

Resistance and Identity in The God of Small Things Written by Arundhati Roy: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an analysis of the novel "The God of the Small Things" written by Arundhati Roy. The primary purpose of this paper is to evaluate the idea of resistance and identity that have been described in the novel by the novelist. It will be demonstrated in this novel that how the resistance against the traditions and norms of post-colonial era is related to the self-realisation. There are different kinds of resistance that have been depicted in the novel at various circumstances. In Postcolonial context identity is a complex concept to be located in just a simple definition or to be investigated throughout a single theoretical approach. Resistance as a concept linked to the identity question. The Novel handles this notion and throughout its plot, besides the burden that is left from the colonial legacy, gender identity comes to the surface. Though women resistance appears as a reaction with identity suppression; yet it is a reflection of self-identification of gender inequality under patriarchal traditions inherited from long dominant masculine power. This paper elaborates on each type of resistance and activism that arises against the feudal and patriarchal forces structured by the economic and politically influential people in the new community as a sample in India after postcolonialism. Consequently, one of the points that the research ends with is that the act of resistance validates the pursuit for self-identity, which is an attempt to renown, reclaim and rename the world.

KEY WORDS: Identity of Indian Women, Identity, Post-Colonial India, Postcolonial Novel, Resistance

1. INTRODUCTION:

This study provides an understanding of the resistance and identity that have been shown in the novel "The God of Small Things". An Indian writer Arundhati Roy has written the book "*The God of Small Things*" in 1997. It is the bestselling novel which is about two twins (fraternal) who reunited as adults. The story revolved around a piercing political drama and forbidden love and depicted the wealthy Indian family.

The plot of this story was set in 1969 in Kerala (India), around the story of Estha and his twin sister Rahel, who had realised that their whole world could be changed in a single day. They have learnt that they can lose their lives and love in a moment. Estha is nervous, but a serious young man and Rahel is an impulsive but smart young woman. Ammu is the mother of Rahel and Estha, who took them to Ayemenem to live with her family (Arundhati, 2017; Moore, 2015; Pei, 2017).

The study questions the relation of resistance to the notion of identity in the novel. The methodology used in his study is the systematic review to generate qualitative analysis. The database is compiled, including the studies from each systematic review. As the aim of this research is to critically analyse the phenomenon of resistance and identity explored in the novel; thus, qualitative methodology is used. Qualitative research is a way to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within the natural setting. This research concentrates on the direct experience of human beings to the natural

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phenomena as a meaning-making factor in their daily life. It also focuses on the particular social phenomena of post-colonial India that has been experienced by women of the society since long ago. The area of focus for this research is society and individual's behaviour. In qualitative research, there are various techniques of inquiry, but the subjective knowledge is commonly focussed rather than the objective. That is why qualitative research methodology is used for this paper to learn the social phenomena that exist within the people of post-colonial India and to understand the meaning of their lives. It attempts to maintain the neutrality while involving in the research process to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

The research design that is used in this paper is an ethnographic study that is a kind of qualitative process. Ethnographic studies are used to interpret, describe and analyse the characteristics of a culture. Ethnography emerged from anthropology and used when a researcher aims to study the group of individuals to attain a vast knowledge of their lives or particular aspects of their behaviour. The paper also seeks to understand the act of resistance and self-realisation of the people of Kerala. Ethnographic research can be conducted by three methods, including naturalism, understanding and induction. The naturalist research is done through an intensive and first-hand contact where researcher carries out the research in a natural setting.

On the other hand, the 'understanding' model of ethnographic analysis argues that human behaviour can be determined by understanding the culture in which the action takes place. In the induction method, the research question is refined and can be changed during the research. For the current paper, the "understanding" approach of ethnographic inquiry is used in which the behaviour of resistance is studied by understanding the social-culture of India.

2. RESISTANCE IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*: ANALYSIS

The novel 'The God of Small Things' introduced the platform of resistance against the global and local inequities and injustice in India. This novel is an in-depth study of the plight of Indian women particularly the predicament of Dalits who are considered as untouchables, racial subalterns and lower-class people about neo-imperialism and capitalism impersonating as globalisation. Arundhati Roy believes that the resistance against gender oppression is leading towards the resistance against class, caste oppression on anti-colonial believes. These alternatives of resistance insurrection are coupled through the evaluation of inter-gender and marital relation expedition of four women in the novel. The infringement of these characters broke or subverted the boundaries of the marriage institutions that are

enacted in the post-colonial society of India. Moreover, these characters opened the borders of the *Love laws* that forego the colonialism of West that lead to the devastating interrogation of fundamental structures and values of post-colonial India. Roy defines the path to Indian women to resist the global as well as local inequities (Prasad, 2006, 39).

As shown above the focus of the study is the resistant behaviour of women in Roy's novel but, it will also be illustrated later on that how the society's presumptions towards women are completely contrasting from men. Nevertheless, the prevailing perspective in both feminism and post-colonialism is the "challenging types of oppressions" (McLeod, 2015, 174). The description of India by Roy in the novel demonstrates several layers of persecution originating from patriarchy, caste, colonialism and religion. These structures are generally interlaced and serve as a repressive compound system, particularly for women and untouchable people of the society.

Arundhati Roy has represented the visualised description of Indian reality. Some selected dimensions of Indian existence are depicted in this novel like the long-lasting psychological and social impacts of British colonialism. Various kinds of resistance have been shown in this novel by many characters. The significant wave of resistance can be seen from the leading character who is not accepted and welcomed in her father's house on her return after divorce. She is also ignored by the inheritance law and family structure traditionally exist in the community of Syrian Christian in Kerala. The journey of resistance is started when the women are infatuated with a man who is the untouchable labourer. Following her feelings, she violates the *Love laws* of her community that were inherited from the traditions of the Hindu past. Her misdemeanour of class, religion and cast limits elevates an insurgency against her exclusion as a woman.

According to Aijaz Ahmad, some women in the novel are like strong pebble. The attempt of women for their love was due to the self-realisation that is connected with the destiny of other subalterns. According to Arundhati (2014), the rebellion of different women in the novel against the marital and maternal tradition, their connection with an untouchable man constitutes an infringement against a well-defined social rule and violation of fixed awes of love. The act of rebellion demonstrates the quest for self-identity, which is the attempt to renown, repossess and rename the world. The love of the women for an untouchable man can be seen in the following quote:

"What was it that gave Ammu this Unsafe Edge? This air of unpredictability? It was what she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of

motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber. It was this that grew inside her, and eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day. To use by night, the boat that her children used by day. The boat that Estha sat on and Rahel found." (Roy 1997, p.21)

However, the nature of the society does not allow her pursuit of self-identity to propagate, where she took the refuge with her children after divorce. Roy depicts the women in the novel who revolt against the norms, marriages and social structures that seem to be a chastening institution. These institutions are working towards controlling and silencing the one who stands against the system (Arundhati, 2014). As stated in the novel "That it began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much." (Roy, 1997, p.33)

It was discussed by Foucault that the asylums were considered as the institutions to serve the knowledge of medical and isolate the protests in the 17th century. This is the time when the ambitions of continents imperial arouse (Beacken, 2015, p.343). According to Foucault. These powers took the roots in the person's insanity instead of his mind. The personality of the novel's main character was also locked up, and she died in exile. However, in desirous search of self-realisation, she became the emblematic personification of an entire group of subalterns, particularly women who question the influential structure of the society. This novel depicts the conflict between the main characters with the elimination of institutional powers and their dominant counterparts. The conscious decision of women to embosom untouchable is a cross-caste connection that is forbidden within the given social perspectives of the novel. This scenario depicts the link between violation and the commitment to the power of self-freedom of small things. Therefore, there is the reconceptualization of political feminism in the novel, which is subversive.

The role of Ammu as a divorced, educated, and single women refused her inheritance's rights (Roy 1997, 33-34). This means that, as a daughter, she could not get any property of her father or brother. Ammu is sexually sentient who has no freedom to love according to her choice and deprived of love by the pre-colonial laws of Love. The issues of love stand side by side with different problems within the subalterns such as class, gender and caste issues. Ammu is attracted towards the Velutha who is the proponent of may be the God of *The God of Small Things*. In the Article "Untouchables in *The God of Small Things*" written by Khurshid Alam, the role of Ammu about Velutha is clarified. According to this novel, the disillusionment within the society of postcolonial world still exists, and people experience a hostile society that captivates their freedom and their

independent strengths. It is impossible for Velutha, *The God of Small Things*, to co-exist with the touchable community of the society peacefully as he was attached to the label of untouchability and there are countless other people like him. Ammu, who was another untouchable but labelled as touchable cannot proceed with her life and happiness with Velutha as she is threatened by the existing rules of the society. (Shakely, 2005).

Despite these circumstances, Ammu is trying to take control of her happiness and life that is surrendered by the social order. In her struggle, she observes the worst aspects of this system where the poor labourer women are exploited sexually and financially by her brother (Marxist) Chacko in his factory. Ammu also sees the women like Mamamchi who are being suffocated by the patriarchy. She sees the arresting and accession of Velutha for the accidental death of Sophie Mol. Subaltern women who are socially and financially marginalised has challenged the colonial rulers in the novel. Ammu being smothered by injustice and inequity, revolts against the social standards that possessed by the Syrian Christian community of Kerala. According to Shakely (2005) this rebellion exhibits resistance against the traditional institutions of society. Ammu's act of involvement sexually with Velutha (Untouchable and lower-class man), must not only be considered as transgression. This act is the resistance to bring the change around her surroundings.

Therefore, she goes for Velutha to the police station and place argument against the detention of lower class and lower caste man. This situation illustrates the figure of a post-colonial woman (Indian) who has to retrieve her right as an Indian woman. The words of Amitabh Roy present the substantial evidence. According to this, Ammu is the revolt who depicts the defiance of the neo-colonial stage of society through her informed and passionate perspective. She raises her voice for those women who are struggling for equality and freedom. Thus, she shows the challenging pre-colonial conventions and ideas and hopes for equality in future. Moreover, Ammu as a financially and socially denied women resists the repressive and oppressive political and social structures of the society. Although, she does not get success in bringing the change in society, she continues the battle for self-realisation. She does not consciously stand for other subaltern women, but her actions and strength contribute to the liberation of various kinds of subaltern people and there lies Ammu's exceptionality (Roy, 2009,31).

Anita Sing believes that the novel is a discourse of the subordinated and marginalised as it highlights the issues of violation and inequity against all those deprived of identity. According to Sing, the writing subject (Roy) itself belongs to the category of beforehand

silent. The act of writing is an act of reclamation as well as of liberation (Sing, 2001, 133). It means that Roy has pertinent personal experience as she has grown up as a daughter of Hindu father and Syrian Christian mother in the small village of India. Moreover, Roy's parents divorced in her teenage (Mullaney, 2002, 7). It can be noted in the novel that the voice of women has been excluded in post-colonial India. Singh states that this book became the voice of all those people who have been relegated to the social margins (Sing, 2001,133).

In this novel, the concept of first wave of feminism also discussed, along with the post-colonial literacy discipline (McLeod, 2015, 174). Nevertheless, women remain under the risk of marginalisation across the globe due to the specific patterns of oppression and power. Mohanty depicts how the women in the Third World are often considered in sweeping terms as family-oriented, domestic, religious and illiterate. They have been placed in a position as "the other" (The distinguishing proof of an individual or a gathering or a nation, in postcolonial terms, as one notices effortlessly, is that they perceive themselves as "us" with the presence of the contrary "other.") (Dizayi, 2017) as compared to the more liberal and progressive women in the First World countries. Moreover, this attempt oppresses most of the women in Third World countries where the women are described as the powerless and exploited victims (Mohanty, 2003, 19). Mohanty also concludes that the different forms of relationships between men and women are mainly ignored by society.

That is why the novel of Roy is specially gripping as it concentrates on how women are associated with different kinds of men and how this relationship can bring the behaviour of resistance. It is obvious in the novel to understand through this novel that how women of a society share similar political and cultural interest and identity because of related physical qualities of their gender. Roy's book shows the resistance particularly from the women because they are more intensely divided by the boundaries of ethnicity, class, and nationality (McLeod, 2015,175).

The second most prominent character of this novel is Mammachi, who depicts some resistance against the culture of male dominance oppression and alienation. It is the prevailing culture of this society to torture and traumatise women, and they never speak out. Roy has presented Mammachi in a significantly strategic position between the class, gender-subaltern and class, and patriarchal feudal-capitalist structures that have been existing in the community since ages. She does not permit the acts of impudent isolation and remains firm till the ending of the novel. In this way, Mammachi depicts the character of steadfast Indian women who assimilate many features of the patriarchy. The article of Binayak Roy "The Title of the God of small things" also

comments on Mammachi. According to Binayak, she is also a big woman who worships her son and hates her daughter. Ammu perceives the feeling of jealousy towards Margaret that flows from Mammachi. According to Roy, the character of Chacko the dominant culture of India where the son rules over the mother, particularly in old age. Still, these ideas and system are very familiar to Mammachi. Even today, the evils of class, patriarchal oppressions and repressions and caste feed each other in India. Ammu is the woman who resists this system of patriarchy, class and care bigotry and pays the price with her life (Al-Quaderi & Islam, 2011,69; Roy, 2009,67; Dwived, 2010,386).

Mammachi's labels the wrong doings and flirting with factory women of her son as "Men's Needs". On the other hand, Mammachi does not accept the mutual relationship between Velutha and her daughter Ammu. The class and caste bias of Mammachi are not openly expressed in the novel, but it plays a significant role. She provides the statement against Velutha in a police station for the murder of Sophie Mol. Her complaint assists the killing of Velutha in the hands of police that is the colonial administration that plays a part in stage rouge. Velutha, who is the son of nature, meets cruel death and recognised by the writer as the god of small things. However, the family of Mammachi experiences disaster. The marriages within the family do not work. The relationships between Westerners and Wedlocks never work out. Thus, the novelist showed the consequences of marriages with individuals from the West (Friedman, 2001,122; Dwived, 2010,386-387).

Baby Kochamma is another character of a novel that represents slight resistance in the realisation of self-identity. She is the daughter of John Ipe and fell in love with Father Mulligan, a Roman Catholic priest. Baby Kochamma is afraid to challenge the standard and traditional concepts of marriage and love that prevailed in India at that time. According to Amitabh Roy, it is a pity that Baby Kochamma surrenders in the name of honour to the communal, casteist and sexist prejudices. Baby Kochamma's affection for Father Mulligan brings variations in her life. These variations are subversive of existing social structure. For instance, despite her actual and verbal compliance with the laws of society, she contradicts the borders of community, caste and religion. The conversion of Baby Kochamma into Roman Catholicism. The distinguishing proof of an individual or a gathering or a nation, in postcolonial terms, as one notices effortlessly, is that they perceive themselves as "us" with the presence of the contrary "other. represents not only the denomination change but also exhibits the rejection of her society and history, the Syrian Christian's past.

The life-changing love and affection of Baby Kochamma for Mulligan continue to propagate even

after his demise. This intense level of admiration shows the subversion of "Love Laws" that are inherited from the pre-colonial era that authorised only marriage for the women. It is important to remember in this case that chastity for women is not an option for the community of Syrian Christian. The actions of Baby Kochamma in this critical traditional circumstance speak a lot about her equivocal resistance against the repressive social order and patriarchy. Her affection can be seen from the quote:

Baby Kochamma resented Ammu because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman. The sad, Father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma. She had managed to persuade herself over the years that her unconsummated love for Father Mulligan had been entirely due to her restraint and her determination to do the right thing. (Roy, 2009, 44).

A deeper look at the character of Baby Kochama and Mammachi in tandem will reveal that the power is diffused. Thus, there is a resistance, whenever there is power. This means that even weak characters such as Mammachi and Baby Kochamma show some resistance for their identity against the injustice of economic and socio-political order (Al-Quaderi & Islam, 2011, 72-73). The Rahel also plays a significant role in the novel which was a daughter of Ammu. She was also deprived of parental love as Ammu plays the role of father and mother for her. As it is stated in the novel: "Ammu loved her children (of course), but their wide-eyed vulnerability and their willingness to love people who didn't really love them exasperated her and sometimes made her want to hurt them— just as an education, a precaution." Rahel feels resentment against her relatives as they dislike her very much, as stated in the novel:

What was there to say? Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons. Only that there was a snuffling in the hollows at the base of a lovely throat. Only that a hard honey-coloured shoulder had a semi-circle 128 J.A. Kearney of teeth marks on it. Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief. Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much (328)

Due to her miserable life, Rahel has a difficult time in her school and expelled almost three times. "While other children of their age learned other things, Estha and Rahel learned how history negotiates its terms and

collects its dues from those who break its laws." (Roy, 1998, p. 55).

She was suspended for the first time when she was found outside the garden of Headmistress and decorating the fresh cow's knob with tinny flowers. Finally, she was expelled from Convent Nazareth after continuous complaints of senior girls against her. Rahel was expelled from school second time when she was caught smoking. The third time, she was expelled as she had set fire to the false hair bun of Headmistress. The later Rahel confessed that she stole the bun. "For setting fire to her Headmistress" false bun which, under duress, Rahel confessed to having stolen" (Roy, 1997, 17).

Rahel refuses to be accepted by the teachers and school as her family, society and relatives refuse to take her. As Rahel is marginalised by the community on the basis of religion, class, age and gender, her actions of rejection and non-compliance can be considered as the resistance. With this kind of strength, Rahel wants to bring evolution in her life. The most prominent act of Rahel is the accomplishment of her unacceptable affection for Estha, her twin brother. This affection is the act of self-assertion that profoundly challenge the indigenous political inequities of the society (Al-Quaderi & Islam, 2011, 65; Mirza, 2018, 289).

Therefore, Ammu, Baby Kochamma, Rahel and Mammachi are the four main characters in *The God of the Small Things* who debrief the indigenous pre-colonial laws and customs of the patriarchal system. In addition to this, another significant action of these women can be seen from their resistance against the traditional "Love Rules" of the community. Interestingly, these women did not support the factors of local inequity that are impersonating as globalisation. Ammu resists and refuses to become a prostitute to the white employer of her husband. Baby Kochamma does not acquire every change in Father Mulligan's identity. Although she is converted into Roman Catholicism for his interest but refused to change over to Religion of Hinduism when Mulligan became Hindu. Mammachi tries to challenge authorities of the dominance of patriarchy. On the other hand, Rahel shows her a kind of resistance and revolt against the social standards and laws of loves through being unacceptable and beyond the pale love (Froula, n.d, 39, 41).

Katrak has also referred to the national leader of India Mahatma Gandhi who did great to summon women in the political movement with passive resistance. However, he never attempted to challenge the patriarchal Indian tradition that repressed women (Katrak, 1992, 395-96). Therefore, after independence, women found themselves again in their cultural roles as particularly wives and mothers. The ideas of Katrak are quite similar to that of Roy's as she stated that the notion of women suffering in the Indian tradition is glorified by

the mythological concepts. The significant myths of all-sacrificing ladies Savitri and Sita as a virtuous wife hold the particular socialisation pattern in Indian girls (Katrak, 1992, 398). These representations have been used in India as a role model for women and girls which depicts the female sexuality as a legitimately personified only in motherhood, marriage, domesticity and wifehood (Katrak, 1992, 396). All the mentioned feminised embodiment are still alive in India. Roy, as every female post-colonial writer, has addressed the expectations and identity associated with the women who impact their everyday life. According to Susheela Nasta, the purpose of Roy, as a post-colonial writer is not only to change the structure of male-centred language and ideology but also to demythologise and subvert the primordial male traditions and writings that seek to label women. Roy has highlighted this social-issue in "the God of the Small Things" in which the lead characters choose not to fulfil these role models and labels. Roy has depicted the characters that opposed the expectations thrust on them in spite of the social cost of violating the conventions.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The novel of Roy *The God of the Small Things* depicts the subaltern women. Some women have demonstrated the resistance, but being the subalterns, they do not possess the persuasive voice as compared to other members of the Indian society. These women elevate the resistance against local and worldwide inequalities, and this resistance is perhaps the exception. Through the tracks of personal involvement of these women, they interrogate the order of class, gender and caste explicitly, implicitly, partially, wholeheartedly, consciously and unconsciously. This novel depicts the struggle and resistance of women in pursuing their dreams and self-realisation against the post-colonial system of India. These women are similar in some aspects and different in other aspects, involve with each other in oppressions and sometimes attacking against the inequities of social customs, laws and structures. All the women that are discussed in the novel are plagued by the cruel kind of neo-colonialism and injustice in India masquerading as the globalisation of global connectivity. The insight view of the subaltern community is essential in understanding the critical and complex conditions of the Indian society. An in-depth consideration of Arundhati Roy's depiction of women in the novel can adequately and fully shed light on the four characters of women. These four characters accurately define the way of legal mechanism and social order for post-colonial Women of India.

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