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ARUNDHATI ROY'S *GOD OF SMALL THINGS* - A STUDY IN TERMS OF STYLE, TECHNIQUE AND INVENTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

In the novel *God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy has realistically presented the traditional idea of patriarchal domain in which there is hardly any opportunity for women to acquire education. The men always dominate over women. Both feminism and gender discrimination are very powerfully portrayed by the author. She champions for the cause of the oppressed women and espouses their rebellious sentiments and outrageous reaction against social injustice. Apart from it, the reader of this novel will definitely enjoy the excellent usage of several literary devices. The following paper is an attempt to study the expertise of Arundhati Roy in terms of style and technique.

Key Words: Style, technique, linguistic inventiveness, simile, metaphor and images

INTRODUCTION

A careful reading of the novel *God of Small Things* will enable all the readers to understand that Arundhati Roy is a master in style and technique. She is blessed with excellent command over English language. Her English renders colour and variety and brings out the personality of the author. Her writing style resembles Prospero's magic wand which makes all things precious and excellent. In this context, Arundhati Roy says:

"as a writer one spends a life time journeying into the heart of language, trying to minimize, if not eliminate, the distance between language and thought. Language is the skin on my thought, I remember saying to someone who once asked what language meant to me." (Power Politics, p-152).

Her maiden novel and non-fictional writings exhibit the nuances of the English language in multi

dimensional style and technique. Due to her linguistic inventiveness, she has become unique among the Indian English writers. She happens to be a writer of par excellence and technique.

Arundhati Roy has tactfully employed several literary devices in a wonderful manner. The *God of Small Things* happens to be the most technically accomplished novel to have appeared in the horizons of Indian English novels. It is thick with innovative flourishes and displays a continuous urge to experiment linguistically. The readers will undergo an altogether new experience by enjoying a narrative technique that blends fact and fiction in a diligent manner and creating an impact which she alone is capable of. Indira Nityandan observes:

"Arundhati Roy writes in a style truly different from that of other Indo-English novelists –both male and female of the country. She writes differently to a great extent and in doing so, breaks many of the

accepted rules of the language. There are passages in the novel where the techniques overrides the content and one often has a feeling that the story gets stifled under the weight of her style. Her proclivity to experiment with language and its poetic attributes as well as her rapidly switching points view, seeking to fuse the past and the present create difficulties in the way of the readers. For long stretches , the narrative appears to get bogged down while descriptions pile up . (p 33).

The style and linguistic inventiveness of Arundhati Roy has been very much appreciated by both her admirers and critics. There are many western critics and reviewers consider her as a finest exponent of English language whereas her Indian contemporaries nurture a different opinion about her. In this context, the comments of Louella Lobo has been noteworthy. He gets carried away with the language of Arundhati Roy. He compares and contrasts the initial pages Hardy's visual image in Edgdon Heath. After reading quite a few pages of her novel, he opines that there are endless similes and metaphors. While narrating one item of scenery, he is of the opinion that the author follows the dictum " Nothing succeeds like Excess" (Oscar Wilde). Of course, it is not an exaggeration to feel that there is surfeit usage of stylistic and linguistic devices which elicit sharp reaction from the readers, reviewers and critics.

There has been a tactful usage of English language when you know that what she contributes to the English language falls below the witchcraft. Her inborn abilities involving tactful usage of English language happens to be one of the celebrated aspect of *The God of Small Things* and other fictional writings. The quality and the range of Roy's appropriation of the English language draws the attention of all readers. Her way of using English language is a fascinating part of her. She is an Indian writer in English and an activist focusing on issues pertaining to social justice and economic equality. She exhibits in a grand manner her experiences and imaginative thinking through her novels and fictional writing. Her world is thick with vivid images and metaphors, linguistic devices and intense subject

matter. In her prize winning novel *The God of Small Things* , she has portrayed several fascinating, extra ordinary and fantastic qualities. Her imaginative power and poetic writing style has literally created a sort of mesmerizing effect in the minds of the readers. Even in her non-fictional writing, her essays shine with sentences and epithets which remain etched green in the minds of the readers. Her daring views on politics and individual issues prove to be fearless and clear in her concern for the poor and the exploited due to its scathing criticism on both state and institutions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POETRY

In her novel *The God of Small Things* , she employs linguistic and rhetorical devices which show qualities of poetry rather than prose. In the opening of the novel, the best example is to display the poetic style fused with metaphors and imagery. The first paragraph makes a dramatic opening:

" 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, dust green trees. Red banana s ripen. Jack fruits burse. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. The nights are clear but suffused with sloth and sullen experiences. (p .1.)

The entire passage is replete with images and metaphors by producing excellent setting for atmosphere and background of the novel. It talks emotionally about the month of May and the day and night are precisely described with apt usage of words, metaphors and images. Her narrative is distinguishable emotionally through connotative vocabulary of words and utterances which carry feelings and emotions which are sometimes at low and high keys and ascend to a passionate outburst. The following passage is a good example to exhibit tepid in an emotive manner.

"in the afternoon silence laced with edges of light, her Children curled into the warmth of her. The smell of her.

They covered their heads with her hair. They sensed somehow that in her sleep she

had travelled away from them. They summoned her back now with the palms of their small hands laid flat against the Brke skin of her midriff “ (pp 220-21).

On the contrary, the following passage is thick with acute emotional quality: “ And what Ammu knew (or thought she knew). Smelled of the vapid, Vinegary fumes that rose from the cement vats of Paradise pickles. Fumes that wrinkled youth and pickled futures” (p .224).

Roy’s prose is full of textual features like rhythm, alliteration , rhyme and patterns of sound which properly speaking distinguish the characteristics of poetry. Some examples for it are as follows:

“ her tears triced down from behind them and trembled” along her jaw like rain drops on the edge of the roof.” (p.5).

The following is rephrased in a free verse;

“it was painted blue like the sky with drifting clouds and tiny Whizzing jet planes with white trails that crisscrossed in the Clouds. (p. 5)

The first paragraph of page 163 can be rephrased as a perfect piece of free verse:

“ the steel door of the incinerator went up and the muted hum of the eternal fire became a red roaring. The heat lunged out at them like a finished beast.

Her hair

Her skin

Her smile

Her voice

And here is a perfect example for rhythmic prose:

The God of Loss

The *God of Small Things*

He left no foot prints in sand

No ripples in water, no image in mirrors.

In the novel, the phonetic devices employed create a significant effect and serve as a vehicle for emotion or feeling intent to be conveyed. From the perspective of Baby Kochamma, both Estha and Rahel happen to be “ Half- Hindu hybrids whom no self –respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry”. The h sound carries an alliteration appropriately reflecting Baby Kochamma’s contempt

for twins and the same is contrasted with ‘ s’ alliteration following two words.

It is known to everyone that all children favour playing with the sounds of a language. They are rich with alliteration, rhyme and coinages. A major portion of the novel is felt through the consciousness of the children. Hence, it is natural to feel that such effects should be abundantly found in the writings. There are some examples for this:

1. Satin-lined.
Brass handle shined (p.4)
2. Paradise Pickles & Preserves (p.30).
3. What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine.(p.57)
4. Numbers would do
Numbness would be fine (p. 63).
5. Thimble- drinker
Coffin-cart wheeler (p.135).

There are several such rhythmic passages in the novel. Infact, *God of Small Things* is full of symbols, similes and metaphors blended with images and they are the unifying factors in the novel. Other popular symbols used are History House, Heart of Darkness and Pappachi’sMoth. In the novel, the History House is an image of sinister spirit of evil which captures people’s dreams and redreams them. It exerts its malevolent influence on the lives of ammu, Velutha and the twins. There is a shroud of mystery surrounding the house which was previously owned by Kurtz. Heart of Darkness represents the rotten state of the societies in Kerala state. It is infact the volte face of Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. Of course, the phrase signifies the ‘ evil residing in the heart’. The title is reverted as the Heart of Darkness which represents caste consciousness and caste-ridden Keralite society which exerts dark shadow on the future of Ammu and Velutha. Whenever a dark emotion springs up suddenly or some kind of apprehension is felt, then pappachi’s moth is believed to have descended on the person affected. It is argued that the smell of old roses on a breeze is a symbol which portrays the strangeness of the Keralite society.

The major achievement of Arundhati Roy is felt in the imagery field. She has displayed her literary expertise through apt similes , metaphors which are felt in all pages of the book. The genius of

Arundhati Roy is felt in her imagery. Her expertise in imagery is due to her own experiences. To emphasize on this aspect, there are two passages given as examples. The first example given is the first line in the novel "May in Ayemenem is a hot and brooding month" and closes with "fatly baffled in the sun". The entire passage is thick with metaphors and images pertaining to colour, sound and movement. Yet another passage brings out the experience of filth and rottenness. There is a figural passage describing about the condition of Meenachal river in the year 1993.

"once is had had the power to evoke fear. The change lives. But now is teeth were drawn its sprit spend. It was just a slow sledging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea. Bright plastic bags blew across its viscous, weedy surface like subtropical flying – flowers.(p.124).

Without employing any figurative language, Roy can come up with words which can differentiate several shades, nuances, intensities and amplitudes.

With her literary brush, the colour green gets fragmented into modulations like 'dustgreen, wetgreen and mossgreen.' The white light is shown in several modulations: The sun light got fractured by 'think trunks of tilting trees' (p.306), glittering sunshine' (p. 1). 'wedge of light' (p. 248). 'edges of light (219)' 'bright parallelogram of barred sunlight on the floor' (268).

Roy has explained several kinds of smells in the novel like sick sweet smell, old food smell, sour metal smell, smell of smoke, smell of red ants, backside smell, smell of fresh wood shavings, smell of pickles, smells of milk and urine, smell of printer's ink and so on. She employs coinages, compound words and adjectives to indicate several nuances of smell.

She makes use of similes and metaphors so as to create an impact on the theme and sense of the novel. It involves making use of complex images since the comparison always involves a vehicle whose properties are related to meaning in more than one sense. There are some examples given for similes and metaphors giving only one sense of impression. For visual images,

"her face was pale and as wrinkled as dhobi's thumb from being in water for too long (p.4). (about the white child Sophie Mol drowned in the river).

They were puffy with Oedama like little foot shaped air cushions (p. 20).

Her hair, dyed jet black, was arranged across her scalp like unspooled thread. (p. 21).

Likewise, there are images of Gustatory as follows:

"touching it with their tongues, sucking it like a sweet" (p.17)

"the loss of Sophie Mol Like a fruit in season" (p. 267).

"Rahel, unable to cope with see-sawing charges in her life, had revealed herself like a sausage into the dirty airport curtain, and wouldn't unravel. A sausage with Bata sandals." (p.146).

There are also Olfactory images.

"history's smell, like old roses on a breeze" (p.55)

"meat –smelling blood money" (p.95).

"they are as familiar as..... the smell of your lover's skin" (p.229).

Kinetic images in the novel are as follows:

"the loss of Sophie Mol stepped softly around the Ayemenem house like a quiet thing in socks" (p. 15).

The sexual excitement that rose like a tide in the slender girl....." (p.21).

Kinesthetic images in the novel are :

"They remembered being pushed around a room once, from Ammu to Baba like billiard balls" (p.84)

Perspiration tricked through Chacko's hair. He felt as though a company of ants was touring his scalp" (p.277).

Some static images are :

"the –two things fitted together, like stacked spoons" (p.20).

"Dead as a doorknob (p. 118).

They apart, there are several similes and metaphors which compare two objects in terms of concept, function or connotation than any senses. For better understanding, let them be named conceptual images. For example, when there is an intention to

compare the shyness of the bride, the comparison will be made based on conceptual rather than visual images.

There are several examples from the novel to be mentioned; Some of them are:

“ the loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive ... As permanent as a government job” (p. 16). A captured spy in enemy territory , plotting her spectacular escape .” (p. 238).

“ The silence sat between grand niece and baby grand aunt like a third person. A stranger .Swollen. Noxious” (p. 21)

From the above examples, it is very much evident that Arundhati Roy is a novelist of different taste compared to traditional novelists. Her authentic style and narrative technique has drawn the admiration of not only critics from India, but also from abroad.

In terms of innovation, she is on par with D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, Ezra Pound , T.S. Eliot, Salman Rushdie and Virginia Woolf.

SUMMATION

Through her novel *God of Small Things* , Arundhati Roy has exhibited that she is an expert in employing style and technique. All though the novel, she has applied various literary devices. Infact, *God of Small Things* has been the most technically accomplished novel in Indian English of late. Both poetic mode and satire form the basis for all stylistic elements in the novel. The author has employed metaphors, similes and images of par excellence in plot construction and characterization. The novel is very much symbolic in terms of style and technique.

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