

Postcolonial Bizarre and Trauma in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract: *The luscious and mysterious description of India sounds unmistakably like a tourist novel of postcolonial bizarre in The God of Small Things. Arundhati Roy is ethnic and a strong activist and her cultural authenticity passively provides an authentic Indian voice through her idealised western way of talking and thinking about the east. Roy plays a colonial style known for its dominating, restructuring and authoritative power over India using references from politics and history to keep the story real and dangerously intoxicating for her western readers. The novel exoticises India's inequality, making it light hearted and approachable for its western readers.*

Keywords: intoxicating, exoticise, subjectivity, distortion, pretrauma, depiction, patriarchy

1. Introduction

Since postcolonialism and its rhetoric of resistance have themselves become consumer products, the flow of cultural capital also became unstable. In the words of Aijaz Ahmed, "commodity acquires universality, and a universal market arises across national frontiers and local customs, while white trade joins black trade". Besides, Stephen Forster points out, "the exotic functions dialectically as a symbolic system, domesticating the foreign, the culturally different and the extraordinary". Yet, we must be careful here since exoticism is a control mechanism of cultural translation which relays the other inexorably back and again to the same". To a certain extent, it may be contradictory to say that exoticism posits the lure of difference while protecting its practitioners from close involvement. While most people regard marginality as a weakness, Huggan and Spivak see in it a positive value, an advantageous subject position. Indeed, postcolonial studies have taken advantage of its marginality to turn into a valuable intellectual commodity. Despite marginality to the fact that Indian writings seem to be products of complex collisions between East and the West, Roy in the novel tries to elucidate the marginalized status of Third World people and collect our attention toward their cultural heritage.

Sati, which means widow immolation, is a dreadful practice in India. In some cases, women are coerced and sati is performed for the material gain of surviving relatives. In other cases, sati functions as the act confirming the stoicism of women and as the practice that epitomizes their weaknesses. Here, an issue of female subjectivity is raised as whether the sati women should be considered heroines or victims. As Lata Mani puts it, "given the definition of tradition operative in the discourse on sati, the portrayal of the immolated widow as heroine merely rewrites her as victim of a higher order, not of man but of God. While in the process of salvation, women are denied any agency, nor are they subjects or objects, but the ground of the discourse on sati. Women in fact are the sites on which tradition is debated and reformulated. What is at stake is not women, but tradition. Also Spivak indicates that sati is seen as a women's proper name in India today. She questions if the oppressed under socialised capital have any access to correct resistance, and whether the ideology of sati can be sublated into any model of interventionist practice ("Can the Subaltern Speak"). Sati, therefore, is a way of

cultural assimilation as well as a feature of modern disability of India. On the one hand, women are denied their subjectivity in the process of assimilation. On the other hand, sati could be an obstacle to moving toward modernity since it is a distorted form of myth and superstition. Apart from sati, dowry - murder means 'burning a bride for insufficient dowry'. In India, dowry - murders are actually the killing of women for outright economic gain. The husband and his family murder the daughter - in - law by expropriating as much money and material goods as they can from the women's family and asking the son to remarry and secure another dowry. Despite that, Roy does not deal with issues like sati and dowry - murder in the novel, she tries to suggest by implication that Third World women are capable of resisting against cultural assimilation. For instance, Ammu in the novel is a subversive role that refuses to be confined by tradition and patriarchal regulations.

In Luce Irigaray's feminist deconstruction on western phallogocentrism, women cannot be a subject the way man is. Similarly, Jacqueline Rose indicates that "it is at the level of fantasy that man achieves his identity and wholeness". Put simply, it is man who places women at the basis of his fantasy, or constitutes fantasy through women. Overall, the otherness of the woman only serves to secure man's own self - knowledge and truth. Here, let us make a connection between an Indian woman and the veiled oriental woman. Behind the veil, there lies a presumption of hidden essence and truth by which the colonial and the masculine subject constitutes their own identity. Furthermore, the veiled woman is an obstacle in the field of visibility and control, but her veiled presence is not that of omnipotent gaze. That is, her body is invisible to the European observer except for her eyes and thereby she can see without being seen.

If an Indian woman can be likened to the veiled Oriental woman, what Roy has done in the novel is to lift the veils of Indian women and reveal the hidden truth in a postcolonial subcontinent. Since India has its colonial background like many other countries in the world, everything about India is like a myth that western viewers would like to explore. For instance, the various cultural practices such as sati, dowry - murder and caste system function as India's cultural differences and make India more mysterious and exotic. By examining the caste/class conflicts and the problem of social

mobilization in India, Roy in reality is guiding us through a magnificent museum. Inside this museum, there are various exhibitions which reveal to us the evil legacy of colonialism, the brutality of political struggles, the misrepresentation of orientalist thinking and so on. Indeed, Roy has shed some light on the conflictual situations and the predicament of postcolonial India. Her purpose is not to provide solutions to these problems but to pinpoint the existence of these problems.

Having said that a novel is at some level a documenting of history, it is essential to go through the traumatic memories in the novel. Since Roy's novel correlates personal events to national and historical events, the specific time and place of the novel should not be ignored. In December of 1969, all catastrophes of death, love, murder and betrayal happened to the Ipe family and it is through Rahel's narration that we are able to return to these events in the novel. At the very beginning of the novel, we learn about Sophiemol's death and the vivid depiction of her funeral. For both Rahel and Estha, they feel guilty about Sophiemol's death since they let their little cousin accompany them on the boat trip in monsoon season. Yet, the death of Sophie Mol seems so trifling that the Government never paid for Sophiemol's funeral because she wasn't killed on a zebra crossing. Ironically, Sophiemol embraces her world of children instead of the cruelty of the adult world. She lay in it in her yellow crimplene bell-bottoms with her hair and ribbon and her Made-in-England go-go bag that she loved.

Small Things bring out traumas and haunted memories of each character. Rahel feels, "fiercely vigiland and brittle with exhaustion from her battle against real life". Besides, Rahel's sensitive mind and careful observation accentuate the sad tune of the novel. First, she notices the change of color of the church dome. Second, she notices a black bat. She thinks Shophiemol must have noticed that, too. Here, the church signifies a space for two occasions in life - wedding and funeral. The funeral at the beginning of the novel predicts some kind of misfortune. As for the bat, it signifies bad luck and misery in life. It is in the funeral that Rahel and Estha learn that the world had other ways of breaking men. And the atmosphere at the funeral is that of "sick sweet - like old roses on a breeze". In the end, "the loss of Sophemol grew robust and alive. It ushered Rahel through childhood...into womanhood". Yet the trauma not only lingers on the twins' mind but keeps haunting the heart of Sophiemol's mother." She had come to Ayamenem to heal her wounded world and had lost all of it instead. She shattered like a glass". Sarcastically, "it is curious how sometimes memory of the life lasts for so much longer than the memory of the life that it purloined". While the loss of Sophemol grows robust and alive, Sophie Mol becomes a memory - like a fruit in season. Every season."

After the death of Velutha, Ammu dies alone at the age of thirty - one- "Not old, not young, but a viable, die - able age". And the church refuses to bury her because she is a shame to everyone in Kerala. Since Ammu ends her former marriage in divorce, she seems to worry about madness in her life. That is, "it wasn't what lay at the end of her road that frightened Ammu as much as the nature of the road itself". In relation to the suffering of Ammu, it will be interesting to mention a mysterious dream Ammu in an afternoon. In her dream,

Ammu makes a long journey from the embrace of the one armed man to her identical two - egg twins". In that dream, there are shadows that only the one - armed man can see. Ammu and the man have the desire to touch each other, but they do not do this. Strangely, the man leaves no footprints in sand, no ripples in water. And Ammu flies through her dream on heavy, shuddering wings. Here, it foretells that Ammu and Velutha will break the caste taboo and be punished by their transgression. On one level, the shadows in the dream imply that Ammu will have her days of darkness. On another level, the seduction of the female body of Ammu implies that political upheaval is not related to casted Velutha exclusively.

In addition, we know that twins were born o a us on a journey. Here, the journey symbolises the rugged road lying before Ammu. Because of Ammu's inter - communal marriage with Baba, the twins are considered illegitimate and less lovable. Similarly, the process of writing is like the process of giving birth. The aims of a writer are to record the painful experiences and unveil the truth behind the curtain. Roy's novel presents to us not only the writing of 'History' but the recording of 'her - stories' too.

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