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REVIEW ARTICLE

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A Study on the Novel 'The God of Small Things' By Arundhati Roy

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The God of Small Things (1997) is the debut novel of Indian writer Arundhati Roy. It is a story about the childhood experiences of fraternal twins whose lives are destroyed by the "Love Laws" that lay down "who should be loved, and how. And how much." The book is a description of how the small things in life affect people's behaviour and their lives. The book won the Booker Prize in 1997.

The God of Small Things is Roy's first book and, as of 2013, is her only novel. Completed in 1996, the book took four years to write. The potential of the story was first recognised by Pankaj Mishra, an editor with HarperCollins, who sent it to three British publishers. Roy received half-a-million pounds in advances, and rights to the book were sold in 21 countries.

While generally praised, the book received criticism for its style and themes.^[1]

In 2013, *Talkhiyan* a Pakistani serial aired on Express Entertainment was based on this novel.

The God of Small Things is not written in a sequential narrative style in which events unfold chronologically. Instead, the novel is a patchwork of flashbacks and lengthy sidetracks that weave together to tell the story of the Ipe family. The main events of the novel are traced back through the complex history of their causes, and memories are revealed as they relate to each other thematically and as they might appear in Rahel's mind. Although the narrative voice is omniscient, it is loosely grounded in Rahel's perspective, and all of the episodes of the novel progress towards the key moments in Rahel's life.

This non-sequential narrative style, which determines the form of the novel, is an extremely useful authorial tool. It allows Roy a great deal of flexibility as she chooses which themes and events are most important to pursue. The author is able to structure her book so as to build up to the ideas and events at the root of the Ipe family's experience.

As this story focuses on and their impressions of the world, Roy uses various techniques to represent the children's viewpoint and their innocence. One technique that Roy employs is the capitalisation of certain words and phrases to give them certain significance. Similarly, the children will restate things that the adults say in a new phonetic way, disjoining and recombining words. This echoes the children's way of looking at the world differently from the grown-ups that surround them. They place significance on words and ideas differently from the adults, thereby creating a new way of viewing the world around them. They pick up on certain feelings and ideas that the adults around them either fail or refuse to recognise, and give new significance to things that the adults may or may not ignore for their own purposes. The children use and repeat these phrases throughout the story so that the phrases themselves gain independence and new representational meanings in subsequent uses.

Roy also employs a disjointed, non-sequential narrative that echoes the process of memory, especially the resurfacing of a previously suppressed, painful memory.

The uncovering of the story of Sophie Mol's death existing concurrently with the forward moving story of Rahel's return to Aymanam and reunion with Estha creates a complex narrative that reiterates the difficulty of the subject of the story and the complexity of the culture from which the story originates. Time is rendered somewhat static as the different parts of the one narrative line are intertwined through repetition and non-sequential discovery. This is also part of the way in which Roy uses real life places and people that she has shifted and altered for use within this story. All of the multifarious elements come together to construct a diverse look at one instance of Indian culture and the effect of the caste system on life and love during a time of postcolonialism. As the children attempt to form their own identities, naming and renaming themselves in the process, Roy places in parallel the effect of the process, by intertwining the past and the present.

Similarly, this process echoes the progression of the Indian people, like all other cultures that attempt to find ways to maintain their traditions within a time of increasing globalisation.

The story is set in the village of Aymanam in the Kottayam district of Kerala, India. The main part of the plot takes place in 1969, a time of changes in ideology and influence.

India is a very complex society with various cultural and religious habits and beliefs. Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims share the same space. Society is divided not only by the very strict caste system but also by class consciousness. There are a number of languages spoken in India, but the higher classes make a point of speaking English, sending their sons to study in England and adopting certain English habits. Kerala, where the story is set itself has a complex social setup with Hindus, Muslims and Christians having lifestyle and traditions different from each other. It also has the largest number of Christian population compared to other parts of India, predominantly Saint Thomas Christians or Syrian Christians. Kottayam is a district where the Christians are a majority.

Arundhati Roy describes her book as "an inextricable mix of experience and imagination."

Betrayal is a constant element in this story. Love, ideals, and confidence all are forsaken, consciously and unconsciously, innocently and maliciously, and these deceptions affect all the characters deeply.

Baby Kochamma is capable of lying and double-crossing anyone whom she sees as a threat to her social standing, as a consequence of her loss of respectability after becoming a Roman Catholic nun to be close to Father Mulligan, despite her father's disapproval. This fear is reminiscent of that of Comrade Pillai, who betrays both Velutha and Chacko to further his own interests, and that of his political party.

The true tragedy is that of Velutha, the only true incorrupt adult in the story, who becomes the repeated victim of everyone's deception, from Comrade Pillai to Baby Kochamma, to his own father, and, most heartbreakingly, Estha, who at seven-years-old, is fooled into accusing Velutha of crimes that he did not commit.

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