

Social Anxieties in Arundati Roy's '*The God of Small Things*'

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Abstract:

Arundhati Roy's book *The God of Small Things* is an example of a structurally hybrid work that analyses the social functioning of hybridity in a post-colonial Indian context. Roy demonstrates how culture, identity, and human relationships were altered into a complicated riddle after the colonial era through a stunning blend of fiction and truth, as well as a fractured and circular narrative structure from many perspectives. Roy methodically elucidates the social fears and major concerns of indigenous identity, as well as the challenges of hybridization that resulted from the colonial legacy. As a result, the focus of this presentation will be on how Roy use the novel's hybrid structure and language to locate hybridity as a type of cultural sustenance. It's also worth noting that Roy mingles Kerala's native language, Malayalam, with the colonizer's English, breaking grammar rules and rigid structures in the process. She also employs a poetical rhythm and rhyme to subvert the colonial language's rigidity. As a result, the purpose of this dissertation is to explain how in her novel *The God of Small Things*, Roy depicts a hybrid Indian locality highly influenced and torn between authentic indigenous identity and colonizer-acquired identity.

Keywords: hybridization, colonization, Indigenous, identity.

Introduction:

The documentation of history has been governed by the upper hand of cumulative forces and colonial ideologies; hence world history denies the cultural supremacy of Third World states like India. Through the process of "othering," the colonisers saw themselves as the centre, while the colonised were pushed to the periphery. India, as a culturally diverse country, exhibited an inclusive nature in terms of acquiring cultures, and colonial rule had such a profound influence on Indians that they eventually began to imitate their colonial masters in their daily lives, jeopardising authentic Indian identity and resulting in cultural hybridization.

In her novel *The God Of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy introduces the Ipe family, who live in Aymenam, a small town in Kottayam, Kerala. Through this fictional scenario, Roy depicts how colonial influence has pervaded the minds of Keralans in even the most

mundane of matters. In recent debates on postcolonial literatures, the term hybridity has been increasingly popular, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is an excellent read in this field. In one of her interviews, Roy stated that the novel's essence is built around a single defining image that she had in mind. She says:

"I didn't start with the first chapter or end with the last... I actually started writing with a single image in my head: the sky blue Plymouth with two twins inside it, a Marxist procession surrounding it".

This sight, which she mentions in the second chapter, "Pappachi's Moth," is also the image that invokes the novel's postcolonial hybridity subject. The sight of the Plymouth encircling an anglophilia-stricken family is a striking metaphor for the colonised psyche. Rahel and Estha, their divorced mother Ammu, uncle Chacko, a "Oxford Avatar" graduate, and their grand aunt Baby Kochamma, a spinster of imperial lineage, are among the passengers in the automobile. The Plymouth is a symbol of colonial history in of of itself, and the inmates can be considered its representations. The protester's voice may be heard among the red crowd that surrounds the car. A large billboard featuring pickle bottles and a Kathakali dancer can also be found on the Plymouth.

As a result, "Hybridity" is one of the novel's key concerns, and it serves as an important voice in the novel's postcolonial study. In reality, the Imperial "Entomologist" is the ancestor of the entire family. The entomologist's surname is no misnomer, and it correctly implies that he is the father (Pappachi) of Ammu and Chacko. Pappachi is a product of the colonial age, and his interactions with Britishers have instilled in him some aspects of imperial culture, making him a "hybrid." His progeny will inherit the legacy of his hybridity. However, the meaning and significance of the term "hybrid" vary from one character to the next in the novel, and the term receives a multi-voiced response. Because it allows for a dialogic examination, this post-colonial reading of Roy's novel will focus on the concept of "hybridism."

Social Anxieties in Multiple Voices:

The God of Small Things is a postcolonial family drama set in the Kottayam area of Kerala, where Syrian Christians predominate in a community that has acclimated to the English language and culture. They are an anglophile family who are motivated by their love of western culture. They can be regarded to have made the first step in acquiring European contact, describing it as "a profound rethinking of many of the main components and some revolutionary denial of the very ideas of the ancient civilization" by Sri Aurobindo. These individuals can also be categorised as Macaulay's Children, a term that refers to persons of Indian heritage who accept western civilization as a way of life or who exhibit coloniser

views (Macaulay). They demonstrate their Macaulayism in their treatment of the other members of the house.

Prior to Independence, Shri John Benaan Ipe or Pappachi worked as the Imperial Entomologist. He spent his retirement years alone and bitterly lamenting the fact that the moth he had discovered had not been named after him. He was an imperial patriarch who treated his wife and daughter as if they were insects, as his title suggests. These statements clearly reflect his polished demeanour in front of others and his hidden crimes at home:

“Alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father” (180).

According to Ania Loomba, “... Colonialism intensified patriarchal relations in colonized lands, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the women as emblems of their culture and nationality” (Loomba 168). Under this image, he represents the veiled face of conquerors that, in the name of moralizing the colonised, loot their resources and denigrate their culture. Pappachi was a result of colonial ideology, which treated colonial subjects who followed the colonizer's instructions. This group of hybrids voluntarily acknowledged the British's superiority and their own deficiency. Pappachi found peace in the Skyblue Plymouth he bought from an elderly Englishman in Munnar following his retirement. Pappachi was a familiar sight for the residents of Ayemenem “coasting importantly down the narrow road in his wide car, looking outwardly elegant but sweating freely inside his woollen suits” (48). The fact that Pappachi is unable to enter the colonizer's zone is revealed in this scene. His incapacity to complete the transition from colonised to coloniser status is exemplified. This line has two voices because there is a conscience that pokes fun at those mimics who still want to dress in western garb, a code of dress that is completely out of place in the 'hot gloomy Ayemenem.' At the same time, the Blue Plymouth is a symbol of colonial relics. Pappachi never allows any of his family members to handle the car, and Mammachi only gets custody of it after his death. This is emblematic of the period of transition between colonialism and postcolonialism.

The dust-coated Plymouth, ignored or rather discarded, as seen on Rahel's return after 23 years, is a clear proof of the colonizer's rejection. The Renaissance, which distinguished our nineteenth century, is the greatest gift of the English, after worldwide peace and social modernity, and indeed the direct result of these two forces. It is responsible for everything in modern India. The Renaissance began as an intellectual awakening that inspired our literature, education, thought, and art, but it evolved into a moral force that

revolutionized our society and church in the next generation. (British Contribution - Historical)

Despite his qualities, Pappachi's son Chacko refers to him as a "Anglophile" since he followed the colonizer's rules. Pappachi's authoritarian tendencies cause him to be estranged from his family. The metaphor of the Imperial entomologist mounting insects has additional meanings. This act of repairing organisms is comparable to the act of establishing rules and limitations for the helpless. The process of confining and limiting the talents of the weak can be explored in the context of imperialism, which underpins colonial actions (Said 8). Pappachi's connection with the British leads him to preach the colonial mentality and morality.

He adores his conquerors so much that he struggles all his life to be recognized by the English. He reveres them to the extent that he refuses to believe his daughter Ammu when she tells him of the Englishman's indecent proposal. Pappachi refuses to believe that "an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man's wife" (42). He believes so strongly in the civilizing mission of the so called superior race that he could not imagine that moral lapses would ensue from any English man. Their agenda, he felt was to moralize and uplift the backward and thus, he finds no remorse in the assimilation of the colonial mindset. But even after the death of Pappachi the colonial residue is seen to stay. The anglophilia is reflected in various degrees in his descendents. This legacy is especially perpetuated by Baby Kochamma and Mammachi after his death.

Ammu's tolerance is not shared by the two older female members of the family. Pappachi's anglophilia can be seen in them. The colonial psyche may also be seen in their treatment of the two ladies, Ammu, who is dark-skinned, and Margaret, who is white-skinned. Margaret, a divorcee and widow, is placed on pedestals of admiration, much as Sophie Mol is favoured over Rahel and Estha, and Ammu, a divorcee, is frequently humiliated. The native is treated as if she were a stepmother. They are continually discriminated against and reminded of their current situation.

While returning from the airport after receiving Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma, it is said "There would be two flasks of water. Boiled water for Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol, tap water for everybody else" (46). This is yet another instance of the anglophile adults of the Ipe family accepting the superiority of the whites with exception of Ammu. The twins too, are constantly made to feel their inferiority by the elders. Even the servant Kochu Maria takes the liberty to rebuke the kids: "Tell your mother to take you to your father's house. There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren't your beds. This isn't your house" (83). A kind of double colonization is imposed on

the twins due to their fatherless status. “The colonial forces, active through the colonized, create a pattern of master- slave relationship that realigns the entire power structure”

Chacko, the son of Pappachi has strains of Angolophilia in him. He would explain that “Pappachi’s mind had been brought into a state which made him like the English” (52). Chacko, in fact, believed that they were all a “family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away” (52). Chacko’s voice here is a clear evidence of the predicament of the “hybrid” who faces cultural disinheritance from both the worlds. He also refers to the inability of his types to retrace their steps and make a sense of their culturally rich ancestry; he feels he has been “locked out” and states that “when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows” (53) and is unable to understand the ‘whispering inside the history house’, because he says “our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re- dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves” (53). Ramraj, a noted critic calls it a metaphor of “conquest and submission” and informs us that “his residual anglophilia is just one of the many constituents of his postmodern psyche stamped... by multiple selves” (156).

Despite the fact that Ammu and Chacko are from the same generation, Ammu's contact zone as a postcolonial hybrid is far better. The tolerance and acceptance she finds in both realms prevents her from feeling the psychological stress that Chacko does. She is more in accord with Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Within recent post-colonial studies, Homi Bhabha's use of the idea of hybridity has been the most important and contentious. Bhabha emphasises the colonizer's and colonized's interdependence. This reliance or contact is largely responsible for postcolonial hybridity. He sees hybridity as the 'Third Space,' or crossroads of cultures. The load of culture's meaning is carried by the interstitial space between cultures. The fact that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial origin is significant, according to Bhabha.

For willingness to enter that foreign territory – where I have led you – may reveal that theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualising an international culture based on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity, rather than the exoticism of multi-culturism or the diversity of cultures. To that aim, we should recall that the load of meaning in culture is carried by the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between area. (Cultural Location 56) The dialogic link between cultures facilitates this entry into alien territory and contributes to the growth of cultural space. His reasoning also asserts why claims to culture's inherent purity and originality are unrealistic, as such monologism will only stifle cultural revolution.

Ammu's attitude toward cultural mingling and acceptance of a foreign culture is an entry point into this realm. One can avoid polarity politics by investigating this 'Third Space.' Embracing the hybridised nature of cultures allows us to move away from the problematic binarisms that have structured our understanding of culture up to this point. Ammu is tolerant of other cultures, yet she never dismisses her Indian sensitivities. Ammu seemed to like Takazhi Sivasankara Pillai's Chemmeen as much as Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*. Ammu listens to the Malayalam song "Panadorumukkuvanvannumuthinupoyi" with the same fervour that she listens to Mick Jagger's "Ruby Tuesday." Ammu accepts the acculturation process, but she is not tolerant of her imperial father's power structures. She expresses her dissatisfaction with the imperial culture of the United States.

Like Pappachi, Baby Kochamma and Mammachi are at ease with their anglophile identity. They don't seem to be in the same predicament as Chacko, nor do they share Ammu's displeasure at their overabundance of affection for the white cousins. While Chacko feels a feeling of loss as his native culture fades, Baby Kochamma and Mammachi never show any desire in preserving it. On the other hand, they express their affinity for a foreign culture while remaining completely at ease in their condition of hybridity and seniority.

Her ingenuity and cause are reflected in Roy's language. Such strategies establish a form of 'multi-acculturality,' or the ability to carry more than one fixed meaning. She does not rely solely on the resources available in English to express herself, nor is she bound by its rigorous constraints. Her familiarity with the great linguistic diversity of her home country aids her in infusing variety into the foreign speech. In her usage of English, she demonstrates both fury and aesthetic carefulness. Roy not only has an unrivalled ability to juggle letters and treat them with poetic compassion, but he also has a profound animosity that compels her to break the rules. Roy wants to bring English back to life by uprooting its dogma.

As critics such as C.D. Narasimhaiah have pointed out, Roy's freedom with language is not only a gimmick. At the same time, it's incredibly subversive and aesthetic. Bakhtin claims that a polyphonic work must be constructed in a unique fashion, or it will ultimately become monologic. If the improper creative processes are applied, the result will be a "objectivized and finished image of a dialogue, of the sort customary for every monologic fiction," rather than a true dialogue (Bakhtin, PDP 63). Roy's inventiveness is mirrored in her equivocal approach to the English language, which encompasses both love and denial, a process that runs throughout the work and is truly dialogic in that it allows for the production of various meanings.

Conclusion:

Arundhati Roy is one of the few writers who has dared to bend and adjust the English language's rhythms and structure to meet the needs and complexities of the Indian

experience. Roy attempts to make English a more authentic vehicle for expressing people's sensibility and consciousness through her creative use of the language. Despite the fact that Roy is a member of a hybrid culture, she is not willing to follow in the footsteps of her coloniser. "Mimicry is thus the sign of double articulation; a complicated method of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the "Other" as it visualises power," says HomiBabha. As a result, the idea of mimicry as a form of respect to the coloniser is called into question." The author uses the authority she gained from her privileged hybridity to decolonize the English language, emphasising her hybrid bearing. Here, she rejects the proposed mimicry of the British culture as practised by Pappachi, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma or the identity crisis experienced by Chacko. She aspires to build an alternative environment that is not solely based on western paradigms, but also includes a parallel renaissance process that Sri Aurobindo referred to as the third phase. Her Booker Prize triumph in 1997 coincided with India's fifty-year anniversary of independence from the United Kingdom. Some commentators regard this as "a magnificent act of imperial retribution" (Aldama 52). The postcolonial critical frame is merely one way of understanding *The God of Small Things*, given the novel's multi-voiced and multi-styled texture; not only how the narrative "writes back" to the centre with its inventive language, but also the expression of numerous hybrid consciousnesses.

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