

Semi - Autobiographical Elements in “The God of Small Things”

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Abstract: *This paper deals with semi- autobiographical element in “The God of Small Things” by Arundhati Roy. It implies a woman as a subaltern in the society. It reveals the significance of the title. The main theme of this paper is semi –autobiographical element is represented by Arundhati Roy and her mother in “The God of Small Things”. The protagonist characters in “The God of Small Things” are very familiar to the true life story of Arundhati Roy and her mother.*

Keywords: Autobiography, God

1. Introduction

The semi-autobiographical novel “The God of Small Things” was written by Arundhati Roy. The novel was awarded “Man Booker” Prize in 1997. Roy is the first Indian Woman ever to achieve this honour. The novel “The God of Small Things” is semi- autobiographical because the major part captures are Roy’s childhood experiences in Aymanam. The remaining the part of the novel is highlighted the oppression of the other marginalized group i.e; the ‘Untouchable’ along with the woman as a subaltern. This novel also reveals the truth transgression of social norms gives severe punishment to the people. Roy began writing of “The God of Small Things” in 1992 and finished it in 1996. Roy was awarded “Man Booker” Prize in 1997 for her novel. Roy introduced new narrative and stylistic technique in her debut novel.

2. Significance of the Title

The title is significant in many ways in “The God of Small Things”. Roy introduced Velutha as an untouchable, and a dalit in the novel. Roy’s depict of Velutha is perfect. He is an excellent mechanic and carpenter. He has pleasing personality and also well educated. Due to the reason of an untouchable everything that concerns him is small, mainly his tiny cottage and his love with Ammu. So he is the “The God of Small Thing”. Deven Campbell-Hall in his essay “Dangerous Artisan :Anarchic labour in Michael Ondaatje’s The English Patient and Anil’s Ghost and Roy’s “The God of Small Things” has remarked in this context.

Velutha is a Malayalee Indian Carpenter an untouchable, Christ like Paravan who slipped through the usual closed doors to gain a high school education and

“a distinctly German design sensibility”.(Campbell 46)

3. Autobiographical Element In “The God of Small Things”

An autobiographical novel is a form of novel, using the merging of autobiographical and fictional elements. Novels that portray situations and settings with which the author is familiar are not necessarily autobiographical. The

novel is about intense, private experiences are written as autobiographical novel that do not fully meet these requirements from true events are sometimes called semi-autobiographical novel. The author may represent his/her experiences through the protagonist in the novel. Arundhati Roy’s “The God of Small Things “we have semi autobiographical elements. Roy introduced first semi autobiographical element of her mother through the protagonist of Ammu’s character, true life story and her experience introduced through her heroine character of Rahel in the novel. The first one is Roy introduced her mother Mary Roy’s true life story through the character of Ammu in the novel. If you can observe in the novel Ammu is a Keralite Syrian Christian, well educated, beautiful and a feisty woman. She married a Bengali who is an employee in Assam state it is an inter caste marriage she gave birth her two children shortly they separated due to his cruel mentality Ammu’s character is very familiar to the true life story of Roy’s mother Mary Roy, Mary Roy also a Syrian Christian, well educated and she was a prominent social activist. She Was also married Bengali Hindu, a tea planter by profession. The marriage was also unsuccessful and shortly she left him. In this way Ammu’s character exactly similar to the real life story of Roy’s mother.

If any married daughter if divorced, the daughter position may or may not understand by family as well as by the society. The views of the patriarchal society are reflected in the views of baby Kochamma in “The God of Small Things”-

“.....a married daughter had no position at her parent’s home. As for a divorced daughter she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage. well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s Outrage. As for a divorced daughter from inter community love marriage-Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subjects”. (TGST.45-46)

Another example of Roy’s mother has come back from Assam to Aynanam. Similarly Ammu while living on the estate In Assam, she declared her identity and freedom through her names and behaviour at social gathering when

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she left her husband, she is constantly reminded that she and her children have no locus standi. Yet she continues her struggle in her own ways. According to sir Thanks Chanda has made a remark regarding Ammu's search for own identity. He writes-

“(her) quest for self identity is an attempt at repossessing, renaming, reowning the world, but it appears doomed from the very beginning because of the nature of the society where she has to seek refuge with her twins after her divorce and also because of the incapacity of her kins (mother, great aunt Kochamma) to provide an adequate model for redefining the self”(Chanda 40)

Another resemble example is Roy portrayed Ammu after her love marriage with a Bengali man, when their marriage was unsuccessful or failed. Ammu becomes unwanted in her own home. Especially in the Christian domination women have no right in father's property after their marriage. When Ammu comes back to her home, Chacko her brother informs his position and states that the house and property belongs to him only. He informs Ammu-

“what's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine”.(TGST-57)

It is exactly resemble to Roy's mother true life. Roy's mother Mary Roy's marriage was unsuccessful. After divorce she fought her share in her father's property. She challenged Syrian Christian tradition by first marrying and the divorcing a Bengali and by getting the Supreme Court to overthrow Syrian Christian inheritance Laws that denied women have an equal share in their father's property.

So the above cited examples are very familiar to the real life story of Roy's mother with Ammu's character in the novel which was represented by Arundhati Roy.

Another major autobiographical element is we are able to detect some similarities between the character of Rahel in the novel and Roy's true life story. Here also we are able to find out some similarities between Roy's true life story and the character of Rahel in the novel. The semi-autobiographical element is Roy was born in Assam like Rahel in the novel. She had spent her childhood in Aymanam and she studied at Corpus Christi school in Aymanam, Kerala. Similarly Rahel in the novel has her childhood in Aymanam, Kerala. Roy studied Architecture like her heroine, Rahel. Here Arundhati Roy at the age of sixteen, she left her home for higher education, she went from village to Delhi. Similarly Rahel also had gone from village of Aymanam to America for her higher education.

Second resemble example is Rahel's marriage ended with divorce with an American husband. Roy's marriage also ended with her first husband Architect Gerard da Cunha. After divorced Rahel worked for several years as-

“...a night clerk, in a bullet-proof cabin at a gas station, outside Washington,

where drunks occasionally vomited into the money tray, and pimps propositioned her with more lucrative job offers”. (TGST-20)

Third resemble example is it was only Rahel who could manage to cope with such a job. A young Indian lady would have dare to work in such a degrading environment. She has feminine virtues of sweetness, modesty, and humility. These qualities are cultivated by women of cultured societies. In the end of the novel Rahel when she heard that Estha has been sent back to Aymanam. She gave up her job in America and returned to Aymanam. According to Aijaz Ahmad in his essay 'Reading Arundhati Roy politically' has remarked in this case-

“.... The growing girl(Rahel) goes out into the world from her little village to Delhi and into then out of a marriage with an American. The leaving of the family home and the sowing of the wild oats endows her with the autonomous self that would have been denied to her, as it was denied to her mother, in the shifting world of the provincial, caste-bound gentility of her family”.(Ahmad 37-38)

Similarly after divorced with her first husband Roy, until made financial secure. She worked various jobs, including running Aerobic classes at “Five star hotels” in New Delhi. She worked for television and movies. She met her second husband, film maker Pradeep kishen in New Delhi. She wrote screen plays for movies and television serials. In this way Roy had also done various jobs and faced many problems in different issues like Rahel as above cited examples.

So, these are major part captures and semi auto – biographical elements in the point of view by Arundhati Roy, which she focused in her “The God of Small Things”.

4. Conclusion

I conclude this paper according to the similarities between the characters depicted in the Novel of “The God of Small Things” by true life story of Roy with Rahel and her mother true life story with the character of Ammu are very familiar and semi- autobiographical and fictional elements. Roy portrayed both characters with very intelligent manner. So, I'm sure that this Novel is semi-autobiographical and because after this Novel she didn't write a semi-autobiographical Novel again.

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