

The Influence Of Social Upheavals On Contemporary Literature: A Study Of God Of Small Things**Dr. Harshita Chhikara****Assistant Professor****Department Of English****Sh.L.N.Hindu College****Rohtak****Haryana****(Received:7May2023/Revised:29May2023/Accepted:11June2023/Published:13June2023)****Abstract**

Arundhati Roy is an award-winning, the prestigious Booker Prize, writer famous for her first novel *The God of Small Things*. The novel revolves around the story of Ammu who is the mother of Rahel and Estha. Through Ammu, the novel portrays the social and political condition of Kerala from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. The novel represents Indian culture and Hinduism as the major religion of India. Velutha represents dalits. Within the time span of the late 1960s and early 1990s, many movements took place in the history of Kerala. The Naxalites Movement is also amid them. Kerala was the place where communism was established for the first time in the history of the world through democratic election. Some significant issues of feminism have been brought into light through the character of Ammu. This paper tries to showcase how Arundhati Roy has successfully manifested the multifarious as well as simultaneous influences of social upheavals in the context of history and how these affect the lives of the marginalized.

Keywords: Social Upheavals, Arundhati Roy**Introduction**

The novel stresses on one of India's neglected religious minorities, the Syrian-Christians. All through the novel, we find instances of the history of the Syrian-Christians and their struggle to cope with the local Hindu-based society. In 52 CE, the apostle St. Thomas reached India near the port of Cranganore. He managed to influence a number of Hindu and Jewish people to convert their religion. Also, he established seven churches. With the Britishers establishing their colonial political power in the region in the early 19th century, the minorities found themselves in a novel western influence. In 1816, the British government sent missionaries to preach Christianity from the Church of England's 'Church Missionary Society'. They helped the Syrian-Christian church

but never interfered. In *The God of Small Things* when Velutha's grandfather converted himself to avoid the miseries of the life of an untouchable, the Anglicans church took this as an opportunity. But the church considered him still as a 'Rice-Christian' (74). In the first chapter of the novel, we come to know that Estha and Rahel's great grandfather was a former priest of the Mar Thoma church. This church was recognized as distinct church tradition and this point has some significance when we recall Chacko's self-mocking assertions regarding the family's Anglophilia.

Caste System And Untouchability

The notion of caste is manifested in some of the early myths of Hinduism. For example, in *RigVeda*, caste is linked with the creation of myth of *Purusa*(man), which is the first celestial man out of whom whole of the universe was formed. The creation and classification of the whole human race into four different social categories is related with the votive recognition of this celestial being as Wendy O' Flaherty says,

When (the gods) divided the Man, into how many parts did they disperse him? What became of his mouth, what of his arms, what were his two thighs and his two feet called? His mouth was the Brahmin (the priest class), his arms were made into nobles (*ksatriyas*), his two thighs were the populace (*vaisyas*), and from his feet the servants (*sudras*) were born. The moon was born from his mind; the sun was born from his eye. (28)

Many of the historian consent upon a common issue, that is, the idea of cast association in ancient India came from the varied profession of the people. K. M. Sen rightly asserts:

The division of the society into four castes has, in all probability, always been theoretical, for, from the earliest time, we find references to a much more complicated caste structure the occupational divisions with which castes were associated give us a better view of the role of castes in the working of society. (28-29)

Caste system is contemplated as way of comprehending Hinduism and India, like various other historical accounts, by the European Orientalists. At the same time, they are of the opinion that caste system is accountable for both the cause and effect of India's economic and political limitations and India's failure to safeguard itself from outsider's attack and conquest. Therefore, Britain found a suitable advocacy in caste system to infiltrate India and set up colony as they

profitably subjugated India by making faith that India cannot shield itself and hence requires a guardian. Also, the seizure model became very authoritative and later on established the foundation for Hindu nationalist readings of history.

During the fight for independence, M. K. Gandhi stood firm by the untouchables and called them *Harijans*, meaning ‘children of God.’ He made sure their entry in temples. But he never attempted to alleviate them from their atrocious works like sweeping and latrine-cleaning, Mulk Raj Anand asserts in his novel *Untouchables*, “He is dirty because he cleans gentlemen’s dirt.”

In *The God of Small Things* Roy elaborates the destructive sense of caste deficiency felt by elderly untouchables like Velutha’s father, Vellya Paapen, as a consequence of Kerala’s old, orthodox rules of caste, distinguished in the ‘Crawling Backwards Days’ of the pre-independence period, when *Paravans* were not allowed to move even on the roads freely, not allowed to wear clothes in their upper bodies, not permitted to use umbrellas. Arundhati Roy stated,

I know that you share the anger at the heart of *The God of Small Things*. It is an anger that the ‘modern’ metropolitan world, the other India, the one in which I now live, tends to overlook, because for them it is something distant, something unreal.

Naxalite Movement

The naxalites were revolutionaries who begun armed civil disobedience within the northwest Bengal in the village of Naxalbari in March 1967. The movement was supported with the aid of China and, even though some of the Naxalbari revolutionaries had been killed in the brutal government suppression of the insurrection, the rebellion quickly spread to other states along with Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh.

In *The God of Small Things*, Velutha is assumed to have joined the Naxalites in his four years leave from Ayemenem, and despite the fact that he is being killed by the police is not always an answer to activist protest, it notwithstanding parallels, in its “sober steady brutality” (308), the now infamous violence meted out to the Naxalite revolutionaries, who had been tortured, raped and accomplished via police inside the pay of coalitional communist kingdom governments. Because of the impressionistic atmosphere of her presentation of Naxalite politics as a chain of emotional nation inclusive of anger and a worry of dispossession, it’s far tough to choose precisely how a long way we ought to study Roy’s comments about the Naxalite opponents as an

endorsement in their revolutionary goals. She has finally stated in interview that while the ‘pros and cons of violent and nonviolent resistance can be debated’, there may be no question that violent resistance harms girls physically and psychologically in deep and complex approaches. If we take her later essays into consideration, then Naxalbari may be greater important in *The God of Small Things* as a natural signal of radical dissent – as such, the rebellion works in Roy’s novel because the symbolic counterpart to the modern taboo-breaking transgression represented with the aid of Ammu and Velutha’s affair, an act which can also be explained as a bodily, deadly revolt towards age old oppressions.

Communism

In March 1957 Kerala became the main Indian state and in fact, the first government in the world to pick a communist government in a democratic way. Roy portrays in *The God of Small Things*, the principal time of comrade lead in Kerala, amid which “the communists wound up in the phenomenal – *pundits* said preposterous – position of governing a people and incite upheaval all the while” (67), arrived at a swift end after they furnished revolting bills, for instance, the completion of settlement charges for understudies, and challenged strikes and common disquiet. As specified by the narrator of *The God of Small Things*, the most plausible clarification behind the socialist exploit in Kerala – one that *The God of Small Things* is disloyalty plot reinforces – is that the Communist Party worked inside the contemporary power structure:

The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste- ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy. (66-67)

Sexuality And Gender Politics

If Roy’s novel is read in musical terms, the suppression of women forms an important cliché that exists, in a span of beautification, throughout the novel. “What was it that gave Ammu this Unsafe Edge? It was what she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber” (44).

At one point when Ammu ventures to claim acceptance under the law by creating an impression at the police headquarters after Velutha’s arrest, the police arbiter rejects the statement, censures

her calling her a *veshya* or whore. Roy tries to draw attention towards one of her meetings in the book *The Chequebook and the Cruise Missile*:

A lot of the women who are involved in resistance movements are also redefining what 'modern' means. They are really at war against their community's traditions, on the one hand, and against the kind of modernity that is being imposed by the global economy, on the other. They decide what they want from their own tradition and what they will take from modernity. It's a high-wire act. (125-126)

In *The God of Small Things* it is noticed that the bisecting forms of subjection that Ammu encounters are further reinstated by her pathetic legal status or locus stand I or, as her children misinterpret it, "Locusts Stand I, as a Syrian-Christian woman." (57) By incorporating references to the legal difference between Ammu and her brother Chacko – who acknowledges his own power of inheritance by informing her "what's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine." (57) Roy draws attention, indirectly, to a history of eviction and a fight for women's rights in which her own mother was greatly involved.

The legal and social conditions that collaborate against Ammu in *The Gold of Small Things* and create such a state of affairs where "there would be no more chances" (43) are particularly perturbing when we recollect that, by the late 1960s, Kerala was beginning to obtain a recognition as a social and economic triumph story.

As Radha Kumar asserts, one of the most significant development in Indian women's claim for indiscrimination has been a retraction away from the difficulty for women's bodies as locations of ethnic and national revival, towards more rights-based assertions that women's bodies should not be considered as the centre of social control. It is the truth of her maternal status that makes Ammu such an easy issue of social control, and her response to her children, whom she loves intensely but describes in a moment of rage as the "millstones around my neck" (253), highlights this stress.

Conclusion

The novel deals with the social and political problems of Kerala. It also lays stress on the history of social structure and political movements of that area. It is crucial to note that the novel does not describe the political upheavals chronologically, rather it brings into focus those incidents of history and politics which are intensely associated with the lives and struggles of the characters. The paper has examined how myriad roles of history and politics influenced and affected the

lives of people in different ways. As a consequence, everything here in this novel has been represented through varied incidents and speeches of the characters. Moreover, Roy tries to cast light on the degenerated condition of women and lower-caste people in the context of *Varna* system.

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