

INTERSECTION OF FEMINIST CRITIQUE AND GENDER INJUSTICE IN THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS BY ARUNDHATI ROY

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Abstract:

‘The God of Small Things’ by Arundhati Roy discusses multi-dimensional discrimination and oppression. Even though most works of criticism address this novel from the feminist perspective, this study explores multi-dimensional aspects of injustice in more detail applying feminist and intersectional approaches and trauma theory to the analysis of the novel. Through applying feminist theories, the current study explores ways in which patriarchy influence’s identity and freedom of women. Using the concept of intersectionality, this study examines ways in which caste and gender work together to marginalize two main characters Ammu and Velutha. Furthermore, through the application of the trauma theory, the current study aims to uncover psychological effects of discrimination and social injustice in the case of Estha and Rahel. It seems that oppression discussed in the novel is multi-dimensional and influences lives of main characters in different ways.

Keywords: Feminist Theory, Intersectionality, Trauma, Gender Inequality, Caste, Oppression

Introduction:

The God of Small Things provides an extensive criticism of the structures of society, which define the processes associated with the formation of people’s identities and their interpersonal relationships, as well as human freedom. In general, this work describes how the lives of people, who experience serious impacts of strict social norms, in particular, associated with caste and gender, evolve. Moreover, the book is written in the form of flashbacks, which demonstrate the way the past influences the life of the main characters. It should be noted that one of the most significant aspects discussed in the novel is connected with the phenomenon known as ‘Love Laws’ which dictate ‘who should be loved, and how, and how much.’ As it has been mentioned before, these unwritten laws define the relationships in the context of the present paper, it will be attempted to undertake the analysis of the novel employing a multi-level approach, which involves not only the usage of the feminist perspective but also the application of the theory of intersectionality and the theory of trauma. In contrast to many previous analyses, which mainly considered gender oppression as the primary focus, the present study claims that there is an interplay between different oppressive systems in the novel.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology:

The novel is conducted based on a qualitative textual analysis. Three theoretical perspectives will be employed for this task feminist theory, intersectionality, and trauma theory. Through their use, it becomes possible to explore the novel on an entirely new level, going beyond its superficiality and discovering the deep structures of power and inequality present in it. The importance of feminist theory in analysing this text comes from the focus of this approach on uncovering the structures and practices of oppression typical for the patriarchal society. More specifically, in this research context, feminist theory would help understand how women are socialized into their gender role and limited by these norms when it comes to marriage, motherhood, and morality. Intersectionality is a theory put forward by Kimberlé Crenshaw, explaining how different types of oppression interact and intersect with each other. The theory of intersectionality becomes crucial for analysing the situation of oppression that affects Ammu and Velutha, as their discrimination is based on gender as well as on their caste. According to the intersectionality theory, oppression happens due to several overlapping

oppressors at once. Trauma theory is aimed at exploring the consequences of social injustice for individual characters' mental state. It focuses on violence and trauma that have been suffered in childhood and create a long-term effect on personal identity and memories. For instance, in the novel, the concept of trauma implies that suffering does not happen once but is rather continuous and repetitive. The combination of these three theories allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the novel. It shows that in order to understand oppression; one must consider not only the social systems but also the inner feelings of an individual.

Gender Inequality and Patriarchal Domination:

One of the major themes found throughout the novel is the domination of patriarchal institutions over women. According to a feminist analysis, the plot describes how gender inequality is an integral part of both social and private lives of people. The characters are expected to live according to certain roles, and if someone fails to do so, this person is considered socially inappropriate and faces social condemnation and punishment. The character of Ammu offers a very strong depiction of this state. As a divorcee, she is marginalized both in her family and society at large. What defines her identity is not her individuality but her inability to live up to societal norms with regard to being married. She lacks independence and is looked upon as a liability, a reflection of how little room there is for such women. Moreover, Baby Kochamma serves as an example of the ways people consciously uphold oppressive social systems. She is motivated by the need to preserve the order and her sense of power, thus reproducing the same rules that oppress other people. With these characters, the novel demonstrates that patriarchy not only dominates people but is upheld by their daily routines and ideologies. In general, the novel illustrates that gender oppression is an intricate structure, both enforced externally and accepted internally by people who take part in it

Intersection of Caste and Gender:

While gender inequality is a central concern, the novel also emphasizes the importance of caste as a defining factor in social hierarchy. The intersection of caste and gender creates a particularly intense form of oppression, as individuals are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha serves as a key example of this intersection. Ammu's position as a woman already limits her freedom, but her involvement with Velutha further challenges societal norms. Velutha, as a member of a lower caste, occupies an even more vulnerable position, as his existence is defined by systemic discrimination. Their relationship represents a direct violation of the social order, bringing together two individuals who are separated by rigid boundaries of caste and gender. The consequences they face are severe, reflecting the society's determination to maintain its hierarchical structure. Ammu is isolated and condemned, while Velutha is subjected to extreme violence. The intersectional view makes one realize that oppression can never be explained by looking at things through one perspective alone. One has to look at how gender and caste intersect to understand oppression in its totality. Through the novel, one realizes that there are many dimensions when it comes to the way people suffer from inequality.

Trauma and Resistance:

The psychological effects of social injustice are a key element of *The God of Small Things*. In the novel, through Estha and Rahel, trauma is shown not as one event but as a state that continuously affects one's identity, memories, and emotions. Both characters have had a turbulent childhood filled with loss and violence, which affected them deeply in many ways. Estha's personality displays the effects of trauma through his inability to express himself and his emotional isolation. His inability to verbalize what he experienced shows how psychological pain can affect one's identity. On the other hand, Rahel experiences trauma through emotional distance and fragmented memories. This portrayal fits the principles of trauma theory, according to which unresolved experiences resurface through memories and behavioural changes. Nonetheless, the book shows that such resistance often brings about serious effects, and anyone who tries to challenge the existing conventions is likely to suffer for it, be marginalized or silenced. Such actions indicate that although resistance can be carried out, there are always the strong and durable mechanisms of social regulation in place. Finally, the novel demonstrates that trauma and resistance are closely connected concepts that play a vital role in social oppression. Whereas trauma shows how deeply affected individuals are psychologically by oppression, resistance symbolizes the will to be free.

Conclusion:

The God of small things by Arundhati Roy analyses the multifaceted portrayal of gender oppression and multidimensionality of oppression. The interrelated views of feminist perspective, intersectionality, and trauma theory. The study proves that oppression presented in the novel is not restricted only to one dimension, but involves multiple dimensions including patriarchy, caste system, and psychology. The characters of Ammu, Velutha, Estha, and Rahel reveal how these systems shape individual lives in different yet overlapping ways. While Ammu's experiences highlight gender-based restrictions, Velutha's condition exposes caste discrimination, and the emotional struggles of Estha and Rahel illustrate the lasting psychological impact of social injustice. Together, these perspectives show that inequality is both external and internal, affecting not only social position but also identity and emotional well-being. The explore suggests that The God of Small Things complicates the simplistic portrayal of oppression as a complex and evolving entity. The explore asserts the importance of adopting a multidimensional perspective when analysing literature. This perspective involves the use of various theories simultaneously to capture the multidimensionality of the human condition. In doing so, the novel provides profound insight into the workings of power structures and their continued impact on people over time.

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