

Review Article

Feminine Sensibility in God of Small Things

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ABSTRACT

Perhaps, no other single work of fiction has made such a momentous impact in Indian English Literature in recent years as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. She is one of the few Indian English writers actively interested in contemporary socio-political issues which are amply evidenced in a number of articles, interviews and books she wrote on various topics in recent years. *The God of small things* is about several themes - one of the chief issues it brings into focus is the family and social mechanism evolved over centuries in traditional Indian society to suppress woman and her independence as a human being.

Key Words: Fiction, *God of Small Things*, Socio-political Issues.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps, no other single work of fiction has made such a momentous impact in Indian English Literature in recent years as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Its impact is all the more significant considering that the author has so far produced only one novel. Indeed, the work has been widely acclaimed as an important book of the post-modernist literary trend that has motivated such major novelists as Salman Rushdie, Upanayan Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, R. Mistry who immortalized themselves with just one novel. She is one of the few Indian English writers actively interested in contemporary socio-political issues which is amply evidenced in a number of articles, interviews and books she wrote on various topics in recent years.

The God of small things is about several themes – one of the chief issues it

brings into focus is the family and social mechanism evolved over centuries in traditional Indian society to suppress woman and her independence as a human being. Right at the centre is woeful tale of Amma, mother of Rahel and Estha, who suffers silently, yet simmers inside her a deep discontent. Traditional joint families are neatly structured where some woman assume dominant role with greater authority over others who are lower down and, therefore, enjoy certain power. The complex structure is deeply embedded and has given rise to countless stories of personal tragedies of unequally placed women. Their unequal position creates great misery, suffering and hardships in their lives forcing them to accept the oppressive system in a spirit of religious submissiveness and personal renunciation. It is interesting to note how Mammachi and Baby Kachaman fit into the oppressive system that blatantly victimizes

Amma. They become her active oppressors, seeking to corner her and then drive her to her miserable death.

One of the most glaring instances of it is the ambiguous stand adopted by these women with regard to Amma's relation with Velutha. They express scant sympathy for Amma's lonely life, her tragic marital circumstances and her anxiety about her children. On the other hand, their casteist-hostility finds double force in Amma-Velutha relationship and breaks out into expression of moral outrage, while Chako's sexual indulgences with low caste women is overlooked as "Man's Needs", Amma's affair with Velutha is treated as an unpardonable offence against family's reputation and status. Thus one can see that in this novel Arundhati Roy puts under focus deliberately constructed agencies of cruelty that work against women's interests. In this all are involved-the so-called progressive politicians, the family members, the police etc. In the traditional Indian society such forces flourish and find encouragement in maintaining their hold over the weaker people. Social structures are so formed as to sanctify women's victimization. Roy's depiction of the miserable lives of women in the novel generates in unmistakable terms the perpetuation of these exploitative forces.

In *The God of Small Things*, there is enough exploration of female experience, yet there is a wider view of society as other ideas have been blended with this basic theme. The novel sheds enough light on the plight of women and how they live under oppressive forces including their relationships with men who control them. It goes without saying that women are treated as objects of lust and sexual gratification. They are robbed of basic amenities of life. Thus they are forced to live in a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women." 1

Roy shows a strong social concern by expressing her passion for equality and fairness. Amma, the female protagonist is denied freedom of expression. Even in matters of education she is neglected. She is confined only to school education, while her brother Chako is sent to Oxford. Her hot tempered father, Pappachi, in a fit of anger, beats his wife, Mammachi, with a brass vase. Needless to say, they suffer meekly. Since no dowry is arranged for Amma, she rushes into marriage. Her maternity, full of vitality, is over lorded by her parents. When her husband compels her to stay with his English boss, during his absence, she returns to Ayemee to her parents with her twins, a boy named Estha and a girl Rahel. As a divorcee, she is sheltered, her life rendered meaningless at 27. Unwelcome in Ayemenen, she ridicules the self-deception folly of Chako in regarding himself as brilliant and breaking the myth of mothers like Mammachi, who believe in the cleverness of their sons. Isolated, her distress is diverted to her children. Even her children are not-spared from discrimination against their cousin Sophie. Sophie is considered as angel and the twins devils.

Even regarding property, gender-priority is obvious. Until Chako returns from Oxford, the factory is owned by Mamachi which is a small profit giving business. As soon as he returns, the factory is registered in his name. Amma, being a woman, has no claims on the factory. Chako is thus, a representative of the exploitative male who oppress women. To bring out effectively the feminine sensibility and moral life of the characters in the novel, Roy uses language that is very fresh. All the events, episodes and characters are vividly described by her. Her marriage to Velutha is looked down upon to not only by her parents but also by the society she lives in Velutha being a member of the untouchable class, is humiliated at every step. The police, politicians and

almost every one turn against Amma and Veluta and make their life difficult. Unable to challenge these oppressive forces, Amma runs away from the house and is found dead in a hotel. She dies unseen, unnoticed and unwept. It is worth noticing that Amma is a Malayali woman and Malayalis are the only community in India where matriarchy prevails. But even the women of such communities adopt different standards for men and women giving priority to the former. Thus, the Amma - Veluta relationship is presented as a protest against the existing laws of the society. It attacks the

institutions of family, religion, politics and public administration, but in doing so it touches the bounds of sentimentality swinging between a personal tragedy and archetypal symbol.

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