



Voices From The Margins: Arundhati Roy And Toni Morrison

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Abstract: Arundhati Roy and Toni Morrison are regarded as amongst the most influential contemporary novelists. Despite their distinct socio-cultural contexts, Roy as a writer of postcolonial India and Morrison as an African-American writer, both authors converge in their exploration of themes such as gendered suffering, racial and caste marginalization, trauma, memory, and the moral agency of children. This study examines key novels, '*The God of Small Things*' (Roy) and '*The Bluest Eye*' (Morrison) highlighting their use of socio-historical context, the depiction of trauma across generations, feminist perspective and child protagonists as moral witnesses.

Index Terms : Love Laws, Marginalized identities, African-American literature, Narrative Technique

Suzanna Arundhati Roy (born 1961) is one of the best-known representatives of the contemporary generation of Indian writers who write in English. She is a renowned Indian author and political activist. Some of her famous visionary works include '*The God of Small things*' (1997) which won the Booker prize, '*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*' (2017), '*My Seditious Heart*' (2017) etc. Amit Chaudhari has praised Arundhati Roy about her "richly sensuous, political, and disturbingly original."

Chloe Anthony Wofford 'Toni Morrison' (1931-2019), a Nobel and Pulitzer prize winning American novelist, essayist and professor. She is celebrated for her powerful exploration of Black American life, particularly Black women's experiences. She often uses rich poetic language and mythical themes in her works. Some of her famous works include '*Beloved*' (1987) '*Song of Solomon*' (1977) and '*The Bluest Eye*' (1970). Aijaz Ahmad believes that the author "exposes the brutal workings of caste, class, and power in postcolonial India."

Arundhati Roy and Toni Morrison, the two major contemporary writers in their respective works explore history, memory, and the lasting effects of social oppression. Though writing from different cultural and national contexts—postcolonial India and African-American—both authors foreground silenced voices and challenge dominant historical narratives through innovative narrative techniques.

In social and historical context, Arundhati Roy exposes the persistence of caste oppression despite India's post-independence democratic ideals. In her famous work *'The God of Small things'*, despite constitutional equality after Independence, caste oppression continues to dominate social life in Kerala. In the lines "He was called Velutha—which means White in Malayalam." (*The God of Small Things*,76) Velutha belongs to backward class and his name is contrary to his caste and the society considered it unjustified. And another line "It was against the Love Laws." (*The God of Small Things*,33) Velutha's relationship with Ammu violates caste boundaries, revealing the brutal survival of untouchability in modern India.

While in Toni Morrison's work *'The Bluest Eye'* shows how Black characters absorb society's hatred and turn it inward. In the lines "The master had said, 'You are ugly people.' They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement." (*The Bluest Eye*,39) Here Morrison exposes how systemic racism produces psychological damage.

The theme of Trauma and memory has also been very closely depicted in both the works. Roy presents trauma not as a single event but as a broken repetitive memory. The novel moves back and forth in time, mirroring how traumatic experiences are remembered. The line "Things can never be the same again" (*The God of Small Things*,04). In this line trauma resurfaces unpredictably, especially in Estha and Rahel's adult lives. Further, Estha's silence and Rahel's emotional numbness are long-term effects of childhood trauma in the novel.

In Toni Morrison's work *'The Bluest Eye'* Morrison presents trauma as a consequence of systemic racism, which shapes memory and self-perception, especially in Black children. In the lines, "They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly." (*The Bluest Eye*,38). Trauma in childhood is shown as irreversible. It shows how the internalization of racial prejudice shapes the characters' memories of themselves, turning social trauma into personal shame. Personal suffering is inseparable from America's racist past.

Another theme of Gender and Female suffering has also formed a central thematic concern in the works of Arundhati Roy and Toni Morrison. Both writers portray women as victims of patriarchal, racial, caste-based, and socio-historical oppression, while also revealing their resilience and muted resistance. In Arundhati Roy's *'The God of Small Things'* women suppression has been shown through characters like Ammu, Mammachi and Baby kochamma. The character of Ammu suffers, beginning with her failed marriage, marked by emotional neglect and domestic violence. As a divorced woman in a patriarchal society, she is denied dignity and social acceptance. Mammachi's suffering is normalized within marriage.

She silently endures physical abuse from Pappachi, yet society treats it as acceptable, reflecting how patriarchy legitimizes violence against women.

In Toni Morrison's *'The Bluest Eye'* he portrays women suffering both under patriarchy and racism, creating a layered oppression. Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of the novel represents the most extreme form of female suffering in the novel. She is young, Black, poor, and female—placed at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. In one of the lines, Morrison writes that Pecola "prayed for blue eyes," a short but devastating line that captures her desire to erase herself in order to be accepted. Toni Morrison presents female suffering as the outcome of racism, patriarchy, internalized beauty standards, and social neglected.

The theme of Marginalized identities has also left a deep impact on the readers after reading the extended level of oppression. Arundhati Roy's *'The God of Small Things'* is a powerful narrative of social marginalization in post-colonial India where the exploration of postcolonial themes in Indian literature reveals a complex interplay between colonial history and the quest for cultural identity. In reference to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian scholar and feminist critical has also produced postcolonial theory, which offers important insights into the colonial experience and its long-lasting ramifications. In Arundhati Roy's work the love affair of Ammu and Velutha has been described as sin as both the it was against their "Love Laws" which regulate emotional and physical relationships. Love in itself becomes a punishable offense for Marginalized people. The punishment is unequal: where Velutha, the lover is brutally killed, while Ammu is socially erased.

In Toni Morrison's work *'The Bluest Eye'* the protagonist Pecola Breedlove, an eleven year old girl remains marginalized because she is black and poor. She was mocked at school, she was also neglected at her own home due to her parents' deep-seated self-hatred, the internalization of white beauty standards. She totally remained invisible at public places and her only urge is to have the 'blue eyes' to be socially accepted.

Caste in Roy and race in Morrison function as structural forces of exclusion, determining who is allowed dignity, love, and voice.

Arundhati Roy and Toni Morrison, both the writers take children as common witnesses to all the tragedies or mishappenings taking place. In Arundhati Roy's *'The God of Small things'* the child characters Estha and Rachel are at the moral center of the narrative. In one of the scenes, Estha is forced to falsely identify Velutha, making him a child witness to institutional injustice. "He nodded because he was frightened." (303) Through their innocent yet painfully perceptive eyes, Roy exposes the cruelties, hypocrisies, and injustices of the adult world.

In Toni Morrison's *'The Bluest Eye'* the writer presents the child as a moral witness primarily through Claudia, and tragically through Pecola Breedlove. Their perspectives expose moral failures that adults normalize or ignore. Claudia functions as the ethical voice of the novel.

Unlike adults and even other children, she questions dominant values, especially white beauty standards. She questions why "all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired doll was what every girl child treasured." (The Bluest Eye, 20). Claudia's perspective exposes how society teaches racism and self-hatred, rather than these being natural beliefs.

In relation to the use of narrative style and language, Roy's style is lyrical, poetic, and experimental, using repetition, child-like perspectives, and broken syntax. In Arundhati Roy's *'The God of Small things'* her novel moves back and forth in time, shifting between the twins' childhood (1969) and Rachel's adulthood (1990s). Further she uses playful, fragmented and sensory language. Roy has made use of symbols like the 'river' as a symbol of danger and change, 'The Pickle factory' as a symbol of distorted history.

In the same way, Toni Morrison in his work *'The Bluest Eye'* does not follow a smooth chronological order. His events are revealed in fragments, memories, and shifts in time. Beauty of language contrasts with the ugliness of social reality, intensifying emotional impact. Like Roy, Morrison has also made use of symbols in his work like 'Blue Eyes' the symbol of beauty, acceptance and power, 'Seasons' a symbol of

cycles of growth and decay.

CONCLUSION

Arundhati Roy and Toni Morrison emerge as two of the most compelling literary voices of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, united by a shared ethical commitment to writing from the margins and challenging dominant histories. Though separated by geography, culture, and historical experience, Roy writing from postcolonial India and Morrison from African-American perspective, both the writers have talked about socio-historical context, feminist point of view, marginalized identities and the use of symbolism in their literary works. In giving voice to the silenced and dignity to the dispossessed, Roy and Morrison affirm the enduring power of literature to challenge oppression and imagine more humane worlds.

CITATIONS

1. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Harper Perennial, London, 1997.
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