



*Journal of Advances and  
Scholarly Researches in  
Allied Education*

*Vol. VIII, Issue No. XVI,  
Oct-2014, ISSN 2230-7540*

## **A STUDY ON THE NOVELS OF ARUNDHATI ROY**

AN  
INTERNATIONALLY  
INDEXED PEER  
REVIEWED &  
REFEREED JOURNAL

# A Study on the Novels of Arundhati Roy

Shakti Vashisht

Research Scholar of Swami Vivekananda University

**Abstract – Arundhati Roy is one of the few Indian English writers actively interested in contemporary social – political issues which is amply evidenced in a number of articles, interviews and books she wrote on various topics in recent years. Mrs. Roy has authored such thought provoking works as “Confronting Empire”, “The Algebra of Infinite Justice” (2002). An internationally acclaimed essay calling upon the world not to use violence against innocent people in Afghanistan, and “War is Peace” (2002), another powerful essay. Her books like. “The Threat of Nuclear Weapons”. ‘The promotion of Equal Rights’.**

-----X-----

## INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy draws special attention to the fact that a family which swears by male supremacy and which entrenches its familial code in the past is bound to come woe sooner or later. The sacred façade of marriage either lacks harmony or comes crumbling down in such an imbalanced familial set-up. In Arundhati Roy's fictional world, man and woman remain only islands and fail to shape up as continents, because their relationship lacks mutual love, understanding and adjustment. Pappachi – Mammachi relationship is ridden with jealousy, violence and hatred. Neither the external appearance of the “beautiful...Unusual, regal” (Roy 166).

Mammachi nor her talent as a successful business woman succeed in ensnaring Pappachi. On the contrary her flourishing business and growing popularity intensify his Jealousy and desire for vengeance. The edifice of their marriage survives, but its spirit crumbles totally when Pappachi, warned against beating, withdraws all communication with his wife.

The novel has some autobiographical traits Arundhati Roy seems to identify with Rahel who like the author is an architect by profession Ammu and her tragic travails are fictional adaptation of the various kinds of social ostracism that Arundhati Roy's mother had to suffer due to her rebellious outlook. She too, like Ammu was separated from her husband. The resemblances between *The God of Small Things* and its author's life are obvious and all-pervading and have only too often been pointed out in popular articles. But fictionalizing “real” life-which is history exercise; the pain and lays the ghosts of the past; in the artistically successful work, the novelist at once recovers the past and is released from it. It would be doing *The God Small Things* an injustice, therefore, to read it only as an account of Roy's childhood and her relationship

with her famous mother and not - so - famous brother, as “a unique conflation of history and discourse, of veritable fact and aesthetic fabulation”, the autobiographical novel enables its author “to reassess his or her past and to reinterpret a plethora of racial, sexual, and cultural codes inscribed on personal consciousness ... transforming experience fictive fabulation, the author can reinscribe an alienated and marginal self into the pliable body of a protean text” (Henke 210-211). This is one of Roy's most striking achievements in *The God of Small Things*: They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how.

The above quotation points to the central theme in *The God of Small Things*- the theme of broken laws. Roy is not only critiquing the deep-rooted caste system in India, but the entire patriarchal structure and its concomitant devaluing of women. The novel has been aptly described as “one of our protest novels, radical and subversive and attacks several holy cows. In its taboo- breaking too, it goes farther than what has been attempted” (Lahiri 112).

*The God of Small Things* centres on the relationship between Ammu, a Syrian Christian young woman divorced from a drunken, Bengali Hindu, and Velutha, an untouchable, paravan carpenter. The doyen of English literary studies in India, C.D. Narasimhaiah, is symptomatic of the deeply entrenched caste and gender prejudices that still exist in our society.

The impact of the caste system can be felt even among the Christian community in India which is indicative of the fact that the dogma of equality of this religion has not been able to dissolve it. Christians in India have internalized the idea of caste ranks even though they live and operate in a largely Christian universe. Moreover, as far as caste at the lived *Public power in the Age of Empire* (2004). In her major

address to the 99<sup>th</sup> annual meeting the American Sociological Association on August 16, 2004, Arundhati Roy brilliantly examines the limits to democracy in the world today. Roy clarifies the political and human stakes of “regime Change” and reaffirms the importance of activism and protest she also discusses the need for social movements to contest the occupation of Iraq and the reduction of “democracy” to elections with no meaningful alternatives allowed.

She explores the dangers of the “NGO-ization of resistance”, shows how governments that block nonviolent dissent in fact encourage terrorism and examines the role of the corporate media in marginalizing oppositional voices.

*The God of Small Things* can undoubtedly be called the book of the decade is the much discussed *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. The Booker citation describes the novel as one written with extraordinary linguistic inventiveness. Roy reveals a child's vision of the adult world in this novel in one sense, she herself being an “unprotected child in some ways”. The novel can be said to be about several other things. Those interested in politics can claim that it is a satire on politics – communist establishment, to be more specific. One can call it a protest novel which is radical, subversive and taboo – breaking.

Instead Roy writes with a linguistic stylistic exuberance which lends a flavor and color, though artificial, of its own to the entire novel. She writes different to a great extent and in doing so breaks many of the accepted rules of language. The novel abounds in single word sentences, and paragraphs, mis-spellings, verbless sentences, capital at will etc.

Ideas come to Arundhati Roy like insects in the rains. Similes jostle each other, in measureless numbers and hustle her into making them talk loudly. It is a whirlpool of Similes, Metaphors repetitions, parenthesis, Idylls, Rhyme and Rhythm, Music and Dance. , Mythology and Modernity, Poverty and Riches; poetry and prose, Monologues and soliloquies, pleasure and pain, sex and sensations, Love and Hate; past, present and future.

Arundhati's mind flashes forwards and backwards, jumps into the future and falls back into the past, which in fact pictures the present Heaven and Hell; Past; Present and Future all become one. Keats, in his odes, has given a Feast of colours' a Feast of sound, a Feast of Seasons- separate feasts. Arundhati out – Keats Keats and feeds us with sumptuous.

Feasts of all kinds on the same table simultaneously, like a Victorian Hostess serving different dishes but on the same platter- sweet, salty and Coconuts. It is all delicious. Roy writes in a Faulknerian style which is a combination of both a stream of consciousness novel and traditional or narrative style as it is used in *The Sound and Fury*.

By presenting two innocent children as responders to the tragedy resulting from the rigidity of petrified social mores nurtured by the patriarchal ideology of a caste-based culture that cultivates snobbery and violence to maintain social order, Arundhati Roy condemns and rejects the tyranny of this tradition for a story of her own. The anguish of the guilt stricken and grief-crazed children who are traumatized by the ‘Terror’ perpetuated by the adult world serves as a powerful language of rejection of this authoritarian system that has no place in it for dissent and for self-asserting individuals.

Arundhati Roy through the means of storytelling questions the system of powers and attempts to change it through the power embodied in literature. Kate Millet has pointed out: ‘when a system of power is thoroughly in command, it has scarcely a need to speak itself aloud when its working is exposed and questioned it becomes not only subjected to discussion, but even to change’. It is very interesting to note that in the text Roy has carried out covertly the emasculation of men by women and also emasculation of woman but not in the conventional derogatory sense. Her women learn to think and act independently and take on the role of protector but in the process do not sacrifice their feminine qualities.

One of the dominant socio-political concerns in Arundhati's novel is the rigid caste-structure to be seen in India. This caste-oriented rigidity sometimes plays havoc with the innumerable innocent lives. The ‘bigness’ of ‘big things’ and ‘big people’ should be read in their generous and compassionate understanding of ‘small things’ and ‘small people’. Unfortunately, in the present-day Indian society, this is not to be, and the inevitable consequence is tragic and claustrophobic. The weaker sections of our society - like the paravans. The scheduled castes and the have-nots - inescapably suffer a good deal in the process of caste-stratifications.

Typical themes in Indian fiction are said to be “the caste system, social attitude, social and religious taboos, superstitions, notions superiority and inferiority”.

Another dominant theme that gets focus in the novel is environmental problems. E.M. Forster who is often referred to as a reluctant traditionalist has admitted “oh dear, yes – the novel tells a story”. But felt that its most fundamental aspect “could be something different – melody, or perception of the truth...” (Forster). What is attempted in the present novel is a truthful account of the ills of the society.

The first reference to environmental problems we get in the very first chapter of the novel. Estha used to walk “along the river that smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils”. The novelist is here critical of the hands behind polluting the river and the policy of

the government buying pesticides with World Bank, both of which will ultimately contribute in making the life of the people miserable.

As is well known, the patriarchal structure with its resulting class and gender hierarchy is a more or less universal phenomenon, which cuts across all nations, religions and races. However, in India, a further dimension was added to it with the origination of the caste system about 2,500 years ago. This system which is an integral part of Hinduism, divides the population into four major groups. The Brahmins, (Priestly caste) at the top, followed by the Kshatriya (warrior caste), then the Vaishya (commoners, usually known as trading and artisan castes), and at the bottom the Sudra (agricultural laborers). Some of whom are beyond the pale of caste and are known as untouchables.

The caste system is not only structural, but has a cultural dimension as well. At the structural level it consists of a hierarchy of in-marrying groups, organized into hereditary occupations. As a cultural system it comprises belief in karma (that the circumstances of birth depend on action in one's previous life), "commitment to caste occupation and lifestyle, belief in the hereditary transmission of psychological traits associated with occupation, tolerance of distinct lifestyles for other castes, and a belief in a hierarchy of value along a scale of purity and pollution. In the scale of purity and pollutions, Brahmins are generally, but not always, the purest and Sudras the most polluted". Thus, as against a "class" society which is characterized by personal and familial mobility, in a social structure based on the caste system, birth has a lethal effect on the life chances of an individual as it determines everything.

## REFERENCES

- Allot, Miriam. *Novelists on the Novel*, London: Routledge, 1957.
- Balvannanadhan, Aida. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, A Study in the Multiple Narratives, Published by Prestige Books, 2007.
- Bharat, Urbashi. *History Community and Forbidden Relationships* in *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy the Novelist extraordinary. Edited by R.K. Dhawan, Published by Prestige Books 1999.
- Booth, Wayne. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1961.
- Cowley, Jason. *Why We Chose Arundhati*. India Today Oct-27, 1997.
- Forster, E.M. *Aspects of The Novel*, Newyork : Hercourt, 1927.
- Khair, Tabish. "Can the Subaltern (Shout and Smash)?" world literature written in English, 2000.
- Mann. Qtd. by Sharma, K.L. *Dimensions of Social Stratification*, perspectives on social stratification, Rawath publications, Jaipur, 2010.
- Patil, Mallikarjun. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: A Study of Theme, Language and Style, Arundhati Roy's Fictional World, (A collection of critical essays) Edited by A.N. Dwivedi, B.R. Publishing corporation.
- Rao, Ranga. "The Book(er) of the year" The Hindu, Sunday, November 16, 1997.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*, published by India Ink, 1997.