

THE STIFLED VOICE: A STUDY OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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Abstract:

Every day, violence against women happens all throughout the world. Every day, women face many forms of persecution and humiliation in India as well. The primary reason of oppression faced by Indian women is the patriarchal mindset that permeates the nation. A patriarchal social structure is one in which men rule and make all of the decisions for the family. They play the parts of moral authority, political leadership, and landowners. The patriarchal notion holds that a woman's primary responsibilities are to her husband, father, and brothers. The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy is a book set in a patriarchal culture. Among its principal topics include breaking the law, prohibited relationships, the shifting social structure, and the subjugation of women. Arundhati Roy portrays an abstemious picture of the stifled class in Indian social order in her Man of Booker Prizing winning debut novel The God of Small Things (1997). She has taken a bold stand against the powerful classes of the society. Arundhati Roy voices the root problems of the oppressed, marginalized, poor, untouchables etc..in this caste-ridden society. This research paper posits the presence of a suppressed voice in The God of Small Things through the characters of Ammu, Rahel, Estha, Velutha, and Sophie Mol. It also attempts to expose the social hypocrisy of giving equal rights to men and women and the plight of children who are perpetually tormented in different stages of their lives by the upper class. The present paper uncovers the suppressed voice of the oppressed who lost their identity and fundamental rights in modern society.

Keywords-

Stifled, downtrodden, tormented, untouchables, Arundhati Roy.

INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy portrays the darkest side of modern society in her first Man of Booker prize-winning novel The God of Small Things (1997). The story revolves around a small village called Ayemenem near Kottayam in Kerala which is the most literate state in India. It is a bit autobiographical novel as Roy narrates her childhood experiences in the novel. Despite being the most educated state, society is immersed in the castes, classes, prejudices and many more unethical practices. Most of the families are trapped in various struggles and issues. Poor's are suppressed by the dominant strata of society. They are not allowed to make the free exchange of thoughts. There is the monopoly of specific groups of people like Baby Kochamma, Chacko, Pappachi and the corrupt administration. Arundhati Roy peeps into the life of Keralian society, their wrong customs, traditions, and patriarchal domination where the caste-ridden mentality of certain groups of people whom Roy terms as 'Laltain' and the suppressed as 'Mombatti'. There is a confrontation between 'Laltain and Mombatti'. Roy brings the reader back into the dreaded colonial past in The God of Small Things where people are the victims of political and religious disorder, cultural hegemony and most importantly British slavery. Renowned critic Amar Nath Prasad holds a view:

"Life offers little choices for a forsaken woman like Ammu, the central character, who yearns for pleasure and happiness and a life far from shackles or constraints. The narrator portrays a detailed picture of the lady's childhood to adolescence, to the experience of the marriage of a sympathetic and affectionate mother, to a rebel wife who challenges the age-long hypocritical moral stand of a patriarchal family." (Prasad 106)

Research Methodology:

The Present research work is analytical in nature. The critical opinions of various critics are taken into consideration to reach the conclusion. Along with the critical opinions the quotes from original text are also analyzed.

Stifled Voices:

Women are considered the toys in the male-dominated society. They are fastening in the customs, rituals and traditions. She is a mere object of pleasure or gratification for men. They don't have the freedom to express their ideas or the right to claim for certain things. Roy depicts the patriarchal attitudes of the society in the novel when Pappachi asserts that *"For girls, attending college is an unnecessary expenditure. Ammu was forced to leave them and relocate to Delhi. In Ayemenem, a young girl's sole viable option was to wait for marriage proposals while assisting her mother with household chores"*. (Roy 38)

Women are deprived of equal rights in the male-dominated society. Roy uncovered the hypocritical mentality of society through the marathon struggles of women to seek their identity in modern society. As it is seen in the discussion between Ammu and Chacko when Ammu claims her equal rights; Chacko contemptuously says:

"What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine. Why because Ammu as a daughter had no claim to the property and she had no locusts stand." (Roy -57)

However, Ammu is an unsatisfied lady as far as physical pleasure is concerned. When she meets Velutha, the Untouchable and makes an illicit relationship with him to gratify her greed; it is questioned by society on account of their caste issue because Velutha belongs to an untouchable caste, as the author observes:

"In order to prevent brahmins or syrian christians from unintentionally walking on paravan's footprint, it was expected of paravans to crawl backwards while holding a broom and wash away their footprints". (Roy 73).

The twins (Rehel and Eshta) in the God of Small things are homeless in spite of being their parents alive; they are the deprived sections of society. They are the orphans from the marriage

between two communities. The post-colonial world depicted in the novel is 'The God Of Little Things' faces greater challenges than those posed by social and political turmoil. It is the world where people fight for power and have an irresistible urge to rebel against the communist insecurity, social pressure and corrupt administration. Every character is trying to find out safe place for peace and harmony. The hatred that runs through all family bonds and ultimately destroys them has larger manifestations in the Big God of wrath and fury with his blind rule of terror. As a renowned author Sobia Ilyas in her scholarly article holds a view:

"Thus Ammu and Velutha became victims of a senseless furor and die undeserved deaths because the small god of love and freedom could not shelter and protect them. The paper attempts to expose that how colonized India was suffering with hate and malice (worse than that suffered at the hands of the British) and where colonization had acquired a more vicious identity in that the socially and religiously marginalized groups (of Indians) were persecuted by the superior and privileged classes (also Indian) in mimicry of the more powerful British colonizers. The people remained slave under the modern colonizers rule and lives traumatic life." (Ilyas 3)

Therefore, this paper focuses on the power relationship between different cultures, religious groups and predicament of suppressed masses in the post-colonial society.

The colonized voice:

Arundhati Roy depicts fuzzy picture of a vague personality of a tortured woman Ammu. In fact, Ammu, the daughter of a rich Syrian Christian Catholic family marries outside her caste and being divorced returned to her parents in Ayemenem. She is the mother of twins Estha and Rahel. She loses trust of her family because of wrong decision. Therefore, she faces humiliation and defeat. She becomes the deprived section in the post-colonial society in spite of getting liberation from British Colonies in 1947. Further, she makes illicit relation with a 'Paravan' Velutha the untouchable but it doesn't proves fruitful because of relations with

low caste man. Here, Roy defends their relationship but society disallows and considers it as an offence. In short poor's are not allowed to live freely, get access of equal rights and opportunities in the main stream of society. Even the corrupt and faulty system doesn't make justice with suppressed people. The system is a puppet in the hands of powerful feudal lords and Big Gods. The cultural and religious hegemony destroys the lives of marginalized, suppressed downtrodden etc. Masses in the society due to the detrimental practices leads to destruction of their lives. In this regard a critic Singh, B.N aptly analyses in his scholarly article. "combating Caste and Sexuality in God's own Country: A Feminist Reading of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things:

"He is done to the death on flimsy grounds (the death of Sophie Mol) in police custody, even in a state under communist rule, its cadres and establishment being themselves shocked that a low caste man and upper caste woman broke "the love laws". The wages of such sin is not one death but several: Ammu becomes insane, dies in a grief and Estha becomes dumb and immobile due to false witness extracted from him in the police station to implicate innocent and beloved Velutha in the murder of Sophie Mol, a half-caste child of Chacko. Rahel escapes this catastrophe and returns to Ayemenem to take her mentally deranged brother into her arms and heal his psyche wounds through the "bereaved solace of incest". (Singh 4).

Liberation through Rebels:

The liberation is the ultimate goal of all the characters in The God of Small Things. Everyone is fighting for his rights and social status. It is not only restricted up to the suppressed and colonial masters but also the conflicting attitudes of power and retaliation that marks the smaller discourses whereby homogenous groups engage in revengeful activities by creating categories of powerful and weak through violence and rebellion.

The powerful groups are inwardly related to the members of the Ipe household including; Pappachi, Mammachi, Chacko and Baby Kochamma with their anger toward Ammu and

her children Estha and Rahel. Roy brilliantly portrays the rebels of Velutha in the second chapter Pappachi's Moth that, how velutha faces the intense opposition for working as a senior worker (carpenter) by the other upper-class labor.

A step in that process was the March that erupted around the sky-blue Plymouth on that particular sky-blue December day. The Marxist Labour Union of Travancore-Cochin had organized it. Marching to the Secretariat, their Trivandrum comrades will deliver the Charter of People's Demands to Comrade E. M. S. The orchestra is pleading with its director. Roys asserts:

They demanded the right to a one-hour lunch break for paddy labourers, who were forced to work eleven and a half hours a day—from seven in the morning to six-thirty in the evening. that the pay rise for men should be from two rupees fifty paise to four rupees fifty paise per day, and for women from one rupee twenty-five paise to three rupees. Additionally, they demanded that Untouchables no longer be referred to by their caste designations. They insisted on being called simply Achoo, Kelan, or Kuttan and not Achoo Parayan, Kelan Paravan, or Kuttan Pulayan. (Roy 69)

Once more, the problem of self-identity and existence is brought about by communal discord between two social strata. Since Velutha is an untouchable Paravan, he is not permitted to have a high position in the factory. Velutha and his father are forbidden from entering the Ayemenem home or touching anything that can be touched, even though they often visit the Ayemenem home to deliver coconuts that have been plucked from the trees.

Conclusion:

The present research paper uncovers the hypocritical attitudes of post-modern society in which unethical, detrimental practices are done by the upper sections of the society. Ammu, the central character of the novel raises various worthy issues to get justice. Velutha represents the God of Small things. He is paravan, the untouchable and is not allowed to get access of all the public resources and fight for the equal status and self-identity. Ammu is the most ruthless victim of postcolonial suppression and

patriarchal degradation. While accepting Velutha as a lover, Ammu faces lots of social challenges and insults but she as a postmodern woman firmly fights against all the dominant forces of society. In my view we cannot imagine society unless we bring revolution in the life of suppressed masses of the society. If the policy makers don't bring certain changes in the corrupt system to make reformation of society; it would be merely a farce or hypocrisy. Ammu and velutha represents the deprived, socially alienated elements only needs to eradicate social evil and unethical customs to bring reorientation of the society for creating social harmony.

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