

## Interweaving Aesthetics and Activism: Portrayal of Artistic Sensibility and Social Reform in Arundhati Roy's Fiction

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### Abstract

Indian English Literature (IEL) has had a major impact on the development of society. It has shaped civilizations, changed political systems and exposed injustice. It gives us a detailed preview of human experiences, allowing us to connect on basic levels of desire and emotion. Indian writers in English were deeply influenced by the political, social and ideological ferment. The rise of Indian English fiction represents the cultural perspectives of people. Arundhati Roy, the developing spokesperson of the anti-globalization movement has been a great critic of the many social and political issues that are constantly loitering around our nation Indian. As a novelist she deals with social problems to bring in rapid social awareness. Roy's literary works deal with inequality, economic fairness, acceptance of cultural diversity and participatory democracy. She has also written a collection of essays in which she has presented both political and social issues and raised her voice on many of the controversial political issues to bring revolution. Through her artistic portrayal she becomes the voice of the marginalized in her fictions and non-fictions. "A novel is such a powerful thing because it comes to a radical understanding, only by seeing how these [issues] are folded into each other and connected to our lives" (Roy). Roy's writing isn't a reporter of human conditions; instead, it is a form of activism where she challenges the partiality with human and environment.

**Key Words:** political system, spokesperson, awareness, revolution, challenges, partiality, activism.

## Introduction

The present research paper, “Interweaving Aesthetics and Activism: Portrayal of Artistic Sensibility and Social Reform in Arundhati Roy’s Fiction,” attempts to find out Roy’s activist interventions and creative writing through which she takes up the responsibility of social transformation of the oppressed including women and nature in contemporary India. Suzanne Arundhati Roy (born on 24 November 1961) is an Indian English writer and activist who focuses on issues related to human rights and environmental causes. Arundhati Roy is best known for her debut novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), the book is semi-autobiographical and a major part captures her childhood experiences in Ayemenem. The publication of *The God of Small Things* catapulted Roy to international fame. Roy’s fictions are political fable and challenge unjust power. She won the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1997 for her debut novel. She has written not just to sell her product but speaks out for her beliefs and stand up for them even when extremely unpopular. India is a country made up of people from different cultural backgrounds and religious people who practices understanding and ways of life. Arundhati Roy’s works examine how India’s minorities become victims of marginalization and exclusion from the larger political and social structure because the contentious politics in India exacerbate minority problems. Roy also believes that women’s rights need to be championed more in the developing world. Roy’s works and statements show that she believes women are undervalued, exploited and mistreated— broadly speaking in the developing world and countries such as India.

Roy’s artistic sense is distinguished by its lyrical prose, intricate narratives, and powerful social commentary. Her prose is commemorated for its poetic density and evocative illustration, extorting sensory experiences. English with regional idioms and neologisms defines the linguistic diversity of India.

### Artistic Sensibility and social commentary in *The God of Small Things*

Roy uses a variety of English in *The God of Small Things*. She is successful in communicating to the world the culture she represents, creates a new space for Indian literature and culture within the arts, even as it courted controversy and divided critical opinion. Her narrative here is non-linear storytelling and bildungsroman technique. This novel is written with full of literary devices like; defamiliarization, repetition of words and phrases, synecdoche, pun, rhythm, alliteration, similes, metaphors etc. “The yellow church swelled like a throat with the sound of sad singing” (Roy, 4).

She transforms a prosaic scene into an instinctual by frequent use of metaphors and similes to convey complex ideas and emotions. Her poetic prose with redolent metaphors provides detailed

description of Indian landscapes and cultures. The beginning of the novel explains the charm and brutality of Kerala amalgamating magic realism with social realism. The novel begins:

May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. (Roy, 1)

She created new words, phrases, intonation and connotations, new collocation to express various ideas and emotions in this novel like: “dustgreen”, “moss green” (Roy, 1), “child-sized”, “funerals-a funeral junkie”, “hymnbook-holding” (Roy, 3), “Furrywhirring”, “Sariflapping”, ““Whatisit” (Roy, 4), “re-Returned”, “tea-colored”, “wetgreen”, “greenmossing”, (Roy, 6), “crushed-strawberry-pink T-shirt”, “swampy arms”(Roy, 7), “ration-buyers”, “omeletteer” (Roy, 9), “Touchables” (Roy, 42), “Thimble-drinker”, “Coffin-cartwheeler”(Roy, 83). “Viable – dia-able age” (Roy, 2), this hyphenated phrase juxtaposes life and mortality, emphasizing the fragility of existence. The use of repetition in Roy’s novel is significant, it adds both emphasis and rhythm to its prose, “Estha’s sandwiches, that Estha ate” (Roy, 2), “My dearest Papa, I am well and happy in the service of Our Lady...My dearest Papa, Today Koh-i-noor vomited after lunch...My dearest Papa, Convent food does not seem to suit Koh-i-noor...” (Roy, 16). Fiction writing undoubtedly gives her chance to establish a new form of writing technique through which she portrays mourning of the victims of our society. “The quality of Ms. Roy’s narration is so extraordinary...at once so morally strenuous and so imaginatively supple... that the readers remain enthralled all the way, through to its agonizing finish” (Truax). Roy considers fiction writing “Azadi” (Roy, 7). Her statement truly justifies her novels. Her writing isn’t only for art’s sake instead art for life’s sake. She writes:

A novel gives a writer the freedom to be as complicated as she wants – to move through words, languages, and time, through societies, communities, and politics. A novel can be endlessly complicated, layered, but that is not the same as being loose, baggy or random. A novel to me, is freedom with responsibility. Real, unfettered azadi – Freedom. (Roy, 7).

The God of Small Things is non-linear, moving back and forth between 1969-1993, concentrated around the childhood experiences of fraternal twins Rahel and Estha, and tragic love affair between Ammu - the twins’ mother - and Velutha - an untouchable ‘Paravan man’. Relationship of Ammu and Velutha defies the rigid social hierarchies and caste norms leading to devastating consequences and examines the life in the post- colonial India. The novel counterparts with *Untouchables* by Mulk Raj Anand and reminisces the words of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar written in *The Annihilation of Caste*. Velutha represents the economical, social, and political

marginalization in post-independence India. “Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched” (Roy, 45).

Velutha portrays love, loss, casteism, oppression of the marginalized and deprived in post-colonial Indian society. The females of the novel Ammu, her mom, Baby Kochamma and the twins suffer in the overwhelming androcentric culture. Her female characters furnish miscellaneous double marginalization- 1<sup>st</sup> on the basis of family structure and 2<sup>nd</sup> on the basis of societal norms. As a female, Ammu is oppressed by her father, treated badly by her husband and embarrassed and sidelined by the police and casted aside by her brother. “Through the character of Ammu, Arundhati Roy lashes out at the hypocritical moral code of society, which makes a great difference between men and women even to her death bed” (Goswami).

### **Artistic Sensibility and social commentary in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness***

In 2017, twenty years after her first novel’s publication, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, her second, most-awaited novel was published. Once again this novel characterizes agitated personas of the modern contemporary India. After her first novel, in the past two decades Roy was dedicated to political essays and activism. Her political philosophy, non-linear narrative, metaphors, wordplay, vivid imagery, sensory and poetic description, dark humor and irony, realism, magic realism etc. give privilege to produce bleak realities of contemporary India without becoming sententious. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy integrates Urdu, Hindi, and regional dialects into English prose which presents Indian’s multicultural identity. In a lecture she describes the novel as “A novel written in English but imagined in several languages” (Roy).

Throughout the novel Roy uses the words like ‘Hijra’, ‘khawabgah’, ‘Majnu’, ‘Khuda’, ‘Masjid’, ‘Dargah’, ‘Jannat’, ‘Duniya’ etc. This hybridity challenges the hegemony of English language and positioning English as a vessel for India’s pluralism. Her narrative style sets deep thematic and emotions impact. Opening of the novel is situated in a Delhi graveyard signaling Roy’s spontaneous magical – realist imagery, lyrical yet ironic.

She lived in graveyard like a tree. At dawn she saw the crowns off and welcomed the bats home. At dusk she did the opposite. Between shifts she conferred with the ghosts of vultures that loomed in her high branches... (Roy, 9)

Roy’s activism flows into every aspect of the novel. It is a political fable: It chronicles and critiques contemporary India through personal histories of marginalized individuals. The relationship between Tilo and Musa approximates Ammu and Velutha romance from the

author's first novel. "The novelist is not oblivious to the fact of various relationships which fade because of the political instability. Government policies seem to favor the elite masses and show disregard to the common masses. People in power most often get shielded at the cost of the blooded murder of innocent merely because of the fault of a handful of people or their faith." (Mishra). Anjum, Tilo, Musa, Saddam, the slum children and others depict governments hypocrisy, land reform in Kashmir, operation Green Hunt, communal riots, caste violence, gender discrimination and other political and social horrors. The depiction of Kashmir, scenes of Hindu-Muslim riots, plights of hijra and a Dalit painter lay bare the endless cycle of violence and propaganda. An analysis notes Roy "builds on actual history and news headlines" (N. Roy) to ground her fiction in reality.

Anjum, a transgender woman faces mockery from others as a "clown without a circus, queen without a palace" (Roy, 9). Anjum's identity excluded her from traditional norms and customs of the society, emphasizing her marginalized position. Anjum's mother's desire for a baby boy reveals gender discrimination in a male dominated society. Romance between Musa and Tilo disturbed by Musa's urge for Kashmir's freedom. The concept of Kashmir's freedom reveals the conspiracies which make the valley a hot bed of politics.

## Conclusion

She draws attention through her fertile commentary on current society, their practices and ideologies. Roy believes that there is an intricate, rigor and responsibility that art, that writing itself, imposes on a writer. Almost all her literary works depict her concern for the social and cultural transformation of the downtrodden. The beauty of her novel lies in the use of Indian English and the varieties of techniques she uses. She uses that English, which is a distorted one from the standard conventional use of words and sentences from regional languages in India apart from the use of subjectless sentences, faulty spellings, capital letters, use of italics, single word sentences, change of parts of speech, clustering of adjectives, nouns and deviation from normal word order etc. That English is a kind of 'Manglish' (Malayalam-English) and 'Hinglish' (Hindi-English) as far as the Indians are concerned, but for the international readers she had the Oxford and Cambridge versions too.

She genuinely explores issues around gender inequality, militarism and prejudices in modern India. It reflects the fragmentation of the world around us. In both novels, Arundhati Roy's artistic creativity is in full force. Roy presents the case of the subaltern class who have no access to power and their voices have never been heard in the political and social arena. Her writings show how the elite and patriarchs have been affecting minorities, Dalits, transgender and those who have no access to power. She innovates with forms and genre, uses a rich tapestry of language, and crafts unforgettable characters – all in service of a novel that is an emotionally powerful as it is politically charged.

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