

## ANALYZING ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*: POLITICAL GLOBALIZATION

**Farhat Nawaz \***

Lecturer Department of English, Abbottabad University of Science and Technology Havelian  
[farhatjadoon995@gmail.com](mailto:farhatjadoon995@gmail.com)

**Malik Jawed Ahmed Khan**

PhD Scholar, Department of Linguistics the University of Haripur, Haripur Pakistan  
[jawedmalik5@gmail.com](mailto:jawedmalik5@gmail.com)

**Seema Safeer**

M.Phil Scholar, Department of Linguistics the University of Haripur, Haripur Pakistan  
[seemasafeer1986@gmail.com](mailto:seemasafeer1986@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*This research paper aims to analyze the notion globalization and the element of politicization in Roy's The God of Small Things. The writer discusses a number of socio-political issues in India through the use of the device of political satire in her writings. In the novel characters move from personal life to public. In Current paper politics works at two major levels in the present study: firstly, domestic; and secondly at global. In this context, this study is particularly concerned with certain political issues in India. The paper exhibits Roy's selected novel functioning as a political activism against both; domestic as well as global politics. Moreover, it reflects that how literature functions as a social weapon to debate socio-political predicaments. This qualitative study rests on theory of dissent that is a philosophically political theory which means opposition, disagreement, or deviation from traditional norms of something.*

**Key Words;** globalization, politics, satire, dissent.

### BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Literature is a powerful mean in the writer's hand for social and political criticism. Those writers are considered praiseworthy whose writings work for the cause of humanity. Literature is not a separate order, but should be socio-political communication, as Raymond's Long Revolution (1966) ends with a plea that art not be seen as a separate order, but as a means of social communication. The element of politics is linked to literary creation, as Fredric Jameson in his essay Third World Literature in the Era of Transnational Capitalism argues that: "All Third World texts must be read as national allegories, because the story of the fate of the private individual is always an allegory of the tangled situation of public culture and society of the third world" (p. 86)

According to Jameson, the denial of individuality without a place in the Third World leads to the allegorical nature of Third World culture, where the telling of the individual story and individual experience ultimately cannot encompass the whole.

Roy is one of India's brilliant English writers. She is a post-colonial activist dedicated to the interest of Indian people. He stands behind the cause of voiceless people against the worse colonization of political parties and socio-religious groups in society. He criticizes not only the colonial rule in India, which exists there even after the declaration of independence, but also the local government, which he describes as even worse than the first one. She wrote a lot of her fictional and non-fictional works, which followed the formation, evaluation and reform of the socio-political perspective. According to Marxist critics and new historians, literature cannot escape the conditions of the time of its production, and this was often observed in Roy's work. Her work serves the socio-political.

A closer examination of Roy's works reveals that she appears to be an outspoken political activist, social and cultural critic. In contemporary Indian postcolonial writing in English, Roy would

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\* Corresponding Author

figure as a prominent voice of dissent. Roy, who belongs to the current generation of Indian writers in English, is known for her grassroots activism. She became famous above all for her novel *The God of Small Things*. Much of her writing deals with the socio-political aspects of Indian society. Roy's *The God of Small Things* debates the reconstruction and reinterpretation of globalization.

The novel is relatively considered a post-colonial work that raises its voice against the history of colonialism. In the novel, Roy wants to change the Eurocentric perception of global industrialization and also to point out the suffering created by the ideologies inherent in globalization. This paper aims to explore Roy's attitude towards the concept of globalization and its impacts. The major aim of this paper is to investigate the political expression in Roy's below mentioned selected fiction and non-fiction work. Furthermore, to analyze the used element of politicization and the use of the personal sphere as public and political in fiction.

The relationship between literature and politics has always been a contentious topic. Some argue that literature and politics are two different things, while others challenge this view on the grounds that the social reality "constructed" in literature with the help of the most powerful social institution that is language cannot be freed from the politics, ideology and personal beliefs of those who participate in its creation. Especially since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism, Culture and Imperialism*, these warring positions have become further polarized. According to postcolonial critics, literature is a social fact and as such fulfills a political function.

In reality, things are not as clear as they seem at first glance, nor are they as simple as they seem. These hastily formulated alternatives, these concepts of art-as-ends or art-as-means, are far from solving the problems facing intellectuals in today's troubled world. In an essay entitled *Literature Tracked by Politics*, Alain Robbe-Grillet criticized the politicization of a work of art and says that a work of literature should not exhibit an element of politicization. The opposite opinion is held by, among others, Ngugi wa Thiongo, who claims that "Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics?" (Ngugi, 1981:3)

As Roy states in her essay, specifically *The Politics of Power* (2001), "as a writer I have the right to express my opinion and beliefs; as a free citizen of India I was part of any peaceful dharna, demonstration or protest march" (p. 103). He talks about things like the globalization of the world economy, the privatization of India's energy supply by the US based on energy companies, and the construction of large dams that will displace thousands of Indians. He asks, is globalization supposed to close the gap between privileged/underprivileged, upper/lower castes or educated illiterates? (p. 14). Pessimistically, globalization is not the eradication of world poverty, but a mutated variety of colonialism that is controlled by some invisible empire. At first glance, she appears to speak for her countrymen and actively participate in the political movement, but in reality she is suspicious of India's ability to change and improve. He criticizes the big dam project that cost the lives of thousands of Indians. So far, there is popular talk and slogans about the free market, deregulatory reforms, but in reality it is nothing but corruption.

In the modern era, speech genres, literary writing, storytelling and spoken poetry serve to express political reality. In this context, Roy's work, including her fiction, non-fiction and speeches, serves much for press, propaganda and political purposes. Dissent is, philosophically, a political theory or doctrine that means opposition, disagreement, or deviation from the traditional norms of something. Further, the *New Shorter Oxford Dictionary of Historical Principles* defines the word "disagree" as a refusal to agree or agree with a proposal or an expression of opposition. Disagreement has remained an integral part of human attitude, thought and behavior. It is understood as an aspect of individual attitude. A person who does not agree with the established norms of society or is against them is called a dissenter.

The concept of dissent is embedded in a complex interplay of multiple subjectivities. A dissident is a person who is usually ascribed characteristics such as a predisposition to disagree and differ from a widely held opinion. As part of the recent generation of Indian writers in English, Roy is known for her activism and has written boldly against India's nuclear policy and her outspoken political courage and the four main characteristics of a dissident, i.e. strong personal convictions, expressiveness, rebellion and clear personal views. Her voice in writing is seen as a voice that goes against the established norms of society, especially her work brings an element of dissent. Her disagreement is essentially of a political nature, which takes the form of scathing criticism, i.e. a fearless expression.

Roy is dominant dissentient figure, as Ghosh argues about Roy as political dissentient (128). Similarly she adds "Roy's nonfiction offers us the mathematics of justice, valuable resources against the excesses of globalization (145). Roy also wrote some of the non-fictional works such as *Power Politics* (2001), *The End of Imagination*, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2001), *Monuments of Modern Civilization and The Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* (2004). In her political essays she debates a number of issues related to globalization, imperialism, neo capitalism and politics in the state of India.

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Roy's <sup>†</sup>*TGST* is about several things at the same time. It has a strong political significance and it can be read as a political satire. The novel can also be considered as a protest novel. *TGST* mostly debates on village of Ayewenem in Kottayam District in Kerala and through this small village the writer peeps into the life of whole nation from various aspects such as social, political and economic. She uses her characters as personal political agent. Her characters' public and private lives are mixed up through interconnection of social, political and religious structure. Being an Indian writer, she talks about the political nature of India. As India is a divided country into twenty states and seven union territories and Kerala- the native place of Roy is one of them, so there are multiple political parties in the countries.

*TGST* first discusses policy at the national level. Ironically, it deals with the corrupt national politics at various levels, for example, it refers to the Congress party, which is originally the Indian National Congress, which was founded in 1885, and the Communist Party of India, which was started in 1920. There is a political meaning behind the setting of the novel, because when the main events of the novel took place, the Congress Party was in power at the national level, while the Communist Party was in power in Roy's native village of Kerala. The novel talks about politics through a series of agencies, where Roy presents politics as a complex force, operating at different levels. In the words of Reena Kothari, Roy represents the power structure in society; there is gender oppression, lower caste oppression, child subjugation, police extremes and a hypocritical marxist leader-Mr. Pillai. He oppresses others for his personal gain. He uses the idea of Marxism for his personal gain rather than for the betterment of the poor working class. The novel presents the forces of political power in various forms. According to Ranga Rao, Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a unique protest novel. He claims that Roy's book is the only Indian novel in English that can be considered a protest novel.

It may be interpreted at various levels where one dimension is its satirical aspect on politics particularly on communist class. Roy through the medium of storytelling questions the system of power and endures to change it through the tool of her writing. She allegorically constructs caste system in *TGST* in order to investigate the cultural clashes and differences in Indian society. In the novel Velutha is noticeable character in this regard because his caste figure indicates the cultural difference of India. The symbolic character of Velutha reveals us the fact that he represents the unheard voices and ignored ones in the society. The writer discusses a number of cultural crises such as hybridity, mimicry and displacement. In addition, all personal events in the novel are connected to historical events. Roy does not reverse history, rather draws attention to big problems from history based on small things. Similarly, it decodes Western codes through a process of literary decolonization. The narrative implicates British imperialism and Christianity as complicit in the oppressive caste system, as Aldama puts it; the novel functions as an allegory of the nation, where Roy writes against empire and global capitalism. Nair argues that Roy tackles big issues like revolution, change, politics and religion. Her way of discussion is from all the little things to finding the big things. In her work *Analysis of TGST*, Friedman explores a range of issues such as caste, violence, gender and nationalism, and argues that Roy's integration of gender and caste into the story of the nation shows how feminist geopolitics engages power relations locally as they operate, both on the nation and within the nation" (p. 117). The novel can be seen as a political allegory in the context that it connects the nationalist imagination between the region and the nation. Focusing heavily on the local to discuss the global in this context, Friedman argues that "what happens inside a nation" is as important as "what happens outside a nation" (p. 118). In the words of Susan Stanford Friedman: Roy's *TGST* discusses a range of issues such as gender, caste, violence, feminism and nationalism, and in her view, Roy's depiction of gender and caste in the story reveals feminist geopolitics at both local and national levels.

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<sup>†</sup> The abbreviated term *TGST* stands for Roy's novel titled as *The God of Small Things*.

Her revealed relationship between the Brahmin and the untouchable can be taken as a political allegory suggesting the relationship of the colonizers and the colonized. In the novel, they are untouchable to the Brahmin much like the colonizers treated the colonized people during the colonial rule. The novel deals with different periods in India such as the colonial period, the post-colonial era and the post-modern period, and thus the caste system plays an important role in the discourse of the novel. It is an allegorical construction, as Dirks says that caste is a product of the historical encounter between East and West, and so is Roy's construction of the caste system in TGST.

Roy's TGST takes a political stance through an examination of power opposition both within and outside of the text. The novel is a dissident tale in this regard. Roy's novel can be interpreted in this light because the notion of dissent theory is a crucial component of South Asian literature as a result of the protracted colonial rule. The novel's style and linguistic choices, which highlight its dissident narrative nature, are mostly challenged by its contentious nature. Roy uses suitable language in his narrative so that it can be understood by a diverse range of non-Eurocentric subjects. Through his photos, he illustrates how the middle classes are unable to come up with practical solutions to help society's outcasts because they are cut off from their predicament by their reliance on image-based media. It is believed that Roy's response from the outside world offers several illuminating insights into her objectives. Her attention to current events demonstrates how the heterogeneous population of Kerala has been impacted by "foreign" schooling, Americanized media, religious subjectivity the perceived liberties provided by communism, as well as the rising separation from nature following the pandemic of industry. Roy uses dissident vocabulary in her narrative style in an intentional effort to undermine the canonized version of colonial English.

According to Smith's point of view, Roy's fun anti-capitalist neologisms, linguistic ruminations, and "nationalized" and rhythmic style make his language "light on the tongue." The darker and more politicized setting of her "whimsical language" always references the power systems in the narrative. For example, text from TGST includes: "Coca-Cola Fanta? Rose milk ice cream?" (p. 109) Roy also clearly indicates that the language she has re-learned is the orthodox English of colonial Christian schooling, which she learned through forced indoctrination through the repetition of a canonized lexicon rather than as a creolized mix of English. Roy repeatedly uses clichés from colonial discourse to undermine this "learned" English as a form of resistance. Her act of repetition is an example of semantic meaning, which is the process by which words lose their particular meaning even as they are considered and decontextualized. In order to undermine the pronounced inviolability of language, Roy reduces colonial English to a pliable form that is open to the verbiage of the colonized cultural speech. According to Nien-Ming Chien (2004) "Roy's anarchic writing transforms English from colonialist origins to nativist self-expression" (p. 158).

The politics of creative representation are the center of Roy's oppositional position. (2012) writes that "it is time for us all to sit up and worry" when "independent, thinking people begin totally under flags, when authors, artists, singers, and actors blindly harness their creativity to the benefit of 'the nation'." (Accessed: May 3). This would imply that her anarchic usage of English is genuinely involved in the development of an expression of English that is generally oppositional and unhindered by governmental control. According to Roy, her ability to understand and reinscribe the symbolic supremacy of Western cultural hegemony through the re-appropriation and hybridization of the English language is her mastery of a "specialized symbolic code,". This makes her "place of origin" a good representation of post-colonial rebels who were once complicit in Anglophilia. Roy's criticism of globalization also covers Americanized imperialism, which aims to convert people who have access to Western media through technology into admirers of Western ideas. The discrepancy between the exterior and the interior, between the local and the outer world, is the primary theme of TGST. He illustrates the challenge of balancing the daily experiences of people involved in the politics of increasing affiliations with the politics of the exterior nationalized and globalized world within this metaphorical dichotomy. The local becomes involved in a peculiar type of the global within these associations—strong ideological links, mediated by universalized images—even though neither of them seems to match the other. The following passage from the book TGST serves as an illustration of Roy's criticism of technology that fosters global universality. Roy places a lot of emphasis on the impact of television images on Baby Kochamma's life.

The sky was littered with televisions. If you wore special glasses, you could see them spinning in the sky among bats and homing birds - blondes, wars, famines, football, food parades, coups d'etats,

hairstyles set in hairspray. Designer studs, gliding towards Ayemene like paratroopers. Creating patterns in the sky. Wheels. Windmills. Blooming and non-blooming flowers. (p. 188)

She considered ethnic cleansing, famine and genocide to be a direct threat to her furniture. (p. 28) The unreality of not just television but also televised events as a trusted source of information about the "reality" of the world outside of the local one is further reinforced by Roy's images in this instance. Despite his participation in this television unreality, Baby Kochamma is only able to relate the pictures he sees to his own environment, absurdly equating scenes of the holocaust with an assault on his own furniture. The viewer simultaneously feels compelled to support a seemingly vital ideal or choose sides in a fight that is purported to be fictitious. Hence, Baby Kochamma's aversion to her furniture serves as a metaphor for the heedless materialism of the Western middle class that is focused on consumption. Characterized as Baby Kochamma, this middle-class alienation from the oppressive and invisible world outside of the media is exemplified. Roy's use of imagery emphasizes Baudrillard's idea of "hyperreality," where people are recruited and coerced into experiencing an individual connection to global politics, nationalism, and collective consciousness—contextualized through localized reference—through television's simulation of the world.

## CONCLUSION

The study shows that Roy has created political satire in *TGST* and firstly, she sharply criticizes the negative effects of globalization where the common people are marginalized when it comes to the notion of global welfare like building dams, IMF loans. She considers this concept of globalization as a kind of neo-colonialism and through this hegemonic power, the country is controlled by a foreign power. Similarly, she dealt with the second aspect of manipulating politics, where she used her characters as a national allegory. In the novel, it can be seen that the author presented the worst kind of domestic corruption, where domestic so-called nationalists or political leaders leave no stone unturned in revising the brutality of the early colonizers who once ruled the country and got their motives. In this context, Roy deftly intertwines the caste system in India, where there are two main classes, the rich and the poor: the first class as the colonizer exploits the colonization of the second class. The writer even discouraged the idea of nuclear energy because it brought a lot of destruction to mankind, rather something positive like defense. Finally, Roy's use of narrative technique is worth mentioning because through this technique she used a new kind of English that recalls the questioning nature of the colonized people. By using this new kind of English, she introduced a counter-narrative into her novel. It indicated opposition to globalization, corruption, and the domestic ruling elite class.

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