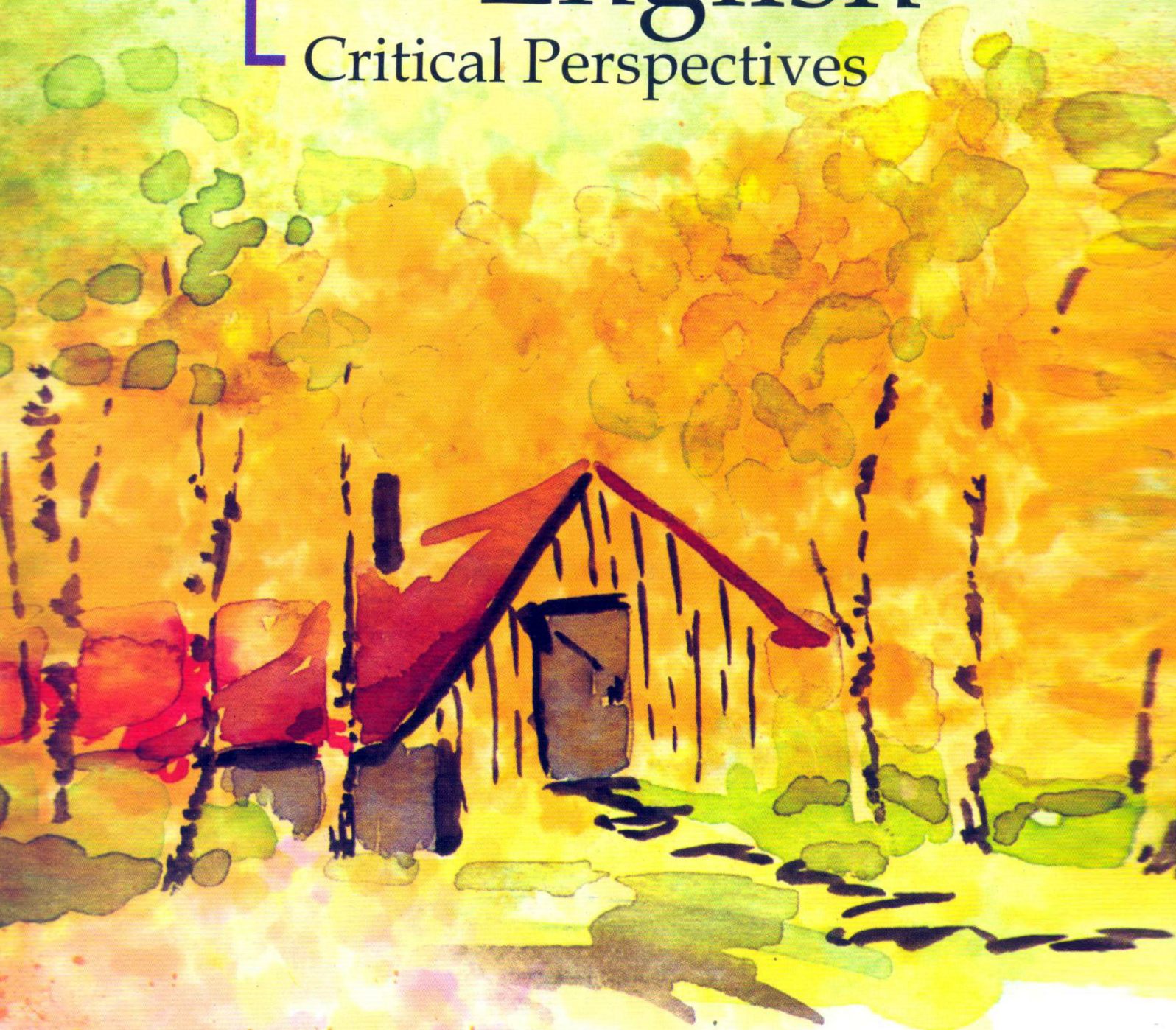


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Dr. Vishwanath Bite • Dr. Arvind M. Nawale

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Baby Bush Go Home : A Dialogue on Bush's Monologic Principles

ZEENATH MOHAMED KUNHI

Language is dynamic. Verbal interchange is the fundamental reality of any language. In the history of human species, language is born not within the isolated individual, but in interaction between two human beings. While many highly influential theories of language have obscured this truth, it was the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin who posited that the forms and meanings of language are constantly shaped by history, culture and the interaction between various discourses. Bakhtin's concept of 'polyphony,' or multi-voicedness points to the idea that culture and its narratives, no matter how monolithic they appear, are comprised of a multiplicity of competing voices. Bakhtin's theories, which celebrate the parodic and fragmentary, have provided new ways of reading both canonical and marginalized literature. His concept of 'dialogism,' holds that culture is inherently responsive and interactive. This means that an utterance always exists in response to things that have been said before and in anticipation of things that will be said in response. Nothing is communicated in a vacuum. His dialogic model conforms to the idea that no text exists in isolation. Thus, in conveying meaning, dialogue takes place not only between various consciousnesses but also between the components of language.

Bakhtin also emphasized certain uses of language that maximized the dialogic nature of words. This kind of creative use of language by

certain authors enables multiplicity of voices and meanings in their works. One work which has been acclaimed for its polyphonic nature is Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Her non-fiction has been rarely valued for its literariness and has been usually considered single-voiced. It is true that her essays appear to be monologic outwardly, but

Monologism denies that there exists outside of it another consciousness, with the same rights, and capable of responding on an equal footing; another and equal *I (though)* The monologue is accomplished and deaf to the other's response; it does not await it and does not grant it any *decisive force*" (Bakhtin 1984, 318).

Roy on the other hand is seen to acknowledge the entry of diverse consciousnesses.

In her non-fiction we find inner tensions, collaborations, negotiations which are comparable to the process of dialogue. It is not just a synonym for verbal interaction in general. As Bakhtin used the term, dialogue cannot be equated with argument, nor is it equivalent to compositionally expressed dialogue, that is, the sequential representation of transcribed voices in a novel or a play.

In fact her essays are multi-voiced in the sense that she explores alternative perspectives by using multiple genres written from different points of view to augment her point. Genres include a dialogue, a report, satire, or even a lampoon—in addition to the traditional essay. The language of any text should be inherently dialogic, that is, it should be characterized by the constant play of different discourses, without necessarily an assumption of authorial control by any of them. Bakhtin remarks :

‘The novel permits the incorporation of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.) and extra artistic everyday, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and other). In principle, any genre could be included in the construction of the novel. (Bakhtin 1981, 320-21)

The above quote is equally applicable to some of her works of non-fiction as well. She supplements her views with the help of such “voices”, creating an organic whole. By combining an array of voices

with the rigour of scholarship she highlights her vision. I have selected her essay *Baby Bush Go Home* for substantiating my claim. In the essay we perceive the centre of a multiplicity of voices that Roy manages to achieve through stylistic devices. Arundhati Roy highlights the most powerful man in the world by belittling him. The author comprehends that the stature of the American President's is huge, blown out of proportion. She amplifies this persona (utilizing the adverb 'imperiously') and simultaneously condenses this larger than life picture in the title: "Baby Bush, go home." The alliteration in the phrase 'Baby Bush' draws attentions at once, and underlines the same. Further, the term 'Baby Bush' is indeed deceptive at first sight, as one looks at it. The prefixing of 'Baby' to the name 'Bush' baffles one, as 'Baby' comes across as a term of endearance. Subsequently, we stumble upon the phrase 'go home' following it. Therefore the person in question, first of all, does not belong. Secondly, he is not accorded the respect and honour meant for a guest, as he is ordered to 'go home'.

In his essay, "Discourse in the Novel", Bakhtin, states that "intra-language dialogue (dramatic, rhetorical, cognitive or merely casual) has hardly been studied linguistically or stylistically up to the present." (Bakhtin 1981, 273) The above essay combines the dramatic, rhetorical, casual, cognitive and figurative language in dialogue.

The title, in particular is in an imperative form, commanding the President just as a toddler is commanded to do what an adult demands without uttering a rational reason. And this voice while demeaning The Bush in question also provides a mirror image to his policy, making it a double-voiced discourse. It reflects his method of execution without stating any logical reason, whether it pertains to the gratuitous occupation of Iraq or the unwarranted intrusion into Afghanistan. The centre-point of the array of voices here first magnifies the persona, inverts his position and thus voices his own strategies. Therefore the essay also brings into discourse, the subversive style. He may pose to be the most powerful person in the world; and in spite of this, his utter, vulnerability is underlined in contradictory voices. He is portrayed as powerless in the face of a handful of parliamentarians, and the Muslim population of New Delhi that prove to be a security nightmare for him. The place that is finally decided upon for the President to address the nonchalant gathering is the Purana Qila, the Old Fort. Roy quips:

Ironic, isn't it, that the only safe public space for a

man who has recently been so enthusiastic about India's modernity should be a crumbling medieval fort? (Roy 2009,103)

Arundhati Roy very adeptly makes an affirmation of the irony of the turn of events in a rhetorical question that in itself poses a point of multiplicity, for the answer is implied in the question itself. The person who had been the enthusiastic mouthpiece of India's modernity is placed on an inconspicuous Old Fort. Bush is placed inadvertently on an Old Fort what to him is anti-modern, but to the Indians a pervading symbol of antiquity and inherent tradition. Recent archaeological evidence proves that the legendary city of Indraprastha in the great epic of Mahabharata, flourished earlier here.

The American President voices modernity, sidelining antiquity; because ironically America has no history to boast of since it does not possess a real past. Needless to say, a country that has no antiquity goes for Modernity not as preference, but because it has no other alternative. We wonder whether Roy refers to the same lack of tradition when she asserts in her essay "The End of Imagination": These are people whose histories are spongy with the blood of others."(Roy 2002, 24) Roy combines the image into a paradox as the epitome of Modernity is juxtaposed here against the Old Fort. Bush has to stand on the concrete example of the distant past in spite of all his principles. The President can only stand here, he cannot adopt a stand.

Bakhtin underlines the inadequacy of traditional stylistics that locked every stylistic phenomenon into the monologic context of "self-sufficient and hermetic utterance, imprisoning it, as it were in the dungeon of a single context; it is not able to exchange messages with the other utterances; it is not able to realize its own stylistic implications in relationship with them; it is obliged to exhaust itself in its own single hermetic context."(Bakhtin 1981, 274) Bakhtin proposes the dialogized style that entails the polemical, the parodic and the ironic, that he claims are bracketed in to the rhetorical style and not into the poetic style. The beauty of the style is determined in its interaction with other styles and not by combining them into monologic brackets. The prescribed essay engages all these three styles- the polemical, the parodic, the ironic that Bakhtin refers to as "externally most marked manifestations" in the dialogized mode.

Roy utilizes irony in the next paragraph to point to the incongruity of the situation. The greatest irony is that The President

will be delivering his inscrutable reason in the Old Fort that houses the Delhi Zoo. In other words, his Reason will be perceived by creatures of Instinct. Furthermore, the essayist asserts that the place has more caged animals, the people who go under the label of 'eminent persons'. They too will only 'hear' the address and not listen to it, simply because they don't need to. They are caged in the bars of complacency far removed from the suffering multitudes.

In the earlier paragraph, Roy echoed the diversity of positions by superimposing a symbol of modernity against a concrete emblem of tradition. Next, she echoes how Bush visits Gandhi's memorial to pay homage to him. Here, again she poses a perfect dialectical pair violence/non-violence as Bush is the thunderous insignia of neo-imperialism, and he pays tribute to a person who preached non-violence throughout his life. Just as Bakhtin states in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*: "One could put it this way: the artistic will of polyphony is a will to combine many wills, a will to the event." (Bakhtin 1984, 22). Like wise, Roy employs figurative means such as paradoxes and irony to bring across her point effectively. By highlighting contradictory angles she thus emphasizes her point:

"But when George Bush places flowers on that famous slab of highly polished stone, millions of Indians will wince. It will be as though he has poured a pint of blood on the memory of Gandhi." (Roy 2009,104)

At the end of the essay it emerges that the duality of voices in also echoed in the nature of the tone of the essay. At the beginning, the tenor is playful: Baby bush go home. At the end, it is outright serious:

"It is not in our power stop Bush's visit. It is in our power to protest it, and we will. ...George W Bush, incumbent president of the United States of America, world nightmare incarnate, is just not welcome." (Roy 2009,104)

The hybrid utterance, as postulated by Bakhtin, is a passage or section that employs a single speaker but entails one or more kinds of speech. The coincidence of the two different speeches brings with it a contradiction and conflict in the belief system as a whole, but is intended to prove a certain point. Likewise, Roy utilizes the playful tone and the serious one, and as in the hybrid utterance this multi-voicedness is used to foreground a single voice that unites all considerations.

♦ Bakhtin exemplifies this with regard to the English comic novel, principally the works of Charles Dickens. Bakhtin substantiates his theory with examples from the same. He illustrates how Dickens parodies both the 'common tongue' and the language of Parliament or high-class banquets, and utilizes 'concealed languages' in order to evoke humour; likewise Roy uses duality of tones- the solemn and the lighthearted to enforce a dialogic sense of truth. The author acquires a special position necessary for visualizing and conveying that sense of truth. In one passage, Dickens according to Bakhtin turns from the authorial narrative casual voice into a formalized, grand epic tone as he relates the vocation of a commonplace bureaucrat; his objective is to parody the narcissism and haughtiness of the bureaucrat's stature.

Concealed speech is used by Roy too, in the sense that demarcations are not made, as the speaker shifts from one tone to the other. This is the hallmark of a hybrid utterance. In this instance, the clash is between the factual narrative and the 'caricaturish' epic tone. The role of the hybrid utterance is to challenge the authoritarian voice of the author. Like wise, Roy's stylistic inclination in this regard echoes her own stance in this essay to challenge the dogmatic standpoint of the Big Brother, America.

It is her ability to evoke multiple sensibilities by way of her dialogic style is what makes her a successful writer. Roy is a spokesperson for the masses. Therefore she herself stands for multiple views and voices. This is one possible reason that multiplicity finds it way to her non-fiction as well.

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