

Architectonics implied in Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things"

*Amritanshu Kumar

Arundhati Roy, the Booker Prize winner novelist, is known to all not only for her new and original style but also for her thought provoking attitude regarding social consciousness. Her very first book, The God of Small Things deals with, apart from many other things, the universal theme of social consciousness for example, the confrontation between the "Laltain and Mombatti"; class antagonism and class exploitations; exposure of the tyranny and injustice the untouchable have to suffer without any rhyme or reason; the insult and abuse the women of the society have to tolerate and above, all, the trials and tribulations, 'the fret and fever', the deserted and the defenseless have to pass through in the police custody and in a caste-ridden societal structure.

The structural pattern or the architectonics of *The God of Small Things* has vehemently brought about a revolution in the literary scenario. A thorough study of the novel obviously shows that the novel is rich in both matter and manner. Probably it is the manner (entirely new and original) that matters most. The design, language, mode and material of the novel are so beautifully employed and tugged together that they cannot help without giving jerk and jolt to the average readers. The novel has a revolutionary style that reminds us of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, Henry James and Joseph Conrad and in Indo-Anglian literature it is very near to Salman Rushdie.

In the work under consideration Arundhati Roy, the narrator like a good surgeon examines the cause of the disease objectively and tries to probe the recesses of the decayed organs. R.S Sharma rightly assumes that "the text is an intricate organism with external and internal injuries. The whole creature is brought to our view with an invisible hand that holds it by the tail. We are invited to inspect this whole being as a whole and grasp the contours of its body. We are unaware of the internal constitution and the chemistry and cannot perceive the functions of the various limbs and joints nor do we realize the nature and location of the damage that lies beneath the skin."¹

This book has an architectural shape. As an expert architect who is in a habit of creating new and attractive models, Arundhati Roy has also coined some new words and phrases and has turned and twisted language to conform to the feeling, as a result of which we have broken sentences, illogical statements, unrestricted sprinkling of italics, bizarre phrases, ungrammatical constructions, unconventional rhythm etc. In other words the author has tried her best to assimilate those things in such a way that they suggest the sense very well or to quote T.S. Eliot they have objective correlative or emotional Equivalent.

One of the striking features of *The God of Small Things* is a brilliant display of some powerful images. It is a whirlpool of images and symbols, antithesis and balance, rhyme and rhythm, mythology and modernity, sex and sensation. Though the book is also rich with many other tropes such as personification, irony, oxymoron, pun and hyperbole etc., the main concern is the appropriate and powerful similes. In the field of similes and metaphors, she is entirely original and impressive. In her handling of images and symbols, she is very near to James Joyce, Virginia Woolf,

* Ph.D 2010. English. Adhoc Lecturer. College of Commerce, Patna-20 (Magadh University) Ph-09801068969



Faulkner, T.S. Eliot and Salman Rushdie. Most of the images, words and phrases of Roy are deliberately distorted; sometimes two or three words combined together in an idiosyncratic way; sometimes even the rules of grammar are consciously neglected; sometimes the reversed spelling and weird and grotesque word formation are beautifully placed to arouse a unique sensation in reader's mind.

The God of Small Things is significant for the special use of similes, somewhat different from our rich heritage. In this book, Roy's similes excel her plot construction, her characterization and above all, her truthful portrayal of the social indiscrimination. In this field she has heralded a new conception, which creates jerk into the entire notion of traditional thinking. Like T.S. Eliot, she has evolved some modern images which very beautifully suggest the sense. In this respect Prayag D. Tripathi writes : "Her novel contributes a significant variety of material and a narrative technique that reminds us of modernists approach, say of, James, Joyce and Virginia Woolf in 'magic realism'. But it is most fascinating in its innovative language use, with metaphors, alliterations, musicality etc. It plays with words she has used the language the way she likes, with rule-bending creativity."²

Arundhati Roy has put in this novel two important metaphors-Laltain and Mombatti, which suggest the two forces-the god of big things and the god of small things. They are the recurrent images like those of Shakespeare's major images e.g.; sea and animal imagery in *Othello* and disease imagery in *Macbeth*. Here the term 'Laltain' and 'Mombatti' are highly suggestive. Both 'Laltain' and 'Mombatti' give us light and burns another light. The 'Laltain' is well fed and well protected. It can bravely face the blowing wind. But on the other hand the Mombatti has no glass, no protection, no support. It can easily be blown out by the surge of wind. One of important virtues of 'mombatti' is that it can very soon light another lamp : But a laltain in comparison to a mombatti is somewhat stubborn to burn other's light. Thus, through these beautiful connotations, the author has successfully tried to arouse our sense of pity and catharsis for the mombattis, the down-trodden and have nots, the dalit and 'deserted. The author says "There are big dreams and little ones. Big Man the Laltain sahib, the small man the Mombatti, an old Bihari Coolie who met Estha's school excursion party at the railway station used the say of dreams. Big man the lantern-small man the Talow-stick. Huge man the strob lights, he omitted to say. And small man the subway station."³

Some of the words and phrases like 'atmospheric tumult', 'north wind', 'stunned firs' and 'gaunt thorns' are highly suggestive and they deal with the whole processes of the novel in a nut, shell. The atmospheric tumult caused by stormy weather, suggests not only the atmosphere of the place where the house is situated but also the stormy nature of the devellers of the house that lack etiquette and manner, decorum and decency. On the other hand the house, 'Thrush Crush Grange', is just the opposite of 'Wuthering Heights'. The above quoted sentence have also got cacophonous sound which clearly suggests the sense.

Arundhati Roy also shows the same artistic skill in depicting the picture of the big 'Ayemenem House', which symbolizes the house of hypocrisy, cruelty, injustice and jealously. She observes : "The old house on the hill work 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. The wild overgrown garden was full of the whisper and scurry of small lines ... The house itself looked empty. The doors and windows were locked. The front verandh bare. Unfurnished. But the sky blue plymouth with crome tailfins was still parked outside, and inside, Baby Kochamma was still alive."⁴

This poetic passage loaded with rich symbolism describes like 'Wuthering Heights', not only the Ayemenem House but symbolically it also shows how the dwellers of this big house are devoid of all the healthy values of life; how they are narrow-minded and unfurnished in their attitude; how the walls of the house is streaked with moss, a symbol of rawness, rubbishness and clumsiness; how the 'skyblue plymoth' a symbol of luxury and prosperity, is still parked outside; but inside Baby Kochamma, who symbolizes here cruelty, injustice and jealousy.

This brief survey of Roy's imagery clearly points out the author's great sense of poetry, rhythm and pattern. Her images have often been taken from the day to day common life, mostly from nature and modern commercial world. Sometimes they become so complex that they call for cerebral gymnastics to comprehend their implications.

Apart from many other beautiful things, *The God of Small Things* matters to us for its 'linguistic inventiveness', which reminds us of James Joyce, William Faulkner, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie. The Booker committee rightly observed: "with extraordinary linguistic inventiveness, Roy funnels the history of South India through the eyes of seven year old twins."⁵

The novelist has so sagaciously selected some images that they present a very fine correspondence between the major and the minor term. Sometimes, the images are so complex that they call for cerebral gymnastics to understand the inherent meaning. A deep profound study of the images shows that the images have vividness, force and economy. She, like a great artist creates surprising images out of most familiar material. Her images always move back and forth and they have the unique smell of the character, situation and environment where the plot revolves. Besides, she is gifted with an integrating power-the power of organising the different complex and obscure material into a dramatic whole.

The other recurrent image, which attracts is the image of 'hole'. This image is highly significant and pervasive. The word 'hole' seems to suggest the gap, the unsatisfied longingness or the various obstacles faced by some socially isolated characters like Ammu, Velutha and the twins. Arundhati is also an expert in comparing concrete with abstract in the most meaningful manners. One such image occurs in the very beginning of the novel: "strange insects appeared like ideas in the evening and burned themselves on Baby Kochamma's dim 40-watt bulbs"⁶ Here Roy has concretized the abstract idea of Baby Kochamma that comes to her especially in the evening. The image of burning insects is quite realistic as it is the time of rainy season where a large number of insects are born. 40 watt bulbs suggests slow and dim vision engendered by her mind. The other such beautiful image in the book is the description of the teeth of the seven year old Rabel: "new teeth were waiting inside her gums like words in a pen. Waiting inside her gums, like words in a pen"⁷; the description of the restless police who are dogging out the supposed abductor of the twins: "past giant spider webs that had withstood the rain and spread like whispered gossip from tree to tree."⁸

Arundhati has also presented some domestic and rustic images like those of Wordsworth and Thomas Hardy. The beauty of these images lies in the author's imagination which creates new ways to traditional images. Another powerful images are of moth and history which are not simply symbols but also structural unifier making the book coherent and highly poetic. Apart from all these the words 'silence' and 'childhood' have been used as images. The book is replete with the images of silence.

Apart from all these techniques, Arundhati Roy has also used some fine cohesive and cogent symbols, which beautifully project the situation concerned. As a matter of fact the sense of mystery and muddle, the feelings of richness and complexity, a symbol may communicate can not be communicated ordinarily by any other means. It is symbols in great works that make the language rich and expressive.

This brief survey shows that in the handling of English language, Roy has revealed her as an interesting word-smith. Her style has got an architectural framing and cinematic movements. Though Peter Kemp calls her style of writing, a liberal sprinkling of italics and Caman Callil a Broker Judge, in 1996 and co-founder of the feminist publishing House Virago, denounced *The God of Small Things* as 'vulgar and execrable'. Yet it can't be denied that Arundhati Roy has effected a new thought in the realm of traditional thinking. She has to her credit so many new words and phrases, images and symbols which have undoubtedly, enriched the English, tongue. Here striking similes and verbal exuberance, her poetic structure and architectural method will ever remain permanent on the pages of literary history.