

Subversive Elements in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract: *The God of Small Things* is a semi-autobiographical in that it contains, expounds, and weaves episodes from her family's history. It touches upon many issues like caste system, communism, religious issues etc. British colonization of India has challenged the traditional and original culture to the point that some native peoples developed a particular interest in British ideals which brought misperception and prevention. *The God of Small Things* is not written in a sequential narrative style in which events unfold chronologically. Instead, the novel is a patchwork of flashbacks and lengthy sidetracks that weave together to tell the story of the Kochamma family.

Keywords: Dalits, culture, conflicts, marginalized, exploitation, relationships, misperception.

The main events of the novel are traced back through the complex history of their causes, and memories are revealed as they relate to each other thematically and as they might appear in Rahel's mind. To start with, Mamachi and her daughter, Ammu are the main victims of exploitation. They don't have any social recognition and depend totally on male members. They are made to follow the love laws as binding cultural norms and misbehaviour of these meant an open invitation to wrath. Mamachi, the first generation woman sufferer, suffers silently. To quote Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman...it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine. (Rai, Sunita, 56) She does not dare to turn her back to the patriarchal culture. She endures her husband's torturing and painful company because on him she is dependent for her social recognition.

When the twins asked what cufflinks were for—"To link cuffs together," Ammu told them—they were thrilled by this morsel of logic in what has so far seemed an illogical language. Cuff+link = cufflink. This, to them, rivaled the precision and logic of mathematics. Cufflinks gave them inordinate (if exaggerated) satisfaction, and a real affection for the English language. (Roy 50)

It supports the fortunate position enjoyed by men and continues women's oppression within the patriarchal order. While conformity to the myth reinforces men's power and hierarchy, challenges to the myth represent challenges to the organisation of society. How men and women convey these changes will vary, depending on their ability to risk changes to the way their lives have been lived. In the novel, Roy also concentrates on subaltern issues concerning women and dalits. Being a subaltern in gender, Ammu, the daughter of Reverend John Ipe has to face marginalization not only from her drunkard husband but also from her own family. The protagonist Ammu is not an ordinary woman but a woman capable of breaking the orders of society by revolting against customs and traditions and marrying a man of her choice from a different caste.

The articulation of relationships gives a link to such a serious question and demands critical attention to the various aspects of society. Since caste and patriarchy have an intrinsic nexus with gender in the lives of men and women, they contribute to a particular degree to men's superiority and women's inequality. Since a man is by nature supposed to be superior, the differences between men and women are thus natural and unavoidable. According to Vandana Shiva the exploitation of nature and the marginalization of women are done by men in the pretext of development without realizing the fact that they are moving towards not development but mal-development. The impatience of a child is easy to understand; however, Roy allows the reader to see how the children regard the word "later," specifically after they have heard it multiple times in one day:

"And Ammu's angry eyes on Estha said All right. Later. And later became a horrible, menacing, goosebumpy word. Lay. Ter. Like the deep sounding bell in a mossy well. Shivery, and furred. Like moth's feet." (Roy 139)

Yet, for better or worse, British colonization of India has challenged the traditional indigenous culture to the point that some native men and women were to develop a particular interest in British ideals which brought misperception, dissatisfaction, prevention or reception. Arundhati Roy focuses on the issues of both women and nature along with the trauma of dalits in her novel and the writer's ecofeminist bent of mind is revealed in each and every reading of the text. They are thus bound to or destroyed by the pressures intrinsic to the conflictual remnants of English colonial and postcolonial India. The subsequent process of construction through disobedience gives a new

vision of Indian man and woman, pleasing to western mind and feelings and yet reflecting part of their Indianness. The fourfold division of caste system entrust different duties and responsibilities to each group. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra are the main castes and there are hundreds of sub castes fall under these main castes. Sudras are the low caste and they are designated to carry menial jobs in the society such as scavengers, cleaners, cobblers, disposing the dead and leather works etc.

Her free expression of individual freedom was usurped even when she was a little baby. She had to face a violent resistance and suffering at the hands of male-controlled set up. Instead of pouring love and affection on his daughter, her father beats her severely. She was even denied the right to continue her education further because Papachi, Ammu's father, considered money spent on female education as a mere waste of money

Hindu representation has a powerful impact on the construction of masculinity and femininity within Indians. As it has been revealed in the novel, Indian men and women who resisted Hindu traditions are accused to transgressing and violating the oppressive patriarchal patterns within Indian family structure and therefore are condemned to ostracism till death. Ammu happens to be the most pathetic victim of the nature- culture conflict. Her free expression of individual freedom was usurped even when she was a little baby. She had to face a violent resistance and suffering at the hands of masculine set up. Instead of showering love and affection on his daughter, her father beats her severely. She was even denied the right to continue her education further because Papachi, Ammu's father, considered money spent on female education as a mere waste of money

In *The God of Small Things*, there generations of a Syrian Christian family live together in Kerala. Mammachi, who intensely loves her son Chacko, remains entirely indifferent to Ammu, her daughter. This clear difference, shown in terms of emotional investment is to be transmitted to the grandchildren as the only one who is taken into consideration is the son's daughter.

In a wider social context, this preference is depicted in the literary writing as a standard behaviour. In reality, sexism is sanctioned by law concerning inheritance rights since the son is legally and religiously to inherit the complete family wealth. The impatience of a child is easy to understand; however, Roy allows the reader to see how the children regard the word "later," specifically after they have heard it multiple times in one day: "And Ammu's angry eyes on Estha said All right. Later. And later became a horrible, menacing, goose-bumpy word. Lay. Ter. Like the deepsounding bell in a mossy well. Shivery, and furred. Like moth's feet." (Roy 139) his Clear policy of exclusion regarding daughters either married or divorced supports the sons and the progeny as the only active individuals of the following generation. Even more, there is no need to waste money on the education of girls as they are temporarily staying in their parents' home. Thus, Chacko is sent to Oxford, whereas Ammu is simply ignored and left at home to the extreme point that no traditional responsibility of arranging a husband was shared. Almost all the women characters portrayed in the novel along with a few men exhibit a strong connection with their land and nature. They are always ready to forsake their lives to safeguard and protect Aati from being a land of sewages. They are adamant that they never leave Aati and resort to protect their homeland from being converted into a commercial township.

Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl... Since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposal came Ammu's way. Two years went by. Her eighteenth birthday came and went. Unnoticed, or at least unremarked upon by her parents. Ammu grew desperate. All day she dreamed of escaping from the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long suffering mother. (Roy 38) Roy has criticised all other characters through her narrative voice except Ammu. Chacko stopped his father from beating his mother but he beats Ammu mercilessly. He also constantly had sex with untouchable workers but act against Ammu when she had a relationship with Velutha.

Certainly, the world religions possess their own laws which manage divorces within their own communities as well as different regulations governing divorces in interfaith marriages. There are root causes for which divorces are granted, notably adultery, desertion, cruelty, impotency and chronic disease. But it seems Indian divorcees are more harshly judged than men, as reflected in *The god of Small Things*: "Ammu left her husband and returned. Unwelcomed to her parents in Ayemenem. To everything she had left from only a few years ago, except not she had two children. And no more dreams" (Roy 42).

As any other Indian divorcee who often returns to her own family, she is not at all warmly welcomed, for a divorced woman is an economic burden on her family, particularly if she has children. Inevitably, Ammu would face great difficulties to remarry since her parents would find that they had already discharged their parental obligations to their daughter. As Mary Snell-Hornby indicates, this "'new English' with its own individual language 'norms', along with the many 'exotic' cultural-bound items, which in their entirety often carry the message of the text, present a genuine challenge for the [reader's] capacity of understanding, and for his or her creative powers (2003: 187) Roy has kept silence in displaying the double standard of Ammu. Ammu criticised the silent authorization of Mammachi and Baby Kochamma but she repeatedly met Velutha for having the sexual relationship and made a promise that she will come on the next day. Though divorce remains a highly stigmatizing experience, a women's caste is a fundamental characteristic in her acceptance back into a society, as women from higher caste have an easier time than middle or

low caste have an easier time than middle or lower caste divorcees; the latter are given lowly household chores to perform and bad food for survival.

CONCLUSION:

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy presents a slice of life in a small Indian town where male hegemony as well as androcentric power relations are prevailing. She portrays identities that are rooted in traditional gender definitions, notably Chacko, the son, and Pappachi, the father. On the other hand she describes different types of male and female identity challenging the myths, respectively the young Dalit carpenter, Velutha, and the divorced progressive daughter, Ammu. Ammu happens to be the most pathetic victim of the nature- culture conflict.

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