

# Voice of the voiceless: a thematic discourse in Arunthathi Roy's The God of Small Things

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## Abstract

Indian literature mostly based on variety of themes and concepts. Suffering of the low caste women is one among the most important thematic concern to be discussed. According to the reviewers the prime objective of the study of the novels of Arunthathi Roy is to expose how the Indian novelists have explored the unbearable sufferings of the low caste women in The God of Small Things. The low caste women have mostly hailed from the typical villages in India. The general themes of Roy's novels focus on exploration of the low caste and down-trodden identity, the condemnation and the celebration of the unique aspects of Indian culture. Among the writers of Indian literature, Arunthathi Roy is an inevitable and significant writer who has projected the sufferings of the low caste women in her well-known novel The God of Small Things and their culture and society in different situations. The God of Small Things make deep study of the inter-relationship of cultural dilemma, caste, gender and class. Roy tried to establish an evolutionary pattern of her own principle. As a writer she succeeds in her attempt to combine political consciousness with aesthetic sensibility. Most of the reviewers examines about the place of Arunthathi Roy in the literary tradition of Indian women writings and establishes the inter-connectedness of the Cross cultural conflicts. It also emphasis on the survey of the current topics on the novels of Arunthathi Roy discussed here and also pointed out with the ethnicity and self-esteem of Indian women. Roy's one of the prominent novels, The God of Small Things in which the author has emphasized fully on The God of Small Things. She brings out the overwhelming effects of the standard and the beauty of the dominant culture on the self-image of the Indian female adolescent protagonist Ammu. It explores Roy's primary focus on the uniqueness of individualism in the Indian society. It also demonstrates the mental pangs and destruction of the hopes of its female protagonists Ammu and Kochamma in The God of Small. The novel deals with the conflict between the native Indian culture and the caste discrimination brought radical changes in the life of the protagonists and other characters. Through this, one can understand the ability and commitment of Arunthathi Roy who has explored the cause-and-effect relationship between the diverse classes in Indian society.

## Keywords

Caste Discrimination, Voice of the Voiceless, Gender Bias

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## 1. Introduction

Gender and violence are two sides of the same coin. Shorty -a Sheppard boy always advocate peace, fight and to kill the evil doers. He fears bloodshed takes the excuse not to kill his dominant caste peoples, The Sheppard boy Shorty was still under an illusion: an illusion about peace without any violence, Shorty was practical it is said that "the preparation for fight is the best form of peace' (12). The Iliad and The Odyssey and the Indian myths vividly depict fight against the violence. It is the truth, the reality. No writer as a sensitive being, endowed with rich sensibility, can afford to ignore this aspect of human instinct. It is no wonder that Kate Millet's Sexual Politics has disturbed the Shorty hegemony.

God of Small Things and Seasons of Palm are different from other novels of Arunthathi Roy and Perumal Murugan. The publication is significant in the sense that India and the western world had passed through turbulent 960s to quiet 1970s. The Sixties cannot be called a period of sexual free-

dom: rather it was the period when Indian women wanted to pass through the streets without bras. They wanted sexual freedom, which they were deprived of. The Seventies ushered in a period of comparative tranquility. Roy and Murugan are exposed to the western world is conscious of the happenings around her. As an Indian novelist they know the predicament of a man woman in India. As the writers they takes up this as a new paradigm of gender and violence God of Small Things and Seasons of Palm can be called the novels of education or a bildungsroman and exposed to the forbidden world for their safe stay in the world dominated by male gender maniacs.

It deals with the education of Ammu who is a minute observer of things around her. So it is the woman's perspective that Roy brings in God of Small Things. The novel is based on sexual education. Ammu learns everything from her surroundings. She along with her friend Java leans gender from a mature woman. The learning helps her not to be bullied like Lalitha. She can Judge the world she has seen the nude body of her mother: she has seen the sexual act of her relatives. This

indirect knowledge helps her to accept or refuse the world on her own terms and conditions

Ammu views the world and society through Lalitha's experience. She matures through it Her own experience with Gupta's assistant Devraj who attempts to take advantage of her youth and helplessness also helps in her development.

In the novels of Perumal Murugan and Roy the man-woman relationship is not ignored but much significance has given because, both man women have a significant place in their novels. In majority of their works we have women narrators. Roy's fiction testifies to her intense flightiness of her Identity as a woman and her attention to feminine problems. Arunthathi Roy's attitude to feminism is established as personal, analytical and exploratory rather than political or polemical. She does not create a woman's world; rather she presents the real world. Indian woman in her novels defines herself by a set of dominant caste relationships and modes of conduct within a society. She confronts a tradition-oriented society and learns to live under the twin whips of heritage and modernity.

Seasons of Palm and *God of Small Things* made an attempt at a socially realistic portrayal relevant to the changing socio-cultural scene of post- Independence India. The tradition-modernity opposition continues here. The issue of traditional values versus modern westernized values comes to the forefront in the portrayal of the culture, society and gender difference While one chooses modernity out of free will and free choice, the other chooses tradition. These novels set in a typical Indian village where the seasons spell time and machines have not yet displaced the ancient methods of labour the village in both the novels like the one it, does not have any geographical demarcation. This absence of locale presupposes that man woman can be found in any corner of the world their women characters are as true as the characters of Toni Morrison or Margaret Atwood. However, judging from the lie name of their native, the location can be guessed to be somewhere in South Indian family is higher up on the social ladder than their novel.

The prime focuses of the novels are on the psychological development of the two adolescents Velutha and Shorty, but the growth is not explored in its deeper dimensions. While one grows up to accept the conventional code of conduct, the other grows out of its precincts and away from its restraints, eventually both become the victims of their choices and circumstances in different fashions. The characters of Velutha and Ammu are portrayed as a contrast to Shorty, like Elizabeth and Lydia, the two sisters in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and Elinor and Marianna in *Sense and Sensibility*.

Gender is the theme around which most of the novels of Arunthathi Roy revolve but there is lack of explicit reference to gender in *God of Small Things*. Ammu gets numbers of opportunities to know gender. She learns from Shorty's sister, the milkmaid, who functions as the village wet-nurse: hears the creaking sound of the taut cot-strings' as their parents surreptitiously make love in the darkness; she perceives the

flirtation of her mother with the Sikh hawker. She experiences sexual game with her sister. All these experiences help her to a mature woman, a virgin without losing grow into a woman the balance either in favour of emotion or intellect. Here Roy differs from traditional concept of virginity as hailed by the society. Woman is called virgin who remains untouched by man. But that concept does not hold well in life. This sort of Idea stunts the growth of a girl into a full-fledged woman. Like a boy, a girl should be allowed to grow up against all sorts of odds that she may encounter in her journey. Of course, Roy does not write a mere pamphlet. She writes fiction and in her fictional world she tries to depict the world around her. Ammu is the heroine of the novel who sees. Thinks and acts whenever it required.

Ammu's experience consists of a clash of values—one personified in her sister, mother, Aunt and the village. She handles carefully the older generation and the younger one. Shanta Gurusamy comments: Ammu symbolizes the conflict between reason and feeling, between tradition and modernity (29). She realizes the social dangers of unwed motherhood in a traditional community and develops a flightiness of the importance of conformity for personal happiness within a society. So she does not become the victim of the rural community. She accepts the code of her community knowing that it also protects the individual. Without this maturity of understanding, freedom has no value: in fact, it is a function of positive freedom

It is thus, that the desire for freedom can be repressed as in the case of Ammu and can even disappear from the flightiness of the individual. In the Indian social context it is seen that girls, as shown in *God of Small Things*, are torn between the desire for self-expression and the need of social obligations in a given community. Indian women have been traditionally portrayed as the paragon of resignation and patient suffering. Bidothini in Tagore's *Chokherbali* (1903) is perhaps the first Indian woman who rebels against the social norms, claiming an identity of her Own at a time when widows were socially ostracized. Velutha is an unconventional, bold character who loves Bihari, though ultimately she submits herself to the social code of self-denial and self-sacrifice. In contrast to her, in *Ghare-Baire* (1916), Tagore shows in Bimala a traditional house sister who cannot extend her love beyond the strict Hindu social system.

Roy brings the mother to the limelight. She is attracted by the Sikh hawker and deliberately exposes her body to him. Whenever he came, there was colour in mother's cheek bones as noticed by her daughter Ammu. The mother was also not free from the sexual passion. Roy gives a clear-culture description regarding the sensuousness of mother. Although there is no explicit description of gender between mother and the Sikh hawker in the novel, there is sexual undertone in their dealings. Ammu noticed it: "she remembering the looks that Mother and the hawker had exchanged against him as they bent over his suitcase" (49). Mother is found Very happy and pleased. It is just an excuse of Mother to be alone with the

Sikh hawker. Velutha remembers the gift presented to her by the Sikh hawker and now she realizes why the Sikh hawker gave that porcelain doll to her. It was given to her to leave mother and Sikh hawker in peace. The hawker is taken to the private place of the house. He says: "If you wanted to be alone you had to go into the courtyard, which was open to all (73-74). It shows that there is sexual undertone she cannot cross the territory. One need not go to Freud for this justification because gender is as old as man. Freud only makes us conscious of it.

Passion and love are natural emotions and inherent instinct of human beings. In an orthodox society, these things are kept under strict control. Any deviation from this was considered a sin and punished. But with the flow of western ideas, the grip of restriction is considered to be an act of narrow mindedness; many liberal thinkers believe this to be a curse for India. So they advocate intercourse between man and woman which, according to them, is a mark of civilization. The liberal attitude of father makes mother have an extra-marital dominant caste people with the Sikh hawker and there is a clear symptom of passion for sexual desire between them. All these whet sexual appetites of Ammu. But she fears to take a plunge. Desire remains unrequited. Repressed desire turns into a dream

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