



International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences
ISSN(O): (2349-4085) ISSN(P): (2394-4218)
Impact Factor- 5.414, Volume 4, Issue 12, December 2017
Website- www.aarf.asia, Email : editor@aarf.asia ,
editoraarf@gmail.com

Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things – Its Sense and Sensibility

Prof. (Dr.) Rajeshwar Prasad

Professor & Head, Dept. of English

Sarvodaya Post-Graduate College,

Ghosi, Mau, U.P.

ABSTRACT: Arundhati Roy established herself as one of the great novelists with the publication of her only fictional work entitled *The God of Small Things*. This novel is replete with several themes which are woven into one story revealing various senses and sensibility, and portraying Dalit elements, love, spite, betrayal, hatred, guilt, untouchability, corruption in police departments, politics, male domination, women's sufferings, etc. The events which occur in the novel are depicted in a fragmentary way. This article aims to highlight its sense and sensibility which are sad and bitter but factually revealed in this novel and one story.

Keywords: *The God of Small Things*, untouchability, Rahel and Estha, love, death, police, politics, male domination, women's marginalization, etc.

Introduction: Indian English prose for social and political purposes was written by Indians from the earliest times with rare force, eloquence, and effectiveness, excellence in the writing of creative prose. The Indian novel made such a late start because it had to face several peculiar problems in the beginning. They made language flexible and varied enough to suit different fictitious characters taken from different professions and strata of society involved in the authenticity.

M.K Naik writes, “*Post-independence Indian English fiction retains the momentum the novel gained during the Gandhian age. The tradition of social realism established earlier on a sound footing by Mulk Raj Anand is continued by novelists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, and Khuswant Singh...*” (Naik, M. K., 2005, A History of English Literature, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, Page no. 212)

Indian English writing passed several stages, and Arundhati Roy came into the limelight with her novel, *The God of Small Things* when she got the Booker prize for this work which was planted into her mind six years before she was awarded. She desired to write something highly personal and autobiographical. This takes on some great subjects – love, madness, hope, and infinite joy. She dares to break the traditions. The novelist has created a work that is anchored to anguish but handled by wit and creative magic. The novel depicts the story of one fractured family from the southernmost tip of India – the unhappy family, unhappy in its ways through flashbacks and flashes forward to the God of Sin. Things unfold the secrets of these characters' unhappiness. Rahel and Estha are fraternal twins whose emotional link to one another is stronger than that of most siblings – Esthappen and Rahel thought of them together as we and separately, individually as "we" or "us". They were a breed of Siamese twins – which means to say that they were physically separated, but with joint identities. Later on, Rahel has a memory of walking up one night giggling at Estha's funny dream. Rahel has other

memories too that she has no right to have. Their childhood household hums with hidden antagonism and pains that only family can give one another.

Supriya Chaudhuri rightly observes in *Asian Age*, “Roy handles the shifting surfaces of past and present with extraordinary fineness and delicacy, producing a controlled, intricate narrative structure through which the themes of love, spite, betrayal, hatred and guilt run like a spider’s web. A remarkable achievement.” (Roy, Arundhati, 1997, *The God of Small Things*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, Remarks added with the novel in front)

The God of Small Things is a Cultue-Puran that deals with the themes of every sphere of life, society, politics, and police administration in India. This is work that shows a true record of Indian sense and sensibility. It is a way by which foreigners can enter the world of Indianness in a broader aspect witnessing the sad note rooted in Indian culture.

J.N. Mundra rightly observes, “...it is the Indo-Anglian fiction which has put India on the literary map of the world and brought her home to foreigners as never before in the history of international cultural relations. Indo-Anglian fiction has indeed opened a window for foreigners through which they can see Indians themselves would like to see her.” (Mundra, J.N. & Sahni, C.L., 1991, *Advanced Literary Essays*, Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly page 229

The events which occur in *The God of Small Things* are depicted in a fragmentary way. Most of the events are jumping back and forth between scenes in 1969 and 1993, and also with back story scattered throughout. The story centres on the wealthy, land-owning, Christian Ipe family of Ayemenem in a town in the Kerala state of India. Most of the events take place in 1969, focusing on the seven-year-old twins Estha and his sister Rahel. She lives with their mother Ammu, their grandmother Mammach, their uncle Chacko, and their great-aunt Baby Kochamma. It is the rarest among rare novels which present the Indian sense and sensibility.

Daily Telegraph writes in its comments, *“It is rare to find a book that so effectively cuts through the clothes of nationality, caste and religion to reveal the bare bones of humanity.”* (Roy, Arundhati, 1997, *The God of Small Things*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, on the backside cover page)

The God of Small Things is a revelation of several themes. The story begins with the return of a brother and a sister twins who are Estha and Rahel. They had parted in their seventh year and now they have come back to Ayemenem, after twenty-four years. Ayemenem is a remote village in Kerala, the once happy home of their childhood. The sense of haunting pain and a never lifting weight of sadness govern the story. Its story is sad, absorbed, and repetitive like electronic equipment reversing and forwarding again.

The novelist writes, *“And Estha, walking in the riverbank, couldn’t feel the wetness of the rain or the suddenshudder of the cold puppy that had temporarily adopted him and squelched at his side. He walked past the old mangosteen tree and up to the edge of a laterite spur that jutted out into the river...”* (Roy, Arundhati, 1997, *The God of Small Things*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, Page 13)

The novel depicts a confrontation between ‘The Big Man, The Laltain’ and Small Man, the Mombathi. In short, the novel shows maladjustment between ‘the God of big things’ who are Pappachi, Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Chacko, Comrade Pillai, and Inspector Thomas Mathew – and the God of small things who are Ammu, Velutha, Estha, and Sophie Mol. According to the novelist, the term ‘Laltain’ means ‘The big guns of society’ who are in a situation to live and pass happy life all around – and Mombathi indicates the lower strata of society, which has no support and no protection in any way and are compelled to suffer in the entire part of life. They are the helpless ones, sufferers, downtrodden, have-nots, the Dalits, the deserted, the marginalized, and the defenceless in other words we can say that they are the

slaves of destiny to suffer lifelong. Very frankly to say that the two Mombatties, Ammu and Velutha have to forsake the big things and indulge in small things.

Arundhati Roy writes, “*There are big dreams and little ones. ‘Big man the Laltain sahib, small Man the Mombatti, ‘ an old Bihari coolie, who met Estha’s school excursion party at the railway station (unfailingly, year after year) used to say of dreams.*” (Roy, Arundhati, 1997, *The God of Small Things*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, Page 89)

The novelist flings a harsh irony on man's domination over a woman in every walk of life. The novel communicates a message that a woman is not a mere toy or an object of pleasure or a means of satisfying the passion of men, but she is the noblest and richest part of a man's life. Chacko, the brother of Ammu has been portrayed as a hypocritical male character in the novel, in the Ayemenem house. This was the reason why he was sent to Britain to study, although he is an ordinary student. But Ammu is not allowed to study further. She is a woman and so she has no right to go to college because college studies corrupt a woman as was considered at the time. Women were supposed to be meant for only mating and procreating, serving and nourishing, not more than this.

Chacko fails in almost every part of his life including his marriage with Margaret, an English girl who deserted his life. He cynically says to his sister Ammu “*What is yours is mine and what is mine is also mine*”. It is indeed a great irony of fate that a daughter estranged from her husband is tortured and tyrannized in the house of the parents, too leading to the poignant situation. But, an estranged son, Chacko not only receives warm welcomes but also remains the rightful inheritor of the family's wealth and fortune – the main reason behind this is that he was a male. The same behaviour of Ammu is termed illicit, sinful, and untraditional. She is mercilessly locked up in a room and is beaten black and blue too. Thus, in this novel, the novelist lashes out at the hypocritical moral code of society, which makes a great difference between men and women and leads to several other problems in the future.

The novelist depicts untouchability as a great evil in society. She shows that Velutha has to struggle hard to achieve identity in society. Roy wants to show that even a Dalit can also become an engineer, a doctor, or a professor if he is properly guided, but for the entire part of his life, he has to face discrimination and struggle for survival.

The novel also flings a very harsh satire on the police administration system which is unable to award justice to the common people, instead, it creates problems in many cases. Roy feels that the word 'POLICE' stands for politeness, obedience, loyalty, intelligence, courtesy, and efficiency. But Police Inspector Thomas Mathew has not even a single quality to be on the post. He does not behave well with Ammu. He is an officer mainly handled and guided by politics and big-ups of the society at large and the common people cannot expect justice from him.

Arundhati Roy writes, *"They were not arresting a man, they were exorcizing fear. They had no instrument to calibrate how much punishment he could take. No means of gauging how much or how permanently they had damaged him."* (Roy, Arundhati, 1997, *The God of Small Things*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, Page 309)

Arundhati Roy also depicts another theme in the novel – that this novel is a satire on politics. She satirises Marxism and contemporary politics in Kerala through the character of Comrade Pillai, who is an opportunist and who does not help Velutha in police custody.

Arundhati Roy writes, *"It was not entirely his fault that he lived in a society where a man's death could be more profitable than life had ever been...Velutha's last visit to Comrade Pillai – with Mammachi and Baby Kocahmma – and what had passed between them, remained a secret. The last betrayal that sent Velutha across the river, swimming against the current, in the dark and rain, well in time for his blind date with history."* (Roy, Arundhati, 1997, *The God of Small Things*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, Page 281-282)

The novel also fosters the philosophy of Thomas Hardy that love awards joy to a few, but sorrows to many. Love is the godly emotion, but portrayed as an “untouchable” in the novel like the Paravan caste and we also see that the emotion is the impetus behind much of the main events in the novel. The passion of love propels Ammu to sleep with Velutha. Love also fascinates and instils fear in Rahel. Ammu’s love for Rahel constantly plagues Rahel as a child. An unfulfilled love leads to Baby Kochamma’s bitterness - which leads to her tragic betrayal of Velutha, Ammu, and the twins. Only Sophie Mol is "loved" outwardly in the novel and is a relative of the Kochamma family. They fawn over Sophie Mol’s arrival and her death is the ghostly core around which the novel’s main plot is told.

Arundhati Roy writes, *“She has no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s courage. As for a divorced daughter from a intercommunity love marriage – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject.”* (Roy, Arundhati, 1997, *The God of Small Things*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, page 45-46)

Thomas Hardy views love as a momentary passion and thereafter pain and anguish and in this novel, Arundhati Roy’s love has also is portrayed as twisted and sick. It is also mixed with violence in perversion. It has been depicted in the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man’s molestation of Estha, Mammachi’s nightly beatings by her husband, Pappachi, Ammu’s beating of her own husband, Babu, and perhaps most tragically of all, Estha and Rahel’s night of incestual love-making. Love, in all it's mixed and perverted, as well as purest, forms is something that is woven in and out of the characters' lives. Whatsoever, love is only truly experienced and achieved between Ammu and Velutha. Despite, love being the fuel for so much of the action in the novel, the emotion is only explicitly given a single chapter’s worth of description at the end of the novel.

We also find the struggle to maintain boundaries in the novel in their literal and figurative manners. They are constantly crossed, mutated, observed, and defied throughout the novel. Nature is indeed the first transgressor of boundaries, turns brick walls green with moss, chokes electric poles with vines, and overtakes the Ayemenem house with dirt, grime, and insects all around. Here Nature finds a way of eluding and moving beyond boundaries, and it is a reminder of the “Small Things”, that constantly warn to overturn the “Big Things” as Roy reveals in the novel. Pappachi’s treasured moth also eludes him. Other scientists argue for years over its official classification. Rahel and Estha themselves are hard to classify as children and consider themselves as "One" since they share the same thoughts and experiences. Rahel and Estha become individuals and they defy social norms by sleeping together. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma try to uphold boundaries and the social order of the caste system. But they end up betraying the true things that hold people together, such as love, honour, and compassion. Mammachi turns her back on Velutha after years of service to maintain her family's standing. Baby Kochamma betrays the twins to save herself and her standing in the world. Thus, we see the struggle to maintain boundaries in the novel in their literal and figurative manners throughout the novel.

It is also clear that the senses of pride and shame were running strongly in the Kochamma family which resulted in emotional instability. To keep his pride, Pappachi buys a blue Plymouth and drives it around the town to show himself attractive and worthy of respect. He also dominates his wife Mammachi and his social standing as Imperial Entomologist at the Pusa Institute in Delhi. They are taken away when his son Chacko forces him to stop beating Mammachi. He doesn't find credit for discovering the species of moth he found in his drink one day. Finally, Pappachi dies of a heart attack, embittered because of losing his pride and standing in the world. A lower caste man like Comrade Pillai uses his children to impress others by making them recite literature. Baby Kochamma also refers to a Shakespearean play

to impress a child Sophie Mol. Thus, the readers may have sympathy for these characters. Shame also functions as a destructive force in the novel keeping Estha from revealing that he has been abused for fear of no longer being worthy of his mother's love. Pride and shame are motivating factors for many of the things which occur which the characters do to avoid being real. Thus, they live in an altered version of reality where they have control. Pride and shame are also the motivating factors involved in heinous actions, especially Baby Kochamma's betrayal of Velutha, Amma, and the twins Rahel and Estha.

Conclusion:

The God of Small Things is a truthful portrayal of various senses and sensibility, and portrays Dalit elements, love, spite, betrayal, hatred, guilt, untouchability, corruption in police departments, politics, male domination, women's sufferings, etc. The novel is a truthful portrayal of the plight of women in society and their lifelong and tough struggle for seeking a sense of identity in a male-dominated conservative society. Undoubtedly, the social structure of an Indian woman is full of many ups and downs, and ifs and buts – and on the other hand, men enjoy their life with freedom. It shows that life offers little choice for a forsaken woman like Ammu, who is the central character in the novel.

References:

1. Naik, M. K., 2005, *A History of English Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi
2. Mundra, J.N. & Sahni, C.L., 1991, *Advanced Literary Essays*, Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly
3. Iyengar, K.R.S., 2019, *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling Publications Private Limited, New Delhi
4. Roy, Arundhati Roy, 1997, *The God of All Things*, Penguin Books, New Delhi