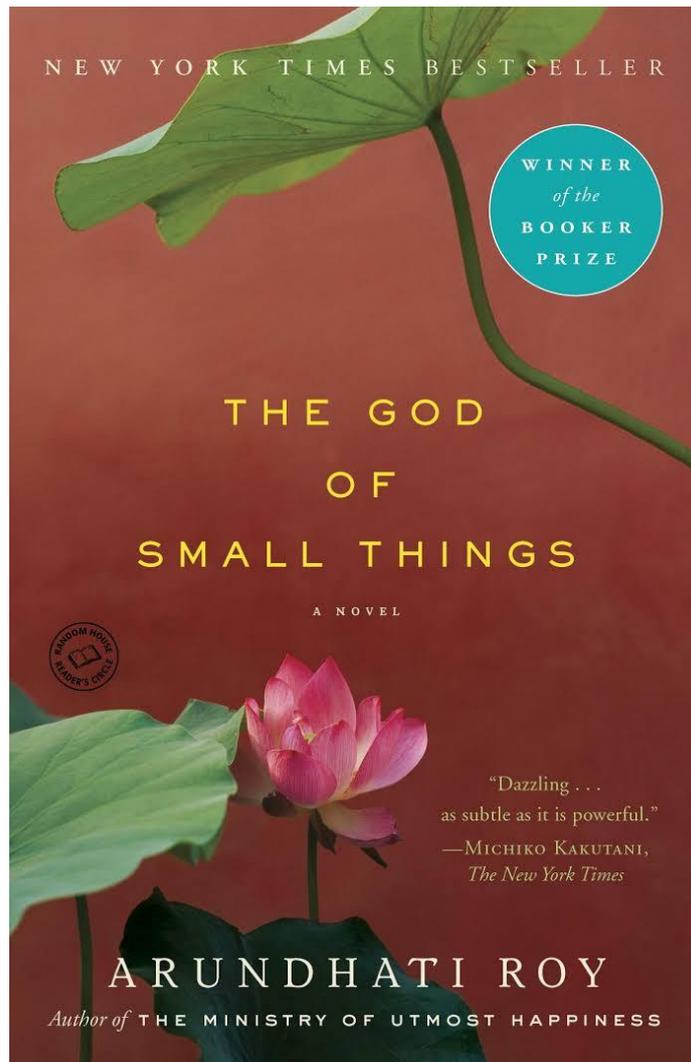


Journey Motif in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Vivek Dinkar Khabde, M.A., N.E.T



Abstract

The motif of journey has long standing history in the world of literature. It is the prime motif of quest and exploration of the self. The journey motif can be seen in the world's most celebrated works of fiction achieving significant effect. The diaspora literature uses it for expressing the angst of displacement, homelessness, feeling of alienation and the concepts related to migration. Indian diasporic writing has extensively used this motif for expressing

various issues related to displacement. Arundhati Roy's debutant novel *The God of Small Things* has elements of journey which can be analysed in terms of journey motif. The renowned, prestigious award winning novel has gems of journey elements in it.

Keywords: Diaspora, Displacement, Journey, Homelessness, women's struggle.

The God of Small Things

The God of Small Things is a seminal novel by Arundhati Roy. The novel deals with various journeys of the characters and their return to the center i.e. home. The novel discusses certain important issues like – the divorced and estranged women in a society like India and the problems arising out of caste issues. The novel has journey motif which are obvious in the delineation of the characters and the narration. The characters in the novel move out and undertake journeys towards their destinations and ultimately return to the center i.e. their native place 'Ayemenem'. The novel deals with the diasporic theme of 'home' and 'alienation'. The characters in the novel feel homelessness though they return to Ayemenem. The unrest and isolation from the roots which the characters in the novel suffer are the distinct characteristics of diasporic writing. The character of Ammu suffers alienation from family and society. The novel records the diaspora within a country.

Ammu's Character and Patriarchal Society

The journey of Ammu's character is most touching and remarkable. It is a touching journey of a woman who fights against all odds in her life continues her struggle and move on. Ammu is a victim of the patriarchal Indian social structure. The end of Ammu's journey is most saddening but the struggle of hers is the winning side of the novel. Ammu sets out to get an escape from the patriarchal attitude of her family in Ayemenem. Ammu could not take further education as her interest in studies was rejected by her father and was kept at home. The very home of hers became a center of exploitation for her. She decides to move out and eventually marries a man from Calcutta. He was working as an assistant manager in Assam. Ammu was ready to accept her as a husband rather than returning to her home which she hated the most.

“She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem” (19).

Her desperation is obvious in marrying a man of her choice and moving out of Ayemenem. Ammu wanted to lead an independent life and preserve her own identity and so she married a man of her own choice and moved out. Her journey was hazardous. The marriage proved to be a futile escape for Ammu as he was a drunkard and was not of loving and caring attitude. Ammu returned to Ayemenem after being divorced from her husband. In Ayemenem was the only option left with Ammu to return to as the parent's home is the only place where a divorced wife can live. Living with her in-laws in Ayemenem was humiliating and torturing experience for Ammu. The life of her became more hazardous. She had to work in the pickle factory and was treated just like a worker in their own factory.

Voice for the Downtrodden of the Indian Society

Arundhati Roy has given voice to the downtrodden of the Indian society in the novel. Velutha is character from the lowest strata of the Indian society. Roy underlines the caste issue in India. The Ipe family could accept everything about Ammu but they could not digest the idea of Ammu having any relationship with Velutha who is a low caste person. Ammu is thrown out of the house because of her relation with Velutha. This brings the tragic end for Ammu. The forbidden love between Ammu and Velutha has tried to break the walls of castes. The ultimate end of their union meets tragic end. When Velutha's father came to know about the blunder of forbidden love of his son, he tells it to the Ipe's. Velutha is beaten to death and Ammu is thrown out of the house. Ammu after being thrown out of the house moves out to find job in some distant places in South and eventually surrenders to the blows of the destiny and dies. This brings the tragic end of Ammu's life journey. The tragic journey of Ammu begins with Assam where her husband was working, then she returns to Ayemenem with her two children after being divorced from her husband. She again moves out of Ayemenem when her brother Chacko expels her from home when her relationship with Velutha is surfaced. After expulsion from her home in Ayemenem she goes to South-West part of India to survive. Her journey of life is intensely tragic but she fights with her destiny. The ultimate end of her journey may not be successful for her but she struggles with it.

Other Characters Part of the Journey

Other significant characters which undertake journeys in the novel are Estha and Rachel. Estha, after the divorce of her parents goes to Calcutta with his father. Both the kids

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Vivek Dinkar Khabde

Journey Motif in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Estha and Rachel suffer the separation of their parents. Rachel remains in Ayemenem with her mother. Estha could not decide his course of journey on his own. The saddening separation of the Estha and Rachel has adverse effect on their psyche. Estha returns to Ayemenem after twenty three years after being sent by his father. Estha enters into the adulthood and the journey to adulthood is saddening.

Usha Bande remarks' "Estha's journey into the world of adult aberrations is painful and tragic. He is exposed to sodomy which leaves him physically sick and mentally paralysed. His "exit" through the "EXIT" of the Cinema Hall (P. 107), is symbolic of his exit from the world of mental peace and health." (29). The upbringing of the twins is hampered. The effect of Sophie Mol's death and the relationship of Ammu and Velutha on the banks of the river, the tragic life of his mother has had an adverse effect on Estha's psyche. Estha bears the burden of Ammu's death, feeling responsible for her death. Both Estha and Rachel are affected by the death of Ammu and Sophie Mol. Estha becomes more introvert and Rachel develops more manly qualities opposite to natural order. Rachel suffers from the guilt of Sophie Mol's death

Rachel's Independence - A Tragic, Parentless Child

Rachel is more independent in her decision than Estha. This might be probably because she was not much looked after at her mother's home in Ayemenem and so took her decisions on her own. She marries a American person and goes to Boston

"Rachel grew up without a brief. Without anybody to arrange a marriage for her. Without anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore without an obligatory husband looming on her horizon." (9).

Roy shows Rachel as a tragic, parentless child which suffers and drifts away with the passing of time. "Rachel drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge. With a sitting down sense. She returned with him to Boston" (10).

Rachel returns to Boston to meet her brother Estha in Ayemenem. The peculiarity about the characters in the novel is that they return to the center i.e. Ayemenem in some time later in their life. Chacko has studied in Oxford and returns to Ayemenem.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:7 July 2017

Vivek Dinkar Khabde

Journey Motif in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

393

Symbol of River

The river is symbolic of journey of life. The constant movement of the river water is symbolic of the flow of life which struggles and moves beyond overcoming every possible obstacle. Many things are related to the river in the novel. Sophie Mol's death, Ammu and Velutha's union at the bank of the river are some of the important happenings which are related to the river. In the novel the river is symbolic of life as well as death.

Physical Journey on Road

As regards to the journey on road the physical journey which are obvious signification of travel as Usha Bande in her book *Journey Metaphor in Indian Women's writing marks*, "as regards physical journey, there are almost all the modern modes of conveyance – bus, car, boat, rail and aeroplane- which the characters board to reach their geographical destination".... She further remarks that the names of the chapters in the novel also traces and indicate travel, "... Some chapters are titled, 'The Madras Mail, The Crossing, Cochin Harbour Terminus....'" (25).

Questioning the Idea of Home

Arundhati Roy interrogates or questions the idea of home in the novel. Does the twins and Ammu in the novel got love, care and affection at home? The twins undertake journeys to find solace from the saddening memories of their past life. Ammu moves from place to place to find a living. Moved to Delhi she remembers her native place with saddening memories. The diasporic distance from the native place is of less importance so as to experience the diasporic conditions. Living in the same country one can experience the same. The novel charts various journeys, journeys which lead to life as well as death - the final merging with the eternity.

References

- Arundhati, Roy. *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2002.
- Usha, Bande. *Journey Metaphor in Indian Women's Writing. Cultural Space and Diaspora*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies 2003.
- Indira Bhatt, Indira Nityanandam. *Explorations: Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1999



Vivek Dinkar Khabde (M.A. N.E.T.)
S.S. Dhamdhare Arts and Commerce College
Talegaon Dhamdhare, Tal- Shirur 412208
District Pune
Maharashtra
India
vivek_mail@rediffmail.com