

Nativity as Projected by Arundati Roy and Manju Kapur in '*The God of Small Things*' and '*Difficult Daughters*': A Brief Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to analyze the spirit of nativity in Roy and Kapur and how they expose it in their novels. Nativity in reality means manual labor, confinement, liberation and death. Nativity also means the birth of Jesus, which is celebrated by Christians at Christmas. Nativity also indicates the tableau of the nativity and native story. Native country or area is a place where one is born and brought up. Native speaker of a language is someone who speaks that language as their first language. This concept of Nativity occupies a considerable place in both **The God of Small Things** and **Difficult Daughters**.

Key words: Nativity

Suzanna Arundati Roy (24/Nov/1961) was born in Shillong, Meghalaya, India to Ranjit Roy, a Bengali Hindu Tea planter and Mary Roy, a Malayali Syrian Christian women's rights activist. She spent her childhood in Kerala and went to Corpus Christ School at Kottayam. She is best known for the 1998 Man Booker Prize for fiction winning novel **The God of Small Things** (1997) for her involvement in environmental and human rights causes. **The God of Small Things** is a perfectly made tale, proficiently unfolded. Roy's talents as a screen writer have obviously been organized to good effect, Each scene is a segment. The camera floats over the green Kerala landscape, hot wet countryside, the slow-moving river, the pelting rain, as a lonely figure makes its way to the ancestral home. Soon the camera follows Ammu, her twins, Rahel and Estha,

seated in the Church. The tragic atmosphere is already there - a small bat making its way to the hated aunt's back, the church and its architectural embellishment, indicate that there is something very wrong here, and of course, there is. Ammu's return to Ayemenam -Kerala is a return what the French called 'nostalgie de la boue', a desire to wallowing in primeval sludge, of which there is obviously plenty in Kerala. Her description of childhood is marvelous and poignant. Like Lewis Carrollian, who has given new shapes to words and names, Roy also creates a non-sense private vocabulary which in turn evokes a new childhood world. She is managed to retain the scatological vitality of the Malayalam language that is explicit in the boatmen's songs, or, short phrases which the children pick up from their elders. This Malayalam word play is another device to

show Roy's affinity to her mother tongue. The Child's world that Roy recreates through the innocent eyes of Rahel gives a sense of exactness, originality of imagination, trick of language, a communion of minds that has nothing to do with identity, sex or history.

Rahel as an adult describes how the old palace has dried up after the events of that summer' when something terrible happened here.' The grand finale or climax takes one into 'The Bridges of Madison Country Territory ', Kerala chapter. The readers discover the beast of colonial discourse in the hero, villain or victim that makes it clear as Black and White, East and West, the dark, animal primitive savage, rising up to connect with the pale, beautiful, lustrous woman, who needs him in spite of acute problems that threaten them every now and then.

The God's own country, Kerala, remains a vibrant throbbing presence throughout the story. When Roy describes the beautiful landscape, the attitude of the people, the hypocrisy of those in power in the State machinery, the reader feels .while reading the story that he is in Kerala. The writer's sensibility is an influencing one as far as the reader's response is concerned. Here sensibility captures the Indian society, its religious system, institutions and habits from a vantage point of irony. She spares nothing-whether it is Christianity or Communism, caste system or Kathakkali, and her criticism of India "comes from an affection, not from standing outside and sneering and laughing" (WB 2) Her love for the nation brings in features to be preserved and discarded. Roy wants to preserve the art of Kathakkali. She vividly describes the appearance of kathakali

man, his skill in storytelling, 'he can fly you across the whole world in minutes, he can stop for hours to examine a wilting leaf' (p.230). Such is the splendor of the artist and art. But the artist is not honoured at home, his children mock at him, they don't cherish the art, they want to break tradition. Hence the artist turns to Tourism, and the tourists give him 'the imported attention 'The lack of patronage to the artist leaves him with the darned shirt, balding velvet blouse, hollow crown and crooked heels. The description of the classical art undoubtedly appeals to the native conversant While describing the beautiful love episode of Velutha and Ammu, Roy questions the love-laws of the society, the laws that lay down who should be loved and how and how much. Roy introduces caste system also in the story. During the British rule, a number of untouchables in Malabar had been converted to Christianity to escape the curse of untouchability. **The God of Small Things** is about a Syrian Christian family. But, in the way that Roy criticizes the Christian practices and institutions, the green-eyed religious priests, the caste-conscious parishes', the novel is actually a religious ridicule. In mocking at the failures and shortcomings of the Christian Church, the novel turns into a ghostly frivolity on a Christian Paradigm. This novel is specifically Christian in the quality of suffering and darkness, in the assessment of power in the Christians way, and in textual references and Imagery.

Conventional Christianity offers salvation and ever-lasting life to the sufferers, and, Resurrection is the centre of hope and doctrine, Crucifixion is only an event.

A.N.Wilson in his biography, Jesus (London, 1992) says that the disciples while recognizing Christ after death, cannot be sure of resurrection, and to them no such resurrection has taken place. The final cry on the cross, 'My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?' 'is the death cry of an abandoned man. To a Hindu, suffering has no redeeming value. To a Christian, suffering is the central theme, The blood of Christ while executing death on the Cross. Velutha's suffering in the novel is dealt with perseverance which is christian. 'They heard the thud of wood on Flesh. Boot on boot. On teeth. The muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in. The muted crunch of skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on a man's breath. When his lung is torn by the jagged end of a broken rib' (p.338) Velutha, like Christ, is a helpless sufferer at the mercy of a penal code. Was Christ powerless to save Himself or others/ controversial, but, the fact is that he suffered and died.

In **Difficult Daughters** (1998), Manju Kapur discusses the same that one finds in Arundati Roy but in a different angle. British culture and education have brought changes in the minds of the people. Gandhi has succeeded in rousing people against the British domination. There were protests all over India and people began to value culture, nationality and nation. But independence brought only partition and issues existed in the post colonial India and she presents the post -colonial India in an effective language. The characters in the novel suffer from humiliation and exploitation by their nearest and dearest and the society. The theme of her novel is hunger for love and the sense of

alienation. In both Roy and Kapur, the victims suffer alone and in silence, and there is no sympathy or pity for the victim. Though the novels present two different time frames, in their delineation of characters, society, they are identical. Their society is stereotyped. It reflects a fact that over the years, the attitude of the society, towards the lover remains the same. Both Roy and Manju Kapur highlight the status of women in the society. In Roy, there is gender and class oppression, which brings in a fear of eternal damnation. Kapur presents Virmati as a woman deficient of love and privacy. Her home town Kerala denies a place of her own. The patriarchal society rejects a share of her paternal property.

Roy presents the crisis of the Syrian Christian family. In Manju Kapur, the convent-educated mother of Virmati, prays before Christ, which becomes a starting point for the induction of Arya Samaj. Arya Samaj has a key role in imparting education to women, and discarding child marriage. It is basically Hindu in spirit and counteract to Christianity, especially to the act of converting the untouchable into Christians. According to Kasturi, Virmati's mother, education is important to girls from the matrimonial point of view, Virmati too receives higher education, not to pursue a job, but to pursue her clandestine affair with the professor. Her cousin Sakuntala and roommate Swarnalata make use of their education to come up in life. Whereas Virmati uses her education only to indulge in sex. Both Roy and Kapur demonstrate their love for Kerala by showing, describing Velutha and Ammu, the lovers meeting by the side of a river, and canal where Virmati tries to drown herself. The

river and the canal, thus become an important metaphor in the novels. Roy also describes the chilly winter nights in New Delhi, when Mammachi and Ammu are thrown out of their house.

Both the writers show that the Indians by nature do not take either life or problems seriously. According to them, an absolute surrender to the Ultimate is a sign of wisdom. Based on the actual events of India's partition, the story of **Difficult Daughters**, unfurls the tale of three generations of women. This novel has, to an extent autobiographical elements Like Manju Kapur, Virmati is a lecturer and her whole family is associated with Arya Samaj, Kapur, like Virmati, seems to be a difficult daughter to her parents. Virmati's position in the family after her marriage with the professor is pitiable. She has no space there. Her subdued and oppressed and suppressed position is known from the episode of naming the daughter. In the words of Vandita Mishra,

"Kapur never permits Virmati any assertion of power or freedom. Because even as she breaks free from old prison, she is locked into newer ones. Her relationship with the professor, for instance. While it does provide an escape from a loveless arranged marriage, it is itself furtive and catastrophic, offering only a stolen togetherness behind curtained windows. Even years of studying and working alone do not give her the confidence to strike independent roots and grow. She hovers uncertainly at the edge of each new world, never entering, lest the professor should call and not find her near. Eventually, marriage to

the man of her choice is no triumph either. As a second wife, she must fight social ostracism outside the house and compete for the kitchen and conjugal bed with Ganga, the first wife, inside it".

The novel portrays India in 1940, when women cannot assert power. But there are two consoling factors, education and economic independence for women. Virmati gets both education and economic independence. Trampling patriarchal norms, Virmati defies social expectation to assert her individuality and hopes to achieve self-fulfillment. Virmati is a loser in the sense that her acts alienate her from her family and she fails to create a space for herself for which she has been striving all along. Feminism is implied in the novel, when Ida, her daughter, makes a statement, "I hate the word 'simple' nobody has any business to live in the world and know nothing about its ways", (p.207)

No woman, who dares to reject patriarchal protection, can afford to be ignorant, simple or naive. The novel conveys a message that merely transcending social norms is not enough, a woman should be self-controlled, self-willed, self-reliant and rational. No doubt, **Difficult Daughters** is a feminist discourse not because she is a woman writing about women, but because she has 'understood a woman both as a woman and as a person pressurized by all kinds of visible and invisible contacts (Jaidev 68). Kapur presents feminism at its best, keeping in mind, the Indian context. Roy's using of communist background has invited a lot of criticism from the public. People like Nayanar, E.M.S.Namboodripad, the former CM. Of

Kaerala, and Marxists have expressed their anger at the scornful nature of Communism and its leaders. On behalf of them, lawyer Babu Thomas has filed a public interest petition against Roy asserting that the novel is obscene and likely to corrupt the readers. But, this reaction is to the propaganda connecting the author and the novel. Hype or no hype, this novel is astonishing, spectacular and dramatic with its universal appeal, especially the native appeal. Another attractive feature of this novel is the description of nature, description of mother's intense love for children, description of broken family and the tragic childhood with a keen insight into the human nature. This novel, written in original and naughty, playful style has attracted many native readers. In the words of William Walsh, " however much importance one attaches to the medium, Indian Literature in English has an Indian soul and expresses a sensibility drawn from the same sources as the other embodiments of the Indian Spirit and the Indian Tradition".

Roy's novel has an Indian soul. In the depiction of socio-cultural setting where the

children are placed, in the depiction of deep -rooted caste -system, in the portrayal of the epic scene of Kathakkali Artists, in describing the changing attitude of divorce, in using of Malayalam words and phrases, all these areas have native response. But this response is sometimes likely to be an exotic, sometimes an incomprehensible. Roy says, her book, 'does not trade on the currency of cultural specificity'. (India Today, p 28) To conclude, the writers **Roy** and **Manju** in their delineation of '**Nativity**' and its response seem to be unique, and exceptional in treatment of Nativity in their novels.

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He who lives without discipline dies without honor.

~ *Icelandic Proverb*