



Impact of Religion in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

Many aboriginal groups have separate religious structures and practices similarly that they have their specific language and cultures. The present study analyses show how the internationally acclaimed writer Arundhati Roy expressed her extreme agony to the readers for the Ayemenem village people in Kerala. She tries to show the ugly realities of religion and its core communities such as family, political and social in her novel *The God of Small Things*, one can see the cry for injustice. She goes on to reveal the smokescreen truth of the country. The researcher likes to focus on three dimensions of society in the novel. (1) How religion disturbs the life of a divorcee from inter-caste marriage. (2) How it affects the lives of innocent children of the broken family and (3) how religion looks at the low caste or the untouchable man. On the other hand, the researcher would like to analyse the term religion with the reference of a few religious books and to what extent the people of high-caste adhere to it.

Key Words: Religion, Smokescreen, Dimensions, Inter-caste, Untouchable

Introduction

Arundhati Roy is an Indian author, activist and citizen of the world. She came to publicity when she won the Booker Prize in 1997 for her debut novel *The God of Small Things*. She looks at common problems as inflexibly as the novelist's emotion and fights for the benefit of society. Roy herself said that her novel is a difficult combination of understanding and imagination. Her novel *The God of Small Things* opened the world's door.

She sets the novel in the non-descriptive village Ayemenem in the Kerala State of India. The plot of the novel *The God of Small Things* is very interesting. The novel explores the early life of the author. Arundhati Roy's lifetime was full of struggle. It is an autobiographical type of novel. In the novel, Ammu the protagonist represents Mrs. Mary Roy, mother of Arundhati Roy. She has married a man named Roy with the surname he is Bengali. There is so much cultural and religious difference

between husband and wife. It results in several problems and their life is full of conflicts. Her husband gives her a divorce. Then she is overburdened with the duty of carrying up to two children. Ammu's struggle for her children's education and livelihood touches our hearts.

Arundhati Roy grew up in Kerala, was born to a Syrian Christian Mother and Bengali father and lived at her uncle's pickle factory. She discloses a child's dream of the adult world in this novel, her presence as an "Unprotected child in some ways". She has confessed the same thing in one of her interviews. As a narrator, she adds a lot of charms to the novel. It is certainly an autobiographical novel. It projects the writer's own life through Ammu's character. She uses the word communism rather than a proper religion in her novel. She highlights religion in an individual's moral and ethical life.

Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* has many themes but the most important one is religion. She has taken as a Background of the novel is Ayemenem village where the majority was being followed by Christianity. The research article aims to focus on the theme of religion and its impact on society through the characters in the selected novel of Arundhati Roy. The methods of approach are based on three dimensions: (1) how religion disturbs the life of a divorcee from inter-caste marriage. (2) How it affects the lives of innocent children of the broken family and (3) how religion looks at the low caste or the untouchable man. Finally, the researcher would like to focus on how religion is a device in the hands of authoritative people.

Let's talk about religion. What is religion? Why is religion needed? According to the Oxford dictionary, religion is a set of faith and preparation, and is a worldwide social phenomenon that completely alarms almost all living beings. Religion is also accepted as one of the strongest sources and means of social control.

Religion helps to form the personality of an individual and thereby it shapes social life. It conveys the sense of social value in the mind of people. Moreover, religion explains that man's love and services to God will be existent only if he loves and serves humanity.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy's has discovered the ugly faces of the powerful hands who hide under the so-called liberal faces of theirs, they are the real culprits who are the cause for the innocent's victim:

Love laws made in mythological times stratified people into castes and are passed down throughout the various layers of Indian history and exist in the postcolonial present. Roy repeats this mantra of the "Love Laws" and it echoes throughout the novel as a reminder of a past that haunts the present, suffocating the emergence of the new. Rofail (206)

Religion has always been in the hands of the upper-caste people in India. For instance, a woman is controlled by a patriarchal society. On the other hand, upper-caste people used to order the untouchables. In both places, one can see people surrender without a

question if they try to raise their voice they have to suffer.

This novel has been set up in Ayemenem, a small village in Kerala, where Christianity is a common religion. The story is about the period when Marxism started blooming in Kerala. This story was written by Roy. The marginalized people have actively participated in the activities of the party. In this scenario, Ammu, the protagonist and her two children meet Velutha. The small things efforts to live a normal life are rumbled in the name of religion. Through the gradual development of the story, one can understand that the authoritative people of society are nowhere disturbed by the marginalized or poor people. But their skills were used only for their benefit.

At the time Ammu divorced her husband and returned with her twins, unwelcomed by her parents in Ayemenem, in the same place from where she had tried to run away a few years ago. After her divorce, she has no place in her father's home. She and her twins are considered a burden even by her mother and brother. Frustration seems to have made her reckless. She starts behaving strangely. She has faced many insults and abuses right from the beginning. Her attractions are desirable but they invariably curse destruction and disaster.

She became virtually untouchable at her house, in her family and the society, because she married a Hindu Bengali man. Christian religion believes that marriage is a gift from God that should not be taken for granted. Christian marriage is a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God. Those in troubled marriages are encouraged to seek counselling and restoration because most divorces are neither necessary nor unavoidable. But in the case of Ammu, she alone decided on her marriage and divorce.

A divorced woman is not considered a virtuous woman. While her brother, Chacko, has returned from Oxford, he has divorced his wife, but no one talks about him. He lives happily, he also breaks family norms and does not even care to take his parent's permission to his marriage. He did inter-caste marriage, it is acceptable by his family and society at all times and by all means. He always insults Ammu by saying to her children "Ammu had no Locusts stand I" (57). She spends her time in the front veranda, and back veranda, a hot river and pickle factory in Ayemenem for relief. There is no equality shown in the family.

Ammu first breaks the love law, as a divorced daughter of the Syrian Christian family and she is neglected to the edge of the social norms and greedy for affection. She finds him a substitute father. They receive sympathy from Velutha, while repairing the boat, making fishing rods or instinctively colluding in the conspiracy of their fiction.

The caste or religion does not pollute the children who easily identify themselves with Velutha, a social outcast like them. Ammu discovers a kindred heart in him. She likes the "living, breathing anger that he houses under his cloak of cheerfulness against the smug, ordered world she rages against" (176).

She realizes that he is the only person who loves her children. She dared to meet him at the ghostly household on the waterway bank. They continued to meet for the next thirteen nights.

Velutha's father, Vellya Paapen, understands his son's affair with a touchable woman. He feels duty-bound to disclose the violation. He informs Ammu's mother first, he believes that being a paravan is a penalty for having lived in their previous life. By being virtuous and obedient, an untouchable can get a higher rebirth. So, Velutha has no right to love the upper-class touchable woman. The right to love a man is a woman's choice and inheritance which should not be destroyed in the name of religion, caste, colour and class. But Ammu's mother Mammachi thought that an illicit affair is a social crime. "The only way to contain their intimacy is to separate Ammu and Velutha by locking Ammu in her room" (239). Ultimately, both were separated physically.

Baby Kochamma uses this opportunity to take revenge against Velutha for his relationship with Ammu. She reports the matter to Inspector Thomas Mathew who helps her to fabricate a case implicating Velutha in the alleged abduction of two children, raping Ammu and the death of Sophi Mol, and threatening the family. The death of Sophie Mol in a capsized boat provides an opportunity for Baby Kochamma to file an FIR at Kottayam police station against Velutha. Velutha's improvements are completely blocked for no fault of his. Mammachi went ahead with all Baby Kochamma's plans against Velutha simply because "he was a Paravan- a coolie". (257)

The innocent man is beaten to the edge of death by the merciless police force that bears bitterness against him for having an illicit relationship with Ammu. The violence of the police, the cruel insignificance of Ammu, and the communist party, and the departure by the children are precisely summed up thus: "their work, abandoned by God and History, by man, by the woman and by children, lay folded on the floor. He was semi-conscious, but wasn't moving" (310). What is less significant is that Velutha is never allowed to break his silence regarding the crime he is implicated in. An additional tragic factor is Velutha's crime. The whole of humanity had turned against him.

Baby Kochamma "disliked the twins ... because they were Half-Hindu hybrids whom no self-respect Syrian Christian would ever marry" (67-68). This shows that cultural and religious antagonism and also religion become part of the cultural background. So, Estha and Rahel are induced by Baby Kochamma. If they don't lie that Velutha kidnapped them, they will have to go to the "three different jails" (301). She has given them a choice to select Velutha or Ammu. Religion plays a vital role in the life of small children, Estha and Rahel, who had been forced to become false witnesses against their friend Velutha. All that happened Velutha disobeyed Love Laws and suffered terribly to die at his altar.

Velutha's story can be understood as a metaphor in the life of Jesus Christ. Like Jesus Christ, Velutha is a very good carpenter, he breaks non-violent. He dies saving others, saving the status of Ammu and her family. He knew that surrendering his life was too big a cost for this purpose. But he embraces it willingly. When he is taken to the police station, Rahel sees that the nail of his right thumb

has been painted red. This shows the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed for others.

As a punishment for the lovers, Velutha has to lose his life all because of his religion. Estha and Rahel were separated. Ammu should leave the Ayemenem House. They were not allowed to join the funeral of Sophie Mol because of their hybridity. Ammu died in a grimy lodge in Alleppey at the age of thirty-one. Church authorities refused to bury Ammu's body in a Cemetery.

Thus, God created man, man invented religion for the benefit of society and to live happily, and government laws are meant for the help, safety and growth of people of all the religions without discrimination but unluckily the upper-caste people use religion for their own will. But Religion destroyed humanity.

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