

LIFE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION TODAY

(Book 1)

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CULTURAL STUDIES, KALYAN (W)**

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ISBN: 978-93-87377-19-6

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First Published: 2020

Price: Rs 495/-

Published by

Mahatma Gandhi Education &
Welfare Society, Parbhani -431401
cheskalyan@gmail.com
www.mgsociety.in

Printed at

Snehal Printers and Book Binders,
Ramdasnagar, Parbhani – 431401
Maharashtra.
Mob. + 91 9730721393

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Editorial

We are delighted to present the book ‘ Life, Culture and Education Today’ with valuable contributions from reknowned scholars of India. This special issue is a collection of papers received for the Virtual Conference on *Life, Culture and Education Today* held on 5-6 June 2020.

Human life has never been more threatened globally after the Second World War as is done today. Enveloping domestic, social, financial, educational and creative spheres of life, the COVID-19 outbreak has wreaked havoc in the world leaving the American and European superpowers clueless. As can be clearly seen, the academic world has remained riveted by the COVID-19 circumstances. Under such a scenario, to keep the academics activated in their research work on a common platform, we organised an international level conference on the foregoing theme. We received more than two hundred papers for this conference. Almost all the papers have been published in the e-book format and in the special issues of CHCS.

We are confident that the present book will be useful for readers, critics and researchers. We thank all the research scholars and supporting personnel who made this publication a dream come to reality and request everybody to extend their support and help to continue such publications uninterrupted in future also.

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**Critical Perspectives on
Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* :**

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Among the writers writing in English, women writers have also made their presence felt. The phenomenal emergence of women writers during the post-independence era was a crucial incidence. Kamla Markandaya, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, and Anita Nair have extended new dimension and depth to Indian writing in English. The emergence of these women writers marks the dawn of a new era which promises a new height and vision for Indian writing in English.

In recent times one more creative force flashed across the horizon of Indo-Anglian literature and charmed the world with her debut novel. Arundhati Roy won the coveted Booker Prize for her *The God of Small Things* which jolted aware the people across the globe to listen and realize the magical prowess of a woman writer. She resolutely pursued the goal to champion the cause of the suffering millions. She says: "for me the book is not about what happened but how what happened affected people" (Roy 46).

In *The God of Small Things*, there is a great deal of revelation of female experience. The setting is a well-established patriarchal society, where women are naturally oppressed and exploited. There are unfulfilled desires, broken marriages, shattered faiths and prejudices, planned revenge in the novel. These complex problems bring nothing but frustration to the female characters of the Novel. *The God of Small Things* inaugurated a career of activism and resistance against local and global inequities in India by its Booker prize winning writer Arundhati Roy. In this novel the predicament of Indian women is studied in depth along with the plight of dalits (untouchables), lower class people, racial subalterns vis-à-vis global capitalism and neo-imperialism masquerading as globalization. Roy sees the resistance against gender oppression to be leading towards if not instigating resistance against caste, class oppression and spurring on anti-colonial thought and action. Such variants of resistant rebellion are articulated through the examination of the marital and inter-gender relations of Ammu,

Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Rahel. Transgressions of these characters, openly subversive or outside the boundaries of the institution of marriage as practiced in post-colonial India, and the "Love laws" that predate Western colonialism lead to a scathing interrogation of the basic values and structures of the post-colonial Indian society. Thus Roy shows a way for the Indian women for resisting local as well as global inequities.

Ammu is the most important female character in *The God of Small Things*. A middle class bourgeois woman, she is a divorcee with two children, Eshta and Rahel. Educated and articulate, Ammu is not welcome on her return to her father's house. A kind of an elite leftist, her brother Chacko marginalizes her. She is also cornered by the family structure and inheritance laws customarily prevalent among the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. Ammu is enamoured of the untouchable labourer Velutha and violates the "Love Laws" which her community has inherited from, among other things, their Hindu past. Her transgression of the caste, class and religious boundaries mounts a rebellion of a kind against her marginalization as a woman. Aijaz Ahmad calls her "a woman of great grit" (Prasad 39) and Murari Prasad comments thus about her attempt at self-realization which is not unconnected with the fate of other subalterns: "Ammu's rebellion against maternal and marital conventionality, and finally, her liaison with dark-skinned and untouchable Velutha (ironically meaning white) constitutes a violation against a determinate social order, sponsoring the immutable „love laws". Her rebellion or her "quest for self-identity", as Tirthankar Chanda points out is "an attempt at repossessing, renaming, reknowing the world", but it "appears doomed from the very beginning because of the nature of the society where she has had to seek refuge with her twins after her divorce and also because of the incapacity of her kin (mother, great-aunt Kochamma) to provide an adequate model for redefining the Self" (Chanda 40). Ammu is a victim of a marriage that does not work out. Her being treated as an outcast in her own family clearly defines her position in the society.

But she rebels against such social structures and challenges marriage that rather seems to be a disciplinary institution, as Michel Foucault would have called it, working towards silencing and controlling the one who stands apart, as if a lunatic/non-conformist who needs to be imprisoned/reasoned. Foucault discussed how asylums were being put up, in the pretext to serve medical knowledge, to isolate and incarcerate dissidents in 17th century Europe—a time that saw the rise of the continents imperial ambitions. "They did not introduce science, but a personality, whose powers borrowed from science only their disguise, or

at most their justification. These powers, by their nature, were of a moral and social order; they took root in the madman's minority status, in the insanity of his person, not of his mind" (Rabinow .160). Ammu, a *personality*, has to be locked up too.

The novelist analyzes the gender oppression through the examination of the marital and inter-gender relations of Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Rahel. All these female characters are resourceful, smart and belong to the affluent class but they are deprived in fully realizing their capabilities. They lack guts to openly defy the social order and are torn between traditional norms and modern attitudes. In their attempt to challenge the customs, laws, values of social and cultural boundaries, they commit moral transgressions which ultimately lead them toward their demise and destruction.

"Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinistic society" rightly Ammu had observed (57). Through their trajectories of personal involvement in different issues, they interrogate the structures of caste, clan and gender in both implicit and explicit manner. Ammu, middle class bourgeois woman, a divorcee with two children, she is the female protagonist of the novel. Though she is educated and articulate, she is the victim of marriage that did not work out. "Her husband turned out to be not just a heavy drinker but a full blown alcoholic with all of an alcoholic's deviousness and tragic charm. "There were things about him that Ammu never understood. Long after she left him, she never stopped wondering why he lied so outrageously when he didn't need to particularly when he didn't need to" (40). Her alcoholic husband used to inflict beastly treatment on her to the extreme end of satisfying the carnal pleasures of his boss, so that his job remains secure. Situation becomes so painful and unbearable that Ammu is forced to divorce him: "Drunken violence followed by post-drunken badgering" and 'Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcome to her parents in Ayemenem.' (42)

Along with her dizygotic twins-Estha and Rahel, Ammu seeks refuge in her own home but her father's house turns out to be a horrid place for her and she is subject to humiliation, insults and mental blows by her own family members. Ammu as a lady has great self-confidence in herself and she often outwits her own oxford educated brother, Chacko even though she was deprived of the opportunity to study and have an exposure like her brother. According to Chacko who is always bent on marginalizing his own sister – "Ammu had no Locusts stand I" (57) and that "Ammu and Estha and Rahel were millstones around his neck" (85)

"Ammu learned to live with this cold, calculating cruelty... she did exactly nothing to avoid quarrels and confrontations. In fact, it could be

argued that she sought them out, perhaps even enjoyed them.” (182). The repeated rejections of Ammu by her own kith and kin compels her to seek emotional refuge in Velultha - a low caste or ‘untouchable’ carpenter. A clandestine love-affair develops between the two resulting in furtive sexual encounters which is in violation of the traditional norms of the Syrian Christian society. Because of her moral transgression the church also refused to bury Ammu. “Rahel thought she looked like a roman senator. Et tu, Ammu! She thought and smiled, remembering Estha!! (162). Thus “Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat lodge in Alleppey... She died alone. She was thirty-one. Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age.” (161). In the long run, Ammu is disowned by her society, separated ruthlessly from her children and faces a lonely death.

The second woman character is “Mammachi”, who is both Ammu and Chacko’s mother. She possesses the adept business skills and starts a pickle factory all by herself, but her husband Pappachi “would not help her with the pickle-making because he did not consider pickle-making a suitable job for a high ranking ex-govt. official” He beat her constantly for no apparent reason “the beatings weren’t new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place” (47-48). After Pappachi’s death Chacko, her son took over the factory from her and in losing her factory Mammachi was marginalized in terms of both clan and gender. She was made a sleeping partner. According to Chacko’s philosophy ‘what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine.’ (57). Mammachi however does not resist her tyrannical son, she concedes to his “Men’s Needs” as Chacko flirts with “pretty women who worked in the factory.” forcing them to “sit at table with him and drink tea” (65) much to the dismay of his own mother. Mammachi is artistic. She has the skills of playing the violin. When her music teacher praises her exceptional talent before her husband her music lessons are stopped abruptly because of the fear that his wife may surpass Pappachi. However, unlike Ammu, Mammachi never questions the conditions and accepts the reality passively and with a strange ‘resilience’ in her character. Her acquiescence is a defensive gesture of her story sense of ‘endurance’ to undergo the torture and trauma without speaking it out.

Baby Kochamma is the sister of Pappachi who is another maltreated victim in the novel. She receives the shock of her life when her dream of marrying father Mulligan, an Irish priest gets shattered. To win him, she converts herself to Roman Catholic faith but ultimately she is a failure and starts living in isolation in the Ayemenem house. Baby Kochamma conspires with the inspector and puts Velultha behind the bars, where he is severely beaten to death. This attitude of negativism is perhaps due to the unjust and malicious treatment meted out to her in her life: “the fear

of being dispossessed". She felt that she had the "fate of the wretched Man-less woman." Amitabh Roy in his analysis of Baby Kochamma's character opines : " It is a pity that she submits in the name of decency and honor to the very sexist, casteist and communal prejudices that have stood in her way and denied fulfillment to her" .(62) Thus like Mammachi, Baby Kochamma also apparently submits to the patriarchal social norms without any hesitation but if closely examined she puts up a line of implicit resistance against the biased socio-political and economic order in the post-colonial India.

Rahel is the offspring of divorced parents, daughter of Ammu who is deprived of conventional parental love. She lives with the stigma of a mixed parent age, both religious (as her father was Hindu and Ammu a Syrian Christian) and ethnic (as father was a Bengali and Mother is a Keralite. She has a hard time in School and was expelled three times from the Nazareth convent and refused to be co-opted by the school. She is disliked by her relatives-Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria and even Chacko. She considers Velultha to be a father figure with whom she plays. "She knew his back. She'd been carried on it, more times than she could count"(73). When Rahel discovers about the sexual liaison of Ammu with Velultha, she locks herself in the bedroom. When Police arrests Velultha Rahel goes to the police station with her brother Estha to identify Velultha as a criminal. Being the victim of a dysfunctional family, she fails to connect with the people around her and lacks self-confidence. The most unnatural act of social transgression committed by Rahel is her incestuous love for her twin brother Estha- which is perhaps her implicit resistance toward the social order. "Rahel watched Estha with the curiosity of a mother watching her wet child. A sister a brother. A woman a man. A twin a twin".(93) The only person with whom Rahel has harmony, an empathetic link is her own twin brother Estha, eighteen minutes her senior. Their personality's balance each other like the two halves of a circle; complementing each other.

She is a girl with an active imagination. For instance when she feels scared, she imagines that Pappachi's moth is crawling on her heart with icy legs. While attending Sophie's funeral, she imagines Sophie Mol turning over in her coffin. Like a lost soul Rahel wanders in her life. She takes up architecture program in Delhi without any thought or interest, there she meets Larry MCcaslin the researcher, marries him and goes to the U.S.A. She drifts into marriage, "Like a passenger drifts into an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge"(18). But soon divorced she returns to Ayemenem, her birth place. The only person with whom, she has compatibility, a balancing harmony is her brother Estha.. Like Ammu, Rahel at a young age also learns to dream and imagine and like her she

is ultimately disowned and rejected by the society. In a relationship with her brother Rahel transgresses the traditional boundaries of a defined and social relationship. While Ammu has an illicit relationship with Velultha, Rahel indulges in a sexual relationship with her own brother. Both in a way transgress the social norms of the traditional Ayemenem society – Their transgression is perhaps a deliberate act to defy and to challenge the society where in, they have to survive as the oppressed victims.

Roy's *The God of Small Things*, presents women as subalterns, some of whom try to bring about change through resistance. But as subalterns they do not have the articulate voice that members of other groups in Indian society have. These women mount resistance against both local and global inequalities, though the first kind of resistance is perhaps stronger. Through their trajectories of personal involvement in different issues they interrogate the structures of caste, class and gender, implicitly and explicitly, unconsciously and consciously, partially or tangentially and wholeheartedly.

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