

Volume-1, Issue-VI, Sept- 2017

Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

CONFERENCE

of

**Thiruvalluvar University
College of Arts & Science, Arakkonam.**

on

**"EMERGING TRENDS IN ENGLISH
LANGUAGE & LITERATURE"**



Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN NO- 2456-7078 IMPACT FACTOR- 4.520 VOLUME-1, ISSUE-7, SEPT-2017

CULTURAL TABOOS IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

¹E. Yogalakshmi and ²P. Hemavathy

¹Asst. Prof., Department of English, D.R.B.C.C.C. Hindu College,
Pattabiram

²Asst. Prof., Department of English, Soka Ikeda College of Arts &
Science for Women, Ambattur

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the social-cultural status, of Indian society especially in Roy's community. Her literary works always tell about social and tradition also symbols to be analyzed. The novel struck out with this theme and explains how the social relationships shaped the individual characters. The social relationships consist of other divisions like religion, culture, class and caste. The paper shows a limelight on the complex social-cultural status in the life of the characters.

KEYWORDS:

Ethical transgression, Love Laws, Social Cobweb.

INTRODUCTION

People around the world are so very different. They have created a complex system of cultural status to aid in the categorization of life and to define behaviour and perception. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is the novel that captures a clear glimpse of the culture of Indian society and she also explains how that man created cultural concepts influence their day to day life. The novel brings the reader close towards the land and culture of Kerala. Roy's splendid narrative style stimulates an intimacy with her society and assists to gain knowledge about her Syrian Christian Community. The characters in this novel are deeply rooted with the caste system. With the fixed taboos they defined their own characters. The back stories of this novel provide information about the central characters' rigid behaviour with the codes and conduct.

Roy's subsequent literary output largely consisted of socially oriented issues faced by her homeland. Suzanna Arundhati Roy was born on November 24, 1961 at Shillong, Meghalaya, India. She was an Indian author, actress, political activist and best known for the award-winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) and for her involvement in environmental and human rights causes. Arudhati Roy's

"Emerging Trends in English Language & Literature"

father was a Bengali tea planter, and her mother was a Christian of Syrian descent who challenged India's inheritance laws by successfully suing for the right of Christian women to receive an equal share of their fathers' estates. Though trained as an architect, Roy had little interest in design; she dreamed instead of a writing career. After a series of odd jobs, including artist and aerobics instructor, she wrote and co-starred in the film *In Which Annie Gives It to Those Ones* (1989) and later penned scripts for the film *Electric Moon* (1992) and several television dramas.

Roy's debut novel, *The God of Small Things* gives a wide acclaim to her novel became the biggest-selling book by a non-expatriate Indian author and won the 1998 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Among her publications were *Power Politics* (2001), *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002), *War Talk* (2003), *Public Power in the Age of Empire* (2004), *Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers* (2009), *Broken Republic: Three Essays* (2011), and *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (2014) were notable. In 2017 Roy published *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, her first novel in 20 years. The work blends personal stories with topical issues as it uses a large cast of characters, including a transgender woman and a resistance fighter in Kashmir, to explore contemporary India. In recognition of her outspoken advocacy of human rights, Roy was awarded the Lannan Cultural Freedom Award in 2002, the Sydney Peace Prize in 2004, and the Sahitya Akademi Award from the Indian Academy of Letters in 2006.

There is a wealth of information available in the novel regarding the social issues. Roy tells dozens of stories, with multiple characters in such a scattered way, symbolizing the dishevelled lives of the characters themselves. Rahel and Estha, the fraternal twins, represent and illustrate most of the themes in the novel, including forbidden love, discrimination and familial and social tensions in such a large family with a lot to lose. *The God of Small Things* has more universal themes like betrayal, family and love – things we can all relate to. the story spans two dozen years, jumping back and forth, through flashbacks and flash forwards, from 1969 when fraternal twins Rahel and Estha were 7 years old, and then to 1993, when they reunite at age 31.

The story begins with Pappachi, their grandfather how he lost his chance to become a famous entomologist, and throughout his life takes it out on Mammachi, their grandmother by beating her constantly. They have two kids – a daughter, Ammu and a son, Chacko. Chacko, a scholar, studies in England and marries an English woman named Margaret, and they have a child together named Sophie. Their marriage falls apart when Margaret falls for another man. They divorce, and then Chacko returns home. Ammu on the other hand, wanting to be more adventurous, goes off to live with a relative away from Ayemenem, where she meets a man named Baba and marries him. They have twins: a boy, Esthappen, and a girl, Rahel. Baba is abusive and incompetent. He loses his job, and his only chance of getting it back is to let his boss have sex with his wife. Before that can happen Ammu takes the kids and back home to Ayemenem.

The main plot of this story opens with the arrival of Chacko's ex-wife and daughter Sophie. Two main incidents happened in the fraternal twins' life when they travel to airport to receive Margaret and Sophie. The first incident happens to Estha in the theatre. While watching the film *The Sound of Music*, Estha can't help but sing along with the songs in the movie. He is told to go, stand in the back so as to not bother anyone else, and he ends up getting molested by the movie theater's snack vendor. Later the next day, after they pick up Margaret and Sophie, Rahel feels jealous of the attention Sophie is getting, and goes to her friend Velutha to talk about it, telling him she saw him at the march, but he makes up a lie, not wanting his employers to know that he is a communist. Ammu sees her daughter and Velutha

"Emerging Trends in English Language & Literature"

talking together, and it seems to make her jealous.

Meanwhile, Estha is still traumatized after the incident with the snack vendor, and thinks of a way to escape his current life, believing that the vendor will come for him once more. He tells his sister his plan to leave, and they find a boat to fix up and get ready. As this is happening, it is discovered that Ammu and Velutha are having an affair, which is forbidden, especially because of Velutha's low class. The family hears of this, and locks Ammu in her room. The kids find this a perfect time to escape, and Sophie begs to go with them. A log collides with the boat and Sophie drowns and dies. Rahel and Estha swim to shore and hide in a large place called "History House." The tragic death of Sophie stirs the entire family. Baby Kochamma knits a story about Velutha in order to safeguard her family status in the society. She deceives the police by telling Velutha raped Ammu and stole the kids.

After Sophie's funeral, Estha moves to live with his father, Baba. Rahel stays with Mammachi and is sent to school, and Ammu runs off to live on her own. Years later Rahel reunites with her mother when she discovers that Ammu has a lung disease that eventually kills her. Rahel finishes her studies and moves to America and lives a normal life as an architect, married to a white man that she doesn't really love. At age 31, Rahel finally hears that her brother, Estha, had returned to Ayemenem, and so she heads back to meet with him. Rahel spends a lot of time with him as they go through their old stuff, reminiscing together. This leads to them having sex, and for the first time in decades, being with someone they love, even if that person is not someone they should be in love with.

The main characters of this novel carry forward a conflict in their minds. Especially the 'love laws' which are framed by the Indian social setup are not the same with the other nations. This creates a mental conflict in the lives of the main characters that too specifically in Ammu and Velutha's love and in between Estha and Rahel's relationship. The cultural setup of the community makes the people to consider a small thing as a great issue. Baby Kochamma, one of the leading negative characters of the novel used such social issues to betray her own family. On the whole the social obligations mainly hold the minds of the characters. Furthermore, codes and ethics exist in all societies. Every religious group has their own religious convention. Christian religious laws are contrast with the other religious groups. IPE family belongs to "Syrian Christian Community", from Kerala, who are maintaining its ties with the Christian homeland. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma used their religious faith to justify their actions.

Roy portrayed an ethical transgression through her main characters Estha and Rahel who are half-Hindu and half-Christian. Social codes and ethics frame both internal and external conflicts in the novel. Estha and Rahel must struggle with this conflict because of the transgression. They visualized how was the class system of landlords and laborers still deep rooted in the minds of the public in the case of Velutha. Similarly that class deviation alone lay down the Love Laws, "who should be loved and how and how much. The laws that make grandmother's grandmothers, uncle's uncles, mother's mothers, cousin's cousins, jam jam, and jelly jelly."

As the main part the novel questioned the rigid social structure. Novel set up in the year 1993 but it takes the readers backwards in 1964 through the time span, it makes the reader to realize the power structure in society and shows how the powerful society suppress the less powerful one. Society is just like a cobweb. It is really intricate to understand. The social cobweb consists of caste system, gender oppression, police atrocity, fake leaders and so on. This intricate social cobweb explained well by the narrator with the help of the characters. Church failed to do proper burial after Ammu's death just because her marriage with an outsider. Mr. Pillai, a Marxist leader used his position for his own

"Emerging Trends in English Language & Literature"

personal gain. He also failed to help Velutha when he caught up by the police, though he knew the true motif of Velutha's arrest, he refuses to save him.

CONCLUSION:

The social and political milieu depicted in the novel expressed Roy's anger over the patriarchal society. The novel further explains how the society breeds cultures which that always draw a boundary line for women and also frame territory for less power people in the name of class and caste. The intertwined narration of class division, caste system, political issues, and women suppression shows Roy's power and wide opened eyes on her surroundings. The novel brings out the hidden social oppressions to the lime light through the lively characters.

REFERENCES:

1. Dhawan, R.K. Arundhati Roy. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1999.
2. Roy, Arundhati . Wikipedia. Com. Wikipedia, 21 August 2017. Web. 26 August 2017.
3. Roy, Arundhati. The God of Small Things. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002.

