

Thematic Concerns in Arundhati Roy's God of Small Things

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy's The Booker prize winning novel *The God Of Small Thing* is a complex mixture of various social, political, cultural themes which making it as one of the most influential works of the world's literature. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the major themes of the novel. It reveals how the weaker sections of the society have suffered and destroyed by the combined forces of religion, tradition and society and, leaving them with no choice but to submit to mental and physical torture silently. Through a deep analysis of these themes, the study reveals that the society concerned with big things as the caste system, political affiliations, marriage while Roy directs the reader to the small things, these small creatures (things) and their impact on the larger societal structure serves as a poignant commentary on the intricate web of power, privilege, and oppression in post-colonial India.

Keywords: oppression, post-colonial, hegemony

Introduction

Arundhati Roy is a great writer in India who won The Booker Prize for her novel *The God of Small Things* in 1997. It is a ground breaking novel that has received very high acclaim from both India and abroad for its thematic richness and revelation of complex social, political and cultural aspects. In this novel Roy presents a slice of life in a small Indian town in Kerala where hegemony as well as androcentric power relations are prevailing. It tells the story of a fractured family centre around the lives of the twin Rahel and Estha. This research article explores love, suffering and the plight of the deprived class. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy aptly uses her narrative skills to address issues like caste, gender and fragility of human relationships.

The Caste Taboos

Caste and Social stratum is one of the central themes in *The God of Small Things* that continues to oppress the lives of the weaker section of the society. The novel provides a scathing critique of the rigid social hierarchy that prevalent in Indian society, where individuals are often treated and restricted based on their caste. In fact the members of the Ayemenem house were Syrian Christians yet they followed the caste system of Hindus, and likewise shirked from the untouchables. The caste taboos were so deeply mingled in the psyche of the people that the love relationship between Ammu, a Syrian Christian woman, and Velutha, a Dalit (or a member of "Untouchable" Paravan caste) was scandalous enough to take the entire area by storm and rouse widespread condemnation. Their emotional involvement, considered as the violation of social system, brings fatal effect, highlighting the brutal enforcement of caste boundaries. Velutha's brutal death by inhuman beating by the

policeman delineates that untouchables are not merely considered as members of the lowest possible social status, but as rabid animals.

Forbidden love

Love comes in many forms in this novel but actually it is most important when it crosses boundaries of society and duty. Roy's theme as forbidden love is such a powerful and uncontrolled force that it cannot be controlled by any conventional social code. To show how did destroy the real love? That is why love in the story is consistently connected to loss, death and suffering. According to Ammu's family or society she is already frowned upon for being a divorced woman. It is the tension between internal love and social obligations. That times the love laws that makes by society, particularly divided between touchable and untouchable. This love relationship is horrifying to the community and leads to Velutha's death. And on the other hand Ammu's exile. Ammu was called as Veshya. She died in her lodge. The helpless woman dies because she can not tolerate the public humiliation. It is forbidden because their caste and social status are different. The theme of forbidden love pervades the novel along with the theme of caste. The pure and genuine love of Ammu and Velutha is rejected by societal standards. Their relationship is not mere an act of personal defiance but a challenge to the deeply entrenched social system. This forbidden love results into a series of tragic events, including Velutha's tragic death and the eventual unraveling of the family. The novel reveals that love when it crosses social limitations becomes a destructive force, not due to love itself but because of the harsh societal norms against it. The same theme is also revealed in the unsuccessful marriage of Ammu and Baba, a man outside her community, which further illustrates the novel's manifestation of love and its shortcomings in a rigidly structural society.

British Colonization

British colonization of India has challenged the traditional indigenous culture to the point that some native men and women developed a particular interest in British ideals which brought confusion frustration or acceptance. Roy portrays how British affected the life of the most of the people in India. Characters like Baby Kochamma, who is fascinated with Western culture and sticks to the remnants of colonial power. This adaptation of colonial attitudes manifests the deep psychological effect of colonial rule, which continues to mould the characters' perceptions of themselves and their world. The novel also highlights how British have changed the cultural landscape of India, leaving behind a society that is conflicted between its indigenous traditions and the remnants of British influence.

Social issues

Male hegemony and androcentric power relations are also important themes in *The God of Small Things*. Roy implicitly presses for greater social reform in the rigid positioning of women and the intolerable plight of the deprived class. Ammu's life is a manifestation of the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society. She has too many fronts to cope with- her personal misery and her children's upbringing. As a single parent, she is subjected to social ostracism and economic hardship. Her desire for love and autonomy is met with harsh judgment and ultimately leads to her downfall. Through Ammu, Roy challenges Indian patriarchal representations of the female body, behavior and language, all forms of independence and autonomy that are forbidden for a woman to veil the markers of her feminine identity. Ammu is not only victim of male hegemony in the narrative. Her mother, Mammachi is also oppressed by her husband, Pappachi.

Loss of Innocent Childhood

In *The God of Small Things*, the sense of childhood is portrayed as innocent world that is gradually eroded by the harsh realities of the adult world, mainly through the experiences of the twins, Estha and Rahel. The novel explores how the twins' early experiences including witnessing a forbidden love affair, the death of their beloved Velutha and the breakdown of their family, leave deep psychological scars, shattering their innocence and altering the course of their lives.

Conclusion

The God of Small Things deals with the wide range of themes as caste and social hierarchy to forbidden love, colonial legacy, memory, gender, and the loss of innocence. Roy has shown her expertise in creating a complex web of themes that offers a powerful criticism on the societal norms and structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression. Through the title of the novel, Roy points out the significance of "small things" in the characters' lives. Roy emphasizes how seemingly insignificant moments, choices, and objects lead to the "big things" in life, like death, love and political upheaval.

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