

Family, Discrimination and Social Class Inequality in Arundhati's Roy's Novels

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Abstract: Arundhati Roy is an Indian author. She won the Booker Prize for fiction in 1997. She is also a notable political activist. She has been involved in issues related to human rights. Arundhati Roy has also been involved in environmental issues. She won the PEN Pinter Prize in 2024. This paper studies some of the author's critically acclaimed works.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy, The God of Small Things, The Ministry of Utmost Unhappiness.

I. Introduction

Arundhati Roy is an Indian author. She won the Booker Prize for fiction in 1997. She is also a notable political activist. She has been involved in issues related to human rights. Arundhati Roy has also been involved in environmental issues. She won the PEN Pinter Prize in 2024. This award is given in honour of Harold Pinter, a playwright who had won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Arundhati Roy was born in Shillong, India, and is also an essayist. Her famous works of fiction include the novels, The God of Small Things and The Ministry of Utmost Unhappiness.

II. The God of Small Things

The God of Small Things won the Booker Prize in 1997. Its focus is on casteism and colonialism in India. The story revolves around the childhood experience of paternal twins, namely Rahel and Estha. The God of Small Things is a family drama novel. It was Arundhati Roy's debut novel. The setting of the story is Ayemenem, Kerala. And the novel alternates between 1969 and 1993.

Ammu Ipe is the mother of Rahel and Estha. Ammu had been married to Baba, but leaves him after encountering his abusive nature. Her brother is named, Chacko, who returns from England and has divorced his wife. Baby Kochamma is Ammu and Chacko's aunt. She has remained unmarried due to a case of unrequited love. Baby Kochamma is a bitter woman and a constant manipulator. Chacko's wife is Margaret.

Margaret's second husband has recently passed away, and hence Chacko invites her and their daughter, Sophie, Ayemenem, Kerala and asks them to spend Christmas with his family. Velutha is an untouchable who works at the family's pickle factory. Ammu and Velutha begin a relationship and this brings forth the wrath of the family due to Velutha being an untouchable. Sophie dies in a boat accident and Velutha is falsely blamed for it. He is brutally beaten by the police and passes away. Family, discrimination and social class inequality are the main themes of the novel.

III. The Ministry of Utmost Unhappiness

The Ministry of Utmost Unhappiness is the second novel of Arundhati Roy, and was published in 2017. There is a twenty year gap between the publications of The God of Small Things Arundhati Roy's debut novel and The Ministry of Utmost Unhappiness, her second novel. The Ministry of Utmost Unhappiness includes a lot of significant events from Indian history. The novel describes the effects of the land reforms which caused a lot of farmers to be dispossessed. She also speaks about the Bhopal Gas Disaster. This was a chemical accident that occurred on December 3, 1984 at Union Carbide India Limited pesticide plant located in Bhopal. People in the surrounding areas were exposed to methyl isocyanate, a toxic gas. It caused the death of several of the town's inhabitants. The setting of the novel is Delhi and Kashmir.

Other incidents of Indian history that are included in the novel are the Kashmir Insurgency and the Godhra train burning of 2002. The Kashmir Insurgency refers to a separatist insurgency against the Indian administration in Jammu and Kashmir. The Godhra train burning occurred on 27 February, 2002. The Hindu pilgrims who were returning from Ayodhya were killed in a fire occurring inside the Sabarmati express. It was located near the Godhra railway station in Gujarat, an Indian state. After this, the Gujarat riots took place, in which Muslims were targeted with violence. Politics and resistance can be seen throughout the course of the novel. Inequality, family and discrimination are depicted.

REFERENCES

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