxalite. That he had been to prison. (p.37)

As per the traditional grammar there must be a noun reference before the use of a pronoun. But here we get numerous examples of reordered usage by using a pronoun before its subject reference. Roy frequently uses this innovation where instead of using the noun reference before a pronoun, she prefers to provide the noun reference later, after the sentence has ended:

- It was a little cold. A little wet. A little quiet. The Air. (p.338)

- They thought about it often. The house on the other side of the river. (p.55)

Arundhati Roy displays her own kind of “poetic effect” through her figurative use of language. Her language is rich in a peculiar kind of sound effect that derives from her child play with language- the use of alliteration and use of some phrases repetitively. There are very interesting instances of the repetition of a certain kinds of sentence structures that sound very fascinating when spoken.

- Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. (p. 1)

- Shutup or Getout. Getout or Shutup. The Audience was a Big Man. Estha was a Little Man, with the tickets. (p. 48)

- To read her like a check. To check her like a banknote. (p. 83)

Sometimes these repetitions take a poetic shape too:

- “One for you and one for you,” Chacko said with his roses.

“And Thank you?” Margaret Kochamma said to Sophie Mol.

“And Thank you?” Sophie Mol said to Chacko, mimicking her mother’s question mark.

(p. 71)

One of the most striking aspects of linguistic ingenuity in Arundhati Roy’s writing is her Neology. She on the whole ignores the usual grammar and freely coins her own words with an “anything goes” attitude. Roy’s word-creation follows a few key formulas like:

- A rushing, rolling, fishswimming sense. (p. 15)

- Past the Audience that had to move its legs again. Thiswayandthat. (p. 51)

- “Is she, now?” the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man said. (p. 52)

Hyphenated mixing of words and morphemes is also quite frequently seen. The most common of these are “-shaped” and “-coloured” phrases:

- A red, tender-mango-shaped secret in a vat (p. 96)

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- The gray, elephant-shaped Hole in the Universe (p. 112)

### 3. Conclusion

A literary text is like an iceberg. From the surface, only one eighth of this iceberg is visible. The mechanism of the socio-psychological as well as anthropological factors that works behind the creation of the text is the actual decisive element of the connotative meaning, which forms the hidden seven eighths of this iceberg. A close scrutiny of the selected texts reveals that these text have several layers of meaning hidden below the surface, beyond the first hand denotations. A structural analysis into the graphological, phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactical elements of the text can help the readers reach the implied connotations and thus draw the real pleasure of reading the text.

### 4. References

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