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“SOCIO-POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONFLICTS IN THE SOCIETY”

By the writings of Arundhati Roy

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ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy's work examines India's social and political issues, particularly concerning gender, caste, class, and globalization. She highlights the caste system, failures of the legal system, and the adverse effects of development, advocating for social and environmental justice. Roy critiques land exploitation and links social violence against marginalized communities to a consumer-driven culture, which leads to unsustainable practices and farmer suicides. Roy denounces the neoliberal dam industry as a source of ecological damage and social displacement, impacting around 33 million people. Roy contends that while rural areas symbolize India's essence, urban spaces reflect a more genuine reality, criticizing the elite for promoting large dam projects that ultimately harm disadvantaged communities and enhance ecological destruction.

Key Words: Roy, Social, Political and Ecological

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy's novel 'The God of Small Things' explores various social, political, and ideological conflicts in India and offers a radical alternative vision of how to resolve them. These conflicts include issues related to class and caste, the oppressive nature of the Indian state, the Maoist movement, the role of the media in corporate globalization and consumer culture, environmental damage, parliamentary Marxism, and male-dominated gender relations. Roy often presents these issues in contrasting pairs, one oppressive and dominant and the other repressed but radical and emergent. He embodies his radical vision by prioritizing others. For example, it depicts the discriminatory caste system in India as a cruel and unjust practice and highlights the love between Ammu and Velutha as a subversion of this system. In contrast, he depicts the relationship between Pappachi and Mammachi as a compulsive and oppressive, loveless bond. In her political article "Come September," Roy describes how her fiction and nonfiction intersect.

"Fiction and non-fiction are only different techniques of storytelling. For reasons I do not fully understand, fiction dances out of me. Non-fiction is wrenched out by the aching, broken world I wake up to every morning." An Ordinary Person Guide to Empire, p.13

The act of storytelling can take many forms, whether through fiction or non-fiction. The author expresses a sense of uncertainty as to why fiction comes naturally to them while non-fiction is the result of the harsh reality they face every day. In Ayemenem, there are two deities that influence the events that take place: the God of the Great and Mighty and the God of Small Things. The dominant figure of society is the patriarchal God, but it is the God of small things that forms the very foundation of society and provides everything necessary for its continued existence. In the novel, little people are referred to as "things" and are not respected or treated as human beings in society. Anything or anyone that is not respected is considered a thing. Therefore, in the eyes of the powerful, the little people in Ajemenem are considered trifles. However, these little people also have godlike power. The God of small things does not create obstacles or traditions but instead encourages the growth of the human spirit and love. On the other hand, the God of great people restricts the human spirit and actions, creates barriers, and enforces dead customs in society. The result is a conflict between the two gods in Ayemene, and Arundhati Roy sides with the God of Small Things.

1.2 THE TASTE OF INJUSTICES

Unlike the mighty God of Big Things, God of Small Things tells stories of the struggles and sufferings of the downtrodden, such as Vellya Paapen and his sons, Velutha and Kuttapen, as well as the ostracized figure of Ammu. This God represents those who are victims of historical forces, social norms, false pride, and abuse of power. The title of the novel suggests that these themes are universal, as in any society, the clash of the powerful and the powerless is a story of human suffering. In the novel, the God of Small Things appears to be defeated, but in her nonfiction, Arundhati Roy joins the cause of the God of Small Things. This God represents the lives of the weak and vulnerable, whether they are small creatures or human beings who are victims of abuse or neglect. The court was appraised of the forced removal of Adivasis and their rehabilitation status, as well as the tribunal's decision regarding the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam. However, the Supreme Court finally approved the violation of the human rights of the impoverished people in the valley. This is reminiscent of the tiger in the Belgrade zoo, which resorts to eating its own limbs. Arundhati Roy emphasizes this point.

"With this single statement, the Supreme Court of India is abdicating its supreme responsibility. If the court has no role to play in arbitrating between the state and its citizens in the matter of violations of human rights, then what is it here for? If justice isn't a court's business, then what is?" The Shape of the Beast, p.4-5

The Supreme Court of India shirks its most important duty with this single statement. If the court refuses to intervene in cases of human rights violations by the state against its citizens, then what is the purpose? If the court is not in the business of dispensing justice, what is its purpose? The novel sharply criticizes politicians who live a double life, while the author exposes their hypocritical behavior and speech. Kerala is known for its high level of social awareness, 100% literacy rate, and tradition of Marxist politics. However, the state also has deep roots of religious orthodoxy and conservatism that influence social life. The rural environment plays a significant role in shaping village life, where different layers intertwine and influence the drama and tension. Arundhati Roy effectively uses literary devices to create a rural landscape, and her descriptions highlight the conflicts of values. In "Democracy," he emphasizes:

“People who have been uprooted from their homes and communities, who have lost their culture and language, are being made to feel proud of something. Not something, they strive for and achieved, not something they can count as a personal accomplishment, but something they just happen to be. Or, more accurately, something they happen not to be. And the falseness, the emptiness of that pride, is fuelling a gladiatorial anger that is then directed towards a simulated target that has been wheeled into the amphitheatre.” My Seditious Heart, pp.174

Individuals who have been forcibly removed from their homes and communities and experienced the loss of their culture and language are encouraged to take pride in something that is not the result of their own efforts or achievements. This false sense of pride fuels deep anger, which is then directed at the simulated target, creating a sense of emptiness and falsity. This is described as a gladiatorial rage that is directed against a manufactured enemy. To achieve her goal, she goes to great lengths to expose the devious plans of powerful male leaders and to raise awareness among the poor, helpless addicts. In an interview in Scimitars of the Sun, he states that she tries to explain complex things in simple terms. It reminds us that no government gave us our freedoms, but we took them away. Once we give them up, only revolution can get them back. The people have the right to refuse—to refuse to fight, to refuse to move rockets, to refuse to wave the flag, and to refuse to have a victory parade. Being poor is considered a crime in India. Arundhati Roy disagrees with the belief that the essence of India lies in its villages.

“India doesn’t live in her villages. India dies in her villages. India gets kicked around in her villages. India lives in its cities. India’s villages, Live, only to serve her cities. Her villages are her citizens’ vassals for that reasons must be controlled and kept alive, but only just. The Algebra of Infinite Justice, p.70-71

The real essence of India is not found in its villages but rather in its cities. The villages are neglected and mistreated, existing only to meet the needs of the urban areas. They are considered subordinate to the cities and are kept alive only out of necessity. This is a harsh reality that needs to be acknowledged and addressed. She compares it to the movie Titanic, where the ships slowly sinks into a dark sea and the lower-class passenger’s panic and are washed away, while the rich in the banquet hall are comforted by the thought that the lifeboats are reserved for them. She points out that the tragedy is that the poor have no escape. She writes about social justice and involuntary displacement, and how people are uprooted from their familiar surroundings and placed into a world they know nothing about, where they face unemployment and poverty. They argue that large dams are no longer viable, outdated, uncool, and undemocratic. It suggests that if the world were to fall into heartless commercialism, the rich and powerful would also perish along with the poor and disadvantaged, despite their false confidence in their life jackets.

“I find it offensive, this notion that things are too complicated to explain to an ordinary reader—again, this coterie, this club mentality. I write about things that vitally affect people’s lives.” The Shape of the Beast, pp. 18-19

I am offended by the idea that some things are too complicated to explain to the average reader. It feels exclusive and elitist. I write about important topics that have a significant impact on people’s lives. Arundhati Roy believes that dams are a way of depriving farmers of their knowledge and taking resources like water, land, and irrigation from the poor and giving them to the rich. Building large reservoirs displaces many people, leaves them without homes and resources, and causes environmental damage, flooding, and disease. Because of these negative effects, the dam-building industry was no longer popular in the first world, so it was exported to the third world through development aid. The Indian government does not have an official number of people displaced by the dams, but Arundhati Roy estimates that it is at least 33 million. The government has made no effort to help the displaced people

and has only offered financial compensation, which is insufficient to support them. Many of the displaced people end up as cheap labor and essentially become refugees in a covert war.

1.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL MONOPOLY

Roy's novel explores the experiences of marginalized individuals, damaged characters, fragile environments, and historical conflicts, revealing the complex interplay of positive and negative elements in narratives of trauma and suffering. While Roy's incorporation of mythological events into a historical context is consistent with Varughese's claim that the authors of Barahati Fantasy "tell stories rooted in a shared historical understanding," a sense of strangeness pervades the novel. Despite the fact that the choice to subvert the traditional time settings of the fantasy genre creates a fictional account that evokes "a sense of unease about unknown forces or beings" and challenges established notions of historical accuracy, Postcolonial environmental critics link processes of colonization to the exploitation of natural resources and, as Huggan and Tiffin argue, emphasize that "there can be no social justice without environmental justice." This highlights the significant socio-political implications of environmental protection. Following the principles of postcolonial ecocriticism, the novel delves into contemporary environmental issues, from cows receiving chemicals to increase milk production and ease pain to vultures dying from consuming poisoned corpses. Roy expresses concern over the abuse of the ecological balance and condemns the violation of nature. The narrator describes the air as chemical and the water as poisonous, and the construction of the dam displaces vulnerable people; villages and towns are emptied, and millions of people move without a clear destination.

To reclaim these stolen words requires explanations that are too, tedious for a world with a short attention span, and too expensive in an era when Free Speech has become unaffordable for the poor. This language heist may prove to be the keystone of our undoing. Two decades of this kind of "Progress" in India has created a vast middle class punch-drunk on sudden wealth and the sudden respect that comes with it-and a much, much vaster, desperate, underclass. Tens of millions of people have been dispossessed and displaced from their land by floods, droughts, and desertification caused by indiscriminate environmental engineering and massive infrastructural projects, dams, mines, and Special Economic Zones. All developed in the name of the poor, but really meant to service the rising demands of the new aristocracy. Field Notes on Democracy 6

Retrieving stolen words requires explanations that are too laborious for a society with limited attention spans and too costly in an age when free speech is unattainable for the poor. This linguistic theft may prove to be a major factor in our downfall. Over the past two decades, progress in India has led to the creation of a sizable middle class intoxicated by sudden wealth and accompanying newfound respectability, as well as a significantly larger, desperate underclass. Tens of millions of individuals have been deprived of their land due to floods, droughts, and desertification caused by indiscriminate environmental manipulation and large-scale infrastructure projects such as dams, mines, and special economic zones. These initiatives were ostensibly developed for the benefit of the poor, but in reality, they were intended to satisfy the growing demands of the new aristocracy. Roy effectively combines human and non-human injuries by incorporating environmental hazards that reveal nature as a space where different spatial narratives and histories intersect and where land is both a speaking subject and a contested object of discursive management and material control. In addition, Roy's eco-critical perspective seems to resonate with Glissant's concept of "aesthetics of the earth," in which the Martinic poet and writer views the earth, especially the plantations, as a form of resistance against the colonial forces of global markets that erase local identities while acting as a rhizomatic network that connects the local to the global.

Building on Heidegger's understanding of the earth as a potential resource for exploring existence, Glissant advocates an "aesthetics of rupture and connection" that neither celebrates nor excludes singularity but rather enables mutual change. Roy's devotion to ecology is similarly expressed through the depiction of land exploitation, and although these apocalyptic images are traumatic, they also offer a glimmer of hope and temporary solace for the sense of sadness. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness therefore contains harsh tones that bridge imagination and reality. The author consistently portrays people living in precarious conditions, such as religious minorities, and addresses the violence stemming from ongoing tensions.

Today, words like Progress and Development have become interchangeable with economic "Reforms," Deregulation, and Privatization. Freedom has come to mean choice. It has less to do with the human spirit than with different brands of deodorant. Market no longer means a place where you buy provisions. The "Market" is a de-territorialized space where faceless corporations do business, including buying and selling "futures." Justice has come to mean human rights (and of those, as they say, "a few will do"). Democracy's Falling Light p54

The concept of freedom has been simplified to mean choice, with a reduced emphasis on the human spirit and an increased focus on consumer goods. The term market no longer refers to a physical place to buy goods but rather an unbounded space where unidentified corporations conduct business, including the trading of "futures." A free market economic policy regime administered by people who are blissfully ignorant of the fate of civilizations that have grown too dependent on artificial irrigation has led to an alarming shift in cropping patterns. Sustainable food crops, suited to local soil conditions and microclimates, have been replaced by water-guzzling, hybrid, and genetically modified "cash" crops that, apart from being completely dependent on the market, are also heavily dependent on chemical fertilizers, pesticides, canal irrigation, and reckless groundwater extraction. As abused agricultural land, saturated with chemicals, is gradually depleted and barren, the cost of agricultural inputs rises, and small farmers fall into a debt trap. Over one hundred and eighty thousand Indian farmers have committed suicide in the last few years. While state granaries do. Brimming with food that eventually rots, starvation and malnutrition approaching the same levels as sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, the 9 percent growth rate is starting to look like a downward spiral. The higher: the rate of this kind of growth, the worse the prognosis. Any oncologist will tell you that.

It has allowed them to marginalized their detractors ,deprive them of a language to voice their critique and dismiss them as being "anti-progress,""anti-development,""anti-reform," and of course "anti-national"-negativists of the worst sort. Talk about saving a river or protecting a forest and they say, "Don't you believe in Progress?" To people whose land is being submerged by dam reservoirs, and whose homes are being bulldozed, they say, "Do you have an alternative development model?" To those who believe that a government is duty bound to provide people with basic education, health care, and social security, they say, "You're against the market." And who except a cretin could be against markets? Field Notes on Democracy p 6

They have used this tactic to push their critics to the sidelines, stifle their disagreement, and brand them as "anti-progressive," "anti-development," "anti-reform," and "anti-national"—individuals who resist change in a negative manner. When individuals speak up for the protection of a river or a forest, they are questioned, "Don't you support progress?" Similarly, people impacted by the flooding of their land and the destruction of their homes are interrogated with, "Do you have an alternative development plan?" Furthermore, those who advocate for the government's responsibility in providing education, healthcare, and social security are accused of being against the market. This language dismisses any opposition to these ideas as foolish. Arundhati Roy believes that large dams are a way to exploit farmers'

wisdom and take away their resources. They are a means for the rich to take water, land, and irrigation from the poor, displacing large populations and causing ecological destruction. This resulted in the dam-building industry being out of work in the first world, so it was exported to the third world through neoliberal development aid.

I was writing about social justice, about the politics of involuntary displacement, about what happens to people who are forcibly uprooted from an environment they know well and dumped in a world they know nothing about—a world in which, instead of a forest and a river and farmlands, they have unemployment and tin shack. It's an unfair, unequal bargain for anybody—Adivasis or Aggarwal. The Shape of the Beast, p.16

Roy spoke about the issue of social justice, specifically the political implications of forced displacement. I researched the experiences of people who are uprooted from their familiar environment and placed in an unfamiliar environment where they face unemployment and inadequate living conditions. This situation is unfair and unequal for everyone, regardless of their background. The Indian government does not have an official number of people who have been forced to leave their homes for the construction of dams or other development projects in the name of national progress. Arundhati Roy estimates that the number of displaced persons is at least 33 million, and if other development projects are included, the number would be even higher. The government made no effort to investigate the plight of the millions of displaced people and offered only cash compensation as a solution. However, it is clear that there is insufficient financial compensation for displaced persons, especially illiterate male Adivasis who have been forced to leave their homes several times. Many of them end up working as cheap construction labor and are essentially refugees in an unrecognized war.

To be poor in India is a crime. Arundhati Roy disagrees with the dictum that India lives in her villages. "India doesn't live in her villages. India dies in her villages. India gets kicked around in her villages. India lives in its cities. India's villages live, only to serve her cities. Her villages are her citizens' vassals for that reasons must be controlled and kept alive, but only just. The Algebra of Infinite Justice p.70-71

According to Arundhati Roy, poverty is considered a crime in India. He challenges the belief that the essence of India lies in its villages and argues that the reality is quite the opposite. Roy believes that India really suffers and struggles in its villages, while its cities are where the real essence of the country resides. It suggests that villages exist only to serve the cities and their inhabitants, and therefore are controlled and kept alive only to fulfill that purpose. Since India's independence, the country's elite and corrupt bureaucracy have decided to build numerous large dams across the country without considering the impact on the lives of ordinary citizens. This has led to immense suffering for the poor, powerless, and marginalized individuals. The government's construction of these dams has essentially privatized water, a resource that belongs to all of humanity. These dams have become lucrative ventures for politicians, bureaucrats, and the construction industry. Rather than being symbols of modern India, these dams represent the widespread displacement and suffering of millions of Indian citizens. They have led to the flooding of large areas of valuable forest land, the destruction of estuarine ecosystems, and significant changes in the river ecology of the country. The construction of these dams was fraught with bureaucratic and political corruption, as well as the involvement of international finance, which had unimaginable consequences.

1.4 CONCLUSION

Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things' explores India's social, political, and ideological conflicts, focusing on issues of class, caste, and gender, as well as the impact of globalization and the Maoist movement. The narrative contrasts the oppressive love between Ammu and Velutha with the lack of affection in Pappachi and Mammachi's marriage, critiquing the caste system. Roy emphasizes the conflict between marginalized individuals and the constraints imposed by powerful figures, illuminating human suffering due to societal oppression and critiquing the inaction of India's judicial system on human rights. The novel questions the hypocrisy of politicians while highlighting Kerala's social dynamics, interweaving rural life with tension. It also addresses the concept of "gladiatorial rage" among forcibly displaced individuals, critiquing the view of India as solely rural and underscoring the impacts of large dams and infrastructural displacement. Roy's work advocates for social and environmental justice, integrating myth into history and aligning with ecocriticism to address the exploitation of people and nature. Retrieving stolen words emphasizes difficulties in a society with limited attention spans and free speech restrictions, contributing to decline. In India, contrasting middle and under classes emerge due to environmental degradation from infrastructure benefiting the elite. Arundhati Roy's eco-critical work intertwines human and environmental injuries, advocating for resistance against colonialism and local identity erasure. Hope exists among marginalized communities despite ecological trauma. The conception of freedom as consumer choice neglects the human spirit, fueling resource-intensive agriculture that drives small farmers into debt and results in over 180,000 suicides. Critics face marginalization through accusations of being anti-development, while large dam projects exploit farmers and ecosystems. Roy discusses forced displacement, highlighting the plight of uprooted individuals and the inadequacy of government compensation for affected Adivasis. He critiques the view of poverty as a crime and the corrupt prioritization of large dam projects that enrich elites at the expense of the marginalized.

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