

THE THEMATIC CONCERN AND THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN THE WRITINGS OF ARUNDHATI ROY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE *GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

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Abstract: The new Indian novel in English is marked by unrestrained experimentation in narrative technique and language. Starting with Salman Rushdie, even new novelists like Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Alan Sealy and Nina Sibley have all experimented with narrative techniques to present new sensibilities, meanings and dimensions for the Indian novels in English. To the line of modern and postmodern novels written by these writers can be added 'The God of Small Things' too. Arundhati Roy's winning of the popular Booker Prize in 1997 for her debut novel 'The God of Small Things' created history. It reflects the complexity of Roy's book itself, conceptually, rhetorically, statistically. 'The God of Small Things' has quickly generated puzzles that fuel a whole shelf of criticism. The novel presents vivid and lively pictures of south Indian society, particularly of the villages and suburban areas of Kerala. With the descriptions and pictures, the novelist has re-drawn the history of south India. So that my present paper focus on the thematic concern and the narrative technique in the writings of Arundhati Roy with special reference to 'The God of Small Things'.

Keywords: Thematic Concern, Structure, Narrative Technique, Laltains and Mombattis

Introduction: Arundhati Roy appeared like a large luminous star in the firmament of literature by her 'Magnum Opus' "The God of Small Things". It is a unique book in both matter and manner. In a stormy manner Arundhati Roy came into the realm of literature in 1997, when her debut novel "The God of Small Things" got the valuable 'Booker Prize' for Literature. Her 'The God of Small Things' was fully appreciated at globe level. To quote British Reviews of William Darymple, we can say: "The joy of 'The God of Small Things' is that it appeals to the head and the heart. It is clever and complex. Yet it makes one laugh and finally, moves one to tears...A master piece, utterly unexceptional". On the large canvas of the novel, there unfold, itself 'the story of five generations of a family of the Ipes'. It becomes a tale of 'Lost dreams' or 'the novel is saga of lost dreams' Roy, a student of architecture, thoroughly, both in feeling and form heralded a new concept of novel writing of post moderns. In theme, it deals with a confrontation between the 'Laltains' (The God of Big Things like Pappachi, Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Chacko, Comrade Pillai and Inspector Thomas Mathew) versus 'Mombatti' (The God of Small Things like Ammu Velutha and Rahel, Estha, Sophie Mol). The novel, thus, deals with the apathetic plight of a woman Ammu and her suffering in the journey of life. With Ammu's suffering, because she is born as a woman, the novelist has exposed the shameful and nude pictures of cold and indifferent social norms, dominated by patriarchy, cruel and corrupt police administration, selfish deceiving politicians, tyranny and injustice on the dalit and the deserted and above all the problem of divorce. Therefore a British critic Boyd Tonkin, in 'Independent, writes. . . "The God of small Things" is an ancient drama, played out against

an unmistakably modern backdrop." Hence the novel shows, beautifully, the author's sympathetic attitude to the weak and the vulnerable in society who are brutally and mercilessly persecuted by the big guns of so-called aristocratic and hypocrite society.

Various Themes of the God of Small Things: First of all, the novel deals with the theme of confrontation between 'The Big Man-the Laltain' and 'The Small Man-the Mombatti'. Both 'Laltain' and 'Mombatti' give us light. The Laltain is well fed and well protected. It can face the blowing wind, bravely. But on the other hand the mombatti has no protection, no support. Through these fine confrontations, the author has successfully tried her best to arouse sympathy for the mombatties like Ammu Velutha, Estha and Sophie Mol, the downtrodden have nots - 'the dalit', the deserte and marginalized. The mombatties are cause of Indian social age old tradition. Ammu and Velutha have to forsake the big things and indulge in the small things. Arundhati Roy throws a harsh irony on the Man's domination over woman. She, through Ammu's life tragedy, wants to say that 'a woman is not a mere toy or an object of pleasure' or 'a means of gratifying the Men's baser - sexual passion'. On the other hand, Chacko is a male person of the Age. He was sent to Britain to study. However, Ammu was not allowed to study further i.e. the college study. She has no right to go to college because the college study corrupts a woman. Even today, though in spite of a fundamental improvement in woman's stature, we see the surreptitious and conservative minds of the Indian. Chacko fails in every other respect including the marriage with Margaret, an English girl who deserted him. He can hold the charge of house. And Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property. It is a great

irony that a daughter estranged from the husband, is tortured and tyrannized in the parents' house. On the other hand, Chacko receives a warm welcome and remains the rightful inheritor of the family wealth and fortune. When he flirts with low women he is encouraged by Pappachi in the name of, "Man's needs", whereas the same behaviour of Ammu is termed as illicit, untraditional and sinful. Thus the novelist lashes out at the hypocritical moral code of society which makes a great difference between men and women. As a matter of fact both men and women are the two wheels of the same chariot or the two phases of the same coin.

The second theme of the novel is gender discrimination. The novel 'The God of Small Things' presents a truthful portrayal of the plight of women in society and their marathon struggle for getting identity in a male dominated conservative framework. The social structure of an Indian woman is full of many ups and downs and ifs and buts. Life offers little choice for a forsaken woman like Ammu, the central character, who yearns for pleasure and happiness and a life far from shackles or constraints. Against male's position and status, the narrator portrays a detailed picture of the Lady's childhood to Adolescence, experience of marriage to a sympathetic and affectionate girl, to a rebel wife who challenges her age long hypocritical moral stand of patriarchal family. As a girl, Ammu had seen cruelty of her father, who used to beat her and her mother with a brass vase. She was deprived of her higher education. Pappachi is a man of schizophrenia. Ammu marries to a Bengali man whom after marriage she finds a heavy drinker, a man, a loafer. She gives birth to the twins. Babu is asked to serve his boss Mr. Hollick. The final outcome was that she left her husband and returned unwelcomed to her parents in Ayemenem. The theme of untouchability in the novel is very close to the novel 'Untouchable' by Mulk Raj Anand. Velutha is Bakha both in vision and venture. Untouchability is that disease which creates contagion in our social structure. It is the evil that eats into the vitality of a healthy nation. Arundhati Roy, like a champion of the cause of down-trodden, highlights this social problem. Velutha's grandfather Kelan, along with a number of other untouchables, embraced Christianity to escape the scourge of untouchability. But later on they found that they had done a blunder. But as they were Christian and so they were not given government's benefits like job-reservation. Velutha is a man of innocent and simplicity. God never makes any difference between touchable and an untouchable. As novelist states, "the mind of all men is almost equal." In spite of great virtues, art and skill in Velutha, he does not get proper respect, friendly treatment in society Parvans.

'The God of Small Things' also deals with the revolutionary theme of illicit relation. The taboo relation between Ammu and Velutha does not sound shocking to westernized urban sensibility. It appeals to a vast number of people. It is a part and parcel of life. Without sex, femininity is not complete, it is meaningless. We study that Ammu's sexual thirst, the natural instinct of a youth, was not properly satisfied and so she is always seen haunted by the sexual passion. She sees her body in the mirror and gets stimulated. In many ways, Roy's erotic description makes the novel "replete with vulgar scenes and pornographic delineations." For example the Abhilash Talkies scene and the scene of Ammu's abnormal activity have a deep root in abnormal life. One more theme is hinted, that is of cruel and corrupt police administration in the novel. There novel remains a harsh satire on the faulty police station administration. Inspector Thomas Mathew tortures Velutha in such a way in his police station that he has to breathe his last when Ammu goes to see Velutha. The inspector never behaves well. He speaks the coarse Kottayam dialect in Malayalam and uses some vulgar words. He stares at Ammu's breasts. He says that Kottayam police doesn't take statement from 'Veshyas' or their illegal children. Even he goes extreme vulgarity, by tapping Ammu's breasts with his stick. He favours those who are associated with political leaders. When Velutha is under his custody, he wants to be assured whether he has any political connection or not. On Pillai's answer, he gets a chance to torture Velutha mercilessly. With these major themes, there is a theme of politics and Marxism. Marxism works for the cause of deserted and 'have nots', but here Pillai declares that Velutha has no connection with his party. The heartless politician Pillai does not refuse the false charge or allegation of abduction by Baby Kochamma. This gives a chance for the corrupt police to inflict torture and savagery to the innocent Velutha. Through this episode of the novel, Roy wants to point out to the modern politics, which is not a matter of honesty and truth but false hood and deception, frailty and cruelty. Velutha - the Paravan comes to comrade Pillai, to pray earnestly to help him on the ground that he has been loyal and devoted worker of the party throughout his life. But his request falls flat on him like a complete politician Pillai remarks. . "You should know that party was not constituted to support workers' indiscipline in their private life." A man who speaks of discipline, himself is breaker of discipline. He is thus an opportunist. Pillai does not want to lose a number of votes of the touchable workers, so he denies to the police that Velutha was a party worker. Finally, there are themes of divorce, frivolity and fate woven in the novel. Four women

characters are seen grappling with problems in this novel. They are Ammu, Margaret, Rahel and Kochamma. These women make choices, take decisions which finally not only fail but prove disastrous. They fail in love and to be loved because of the fate or frivolity of male or they are conditioned by social tyranny. These women suffer and one of them even dies in the miserable condition and the other live death in life. In this way, "The God of Small Things" is a blending of several themes that makes the novel stormy and all arming to the readers.

The Structure and Narrative techniques: Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things' is a unique experimentation in style. The novel begins with Rahel coming back to Ayemenem to see her twin brother, Estha. Moreover, everything of the novel has been rendered through the stream of consciousness fourfold or through the point of view of the various characters. The novel ends with the word "Naaley". If we analyze the novel minutely, we find the narrator like a good surgeon examining the cause of the disease objectively, and tries to probe the recesses of the decayed organs. In this architectural shape of the novel, Ms. Roy has also coined some new words and phrases and has turned and twisted language to conform to the feeling. As a result, we find frequently, the broken sentences, illogical statements, unrestricted sprinkling of italics, phrases, ungrammatical constrictions, and unconventional rhythm.

In the first chapter, we see that Rahel after a long gap of time comes to Ayemenem to see her brother, Estha, so the actual event is the arrival of Rahel to Ayemenem. The remaining part of the plot has been dealt through Rahel's memory, and the narrator's information with a bit of mixture of the point of views of some of the characters. Rahel remembers what the orange drink man did to Estha at "Abhilash Talkies". We also come to know that Ammu breathed her last at the age that was neither worth dying. Sophie Mol paid her debt to Nature. The novelist very beautifully provides us hints of the events under the cover of some enigmatic sentences. The prose setting and the distinctive voice of the narrator make the novel remarkable. But, the fundamental aspect of narrative technique is the point of view from which the story is told. The old age theme of the book is told through the stream of consciousness of a small girl. But the novel reveals an omniscient author narrating the tale from shifting points of the view. The tale is being told added by Authorial comments. Anyone can notice the unconventionality of the structure and chronology of the narrative.

As a postmodernist, Arundhati Roy weaves the saga of a family of three generations living in the Ayemenem House in Kottayam. "It is a saga that

moves towards its doomed destiny". We find four distinct strongest of actions narrated here. One is the tale about the doomed love between Ammu and the untouchable, Velutha culminating in her separate deaths. The second is the tragic drowning of the Anglo Indian girl, Sophie Mol, in the river while on Holiday. The third action is interrelated with first and second, when the twins are made to witness the action in the first and second actions of the society. Thus first, second and third strands of action form the main action of the novel. They also constitute the major part of the narrative and take place in the past. The fourth story of the grown up twins happens in the present and occupies only a little place of the narrative. The novel starts in the present with Rahel returning to Ayemenem 23 years after the time of the main action of the novel. The first chapter deals with past references made from present time and which are developed in course of actions of the past. In the first chapter Sophie Mol's funeral, the twins birth, Baby Kochamma and her past, Velutha's death, Estha's silence, Rahel's marriage and divorce, Ammu's Death, Kochamma's grief all are introduced. Thus the first chapter of 33 pages encompasses the entire story of the book. The rest of the book of 250 pages reworks on several issues mentioned in miniature ones. This random and brief mention of important events in the story provides a remarkable effect on the reader. These brief references of the past action have story bearing on the immediate present which is the condition of the twins. Those events were responsible for what they have become quiet and empty shells. All the four threads of the narrative run their course leading up their respective ends, mostly tragic in nature. For instance, the intense love affair between Ammu, a high caste Syrian Christian and the Paravan Velutha is doomed and finds itself in the arrest, fortune and death of Velutha. The other striking aspect of Arundhati Roy's narrative technique is the unconventional use of time. Just as the experimental substance of the novel, it is also ordered in the scheme. Arundhati Roy employs an arbitrary narrative so the events emerge without chronological sequences.

Arundhati Roy, also, uses many cinematic techniques in her story telling, time shifts, endlessly fast forwards and reversals etc. There is no linear progression of the events, not in just the story of the novel but also within individual streams of narrative. The text plays thus, with time and space and it is intriguing. For example, Ammu's death which actually follows quite sometime after Velutha's death in custody is narrated earlier in chapter 7, whereas Velutha's death is described in chapter 19, almost towards the end of the book. A study of the time shifts used in chapter 1 gives us quite a good idea of how they operate in time

rest of the book. The moving of text events provides “an ample saga microscopic in the time.” The text opens describing Ayemenem in the month of May and slides to early June referring to the monsoon rains in Kerala, the time that Rahel comes there from America. In the next section the text moves back in time, some 23 years, to the childhood days of Rahel and Estha, and then it moves forward in a few years to speak of Ammu’s death. Again the text moves fast forward to refer to the funeral of Sophie Mol, which also refers to Velutha’s death, briefly. Describing the novel Prof. Gillian Boer, the chairman of the Booker Panel of Judges, said that: “Arundhati Roy funneled the history of south India with extra ordinary linguistic inventiveness.” Indeed, the story, she tells, is fundamental as well as local. It is about love and death; about lies and law. Her narrative crackles with

riddles and yet fills its tale quite clearly. We are all engrossed by this moving novel.

Conclusion: The novel is memorable for its extraordinary thematic concern as well as its technique. Indeed, how much importance Arundhati Roy attached to the structure and technique, comes out emphatically in her interview taken by Alex Wilbur. In an interview, about narrative telling of a tale Arundhati Roy says.: “For me, language is a skin on my thought and I was thinking about it as story and was thinking of a way of telling it.” True to say, the narrative technique of Roy, as we study, is so much different from the old tradition. The structure pattern of ‘The God of Small Things’ is made complex due to her degree in the field of architecture. When we read the novel, we are reminded of the style of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Henry James and Salman Rushdie.

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