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The Gist and Drift of God of Small Things

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Abstract:

This paper aims to research on diaspora, hybridity and mistreatment of women in *The God of Small Things*. The writer and the character of Ammu are women. And they belong to diasporic community, the researcher wants to work on the role of women in Indian society. Other concepts are resistance and orientalism. Arundhati Roy portrays the predicament of women through her female characters belonging to three generations in this novel. In the novel, a sense of antagonism and division also infuse the difference senses of identity among the different generation of women. It also generates a line of the clash between the older and the younger generation. Family and political customs play a key role in disadvantaging women. Social constrains are so built up as to sanctify the persecution of women. This is because, in most of the civilizations, social structures are basically patriarchal. Arundhati's novel challenges this position, though her avowed feminist stance.

Keywords:

Diaspora, Hybridity, Patriarchy, Political Activist, Homecoming, Feminism, Emotional, Masterful, Rebellious

About the author:

Indian author, actress, and political activist, Arundhati Roy, full name Suzanna Arundhati Roy, got glory with her first novel *The God of Small Things* which won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Also known for her involvement in environmental and human rights causes. She emerged an extraordinary writer of this present era possessing genuine, rebellious, reformative voice.

She was born in Shillong, Meghalaya, India. Her mother Mary Roy, a Malayali Syrian Christian women's rights activist from Kerala and her father Rajib Roy, a Bengali Hindu tea plantation manager from Calcutta. Her parents got divorced when she was two, then she returned to Kerala with her other and brother. She did her schooling from Corpus Christi, Kottayam, followed by the Lawrence School, Lovedale, in Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu. She then studied architecture at the School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi, there she met architect Gerard da Cunha. She married to filmmaker Pradip Krishen but later they got separated.

If we talk about her career life, early in her career, she worked in television and movies. She wrote the screenplays for *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones* (1989), a movie based on her experiences as a student of architecture, in which she also appeared as a performer, and *Electric Moon* (1992). Both were directed by her husband, Pradip Krishen, during their marriage. Roy won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay in 1988 for *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones*. She attracted attention in 1994 when she criticised Shekhar Kapur's film *Bandit Queen*, which was based on the life of Phoolan Devi. In her film review titled "The Great Indian Rape Trick", she questioned the right to "restage the rape of a living woman without her permission" and charged Kapoor with exploiting Devi and misrepresenting both her life and its meaning.

Roy began writing her first novel, *The God of Small Things*, in 1992, completing it in 1996. The book is semi-autobiographical, and a major part captures her childhood experiences in Ayman am. The publication of *The God of Small Things* catapulted Roy to international fame. It received the 1997 Booker Prize for Fiction and was listed as one of *The New York Times* Notable Books of the Year. It reached fourth position on *The New York Times* Bestsellers list for Independent Fiction. From the beginning, the book was also a commercial success: Roy received half a million pounds as an advance. It was published in May, and the book had been sold in 18 countries by the end of June.

She has written numerous essays on contemporary politics and culture. In 2014, they were collected by Penguin India in a five-volume set.^[5] In 2019, her nonfiction was collected in a single volume, *My Seditious Heart*, published by Haymarket Books in 2017, she announced she would publish her second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, and later this novel was chosen for man Booker prize 2017 long list. Her works involves the harsh reality of society. She never showed any hesitation either to write or speak on any felonious issue. As a writer, she never chooses to write fantasy, fairy tale or romance but she prefers to decode the suffering of mankind. Even she got famous for her social activities and her active participation in various revolts boldly speaking about what she feels and see in our political system. She does not believe in rushing things. Her writing style is full of patience, in her novels she prefers to wait for characters to introduce themselves to her and slowly develop a trust and fellowship with them.

"I have never been particularly ambitious. I am not a careerist; I am not trying to get anywhere in a career. It is more important to engage with society, to live it, to have different experiences", said Roy, addressing the audience at Sharjah International Book Fair.

GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Perspective and Narrator:

The God of Small Things is narrated from the third-person omniscient point of view. It is told by someone who sees the action and knows the characters' secrets without being part of the story. This narrative choice allows readers to experience the events from different characters' perspectives. However, huge part of the story is told as witnessed by one main character named Rahel. This particular focus, especially on a young girl's perspective, is really very useful at revealing the foolishness of some of the traditions and power structures that Arundhati Roy criticizes.

Themes:

In the novel "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy, there is a recurring theme of how complicated relationships can end in betrayal, but unconditional love remains. This theme is important because it incorporates the real life ideal of not everything is as perfect as it may seem. All across social media and on television, many people put on a persona that shows that their life is perfect and that the relationships they have are flawless. Although Roy did an excellent job incorporating this aspect reality into the novel. Honing into one of the most important relationships, we can see how this theme is prevalent. First off, we are first introduced to the close-knit relationship of the fraternal twins Rahel and Estha. They are best friends and act as a sense of protection to one another. Although their mother, Ammu, has a very complicated relationship with them both. In the beginning of the novel, everything between her and her children are normal. Nothing is out of the ordinary. However, once we learn about Ammu's detailed, troubled past, we learn more about the dysfunctional behaviour she relays toward the twins. This may have even been to show how her troubled past has impacted the way she treats her children. As much of a loving mother she can be, she has her

moments where she is rude and disrespectful to her children. She even goes to the extent of verbally saying things to intentionally hurt them. At the end of the day, however, Ammu unconditionally loves her children even though she betrays them by her actions.

Patriarchy:

The physical harassment of women by men is a recurring theme in *The God of Small Things*. This violence is not only a theme in the book, but it is also a mechanism used by the caste system to preserve order and power. “The practise of authority using force underpins caste and gender social ties. What we see is an increase in the brutality that enforces the law. Pappachi is the first character in the novel to use violence, and this violence seems to follow Ammu throughout her life. “Throughout her youth, Ammu had watched her father spin his hideous web. For tourists, he was charming and cosmopolitan... He worked hard to establish himself as a sophisticated, generous, and moral man in the public eye. However, when he was alone with his wife and son, he transformed into a monstrous bully. Ammu, like her mother, had an abusive husband. Ammu's husband is seen getting intoxicated and beating her before passing out in a drunken stupor before she left him and returned to live with her parents. Although it appears to have little bearing on the storey, I believe Arundhati included it to further expose to the readers the husband's abusive nature and the fact that it is something that will continue to happen.

Memory:

Memory is another predominant theme in *The God of Small Things*. There is a sense of childhood trauma on the twins' part, and the impossibility to forget and make peace with the past haunt the present-day life. Roy makes acute observations on the nature of memory saying “Memory was that woman on the train. Insane in the way she sifted through dark things in a closet and emerged with the most unlikely ones – a fleeting look, a feeling. The smell of smoke. A windscreen wiper. A mother's marble eyes” [Roy, 1997: 72]. In the story, things left unsaid and words not forgotten play a part in the present disintegration of the characters. There is a lack of ambition on the part of Estha and a lack of direction on the part of Rahel. The book sometimes rushes forward through the years, and, at other times, slows down to concentrate on a event, such as Estha's meeting with the Orange drink Lemon drink man. The story also may start with the family's trip to the cinema only to then start commenting on the twins' education or Rahel's later life in New York. This writing style is much like the memory itself too which recalls moments, but not days, and which picks up random pieces and tries to join them together.

Allusion

Another prominent theme of the novel is the Small vs. Big allusion. In Roy's book, there is a constant contrast being drawn between smallness and largeness. The author desires to emphasise the smallness of the lives of people living in Ayemenem, their inconsequential existence in comparison to the Big Things around them, such as the power of authority, the immensity of poverty, the hopeless socio-economic conditions, the unfair rigid traditions and conventions, and the weight of history. The people in Ayemenem can hardly have any meaningful control over their lives – beyond being in control of “the small things”. The only way they can somehow rise above their smallness is by moving away. However, as the novel suggests, even that does not always result in happy endings, and the characters are stuck in the endless cycle of silent despair and exasperation in the land that does not know what it is anymore and even forgot what it supposed to be.

Homecoming:

This is a recurrent theme in the book. The lives of the family members revolve around Ayemenem, even though nearly all of them travel away from it and eventually return, with Estha and Rahel's journeys being the most notable. They return to their childhood home, taking with them their deepest fears and pains, as well as each other after 31 years apart. For them, the location of Ayemenem is not home so much as the haven within Ayemenem that they represent for one another.

Symbolism, Allegory and Imagery:**Pappachi's Moth:**

In the book, Pappachi's moth has many meanings. On a simple level, it refers to an insect that Pappachi finds one day and assumes to be a previously unknown species. This is a watershed moment in his career, and as we hear, "his biggest setback in life was not having the moth he had discovered named after him." Some lepidopterists (butterfly experts) visited Pappachi later in life. Some lepidopterists (butterfly experts) later decide that it is a different species of moth, but they don't name it after Pappachi – they name it after someone he doesn't even like. Pappachi stays irritable for the rest of his life as a result. The moth appears to let go of her heart a little bit when Rahel feels safer and more loved. The moth, on the other hand, is eerily present when Rahel is particularly terrified. For e.g., we don't read anything like "Rahel was terrified" when Rahel learns Sophie Mol has drowned. Instead, the narrator uses the emblem of Pappachi's moth to express her fear.

Rahel's wristwatch:

As a child, Rahel wears a toy wristwatch. The wristwatch 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 what time was meant for in the first place. The events in the novel have been frozen in the same way that Rahel's watch has "stopped" and still shows the very same time. As a result, Rahel's watch be a sign of how one brief period in her life – the days leading up to Sophie Mol's death – was in many ways the only time that counted.

Mammachi's pickle factory:

Along with Rahel's watch, Mammachi's pickle factory can be viewed as another symbol of the freezing of time. The whole purpose of pickling and preserving is to take something with a short shelf life and make it last basically forever. It might seem like kind of a stretch to compare, let's say, Sophie Mol to a jar of banana jam, but it doesn't seem to be an accident that the family is in the preservation business. The preservation and persistence of certain memories is central to the novel and having a pickle factory as a focal point of the house in Ayemenem serves as a constant reminder of this.

Feminist Approach:

The novel is set in Southern India and is about the situation of daughters in patriarchal families. It's a kind of social platform that sheds light on the construction of masculinity as a source of control. Roy's non-fictional works, *The Great Indian Rape Trick I* and *The Great Indian Rape Trick II*, are outstanding examples of feminist visualisation. She makes a clear statement against Shekhar Kapur's popular film *Bandit Queen* in both works. Arundhati Roy portrays her feminist views through the generations of women characters Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, and Rahel in this book. These characters are executives in their own postmodern world, and Roy depicts the incremental shift in the status of women in society by them. A woman is often portrayed as "the other" and "the oppressed." Roy's novel recounts a young woman's agonising journey through her adolescence, focusing on several themes and realities.

Mistreatment of women:

Ancient hierarchies that perpetuate the caste and gender issue remain assertive, unanswered even by the healing and redeeming forces of fiction, as the God of Small Things tries to subvert patriarchy norms that sustain caste and gender dominance by the use of subversive parallels and analogies. Not only does Arundhati Roy show the direct mistreatment of women but she also portrays a very patriarchal society that is re-established with each generation. For instance, in a conversation between the twins, and their cousin Sophie Mol. They are talking about love and who they each love the most and when Sophie Mol asks Rahel about Estha her response is, “‘ We don’t count,’ Rahel said. “‘And anyway, he might change Ammu says.’ ‘How you mean? Change into what?’ Sophie Mol asked. ‘Into a male chauvinist pig,’ Rahel said.” This is a very clear example of how men are expected to fit into a certain role in the Indian culture

Conclusion:

The God of Small Things, in conclusion, is strong in every way and easily masterful. Underneath the surface, the novel is a deep and emotionally complex work that pays a touching homage to India's "small lives." It's a timely piece of writing of exceptional beauty, infused with melancholy themes of remembrance, death, love, and hope. It's a cliché to refer to anything as a masterpiece. It is a cliché to call something a masterpiece, but, in some way, this book really is.

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