

Multiculturalism in *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

India is a land of diversity. It is a blend of multi religious and ethnic group. Indian society is composed of people belonging to a variety of religions, sects, castes and tribes. Every state in India has their different language, food habits, dress code, religion, culture etc. The present research paper is an attempt to study the theory of multiculturalism. It brings together different themes such as cultural diversity, recognition, peaceful co-existence of many cultures and subcultures. It is a social theory that respects minority cultures which have been suffering from social injustice, marginalisation, exclusion and, dislocation and social discrimination. It appreciates cultural diversity and respects the notion of multiple identities at individual, cultural, ethnic, religious and national levels.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, cultural diversity, social injustice, dislocation

Introduction:

The present research paper is an attempt to discuss Indian multiculturalism in detail as I have chosen Indian novel in English, *The God of Small Things* for multicultural analysis. The term multiculturalism was primarily used in the U.S.A. in connection with the demand of the black and other minority communities for equal representation in American society. After some years multiculturalism has gained the status of a movement. As a movement, multiculturalism emphasizes the value of different ethnic, racial and cultural communities which cannot be allowed to melt into a common culture.

Multiculturalism:

Definitions: There are different connotations and implications, different ideas and opinions about Multiculturalism, both positive and negative. Postmodernism promotes the rights of women, African-Americans, Dalits, homosexuals, etc. It celebrates the rights of all classes and castes.

In the opinion of Judith Squires (2002:114): “Multiculturalism has become the topic of the moment, not only for political theorists, but also for social theorists, sociologists, political scientists and educationalists.” Multiculturalism has derived various themes through its relation to various disciplines. Such as cultural, religious, ethnic diversity, Socio-cultural harmony, value of tolerance, cultural liberty, harmonious co-existence of multiple cultures and subcultures.

Multiculturalism provides equality in all cultural groups. Therefore, all cultures deserve equal respect and value. Sarah Joseph (2002:159) says: “Multiculturalism is used to refer to a desired end-state, as a way of referring to a society in which different cultures are respected and the reproduction of culturally defined group is protected and social diversity celebrated.” Each culture has its own principles, beliefs, thoughts, practices and lifestyles. So, multiculturalism ensures equal respect and value to all cultures.

Multiculturalism in *The God of Small Things*:

The God of Small Things is the debut novel of well-known Indian writer Arundhati Roy. It won the Booker Prize in 1997. The story takes place in Ayemenem, a town in Kerala, India. Kerala is a multicultural and multireligious state. Caste system in Kerala was so rigid and it has created different social problems. It has become a major hurdle in implementing a multicultural policy in Kerala. Syrian Christian and Brahmin communities give the extreme importance to caste system in Kerala. Though multiculturalism provides the principles of equality, freedom and justice, the so-called upper caste people in Kerala violate all these principles and control the power structure of the society.

The novel centers around the Ipe family in Ayemenem city, Kerala in which tradition and history shape the lives of its inhabitants who have been blindly following the dead conventions, rigid values and rules. The late Reverend John Ipe, the oldest member of the family. In Kerala, the dominant patriarchal culture controls women in such a way that they have no other choice than to surrender themselves to certain patriarchal values. As a representative of the dominant patriarchal culture, Reverend Ipe was always trying to control the female members in the family. His wife Aleyooty Ammachi was an early victim of the patriarchal culture. The women in the Ayemenem house are not so free, because of male domination. Pappachi, the present head of the family, always thinks about family's reputation and preserves the patriarchal values. Ammu, daughter of Pappachi starts developing her rebellious spirit and shatters the values that the

family has been preserving for many decades.

The female characters in the Ayemenem house, Ammachi, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Ammu has harassed and exploited by its male chauvinists. Mammachi's husband, Pappachi, harasses her mentally and physically: "Every night he beats her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place." (The God of small Things.47-48)

Ammu and her mother are the victim of mental and physical exploitation by the males of the family. But Mammachi never uttered a single word against her husband and the patriarchal values, whereas Ammu rebels against the patriarchy, which blocks her way to liberty and freedom. She wants to cross the boundaries of caste, community and culture for developing a new version of multiculturalism.

Ammu, the heroine of the novel, is a representative character in atypical patriarchal society. From the beginning, she gets no chance to bloom and grow independently due to social, cultural and religious interferences. Indeed, multiculturalism demands equal opportunities for all cultures, castes, communities and genders. But Ammu gets no chance to continue her education like her brother, Chiko, who enjoys all advantages in the family. As a female child, she has no space in her family and always harassed and exploited by her own family members. Hence, she tries to escape from the loveless Ayemenem house to Calcutta for a temporary relief. At a Bengali wedding reception, she meets a youth and she marries him without informing her parents. Ammu belongs to the upper class Syrian Christian community and she got married a Bengali

person, breaking the rules of matrimony and the false traditional values of her family. She attempts to develop her own female identity. But her decision creates many more problems in front of her.

Multiculturalism promotes cultural diversity and internal plurality of all cultures. But the culture of Syrian Christian is not flexible. Ammu's intercommunity love marriage attempts to unite the gap between cultures. After her marriage she changed her 'imprisoned' life. Her changed look and habits bring out the rebel again in her. But very soon she realizes that her husband is alcoholic and harasses her mentally and physically like the Ayemenem males. His boss Mr. Hollick, too is sexually exploited. Ammu's husband forces her to accept his boss's sexual demands but Ammu refuses, her husband attacks her physically. It indicates typical Indian male's superiority on women. After some days, Ammu leaves her alcoholic husband and returns to Ayemenem with her twins: "Ammu left her husband and returned unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem. To everything she had fled from only a few years ago. Except now she had two children. And no more dreams" (42) At Ayemenem house nobody sympathizes her, her own parents neglect her and insult her. At the social level, she has been concerned as an 'outcaste'. Her sense of revolt takes concrete shape from the time she sees Velutha. Ammu gets attracted to a dalit for whom the Ayemenem house has no respect at all. Velutha, too like Ammu. They both realize that they are made for each other, that they are beyond all man-made love laws. They think beyond culture, caste and community barriers.

Umed Singh (2006:89) says: "They transgress the Love Laws and establish

physical relationship with each other. They seek solace in each other's arms because they belong to the same 'class' i.e., marginalised and oppressed class."

They both try to establish a multiculturalism that transcends all man-made boundaries and restrictions. But a false civilization promotes a false multiculturalism and does not accept Ammu and Velutha's relationship. Ammu's parents start harassing her mentally. Velutha is treacherously arrested and tortured to death in the police station. After Velutha's death, Ammu is forced to leave Ayemenem house. Ammu dies anonymously. The last phase of Ammu's life reveals the brutality of upper-class society: Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppy, where she had gone for a job interview as someone's secretary. She died alone. With a noisy ceiling fan for company and no Estha to lie at the back of her talk to her. She was thirty-one. Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age. (161)

Finally, the vicious agencies of history—such as family, politics and religion—succeed in eliminating Velutha and Ammu. Their death implies the fact that for the establishment of real multiculturalism, one has to make bloody sacrifices.

Conclusion:

The present research paper is an attempt to study a role of multiculturalism in *The God of Small Things*. As a movement, multiculturalism emphasizes the value of different ethnic, racial and cultural communities which cannot be allowed to melt into a common culture. Multiculturalism promotes cultural diversity and internal plurality of all cultures. Every culture has its own value and respect. In *The God of Small Things*,

Arundhati Roy handles the theme of an inter caste love affair, she tries to highlight the need of casteless and peaceful society. If we disrespect any culture or caste, it will lead to conflict and social unrest. Ammu and Velutha's relationship crossed all

limitations of upper class society and tried to spread the equality in the class, caste and community. It gives the message that no community or culture should attempt to dominate another in society.

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