

Child's-eye View, The Macrocosm in the 'Point of view' of Roy's *The God of Small Things*

قراءة في رواية اله الأشياء الصغيرة للروائية أرونداتي روي.

*Riyaz Ahmad Kumar*¹

The paper focus on the point of view in 'God of Small Things', through child narrators, it discusses how the writer uses child's narration in order to bring forth the minute honest details. It also addresses the credibility of child's narration or child's-eye view. The child perspective and 'Child-speak' illuminates the whole narrative. It focuses on how writer transports back onto both the narrator's and onto the readers mind and creative imagination of children on part of the writer. The reader is being offered a piecing together of the past, present filtered through the eyes, mind and memories of the children. The main focus of this article is how Roy succeeds in depicting childhood experience and the portrayal of visual and verbal description in such an effective and memorable way.

Key Notes: *Reader Response Theory, Point of View, Children, Childhood*

¹ Riyaz Ahmad Kumar, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Maulana Azad National Urdu University Hyderabad, India. Email ID: rkum0009@gmail.com

In reader-response perspective a text is viewed as a process that goes on in the mind of the reader, the reader actually participates in creating the text. The important questions to remember in this regard are: what are the factors which influence the response of the reader? What meaning if any, is inherent in the text? What power does the author or the text have in shaping the response of the reader? Here in all questions we are talking of the 'reader' who is outside the text, but in the latter question we see the word 'power' which influences the reader. The 'power' also may be of the first reader who lies inside the text. The first reader may be the 'I' or the third person God like all seer, who reads the world. The child image in the literary world became the concrete focus in the postmodern major literary works. Arundhati Roy amazed the literary world by winning the Booker prize for *The God of Small Things* (1997) which can be described as a wondrous creation for a first novel. Arundhati Roy reveals a child's vision of the adult world in this novel. The child is in a way a macrocosm in the novel. Ramesh K. Srivastava says, 'Roy gives the sense of impressions of the children by defying the conventional rules of grammar, syntax and punctuation (qtd. in Bhargava 104). The effect of telling the tale from the point of view of a child has a peculiar flavor, a refreshing way of looking at the world. We are offered a child's view of an adult world:

*According to Estha, if they'd been born on the bus,
they'd have got free bus rides for the rest of their lives.
They also believed that if they were killed on a zebra
crossing, the government would pay for their funerals.
They had the definite impression that was what zebra
crossing were meant for (Roy 3-4).*

That is how a child's imagination works and how it calculates its chances in life. An adult would not think on the same lines, but for the children, such an option opens a fabulous world of adventure. The narrative unravels through the eyes of the seven year old Rahel, one of the twins of Ammu, the central character. Through the child's eyes credibility is added to the details as Rahel, along with her twin brother, Estha, has been an active participant in the fictional drama. Most of the story relates to Rahel's childhood. She presents an honest and uncorrupt view of the events. The children look at the confusing panorama of life unfolding around them at the Ayemenem House. A child's narrative is 'a pleasant fragrance of her genuine feelings and unalloyed ring of truth that one finds in Rahel's narrative'. It slips back and forth, shuttles between the past and the present at such a puzzling pace as does the conversation of children (qtd. in Bhargava 96).

Rahel is a child of a broken home and a daughter of a divorced mother absolutely neglected by the Ayemenem house. She is deprived of the love and affection that a child is supposed to get during her childhood. The novelist has chosen major symbols to decorate the theme of childhood in the novel. The Meenachal River symbolizes the flowing time. It is near the river that children learn the harsh and deeper realities of life. The silent river also sends them into moods of contemplation. In the early childhood they learn that they were unwanted burdens on their elders. Their existence was very insignificant as compared to other family members.

The novel has some of the devices used in a cinematic technique with episodes, flashbacks, and flash forward largely because it is viewed through the eyes of Rahel. Such a narrative is bound to remain raw, honest and yet repetitive, slow and fragmentary as children do not always have control over their thoughts and imagination. Richard Lane writes, “the author’s focalization on Rahel and Estha also gives the reader ““access to the children’s minds, making apparent the often incomprehensible and threatening adult world”” (qtd in Toress 197). The effect of telling the tale from the point of view of a child has a peculiar flavor, a refreshing way of looking at the world. We are offered a child’s view of an adult world Arundhati Roy writes about Kathakali stories:

To the Kathakali Man these stories are his children and his childhood. He has grown up within them. They are the house he was raised in, the meadows he played in, they are his meadows and his way of seeing. So when he tells a story, he handles it as he would a child of his own. He teases it. He punishes it. He sends it up like a bubble. He wrestles it to the ground and lets it go again. He laughs at it because he loves it. He can fly you across world in minutes; he can stop for hours to examine a wilting leaf, or play with a sleeping monkey’s tail (Roy 229-230).

Arundhati Roy does the same in *The God of Small Things*, She tells the story of her own childhood, her home, her meadows. Ayemenem is Aymanam, Roy’s hometown in Kottayam district of Kerala. Roy shows the detailed children’s activities and child abuse, when Estha’s sensitive mind thought of the encounter with OrangedrinkLemondrink Man in the Abilash Talkies who forces the boy to masturbate him.

“No, if you’ll kindly hold this for me,” the OrangedrinkLemondrink Man said, handing Estha his penis through his soft white muslin dhoti, I will get you drink. Orange? Lemon? Estha held it because he had to. ‘Orange? Lemon?’ the Man said ‘Lemon Orange?’ ‘Lemon, please.’ Estha said politely (Roy 103).

Its effect remains so strong that it sinks deep into the psyche of the seven year old child and haunts him throughout his life. It is a psychological truth that the mind of a child is so sensitive that when his innocence comes in contact with experience, he is haunted by a nightmarish experience all through his life. Ramesh K Srivastava writes, “whether the elders are aware of the fact or not, children remain quite conscious when they are not being liked or are being exploited” (Bhargava 118) and this is what we see in the life of Estha who suffers from a sense of claustrophobia. That is why we see Rahel and Estha’s traumatic and nightmarish experiences felt in their past life spills over into their young adulthood.

The children of the novel became the objects of sufferance and pity, contempt and hatred. Neglected by

both home and outside they are just like ship without radar, a gang without a leader. Their separation from the very kiths and kins and even their parents causes an indelible scar on the innocent psyche (Prasad 205).

Children in Arundhati Roy do not know caste, creed and religion of adults. The children who are the 'smallest things' in the novel are the worst affected of all. They go against the rules and make Velutha, who is a paravan, an untouchable their god. Velutha, 'the God of Small Things' is their best friend and also participates with them in play.

The world seen and experienced through Rahel and Estha brings about the recognition of the difference between the world of children and that of the adults. The vulnerability and innocence of children is often exploited by adults. Baby Kochamma treats Estha and Rahel scornfully because they are Ammu's children. As Rahel grows up she realizes:

It is after all so easy to shatter a story. To break a chain of thought. To ruin a fragment of a dream being carried around carefully like a piece of porcelain. To let it be, to travel with it, as Velutha did, is much the harder thing to do (Roy 190).

Roy has depicted the children skillfully in the novel from beginning to the end. "It is fascinating to see how imagination of children and their guesswork operate as if Arundhati Roy had kept a hidden micro camera in the hands of the children to record the working minds" (Bhargava 114). Roy keeps the child characters in such a way that, "to judge the validity of their imagination, one has simply to peep into one's own childhood in order to realize that he too had thought the same way as Rahel and Estha do" (Bhargava 114). Mischievous, playful, and funny activities are the best traits of children, and Estha and Rahel remain in it gleefully. Rahel was blacklisted in Nazareth Convent School because she had decorated a knob of fresh cow dung with small flowers outside her headmaster's garden gate.

At assembly the next morning she was made to look up 'depravity' in the oxford dictionary and read aloud its meaning. 'the quality or condition of being depraved or corrupt' Rahel read, with a row of stern mouthed nuns seated behind her and sniggering school girls faced in front (Roy 16).

Then

Six months later she was expelled after repeated complaints from senior girls. She was accused (quite rightly) of hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors. When she was questioned by the principal about her behavior (cajoled, caned, and starved), she eventually admitted that she had done it to find out whether breasts hurt (Roy 16).

Children have the aspirations and the ambitions of beautiful toys which are always in their imagination where they can fulfill their imagination Rahel has the same imagination:

Rahel's toy wrist watch had the time painted on it, Ten to two. One of her ambitions was to own a watch on which she could change the time whenever she wanted to (which according to her was that time was meant for in the first place). Her yellow rimmed red plastic sunglasses made the world look red (Roy 37).

Sometimes the twins fight each other, “when they fought, Estha called Rahel a Refugee Stick Insect. Rahel called him Elvis of Pelvis and did a twisty, funny kind of dance that infuriated Estha. When they had serious physical fights, they were so evenly matched that the fights went on for ever-table lamps, ashtray and water jugs were smashed or irreparably damaged” (Roy 62). The other playful activities of the children are when they caught dragonflies and when they bathed the pigs and found an egg from a hen. While going to airport to receive Sophie Mol:

Ambassador Rahel looked down, and saw that his shoes (from where the angry feeling rose) were beige and pointy. Ambassador Rahel looked down and saw that in her Bata Sandals her toes were trying to disconnect themselves. Twitching to join some else's feet. And that she couldn't stop them. Soon she'd be without toes and have a bandage like the leper at the level crossing (Roy 148).

In such situations, the mischievous are not noisy but silent ones, where no words are spoken but the agile minds of the children remain active, their eyes dance to the tune of their intentions while no significant activity is visible to the outsiders. Sometimes they acted as theater players. Estha, Rahel and Sophie Mol act as Mrs. Pillai, Mrs. Eapen and Mrs. Rajagopalam and also one chapter is based upon the same in *The God of Small Things*:

They were, all three of them, wearing saris (old ones, torn in half). That day, Estha was the draping expert. He pleated Sophie Mol's pleats organized Rahel's Pallu and settled his own. They had red bindis on their foreheads (Roy 189).

In order to satisfy their own anxieties or to impress other children by their knowledge, Estha and Rahel marvel with the words, play with them and find the meanings of words as well as their backgrounds. In accordance with their limited knowledge and understanding, the unfamiliar long words assumed for the children different forms, spellings and meaning:

When Baby Kochamma's Australian missionary friend, Miss Mitten, gave Estha and Rahel a baby book-The Adventures of Susie Squirrel as a present when she

visited Ayemenem, they were deeply offended. First they read it forwards...

ehTserutnevdAfoeisuSlerruiqSenOgnirpsgninromeisulerruiqSekowpu
(Roy 59-60).

When they, Estha and Rahel go to police station, they see the word 'POLICE'. They find out, what each of the six letters stand for

Behind him (policeman) a red and blue board said:

Politeness

Obedience

Loyalty

Intelligence

Courtesy

Efficiency (Roy 8).

Tapan Kumar Gosh writes: "it is a breathtaking evocation of childhood echoed in the silly word-play, the reading backwards habit of the twins, the soft-slurring patterns of word sound that produces an incantatory effect, the splitting up and occasional distortion of words to express the exact mood conveyed by the word to the child's mind, and the meaningless private vocabulary that gives new shapes to names and words" (qtd. in Bhargava 116).

The point of view through the eyes of children is indeed employed for simple aesthetic beauty and rhythmic flow, but it also allows the reader to enter into the mind of the character at hand. The reader is not only placed in the character's perspective, but also the character's mind. The transparency of the child's eye differences with and subverts the dogmatic callousness of the adult world.

Works Cited

- Bhargava, Rajul. Ed. *Indian Writing in English: The Last Decade*. New Delhi:Rawat Publications, 2002.
- Prasad, Dr. Amarnath. *New Lights on Indian Women Novelists in English*. (Part III). New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2005.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1997.
- Toress, Agustín Reyes, "Roy's *English* in the *God of Small Things*: A Language for Subversion, Reconciliation and Reassertion" *Journal of English Studies: Odisea*. 12.(2011): 195-204

"Child's-eye View, The Macrocosm in the 'Point of view' of Roy's *The God of Small Things*"

FIRST EDITION

International Journal of Research and Humanities Studies
Vol. 2, Issue 2, December 2016

WWW.IJRHS.WEEBLY.COM

