

CONSTRAINED PURSUIT: EXPLORING HAPPINESS AND LIBERTY IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

K.T.Shaima, S. Saranyadevi, Ph.D Research Scholar Department of English Dr. SNS Rajalakshmi College of Arts and Science Affiliated with Bharathiyar University Coimbatore.

Dr. D. Divya Research Supervisor Head of the Department Dr. SNS Rajalakshmi College of Arts and Science Affiliated with Bharathiyar University Coimbatore

Abstract

In Arundhati Roy's novel "The God of Small Things," the characters navigate a world fraught with societal constraints that hinder their pursuit of happiness and freedom. This abstract explores the interplay between personal desires and the limitations imposed by societal norms, encapsulating the struggles of individuals like Estha, Rahel, Ammu, and Velutha. Their yearning for autonomy and genuine fulfilment clashes with the rigid structures of caste, societal expectations, and cultural norms. As they challenge these constraints, tragic consequences unfold, illustrating the heavy toll exacted when individuals endeavour to break free from societal boundaries in search of genuine happiness and freedom.

Keywords: Liberty, Happiness, Freedom, Culture. Society.

Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house—the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture—must be resurrected from the ruins and examined. (17, *The God of Small Things*)

The God of Small Things perfectly captures the idea that momentous, life-changing events can happen quickly and change the course of entire lives. The aftermath of such tragedies is emphasized by drawing an analogy between a burned house and its rescued parts. Imagine a house that has been completely devastated by fire. Amid the ashes and rubble, some objects manage to survive, albeit with some damage: the burned clock, the burned portrait, and the burned furniture. Despite having been damaged by the fire, these ruins preserve the past and memories of the past.

Like this, when events occur that alter someone's life, they leave behind remnants, memories, and effects that endure. Like the things that can be saved from a burning house, these moments must be thoroughly investigated and comprehended. Even though they are altered or damaged, they nevertheless hold the essential elements of what transpired components that, when combined, shed light on the events and how they affected people's lives. The remark prompts contemplation on how life-changing events, no matter how short, can influence a person's entire trajectory. Despite these moments' frequently altered or broken form, it begs us to recognize them, examine them, and understand the changes they bring about in our lives.

The secret of the Great Stories is that they have no secrets. The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. The ones you can enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably... in the Great Stories you know who lives, who dies, who finds love, who doesn't. And yet you want to know again. (229, *The God of Small Things*)

The force and attraction of excellent stories are captured in this quote. It implies that the basic quality of these stories—rather than their enigmas or surprising turns—lies in their capacity to strike a deep chord with us. The notion that great stories are secret-free suggests that unexpected turns of events or withheld details are not necessary for them to be powerful. Rather, their allure stems from their capacity to establish a connection with common human realities, feelings, and experiences. Because these stories deal with issues and characteristics that people can relate to on a universal level, they feel welcoming and familiar, almost like a comforting embrace.

The idea of knowing who survives, who dies, and who falls in love or not testifies to how predictable these stories are. Paradoxically, though, people are drawn to these stories over and time again even when they know how they end. This rereading is an attempt to rediscover the feelings, experiences,

and revelations that these stories arouse rather than to find something new within the story itself. Even in their familiarity, it's about finding solace, connection, and a sense of belonging in these stories.

Because these great stories provide a space for us to explore and process our own emotions, experiences, and thoughts, they enable us to safely inhabit their world. They take on the role of a canvas onto which we may project our emotions and viewpoints, enabling us to live inside these stories and derive comfort or significance from them. This essentially emphasizes that even when the endings are known, the timeless power of great stories to arouse feelings, spark conversations, and establish a space where people can connect with essential aspects of the human experience is what makes them so alluring.

In her work of fiction, *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy explores the lives of her characters, particularly the twins Rahel and Estha, in a world where family expectations and societal conventions have a big impact on their quest for freedom and happiness.

Rachel and Estha are raised in a world characterized by strict caste rules, cultural norms, and rigorous social systems that control their lives from a young age. These social norms are especially onerous in their hometown of Ayemenem, India, where customs and societal expectations have a significant impact on people's decisions and behaviours. The twins' experiences serve as a metaphor for the greater challenges that people encounter when attempting to reconcile their aspirations with the constraints of a society that places rigid roles and restrictions on them. They wish to be free from the expectations of society, yet their goals conflict with the customs that are common in their neighbourhood.

The protagonists' attempts to escape these limitations are resisted throughout the book, which frequently has tragic results. For Rahel and Estha, pursuing freedom and happiness means defying social and family expectations, which makes for a difficult and painful path. Social forces thwart their yearning for liberty and happiness, which leaves them feeling trapped and disillusioned. The story masterfully captures the complexities of their struggle, emphasizing how household responsibilities and societal conventions may stifle uniqueness and obstruct the search for true freedom and pleasure. Roy skilfully incorporates these ideas into the story to show how the individuals' attempts to rebel against social norms ultimately determine their fates and the tragic events that take place in their lives. In general, *The God of Small Things* explores happiness and freedom and sheds light on the difficulties people encounter in attempting to express their uniqueness and find true joy in a culture that is deeply rooted in customs and expectations. In the novel, the Ministries of Freedom and Happiness function as metaphors for the larger structural and sociological factors that limit the protagonists' capacity to live free lives and experience true happiness.

These "Ministries" are symbolic representations of the social structures that restrict human fulfilment and individual autonomy, such as the caste system, politics, and cultural norms. They represent the institutionalized hurdles that prevent the characters from fully accepting who they are and going after their ambitions.

The expectations and conventions of society that specify what constitutes happiness in a community are personified by the Ministry of Happiness. It stands for the predetermined expectations and standards that society has established, which frequently push people to adopt roles and actions that are considered appropriate by the dominant norms. The characters are unable to explore their wants and look for fulfilment outside of the set parameters because of this strict notion of happiness.

In a similar vein, the Ministry of Freedom represents the institutional frameworks that impede the characters' autonomy and freedom of choice, such as the governmental hierarchy and the caste system. These systems impose prejudice and social stratification, which limits a person's ability to live genuinely and make judgments.

Arundhati Roy criticizes societal problems that impede the quest for pleasure and freedom and limit individual liberty through these symbolic representations. Readers can comprehend the oppressive nature of society frameworks through The Ministries, which show how these forces obstruct the characters' attempts to break free from societal expectations and attain true fulfilment. The narrative of the book deftly interweaves the struggles of its characters within the confines of these Ministries, underscoring the significant influence of societal norms on their lives and the difficulties of pursuing

personal freedom and happiness in a culture that is ruled by inflexible standards and structural injustices.

Estha, Rahel, Ammu, and Velutha stand in for those who, in the face of a society firmly rooted in prejudice, inflexible customs, and social hierarchies, are attempting to find happiness and freedom. Their goals and deeds go against the accepted conventions, with far-reaching and frequently tragic results. As twins, Rahel and Estha have a special bond that goes beyond what society would normally anticipate. But their nonconformist actions and aspirations run counter to the social mores that demand conformity. They struggle against social and familial norms because of their innocence and desire for personal freedom. Their acts, which are frequently motivated by the desire for freedom and happiness, unintentionally have catastrophic results that determine the sad path their lives take.

The mother of the twins, Ammu, likewise struggles with social expectations. She enters an illicit relationship with Velutha, a member of the "Untouchable" caste, because of her quest for independence and love. The harsh consequences that follow this violation of the rigid caste system demonstrate how much societal standards impose restrictions on personal freedom and happiness. The talented carpenter Velutha stands in for the downtrodden and disenfranchised in society. The caste system pushes him to the periphery of society despite his gifts and kindness. He sadly meets his end because he defies social constraints in his pursuit of love, equality, and decency.

The pursuit of freedom and pleasure by these characters turns into a conflict between firmly embedded societal hierarchies and prejudice. Their hardships serve as a reflection of the larger social issues of tyranny and injustice, showing the tremendous cost people bear when they defy social standards and pursue personal fulfilment outside of accepted bounds. The lives of these characters are deftly woven by Arundhati Roy, who shows how their pursuit of freedom and pleasure clashes with the inflexible rules of society to disastrous results. The book poignantly illustrates the human cost of trying to escape social norms in the name of true freedom and pleasure via their experiences.

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy explores in detail the complex relationship between individual desires and social limits. The novel effectively illustrates how pursuing happiness and freedom comes at a significant cost in a society where possibilities and status are determined by inflexible systems. Fundamentally, the story presents persons battling with their wants, which frequently conflict with the expectations and social mores that are common in Ayemenem. These social structures which include the caste system, cultural customs, and familial responsibilities create a stifling atmosphere in which breaking from the expected duties has dire repercussions.

The characters' desires for independence, true love, and self-expression are strongly opposed to the norm in society. The twins, Rahel and Estha, for example, long for a relationship that goes beyond the constraints placed upon them and is willing to break free from the boundaries of their assigned positions as per social conventions. They unintentionally put themselves in situations that have disastrous outcomes because of their innocence and desire for happiness.

Ammu and Velutha challenge the rigid restrictions imposed by the caste system in their quest for equality and love. The social hierarchy is challenged by their unlawful relationship, which has disastrous effects on both them and others around them. Their lives suffer greatly because they yearn for pleasure and personal fulfilment colliding with rigid societal systems.

Roy deftly conveys the high price people must pay for daring to challenge social norms in the name of true happiness and freedom via these characters' hardships. The story of the book powerfully illustrates the struggles people have when they are confined to a system that firmly establishes their identities and opportunities. It also highlights the terrible costs and great sacrifices that come with trying to find personal freedom in such a society.

The God of Small Things captures a moving picture of the never-ending quest for freedom and pleasure in a society constrained by prejudice and social expectations. The work skilfully interweaves the lives of its characters to demonstrate how these limitations place severe restrictions on personal decisions, with frequently tragic results. The novel's characters struggle with a society that is firmly rooted in strict conventions and biases. Personal autonomy and true fulfilment become unattainable aspirations

in a stifling environment created by the weight of cultural expectations surrounding caste, gender, and family obligations.

Among others, Estha, Rahel, Ammu, and Velutha long for independence and happiness beyond the limitations imposed by social conventions. Nevertheless, opposition, exclusion, and tragedy greet their attempts to escape these limitations. Their aspirations collide with the prevalent biases, causing terrible outcomes that affect them for the rest of their lives.

Ammu, who aspires to love and independence, encounters strong social criticism because of her association with Velutha, a guy from a lower caste. This forbidden love disobeys social norms and sets off a series of unfortunate events that affect everyone concerned. The naiveté and need for a deeper bond between Rahel and Estha beyond social conventions thrust them into uncontrollable circumstances that ultimately result in unanticipated catastrophes that permanently alter their lives.

Roy's story vividly and heartbreakingly illustrates the human cost that results when people defy social standards in the pursuit of true freedom and happiness. The novel's depiction of the characters' hardships and the terrible outcomes they encounter strikes a chord as a moving critique of society's constraints and the toll they have on people's lives. In the end, "The God of Small Things" is a powerful reminder of the costs people bear while attempting to achieve true pleasure and freedom in a culture that is firmly rooted in stereotypes and expectations.

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