



**POST COLONIAL INDIAN-FICTION NOVEL – A STUDY OF
ARUNDHATI ROY'S *The GOD OF SMALL THINGS***

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ABSTRACT

At present "Postcolonial Literature" has been a current topic in literary circles. There are scholars pursuing postcolonial literature for their research and writers like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy are being taken up for study as post-colonial authors. But to many who have not gone deep in to the term and the related studies there is some indistinctness as to just what the term stands for. A simplistic literary approach of the term "postcolonial literature" would apply it to literature written by writers about people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations. In this article I have looked at Arundhati Roy's "The God of small Things" as a novel set in a postcolonial society and how the characters face the traumas even in the postcolonial life.

The God of small Things, set in India, is a story of a family torn apart by the wish to love, but more so, the desire to be loved. It is seen through the eyes of Estha and Rahel, a pair of fraternal twins, and portrays their experiences and how they are the victims of circumstances. Roy does a pretty good job of telling this story of how a family in our country struggles with many things starting with the caste system, the intrusion of Western culture, class conflict, etc. The book is a true testament to how even the smallest things or events can change the course of people and shape the rest of their life. Roy repetitively uses the phrase, "Things can change in a day," and that phrase holds the key to understanding the novel.

The story primarily takes place in a town named Ayemenem in Kerala state of India. The time shifts back and forth from 1969 to 1993, when the twins are reunited at age 31. Arundhati Roy's rhythmic structures dominate the novel at all levels. The openness of the structures is perhaps the novel's most interesting feature. To conclude, Roy's unwavering moral compass steers through colonialism and neo-colonialism, racism, caste oppression, sexual violence, and myriad other types of social violence and injustices, while pausing to savor the tiniest wonders in love and biology along the way. All of this unfolds through Roy's gorgeous prose and unerring talent for character and narrative development.

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At present "Postcolonial Literature" has been a current topic in literary circles. There are scholars pursuing postcolonial literature for their research and writers like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy are being taken up for study as post-colonial authors. But to many who have not gone deep in to the term and the related studies there is some indistinctness as to just what the term stands for. Some say that the writing of the authors in countries liberated from colonial rule comes under the term postcolonial writing. Many scholars take up the debate and ask if the writings of authors in such countries as ours can be justifiably included in the postcolonial canon or under national literature. Some are interested in pursuing the discussion on the term "postcolonial" itself. Added to this is the problem of the writers themselves not tagging the term postcolonial to their own writing.

There is an argument that postcolonial theory functions as a subdivision within the field of "cultural studies" and includes leftist and feminist schools of thought, among others. A simplistic literary approach of the term "postcolonial literature" would apply it to literature written by writers about people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations. This we believe is certainly what the term must have originally meant. In this article I have looked at Arundhati Roy's "The God of small Things" as a novel set in a postcolonial society and how the characters face the traumas even in the postcolonial life.

The God of small Things, set in India, is a story of a family torn apart by the wish to love, but more so, the desire to be loved. The story is simple but so real, with the culture of Kerala as its background makes it so beautiful. It is seen through the eyes of Estha and Rahel, a pair of fraternal twins, and portrays their experiences and how they are the victims of circumstances. The setting and time shifts back and forth between 1969 and 1963. Rahel and Estha are seven in 1969, and they are thirty-one in 1993. The story's turning point is the death of their 9-year-old half-British cousin, Sophie Mol, visiting them on holiday. Their lives were changes so drastically by this one event, and they must figure out how to deal with what has happened and make some sense of it.

The story starts off with the funeral of Sophie Mol and unravels through memories and the personal histories of the characters involves. It has a tragic plot – but in that sense also refreshing. From the beginning the reader knows the book will end in tragedy. The only question is- how? Roy does a pretty good job of telling this story of how a family in our country struggles with many things starting with the caste system, the intrusion of Western culture, class conflict, etc. But the conflict is mostly with the characters themselves. The book is a true testament to how even the smallest things or events can change the course of people and shape the rest of their life. Roy repetitively uses the phrase, "Things can change in a day," and that phrase holds the key to understanding the novel.

Estha and Rahel are innocent children. Just like children they are unaware of the cruelty against those defying society- those who'd rather follow their hearts for a chance of happiness. In this novel, and perhaps through it, Roy confronts an irrational society which tries to decide how individuals should live and love. Society, to many, is the oppressor; because what matters is what the masses think is right and best. It depicts a society kept alive by the very people it tries to control. It means sacrificing romance, friendship, family, children's innocence. And that is what makes the novel so valuable.

The story primarily takes place in a town named Ayemenem in Kerala state of India. The time shifts back and forth from 1969 to 1993, when the twins are reunited at age 31. Much of the story is written in a viewpoint sympathetic to the 7-year-old children. Malayalam words are liberally used in conjunction with English. The novel deals with prominent facets of Kerala life which include Communism, the caste system, and the Syrian Christian way of life.

Ammu's father Pappachi (meaning grandfather) was an imperial entomologist. He was bitter because the credit for his discovery of a new species of moth went to someone else. Though in public he played the part of the perfect husband and father, in truth he was abusive towards his

Family, especially to his wife, Mammachi (meaning grandmother). Chacko, Ammu's brother, a Rhodes scholar home from Oxford University stops

him and tells him to never do it again. From then on, till his death, Pappachi never hit nor spoke again to Mammachi. He also refused to let Ammu continue with a college education. Ammu was forced to return home to Ayemenem.

Ammu was desperate to escape the house. She finally convinced her parents to let her spend a summer with an Aunt in Calcutta. There, she fell in love with and married a man who was managing a tea estate. She gave birth to two children, dizygotic twins Estha and Rahel. She later found out that her husband was a heavy alcoholic. He beat her, and tried to pimp her out to his boss in order to retain his job. She left him.

Ammu came to live with her mother and brother in Ayemenem. Also living at the house was Baby Kochamma, which is a honorific name for a female, the sister of Pappachi. As a young girl, Baby Kochamma had fallen in love with Father Mulligan, a young Irish priest who had come to Ayemenem to study Hindu scriptures. In order to get closer to him, Baby Kochamma became a Roman Catholic and joined a convent. She quickly realized the futility of her plans, and returned home, though she never stopped loving Father Mulligan. Because of her own misfortunes, Baby Kochamma delights in the misfortune of others.

While studying at Oxford, Chacko had fallen in love and married an English woman – Margaret Kochamma. After the birth of their daughter Sophie Mol (means girl), Chacko and Margaret were divorced. Unable to find a job, Chacko returned to India to teach. Chacko never stopped loving Margaret, and the two of them kept in touch. When Pappachi died, Chacko returned to Ayemenem to expand his mother's pickling business into an eventually unsuccessful Pickle factory called Paradise Pickles and Preserves.

Margaret remarried, but her husband was killed in an accident. The grieving Margaret and Sophie were invited by Chacko to spend the Christmas in Ayemenem. On the way to the airport, the family encounters a group of communist protesters. Rahel claims to have seen Velutha, a man from the factory, in the crowd. Velutha is an untouchable (the lowest caste), a paravan. His family had been working for Chacko's family for

many generations. Velutha was extremely gifted with his hands, and was an accomplished carpenter and mechanic. Unlike other untouchables, he had a self-assured air, unable to conform to this father's idea of the proper behavior for an untouchable, Velutha disappears. However, when his brother becomes paralyzed from an accident. Velutha returns to work at the pickle factory. He becomes an indispensable, the one who fixes all the machinery. Because of his easy-going nature, Velutha was great friends with Rahel and Estha.

A group of protesters surround the family car and force Baby Kochamma to wave a red flag and chant the communist slogan. She is deeply humiliated and begins to harbor a deep hatred towards Velutha. At around the time of Margaret and Sophie's arrival, Ammu became attracted towards Velutha.

When their intimate relationship is discovered, Ammu is tricked and locked in her room and Velutha is banished. When the twins ask their mother why she has been locked up, Ammu, in her rage, blames them as the reason why she cannot be free. She screams at them to go away. Rahel and Estha are deeply wounded, and decide to run away. Sophie convinces them to take her along. During the night, while trying to reach an abandoned house across the river, their boat capsizes and Sophie drowns. The twins search all night for Sophie, but cannot find her. Warily, they fall asleep at the abandoned house. They are unaware that Velutha is here as well, for this is where he meets secretly with Ammu.

When Sophie's body is discovered in the morning, Baby Kochamma goes to the local police station and accuses Velutha for Sophie's death. She claims that Velutha attempted to rape Ammu, threatened the family, and kidnapped the children. A group of policemen are sent out to look for Velutha. When he is found, they savagely beat him, for he has crossed the caste lines. The twins witness his terrible injuries.

When the truth of Sophie's death is revealed by Rahel and Estha, the chief of police is alarmed. He knows that Velutha is a communist, and is afraid that his wrongful arrest and likely death will cause a riot amongst the local communists. He

threatens Baby Kochamma that unless she gets the children to change their story, she will be held responsible for falsely accusing Velutha of the crime. Baby Kochamma tricks Rahel and Estha into believing that unless they accuse Velutha of Sophie's death, both of them and Ammu will be sent to jail. She tells them that Velutha will not live through the night anyways. Eager to save their mother, the children testify against Velutha. Velutha dies from his injuries.

Baby Kochamma has underestimated Ammu's love for Velutha though. Hearing of his arrest, Ammu comes to the station to tell the truth about their relationship. She is told by the police to leave the matter alone. Afraid of being exposed, Baby Kochamma convinces the grieving Chacko that Ammu and the twins are responsible for his daughter's death. Chacko forces Ammu out of the house and forces the twins to separate.

Ammu, finding employment difficult, was forced to send Estha to her divorced husband. Not able to make ends meet, she dies a few years later alone in a hotel room. The church refuses to bury her corpse.

Rahel when grown up leaves for the US, gets married, divorced and finally after several years working as a waitress in an Indian restaurant and as a night clerk at a gas station returns to Ayemenem. Rahel and Estha, who are both 31 at that time, are reunited for the first time since they were 7 years old. By this time Estha had become perpetually silent, because of his traumatic childhood experience.

Arundhati Roy's rhythmic structures dominate the novel at all levels, from the riffs and variations of "If he touched her he couldn't talk to her, if he loved her he couldn't leave, if he spoke he couldn't listen, if he fought he couldn't win," to the larger rhythm of foreshadowing backed by detailed reminiscence that drives the narrative while not pretending to do anything else. The openness of the structures is perhaps the novel's most interesting feature. Here there are no plot devices disguised as flower vases or casual conversations. The rhythms are out in the open, spoken so forcefully that the reader cannot help but attend. From the first pages the shape of the plot is as obvious as a detective

story, a form which it borrows many elements, though replacing the impeccable logic of the detective with the gradual, associative leaps of individual memory. The book is a mild pleasure, its story distressing and strange, framed as it is in so many melodic details

To a question "How did you arrive at final sequence that became the novel in its finished form?" Arundhati Roy answered:

It just worked. For instance, I didn't know, when I started writing, that this book would take place in exactly one day. I kept moving back and forth in time. And then, somehow, I realized that in some of the scenes, the kids were grown up, and sometimes they weren't. I wound up looking at the scenes as different moments, moments those were refracted through time. Reconstituted moments. Moments when Estha is readjusting his Elvis puff of hair. When Estha and Rahel blow spitballs. When Ammu and Velutha make love. These moments, and moments like these in life, I realized, mean something more than what they are, than how they are experienced as mere minutes. They are the substance of human happiness.

She adds:

(the God of Small things) "...is not just about small things, it's about how the smallest things connect to the biggest things- that's the important thing. And that's what writing will always be about for me... I'm not a crusader in any sense."

To conclude, Roy's unwavering moral compass steers through colonialism and neo-colonialism, racism, caste oppression, sexual violence, and myriad other types of social violence and injustices, while pausing to savor the tiniest wonders in love and biology along the way. All of this unfolds through Roy's gorgeous prose (some sections beg to be read out) and unerring talent for character and narrative development.

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