

UNDERSTANDING THE ROY PHENOMENON OF 1997

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“The God of Small Things” (1997) created a major stir on the world literary scene. Above everything else, it has brought a breath of fresh air into Indian English fiction with its superbly crafted narrative, lyrical prose and an uncompromisingly forthright presentation of contemporary life. Few literary scholars have observed and strongly protested her usage of derogatory usage of words and entitled her as a writer who is interested in writing something which is very obscene and unethical. Roy’s representation of subaltern agency in both her fiction and nonfiction yields insights into her governing ideology. She articulates the need for the abrogation of the marginalizing power of the dominant centre. As its site for resistance and ideological positioning, Roy’s discourse has the postcolonial nation as both the material referent and the condition of production. Situated within the discourse of resistance and abrogation, Roy’s writings also evidence the nefarious and debilitating impact of neocolonial pressures complicit with the postcolonial order. She fashions subversive strategies to expose the inherently diminishing forces as well as to mirror the balance of power between the characters. Her novels’ firm achievement fully forecasts her non-fiction. However, both the form and content of marginality change in her polemical writings. As the author of social commentary, Roy has shown herself considerable strength and skill in confronting current realities. The narrative skill and stylistic virtuosity which distinguish her novel are combined with the stinging immediacy, the urgency and directness of her non-fiction. Roy’s phenomenon as a writer is extremely important for us to understand the developments in Indian English fiction in the last decades of the twentieth century and has important implications for the 21st century novel in general and the future of Indian fiction in particular. Arundhati Roy is the fulgent star in the constellation of eminent writers. She has an elegance and control that seem more classical than many modern writers, due to her unconventional and realistic literary attitude. Roy is best known for her 1997 Booker prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things*, but for the past decade has been an increasingly vocal critic of the Indian state, attacking its policy towards Kashmir, the environmental destruction wrought by rapid development, the country's nuclear weapons programme and corruption. As a prominent opponent of everything connected with globalization, she is seeking to construct a "new modernity" based on sustainability and a defence of traditional ways of life. Evaluating the spectrum of Arundhati Roy’s literary treasure from socio-cultural and political perspective, we can interpret the contemporary complex structure of society as the pre-determined stereotype pattern, in which, we are supposed to befit ourselves. But Roy’s convincing arguments will make us believe that this pattern can also be moderately modified. And as a fact, every committed writer seeks to change the world around oneself. That requires an ideal vision of a better society or a better world. Most of these committed writers subscribe to one or other of the prevalent political or philosophical trends like

Gandhism, Marxism etc., Arundhati Roy as a committed writer is no exception to that rule. She is a non-conformist, who cannot be identified with one or other trend without certain reservations. She has a world-view of her own. She wants a saner world based on reason which permits individual freedom, takes due regard of natural instincts and shuns violence. Not ruthless pursuits of money and power, but the concern for peace, happiness and equality shall be the guiding factor in the better world. Roy resents discrimination against women in respect of education, job and property. In social relations, including sex, she has no regard for barriers like religion, language, ethnic group, caste or class. Arundhati Roy seems particularly interested in portraying the gray zones of human psyche, where the paradoxical emotions and thoughts exist in a fragmented, flimsy way. Roy also exposes the hypocrisy and ostentation of some of the people who felt no qualm of conscience in blowing hard on the suppressed and the downtrodden of the society. Further, Roy has very remarkably depicted the pathetic situation of women dominated by the patriarchal society. And she firmly believes that for the smooth development of any society both the wheels of the chariot must be well maintained. Moreover, some people say that “*The God of Small Things*” is replete with vulgar replicated scenes and pornographic delineations. We should not forget that though Roy has deliberately described some vulgar replications, but it is done only to suit the framework of the plot or the sentiments of the characters, such characters, who are mostly neglected by society. Instead of describing hypocritical characters full of affectation, Roy preferred to describe such real and innocent characters that are psychologically disturbed and socially discarded. Moreover, the readers find an undercurrent of connotation, aestheticism and pure artistic exuberances. In terms of solidity, condensation, crafting and linguistic inventiveness, Roy’s place in Indo Anglican fiction is highly original. It is through her realistic characterization; Roy is able to depict the social theme of the high and the low, the rough and the sublime. Roy’s vision of politics remains clear voiced and fearless, large in scope, consistent in its concern for the exploited, scathing in its criticism of its state and its institution. Roy believes that through Corporate Globalization only the politicians and the Government officers were profited. Arundhati Roy has depicted the harsh reality that how culture and ecclesiastical beliefs constitute the social hierarchy, when the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans, Pellyas and Pulayas converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of stigmatic Untouchability. As added incentive they were given a little food and money. They were known as the Rice-Christians. It did not take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Pariah Bishop. After Independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians and therefore casteless. It was little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom.

Roy believes that abilities must be rewarded, remunerated and appreciated with least regard to any differences. She seems to bring to our notice the grave situations our Country has been facing and draws our attention or our sympathy to their piteous plight. In this regard, she is very close to Mulk Raj Anand, who at first, dared to describe realistically the terrible and heartrending blustering and false accusations imposed on the untouchables. She also agrees to the opinions of M. K. Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar who, to their very core of heart, showed the sympathy to a large section of society devoid of humanity and down trodden. In fact, a great art does not mean simply the stinging to one’s heart to the highest percipience by aestheticism, but it must have a

social significance, a realistic ring of the various drawbacks of the society. Arundhati Roy seems particularly interested in portraying the gray zones of human psyche, where the paradoxical emotions and thoughts exist in a fragmented, flimsy way. Here, she seems to be very near to P. B. Shelley in Romantic poetry and G. B. Shaw in the modern drama. Like P. B. Shelley, she believes that the poet must be the unacknowledged legislator of mankind. Like George Bernard Shaw, she harbours the opinion that the world can become paradise if some of the evils of society are uprooted. Roy also exposes the hypocrisy and ostentation of some of the people who felt no qualm of conscience in blowing hard on the suppressed and the downtrodden of the society. Arundhati Roy, a close observer of men and manners, very aptly flings a mild but pinching irony on the various loopholes of the police and the entire Judicial System.

Further, Roy has very remarkably depicted the pathetic situation of women dominated by the patriarchal society. And she firmly believes that for the smooth development of any society both the wheels of the chariot must be well maintained. Instead of describing hypocritical characters full of affectation, Roy preferred to describe such real and innocent characters that are psychologically disturbed and socially discarded. As a matter of fact, the novel seems to be the great psychological study of various characters, who failed to achieve their desired destination. And as a consequence, suffering becomes their destiny. But we should agree at one point that these abnormalities and discrepancies are the result of loneliness and devoid of security, love and sympathy. The readers find an undercurrent of connotation, aestheticism and pure artistic exuberances. In terms of solidity, condensation, crafting and linguistic inventiveness, Roy's place in Indo Anglican fiction is highly original. The next stylistic feature of Arundhati Roy is her brilliant display of some powerful images. The characterization of Roy is even more fascinating. It is through her realistic characterization, she is able to depict the social theme of the high and the low, the rough and the sublime. Through the "stream of consciousness" technique, Roy dives deep into the recesses of the mind of the characters and digs out those unnoticed shades of mind which generally escape the eyes of even great psychologist or social scientists. In theme, it is not a "turning loose of emotion" but a realistic, deliberate and conscious portrayal of the various social maladies inflicting the modern commercial civilization. It has metaphoric structure, verbal exuberance, idiosyncratic use of language challenging even the age-old rules of grammar, unconventional rhythm, sprinkling of italics etc.

If we discuss the unconventional though extraordinary features of Roy as a modern writer, one of the crucial innovations in form of "The God of Small Things" is unmitigated fictional work as far as her fame as a fiction writer is concerned. The title itself suggests the significance of the demarcation line drawn by the elite of the society between the 'Small' and the 'Big'. In "*The God of Small Things*" Roy creates a microcosm that encompasses wife battering, infidelity, molestation, emotional insecurity, pride, and death within one family in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Through this microcosm, Roy explores the often chaotic social and political history of India. Written in a style verging on magical realism, the novel features nonlinear chronology and fragmented flashbacks so that the reader must unravel the story from its conclusion to its source. Roy herself grew up in Kerala, where she witnessed the disarray of Indian politics and the quiet violence of the Indian upper classes against the Untouchables—the lowest in the ladder of social hierarchy. Consequently, it is the children of the story—the fraternal twins Estha and Rahel—who are left irreparably scarred by their tumultuous family and society. Roy evaluates the theme of class segregation as India's post-colonial complexity. It is a big rise of the Indian star in the west! Ms. Roy has chiseled a niche in the treasure trove of Indian

fiction in English. Being one of the most prolific writers of Indo-English literature, Arundhati Roy has remarkably presented Indian sensitivity with its multi colours and unique portrayal of various shades of life embellished with literary flavour. As a matter of fact, the modern Indian Technology is a new portent in an old world yet the Indians in the rural area keep on observing those socio-cultural and religious taboos. However, the literary world has observed and appreciated the very potential of these creative writers, who present realistic description, be it of any particular state or Indian continent. A group of creative writers have put forward acceptable intellectual interpretation, frequently referring to Hindu scriptures and contemporary problems of Indian society. Thus, Ms. Roy shows sound acquaintance with the socio-cultural as well as the churning political process of Kerala State. This deliberate literary endeavour of Arundhati Roy- to spread the awareness regarding the social taboos, to acknowledge the significance of a human being beyond the cast segregation and gender bias and to protest against the prevalent political injustice- is commendable.

Arundhati Roy unlike other literary writers is primarily interested in evaluating the unjustified issues having profound cultural, social and political concern. Apart from her masterpiece "*The God of Small Things*" Roy raises the fundamental questions indirectly or preferably avoided by the authority. This particular chapter would draw our special attention towards the attack on Indian Parliament, which was an indirect humiliation of Indian Democracy as well as the pre-planned strategy to collapse the uniformity of Indian tradition, ethos and cultural inheritance. And this heinous act must be objectively judged by the Indian Judicial system, but as a matter of fact the ultimate reality is far away from whatever happened. We have witnessed that the greatest masters like Aristotle, Plato, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Johnson and up to the modern writers like T. S. Eliot and G. B. Shaw, who believed that the function of a true literary writer is to present the realistic portrayal of the contemporary society, culture and politics with having utmost objectivity. Even, the constellation of eminent writers of Indo-English literature in their literary world has beautifully depicted the cultural ethos, social values and political scenario enriched with Indian flavour. Among all the writers Arundhati Roy with her indigenous, thought provoking and sparkling literary power acknowledges her function as a radical dissenter. She is entitled by some critics as a writer, who has anti-nation agenda in her writing, but as a matter of fact one who has a sense of belonging for his/her nation can think about the welfare of the nation and confidently express the opinion. She thinks that it is better to speak, to disagree and to protest than to have a silent and submissive mindset. Her masterpiece "*An ordinary person's guide to an Empire*"- is a collection of fourteen essays, which express her extraordinary intellectual profundity. Her fame as a literary writer rests not only on her masterpiece "*The God of Small Things*" but she is equally outstanding as a political writer as well. In these essays, she draws the thread of empire through seemingly unconnected arenas, uncovering links between America's War on Terror, the growing threat of corporate power, the response of nation states to resistance movements, the role of NGOs, caste and communal politics in India, and the perverse machinery of an increasingly corporatized mass media. It is meticulously researched and carefully argued by Roy. In the very beginning of the Chapter, Arundhati Roy describes that the NBA and its defenders have fasted two days longer than Gandhi did on any of his fasts during the freedom struggle. Their demands were more modest than his ever were. Moreover, she is about the opinion that those who express their views on nuclear bombs, Big Dams, corporate globalization and the rising threat of communal Hindu fascism are branded as "anti-national." Nationalism of one kind or another was the cause of most

of the genocides of the twentieth century. Flags are bits of coloured cloth that Governments use first to shrink-wrap people's mind and then a ceremonial shroud to bury the dead. It is time for us to sit up and worry. Recently, those who have criticized the actions of US Government have been called 'Anti-American'. Here anti-American does not mean that you don't delight in Tony Morrison. It does not mean that you hate all Americans, their culture, music, and literature, the breath taking beauty of the land and the ordinary pleasures of ordinary people. To call someone anti-Indian or anti-American is the failure of the imagination, an inability to see the world in terms other than those that the establishment has set out for you. Roy very sensibly describes the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attack. The grief is still deep. The rage is sharp. The tears have not dried. Yet each person who has a loved one surely knows that no war, no act of revenge on someone else's loved or children will bring their own loved ones back. War cannot avenge those who have died. War is only a brutal desecration of their memory. What we are seeing now is a vulgar display of all the business of grief, the commerce of grief, the pillaging of even the most private human feelings for political purpose. Moreover, Arundhati Roy has presented some issues in front of the readers for the open debate and she has advocated the downtrodden and the oppressed who were the victim of the injustice. In one of her most celebrated books "*The Algebra of Infinite Justice*" Roy has brilliantly presented a collection of eight political essays discussing the U. S. Government's war against terror, corporate globalization etc. She also interprets the current scenario as having legal wilderness without any rights, the inclination of people to change nothing and ultimately an utter despair. But among all these she expresses her desire "to love, to be loved. To never forget your insignificance. To never get used to the unspeakable violence and vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair and slander. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simplify. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away and never, never to forget.

In her objective opinion Roy is very clear when she takes special interest in exposing the Western hypocrisy. She accepts that the Western countries have more money, more food and bigger bombs than anyone else. They know that they can wipe us out in the course of an ordinary working day. Compared to this, for India to demand the status of a Superpower is as ridiculous as demanding to play in the World Cup finals simply because we have a ball. For this we have to follow two pre-conditions,

- I. To acknowledge the masters.
- II. Locate yourself in relation to them, i.e. make an honest assessment of your position and abilities.

The majority of India's citizens will not be able to identify its boundaries on a map, or say which language is spoken where or which God is worshipped in what region. To them the idea of India is, at best, a noisy slogan that comes around during wars and elections. Or a montage of people on Government TV programmes wearing regional costumes and saying "Mera Bharat Mahaan". Arundhati Roy's commendable efforts for having a great concern for the common man's welfare do require courage, frankness and above all an objective vision of a sensible writer.