

## Protest against social stratification in Arundhati Roy's *The God of small things*

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### Abstract

Through this novel, Roy presents the theme of minority that questions about the system of caste itself and its hypocrisy around the system. Roy admits that the unique mixture between progressivism and slinkiness, which are extreme in Kerala, inspires her to reflect the most basic human natures. It also protests the socio cultural reality that is sensitive in India. *The God of Small Things* is a postcolonial novel. The horizon of this unfinished redefinition (which is always a process anyway) is determined by a corruption of the independence ideals, current social problems, internal tensions and the clash between partial modernization and traditional mentalities. Self-consolidation is waiting on the way all these elements are managed. But, apart from internal problems, this self-consolidation process has international implications. According to events inside the nation, the still unsettled place of the post-colonies in a new world order will be defined.

**Keywords:** untouchability, communism, humanity, social evil, etc.

### Introduction

Literature is the mirror of the society. It reflects the happenings intentionally or unintentionally by any writer. The expressions of the authors can bring about awareness, changes and transformations among the readers according to their reach Arundhati Roy's "*The God of Small Things*" which aims at the display of the protest of both the authors against the class and caste stratification prevalent in India.

### Awareness of major problems

Ms. Arundhati Roy is one of the front-ranking novelists of India. She has established herself as a novelist par excellence. *The God of Small Things* is her epoch-making work and at the top of best seller list in many European and Asian countries. Even before she won the Booker Prize Award this novel had attracted wide attention of the readers and reviewers throughout the world. The theme was relevant in the Indian Social context as the basic issues related to the theme was one prevalent in the villages of all states. Though Hindi and other Indian language writers had taken up the Social issues in native languages, Arundhati's effort internationally created an awareness regarding the major problems in India. The plot was given a strong political undercurrent or a political satire at a certain level. She is always protesting, radical, and unconventional. Untouchability is her canon. She draws a large canvas of characters that belong to five generations.

She has carved out a place of her own by presenting a social satire on contemporary society. As a novelist Arundhati Roy discusses issues like homeless and hungry, alcoholism, violence, untouchability, cultural decadence, marginalization of women and sexuality. The vote-bank politics is very active in the contemporary society which she tries to portray. In many ways the novel represents her thinking beyond the limits of Gandhi's idea of untouchables as harijans.

**"The greatest national sin is the neglect of the masses and that is one of the causes of our downfall."**

The identification of *The God of Small Things* as postcolonial and/or feminist hinges on the psychoanalytical, socio-historical and political concepts or themes chosen to read the novel as a whole, to interpret its characters, their behavior, attitudes and actions, and to attach a certain meaning to its descriptions and narrative comments. Such a focus is fundamentally a politically informed choice to see this and all other literary works of art as social-science specimens: produced of course by individuals addressing themselves to other individuals, but knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously, in ways that are determined by nationality or postcolonial status, class, membership within a caste system, ethnicity, and gender. Both writers and readers are identified in all cases as *subjects*--as being under the control of the social forces that shape and determine them.

Set in Kerala, India, during the late 1960s when Communism rattled the age-old caste system, the story begins with the funeral of young Sophie Mol, the cousin of the novel's protagonists, Rahel and her fraternal twin brother, Estha. In a circuitous and suspenseful narrative, Roy reveals the family tensions that led to the twins' behavior on the fateful night that Sophie drowned. Beneath the drama of a family tragedy lies a background of local politics, social taboos and the tide of history all of which come together in a slip of fate, after which a family is irreparably shattered. Roy captures the children's candid observations but clouded understanding of adults' complex emotional lives. Rahel notices that "at times like these, only the Small Things are ever said. The Big Things lurk unsaid inside." Plangent with a sad wisdom, the children's view is never oversimplified, and the adult characters reveal their frailties and in one case, a repulsively evil power in subtle and complex ways.

### Social stratification in the society

The novel depicts the problem that happened in India. One of the problems is social stratification in the society. The depiction of the events in society described complexity and its relation with others, so it forms a series of inoculations between one event and others. Issues about social stratification and the mixture of exotics, mysticism, and India local history, which is nationally discussed, are not very often found in a book, which effectively takes off all the clothes of nationally, castes, and religion to eventually show what humanity is all about. On the other word, this novel represents Roy's protest against the system that put the value of humanity away. Stratification can be defined in various ways, but most commonly refers to *institutionalized inequalities in power, wealth, and status* between *categories* of persons within a single social system (e.g., classes, castes, and ethnic groups). The word "protest" itself, according to Oxford (2007: 332), is a statement or action that shows strong disapproval or disagreement. Protest (against) shows one's strong disapproval/ disagreement of somebody / something. Protest also declares firmly against opposition.

For better and for worse, history is relevant, and one cannot ignore that involvement in a centuries long process of colonial history makes the relatively recent process of independence an important reference to understand the transitional and provisional contradictions of a society that is living through fundamental changes, consolidating and self-defining itself between what has been and what may become. This means that, for me, one of the things a postcolonial novel does is to deal with a current postcolonial society, reflecting on, among other things, its search for post-independence patterns of collective identity, the exorcism of traumatic memories from a colonial past, and the self-assertive remembering of local cultural references (I am leaving Diaspora and migrant writing out of this research). All of these issues are articulated within the frame of local, material circumstances. They are solidly connected to their postcolonial geography and time, and there is no ambiguity about these co-ordinates seen from within a located text, where they are the references to everyday life. At its most optimist tone, postcolonial literatures still exude a willingness to change, mend, and "move on", licking one's wounds. But, after the post-independence euphoria, there is, in many of these same novels, this feeling that some of the old problems remain, the promised changes did not happen, and something has gone sour in the current political scene. From a postcolonial angle, the novel *The God of Small Things* is relevant for its resistance to Anglophile, its rejection of Western influences as a "solution" for the problems of India and its caustic analysis of Indian patterns of collective identity, totally embedded in caste segregation and sexism.

The novel tells the story of the Kochammas, a wealthy Christian family in a small village in the southern Indian state of Kerala. Based loosely from the perspective of Rahel Kochamma, who has returned to her hometown to see her twin brother, it pieces together the story of the dramatic events of Rahel's childhood that drastically changed the lives of everyone in the family. *The God of Small Things* is an ambitious work that addresses universal themes ranging from religion to biology. Roy stresses throughout the novel that great and small themes are interconnected, and that historical events and seemingly unrelated details have far-reaching consequences throughout a community and country. The novel is therefore able to comment simultaneously on universal, abstract themes, and a wide variety

of ideas relating to the personal and family history of the members of the Kochamma family as well as the wider concerns of the Kerala region of India.

The Sociological approach concerning the contemporary and still persistent social evils in India such as caste system and untouchability, highlights the human perceptions and the lack of concern for universal brotherhood.

### Conclusion

"*The God of Small Things*" bring out the in depth analysis of the Indian Society and how the possible changes are awaited by the author. The desire for reforming human minds and the need for inculcating broader views is interwoven in each and every plot, setting and depicting of characters. It also deals with Anglophilia and Anti-colonial Resistance in the *God of Small Things* which discusses the western influence on Indian Society bringing out the differences in the status due to colour and literacy as a category of social stratification. The political influence as that of British Government also defines the Social category. The ever existing caste segregation in India is another string which binds along all these stratifications. It also portrays the indelible problem of Untouchability. The ugly realities of life as portrayed in the existing inhuman caste segregations and class stratifications are highlighted with reference to this novel, "The God of Small Things". The approaches of the novelists with an aim to protest against the social evils and a focus to create an awareness regarding the tragic consequences due to such unwanted segregations are brought to the forefront. If not for that period in which the novels was written, the author was sure that her writings would touch the readers' hearts and try to achieve success in reaching her goals. No doubt that Arundhati Roy was given the Booker Prize for her novel. The analysis in this paper will enable the readers to understand the intentions of the authors in eradicating the social evil of classism and promoting the respect to mutual human values necessary to enhance the living standards in an economy.

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