



ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*: A CRITICAL STUDY OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

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ABSTRACT

The God of Small Things was the debut novel of an eminent Man Booker Prize winning author Arundhati Roy. The novel explores the childhood experience of fraternal twins by adopting the Bildungsroman techniques as narrative pattern. It explores the themes of social discriminations, class relations and cultural tensions, Indian history and politics, forbidden love, betrayal, etc. The novel is rich from the point of Narrative pattern and its techniques. Roy applies traditional, as well as, innovative techniques to build a story which reflects Indian consciousness. Narrative technique is the method and device used by writers to narrate stories. It works upon specific uses of phrases, punctuations or exaggerations of description. Roy, in order to narrate the novel, uses literary devices like- defamiliarization, similes & metaphors, repetition of words and phrases, epigrams and paradoxes, irony, oxymoron, metonymy, synecdoche, pun, saying versus showing in her writing, flashback narrative technique. She also uses some sound oriented techniques like- rhythm, alliteration, internal rhyme, assonance, dissonance, etc. The content of Arundhati Roy's writing basically focuses on feminist perceptions, post-colonial dimensions, politics, literary tourism and her Indianness.

INTRODUCTION

The God of Small Things was the debut novel of an eminent Man Booker Prize winning author Arundhati Roy. The novel explores the childhood experience of fraternal twins by adopting the Bildungsroman techniques as narrative pattern. It explores the themes of social discriminations, class relations and cultural tensions, Indian history and politics, forbidden love, betrayal, etc. The novel is rich from the point of Narrative pattern and its techniques. Roy applies traditional, as well as, innovative techniques to build a story which reflects Indian consciousness. The literary techniques which she uses are still relevant and caught the



attention of readers when the novel was published in 1997. The paper focuses on the use narrative technique used by Roy in her novel *The God of Small Things*.

Narrative technique is the method and device used by writers to narrate stories. It works upon specific uses of phrases, punctuations or exaggerations of description. Although every storyteller uses few foundational techniques but a part of writer is visible in its employment of his own way of narrating the story. Although there are so many technical aspects of narrative technique but setting, plot, perspective, style, theme and character form the crux of any narration.

When an author is as stylistic as Roy, she says a great deal through her style. Her kind of writing lends itself extremely well to literary interpretation because it is possible to find several meanings in her writing that lie hidden behind her style. No interpretation of such a literary style can be final. Yet an endeavour must be made to go beyond the surface of her writing. The fact that it is a woman writer that is in question also becomes evident from her stylistic utterances. The feminine sensibility, obvious or not, is another point of investigation that her style provides.

Roy, in order to narrate the novel, uses literary devices like- defamiliarization, similes & metaphors, repetition of words and phrases, epigrams and paradoxes, irony, oxymoron, metonymy, synecdoche, pun, saying versus showing in her writing, flashback narrative technique. She also uses some sound oriented techniques like- rhythm, alliteration, internal rhyme, assonance, dissonance, etc. The content of Arundhati Roy's writing basically focuses on feminist perceptions, post-colonial dimensions, politics, literary tourism and her Indianness.

The use of repetition in Arundhati Roy's novel is very significant it adds both emphasis and rhythm to its prose. Here are few examples:

My dearest Papa, I am well and happy in the service of our lady. But Koh-i-noor appears to be unhappy and homesick My dearest Papa, Today Koh-i-noor vomited after lunch and is running a temperature. My dearest Papa, convent food does not seem to suit Koh-i-noor through I like it well enough. My dearest Papa, Koh-i-noor is upset because her family seems to neither understand nor are about her wellbeing (p. 25).

Here is repetition of the words 'My dearest Papa' and 'Koh-i-noor'. The Repetition of 'my dearest papa' shows the flattery as well as the constant pleading in the voice of Baby Kochamma to get favour. That is, she wants her father to bring her back from convent. She



joined Roman catholic church is her quest to remain in company of Father Milligan. But, gradually, when she feels that her endeavour would leave her no were close to him, she wants to return. The repetition of 'Koh-i-noor' shows the high degree of greatness for herself Koh-i-noor in accordance to baby Kochamma's grandfathers will in which, he described that of his 7 grandchildren one is Koh-i-noor. Another example is:

*Rej-oice in the Lo-Ord Or -Orlways
And Again I say rej-oice,
Rej Oice,
Rej Oice,
And again I say rej-Oice. (p. 36)*

The constant repetition of the word 'Rej-Oice' instead of Rejoice is to make fun of the accent of South Indians and even show shows the irony That Rahel & Estha are expected to sing that song in the car while going to receive Margaret Kochamma and Seephie Mol. The song which symbolizes the elation in the heart of the singers is absent in this case.

And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a War. A War that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of War. A War that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A War that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves. (p. 53)

The constant repetition of war shows the deep seated desire in Chacko to show himself a true Marxist. The soothing feeling which a Marxist propounds when he talks about the conflict, the years of suppression and deep rooted desire to fling the old tradition, laws etc. is quite imminent in the words of Chacko. Next

We're Prisoners of War; Chacko said, 'Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows will never be sad enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives never important enough.' (p. 53)

Here the repetition of words 'we' and 'our' shows the existentialism. 'We' shows certain group which shows that relations are in state of existence. They put together the existentialist thought. Boostful Chacko who is of the thought that everything in Ayenanenem House belongs to him, when talks about doom and destruction then it is for everyone and he pronounces 'we' and 'our' to lay emphasis on the fact.



Existentialism is a philosophy that suggests that we are chained in relationships and after coming to this world we have little scope to escape. Tide to these relationships we leap into the darkness of uncertainty. The writer with existentialist thinking tends to combine the humorous and the pathetic as an inter-turned part of the human existence. Arundhati Roy's clubbing of Humour and Pathos is not a simple clubbing like the one given by 'Charles Lamb' in his prose. It is a clubbing that exposes her leaning towards existentialism. Next example is:

Squashed Miss Mitten-shaped Stains in the Universe. Squashed frog -shaped Stains in the Universe. Squashed crows that had tried to eat the Squashed fog-shaped Stains in the Universe. Squashed dogs that ate the Squashed crow shaped stains in the Universe. (p. 82)

The constant use of Squashed and stains in the repetition lays emphasis on theme of the novel shows the crushed delicate creatures, crushed emotions and childhood. Here the repetition of the word universe shows the existentialist thought. In these lines the children's hate for *Miss Mitten*, who was their tutor and use to punish them for spelling words backward. She is seen in the same perspective, as that of crushed frog, crow and dog, when they heard that Miss Mitten was killed in the accident, while crossing the road.

The repetition of the word “without” can be seen, "Rahel grew up *without* a brief. *Without* anybody to arrange a marriage for her. *Without* anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore *without* an obligatory husband looming on her horizon." (p. 17) Here the repetition shows the emptiness present in Rahel's life. She was a child from a broken home, so, she has to live a haphazard life like an unleashed insect, who is on a run and never seem to settle. The repetition of the word “my” can be seen, "Though Ammu did as much work in factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as *my* factory, *my* pineapples, *my* pickles." (p. 57) It shows everything in Ayemenem House is only his whether anybody else works more or less it doesn't matter for him. Constant use of “my” shows the male ego and is a possessive word. It shows the relationships that are essential to existentialist thought. The repetition of name of Mammachi as Sосha emphasizes the importance of Mammachi in contest of the Pickle factory, "Everybody just referred to her pickles and jams as *Sосha's* Tender Mango, or *Sосha's* Banana Jam, *Sосha* was Mammachi's first name, Sосhamma." (p. 58). It was her hard work which led the pickle factory stand. Although, Pappachi, her husband, was the head of the family, he never helped her in her endeavour. His contribution in Pickle factory was nil. The name “Velutha” is repeated, "Just then Rahel saw *Velutha*. Vellya Paapen's son, *Velutha*. Her most beloved friend *Velutha*. *Velutha* marching with a red flag." (p. 71). When Rahel and her family were going to Airport to fetch Margaret Kochamma and her daughter Sophie Mol, who were coming from England, on their way a procession of Marxist passed and in which



Rahel saw Velutha. The constant repetition of Velutha's name shows the sense of surprise for family. It led to the deadly events which followed and stopped only after the death of Velutha and destruction of Ipe family. Repetition of the word "What" as, "It was not *what* he said, but the *way* he said it. Not *what* he did, but the *way* he did it." (p. 76) This shows that Velutha was above his compatriots in eyes of children. His way of doing work wasn't like a village green stuff, rather he was street-wise. That's proved when Mammachi says that if were not of lower class he would have been an engineer. Repetition of the word "Slow" as, "She thought of *Slow* being a person. *Slow* Keorien. *Slow* Kutty. *Slow* Mol. *Slow* Kochamma." (p. 96) The repetition of the word slow shows the childish nature of the story teller who thinks that the 'slow' is a person and it could be a name.

There are other repetitions also which play significant role in the novel are like—

"Red staircase with red spit stains in the red corner." (p. 97)

"Past angry Ammu. Past Rahel concentrating through her knees. Past Baby Kochamma. Past the Audience that had to move its leg again." (p.101)

"In the lobby, the orange drinks were waiting. The lemon drinks were waiting. The electric blue foam leather car-sofas were waiting. The coming soon! Posters were waiting. (p. 101)

Arundhati Roy uses alliteration as a part of her narrative techniques. In her novel the long list of use of alliteration has peculiar reason for their being. Each of the alliteration has some functions minor and major in Roy's scheme of things. The narrator says, "They knew the slippery stone steps (thirteen) before the slimy mud began." (p. 203) The alliteration slippery stone steps give the musical quality to the narrative. It signifies that Rahel and Estha knew the secret of the river and its surroundings. By the sibilant sound Roy is able to give a connection to the three words beginning with 'S'. She connects stones and steps and makes them slippery. Thus sound creates a unifying effect which she projects rhythmically in to her prose. Second example of alliteration is, "Finger coloured fingers fought the ferns". (p. 202) In an alliteration like this the 'F' sound contributes to the form of the writing-form, which points to authors experience. In this Roy is rather similar to Gerard Manly Hopkins in her use of Alliteration. Another example to show Roy's prowess in the use of alliteration can be seen, "She was hemmed in by humid hips" (p. 139) In this repetition of 'H' sound is a plane desire to create the sound patterns because their is little relevance in the term humid hips. Roy sacrifices meaning to her lust for sound effect.

Basically, imagery is studied in the context of poetry but modern fiction writers like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy have utilized the poetic mode in their fictional writing. The basic element in writings of Arundhati Roy in comparison and the novelty of these comparisons is



seen in the similes and metaphors. She uses her similes dealing with characters, dealing with incidents and dealing with minute observations of life.

The use of similes can be seen in the art of characterization. As can be seen, "She imagined him dropping like a dark star out of the sky that he had made. Lying broken on the hot church floor, dark blood spilling from his skull like a secret." (p. 6) From these lines we get a picture of Rahel, when she saw the painted dome of the church, then it seemed marvelous to her. She thought anyone, who could do such a job would be like Velutha. This throws ample light on the fact that Velutha was one of the most eminent persons in her eyes to do the job. The shining and black body depicts the pitiful state of a paravan, that he only is, who will go to such a height to paint. At another place Rahel thinks, "She imagined him up there, someone like Velutha, bore bodied and shining, editing on a plank, swimming from the scaffolding in the high done of the church, painfully silver jets in a blue church sky." (p. 6) The comparison of Velutha with a dark star and his skilled blood with a secret, show the mystery and pathetic state of his life. Darkness, symbolizes his humble belongings. He is a Paravan, who leaves the world like an outcast. Another simile which gives the picture of Ammu is, "Her face was set like stone, but the tears welled up in her eyes and ran down her rigid cheeks." (p. 8) This simile describes the pathetic state of Ammu, who was standing before a Police officer with her children and has to face the ignominy of being called a Prostitute. She has lost her Velutha. The inappropriate word and the loss made her a stone and the internal shame to be called a prostitute made her tears roll down. The following simile explores the character of an individual from broken home, "Rahel drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge." (p. 18) This shows the flippancy in the mind of Rahel. The broken home, the tragic past and the mechanical life all added in the development of Rahel as an individual who feels relieved as though some work has been completed, which was to be done comparison with chair, of her marriage is like their is no sense of elation after such an event, which practically every girl looks forward to. The title *The God of Small Things* gets its meaning from the following cited simile, "That Big God howled like a hot wind and demanded obeisance. So, Small God laughed a hollow laugh, and skipped away cheerfully. Like a rich boy in shorts." (p. 19) The upper strata of the society always boast of its power and feels that it is their birth right to suppress the lower ones. The lower strata gleefully accept its destiny and moves around. The simile which gives outer appearance of Baby Kochamma in her old age is, "Her eyes spread like butter behind the thick glasses" (p. 20) This shows that the number on the glasses of Baby Kochamma was very high that's why those eyes looked like butter to the onlooker.

In the novel, Rahel and Estha share a special bond which later turns out into incestuous relation that forms between the siblings as both want to fill the void created due to painful incidences of the past. The following simile reflects the beautiful bond between Rahel and



Estha. "To Ammu her turns seemed like a pair of small bewildered frogs engrossed in each other's company, lolloping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic." (p. 43) Rahel & Estha are compared to gleeful frogs who seem to hop around the highways unaware of the dangers, which are always there to engulf them. They are small kids unknown to the fact what this society could do to them. Ammu, their mother became fiercely protective because of this innocence. The following simile shows the bulky figure of Rahel's aunt, "Inside the Plymouth, it wasn't easy for Rahel to see Estha, because Baby Kochamma rose between them like a hill." (p. 62) This shows the enormity of the size of Baby Kochamma's body. She was bulky in her features & in comparison to her the children, Rahel and Estha, were very small. At another place the use of strong simile can be seen:

Silence filled the car like a saturated sponge. Washed-up cut like a knife through a soft thing. The sun shone with a Shuddering Singh. This was the trouble with families. Like invidious doctors, they knew just where it hurt." (p. 70)

The comment of Ammu was enough to squeeze heart out of chacko who always pretended to be a true Marxist but was a going - easy type burgeoise. And it is quite common in close relatives that they know what, where and when punts the other one.

Similes which decide the path of the novel through incidences are as follows, "Her face was pale and as wrinkled as a dhobi's thumb from being in water for too long." (p. 4) This simile describes the wrinkled face of Sophie Mol, who was described as an Angel when she came to Ayemenem but now she has lost her charm. A dhobi's thumb shows the existentialist thought.

Comrade Pillai who creates havoc in the life of characters of the novel tries to clean his slate with formal greetings to Estha, after his return to Ayemenem. "Estha Mon!', he would call out, in his high, piping voice, frayed & fibrous now, like sugarcane stripped of its bark." (p. 14) This shows that comrade Pillai is now old and his voice is quite different from the time when he conspired with the Police officer or bluntly rejected Velutha when he asked for help or when he led the workers for a strike in the Pickles factory. This sugarcane like voice is a visual change.

The introduction of Sophie Mol proved to be the last nail in the coffin of already deteriorated condition of the twins. "Slowly faded, the loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. It was always there. Like fruit in season. Every season. As permanent as a Government Season. As permanent as a Government Job." (p. 16) "As permanent as a Government job" is an existentialist thought. It has humour as well as satire in it. It is one of the most significant simile. It shows that Margaret Kochamma was never able to come out of the grip of sorrow



after the loss of Sophie Mol. It was always there and haunted her. The gory incident which took the life of the Velutha had profound effect on Estha. The simile demarcates the effect. "Silence hung in the air like secret loss". (p. 91) It shows the state of mind of Estha, whom an envelope of silence has taken in its grip. The reason behind his silence was the guilt of the single word he uttered. If he won't have nodded in affirmative on behest of Baby Kochamma in Police Station that the man who kidnapped them was Velutha, then he could have lived peacefully, without any sense of guilt. Other similes with their effects follows, "Rahel alone watched them walk down the hotel corridor like silent but substantial ghosts." (p. 115) Comparison of Ammu and Estha with the Ghost shows the existentialist thought. The concrete has been made abstract. Keats criticizes Shelley for these kinds of comparisons. In this Rahel felt guilty and thought that her mother won't love her as much as she loved her before and her taking away Estha with her, not her, made her realization more concrete. "The Play had gone bad. Like pickle in the monsoon." (p. 146) Eatha and Rahel were deputed to show good manners before Margaret Kochamma and Sophic Mol. But, untimely the utterances of Baby Kochamma about Estha, led him to anger, which in turn spoiled the showcase of good etiquette. It was unexpected for Ammu. And everything seemed useless like gone bad pickles got rancid state. "To be borrowed and returned. Like Library books." (p. 156) Estha came with her mother, after her divorce, then he was chosen to be sent back to his father, after the fall of Ammu. So, he is one who was used as a shuttlecock and kept in to fro motion, was kept briefly and then returned. "Inside her head, it was like a room with dark drapes drawn across a bright day." (p. 167) This shows that Mammachi was blind. She was cut off from the outer world due to her blindness. "This knowing slid into him cleanly, like the sharp edge of a Knife." (p.177). Velutha when came to know that Ammu has some place for him in her hear, the feeling struck him like a knife because he never expected love to come from these quarters.

The other type of similes used by Roy in her novel is the similes dealing with observations of life. The following use of similes comes under the category. "Inspector Thomas Mathew's Moustaches busted like the friendly Air India Maharaja's, but his eyes were sly and greedy." (p. 7) This shows the enormity of Inspectors moustaches. Image of Maharaja gives a clear visual picture of a man. "The loss of Sophie Mol stepped softly around the Ayemenem House like a quite thing in socks." (p. 15). It was like a quite thing in socks not in shoes which shows that it didn't made any sound. The grief was deep and it settled in the hearts of people in Ayemenem House. "The silence sat between grand - nice and baby grand aunt like a third person." (p. 18) Neither Rahel nor Baby Kochamma was able to forget the past. There was nothing in between them which they would like to share. Rahel came to see Estha, while Baby aunt expected her to take him away as soon as possible. But she rebels against such social structures and challenges marriage. In the novel the characters of Mammachi and Baby



Kochamma suffered due to the institution of marriage. Their pathetic state guided their apathy towards Rahel. In this regard, Debjani Gangulay rightly comments:

Mammachi's own marital experience has not enabled her to empathize with her daughter's brutalized married life. Rather, she sees Ammu's failed marriage as just retribution for her daughter who dared to marry outside her community. Her firm emotional investment in the hierarchies of class, caste and gender is illustrated at several points in the novel. (Caste, Colonialism and Counter-Modernity)

"Like a young bride who couldn't believe her good fortune." (p. 22)

Baby Kochamma was nowhere in the line to inherit the property and jewelry from Mammachi. It was by role of destiny that she got it but was always conscious of the fact that she isn't the real inheritor, so the fear of loosing was always present. "Shut it when you've finished with it', Baby Kochamma said, and closed her face like a cupboard." (p. 29). This was just a one liner. So, after completing the sentence Baby Kochamma didn't utter anything. This also shows that Baby Kochamma was not at all happy with the coming of Rahel back home. "Vellya Paapen trembled his own body like a man with Malaria." (p. 78) Vellya Paapen was frightened by the act of his son. To add to his misery, the out-burst of the nature, gave extension to his superstitious nature and left him trembling with fear. "Velutha smiled when he saw the Marxist flag blooming like a tree outside his doorway." (p. 212) Her was a Paravan, the down trodden, who always dreamed that one day he would live in a society where there would be no discrimination due to one's caste. Marxism was like a window in a dark room and he was happy to see a flag which seems like a tree that means signifies the growth of Marxism.

Arundhati Roy specializes in the dehumanizing metaphors like Rahel was like an exited mosquito on a leash. The Pale day moon was described as big as the belly of a beer - drinking man etc. In the same manner irony too plays a Vital role in the demarcation of true ironical sequences like, "'Congratulations' Chacko said, 'spoken like a true bourgeoisie.'" (p. 61) Here Chacko describes Ammu as a bourgeoisie because she thought that blood on the beggar's hand was Mercurochrome. But, if we analyze Chacko's character then he seems to be one of the upper class who claimed that whatever is yours is mine and whatever is mine is also mine. "She's the sleeping partner." (p. 102) Mammachi is described as the sleeping partner. This is the irony that the person who started the factory from point Zero, the person who brought it, where it stands now is then described as sleeping partner. "'we don't count', Rahel said, 'And Anyway he might change Ammu says.'" (p. 151) Rahel said of Estha that he might change from his attitude of loving brother. And it's true that he changed and changed from a brother



to a lover. 'Real life was inside the van.' (p. 162) Rahel is sitting with the dead body of Ammu, so for Rahel, everything seemed mechanical outside the moving vehicle. But, here was a dead body which will never move or utter a word but is described as having real life.

Arundhati Roy sprinkled Malayalam words to add a new dimension to her narrative like — *Thozhilali Ekta* (p. 66), *Keto and Valurey* (p. 70), *Ividay* (p. 71), *Poda Patti* (p.90), *Eda Cherukka* (p. 101), *Aoyyo Paavam* (p. 131), *Chappa Velaichathu*, *Ammoomas*, *Cantankerous*, *appoopans* (p. 138), *Kappa & Meen Vevichathu* (p. 140), *Kunukku chatta*, *Mar Thomite* (p. 170), *Scrar Vannu* (p. 171), *Aiyyo Kashtam* (p. 177), *Kando* (p. 178), *Sundarikutty* (p. 179), *Kushumbi* (p. 185), *Vallom* (p. 202), *Pallathi, paral*, *Koori*, *Karimeen* (p. 203), *bilimbi* (p. 205), *Ammooma*, *idi appams*, *Kanji & Meen* (p. 210), *Avaney Kadalamma Kondu peeye* (p. 220), *Kuthambalam* (p. 229), *Mittam* (p. 238), *Addeham & edi* (p. 270), *Avalose Obndas* (p. 273), *Oru Kaaryam parayattey*, *Reto* (p. 277) *Enda* (p. 287), *Madiyo & Modi aayirikum* (p. 310), *Themmady Kuzhy* (p. 321), *Rombo maduram* (p. 323) *chappu Thamburam* (p. 339), *Waaley* (p. 340).

Koo Koo Kookum th evandi
Kooki Paadum theevandi
Thalannu nilkum theevandi,
Rpakal Oduna theevandi. (p. 280)

Thaiy Theyy thaka thaiy thome!
Enda da Korangacha, chandi ithra
thenjachu?
Pandjill thooran poyappol nerakkamuthiri neranginjore. (p.196)

The description of Ayemenem in the novel brought many foreigners to explore and compare from the description in the novel to the places in south India which can come closer to the mentioned in the novel. In the context of the place, the writing has created the place. The use of Malayalam in this work of fiction makes the reader inquisitive about the language and in turn contributes in Literary Tourism.

Thus, the critical acclaim Roy received for her first work of fiction can be called as a triumph of story teller's arts. Her writing is compared with the work of Salman Rushdie due to her use of narrative technique. As a writer of fiction, Roy uses three types of similes dealing with characters, incidents and the minute observations of life. Repetitions render plethora of opportunity for literary connotations. Other literary devices like metaphors, alliteration, irony, oxymoron, metonymy, synecdoche, pun, saying versus showing in her writing, flashback narrative technique are used by Roy as an experimental part of her narrative technique.



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