

The Social Theme in Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things*

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Abstract: Arundhati Roy created a great sensation with her first novel *The God of Small Things*. It won the Booker Prize in 1997. *The God of Small Things* remained the first and only novel until the 2017 publication of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* after twenty years. The novel "The God of Small Things" explores, as its title shows, how small things in daily lives have a great impact on the lives of people. It also explores the prevailing caste system in India that has its deep roots in the minds of orthodox and traditional people even today. Arundhati Roy's writings on social issues have significant importance.

Arundhati Roy began writing *The God of Small Things* in 1992 and finished it in 1996. When the book was about to publish, Roy was very confident of this novel's popularity and success. It registered tremendous sales the world over. The novel has been translated into some forty languages. In the first few months, Roy visited nearly 80 cities across the world to promote the book. Arundhati Roy raised her voice of discontentment over the existing social taboos and recorded her protest against views and opinions that are outdated, irrelevant, and unnecessary for the contemporary social system. This novel is a critical and realistic examination of a society's double standard response towards different people according to their social status and power.

The objective of the article is to study the different issues like human exploitation, the constant battle of women, voices of the subalterns, patriarchal machinery, abusive childhood, and other discriminations. Throughout this novel, Arundhati Roy connects all these themes and prepared an excellent composed literary narrative that presents society in its true color. The study is all about those people in society who are victims of injustice, atrocities, inequality, and prejudice. She puts her thoughts and opinions in her novel. It uses a qualitative research methodology to analyze and collect the relevant data using the textual analysis method.

Key Words: Child Abuse, Gender, exploitation, marginalized, Indian Society, Patriarchy.

1. INTRODUCTION :

Arundhati Roy began writing *The God of Small Things* in 1992 and finished it in 1996. When the book was about to publish, Roy was very confident of this novel's popularity and success. It registered tremendous sales the world over. The novel has been translated into some forty languages. In the first few months, Roy visited nearly 80 cities across the world to promote the book. Arundhati Roy raised her voice of discontentment over the existing social taboos and recorded her protest against views and opinions that are outdated, irrelevant, and unnecessary for the contemporary social system. The novel revolves around Ammu, the Syrian Christian divorcee and her twins. Ammu's unfortunate marriage ended up in a divorce, she left her husband's home and returned to Ayemenem, her parental home. In her parental home, Ammu and her dizygotic twins, Estha and Rahel, undergo all sorts of humiliations and insults, and sufferings. Velutha was the only one who cared about them and treated them with kindness. Ammu develop a attraction and love for Velutha, the low-caste worker of Paradise Pickles and Preserves. The children developed a respect for Velutha and Ammu compensated the same with her physical love. This transgression of Ammu proves fatal for Velutha's life and sufferings of children.

2. HUMAN EXPLOITATION AND HER VOICE FOR HUMANITY :

As Arundhati Roy struggled a lot during her young age and very often she has to sell empty beer bottles for earning something. She suffered a lot that's why she could feel the pain and sorrow of the poor. In *The End of Imagination*, Roy criticized the nuclear policies of the Government of India and the testing of nuclear weapons in Pokhran. Similarly, *The Greater Common Good* (1999) is written in support of the displaced tribal people who suffer

from the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the banks of the Narmada valley. She wrote on this matter and made it a national issue after having witnessed the pathetic condition of people. In the same way In "*The People Vs the God of Big Dams*", Arundhati Roy says, "*We must be the only country in the world that builds dams, uproots millions of people, submerges forests and destroys the environment to feed rats.*" The Ministry of Food and Civil Supplies says that ten percent of India's food grain is destroyed by rats every year. So, Roy recommends the construction of better warehouses as more relevant to our needs than big dams. In her non-fictional essay *The End of Imagination*, she speaks about the harmful consequences of nuclear weapons on human beings and ecology.

3. VOICES OF THE SUBALTERNES :

The novel has presented the prevailing pathetic condition of the people of Kottayam who are discriminated and exploited due to the caste system. She is a social critic and a bold novelist who mingled history with imagination to record the harsh realities of society. She painted her story with a tinge of harsh reality to portray the actual condition of people within the Indian social framework. A thorough and deep study of the novel shows how she revolted against the exploitation, dehumanization, and oppression of the lower caste people in society. Arundhati Roy is also a middle-class Indian woman and she saw the cruel realities prevailing in the society in Kerala herself hence she presents a realistic picture of the society, in all its originality. The marginalized section of the society has no voice of their own nor do they have any knowledge about their rights, so Arundhati Roy gave them a voice by writing about them. Velutha, an untouchable, is attracted to Ammu. He was tortured and humiliated by police on false charges of attempted rape and kidnapping of children by Baby Koachamma and this leads to his death ultimately. It is an accepted sin and crime in society for a person like Velutha to have an affair with an upper-caste woman. Vellya Paapen, Velutha's father couldn't hide the secret as he saw "What his Untouchable son had touched. More than touched. Entered. Loved". Comrade Pillai didn't tell to the Police Inspector that Velutha was a cardholder of the Communist Party. Comrade Pillai could have helped Velutha, but he didn't try anything to save him. Poor Velutha has no other hope except Comrade Pillai but he betrayed him. Later when the twins revealed the truth to the chief police officer Thomas Mathew about Velutha's innocence in this matter, he didn't take any action to save Velutha out of the fear of local communists.

In the 21st century, many writers used their art of writing for the social cause. They don't use the art for their pleasure but for the welfare of humanity to bring social changes. Although it is said that now there is no discrimination based on caste in Independent India but despite this, there are many states in India where people are exploited and differentiated based on the caste system. Arundhati Roy used her creative art for spreading awareness about the rights of these marginalized people not only in India but all over the world through her writing and speeches. In this way, it is considered as boldest and most artistically adventurous novel to appear in recent times in India. Roy depicts the humiliations and distress of the minorities at the hands of the upper sections of society. It leads to problems like untouchability, alienation, and caste segregation

4. THE CONSTANT BATTLE OF WOMEN :

Arundhati Roy portrays the poor condition of female characters belonging to three generations (Mammachi, Ammu, and Rahel). In this novel Mammachi, the wife of Pappachi belongs to the first-generation woman character. Mammachi was seventeen years younger than her husband. Pappachi believes that it is his legal right to beat his wife brutally. Mammachi silently bears all the tortures without any protest. Mammachi takes lessons in violin but when her teacher tells Pappachi that she is excellent in violin, he does not allow her to continue her violin classes. Mammachi has wounds and bumps on her head as evidence of beatings with a brass vase by Mammachi out of anger. One day Chacko, her son twists his father's hand and advises him not to repeat it. He told his father, "*I never want this to happen again, Ever.*" After this event, Pappachi stops beating his wife. When Pappachi dies, she even mourns his death like a devoted wife. Mammachi runs the factory of pickle with her full efforts. Mammachi recognizes the ability of Velutha, a low-caste paravan, and made him a chief mechanic. Velutha showed his distinct ability in repairing machines in Paradise Pickles and Preserves. His ancestors have been serving Chacko's for more than a generation. Velutha is a skillful dynamic worker. He is not like other downtrodden people, but he is a very hard-working and dedicated person. Even though Mammachi has many unique qualities, but still she is suppressed in the male-dominated society.

Ammu belongs to the second generation. She may be viewed as the mouthpiece of the author. Ammu is not like her mother but she lives her life with her own choices. But when Ammu asked her father for higher studies, she is not permitted to pursue her higher studies. But on the other hand, when it comes to Chacko, the male person of the Ayemenem House is sent to pursue his higher studies in Britain. Pappachi thinks, that a college education corrupts a woman. To escape from her father's violence, she marries a man of her own choice. "*She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem*".

Ammu's husband is a drunkard man who tortures her every day. When one day Mr. Hollick, the employer, makes an unacceptable proposal for Ammu, she left her husband and returns to her parents. "For herself —

she knew that there would be no more chances. Only Ayemenem. A front verandah and a back verandah. A hot river and pickle factory. And in the background of constant, high, whining mewl of local disapproval”.

In Indian society, it is traditionally accepted that a daughter has no claim on the assets of her parents. Ammu remarks, “Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society”. Her brother Chacko was so mean to her and always tells her “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine.” When Ammu’s family gets to know about her relationship with a low caste paravan Velutha, they locked Ammu in the room. Velutha is tortured physically by the police on charges of rape and kidnapping lodged against him by Baby Kochamma. Velutha an innocent and faultless man who loves children like their own father was tortured and killed by the police. Ammu tries her best to save Velutha but she could not do anything before the corrupted and cruel society. She visits the police station to rescue Velutha from police custody. Inspector Matthews who is investigating her case, beats Ammu and hit her breast frequently with a stick, and goes on criticizing her inside the police station. “He said the police [...] didn’t take statements from veshyas or their illegitimate children”. In this way, women are not safe even in the police station where they go for justice.

Chacko has illegitimate relations with the women working in the pickle factory; his mother concerned about his so-called “Men’s Needs” arranges a separate door so that Chacko can fulfill his desires. But when she thinks of Ammu’s relation with Velutha she vomits:

“She thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie. She imagined it in vivid detail: a Paravan’s coarse black hand on her daughter’s breast. His mouth on hers. His black hips jerking between her parted legs. The sound of their breathing. His particular Paravan smell. Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited.”

The novelist has depicted the double standards of rules for a man and a woman regarding their sexual desires in society. Ammu breaks the convention and aged old rules of society by loving a man below her caste. Ammu’s wrecked marriage, insulted by police and ill-treated by family members leads her to death “Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey, where she had gone for a job interview as someone’s secretary. She died alone. With a noisy ceiling fan for the company and no Estha to lie at the back of her and talk to her. She was thirty-one. Not old, not young, but a viable, dieable age”

In the third generation, Rahel stands for the female character. Rahel and Estha are not only brother and sister but they are identified as dizygotic “two-egg twins”. Her twin brother Estha is eighteen minutes her senior. She too came back to Aymanam at the age of 31 after being divorced by her husband; just the same way it happened with her mother. The rights of women are simply ignored in a patriarchal society which leads to emotional and psychological issues for women.

5. CHILD ABUSE IN THE NOVEL :

This novel depicts not just horrific violence against women, but also child abuse and violence. Estha’s sexual exploitation at the Abhilash Talkies demonstrated how desperate some rural Indians are to satisfy their inhuman sexual desires. Arundhati Roy wove together all of the events around women’s difficulties and child abuse in such a way that it clearly shows the picture of actual Indian society where all of these actions are still prevalent. Even children are compelled to suppress their emotions and are occasionally used as a sexual objects by those who wish to satisfy their sexual needs on them. The same event is presented by Roy in this novel where Estha was sexually abused by the Orangedrink Lemondrink man at Abhilash Talkies. There that man took Estha behind his counter, served him a free cold drink, and sexually abused him. When Ammu scolds the twins and says: “I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born. You’re the mile stones round my neck” and “why can’t you just go away and leave me alone”. Then the twins run away from home. Estha and Rahel eventually decide to live in the haunted history house, an old abandoned building. The twins want their mother to apologize. “What if Ammu finds us and begs us to come back”, asks Rahel. “Then we will. But only if she begs” replies Estha. Since Sophie Mol’s parents have gone to Cochin to buy the flight tickets for the return journey, she decides to accompany her twins’ cousin on the adventure trip. Sophie Mol is drowned because of their small boat which the kids row capsizes. Baby Koachamma accused Velutha of a false charge of kid’s kidnapping and seduction. The twins gave their statements against Velutha as Baby Koachamma said, in the hope of saving their mother. Innocent children have no idea about the malicious plan of Baby Koachamma. Velutha died because of being brutally beaten by police. Sometimes children have to suffer different types of sexual and mental tortures due to the carelessness of elders.

6. CONCLUSION :

This study precisely elaborated and explained different types of evils, injustice, biased behavior of people, hateful mentality, and double standards of society towards those who are, poor, helpless, and weak. This novel tells the story of the childhood experiences of twins whose lives were ruined by the "Love Laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much". Furthermore, it states who can love whom, which occupations people can do, and who is considered socially to be better than whom. It discovers how family pressure and societal boundary affects the inner conscience of innocent and good people badly. Dalits and downtrodden workers are exploited and abused at the hands of their masters and powerful people like landlords, money lenders, and factory owners.

Therefore, in *The God of Small Things*. Arundhati Roy has raised the voice of all these voiceless to reconstruct their social-cultural status. The patriarchal society doesn't treat women equally to men. This double standard of the society toward the weaker section forms the major theme of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Arundhati Roy not only deals with the exploitation and humiliation of females but is concerned about the sexual and mental exploitation of children prevalent on many levels. She tells about the terrible incident of Abhilash Talkies that keeps haunted Estha like a nightmare. She tells it clearly in the novel how these things harm the innocent minds of children. The plot circles between the present and the past, digging deeper and deeper into the tragic secrets and undesirable happenings of the Ayemenem family.

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