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REVIEW ARTICLE

ARUNDHATI ROY'S SOCIAL CONCERNS IN THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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Arundhati Roy's Social Concerns in The God of Small Things

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Suzanna Arundhati Roy is an Indian author and political activist who is best known for the 1998 man Booker prize for fiction winning novel The God of Small Things (1997) and for her involvement in environment and human rights causes. Roy's novel becomes the biggest selling book by a non-expatriate Indian author. Arundhati Roy was born in Shillong early in her career; Roy worked for television and movies. Roy began writing her first novel, *The God of Small Things* in 1992, completing it in 1996. The book is semi-auto biographical and a major part captures her childhood experiences in Aymanam. The publication of *The God of Small Things* catapulted Roy to instant international fame. It was listed as one of the New York Times notables' books of the year for 1997. From the beginning, the book was also a commercial success. Roy received half a million pounds as an advance. Since *The God of Small Things* Roy has devoted herself mainly to non-fiction and politics, publishing two more collections of essays as well as working for social causes. She is a spokesperson of the anti-globalization movement and a vehement critic of neo-imperialism and the global policies Of the United States. She also criticizes India's nuclear weapons policies.

Her novel *The God of Small Thing* registered a tremendous sale all over the world deals with apart from many their things, the universal theme of social consciousness e.g. a confrontation between the laltain and the mombatti, Class antagonism and class exploitations. Exposure of the tyranny and injustice, the untouchable have to suffer without any rhyme or reason; the insult and abuse the women of the society have to tolerate and above all the trials and tribulations, the fret and fever the deserted and the defenseless have to pass through in the police custody and in a caste ridden societal structure. Roy is of the opinion that the society can achieve its goal successfully only when there is no gap between the poor and the rich; between the dalit and the possessed, between the laltain and the mombatti. She once said, "Fiction for me has been a way of try to make sense of the world as I know itif I had to put it very simply, it is about trying to made the connection between the smallest of things and the biggest ones and to see how they fit together."

In recent years, Roy has published several non-fiction books such as *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2001) *Power Politics* (2001) and the ordinary person's *Guide to Empire* (2004) just to name a few. Though her critical remarks outside the field of literature draw her acclaims as well as controversies, she tried hard to give voice to the voiceless and speak for those marginalized and underprivileged, domestically and nationwide.

The very phrase "The God of small Things" is in a way counter-hegemonic if not seditions. Traditional religion especially in the west has always associated "God" with bigness or greatness of all the things in the world and of the entire big thing God was held to be many causes and moving engines in the world. God was seen as the first or primary cause or engine. Due to the traditional linkage of "throne and altar" the bigness of god has tended to rub off on the status of princes,, kings and political rulers. This fascination with bigness has proven to be hard to shake and in some form even persists today. For grown-up people in democracies, god no longer has need of pomp and circumstance but is content to remain sheltered in ordinary phenomena and in conspicuous places and events. As Walter Benjamin has remarked ordinary lives at any moment can become the narrow gate through which the messiah suddenly and without fanfare enters. So it is a small nearly imperceptible change which charges everything. In Roy's novel the changes is so unobtrusive that it is not specifically elaborated or thematized. In her essay "The Greater Common Good," She writes that's what the twenty-first century has in store for us: the dismantling of the big, Big bombs, Big dams, big ideologies, big contradictions, big countries, big wars, big heroes, big mistakes. Perhaps it will be the century of the small,"

Her novel *The God of Small Things* Received diverse reviews. In Anil Nair's view, "Roy novel is a deliberate debunking of the big question. Revolution, change politics, religion etc". She suggests that, "the sanctification of everything small can turn into the pursuit of something big". Tracey Schwarze reveals that the novel is not "to mourn one lost of essential Indian-ness or to flog India's colonizers" Rather she thinks Indian history itself has a brutal heart- "an ancient ordering caste system. That separates

touchable from untouchable." In this case, Roy's novel reminds us of the essence of the Indian-ness and the conflicts within different classes, castes and communities. From the historical background the British colonizers have had strong entanglement with postcolonial India. Along with the influence of caste colonial culture has shaped what modern India is today. Other critic Susan Stanford explores a wide variety of issues such as gender caste, violence, feminism, nationalism; transnational's in her analysis of *The God of small Things*.

Arundhati Roy is considered a political activist and public intellectual-in addition to or apart from being a writer. Her activism does not subscribe to any "big ideology" or overarching platform seeking to mind end reshape social life, She also does not favors mass organizations wedded to rigid marching agendas. As she remarked copy about her Childhood in Kerala. She grew up in a state where different "religions coincide" and coexist where 'Christianity, Hinduism Marxism and Islamall live together and rub each other down."

The God of small Things presents a confrontation between the big man, the laltain and small man, the mombatti. In other words, the book shows maladjustment between The God of big Things (Pappachi, Baby kochamma, Mammachi, Chacko comrade Pillai and inspector Thomas Mathew) and The God of small Things (Ammu, Velutha, Rahel, Estha, Sophie, mol), By the term laltain, Roy means to suggest the big guns of society. Both laltain and mombatti gives us light and burns another lamp. The laltain is well fed and well protected.

It can bravely face the blowing wind but on the after hand the mombatti has no glass, no protection no support. It can easily be blown out by the surge of wind. But the advantage of the mombatti is that it can very soon light another lamp. Laltain on the other hand is somewhat stubborn to burn other's light. Through this fine connotation the author has successfully 'tried her best to arouse our sense of pity and catharsis for the mombatti, the down trodden and have not, the dalit and the deserted, the marginalized and the defenseless. In the last of the novel we see that the two mombatti, Ammu and Velutha have to forsake the big things and indulge in the small things. Even later, on one thirteen nights that followed this one instinctually, they stuck to the small things. The big things ever lurked inside. They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had no future. So they stuck to the small things. The novel *The God of small things* examines India's cultural transformation from colonial, post colonial period to contemporary are of globalization. Among the characters in the novel Velutha is prominent because his casted body/status signifies the cultural difference of India from other nations. The narration of Velutha reveals the intertwined relationship between caste and the social division in India. Moreover, Rahel and Estha's

transgression beings out issues of hyberdity, gender oppression, social taboo and incest.

Apart from these characters, the narration of trauma is from Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Chacko. The traumatic memories of the Ipe family remind us of the India's traumas of colonization. The history house which is a place holding small events and traumatic memories is also the haunted house of "her stories." By dwelling on "the small things" happened to the Ipe family, Roy actually is questioning the construction of empire, the lingering effects of colonialism and the global order in flux. This novel is couched in the consciousness of small things, intimacy of language and the minute undercurrents of a situation. It involves small inchoate personal emotions that burgeon into unsure mountable, impersonal forces. In a novel that carries shades of incipient socialism and feminism, the past colonial condition is reinforced by the added drawback of being an untouchable or a woman as velutha, Ammu Rahel and estha are; their marginality is so acute that leitmotifs of absence and loss accompany them in the novel. Like the small things upon which the novel dwells, the main protagonist of the story essentially occupies peripheral positions in their family or society. The God of small things attempts to overturn their marginality, their absent histories, by their lives, each minute fantasy and idea, the small creeping emotions that culminate in passion or despair. The novel exposes the corruption and inhumanity of socialist party politics and capitalism, both of which are domains of power and of subtle colonial imperialism. The history house which is a place holding small events and traumatic memories is also the haunted house of her-stories." To a certain extent Roy creates a gendered space for her female characters to narrate their own stories. In this space women construct the language of their own to rebel against patriarchy, empire and the colonizer. However Roy does not try to reverse history. Rather by dwelling on the small things. Roy brings out big issue from history. It is also through the act of writing against empire that reader gets a chance to revise our conception of India and its history. Velutha is an untouchable though he is a paravan, an outcast; he is gifted with so many virtues. He is symbolically stands for he is an expert mechanic and craftsman that is why mammachi employs him in her factory to do a carpenter's works. But the workers employed in the factory are not happy to Velutha as a carpenter Velutha is also seen taking part in political activity fighting for the cause of Marxism. The twins are very fond of him and are highly impressed by his craftsman's skilled hand. He converts himself into the Christian religion only to immune from the victimization of a casteist society. But his conversion and his technical expertise, apart from many other good things, never being and fruitful result in this cruel and callous society. Velutha along with his father always goes to the Aymanam house to deliver coconut pouched from the trees. But they are never allowed to enter the room. They were not permitted to touch a thing that a Touchable 'touched.

In mammachi time paravans, like other untouchable were not allowed to walk on public roads not allowed to cover their upper bodies not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. Undoubtedly untouchability is one of the greatest evils our country has been facing from the time immemorial. In the "Manu Smriti," the Hindu's Law book of social code and domestic life, we see the pathetic picture of the untouchable who are deprived of gaining knowledge particularly the vedic knowledge. Arundhati Roy, a great champion of the cause of the dalit and the deserted points out those unnoticed shades of a social problem which generally escape the eyes of social scientist. Velutha's grandfather Kelan, along with a number of other untouchables embraced Christianity to escape the scourge of untouchability. Though they were given separate churches and separate priests and in a special favor they were even given their own separate pariah bishop, but after 1947, they founded they were not entitled to any government's benefits like job reservation nor bank loans at low interest. Because they were Christians and so casteless.

Velutha never behaves a fuming and roaring tiger: never tries to hammer and traditions, never behaves like a rough and savage man a man who has nothing to do with etiquette and manner, decorum and decency and is a man of innocence and simplicity, the god of small things, the god of loss. A man who knows how to make intricate toys, tiny wind mills, rattles, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds, a man who could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts. When mammachi decides to enclose the back verandah it is Velutha who designs and builds the strong folding door. According to the author he knows more about the machines in the factory than any one also. Mammachi often said that if only he had not been a paravan. In spite of great virtues in Velutha, he does not command respect and proper treatment in society. Ammu troubled eyes and dimpled cheeks turn Velutha a transgressor as well as a victim into the secret heart of a touchable woman and a miserable victim its punishment in the police custody. The illicit love affair between Velutha and Ammu was dead against the attitude of both Marxism and socialism. The ayemenem A leader, comrade Pillai, in his heart of hearts, does not approve this relationship live see-that Velutha does not sweep off his foot prints as his forefathers used to do. In this independent democratic country his footprints are erased by the establishments –the police state and tradition. On the other hand patriarchy punishes both the women who, has defiled generation of breeding and the paravan who has challenged the tradition.

Both these mombatti got punishment for unacknowledged fear civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women power's fear of powerlessness

Velutha, the god of loss tables no cognizance of social conventions and restrictions and thus comes in conflict with history and tradition without any chance of success. On the other hand, Ammu who antagonizes her family by marginalizing herself socially is maltreated by the governing body of the family. It is to be noted that the taboo relation between Ammu and Velutha does not sound shocking to a westernized urban sensibility.

But a conventional caste-mentality particularly in India is apt to be shocked by such transgressions. Rahel, Estha and Sophie, Mol are the next mombatti who develop a sense of isolation in a conservative frame work. They are treated by family as outsider. Estha's loneliness in the result of brutality and savagery of the big men-Baby kochamma, Chacko, mammachi, inspector Thomas Mathew etc. Rahel is also subject to the same tyranny and injustice, abuse and insult as meted out to Estha. But he is more aggressive and active than Estha. She is a girl of rebellion like her mother. We saw that the *God of small things* shows a patriarchal domination of the possessed over the non-possessed, the powerful over the weak and the touchable over the untouchable.

Roy's recent work *the greater common good* deals with the pathetic plight of a large number of sufferers of the Big dam projects of the state and the government. Arundhati Roy has a revolutionary attitude against the mal-treatment of the untouchable the vulnerable and the down-trodden. Though these mombatti have no glass, no protection, no support to face the surge of the fast wind, yet in comparison with laltain they are not rigid and stubborn but even ready to burn another lamp. The momatties of Roy's world which she called them the God of loss. *The God of small things* are bound to suffer and obstacles, tyranny and injustice some with cause and sometimes authored any cause.

In a fashion of Edward said, Arundhati Roy asks a question which is too often side stepped by contemporary intellectuals. The question regarding the social responsibility of literature and art what is the role of writers and artists in society? She queries in politics' Can it be fixed, described, characterized in any definite way? Should it be? Roy's entire work is a testimonial to the stringent demands of the thin line: In her writings and in her public conduct she has resisted both radical politicization or political co-operation and retreat into the haven of belle's letters. Like every thoughtful writer or intellectual Roy does not like to be conscripted into ideological agendas or be submerged in mindless activism.

As reflective persons she relishes subtle nuances and the open-endedness of many issues. In her own words I am all for discretion, prudence, tentativeness, Subtlety, ambiguity, complexity, I love the unanswered question, the unresolved story, the

unclimbed mountain, the tender shard of an incomplete dream." Roy dreams the "small god" will be up against all the old bigness; the big old god associated with the biggest country, biggest superpower, biggest wealth, the biggest arsenal of weapons of mass destruction and the biggest bigness. If small god were to come she would come on the feet of a dove, as the consoler of the desolate, the healer of the wounded, and the liberator of the oppressed. All in all we can say that Roy can be said to inhabit a hybrid third space, where she participates in the enterprise of weaving together personal, social and national events.

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