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DEPTH AND SHALLOWSNESS OF RELATIONSHIPS AS PORTRAYED IN ARUNDHATI
ROY'S *GOD OF SMALL THINGS*.

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ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy's booker prize winning work is a human saga ,which focuses on how social circumstances, deprived Ammu Ipe of a chance to live a fulfilling and meaningful life In this analysis, special attention has been given to deciphering the undercurrents that led to the death of her lover Velutha and the bonds caused by familial as well as other relationships and social norms on the lovers,leading to the ruin of not only her life but also that of her twin children. This analysis seeks to throw light on the relationship of Ammu's parents Pappachi and Mammachi,and that between Margret kochamma and Chacko.The complex link between the twins and their affection for Velutha is also brought to close scrutiny.

1. Introduction

Arundhati Roy's *Gods of small things* is considered a milestone work of fiction in Indian English. In this research paper,a beacon of light is thrown on kinship as well as familial ties which chain the characters and enmesh them in a quagmire, from which they find no escape.

2. The unique relationship of the twins

The story which unfolds in Ayemenem, first focuses on life of the two egg twins, who had undergone a lot of harrowing experiences in their lifes and is in the threshold of a 'viable die-able age'. The scandal involving the relationship of their mother with a untouchable paravan, Velutha combined with the death of their cousin Sofiemol during their escapade envisioned and put into action by the molested Estha and the virtual earth quake that follows change their lives for ever.To Ammu, their mother " her twins seemed like a pair of small bewildered frogs engrossed in each other's company, lolloping arm in arm down a high way of full of hurtling traffic, entirely oblivious of what trucks can do to frogs" (43) Silence engulfed the life of Estha after he was parted from this dizygotic twin .He closed down upon himself and became like a 'fisherman with sea secrets in his eyes' and Rahel's heart was filled with emptiness making her mediocre in all things she did, her studies, marital relation with Larry Macaslin. For they had twin souls and the sort of unceremonious ripping apart which resulted due to those unfortunate incidents forming the core of the novel proved catastrophic for them. This is how their relationship is talked of "they were strangers who met in a chance encounter, they had known each other before life began"(327). May be their incestuous relationship was an impact of all the untoward unhappy incidents in their life. Rahel and Estha always longed for someone to take up the vacuum created by their father's absence. At times they tried to fill that emptiness in their mind

by trying to substitute Chacko. At times we find the twins especially Rahel posing questions to Captain Von Trapp, played by Christopher Plummer in the movie *Sound of music*. Similar questions are asked by her when she sees Chacko gazing at the photograph of Sophiemol. She felt "Her cold moth spread its wings again, slow out slow in, a predators lazily blink" (117). She asks him whether it was necessary that people have to love their own children most in the world. She also feels unhappy when owing to her impertinence concerning a comment she made regarding the 'Orange drink, Lemon drink man' her mother chastises her, admonishing that "when you hurt people they love you less. That's what careless words do" (112). She finds a lot of pleasure in the company of Velutha too, and tries to ensure that he loves only her, by preventing him from meeting Sophie mol. Somehow in the long run they feel, they had become because of the lack of consideration of elders like "a pair of actors trapped in a recondite play.... Stumbling through their parts, nursing someone else's sorrow. Grieving someone else's grief" (191). They became not sinners but the sinned against they became the helpless, hapless victims. But in the heart of heart they knew that they were perpetrators in a way and that there was only one victim, "and he had blood red nails and a brown leaf on his back, that made monsoons come on time. He left behind a hole in the universe through which darkness poured like liquid tar, through which their mother followed without even turning to wave good bye" (203). Rahel who watched her mother being cremated, lost to the eternal fire of the incinerator, all the happy memories regarding her, including those regarding how she used to quote Kipling to love her child before putting them to bed, *we be of one blood, ye and I*. All these losses had imprinted itself in her small mind and ruined all her prospects of succeeding in her life. She became 'emptiness' while her egg twin with whom she shared all her memories, 'quietness'

3. Ammu Ipe and her myriad relationships

What might have been the underlying factors which molded Ammu Ipe to be the rebel she was? This deserves deep analysis. It is a crucial factor. We have to travel time and closely analyze her relationship with her father, the Imperial Entomologist. She was constantly ill-treated by her father, who took away all that she loved, who refused to acknowledge her growth, which in turn made her quite desperate and clutch on to a wretched plan to marry a person she hardly knew, in order to escape from the smothering environment. His alcoholism and lack of respect for his wife and eagerness to lack scruples in offering her to his supervisor to salvage his job, finally forces her to return home. She became a combination of "infinite tenderness of motherhood and reckless rage of suicide bomber. It was this that grew inside her and eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day" (44). It was this unhappiness, which made her feel, she was already damned and had nothing left to lose. It made her thwart all the love laws written by society.

4. Velutha, the God of loss

Ammu's relationship with Velutha, ruined him for ever, and made him an outcaste with no moorings. He became a threat to the conservative society because he dared disregard all the bonds of tradition and custom. It is a matter of irony that, even the party or its leaders who took him as recruit failed to vouch for him and facilitated his untimely demise. Velutha is described as 'the God of Loss'. He was 'the god of small things' for Ammu. He was a rebel, who refused to abide by the laws which were considered divine and inviolable by Vellya Paapen, his father and the rest of the clan. He was a self-made man. He dared contravene the invisible laws laid down for untouchables like him, by the conservative society of the time, by reciprocating Ammu's affections. And he became forever enmeshed and entangled in a snare, out of which the only escape was unfortunately death.

He paid for his exploits with his own life. It also cost those lovers the lives and dreams of two innocent children. Hence we can deduce from this that though some relationships are welcomed by society, some others are considered taboo. Another interesting relationship is the one portraying the unrequited and somewhat comical affection Baby Kochamma had for Father Mulligan. May be it was the disappointment arising from her inability to entrap the celibate priest, which might have molded the tyrant whom she became. Her attempts at seduction amounted to forcefully bathing hapless, impoverished children which however failed to procure the desired result. When charity failed to produce tangible results, she invested all her hopes in faith, got converted and became a nun. There too she found that "senior sisters monopolized the

priests and Bishops with biblical doubts, more sophisticated than hers would ever be and it would be years before she got anywhere near father Mulligan.” (24) . She ruined her life waiting for someone who hardly cared for her and as Rahel rightly observed, she began to live her life backwards. For her it was all right if she created a ‘reputation’ for herself by running after an Irish Priest, but unendurable if one got married to a man of another faith, divorced on top of that ,became a burden to the family by returning to them and to surpass all those crimes, created a scandal by indulging in an affair with an untouchable. It was she suggested the returning of the Estha to his father in Calcutta, and forced Chacko to ask Ammu to leave the house after Sophie Mol’s funeral. Ammu’s estrangement from her family, tedious wandering in pursuit of a job ruined her health and mental sanity. Baby Kochamma also forces the twins to give a statement against Velutha, in the Police station making them believe lies and concocted stories. The guilt caused by the episode fails to leave the mind of Estha.Failure of a romantic relationship long back, resulted in reverberations and catastrophes after many years.

5. Chacko and Margaret

Another relationship which should be focused on is the one between Chacko and Margaret Kochamma.Chacko and Margaret met while Chacko was studying as a Rhodes scholar in Oxford. Margaret was a self-made woman with strong ambition. Her life took an unexpected turn when she felt amused and attracted by the eccentric ‘untidy, beatified , porcupine’ like customer who used to amuse her with his cheerfulness. But when Chacko’s untidiness and lack of self-sufficiency began to intrude and irritate her methodical and ordered life she protested and moved out with her child from the ‘baroque bedlam’. Chacko loved her most because of the fact that she did not cling to him, and was uncertain even after years of marriage about her feelings for him. He grew to depend on her for not depending on him. And adored her for not adoring him. Though devastated when she moved out with his baby both of them had a unique place in his life. Theirs was a matured relationship. To get over her desperation caused by Joe’s death, Chacko invites her to spend Christmas with him. She was haunted by the decision as long as she lived and took to her grave the picture of her little daughter’s body laid out on the chaise longue in the drawing rooms of the Ayemenem house.

7. Twins and Velutha

It is worthwhile that we discuss the relationship among the cousins. Though filled with jealousy at first, the twins accepted Sopiemo. They played together. Visited Velutha in his hut and were together even in Sophie’s last moments. It was Estha’s desperation and longing to escape the clutches of the Lemon drink Orange drink man, and his decision to take refuge in the ‘history house’ ,which indirectly led to the death of Sopiemo. She was claimed by death and became “ as wrinkled as a dhobi’s thumb... a mermaid who had forgotten how to swim”(45) Rahel imagines that Sophie were pointing out curiosities for her,even during her final rites.The children’s relationship is by far the most simple and pleasing of bonds portrayed in this work. Before concluding it is worthwhile to point another aspect, Mammachi’s unnatural affection for her son and her refusal to accept and sanctify even the relationship he has with his Ex-wife. Her affections prevent her from ratifying it and makes her think of Margaret as no more than a whore.He was her personal knight, who rescued her from Pappachi’s beatings.

8. Conclusion

The novel portrays relationship ranging from simple ones to those complex beyond description, some tabooed while others sanctified by the society. In this research paper focus has been on such relationships which eventually influence the climax of the novel.

References

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