Chapter 6

Style, Imagery and Narrative Technique

The Booker Prize jury was anonymous in believing that the book *The God of Small Things* presents “extraordinary linguistic inventiveness” and this clue has led critics to comment on style, narrative technique and imagery. These comments appear problematical for the reader as they deal with the validity or otherwise of the technique used by the novelist making it a work of art. Geeta Doctor calls the novel all “entertainment or better still seduction.”¹ Thomas Abraham feels that the novel is “inescapably and fatally compromised by the self-indulgence of her (Roy’s) style”² and is “Much ado about Small Things” and then again Praveen Swamy praises the work for its “universality that has nothing to do with its settings.”³ The fact is that Arundhati Roy, despite her denial that she belongs to the school of Salman Rushdie in her thematic presentation and stylistic devices. After all she belongs to the post-Modernists phase of Indian English creative history which became patently apparent with the publication of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. There is some truth in John Updike’s observation by which he places Arundhati Roy among “Rushdie’s Children” and that Rushdie released a certain impulse
of creative thinking much useful to the writers of "Third World." The truth is that even if Roy's novel strikes a new cord it has strong similarity in the handling of the theme, motive and linguistics innovations with Rushdie's novel. To work out the similarities is not our purpose here, it is enough to point out at this stage that she introduces a new pattern by her style which definitely makes a break through in narrative technique. The stylistic complexity has baffled many commentators and readers but the overall impression is more or less appreciative of the skill of the novelist in presenting the deeply psychological responses to the small happenings, which by getting lodged in the dark recesses of the sub-conscious memory of the narrator. The happenings are of childhood phase and they influence the dizygotic twins Estha and Rahel. The latter has to present her own memory along with the memory of her brother. There is a mysterious bond between the twins which enables Rahel to have access to even what was experienced by Estha alone. This situation makes it natural for Arundhati Roy to evolve a special structure both thematic and formalistic to fulfil the task of providing an aesthetically satisfying and logically convincing account of the plot of the novel. In short, the involuted plot needs an equally involuted style and that explains the unusual stylistic pattern and narrative devices of The God of Small Things. The question of style and narrative technique are bonded in the novel so that the experiences of the dizygotic twins which operate both
separately and unitedly be successfully presented as an organic creative experience.

Since the novel juxtaposes the small socio-political issues like sexual perversion, incests, caste differences, Marxism and naxalite terrorism with small things of life as mentioned by Jason Cowley, one of the five Booker judges who says that the choice was based on Roy's achievement which comes out of her ability "never to forget about small things in life."\(^5\) Cowley rounds up his observations with the view that "Arundhati Roy is the princess of prose." Roy's own explanation for this mixture of the big and small, significant and the insignificant, the ordinary and the extraordinary is remarkable. Her logic is simple that this mixture "doesn't surprise you with the unforeseen. They are as familiar as the house you live in. Or the smell of your lover's skin."\(^6\) With this kind of authorial attitude the hackneyed style would fail the creative purpose and so she forges a new style of course taking clue from her predecessors and the major contemporaries. Thus Arundhati Roy's style marks an important development in the form of modern fiction by mixing of genres leading to a new and effective pitch of high emotionality, heightened sense of irony and humour or utterances steeped in pure poetical mode. The masters of the modern fiction in English like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Salman Rushdie owe their substance much to the kind of genre mixing. In their hands realism and the poetic mode including symbolism and well worked out imagery co-exist and
Arnold Goldman makes a meaningful observation while analyzing Joyce’s story “The Sisters”. The observation is relevant enough to point out the linkage between these masters and Arundhati Roy. Goldman observes:

The clumsily hooked skirt and the trodden-down cloth boots point in the direction of realism, but the experience also includes ‘the tawny gold’ of the clouds and the ‘dusky golden light’ in the room. The almost romantic formality is not only in the words; it is in the rhythms as well. Note how the sentences which include these phrases flow on well past where they might end. The prose is heavily cadenced.7

In short Arundhati Roy is in company of these great writers who show the poetic fervour and poetic content varying from author to author. That is why while Virginia Woolf is eminently poetical, Rushdie’s poeticism is much at a lower level and Joyce stands out with his extremely judicious blending of realism and poetry. By poetic mode we mean that Arundhati Roy makes use of those linguistic and rhetorical devices which belong characteristically to the domain of poetry rather than of prose. She excels in using connotative vocabulary-words and utterances carrying emotive burden of both low and high key according to the demand of the situation. The following two passages substantiate the poet and also support the stylistic variation to suit the occasion. The first passage for example presents emotivity at the lower key:

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 bare skin of her midriff. Between her petticoat and her blouse. They loved the fact that the brown of the backs of their hands was the exact brown of their mother’s stomach skin. (pp. 220-21).

Placed beside it the following passage clearly brings out the poetic mode at the higher key because the character is under a strong spell of self introspection:

So if she (Ammu) were granted one small wish perhaps it would only have been Not to Know. Not to know what each day held in store for her. Not to know where she might be, next month, next year. Ten years on. Not to know which way her road might turn and what lay beyond the bend. And Ammu knew.... Hooded in her own hair, Ammu leaned against herself in the bathroom mirror and tried to weep.
For herself.
For the God of Small Things.
For the sugar-dusted twin midwives of her dream.
(p. 224)

Arundhati Roy’s prose style exhibits a profusion of qualities and devices which are commonly attributes of poetry. We notice the use by Roy of strong rhythm, alliteration, rhyme and words with onomatopoeic effect even on a cursory look. The following example will illustrate the point:

Moths lit up the sky. There wasn’t a moon.
He could swim, with his one arm. She with her two.
His skin was salty. Hers too.
He left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors.
She could have touched him with her fingers, but she didn’t.
They just stood together.
Still.
Skin to skin. (p. 216)

The chapter entitled “Wisdom Exercise Notebooks” show passages with strong rhythmic sense and the phonetic devices used intelligently improve the effect of the emotion to be conveyed. For example:

In Pappachi’s study, Rahel (not old, not young), with floor-dust on her feet, looked up from the Wisdom Exercise Notebook and saw that Esthappen Un-known was gone.
She climbed down (off the stool, off the table) and walked out to the verandah.
She saw Estha’s back disappearing through the gate.
'It was midmorning and about to rain again. The green—in the last moments of that strange, glowing, preshower light—was fierce.
A cock crowed in the distance and its voice separated into two. Like a sole peeling off an old shoe. (p. 164)

The trained years of Roy can realize the importance of alliteration not only to make the description musical but also denote the strong feelings about the caste distinction which mar or make human relationship in Ayemenem. Baby Kochamma is definite that the twins being “Half Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry.” Here the alliteration on ‘h’ sound underlines Baby Kochamma’s contempt for the twins while the
closing 's' alliteration reflects her own high notion of caste superiority.

Since the story of the novel *The God of Small Things* is concerned with the memories of children, Roy very dexterously plays with the sound of the language. In order to accentuate the rhythm to denote the merriments of children in such places the style is marked by alliteration, rhyme and above all by using words of personal coinage. Examples are many as Roy seems to be never short of such improvisations:

(1) Her funeral killed her. Dus to dus to dus to dus to dus. (p. 7)

(2) Satin-lined
    Brass handle shined. (p. 4)

(3) Thimble-drinker.
    Coffin-cartwheeler. (p. 251)

Some striking coinages are 'gnap', 'Bar Nowl', 'Locusts stand I' and 'Lay Ter'. The fact that Arundhati Roy is not merely a juggler with words but a stylist who can take liberty with English syntax at will and with remarkable effect. In fact she has cultivated for herself a unique reductive style which results into rare degrees of condensation and concreteness. In writers not so facile with the language condensation leads to obscurity but in her case syntactical liberty makes her meaning more transparent. Her habit of omitting the structural words like auxiliary verbs and conjunctions, the meaning gets concretized. This habit further operates in her elliptical sentences, verbless and non-finite clauses. The result is
obviously striking as told by the examples of G.M. Hopkins and W.H. Auden. It may be mentioned that the review notices, both British and American the thing most appreciated in *The God of Small Things* was its style and its stylistic devices which are so frequently used to such highly effectiveness that we forget the syntactical lapses on the part of the novelist. The following may serve as an exemplars:

(a) Not old.
   Not young.
   But a viable die-able age. (p. 3)

(b) 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)

(c) As though meaning had slunk out of things and left them fragmented. Disconnected. The glint of Ammu’s needle. The colour of a ribbon. The weave of the cross-stitch counterpane. (p. 225)

Roy’s resourcefulness as a creator of words are as said by R.S. Sharma “an interesting wordsmith” gives much depth and sense to her objective of putting the ‘Great’ and ‘Small’. Her experiments with words and the effect thereof is telling enough to force us into consideration of her innovative devices. The art, it is definite, she learns from James Joyce and Salman Rushdie. She has a strange facility for making new compound words which appear rather absorbed in the story structure of the novel. Words like ‘carbridge’, ‘dust green’ and ‘day moon’ illustrate her efficiency in this respect. What is really significant is that these coinages get an
independent semantic identity which support the structural requirement of the novel namely to remind us of the small verses big. Needless to say she is able to make a distinction between the breeze that we feel in the static car at the sea shore of Kerala is different from the breeze felt in a moving car. Similarly the trees laden with dust have a peculiar stunted greenness and the moon visible at the day time is definitely different from the moon of night. Words like ‘sleep smile’ and ‘shark smile’, ‘sick sweet’, ‘dirt colour’, ‘angry coloured’ and ‘fever bottom’ give a specific context and therefore assume a meaningfulness otherwise difficult. Roy’s fondness for the method leads her to form words with entirely new connotation and interestingly enough she uses words just analogically the best example of which is ‘vomity’ after the words like ‘faulty’. Similarly, words like ‘furry whirring’, ‘sari-flapping’, ‘dieable’, ‘touchable kitchen’ and ‘mid poem’ illustrate the point. In this respect she reminds us of the coinages of Mulk Raj Anand who by his conviction that an Indian novelist writing in English first think of an idea in his own regional language and then translates it into English.

These innovations add to her poetic and linguistic effectiveness which together help her in capturing the mood or the situation of a given moment in a way which is strikingly appropriate and exact. The first chapter in this respect and the one entitled ‘Work is struggle’ (chapter 14) provide us enough proof for
her telling inventiveness and its effect. We may feel the effect just from a single example:

Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha. It reached out of his head and enfolded him in its swampy arms. It rocked him to the rhythm of an ancient, foetal heartbeat. It sent its stealthy, suckered tentacles inching along the insides of his skull, hoovering the knolls and dells of his memory, dislodging old sentences, whisking them off the tip of his tongue.... He grew accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquilizer on his past. Gradually the reason for his silence was hidden away, entombed somewhere deep in the soothing folds of the fact of it. (pp. 11-12)

The point to be noted is that a very mature poetic and linguistic inventiveness is used for writing brilliant narrative patches whenever there is need for a specific background build up or when some crucial stage is there in the life of the characters concerned. These passages by using the poetically vibrant metaphors capable of lighting up the situation reach the desired effect with facile smoothness.

The narrative technique is bound to be of a special kind as the theme is far from the usual as Santa Sengupta says "it is neither a tragedy, nor a comedy, nor history, nor romance. There is tumult and passion and humour and pain. And yet it deals with an ordinary story about ordinary people leading ordinary lives." The very first chapter brings out this fact of special structure as it serves the purpose both of a “Prologue” and and “Epilogue”. The novel is concerned with the memory of Estha and Rahel and even though
Rahel in the mask of an omniscient narrator is thirty one years old now. The writer seems to present the story through the childish vision of the two children along with their mother who had come to Ayemenem under unusual circumstances of neglect and anguish. Since it is the children's narrative Roy uses a style in keeping with the haphazard movement of memory going into the past and rushing back into the present. For the children big things do not matter much as small things. It is the writer's imaginative resourcefulness by which the small things become important and it is in the description of those small things with a transparently visible significance of greater magnitude that the novelist succeeds in her objective. In short, the title of the novel itself is eloquent enough to mention writer's thematic concern symbolically. The novel seems to contain words and phrases which suggest the symbolic basis of the theme. These words and phrases are very intelligently positioned by the author throughout the novel which amounts to nothing sort of a tactical positioning. Even Page 2 and 3 remind us repeatedly the sense of smallness as against the big things. The significance of this intelligent positioning of words and phrases becomes clear when we notice that what she says to an interviewer is found in the first chapter here and there. While answering the query by an interviewer about the title of the novel, she says:

To me the god of small things is the inversion of God. God's a big thing and God's in control. The god of small things... whether it's the way the children see...
things or whether it's the insect life in the book, or the fish or the stars—there is not accepting of what we think of as adult boundaries. This small activity that goes on is the under life of the book. All sorts of boundaries are transgressed upon. At the end of the first chapter I say little events and ordinary things are just smashed and reconstituted, imbued with new meaning to become the bleached bones of the story. It's a story to see a pattern... A pattern... of how in these small events and in these small lives the world intrudes.9

Our logic for quoting her at length is that many words and phrases used in this quotation are repeated in the text of the novel in the very initial chapter. Besides this long quotation we may put just two descriptive passages to show that the words and phrases are not only repeated but also just a little twist invests them more meaningful suggestions:

(1) Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons. Short creatures with long shadows, patrolling the Blurry End. (p. 3)

(2) That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house—the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture—must be resurrected from the ruins and examined. Preserved. Accounted for.
Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted.
Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the
bleached bones of a story. (pp. 32-33).

This repeated similarity is a pointer to the fact that the thematic and
the expressive structure of the novel is well conceived and is
devised along sound lines of judgement. The last quotation
referring to the significance of the small time units can by analogy
be taken as the key for understanding the telling title of the work.
Small incidents like being born at an interval of eighteen minutes
(p. 2) and the seven years old twins watching the funeral service for
Sophie Mol and their feeling that she died because of the heavy
earth that covered her are rounded up by the suggestive words of
the epitaph: “A Sunbeam Lent To Us Too Briefly.” The sunbeam
indicates the significance of the brief and petty details in shaping
our lives. In short the small is juxtaposed with the big wherein
small incidents linger longest in the memory and small details and
calamities haunt the children for life. Even the small matters of
human relationship have got vast socio-political impact to scar the
memory of the sensitive children so much so that when Rahel
comes to meet Estha at Ayemenem at the age of 30 things have not
changed as they (things) have a potential for getting bruised by the
past memory even at the mature age of 30. Being twins they are
identical but not similar. In fact the thematic structure is not
possible without the well contrived play of memory in the novel as
the novelist tells us in the very opening pages:
In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Every thing was For Ever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities. (p. 2)

The metaphorical implication suggests us that *The God of Small Things* represent the life of the weak and helpless in this universe: blue bottles, frogs and also human beings inclusive. Contrasted with the God of Big Things, The God of Small Things is for the life and suffering, tragic hope and the flitting moments of joy of the down-trodden Velya pappen and his sons and the deprived Ammu. To extend the metaphor *The God of Small Things* stand for the vast majority who are suffering not because they are deficient but because of the forces of history. Meaningless conventions, false notions of respectability which very often combine with the organs of the state and opportunistic political workers. *The God of Small Things* is given a human touch by making it to stand for the simple natural life of children and innocent creatures.

Our above observations stand validated by the text of the novel, of course, when seen intently:

He (Larry McCaslin) didn’t know that in some places, like the country that Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy.... That something happened when personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a
nation. That Big God howled like a hot wind, and demanded obeisance. Then Small God (cosy and contained, private and limited) came away cauterized, laughing numbly at his own temerity. Inured by the confirmation of his own inconsequence, he became resilient and truly indifferent. Nothing mattered much. Nothing much mattered. And the less it mattered, the less it mattered. It was never important enough. Because Worse Things had happened. In the country that she came from, poised forever between the terror of war and horror of peace, Worse Things kept happening. (p. 19)

Arundhati Roy usually works through suggestions and seems to indicate the significance of the small things of small people who have got neither privileges nor position in the society and yet whose lives and doings constitute the very fabric of the everyday existence making it to assume significance of the tragic heights. Roy probably suggests it in her own poetic manner:

So Small God laughed a hollow laugh, and skipped away cheerfully. Like a rich boy in shorts. He whistled, kicked stones. The source of his brittle elation was the relative smallness of his misfortune. He climbed into people's eyes and became an exasperating expression. (p. 19)

Thus for Arundhati Roy life without the god of small things is a life without colour and without inspiration. That this idea of Big verses small is central to her socio-political perception is amply clear from the way Roy presents her narrative. While describing the Big segment of socio-political hierarchy Roy's usual tools are banter, ridicule, satire and irony and her descriptions are marked by
display of sheer wit which pinpoints the authorial focus on the shady patches of the lives of the so-called ‘bigs’ in the society by whose observation we can easily know their value system represented by their ‘big God’. The above observations become credible if only we notice the way the narrative get invested with subtle symbolism. In other words it is in the design of her narrative skill who take recourse to the eloquent expressive devices called symbolism and imagery. While symbols give a depth of meaning recurrent or stock images substantiate the lead motive. In Roy both symbolism and imagery go hand in hand to support the thematic structure with propensity for serious socio-political commitment of sorts. The writer’s intention and her narrative technique serving that intention become evident by presenting the unusual responses in a highly meaningful narration. Even in the very first chapter we are informed about the stranged eyes of Rahel in the most intimate moments with her American husband McCaslin. Those strange looks contained behind them the experience of rejection and loss of relations giving rise to a strange mood of indifference as has been noticed in the preceding quotation (quoted from p. 19).

According to Roy’s idea of small peoples’ Small God controls the lives and doings of those who by their very nature are destined to be the transgressors because of their propensity for being guided by nature and not by convention. Conventions imply codes of behaviour and norms of conduct. The small ones very often go astray because as children of nature they follow their own
rules. The life of these people are guided by personal whims and believes not so much by the conventional consciousness of wrong or right but by the compulsions of their emotional and surreal existence. In short they are a class by themselves difficult to be classified almost like the banana jam illegally produced by 'Paradise Pickles & Preserves'. Rahel finds symbolic significance in the unclassifiable jams produced in her family factory and symbolically applies to her own family which started facing trouble much earlier than Sophie Mol’s visit to Ayemenem. The trouble is the direct result of streak of defiance which informs their minds and deeds. The writer makes her view known in a highly poetic and symbolic way which also shows the appropriateness of her narrative technique by which the past pervades the present and history becomes our daily bread and butter:

To say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem is only one way of looking at it.... that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came... it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.

That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much. (p.33)

For Arundhati Roy the idea of classifiability and otherwise is a crucial denominator of socio-political health of the society. The problem is that the majority consists of small ones ruled by their small gods. It is proved by the fact that she repeats the idea in her treatment of "Pappachi’s moth" symbolizing unpredictable
temperamentality resulting into sudden violence in interpersonal behaviour. This trait is not limited to Pappachi. It taints the character of all the members of the family giving rise to not singular but ambivalent response. While Pappachi's cruelty against his wife and daughter is reprehensible, it also explains the defiant behaviour of Ammu with a marked note of revolt against patriarchal oppression and social tyranny. It is by extracting the maximum from the symbol that Arundhati Roy distills her thematic substance conveyed through a narrative, racy but eloquent at the same time. This is how the ordinary small things, as she says, "become the bleached bones of a story". (p. 33) Symbolism thus is the outer covering—the flesh and blood—of the facts i.e. bones of dead history.

For Napolean History is both freedom and slavery, for Arundhati Roy history is more a burden than a convenience because history follows a pattern and that pattern creates an undefiable rut, those who fall short of the pattern and those who try to behave differently from the rut they are just punished by history without paying any regard to the circumstances of the offenders. Its lessons are ruthlessly straightforward. Estha and Rahel, quiet early in their lives, are made to learn the hard methods of history:

While other children of their age learned other things, Estha and Rahel learned how history negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws. They heard its sickening thud. They smelled its smell and never forgot it. (p. 55)
The authorial opinion seems to be conveyed through the subtle arrangement by which the chapter eleven entitled The God of Small Things is placed right in the middle of the narrative. The highly symbolic texture of the chapter is suggested by the preceding one entitled ‘The River in the Boat’. The writer’s idea is that the pattern of history behaves arbitrarily and very often illogically. Chapter Eleven is streaked by strong symbolism as a deprived woman having no Locus stand I in the archetypal social set up which in itself is made by a historical process which never takes into account even the very logical small desires of small people. In the chapter Ammu’s children are watching her dreaming and Estha significantly calls it ‘daymare’. Ammu’s dream is charged with symbolism suggesting her suppressed libido. The dream is of love with a one handed man:

That afternoon, Ammu travelled upwards through a dream in which a cheerful man with one arm held her close by the light of an oil lamp. He had no other arm with which to fight the shadows that flickered around him on the floor.... If he held her, he couldn’t kiss her. If he kissed her, he couldn’t see her. If he saw her, he couldn’t feel her. (p. 215)

This experience is further restricted and troubled by the people sitting in a circle on steeled chairs wearing spectacles and holding newspapers in their hands. This refers to the fact that in this area people have little opinion of their own and that their opinions are made and unmade by the social conventions which, in reality are nothing more than the temporary life of the news in the newspaper.
So in this world even basic elemental desires of man have no possibility of fusion as the public gaze are formed and informed by history are antithetical to the small natural urges pertaining to the biological urges of the body. The purpose of this strange dream is to bring out the principle of opposition between two sets of values—those of small people and of the so called big people with their separate respective Gods. The fact is suggested by the posers raised by the omniscient narrator on the same page of the text and the answer is found in the chapter entitled ‘The Crossing’ and further in chapter 20. The novelist thus slowly builds up the opposition between the big and the small, her creative principle to a point of no return. Velutha and Ammu after chapter 20 just forget the God of the big things operating through familial and societal fears, caste disparities, religious stigma etc. and desperately pursue their small desires ruled by the God of Small Things:

Even later, on the thirteen nights that followed this one, instinctively they stuck to the Small Things. The Big Things ever lurked inside. They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things. (p. 338)

The reason for building up this fictional edifice on the principle of the conflicting opposites is mentioned by Arundhati Roy herself in the novel where she reveals her disillusionment with the poetics and politics of the great (which are usually the stock theme of the usual fictional narratives):

... the secret of the Great Stories is that they have no secrets. The Great Stories... don’t deceive you with
thrills and trick endings. They don’t surprise you with the unforeseen. They are as familiar as the house you live in…. In the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn’t. And yet you want to know again. (p. 229)

It is clear, thus, Arundhati Roy finds the great of little promise as Akshaya Kumar says, “In such a scenario of exhaustion when the grand ceases to fascinate, and the great appears all-too-familiar, the small things come into play as plausible alternative(s) or props upholding the creative vigour.”

The whole structural concept reaches its successful finality through the various narrative devices mentioned earlier but prominently through the intelligently used by the author of the style of the ‘pastiche’ the use and nature of the style becomes clear from Jameson’s definition who holds that “Pastiche is like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that along side the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy normality still exists.” The style of the pastiche is supplemented by Roy’s frequent use of ironies in describing the people who are objects of her ridicule. The two serve an artistic purpose namely the effective exposure of the follies and excesses of an individual and simultaneously assuring the authorial neutrality which is achieved through language and situation.
The above task needs the various narrative and stylistic devices mentioned earlier but imagery and its skillful use is the main contributor to the whole design of bringing out the tragic denouement in the novel with its rare effectivity.

It was A.C. Bradley who in his monumental work The Shakespearean Tragedy (1904) suggested the importance of imagery in creating the tragic atmosphere which informs Shakespeare’s four great tragedies. Taking this clue from Bradley there appeared Clemen’s influential study “The Development of Shakespeare’s Imagery” incorporating the line taken by C. Spurgeon ‘Shakespeare’s Imagery’ (1935) and Wilson Knight’s ‘The Wheel of Fire’ (1930)’. They rightly hold that the thought behind all literary creation can best be conveyed through the imagery. In other words the imagery serves the medium for expressing the idea of the novel in an artistically eloquent manner. James Joyce, Salman Rushdie may be cited as examples of the efficacy of this medium. Arundhati Roy has special eyes and ears for evoking sensuous images to create the peculiar atmosphere and background suiting the thematic and ideational reality behind her creation. The God of Small Things just mesmerizes us with the eidetic quality of its creator’s imagination. Infact appropriate and striking imagery is one of the basic elements which make her novel successful instantly. Her case in working out similes, makes her imagery vivid and effective. Her similes infact patently reminds us James Joyce and Rushdie. The novel is the story of children’s
vision of the world and in this respect her success is really striking. While narrating their version of the story the novelist seems to be completely pervaded by twins consciousness. That is why the passages of literal worth spontaneously used a diction capable of evoking vivid images of great sensuous effect. The very opening observations about the village of Ayemenem may be cited as an example and it forebodes the role and importance of imagery in the novel:

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, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windopanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. (p. 1)

The spontaneity of the passage makes us oblivious of new coinages like ‘dust green’ a practice of which Roy is very fond of.

Roy’s idea behind the novel is to present the seamy side of the Keralite society and therefore her capacity for creating telling imagery is best used when she comes to describe the surface filth and rottenness which by their pervasiveness stands for the general degradation in life. Her description of the river at Ayemenem puts the past health against the present diseased reality:

Once it had had the power to evoke fear. 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)
The two passages patently underline Roy’s penchant for giving a sensuous colouring to her ordinary words by which her exceptional sense of discrimination regarding colour, sound and movement is marked and this is done not with the highly figurative language but by words which are capable to convey as R.S. Sharma says, “the various shades, nuances, intensities and amplitudes of which we were not conscious earlier.” Her mature sense of colour may be explained by taking note of such coinages as ‘dust green’, ‘wet green’ and ‘mos green’. The single colour green offers therefore three different shades to convey the essential effect. Similarly even the daylight has got different variations to denote difference in the scale of intensity and its appropriateness for the meaning to be conveyed. Subtle modulations, sometimes it is glittering sunshine(p. 1), sometimes it sheaves through the thin trunks of tilting trees (p. 306); sometimes it is wedge of light or edges of light (p. 219). The opening pages of chapter 18 entitled ‘The History House’ is virtually infested with striking images to denote the ruthlessness of the atrocious behaviour of the policeman to follow the present scene. Just one sample is enough to present this fact because the whole chapter is presented not by descriptions but by small striking images:

It was a beautiful house.
Making it look older than it really was. Like sunken treasure dredged up from the ocean bed. (pp. 306-307)

Her exceptional skill is not confined only to light. She presents more than two dozen kinds of smell in her own way. Smells like 'sick sweet smell', 'sour metal smell', 'sickled smell', 'back inside smell', 'smelly ants', 'smell of lover's skin', 'smell of Father Mulligan's beard', and even 'smell of history', 'Irish-jesuit smell', and 'Parvan smell', 'smell of sleep'. In short, in respect of the olfactory sense Roy's keenness is like those of children and animals. It is achieved not only through similes but also through coinages, compound words and selectively used adjectives for indicating the various grades and shades of smell.

The narrative style of small sentences without conventional syntactic considerations, broken words and coined compound words is oriented by a purpose, the purpose being to convey the internal or the external reality. Her similes and metaphors therefore are both expansive and illustrative. By her expansive similes and metaphors she presents complex images because the comparison suggests more than one sense. That is why her metaphors depending only on one sense impression are less in number. What strikes us about her imagery and similes of both kinds is that they are highly original and yet apt and exact. In order to have a better understanding we may present the following assortment:

(1) Her (Sophie Mol) face was pale and as wrinkled as a dhobi's thumb from being in water for too long. (p. 4)
(2) Like a seashell always has a sea-sense, Ayemenem house still had a river-sense. (p. 30)

(3) History’s smell. Like old roses on a breeze. (p. 55)

(4) The silence gathered its skirts and slid, like Spiderwoman, up the slippery bathroom wall. (p. 93)

(5) Grief and bitterness at her daughter’s death coiled inside her like an angry spring. (p. 31)

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

(7) Twin millstones and their mother. Numb millstones. (p. 225)

(8) She said that Public Pots were Dirty. Like Money was. You never knew who’d touched it. (p. 94)

(9) The Loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. Like a fruit in season. (p. 267)

The above sample of illustrative similes shows different kinds of single sense images which may be called visual, auditory, kinetic, kinaesthetic, Gustatory, Olfactory and static.

Being a keen observer of socio-political systems Arundhati Roy uses expansive similes and metaphors from the governmental functioning and political diplomacy with a telling effect. The following may be taken as exemplars:

(1) the Loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. It was always there. Like a fruit in season. Every season. As permanent as a Government job. (p. 16)
(2) Sophie Mol looked around the room. Not moving, just swivelling her eyeballs. A captured spy in enemy territory, plotting her spectacular escape. (p. 238)

(3) The stomach sound of the child Sophie Mol while sleeping is like a new government setting up its systems. Organizing the division of labour, deciding who would do what. (p. 117)

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

Arundhati Roy has developed the exceptional skill of using similes and metaphors of disparate kinds and from disparate sources. She excels therefore in comparing concrete with abstract in a highly meaningful manner. Describing the Ayemenem House in monsoon season she says,

(1) Strange insects appeared like ideas in the evenings and burned themselves on Baby Kochamma’s dim 40-watt bulbs. (pp. 9-10)

(2) The growing childhood of Rahel is indicated in these words “new teeth were waiting inside her gums, like words in a pen.” (p. 37)

The chapter The History House contains this category of metaphors in abundant number. Just two can show her adeptness in this matter:

(1) Past giant spider webs that had withstood the rain and spread like whispered gossip from tree to tree. (p. 305)
(2) Past-butterflies drifting through the air like happy messages.
(p. 305)

A close look at the images tells us that Roy is at her best in selecting images which are grounded in the context and the meaning of which arise out of it. For example, the chameleon image quite well-known for denoting changeability but when used by Roy it becomes an image denoting further movement also: “He (Pillai) walked through the world like a chameleon. Never revealing himself, never appearing not to. Emerging through chaos unscathed” (p.14). The image suggests changeability but also many things more including unscrupulous unpredictability. For achieving this broad based effect the main image sometimes need a secondary image for its crystallization as in the following example:

Then he would reopen his umbrella and walk away in chocolate robes and comfortable sandals, like a high-stepping camel with an appointment to keep. He had young Baby Kochamma’s aching heart on a leash....
(p. 24)

Here the word appointment is metaphorically used suggesting the popularity of Father Mulligan among young good looking unmarried women of the village and his positive responses towards them. These images fall into the category of complex images because they attain force only when the context is recalled or understood. Sometimes these complex images open up their meaning and effect only after a careful semantic analysis is used.
We may cite the passage in which Chacko tells the twins his meaning of history. Chacko tells them:

They were a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away. He explained to them that history was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside. (p. 52)

The use of capital letters and its absence gives a subtle ironical touch to the description bringing out the advantage of taking history in the personified form. The comparison between families of Old Plymouth and Baby Kochamma is striking enough to denote the necessary incompatibility of the two. The two are not loved and yet cannot be discarded. The vehicle is therefore described by the novelist as “a wide lady squeezing down a narrow corridor. Like Baby Kochamma in Church, on her way to the bread and wine” (p. 65). This discussion of the intelligent use of similes by Arundhati Roy may be rounded up by an example of cluster similes used for underlining a single object with comparison being multidimensional:

She touched him lightly with her fingers and left a trail of goose bumps on his skin. Like flat chalk on a blackboard. Like breeze in a paddy field. Like jet streaks in a blue church sky. (p. 339)

Arundhati Roy’s imagery is usually drawn from two sources—(i) traditional imagery is drawn from nature and from country life. (ii) His imagery is also from modern urban life. In
both the cases the images are used with a freshness which produce subtle effect for example the author's imaginative resourcefulness exploits even the traditional source of imagery for the new effect. In the first example the height of the coconut trees carries the suggestion of reaching the clouds figuratively. The coconut trees were sea anemones waving their tentacles, hoping to trap and eat an unsuspecting cloud (p. 83).

Similarly the daily occurrence of snake clogging the footsteps of usually the bare-footed Kerala farm labourers is used far deeper effect: "His own voice coiled around him like a snake" (p. 287).

This subtlety extends even to the images drawn from modern urban life in which her originality is immediately conveyed to the reader. Roy conceived of large scale conversion to Christianity in a manner not to be found elsewhere:

Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag. (p. 33)

Similarly she finds the beggars eyes "as blue as faded jeans" and the slowly loosening mud is described as oozings "through toes like toothpaste". These are the ordinary images from urban life but when used as similes they create an image both graphic and telling by which the feeling to be conveyed is made transparent.

A close perusal of the text of the novel shows Roy's special fondness for certain images which show the special purpose for which the novel is used. The purpose is to portray the averations of the common life in a so-called progressive state ruled by the
communist who take pride in their human concerns of progressive nature. Two such images strike us namely the ‘hole’ and the ‘eyes’ image. Regarding the first probably Roy has taken the clue from Rushdie who says, ‘A washing chest is a hole in the world, a place which civilization has put outside itself beyond the pale; this makes it the finest of hiding places’ (*Midnight’s Children*, p. 184). Like Rushdie’s hole is used by Roy for communicating the idea of individual existence as some forced etching into the universe. It may also refer to dents created by the problemical life in the otherwise smooth surface of the universe. The examples cited below put the ‘hole’ in the context of the ‘Universe’ with capital U.

The grey, elephant-shaped hole in the Universe agitated in his sleep, then slept again (p. 235).

He blocked the light from the door.
An Estha-shaped hole in the Universe. (p. 156)

Rotting beams supported on once-white pillars had buckled at the centre, leaving a yawning gaping hole. A History hole. A History-shaped hole in the Universe through which.... (p. 307)

Thus the ‘hole’ image raises the debate to the height of ontological questioning involving human existence and the life in the universe. Similarly, ‘Eyes’ and ‘Silence’ are the other two images which are used for different meaning according to the varying situation. There are children’s eyes and old people’s eyes and the dilation of their eyes indicate sense of joy or a feeling of shock and fear. The eye image therefore communicates a different story in relation to
different situation in which the characters are placed. Baby Kochamma’s frustrations have made her malicious and when she observes that Estha ignores Rahel, newly arrived from America she is rather happy and so the writer has to say about her inner feelings in this angular way:

She was delighted that Estha had not spoken to Rahel.... She was eighty-three. Her eyes spread like butter behind her thick glasses. ‘I told you, didn’t I?’ She said to Rahel. ‘What did you expect? Special treatment? He’s lost his mind, ‘I’m telling you! He doesn’t recognize people any more! What did you think?’ Rahel said nothing. (pp. 20-21)

This image requires a little bit of analytic skill to find out the significance of the specific sense in which ‘the eye image is used.’ In order to appreciate the easy maneuverability of the novelist of the original ‘eye-image’, we need more examples:

(a) “they would watch with dinner-plate eyes as history revealed itself to them in the back verandah;” (p. 55)

(b) “Ammu saw her son’s bright feverbutton eyes” (p. 109);

(c) “Estha’s eyes were frightened saucers;” (p. 133) .

(d) They looked across the river with Old Boat eyes”. (p. 204)

The same as above is true in the case of the ‘silence image’. Literally speaking silence is absence of sound—a state of detachment but it can also be at times an eloquent medium for communicating delicate situation. ‘Silence’ in the hands of
Arundhati Roy attains a multiplicity of meaning illuminating the particular situation and its associated emotions. It serves both as a comment as well as penetrating statement of the prevailing mood and suggested consequence. For this purpose the following assortment may serve as illustration of our above observations:

(a) Silence slid in like a bolt (p. 320)
(b) Silence hung in the air like secret loss. (p. 91)
(c) The silence sat between grand-niece and baby grand aunt like a third person. A stranger. Swollen. Noxious. (p. 21)
(d) The silence gathered its skirts and slid, like Spiderwoman, up the slippery bathroom wall. (p. 93)

In the first example Estha is threatened into endorsing the police inspector version of Velutha’s death. As a child his nature demanded only truth but the truth was throttled by the State instrument of law and order and so the image of silence submitting to the coercive show of force suggested by the bolt of rifle. Similarly everyone of the above citation refer to some concentrated meaning, some opening into the character about which the statement professes to say something.

Certain critics are inclined to study the novel on the lines suggested by the Shakespearean critics like Spurgeon and Wilson Knight. They had felt in the 30’s that the tragedies of Shakespeare and their mystery can only be known by carefully observing the imagery used by the dramatist in a play like Hamlet and Macbeth.
In other words they held that the unities in Shakespeare’s play is given by imagery and not by incidents. There is some truth in the above observation. *The God of Small Things*, if seen in that light strikes us with a definite pattern in the use of images suggesting filth, sickness and incapacitating hurt. This filthiness operates not through suggestion only but also by repugnant details for example, the woman whom Rahel had met in New York on a train journey is recollected by her on reaching Ayemenem. The woman used to cough and put the phlegm into small pieces of paper. The woman “arranged the little packages in neat rows on the empty seat in front of her as though she was setting up a phlegm stall” (p. 72).

That it is not a fictional description but a well considered device for the novelist is proved beyond doubt by a few samples: “A swathe of dirty yellow sponge... shivered on the back seat like an immense jaundiced liver (p.113); she felt like a road sign with birds shitting on her (p. 161); every mouthful she ate was displayed to her admiring younger cousins, half-chewed, mulched, lying on her tongue like fresh vomit (p. 329).

The above images not so much emphasize the general dirtiness around as the degree of dirtiness which is bordering on creating repugnance. There appear to be a system in these images of indecent filth. In other words, it is dirtiness rotten to the core and the images are used both literally and figuratively to suggest that the life in Kerala is not only burdensome but also repugnant to any man at all conscious and desirous of a decent life. Against this
background it is difficult to ignore the symbolic significance of the images which by themselves provide a telling commentary on the Keralite social structure, the tone and tenor of which is negative. In fact, this persistent use of filthy and noxious imagery has provided enough material for those of her critics who feel that Roy, while writing this novel, has Western readership in his mind who revel in watching and reading about the state of the Indian society. The social reality as depicted in the novel is definitely filthy and sick with little chances of redemption. After all the novel ends, despite all its wealth of poetry and poetic mode of the last chapter on a note of tragic negativity. We may admit that her descriptions are graphic enough, made more graphic by the use of pertinent imagery but still the Indian social structure has something more positive and healthy to show to the West which, unfortunately has been chosen by the novelist to be suppressed.

To be precise our discussion in the chapter refer to the great resourcefulness of Arundhati Roy as a novelist. She at once strikes us with her facility with the language and more than that with her perfect knowledge of how to use that instrument for achieving the desired effect. As a novelist with a certain point of view we may or may not agree with her perception of the Indian reality in general and the socio-political reality of the Keralite society in particular but we just cannot fail to realize her exceptional capacity for telling her story in a manner singularly her own. There is no doubt that she has learnt many skills from the earlier masters like James Joyce,
Virginia Woolf and Salman Rushdie but the way those skills are harnessed for achieving her creative goal is definitely uniquely of Arundhati Roy alone. The story element in *The God of Small Things* is rather thin but the intelligent use of narrative strategies along with suitable narrative devices make the novel a success and despite our reservations about her point of view vis-à-vis Indian round reality we are forced to admit her as a powerful fiction writer.
References