

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS: A UNIQUE NOVEL IN TERMS OF NARRATIVE, STRUCTURE, THEME AND LANGUAGE

Dr. S. Sreeramulu
Reader,
Department of English,
VRS Degree College,
VN Palli, Kadapa Dist,
AP, India

ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things', which won for her the famous Booker Prize in 1997, deals with the problems of domestic life and also social and political conditions of the people of Kerala. It is an autobiographical novel in which there are some confessional elements. This novel also focuses an account of the clash between innocence and experience. The narrative is filtered through the eyes of seven-year-old twins, Rahul and Estha, the children of Ammu. They look at the complexities of the adult world of corruption and cruelty with awe and bafflement. Their attitude provides an intimate insider's view of boisterous events unfolding around them. The novel also tells us a bitter indictment of the communists of Kerala during the sixties where the petty politics of power played a major role. The novel also focuses on the angle of feminist fiction taking Ammu's life into account.

Ammu, who is the protagonist of the novel, tries to live on her own turns, though she has to go through terrible hell on that account. And finally, the novel deals with a specific Syrian Christian family to which Arundhati Roy herself belongs. It describes hypocrisy of the seemingly pious middle-class morality of these people, preaching and practicing two different things. Roy also succeeds in describing the panoramic view of Ayemenem and surroundings of Meenachal river. This novel is itself a unique novel in the history of Indian Writing in English.

Key Words: Complexities, domestic, focal point, orthodox mindset, parochial and tyranny.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is indeed a unique novel in the history of Indian English Literature. And it fulfills the highest demand of the art of fiction. Like any other great work of art, this novel has many dimensions and multiple interpretations. It is, first, an autobiographical novel, Mary Roy, mother of Arundhati Roy points out that Arundhati 'has drawn bare bones of the characters from the family'¹. It is also a feminist fiction because Ammu, the protagonist of the novel, faces a number of hardships as a woman. This novel focusses not only on autobiographical and confessional elements but it also reveals the clash struggle between innocence and experience. The narrative is filtered through the eyes of seven-year-old twins Rahel and Esthappen, the children of Ammu. They look at the complexities of the adult world of corruption and cruelty with awe and bewilderment. There is also the eternal element of tragic love between two social opposites. The novel is also a bitter indictment of the communists of Kerala during the sixties where the petty politics of power played a major role. The novel also deals with a specific Syrian Christian family to which Arundhati Roy herself belongs.

The main fabric of this fiction revolves round when Sophie Mol visits Ayemenem along with her mother Margaret Kochamma, the divorced wife of Chacko. Margaret is visiting her ex-husband to forget the accidental death of her second husband, Joe, but unfortunately she has to face a second death too soon, that of Sophie Mol, who is drowned in the Meenachal river of Ayemenem. Yet this death by water of a small child is simply a focal point of reference, because it is universal theme of tragic love, the story of the novel.

The novel also discusses the forbidden love between Ammu and Velutha, between a rich lady and carpenter, between a mother of two children and a youth. Ammu is the daughter of Pappachi, the imperial Entomologist, who becomes a frustrated autocrat and brutally arrogant when the credit for the discovery of a unique moth by him is snatched away by his boss. From that moment Pappachi turns as a monster, spewing forth all his pent-up venom on his hapless wife, Mammachi, and his daughter Ammu. He takes fiendish satisfaction in beating his wife with brass flower vase. And he even uses Ammu's most beloved shoes to beat her to pieces. After his retirement from service, he returns to his native place, Ayemenem a remote, small town in the Kottayam district of Kerala.

Partly to avoid her father's tyranny and to escape from the dull, parochial and an orthodox mindset of Ayemenem, Ammu goes to Calcutta for a few days where in wedding ceremony she meets her future husband and, without waiting for the permission of her parents; she hurriedly marries the Assistant Manager of tea estate of Assam. She thought that marrying anyone would be better than returning to Ayemenem. But within weeks of her blissful marriage, she is shocked to know that her husband is a full-blown alcoholic. A brief respite is there in her troubled conjugal life when she is blessed with two twins, Estha and Rahel. It was in 1962, a war time with China. As her drunken husband mostly bunks his duty he is summoned by his English manager and ask him for an explanation for dereliction of duty. Actually, the manager wants to dismiss him from his service, but tempted by Ammu's extraordinary charm the manager puts a dubious demand that he should go away from his treatment to free himself of alcoholic addiction, leaving behind his beautiful wife at the manager's bungalow.

The degraded husband is ready even to accept this demeaning demand of his depraved boss. But Ammu as a self-respecting wife is so infuriated at this absurd plan. She openly fights with her husband and finally returns to Ayemenem, a place from where she had desperately escaped only a few months back.

But Ammu's sudden arrival is quite unwelcome at Ayemenem, largely on account of her hurried marriage with a Syrian Christian. Even her Oxford educated and self-proclaimed Marxist brother, Chacko, points out to the twins, Rahel and Estha. Ammu protests at this double standard where a son is everything for the family and a daughter is nothing. But Ammu is a born rebel, once she went against her orthodox Syrian Christian Society by marrying a Bengali, now she becomes more outrageous by falling in love with Velutha who is the god of small things and who models everything from toys to small machines to furniture. Basically he is a carpenter by profession and whom Ammu's twins adore during the day and she loves during the night. She finds in Velutha the same spirit of rebellion as smouldering within her.

Ammu is also aware that neither Mammachi nor Baby Kochamma is blissfully ignorant of her womanly desires. So, to square the matter, Amma goes to meet Velutha wearing the shirt of her brother. She deliberately wants to befriend with Velutha because of his commitment towards her and her children.

In the conspiracy played by Chacko, to victimize Velutha for the death of Sophie Mol was unraveled by the police proving that Velutha was an innocent. The death of Sophie Mol was occurred naturally grounding in the Meenachal River while crossing it along with Rahel and Estha. But Baby Kochamma blames Velutha of kidnapping them and lodges an FIR in the Kottayam Police Station. But Ammu goes to the police station saying that Velutha is innocent and he neither molested her nor kidnapped her children as complaint by her aunt, Baby Kochamma. But she is humiliated by police inspector who does not only touch breast with his baton but also refuses to listen anything from her. The police washes their hands off from the custodial death of Velutha on the next day. Ironically a blue sign board at the police station reads ..

Politeness
Obedience
Loyalty
Intelligence
Courtesy
Efficiency

A few months later, Ammu also dies of coughing her lungs out in a remote nursing home of Kerala with none to attend her funeral.

The novel itself is a unique novel in terms of narrative, structure, theme and language. And there are so many sub-plots involved in this novel but all these sub-plots are interconnected. Not only the subject matter and plot structure, even the language used by her is unique. As critics point out that 'book like The God of Small Things come only once in a long time and even Roy is unable to tell if she would, and could, write another such novel in future'.

References:

1. Arundhati Roy: 'The God of Small Things', Harper Flamingo, New York, 1998.