

Arundhati Roy: The Voice of Downtrodden

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Abstract: It is quite obvious that one of the traditions which distinguish India from other nations is the caste system like racism in America and apartheid in Africa. Arundhati Roy, the Booker Prize winner, illustrates and depicts the very aspects of caste system, racism, male chauvinism, child-labour and communalism through her magnum opus, “The God of Small Things”.

In a society concerned with “Big Things” such as the caste system, political affiliations, and marriage, Roy directs the reader to the “Small Things.” These can be small creatures and their activities-the “whisper and scurry of small lives”-as well as secrets, promises, sins, and other emotional ‘creatures’ that people do not want to acknowledge. One of the refrains Roy uses in *The God of Small Things* is, “Things can change in a day.” This phrase encapsulates the tumultuousness of the characters’ lives. Specifically, the story’s three major deaths-Sophie’s, Velutha’s, and Ammu’s-mark major points of change for all the characters.

It is the core matter of my study that Arundhati Roy attempts her best to resist against male chauvinism, social and political errors and finds due solutions. In this paper I make a very attempt to state that Arundhati is an outstanding figure who fights for the oppressed section of the social milieu. The finding of the study is that through “The God of Small Things” narrator manifests the social evils like patriarchal problems, women’s ordeals in society and so on.

Keywords: Caste System, Male Chauvinism, Marriage, Political Affiliations, Voice of Downtrodden, Women’s Ordeals in Society.

1. INTRODUCTION

“This was the trouble with families. Like invidious doctors, they knew just where it hurt.”

English language plays an important and serious role in the arena of modern literature. English literature accelerates its alluring style anew. The literary figures of English language completely involved in arduous efforts avidly to uplift and to alter the English literature into a new phase, without gender distinction. Female writers like, Arundati Roy, Kamala Das, Anitha Desai etc. are some of writers who paved the way for a serious study in English Literature as famous literary female figures.

Arundati Roy’s novel “God of Small Things” is an embodiment of her strivings and hard-working to mould her language into a globally famed and accepted one dealing the social problems like female struggles faced traditionally, socially, etc. The novel is a sharp and penetrating voice against her opposite sex and society. The novel begins and ends with the expression of burning inward violence. In the novel “God of Small Things”, the interior of human being and society form the core of scrutiny. Arundati Roy is interested in the

study of the lives and working of the mind of the society. The most prominent feature of Arundati's art is this delineation of society.

Generations of traditions and conventions verbally dubbed women in a state of passivity and in course of time quite innocuously and ungrudgingly women reconciled to their so called state of passivity, and gradually got conditioned to the strategically proposed systems and traditions. Her psychic violence in the novel is an outcome of her problems faced from society and surrounding. Briefly, she has portrayed as a revolutionary woman who fights for her rights as well as to all women especially for Indian women.

2. GOD OF SMALL THINGS

"When she looked at him now, she couldn't help thinking that the man he had become bore so little resemblance to the boy he had been. His smile was the only piece of baggage he had carried with him from boyhood into manhood."

There are a couple ideas to mull over when we think about the novel's title. On one hand, we can focus on the first half of the title and think of the particular person to whom it might refer – the God of Small Things. Who is this person? Well, from Ammu's dream, we get the idea that the God of Small Things represents Velutha, the man whom she loves in spite of the fact that society will never approve of them being together. Then Ammu sees a dream in chapter 11 as a man holding and clasping her. "He could only do one thing at a time. 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." (11.5-6)

Arundati Roy's "God of Small Things" is notable for its complex narrative technique, particularly its elaborate narrative structure and treatment of perspective. The novel "God of Small Things" exemplifies the stereotyping of women in a patriarchal society. She is rather, the woman who has been crushed by the rigid constraints of custom and irrational barriers of tradition.

She states that she was the woman who was a slave. She is the one who was commercialized. She was praised in ideals, but practically she had no merit. She was a victim of reification. As Virginia Woolf asserts in "A Room of One's Own": Imaginatively she is of the highest importance: practically she is completely insignificant. The writer refers to the practice in some third world countries, where women were deemed to be a burden and therefore drowned at birth. Also, in these countries, a woman is associated with dowry, so that she becomes a liability for her parents. The parents regard themselves as free after ridding themselves of the burden, according to the speaker. However, they were trapped forever as they dwelled in a nation with 'captive minds' rooted in superstition and the darkness of irrationality.

Velutha's identity as the God of Small Things is reinforced at the end of the book when we learn about Ammu and Velutha's first romantic encounters. Since they know it's impossible for their love to exist in the real world, they never talk or think about the future, or the "big things"; they stick to the here and now.

Even later, on the thirteen nights that followed this one, instinctively they stuck to the

Small Things. So now that we've thought about who the God of Small Things is, let's take a minute to think about the second half of the title. What exactly are the small things in this book, and why are they important? We've already discussed how the small things sustain Ammu and Velutha's relationship, since thinking about the Big Things is out of the question. But let's also think about the relationship between big and small things in the development of the novel's plot.

3. SOCIETY AND CLASS

The characters in *The God of Small Things* are constantly coming up against the forces of society and class. Indian society was structured for centuries according to very rigid social classes and boundaries, through what is known as the caste system. Even though the novel takes place after the caste system stopped being a legal social policy, its characters still find themselves limited by what is and isn't deemed socially acceptable for them. Social rules dictate who can love whom, which occupations people can adopt, and who is considered to be better than whom.

Along with the caste system, readers see an economic class struggle. The Ipes are considered as upper class. They are factory owners, the dominating class. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma would not deign to mix with those of a lower class. Even Kochu Maria, who has been with them for years, will always be a servant of a lower class.

However, Roy shows other types of less evident discrimination. For example, there is religious discrimination. It is unacceptable for a Syrian Christian to marry a Hindu. In more than one passage of the book, the reader feels Rahel and Estha's discomfort at being half Hindu. Baby Kochamma constantly makes disparaging comments about the Hindus. On the other hand, there is discomfort even between the Christian religions, as is shown by Pappachi's negative reaction when Baby converts to Catholicism.

Chacko suffers more veiled racial discrimination, as it seems his daughter also did. His English wife's parents were shocked and disapproving that their daughter should marry an Indian, no matter how well educated. Sophie Mol at one point mentions to her cousins that they are all "wogs" while she is "half-wog."

The Ipes are very class conscious. They have a need to maintain their status. Discrimination is a way of protecting one's privileged position in society.

4. PSYCHIC VIOLENCE AND SYMBOLS IN THE NOVEL

The world violence is taken as syndrome representing a sort of metaphysical rebellion, anger and angst, manifesting itself as vehement poetic fury with the help of powerful images and symbols. Violence as such can be understood as fallout of inexpressible emotion and the ensuing suffocation. Her writing is a far cry, the only kind of novel women were traditionally expected or all permitted to write. One of the contemporary feminist voices in Indian English literature, she is also an activist and ardently for the cause.

Arundti Roy is of the opinion that given the opportunity of freedom and transparency in thought and action. What she violently pleads for is a possible understanding between

man and woman as equally interdependent personalities struggling to measure each other's personality mutually in an atmosphere of what the Christ fathers call agape or Christ—charity. The categorical distinction and differentiation between man and woman as naturalistic creatures put man as a self-serving conservative agent, serving his own purposes and cold-shouldering his feminine counterpart into there are two different versions of the History House in the novel, one metaphorical and one literal.

A related inferiority complex is evident in the interactions between Untouchable and Touchable in *Aymanam*. Vellya Paapen is an example of an Untouchable so grateful to the Touchable class that he is willing to kill his son when he discovers that his son has broken the most important rule of class segregation—that there be no inter-class sexual relations. In part this reflects how Untouchables have internalized class segregation. Nearly all of the relationships in the novel are somehow depicted by cultural and class tension, including the twins' relationship with Sophie Mol, Chacko's relationship with Margaret, Pappachi's relationship with his family, and Ammu's relationship with Velutha. Characters such as Baby Kochamma and Pappachi are the most rigid and vicious in their attempts to uphold that social code, while Ammu and Velutha are the most unconventional and daring in unraveling it.

5. CONCLUSION

Indian English women writers such as Arundhati Roy, Kamala Das, Anitha Desai, etc. by dint of their flair in creativity and imagination, have made landmark contributions to literature and remain as fountains of inspirations to the subsequent generation of novelists and poets. Arundhati Roy is one of the centerpieces of the above mentioned writers. She is considered to be one of the most accomplished novelists and social activists.

Arundhati Roy's novel "God of Small Things" that appeared in print from 1997 onwards are both qualitatively and quantitatively impressive and as such they offer enough material for a serious study. The linguistic details of the novel help the reader to view this world in all its actualities. Yet, the personal world of the novel is in reality a mimesis of the external actualities which the novelist shares with the readers.

Arundhati Roy refuses throughout her literary contributions to glorify the historical past in her novel, "God of Small Things" she strongly rejects the patriarchal value system that is based on egoism, greed for power, expansionism, hero-cult, the misuse of intelligence and the supremacy of reason and theory over sensitiveness and experience.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my teachers, Miss. Khairunnisa and Aslam K, Assistant Professors, Dept. of English, MANUU – Hyderabad and NasarPallikkal, English Lecturer of Arts and Commerce College, Calicut University. Cordially I thank my friends: RafeeqeCk, Saidalavi K, Ishaque Pc and others who helped me a lot in the accomplishment of my work.

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