



FORBIDDEN HUMAN RELATIONSHIP: A CRITICAL STUDY OF 'THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS' BY ARUNDHATI ROY

Mohit Kumar

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Shri Jagdishprasad Jhabarmal Tibrewala University, Jhunjhunu (Rajasthan)

Abstract

The paper concerns the personal and family life and the human relationship drifting apart in the modern life highlighted through the first novel by Arundhati Roy 'The God of Small Things'. She introduces an awful vision of life of the characters belonging to the three generations of a family in Ayemenem (a district in Kerala). She shows that a marriage which seals the power of profound devotion ends up being social commitment. Nonetheless, the next generation finds a cold and dry marriage a burden fit to be disregarded. The marriage splits even before turning into a family in third generation. Moreover, this novel features the breaking of two noteworthy taboos; the inter-caste relationship and the incest. The novel can be termed as rebellious.

Introduction

Arundhati Roy is famous for her first novel 'The God of Small Things' published in 1996. She is also renowned social and political activist and has done commendable work for human rights and environmental safety. Roy in her fancy depicts a world that is devoid of mutual love, understanding and adjustment in the opposite sex relationship. It seems to be the destiny of man-woman relationship to be loveless and discontented. The novel is depicted as a work of fiction which protests against the socially established taboos: "They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tempered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how and how much" (T.G.O.S.T, 31) [1]. Roy lashes out at the hypocritical moral code of society. It exposes

the double standards of morality in society regarding men and woman [2]. Thus she presents the heartbreaking story of broken love relations in a feminist way. The novel portrays the truthful picture of the plight of Indian women, their great suffering, cares and anxieties, their humble submission, persecution and undeserved humiliation in male dominating society. It shows the women's marathon struggle for seeking the sense of 'identity' in a totally averse and envious society [3]. Thus the novel presents multiple social issues, diverse yet interconnected.

Depiction of Love Relationship

All the married women characters portrayed in the novel, Mammchi is the only one who humbly accepts the thrashing of her husband and his anger. She also sheds tears at the demise of her aggressive husband. Later on Ammu also gets sufferings from her husband. Marriage for Ammu is a horrible experience; her husband is a reason for her physical and psychological suffering. Thus marriage institution becomes reason for marginalization of Ammu [4]. But instead of meek submission, she rebels against the pain inflicted on her. She refuses to live with her alcoholic husband who would not hesitate to treat her as a prostitute and returns to Ayemenem house. This gesture indicates the disastrous conclusion of a socially established human relationship. Not only women characters fall short of attaining marital pleasure, male characters also remain unsuccessful in getting conjugal happiness in the novel. Chacko's married life with Margaret tags along the blueprint of Ammu's married life. But their passionate fervor remains only a fleeting experience and Chacko returns to India when Canadian wife discards him for a new and affluent lover.

However, Ammu-Valutha relationship is the ideal sort of relationship which cultivates from



the deepest core of two human hearts. Valutha is three year younger than Ammu. He is educated, skilled and not a copy-cat like his father and elder sibling. He can't turn into an exploiter as he has seen the lives of untouchables in the school. He cannot behave like a lantern requiring oil from outside; rather he is like a candle consuming himself. He is self-assured and has the qualities which make a man wonderful. He has got natural abilities to make mind boggling toys with dried palm reeds, custard stems and cashew nuts. He departs for four years and comes back after the demise of his mother. Ammu and Valutha both come closer due to Ammu's children. Both of them knew each other from their childhood days. In his youth, he used to accompany his dad and brought some toys for Ammu. Ammu finds love for her children in Valutha. She is also physical attracted towards him. The attraction is on both sides. Valutha has discovered the woman in Ammu and 'saw things that he hadn't seen before.' It is not an ordinary relationship for two reasons. First, it is a tie which is out of marriage vows and also against communal moral code. Secondly, this bond is against the rules of history. So a liaison between a Christian and a 'Paravan' is destined to be ruined; this association ends only after thirteen days. After that, the story changes dramatically and unexpectedly. Valutha's father tells Mammachi about the relationship between Ammu and Valutha. He gives an account of what his untouchable son has touched. Mammachi registers a case of attempted rape of Ammu at Kottayanr Police Station and also blames Valutha of abducting three children out of which one dies. Discarded and affronted, Valutha approaches comrade Pillai, the leader of Communist Party, who also rejects him with the comment: "But comrade you should know that party was not constituted to support workers indiscipline in their private life."(T.G.O.S.T, 281) This points to the fact about which Valutha was ignorant that the leader deemed him just a supporter who could have been done away with. The basic purpose

of Pillai is just to make the most of the Touchable workforce for his personal gain. Even at Kottayan Police Station, he conceals the truth that Valutha is a card holding member of the Communist Party. This gives an idea that he did not show any interest in challenging fake allegation against Valutha. A gang of Touchable Policemen are sent to the History House. Ammu's children Rahel and Estha were hidden in the same house where Valutha was sleeping. The Touchable Policemen viciously bang Valutha before he wakes up. He is hammered and busted by the policemen. Half conscious he is left in the pool of blood. His head is broken in three places. His nose and cheek bones are cracked so badly that his face gets pulpy. His spine is broken in two places and his right arm is paralysed. Both his knees are crushed. Still he is mocked at by them and they drag him to the police station where he dies at night. Here Roy enlightens the reader about power exercised brutally by Baby Kochamma and the policemen who have protected the so called social customs, which do not allow an Untouchable to be in love with a Touchable. Thus the novel presents the dilemma of Untouchables. Ammu strives hard to save Valutha. She tries to give statement in the police station that the accusation of rape is fictitious. But the police officer is totally programmed by Baby Kochamma. He fearlessly insults Ammu by calling her a 'Veshya' and also taps her breasts. Thus the novelist depicts the lecherous behavior of a man who is in power with a pathetic woman begging for justice. This is also a depiction of untouchability of a high order where women from higher caste are also maltreated.

Breaking taboo of incest

The novel also brings into limelight the shattering of an age old taboo of incest. Ammu gives birth to twins, Rahel and Estha, who are conceived at the same time, in the same womb. Born out of the negligence of Ammu, both undergo certain distressing experiences



because of sin committed by her. Both are nurtured by a separated mother in an ancestral home.

Estha in his childhood experiences a disturbing sexual encounter by a licentious character of the Orange drink, Lemon drink man at the Abhilash Talkies. He moves innocent Estha's hand up and down over his penis for getting some kind of enjoyment. But this incident is so disgusting for the child that he vomits. Estha also goes through many other traumatic incidents. He gets intimidated due to the accidental death of his cousin. He is also disturbed by the shocking episode of wicked beating of Valutha by the police men. He has to identify Valutha as the kidnapper due to force exerted by Bobby. Valutha is killed by the police. Such series of harrowing incidents disturbs his mental poise. He turns into an introvert personality, talking to nobody, dipping into quietness. He is changed into an unvoiced bubble hovering on an ocean of blast. He decides not to join college and indulges himself in the household work only.

On the other side, Rahel also cultivates an unusual disposition due to excruciating experiences. She is debarred from three schools due to her dissolute behavior. She doesn't make any friends in any of the schools and keeps her detached. She grows into a young lady and joins a college of Architecture in Delhi but leaves without completing her degree. She marries a senior student and goes to Boston. But due to her odd conduct, her married life results into disappointment. Later she is also married to Larry McCaslin but could never extract the marital pleasure. She finds the life totally void, full of nothingness, devoid of any vitality. Her husband thinks her to be a lovely present, but feels dissatisfied by the expression in her eyes. The appearance in her eyes makes him feel that they belong to someone else. After being divorced she also works as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York but returns to Ayemenem at last.

Estha and Rahel return to Ayemenem almost at the same time. Being twins, a telepathic

connection is shown in both of them. Both are deprived of a happy and joyful childhood under these hard conditions. Their predicament is portrayed in the novel very painfully. They are victimized by the situations, yet are bonded with each other as a prop. Both are truncated from the civilized and cultured society as being abnormal due to their formidable and ruthless childhood experiences. Now they have established a connection unlike any other normal relation. Estha feels that Rahel has grown into their mother's skin, mouth and nose. He feels an inner urge to be cheered up. He hugs Rahel. It indicates Oedipus impulses becoming active in their kinship. This affinity turns into an action, i.e. indulgence in incestuous relation, which is considered objectionable and awful in our sophisticated culture.

Listening to the news of Estha's home coming, Rahel leaves her job in U.S.A. and also returns to Ayemenem House. Since both are reared up in a milieu of sheer inadvertence, they find a sort of consolation in each-other's association. They start consuming their maximum time by enjoying company of each other for entire long nights together. They put in hours together in the bedroom of Ammu. They contravene the confines established by the customs of all cultures by exploiting the relation between siblings. They violate the rules and regulations of Love which decide who ought to be loved and to which extent by participating in a sin of incest. They were united in the womb at the time of conception and now reunited when the womb has departed. This incestuous relationship hints at the unethical expression of projected physical and psychological desires. It indicates the amoral outlet of repressed and suppressed sexual. Ideologically they surrender and succumb completely into their own selfhood and transcend the boundaries in a rebellious way that disregard and deprive them. Uprooting a deep-seated social value symbolizes that they are extremely marred to the core of their heart.



Conclusion

So Roy gives the reflection of a diverse & exceptional type of milieu expressing human relationship. She portrays an uncommon incident of breaching of societal taboo incest with characterization of Estha and Rahel. She also strikes at the customary value of love between an untouchable man and a touchable widow. She, in her peculiar style, strikes hard at the moral code of conduct of society by depicting in minute details the forbidden human relationships.

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