CHAPTER - IV

THE LITERARY STYLE OF THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

According to Buffon the style is the man himself. And Newman comments that style is a thinking out into language. Arundhati Roy has employed an entirely new and original technique in her novel The God of Small Things. This novel seems to be a bit different because it is somewhat an expression of the author's own personality. It is a clever experimentation in style. Roy has freely combined fact and fiction in it.

The God of Small Things can be taken as a representative Post-colonial novel for it seeks to restructure the power centre by giving right to women to live their lives in their own way and fashions a new language for fiction by creating a new Indian English idiom. The language used in it makes the author an extraordinary stylist. The prose of the book moves back and forth among its key images and phrases like refrain in poetry. Roy uses linguistic and rhetorical devices in the novel. We come across some characteristics of poetry rather than prose. Roy uses connotative vocabulary and utterances carry feelings and emotions e.g.

> "In the afternoon silence, 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." (PP 220-221)

Secondly, Roy's prose is strongly marked for such textual features as strong rhythm, alliteration and rhyme, and patterns of sound are the

distinguishing characteristics of poetry. We find a piece of free verse in chapter seven 'Wisdom Exercise Notebooks', for instance:

> The steel door of the incinerator went up and the muted hum of the external fire became a red roaring. The heat lunged out at them like a famished beast. Then Rahel's Ammu was fed to it. Her hair, her skin, her smile. Her voice. (P.163)

Roy uses the device of repetition to intensify the feelings. This begins with actual, physical, acoustic repetition for as echoic effect e.g.

> He loved them. He loved her, she loved him, they loved the children, the children loved them. They all loved each other. (P.105)

We come across the use of "squashed" and "Universe" in:

> Squashed Miss Mitten-shaped stains in the Universe. Squashed frog-shaped stains in the Universe. Squashed crows that had tried to eat the squashed frog shaped stains in the Universe. Squashed dogs that ate the squashed crow-shaped stains in the Universe. (P.82)

There is syntactic parallelism for a rhetorical effect. In Roy's use of repetition as a linguistic stylistic device, the reader occasionally feels a certain annoyance e.g.

1) But Estha couldn't help it. He got up to go. Past angry Ammu. Past Rahel concentrating through her kness. Past Baby Kochamma. Past the Audience-(P.101)
2) In the lobby, the orangedrink were waiting. The lemondrinks were waiting. The melty chocolates were waiting. The electric blue foamleather car-sofas were waiting. (P.101)

For the sake of weightiness of the content, word like orangedrink, lemondrink man or this way and that are written as a single word-Organgedrink Lemondrink Man. Later on, on page 203, in the chapter 'The

River in the Boat', we find the four paragraphs begins with 'Here'. The novel is sprinkled with single word senteneces and paragraphs.e.g.

1) Wild.Sick.Sad. (P.159)

2) Gate.
Road.
Stones.
Sky.
Rain. (P. 285)

3) Out.
In. (P.293)

4) Up.
Down. (P.293)

5) Click. (P.222)

6) Fatly.
Fondly. (137)

7) Girlboy. (P.195)

About the vocabulary, Keki N. Daruwalla says:

> "The Vintage Book Of Indian writing is an excellent mix of the new and the old, the sober and the experimental the sombre and the comic".[1]

A writer may find it necessary to invent a new word-neologism-to express an idea or a sentiment. Roy's neologisms are purely Nonce-formation or words for the 'nonce', i.e. 'a single occasion' e.g.

> 1) Offity (210), 2) Bar nowl (193), 3) Straightforwardly (277), 4) Pleasetomeetyou (212), 5) Whatisit, whathappened, furrywhirring, sariflapping, (6), 6) dieable 93), 7) touchable (121), 8) Soapslippery (23), 9) yesyesyesyesyes (86), 10) Ofcourseofcourse (109) etc.

Another source of linguistic novelty arises from English words and phrases that are translations from the Indian languages e.g. shit-wiper, meeshas, thoo, etc.

Interpolation of foreign languages has been used by English writers from the days of Shakespeare. Roy has used a sprinkling of Malayalam words e.g.

1) Ickilee (tickle), (178),

2) Kendo (can you see), (178),

3) Modalali (master/owner), 271),

4) Mitten (`backyard), (82) etc.

Then breakfast items like:

avaloose oondas (273), etc.

Or names of fishes:

'Pallathi', 'paral', 'koori', 'karimeen' (203) etc.

The only purpose that is probably served by this kind of interpolation is to provide a local flavour, set it in a particular state.

Roy demonstrates an ability for register mixing as in the conversation between Chacko and Comrade Pillai. Political jargon is used lavishly. This lingustic deviation has added to the communist protest in Kerala against this book. Aijaz Ahmad writes about a completely different register:

> "The comedy of Chacko's absurd, priggish existence which knows its moment of assertion only in impotent rage against Ammu".[2]

Roy's metaphors and similes continue to tease us, amuse us and shock us in her description of people. e.g.

1) Her face was pale and as wrinkled as a dhobi's thumb from being in water for too long. (4)

2) Her face was set like stone, but the tears welled up in her eyes and ran down her rigid cheeks. (8)

3) Strange insects appeared like ideas in the evening and burned themselves on Baby Kochamma's dim 40-watt bulbs. (9-10)

4) Slowly faded, the Loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. It was always there. Like a fruit in season. Every season. As permanent as Government job. (16)

5) Her eyes spread like butter behind her thick glasses. (20)

6) Baby Kochamma's hair, dyed jet-black was arranged across her scalp like unspooled thread. (21)

7) Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.

8) Most of Rahel's hair sat on top of her head like a fountain. (37)

9) Her eyes had become hard, like marbles. (71-72)

10) Mammachi's pale fine skin was creased like cream on cooling milk and dusted with tiny red moles. (166)

It is well-known that children are specially fond of playing with the sounds of a language and along with accentual rhythm they take delight in alliteration, rhyme and coinages.

e.g.

1) Satin-lined
Brass handle shined. (P.4)

2) Thimble-drinker.
Coffin-cart wheeler. (P.251)

Some examples of children's coinages are 'gnap', 'Locusts Stand I', 'antly' (Church), and 'Lay Ter'.

Arundhati Roy forged for herself a unique reductive style which achieves remarkable degrees of condensation and concreteness. In her composition she often omits the structural words, such as auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, subordinators and coordinators. The novel also abounds in elliptical sentences, verbless clauses, and non-finite clauses e.g.

1) Just then Rahel saw Velutha. Vellya Paapen's son, Velutha. Her most beloved friend Velutha. Velutha marching with a red flag. In a white shirt and mundu with angry veins in his neck. (P.71)

2) She managed that by doing what she was best at. Irrigating her fields, nourishing her crops with people's passions.(P.321)

The writer is in the habit of breaking up sentences into clauses and phrases and then making each part graphically a separate sentence:

1) He was grateful to her for not wanting to look after him. For not offering to tidy his room. For not being his cloying mother. (P. 246)

2) It wasn't entirely their fault, though, that the whole thing spun out of control like a deranged top. That it lashed out at those that crossed its path. That by the time chacko and Margaret Kochamma returned from Cochin, it was too late. (P.258)

The main lines of the story are drawn in terms of a single symbol-<u>The God of Small Things</u> – and running parallel to this is the symbol of – The God of Big Things. The other major symbols employed are History House, Heart of Darkness and Pappachi's moth. History House represents a sinister spirit of evil which captures people's dreams and re-dreams them. <u>Heart of Darkness</u> is employed to stand, symbolically, for the rotten state of the Keralite society. In

this symbol, Roy adds and the coinage 'Dark of Heartness' without a hyphen appears to be no more than more word play. Pappachi's moth is recurrently employed with a symbolic connotation. When a dark emotion arises suddenly or there is an apprehension of some disaster, then Pappachi's moth is said to have descended on the person concerned.

In her description of nature as well as the human body, the author combines her poetical powers with the art of the painter or sculptor. There are examples of living descriptions of nature in the novel e.g.

1) It was raining when Rahel came back to Ayemenem. Slanting silver ropes slammed into loose earth, ploughing it up like gun-fire. The old house on the hill wore its steep, gabled roof pulled over its ears like a low hat. The walls, streaked with moss, had grown soft, and bulged a little with dampness that seeped up from the ground. (P.1)

2) With that cold feeling on a hot afternoon that Life had been Lived. That her cup was full of dust. That the air, the sky, the trees, the sun, the rain, the light and darkness were all slowly turning to sand. That sand would fill her nostrils, her lungs, her mouth. (P.222)

In her handling of the English language, Roy has revealed herself as an interesting wordsmith. She has proved a tireless experimenter with words. It is observed that she is very fond of making new compound words such as-carbreeze, dustgreen and daymoon. The other items in this class such as sheepsmile, bluegreyblue, sharksmile. She makes new words by combining different categories of words e.g.

Sicksueet (adjective + adjective),

dustgreen (noun + adjective),

dirtcoloured (noun + past participle),

angrycoloured (adjective + past participle),

feverbutton (noun + noun).

When the various devices are used in an effective and harmonious way, they give rise to some brilliant passages in the novel e.g.

> It wasn't what lay at the end of her road that frightened Ammu as much as the nature of the road itself. No milestones marked its progress. No trees grew along it. No dappled shadows shaded it. No mists rolled over it. No birds circled it. No twists, no turns or hairpin bends obscured even momentarily, her clear view of the end. (P.224).

Vinu Abraham comments on the language used by Arundhati Roy in the novel The God of Small Things: "The soundbite technique of statements without main verbs was presumably inspired by today's advertising language".[3] The language of the novel evokes vivid images in terms of colour, sound and movement which probably arise from the author's personal experience e.g.

> May in Ayemenem is hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas as ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. (P.1)

This opening is strong in both matter and manner that it can be read on several levels. At first, it deals with vivid picture of natural scenes and sights of Ayemenem. Secondly, through the underlying meaning of some images and symbols, the author wants to produce a blending effect of emotion and

catharsis, love and pathos which being the key tone of the story. Thirdly, some of the words are so beautifully handled. The term 'brooding month' shows the figure transferred epithet. The sentence 'blank crows george on bright mangoes' is highly symbolic. Just possible 'black crows', symbolizes Velutha and black untouchables for instance the Paravans of Kerala. The trees are green but they are dusty. It arouses a sense of pity and pathos. There is 'sprung rhythm' in these sentences, 'Red bananas ripen. Jackfruit burst'. The last sentence, 'Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun'. The very pattern of sound suggests the sense. In this way, the opening of the novel is mysterious in both tone and temperament.

We find a short, slightly figurative passage depicting the condition of Meenachal river:

> Once it had the power to evoke fear. To change lives. To change lives. But now its teeth were drawn, its spirit spent. It was just a slow, sludging 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)

We become aware of the author's sense of discrimination as regards colour, sound and movement. Without always resorting to figurative language, she can forge words, which difference the various shades, nuances, intensities and amplitudes. The white light itself is depicted in its varying modulations: the sunlight was fractured by 'thin trunks of tilting trees' (306), 'glittering sunshine' (1), 'wedge of light' (248), 'edges of light' (219), 'bright parallelogram of barred sunlight on the floor' (268).

Similarly we have several kinds of smells that we are made to feel in the novel: smells of sicksweet, oldfood, sourmetal, sickled, smoke, sour, back inside, fresh wood shavings, pickles, ants, lover's skin, the bus conductor's hands, Father Mulligan's beard, medicinal, stale alcohol, history, still water, milk and urine, printer's ink, cloying incense, sandalwood and the crushed green gram, dinner, shit, Irish Jesuit, Paravan, old roses, yellow maps, breathing people, old carpets, magical sound of music, sleep, London etc.

What matters most in the novel is its style that affects the mind of a reader. Sometimes, the author coins some new terminology and turns and twists language to conform to the feeling as a result of which we can see broken sentences, illogical statements, unrestricted sprinkling of italics, bizarre phrases, ungrammatical constructions, unconventional rhythm etc. Arundhati Roy syas:

> "Language was never rewritten. I don't rewrite. It was just a lot of arranging".[4]

The God of Small Things is a fine example of architectonics. The author herself rightly holds the view in one of her interviews:

> "I never believed that there was any sort af direct link between studying architecture and building-building. So far as I am concemed, I still practice architecture. Constructing my book was actually an architectural things."[5]

The novelist beautifully provides us a hint of the future event under the cover of some obscure sentences. Thus, the narrator holds the view about Estha:

> Slowly, over the years, Estha withdrew from the world. He grew accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquillizer on his past. Gradually the reason for his silence was hidden away, entombed somewhere deep in the soothing folds of the fact of it. (P.12)

Thus, Arundhati Roy has yielded most of the important events and their chronological signposts in the first chapter in a very mysterious and precise way.

Roy's style has got an architectural forming and cinematic movements. She has attempted to find a new thought in the realm of traditional thinking. Her depiction of the Indian society in general and the Kerala society in particular is a negative one. The author has clearly suggested that the Indian society is filthy, sick and wounded as V.S.Naipaul has depicted India in his An Area of Darkness (1979)[6] and India: A Wounded Civilization (1979)[7]. But there is a lot of difference in their approaches, because Naipaul writes as an 'outsider' and Roy writes as an 'insider'. It is true that Roy's observations are based on first hand experience, so there is an authenticity in her representation.

Arundhati Roy has also the credit of creating so many new words and phrases, images and symbols, the striking similes and verbal abundance and yielding a number of Indian words to the English dictionary. The God of Small Things is a judicious blending of realism and romance. It can be said that she enjoys excessive liberty with the language of the Empire.

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