

THE CONCEPT OF MIMICRY IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

Sarmad Alahmad

Department of English Language, College of Education for Humanities, University of Kirkuk,
Kirkuk, Iraqsarmadatella@uokirkuk.edu.iq

Sattar J. Hashim

Department of Smart Medical Systems, College of Biomedical Informatics, University of Information
Technology and Communications, Baghdad, Iraqsattaruna@gmail.com

Received: 12-08-2023

Accepted: 15-09-2023

Published: 28-11-2023

Abstract: This study intends to examine the impact of mimicry on India's citizens in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, with a focus on the Post-colonial approach. The significance of this study is dedicated to present the overlapping influence of both the East-West, in the customs, language, garments, and extended to incorporate their manners. Thus, the imitation in aforementioned text is reflected and explored throughout the characters' demeanors within the remarkable framework of Post-colonial theory. The findings of the study indicate that there are several mimicking hints in the novel, which raises the topic of identity throughout the lifestyles of India's citizens. The author successfully portrayed the concept of mimicry in his masterpiece to present his idea to readers. The God of small Things still has the impact to present a prestigious, magic and fresh language to its readers. Its plot still simple yet incisive and can not be found easily in other literary works of its era.

Keywords: Post-colonial; mimicry; Roy; India; baby Kochamma

INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy (born in 1961), the author of *The God of Small Things* was born, raised, and schooled in India (Mohammadzadeh, 2010). The novel is entirely in English, although it is written from the viewpoint of people who do not speak it well. Arundhati Roy uses a variety of strategies to give the reader the viewpoint of people who aren't quite at ease with the English language, such as unusual capitalization, significant use of sentence fragments, and amusing reflections on the sound or structure of words (Torres, 2011). Roy has firmly expressed her opinions on a number of current social themes in her works since the release of her novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) which won the Booker prize in the same year; *The End of imagination* (1998), *The Greater common Good* (1999), *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2001) and *Power Politics* (2002) (Ganaie, 2014).

The God of Small Things is set in the village of Ayemenem in the tropical state of Kerala in south India, and the primary action takes place during a period of weeks in December of 1969 (Olsson, 2011). This bestselling book by Roy, depicts the tale of a Syrian Christian family living in Kerala,

India's southernmost district. The story constructed around this family, Pappachi Kochamma, a retired imperial entomologist, is the family's father, who retires from his work in Delhi and moves back to his village of Ayemenem with his wife, Mammachi Kochamma, and their two children, Ammu and Chacko (Mohammadzadeh, 2010). The story alternates between 1969 and 1993 and is mostly seen through the perspective of Rahel, Ammu's daughter (Olsson, 2011).

Thread by thread, Roy constructs her plot into a vivid, multifaceted narrative. She also includes a variety of cultural allusions, such as those to Shakespeare, The Sound of Music, Kathakali (traditional drama-dance), and The Rolling Stones' music, which adds to the narrative's mixture of associations and connotations. However, the novel is more than just a delightful and intricate postmodern saga; with its close, almost overdone description of caste transgressive intimacy and its critical account of the local communist leader and Kerala communism in general, it is undoubtedly an intervention into (especially Indian) culture. Scholars have also examined Roy's book from a variety of theoretical perspectives, including feminism, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, marxism, new historicism, and others

(Olsson, 2011).

METHOD

Adapting the post-colonial theory as a framework, specifying the concept of imitation is what the study successfully tackled to apply to Roy's masterpiece.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is the conception that examines the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. As historians utilized words like the postcolonial state following World War II, the postcolonial period seemed to have a distinct sense of chronology. But the phrase was employed by literary critics in late 1970s to discuss the cultural effects of colonialism. In late 1970s, the analysis of representational control of power began with literature such as Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The postcolonial Criticism first used the term "postcolonial" in an interview and recollections released in 1990. The term "postcolonial," which had its origins in the context of referring to literary circles in colonial cultures, was crucial to the works of the critics who were interested in the repercussions of colonial representation. This was a component of the policymaking and introspective thinking about issues like the commonwealth that prompted the assessment of what is called New Literature and English literature towards the close of the 1960s. The term is thus employed frequently to illustrate politics. This phrase was consequently a potential forum for discipline and interpretation (Ashcroft, 1996: p. 26).

The term and the discipline of postcolonialism were subject to substantial literary, religious and political criticism during the past two decades. There has been much debate among writers on this topic. Postcolonial thought, however, is a type of resistance through which all oppressive and discriminating behaviors, irrespective of time and place, may be challenged. The negative viewpoint, in contrast, considers postcolonial thought as imprecise, sarcastic, and superstitious. These viewpoints create

curiosity, that has to be handled before scholars can use the concept to their particular domains. In establishing the case for the development of postcolonialism relevant to biblical hermeneutics, notable articles by Robert J. C. Young are specifically highlighted in this regard (1995: p. 29).

Postcolonialism asserts that all people have the right to equal cultural and material prosperity. However, the modern world is one of inequality, and the wide divergence between non-western individuals and western individuals is a big differentiation. In the nineteenth century, the rise and expansion of European empires, which ruled most of the globe, rendered this separation between the west and the east particularly absolute. More and more, anthropological concepts have validated imperial and colonial regime, which also have portrayed the residents of the non - western world as inferior, immature, or female, incapable of providing life of prosperity for themselves. Such anthropological views were founded upon the concept of race and considering White and black nations, the west-non-west relationship. White culture is seen as the foundation for notions of legitimate governance, law, science, economy, language, art, and literature - shortly, civilisation (Young, 2001: p. 30).

The cornerstone of Homi Bhabha's postcolonial ideology is the need to reconsider cultural identity. According to him, the postcolonial environment fosters an adversarial relationship between once dominating cultures and the other. Even though imperialism is more subtle and less obvious these days, it is still very much there. The idea of Bhabha necessitates a reworking of this connection. There has to be a buffer zone where the cultural ties between former colonial powers and their former colonies may overcome their hatred. Postcolonial literature is preoccupied with the shaping of identity. Large part of postcolonialism is devoted to analyzing the influence of social

hierarchies on how people evaluate themselves and the world. Other frequent theme is how people find it difficult to articulate their own knowledge of the colonial period's transformations and the subsequent realities. Bhabha believes that post colonialism has emerged from 3rd world countries as a result of colonial situation with regard to issues such as social, cultural and societal issue. He claimed Postcolonial critique attests to the inequitable and global powers of cultural representations that strive for economic and political domination in the modern world. To him, post colonialism has taken its origin from colonial experiences as in the view of Bhabha Postcolonial viewpoints arise first from colonial testimonies of Third World nations as well as the voices of minorities within East-West, North-South geopolitical divisions. They engage in those conceptual frames of modernity that aim to provide a hegemony to the uneven growth and frequently disadvantaged, race, communities, histories of nations, and peoples (1994: p. 171).

Post-colonialism is related with essential notions. One of these key notions is Mimicry, which is also a subject that is often highlighted in postcolonialism. It reveals the degree to which the colonizer and colonized value their connection. It is a common practice on the part of colonized people to adopt the colonizer's culture, language, social norms, and cultural values. It appears to be "as almost same, but not quite" as in the words of Homi Bhabha, but actually, it is indicative of the dominance that colonists exert. The historical narration of the past is yet another cherished subject matter of the Post colonial writers who, after a long period of being suppressed and subjugated, are more prone to glorify their past before the imperialist and colonialized effects. That is why new genres such as historiography and historiographic metafiction have been making their way into the world of literary and critical studies.

Setyowati argues that Bhabha's

mimicry is a component of a bigger notion for picturing the postcolonial predicament. Such a binary conflict exists between power and subjugation. All forms of coercion, such as requiring the colonized to resemble the colonizer, end into mimicry. (2014: p. 17). Bhabha provides the following concise explanation of mimicry: the need to a restructured Other, like a matter of distinction which is nearly the same, yet not exactly; that is, the ideology of mimicry is organized upon ambivalence to be valid, mimicry needs to continuously create its excesses, its slippage, its difference (1994: p. 86).

Although it is deeply embedded in the concept of post-colonial studies, it is imperative to note that no one has ever depicted it positively. Rather everyone depicted it as someone else who has been involved in mimicry other than them. Mimicry is also very common among immigrants. In the case of colonialism, it is something that the colonizers are forcing to the countries and areas where they establish their colonial empire and Indian on the part of their colonizers British is no exception. Indian have been deeply impressed with the ways and means of their masters. They deem their dress, language, and culture as an upper class, which is evident in the study and analysis of *The God of Small Things*

Analysis

Roy manifested the two dimensions (East-West) in her authentic piece *The God of Small Things* to show the interaction as well as the influence of one upon another throughout the characters in their struggle and the tiring process of daily living. Before Delving into details, it is valuable to mention that the author reflected in her book upon the division of classes which resembles the binary opposition of West-East, occidental-other, privileged- destitute, colonizers-indigenous, and top-lower. Well, as long has been stereotyped is that the norm is headed to the west to exert and enhance their authority while the others are left on the margins, and

this can highly be witnessed in the era of colonialism.

Baby Kochamma is one of the major characters, she is Pappachi's sister, the aunt of Ammu Ipe and Chacko Ipe, and the great aunt of Estha and Rahel (Ammu's children). "Her name was really Navomi, Navomi Ipe, but everybody called her Baby. She became Baby Kochamma when she was old enough to be an aunt." (Roy, p. 2). The untouchability is part of her personality to maintain authority upon the surroundings. The circumstances she faced played a role in stiffening her heart, yet still not an excuse for the misery she caused to others, specifically those from the lower class. Baby Kochamma was sent by her father to America to complete her education, hoping she may forget about the man she loved, the monk. After two years, she came back "from Rochester with a diploma in Ornamental Gardening," (Roy, p. 13). Her travel and living abroad influenced her negatively to imitate and copy the customs and even the language of the west and force those she know to follow her orders, even the younger generation of her family. Furthermore, this strong personality is symbolic one of the west, of the western woman who imposes her demands and be independent, for seeing the indigent women as dependent ones.

Accordingly, Ammu has many of Baby Kochamma's traits. She took up the decision of marrying a man to get rid of her aggressive and decisive father, but later she chose to return with her kids to her family's house after her husband turned to be abusive and alcoholic.

The language is not only a mean of communication, but rather a mean of sustaining one's existence and heritage. The use of English language by the character Baby Kochamma is a strikingly bad impact of Colonialism, and indicates the imitation of those people who cannot define their identity or to whom they belong. Baby Kochamma practiced English instead of her mother tongue. She banned other languages to be

used like Indian, Malayalam, and set up a fine for those who speak any other language and this is what happened with Estha and Rahel. Baby Kochamma told them to express what they have in English and insisted that she "will always speak in English" (Roy, p. 17).

Chacko, the son of the family was studying in England in Oxford. Chacko was honored when people mention that he studied in Oxford, boasting among his friends, environment, and even family that his sister Ammu once said "Going to Oxford didn't necessarily make a person clever." (Roy, p.26). Abroad he met an English woman and fell in love with her, Margaret. After years of having a daughter called Sophie, they got divorce and he returned to India to attain the funeral of his father. His daughter stayed there abroad with her mother, Chacko invited them to come to India to spend Christmas. Likewise, it is not only Baby Kochamma who is fascinated by the west culture, but Chacko as well. The name of his daughter Sophie is an explicit manifestation of his reincarnation of the west culture, and he was totally proud of this. His daughter's features represent the west, "White and blue. Rose-lipped," (Roy, p. 55). To elaborate further, the enthralling reached a level to compare one's ideas and his way of thinking to the west, to betoken their grandeur, as they think. Chacko enrolled in a conversation with Rahel and Estha about their grandfather Pappachi, he described him as a man with an English mind "Pappachi's mind had been brought into a state which made him like the English." (Roy, p.24). Thus, this bedazzling with skin color results in their attachment and deadly imitation of the west.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Appearance and selfishness are also imitated and obtained to be used. The family and the great aunt welcomed Chacko's family with warm reception more than that of Ammu and her children. They tried to keep what preserve the family name, that Baby Kochamma went mad over hearing the

relationship of Ammu with the servant Velutha. She set up her plans to separate them, and did not hesitate to accuse him of murdering Sophie, though her death was an accident.

With life difficult phases and conditions that casted the children to faraway places, specially Estha and Rahel after the death of Sophie as they were together when the accident of drowning happened to her and the guilt of holding silence and not revealing the truth of the accident upon the threat of their grandaunt to keep Velutha in prison. When they reunited after the turbulent childhood and adulthood, they engaged in an illicit sex which is a familiar practice used to be witnessed in Western culture. The Indian codes are shattered with this heinous act that only stands for old western ideology. Broaching such bold idea of intercourse, the author entails the intricate and taboo relations and its influence on both the individuals and the society.

CONCLUSION

The influence of the west and how non-western people or characters imitated their norms, culture, clothes, and language are what the study aimed to disclose and elaborate. The world is divided into two parts according to the west, East and West, educated- illiterate, Superior-inferior, top-bottom, and strong- fragile. There are no other divisions one can follow or acknowledge, for it is structured as the base to be traced and not diverted.

Roy in *The God of Small Things*, offered a close look on the effect of colonialism and the misery those foreign forces caused to the indigenous people. Using English language and blending it with her native one showed the stereotyping concepts and ideals, and the passive imitation of the west that leads to nothing but corruption. Postcolonial pursues not merely the inclusion of the marginalized, but it presents a fundamental critique of the ideology of the western (colonial) domination and simultaneously aims to undo the imaginative fabricated geography.

Using post-colonial theory as a framework, specifying the concept of imitation is what the study successfully tackled to apply to Roy's masterpiece. Through the characters behaviors, speeches, and notions, the imitation of the west was clear. It portrays the subaltern ones, the epistemological mimicking, the stereotyping and the boundaries set up by the westerners. Most of the characters in the novel accepted the westernized lifestyle, created another zone of imperialism and colonialism within their homes and country. Therefore, the severe influence western ideals and the British colonization on the Indian codes is what Roy translated and transferred to be presented.

REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, B. (1996). On the Hyphen in Postcolonial, *New Literatures Review*, 32. 23–32.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London; New York: London. Routledge. Bhabha, H. K., ed. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge
- Ganaie, A. A. (2014). Social Realism in Arundhati Roy's Novel "The God of Small Things". *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, 4(7). ISSN - 2249-555X.
- Mohammadzadeh, B. (2010). A Postcolonial Discourse in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. *Icanas*, 38, 1023- 1035.
- Olsson, A. (2011). Arundhati Roy: Reclaiming Voices on the Margin in *The God of Small Things* (Thesis). HOGSKOLAN I GAVEL.
- Roy, A. (1997). *The God of Small Things*. PenguinIndia.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism: Western concepts of the Orient*. New York: Pantheon.
- Setyowati, Y. (2014). *Mimicry' & 'Cultural Hybridity' from Homi Bhabha to Junichiro Tanizaki. (Post-Colonial Studies)*. Penerbit Fajar Satria.
- Torres, A. R. (2011). Roy's English in *The God of Small Things*: A Language for subversion, reconciliation and reassertion. *Odissea*, (12), 195-204.
- Young, R. J. C. (1995) *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London: Routledge.
- Young, R. J. C. (2001). *Postcolonialism: An historical introduction*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.