

IDENTITY UNVEILED: UNRAVELING SOCIETAL COMPLEXITIES IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S 'THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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Abstract:

This study delves into Arundhati Roy's novel "The God of Small Things" to explore its intricate engagement with issues of identity, politics, and societal subversion. Drawing on Roy's own reflections on fiction as a means of presenting her world, the study analyzes how the novel, through the lens of the relationship between the twins Rahel and Estha, challenges conventional notions of identity. It examines the novel's portrayal of the complexities arising from genetic, geo-political, and cultural factors, suggesting that these complexities are the 'small things' that influence and shape individual and societal identities.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy, The God of Small Things, identity, politics, societal subversion, postcolonialism, feminism

Introduction:

Arundhati Roy's novel, "The God of Small Things," is a rich tapestry of narrative that not only explores the personal dynamics of its characters but also critiques the societal influences that shape their lives (Roy, 1997). Roy's perspective on fiction as a way of seeing and presenting the world sets the stage for an examination of how the novel functions as a critique of societal interference in individual lives. The study explores the inversion of Lacanian concepts in the portrayal of Rahel and Estha, emphasizing the novel's focus on the intricacies of identity in the modern world.

Stylistics of the Study:

The analysis adopts an intricate approach by engaging in a meticulous examination of key passages within "The God of Small Things," with a primary focus on unraveling the nuanced telepathic connection shared by the twins Rahel and Estha. This telepathic bond serves as a literary device through which Arundhati Roy not only inverts Lacanian concepts of identity but also explores the complex and intertwined nature of their joint identity. The study delves into the narrative choices made by Roy, drawing inspiration from Bianca Del Villano's critical insights. Del Villano's perspective becomes a valuable lens through which to interpret the text, linking Roy's narrative decisions to broader postcolonial and feminist theories. Central to the study is the exploration of the multiplicity of identities in post-independence India. The narrative choices in "The God of Small Things" are seen as a deliberate strategy to unveil the intricate layers of identity influenced by genetic, geo-political, and cultural factors (Roy, 1997). This multiplicity of identities, as emphasized by Del Villano, becomes a crucial thematic thread in the novel, illustrating how the characters grapple with a multitude of forces that shape and define their sense of self. As the examination deepens, the study extends its focus to the central metaphor in the novel—the concept of the 'god of small things.' This metaphor, as proposed by Arundhati Roy herself, serves as an inversion of a larger entity, challenging traditional notions of power and control. The 'god of small things' becomes a symbolic representation of the subtle, often overlooked forces that play a pivotal role in shaping individual and collective identities (Roy, 1997). The study highlights how societal forces, depicted through grand narratives like Nation, History, Class, Caste, Religion, and Marxism, act as entities that deny and constrain individual identities. The metaphorical exploration of the 'god of small things' unveils a profound commentary on the ways in which seemingly insignificant aspects of life, often dismissed or marginalized, hold the power to influence and alter the course of individual destinies. The study underscores how these 'small things' are, paradoxically, the undercurrents that disrupt established norms and boundaries. In doing so, the analysis reveals the intricate interplay between the microcosm of personal experiences and the macrocosm of societal structures.

In essence, the study seeks to unravel the rich tapestry of themes and metaphors woven into the fabric of "The God of Small Things," emphasizing how Roy's narrative choices, the multiplicity of identities, and the metaphor of the 'god of small things' collectively serve as a poignant commentary on the complexities inherent in the formation and denial of individual identities within the socio-political landscape of post-independence India.

Findings:

The study reveals how major societal narratives such as Nation, History, Class, Caste, Religion, and Marxism control and limit individual identities in the novel. The failure of Marxism to transcend caste barriers is exemplified through Velutha's tragic fate, emphasizing the inability of grand ideologies to bring about real change (Shiva, 1989). The examination also uncovers the novel's critique of historical amnesia, symbolized by the Ipe family's 'anglophile' orientation, and its implications for the broader Indian identity.

Discussion of the Study:

Through the interweaving of personal and national narratives, Arundhati Roy's novel, "The God of Small Things," emerges as a transcendent force, pushing against fixed notions of nationhood. The narrative's fluid movement between the local and the global serves as a testament to a postnationalist perspective, disrupting traditional boundaries that confine identity within the narrow parameters of a singular nation. Roy's storytelling becomes a powerful vehicle for challenging established norms and urging readers to reconsider identity within a broader, more interconnected framework.

The novel's exploration of personal and national narratives aligns it with the works of other influential postcolonial authors, notably Amitav Ghosh. In this literary landscape, authors like Ghosh and Roy share a common thematic ground as they delve into the intersections of individual and national stories. Ghosh's exploration of the personal and the national mirrors Roy's narrative choices, emphasizing the inextricable links between the microcosm of personal experiences and the macrocosm of national identity. This alignment underscores a shared commitment to unraveling the complexities that arise when personal narratives intertwine with broader socio-political contexts.

In the hands of Roy and her contemporaries, the postcolonial narrative becomes a dynamic space where the dichotomy between the personal and the national is blurred, challenging readers to reconsider their understanding of identity. The narrative transcends demonstrated by Roy's novel, as it moves effortlessly between the local and the global, echoes a broader call for a reevaluation of identity beyond the constraints of nationhood. In this literary exploration, Roy contributes to a growing body of work that reshapes how we perceive the intricate dance between personal stories and the collective narratives that define our shared histories.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, "The God of Small Things" stands as a compelling critique of societal influences on individual identities. Arundhati Roy's narrative intricacy, notably in exploring personal and national narratives, challenges established boundaries and prompts a reevaluation of identity within the complex postcolonial and postnationalist context. The novel's examination of characters like Rahel and Estha exposes the subtle yet powerful forces that shape individual identities, dismantling conventional norms and advocating for a more fluid understanding of the self.

Within the postcolonial framework, Roy's work delves into the multifaceted nature of identity, acknowledging the layers influenced by historical legacies and societal expectations. Simultaneously, in a postnationalist context, the novel urges a shift from grand narratives to a nuanced appreciation of the 'small things'—the seemingly insignificant details that redefine our comprehension of self and society. Arundhati Roy's literary preoccupation with these 'small things' serves as a resonant commentary, compelling readers to reevaluate the subtleties that often elude mainstream discourse and recognizing their profound impact on the construction of identity.

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