

Indian Societal Values: A Study of Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things' from Post Modernism Perspective

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Values are the internal precepts by which we make our decisions. When we are confronted by choices, opinions or moral dilemmas, the decisions we make will indicate what values we hold. The five human and moral values are righteousness, peace, truth, love and non-violence. Human Values give worthiness and respect to life. The world should realise that when Gandhi talked of non-violence, self suffering, consideration for others, honesty, he had only fear of value erosion and wanted to save the humanity from self-destruction. For him the ideal human being was one who was concerned about others their needs, desires, miseries in which he could be of help to them. There is indeed a global need to project Gandhi's ways before the whole world that there is no other way than to adopting the human and moral values.

Society Family and Values:

Family is the foundation stone of a society. Family system often determines the cohesion and disintegration of a society. It teaches us to be social. It teaches us to digest the fact that there is a common interest, which may be more important than individual interest. Thus it may require to be given up in favour of family interest. It modifies individual behaviour and cultivates tolerance, patience, respect for others, love and affection, dedication, care and sacrifices. It checks selfishness and restrains rigidity. In fact, a family is the first institution that cultivates social values and social behaviour among individuals. Social values are basically family values written at large. Had the family been absent, concepts like nationalism could never originate Traditional Asian Societies have survived for thousands of years mainly because there has been a consistent emphasis on enforcing family values. Collapse of the family system simultaneously leads to social breakdown.

Changing Values in the Family and Society:

In our present day society there is erosion of values and degeneration in every sphere of activity. The family has disintegrated in recent years significantly due to a number of changes in modern society and culture. As a cohesive unit with a singular purpose the family is no more replaced by a group of individuals with seemingly separate agendas. The contributing factors vary from a lack of parental involvement to changing cultural morality to personal indifference of the participants but they all have a negative impact in asserting and maintaining family values.

Literature Reflects Society:

Literature is said to be a reflection of the society in which it was born. Different periods and styles of literature reflect the changes that took place in that society at various points of time. Political, Economic and Social changes affect the psychology of the people and since literature is created by human being, it cannot help being influenced by such changes.

The term realism describes the common features of what became the distinctive form of prose fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century. It attempts to make literature a "slice of life" with an aim to portray life with fidelity. It is not concerned with idealization, with rendering things as beautiful when they are not, or in any way presenting them in any false guise. It developed out of an interest in accuracy reflected in the rise of science and the social sciences as sources of empirical truth. Realists try to present an accurate imitation of life as it is, to be faithful to the surfaces of life.

Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things' as a Post-Modern Narrative:

Post Modernism favours seeing the world in more rhetorical terms as a field of contending smaller narrative, where people strive to make their point of view and their interest paramount by making their narratives more convincing. Such is the case of Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things". There is a definite story here but a multitude of different stories that form a kaleidoscopic view of events and experiences encountered by the characters of the book.

Objectives:

Keeping in view the above discussion, this paper will make an attempt to see how Arundhati Roy uses Post Modernism theory as a tool to refine our sensitivity to

differences and reinforce our ability to tolerate the incommensurable in regard to Indian Societal Values in her Booker Prize winning novel "The God of Small Things".

Methodology:

The Research Methodology adopted for the present study is Content Analysis.

Findings and Discussion:

Arundhati Roy's, 'The God of Small Things' which won Britain's prestigious Booker Prize launched its author to international fame soon after its publication in 1997. The novel tells the story of the Kochammas, a wealthy Christian family in a small village in the Southern Indian State of Kerala. Based loosely from the perspective of Rahel Kochamma, who has returned to her home town to see her twin brother, it pieces together the story of the dramatic events of Rahel's Childhood that drastically changed the lives of everyone in the family. This is an ambitious work which addresses many universal themes ranging from religion to biology. Roy stresses throughout the novel that great and small things are interconnected, and that historical events and seemingly unrelated details have far-reaching consequences throughout the community and country.

Roy deals with the classical material of the tragedy of the Kochammas in the modern context to show the erosion of values and degradation in present day society. The members of the family are introverts; Baby Kochamma, Ammu, Chako and Pappachi are unable to come to terms with their complexes. They struggle against the outer world, and the defeat renders them confused and frustrated. The sense of failure expresses itself in dehumanizing others around them.

The Kochamma family has a history of poor relations between its male and female members. Ammu's mother, Mammachi, for example, is severely beaten and abused by her husband and she becomes the victim of his anger and frustration whenever he faces a failure in the outside world. He leaves little room for Ammu to grow as an independent and confident individual. In "The God of Small Things" the conflict exists at individual and societal levels, and people are helpless to resolve these levels of friction. Velutha, the outcaste can never co-exists peacefully with the "touchable" communities for as long as the stigma of untouchability is attached to him and countless others like him. "Velutha is "highly intelligent" an excellent carpenter, but he is also "The God of Loss", "The God of Small Things"- He left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no images in mirror"(265)."

In contrast to Velutha, Chacko can get away with his debauchery-or his "man's needs" as his mother terms it because he is a "touchable". Roy has justly put the issue when she says, "Change is one thing. Acceptance is another" (279). The society presented in the novel is patriarchal. On the one hand we have a group of characters Manmachi, Baby Kochamma and Kachi Maria the cook, who perpetuate the division of caste race and gender. On the other hand, Ammu and the twins, Rahel and Estha, consciously and unconsciously resist these hierarchies. Ammu the biggest victims of the system, is an archetypal image of a daughter marginalised in a patriarchal society.

"Perhaps Ammu, Estha and Rahel were the worst transgressors. They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tempered with laws that lay down who should be loved how and how much" (31).

The novel is a critique of the "grand values" big things governing the Indian society and mentality. What Jean Francois Lyotard, the French philosopher and literary theorist considered to be a mark of Post Modernism was that all values become debate topics and the ones who are likely to win and legitimate their viewpoints are likely to be those detaining power, be it financial or State-granted. The significant feature about Roy's novel is that although characters like the twins Estha and Rahel or Velutha and Ammu do seem to possess a Post Modern Perspective on issues that are generally considered of high value by the Indian society and the caste system, since their actions fall into the realm of sin, proving their affinity for "small things" rather than the generally accepted grand ones. Those who are in power can have the final word-like in the case of Velutha's condemnation to death ultimately for nothing but having an affair with Ammu.

The Indian society presented by Roy values the big things like political affiliations, marriage, whole caste system. However the author manages to direct reader's attention towards the "small things" like the activities of small creatures, day to day habits and little pleasures, sins and emotions that society reject as inadequate.

The repression of such small things results in their recurrence under more unusual secretive and even violent forms. Such as Estha's being molested as a child by

the Orange drink Lemon drink man or the twins making love at a certain point in their adult life out of "hideous grief" for the los of their mother.

These are indeed all condemned acts not only by state authorities, but also by any of the religious authorities in Ayemenem and most parts of the world. But what Roy does is give very detailed and even beautifully written descriptions of even such episodes (like for instance, the incest scene). And because "Post Modern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities, it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable", we can view the unusual aspects and phenomena in this novel from this perspective. One could also say that this "incommensurable may be related to the idea of "small things".

Conclusion:

In conclusion it may be said that what writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens did in the 19th century with their novels and as a result brought about social transformation in England and France, Arundhati Roy sought to do the some in her country. The novel expresses her disillusionment with the social conditions of the post colonial world in which the untouchables of the past still face a hostile society that does not let them live as free and independent individuals. Through her work, Roy also triggers off the great process of self examination and imprints upon the mind of the readers the notion, that things need to be changed and that they can be changed and must be changed.

References:-

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