

GIFT IN GREEN BY SARAH JOSEPH: A CREOLIZED CREATIVE WRITING

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Abstract

Culture is a generic term that entails an organic and dynamic system of interactions, assimilations and shared notions. It constantly undergoes creolizing, especially in a technologically advanced age. Inevitably, being a reflection of the cultural milieu of the times, creative writing reflects this creolizing of culture in terms of themes, language and mode of narration. This is especially evident in translated works as translation in itself is an act of creolizing. This paper attempts to subject Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* (translated by Valson Thampu) to a study of the cultural and linguistic creolization evident in the novel. Primarily read as an eco-feminist text, the novel uses a theme, narrative technique, language and cultural practices that are highly indigenous in nature. It is an instance of an unconscious and at times conscious effort to prioritize the indigenous culture over the Western. The novel can be described as a creolizing interaction of two opposing cultures, making it an epitome of cultural creolization.

Keywords : *Dalit Spirituality, Creolization, Cultural Hybridisation*

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Culture is a complex network of social interactions that is dynamic and organic in nature with its assimilations, appropriations and associations, making creolization or hybridization one of the crucial characteristics of the dynamics of culture. What then is hybridization?

According to Bakhtin

It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor.

The crucial words are social language, a single utterance, an encounter, the arena, and linguistic consciousnesses. In the context of Creative Writing these can respectively be translated as the language of the society or culture, the creolized language, the act of writing, the literary space or the work and the language and cultural consciousness of the two divergent cultures that produces a creolized consciousness. Creolized creative writing, therefore, is a hybrid product of the encounter of two cultural consciousness or cultures within the literary space of the work. Homi Bhabha's definition of hybridity as a counter narrative and a critique of the canon also underscore this 'encounter', though clearly with political connotations, that does not fall under the scope of this analysis.

Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* is one of the many examples of Creolized Creative Writing in Indian English. But being a simultaneous translation of the original Aathi in Malayalam, the book is also an example of a translated work and the very act of translation entails creolizing as it is an act where 'one has to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own' (Rao, ix). Being a reflection of the cultural milieu of the times, the novel reflects this creolizing of culture in terms of themes and language.

Themes

The central theme of the novel is ecology and lends itself to an eco-feminist reading. But it subsumes other themes like the conflict between tradition and modernity, Dalit spirituality, resistance movements, cultural confrontations etc. All these themes are seen to be reflecting a creolization of cultures. Aathi is being exposed to this creolizing process in all its fervor and what evolves is a new Aathi with a new culture. The realities of Aathi are not lost forever, but are transformed. The water that was all around was reduced to a tap; the wind that blew across the land got entrapped in the switch of the fan. The spirituality of Aathi is not done away with, but Thampuran is marginalized and replaced with a more presentable deity

and temple. Agriculture gave way to labour as the source of livelihood. Land and water were transformed to saleable properties by clearing the mangrove and converting the water bodies to land. The novel is an instance, like Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, of the indigenous culture resisting and eventually yielding itself to the creolizing effect of a dominant culture. Thus on the thematic level, the novel is a hybrid, not because the themes are so, but because all the themes dealt with seem to be a resistance to cultural hybridization. The dominant theme of the novel is hybridization, which may be reflected in the following themes.

(i) Modernity Versus Tradition

The novel begins with the Thampuran Myth that forms part of the tradition of Aathi, an element that keeps the people as a unified entity. This forms the prologue to the novel. The very first chapter introduces a conflict, with the intrusion of modernity and the modern administrative system into the well-formed tradition of Aathi. The epicenter of the Myth, the Shrine of Thampuran, is declared to be a plot without a title deed. Modernity has put the knives on what held the people of Aathi together, their culture and tradition, marking the beginning of the end of Aathi. What follows till the end of the novel is a constant conflict between the tradition of Aathi and the value systems of modernity. *Gift in Green*, thus becomes the arena of the encounter between the social languages of Aathi and modernity, leading ultimately to the single utterance of a transformed Aathi with the protagonist Dinakaran becoming the new Thampuran Myth of Aathi. The new Aathi is no longer the traditional one, neither is it fully a modern one. The tradition of the land undergoes a thorough revamping and creolizing.

(ii) Conflict of Spiritualities

The spirituality of Aathi was essentially Dalit spirituality with the fundamental notion of 'Man created God'. The practice of this spirituality was characterized by minimal rituals and maximal devotion; well-balanced gender roles in religion and an egalitarian spirit, with the Thampuran being the refuge of land, water and life. This holistic and naturalist spirituality is undermined by the advent of the new spirituality, practiced and promoted by Kumaran. The new spirituality is all contempt for the old, with a materialist perspective anxious of the 'presentability' of the Thampuran and replaces him with a better-looking deity and a renovated temple with more income and devotees pouring in. the commercialization of religion and spirituality is the new mantra. Ultimately, neither remains, a new spirituality emerges in Aathi.

(iii) Conflict between Cultural Practices

Aathi is rich with its own socio-cultural practices including the story telling sessions, the celebrations in connection with the Shrine of Thampuran, Pathamudayam, Kaappu Kalkku, the agricultural events like the harvest etc. With the

shrine being replaced and Thampuran being reduced to a Dalit god in his own land, the practices too were marginalized. The agrarian economy was replaced by a labour based economy wherein land became a commercial property rather than the source of living. Hence the agrarian cultural practices too faced neglect from the new generation. The story telling sessions continue to the end of the novel with the intensity and agony increasing with every session, till the last session by Dinakaran, with which a new era is set to dawn on Aathi, alienated from the old and never fully reaching the new.

(iv) The Notion of Development

Development is a debated theme in Aathi. The notion of development of Aathi is a traditional one, characterized more by an inclusive growth with the welfare of the maximum number, with no negative influence on the nature that sustains life and livelihood of the people. It strikes a fine balance between man and nature, what in the modern parlance can be called sustainable development. The intrusion of modernity with its own notion of development founded on material prospects of a few influential corporate, symbolized in the novel by Kumaran, unsettles this well balanced system and unscrupulously exploits the bounty of Aathi. This modern notion of development is unmindful of the dues that it owes in return and hence the decline of the land is inevitably ensured. The 'developed' Aathi is no longer the green gift of nature; it is the dumping ground and the filthy backyard of a metropolitan city.

(v) Resistance Movements

In the context of creolizing culture, the resistance movements in Gift in Green assume special significance. The resistance is the hybridizing process involved, as a passive acceptance does not bring in hybridization. Creolizing happens when there is an active engagement with the new, by way of resistance. This venue of encounter facilitates an exchange of cultures, its confrontations, which can be seen as the birth pangs of a new synthesized culture. Aathi evolves into a new creolized culture through these resistances, like any similar cultures across the globe. The debate as to the moral, spiritual, political and ethical aspects of this creolizing an issue to be deliberated in detail, but does not directly fit into the scope of the current study.

LANGUAGE

The novel is a linguistic mosaic as the act of translation fails to capture the essence of the original in the foreign tongue and hence the use of the original vocabulary becomes a necessity. The words like *Thampuran*, *kaappu kalakku*,

Thettamparal, *Villuvandi*, *Pokkali*, *Meenwari* etc. are a few in the novel, which cannot be replaced with an equivalent. These culture specific terms, along with salutations like, *Mashe*, *Dinakaretta* etc. can be substituted using the English near equivalents, but they will jut out as a mismatch in the entire linguistic canvas of the novel. The language of translation is neither English nor Malayalam, the language being heavily creolized as it seems to be the only alternative, similar to the novel *Kanthapura*. The novel is also replete with proverbs, songs and poetic passages that entail an Indian spirit, transplanted into the English tongue.

Ngugi Wa'Thiong'O, who famously advocated the shutting down of the English Department, to decolonize the mind argues that a language transmits culture and for the native culture to survive, it needed its own forms of expression and languages. Raja Rao, Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, Arundhati Roy and other similar writer of the erstwhile colonies, manipulate the English language to express the native spirit. As Kamala Surayya held, 'the language that I write in becomes mine'. Their language, though English in appearance was not English per say, but a creolized version of English, corrupted/ enriched (?) by the native tongue. The master language status is deconstructed by a process often called chutneyfication (Nayar, 38), leading to varieties of creolized Englishes. This heteroglossia is characteristic of the contemporary creative writings and translations, for which *Gift in Green* is a fine example.

Gift in Green lends itself to multiple levels of reading from varied perspectives. Primarily, it is an eco feminist text, with an unconscious and at times conscious effort to prioritize the indigenous culture over the Western. The novel can be described as a creolizing interaction of two opposing cultures, making it an epitome of cultural creolization, especially in its theme and language. The encounter of the social language of Aathi and that of the modern, capitalist notion of development in the literary arena of the language and text of the novel, produces a synthesized and creolized new culture for Aathi that begins its establishment over the land with the death of Dinakaran, the protagonist, as the renewed centre of a new Thampuran Myth.

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