

**A SHORT ANALYSIS OF FACT AND FICTION IN
ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS***

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Indian fiction in English, more accurately, the Indian novels in English, which has received a wide acclaim across the globe in recent years, embarked its glorious journey from the publication of *Raj Mohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in the late nineteenth century. It grew enormously every decade with new themes, styles and motifs and also through these years it has reflected the society and the societal changes. In the earlier stages, the novels were historical in content but gradually changed and fictionalized the facts of the country and world around. During freedom struggle in India, the novels reverberated with Gandhian values and spirit. The ongoing struggle to achieve freedom became the theme of the most of the novels produced during that time. K.S. Venkatramani's novels *Murugan, the Tiller, Kandan, the Patriot* were mainly based on Gandhian ideals and Gandhi's Ahimsa. Similarly, A.S.P. Ayyer's novels *Balaaditya* set in fifth century, and *Three Men of Destiny* based on Alexander's invasion of India in fourth century B.C, though were historical in content, and were Gandhian in spirit. Gandhian nationalism forms the backdrop for K.Nagaraj's *Athavar House*.

After independence from British, the Partition of India and communal clashes were fictionalised by many writers. The other issues that influenced literature greatly were the merging of princely states, abolition of untouchability and rising concern for the emancipation of women. Horror of the Partition is brought realistically by Khuswant Singh in his novel, *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Balachandra Rajan in *The Dark Dancer*, Chaman Nahal in *Azadi*. Manohar Malgonkar's *The Distant Drum* deals with the issue of Partition. His *A Bend in the Ganges* portrays the turmoil of the society from Swadeshi movement to the Partition of the country. *The Prince* presents the changes brought by the independent country to end the sovereignty of rulers. Proclamation of the Emergency by Indira Gandhi and the confusion that ensued became the theme for many writers in late 1970s and 1980s. Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, Rohinton Mistry's *Fine Balance* and *Such a Long*

Journey, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*; Nayatara Sahgal's *Rich like Us* are the novels that have references to the Emergency and its aftermath.

The fictional world took more and more facts from the society and presented it with a strong story line. The writers of postcolonial India, particularly in 1980s, rejected nationalism, as the idealism about nationalist politics, began to recede with the death of a generation of freedom-fighters, who had fought selflessly for the country. Writers developed cosmopolitan and transnational consciousness moving away from nationalism. Cosmopolitan diaspora writers emerged during this period and their narratives dealt with themes like hybridity, multiculturalism, migration and identity crisis of immigrants. The idea of unity that helped the nationalistic struggle and formation of new nation-state in the preceding years began to crumble. The notion of unity was questioned by many. The corrupted nation and its politics compelled the writers to criticise the state strongly, and a rich vein of satire and angst is found in literature of this time. Postcolonial writers became the adversary of their own state and did not limit their resistance to colonial power alone. Arrival of Salman Rushdie brought a lot of changes in the Indian novels in English and this period is considered a renaissance of Indian fiction in English. His writing deviated from the realistic mode of writing predominant in that period and he took new innovative methods. According to Jon Mee, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* brought many changes in the Indian English novels like certain "postmodern playfulness, the turn to history, a new exuberance of language, the reinvention of allegory, the sexual frankness, even the prominent references to Bollywood" (358). *Midnight's Children* was the first novel to win the Man Booker Prize and it paved way for many prizes in future. Stephanian School of writers emerged after Rushdie and wrote on various issues with new stylistic innovations. In this period, appeared a promising Indian female writer, Arundhati Roy who won the second Booker for India with her first novel, *The God of Small Things*. She is not just a novelist but an environmentalist and activist against the dominance of multinational companies. Her second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* was published in 2017 and has been widely translated. She has written several articles and essays and all these writings are laced with the hard core facts that threaten the poor and less privileged of the country.

The story of *The God of Small Things* moves back and forth and is told from the point of view of Rahel, one of the twins in the novel. The backdrop of the novel is a rural town, Ayemenem in Kerala, and showcases the life of an upper middle class family who run a pickle factory, 'Paradise Pickles and Preserves'. The entire story is spun around Ammu who

comes to live with her parents, Mammachi and Pappachi with her twins Rahel and Estha. Though Ammu defies her parents and marries on her own, she returns to them after her husband proves to be an alcoholic and cheat. Ammu's brother Chacko, who is an Oxford return lives there in the house after his divorce with Margaret Kochamma. Ammu's aunt Baby Kochamma too lives there. When Chacko's daughter is welcomed with exuberance by everyone at home, Rahel and Estha are considered liabilities. Mammachi understands that Chacko has his own biological needs and maintains silence over his secret life with the women labourers. On the other hand no one pays any attention to Ammu and her needs. These results in Ammu's relationship with a communist, Velutha, who belongs to the 'Pariah' community, and they secretly meet in the riverside at night. When this relationship comes to the knowledge of Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, they frame him in a false kidnapping case. Velutha is brutally handled by the police and he dies in the lock up. The family throws Ammu out and they force her to return her son Estha to her husband. Ammu dies after some time and Rahel spends rest of her life in different schools and finally ending in America. Unable to live a happy life, Rahel returns to Ayemenem when she comes to know that Estha has returned to the house.

Arundhati Roy has written the story with lot of real facts prevalent in the society. She fictionalizes all these facts into a beautiful fiction. Caste discrimination, status of women in society, religious hypocrisy and the class differences are a part of a society in India. Roy takes up all these issues and weaves her story in such a way that one cannot differentiate fact from fiction. When fiction emerges from imagination, fact is a hard core reality. *The God of Small Things* mixes these hard facts to make it a successful story. In the words of P.S.Ramana:

This highly realizable narrative tells a potentially dark tale of human suffering brought about by casteism and ideologies. The novel particularly exposes the caste/class based, gendered and biased social system manifestly operational, in Indian society that gives privilege to the higher castes, upper classes over lower classes, poor classes and women. (226)

The class and caste discrimination and how the privileged dominate the under privileged is realistically presented in the death of Velutha. When Velutha is framed in the death of Sophie Mol, Chacko's daughter, police torture Velutha instead of investigating the case properly. Velutha is beaten to pulp and Roy's words very powerfully echoes the condition of the caste

ridden society, “After all, they are not battling an epidemic. They are merely inoculating a community against an outbreak” (GST 309). The family is more worried that their woman had brought disgrace to the family by having a relation with a ‘Pariah’.

The pretensions of the leaders who claim that they the saviours of the poor is laid bare by Roy in her portrayal of Comrade Pillai the Communist Leader. When Velutha, who was very active in Communist party, goes to Pillai for help to save him, he realises the false nature of the leaders. Pillai says “But Comrade, you should know that party was not constituted to support worker’s indiscipline in their private life” (GST 60). And Roy writes, “Another religion turned against itself” (GST 60).

Another important issue, rather a hard fact is the condition of women in the society. The rude male chauvinistic society’s treatment of women is given an intense examination in the novel. Ammu and Mammachi are the women who suffer the dominance of men and society. Both these characters suffer at the hands of their husbands but are unable to show resistance. Ammu has to run away with her kids instead of exposing her husband to the society, similarly Mammachi gets beatings from her husband regularly and it is like routine for her. Till today the same condition prevails. The traditional Indian society was indifferent to women and their sufferings. It considered women must be under the care of men and cannot live alone. Dependence of women on men is clearly brought by Roy when she describes the condition of Mammachi. She writes, “The day that Chacko prevented Pappachi from beating her... Mammachi packed her wifely luggage and committed to Chacko’s care” (GST 168) and she goes to the extent that she builds a separate entrance for her son’s ‘Needs’ through which the poor pariah women came to satisfy Chacko’s ‘Needs’. When Mammachi understands the wants of her son, she fails to understand her daughter’s needs. So when Ammu’s relationship comes out she is thrown out of the family. Women grope in darkness unable to voice out their plight. The number of domestic violence happening in the society that women are still suffering at the hands of men.

The hard facts and truths of life and society are fictionalised into an award winning story in *The God of Small Things*. The police brutality is witnessed in every nook and corner of the world now. The caste bias and the power of the upper class/caste over the downtrodden is present even now in India. Domestic violence and subjugation of women has become a part and parcel of the society. All these facts are made into a fiction in the novel.

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