

NEOLIBERALISM IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS* BY ARUNDHATI ROY: A SUBALTERN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract :

The novel, The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy explores the many mechanisms by which neoliberalism permeates society and functions as a means to perpetuate the relics of British colonialism. This influence is not limited to governmental authorities but also to influential individuals within the community. The lasting impact of India's colonial past is apparent in both the physical environment and the people of Ayemenem, following the country's independence. In particular, the story sheds light on the domestic and international connections between multinational companies and how they affect domestic groups. Through an analysis of Roy's story, it becomes clear that the characters of Ammu, her children, and Velutha are subjected to state-sanctioned brutality, bigotry, and hate. This portrayal serves to highlight the manner in which neoliberal interests operate to diminish the agency of individuals. This study aims to elucidate the manifestation of neoliberal ideology by examining the depiction of trauma experienced by the environment, culture, and individuals as a result of abrupt and occasionally forceful societal transformations. Through this article, I contend that the novel's universe is impacted by neoliberalism and globalization via the novel's depiction of the marginalization of the other, the state-enacted disappearance of corpses, and the linkages between the marginalized and the global.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, subaltern, globalization, Marginalization, colonialism, etc.

Introduction:

The term "neoliberalism" refers to the political resurgence of free-market capitalist principles that were prominent in the 19th century but had experienced a decline in popularity following the conclusion of World War II. The success and persistence of conservative and right-libertarian groups and institutions can be attributed to their alignment with policies of economic liberalization. These policies, including privatization, deregulation, globalization, free trade, monetarism, austerity, and reduced government expenditure, aim to bolster the influence of the private sector in both the economy and society. This connection serves as a primary rationale for the continued existence of these groups and institutions. The objective of this initiative is to enhance the involvement of the private sector in both the economy and society. There has been a substantial amount of scholarly discourse surrounding the precise



delineation of neoliberal ideology and its corresponding policy framework. (Wikipedia Contributors)

The French economist Charles Gide used the phrase *néo-libéralisme* in English in 1898 to elucidate the economic perspectives of the Italian economist Maffeo Pantaleoni, despite the term previously being in use in French. The phrase was quickly embraced by other economists, including Milton Friedman, a prominent classical liberal, who authored an article titled "Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects" in 1951. Neoliberalism was chosen at the Colloque Walter Lippmann in 1938 as the term to describe a certain economic philosophy, among other words. At the colloquium, neoliberalism was described using terminology such as "priority of the pricing mechanism," "free enterprise," "the system of competition," and "a powerful and impartial state." Both Louis Rougier and Friedrich Hayek foresaw that neoliberal competition would lead to the formation of a hierarchical social class consisting of accomplished individuals who would gradually gain influence in society, perhaps supplanting the existing representative democracy that serves the majority. Neoliberalism refers to the ideology that supports an economic system where the state guides while the market serves as the foundation. (Wikipedia Contributors). Neoliberalism is commonly defined by its process of relocating capital, weakening traditional communal connections to identity, and destabilizing the fundamental foundations of the nation-state by transferring power to globally mobile transnational corporations, while governments are increasingly constrained in their ability to regulate.

Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* explores the connection between local family dynamics and global political and economic forces by moving back and forth in time. Characters in the story continuously try to maintain the remnants of British rule and the Indian caste system, despite the inescapable presence of history. The novel is set in Ayemenem, Kerala, India. It follows the tragic events that occur after Sophie Mol's untimely death in the late 1960s, leading to the breakdown of the extended family she left behind. The readers witness the traumatic event through fraternal twins Rahel and Estha. Their emotional devastation, caused by their cousin's death, is shown through their estrangement and exile. Twenty-three years after Sophie Mol's death, Rahel and Estha reunite in an act of incest, still unable to recover from the event and its consequences. Roy's narrative explores the consequences of British prominence in India. The remains of British imperialism contribute to the violence connecting the Ipe, Kochamma, and Paapen families. The consequences of the characters' actions are not suffered by them, but rather by the children, their divorced mother, and the Untouchable worker. Roy's writing vividly portrays the irreversible harm inflicted upon these victims, particularly the workers who are killed by the state.

Discussion :

In a comprehensive perspective, it appears that neoliberalism has emerged as the prevailing concept, surpassing globalization, to elucidate the diverse forms of economic reorganization observed in contemporary times. The concept of "neoliberalism" has evolved to encompass the process of liberalizing national economies, thereby facilitating the participation of international actors such as multinational corporations and global institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The term "neoliberal globalization" has been



observed to function as a connecting link between the aforementioned concepts on certain occasions. The preceding conceptualizations of globalization as a "bulldozer," which underscored the inexorable character of the associated phenomena, have been surpassed by this recent advancement. The term "neoliberal globalization" is employed to conceptualize global restructuring as a political endeavor and to identify the principal actors involved in this process. However, it appeared that no additional advantages were acquired.

The origins of neoliberal globalization have conventionally been attributed to the "ideological heartlands" of the United States and the United Kingdom. The analyses were primarily centered on the customary individuals or entities that are typically identified as the principal actors. Insufficient attention was devoted to elucidating the nuances differentiating deregulation, privatization, and marketization, despite the undeniable predictability of their respective outcomes. The prevailing perspective posits that neoliberalism is associated with the exacerbation of sociospatial polarization, ultimately culminating in the erosion of democratic processes. As phenomena undergo shifts and developments, an intriguing observation emerges: a tendency for these transformations to bear resemblance to their antecedent states. The phenomenon of neoliberalism has garnered significant attention and raised concerns among various stakeholders. According to Springer's scholarly work titled *Violent Neoliberalism Development, Discourse, and Dispossession in Cambodia*, the phenomenon being described can be characterized as a manifestation of a ruthless and vengeful ideology. Even in its postulated state, wherein there appears to be a semblance of comprehension regarding the purported decline of neoliberalism, the ideology persists in exerting a profound influence on both the political and social domains, thereby instilling a sense of apprehension and unease. The analogy establishes a connection between the post-neoliberal era and a hypothetical scenario of a zombie apocalypse. This comparison highlights the presence of mutations, deformities, and an insatiable hunger associated with the concept of a living dead idea, thereby symbolizing the alarming nature of the circumstances we currently face. (Springer)

During the 1980s and 1990s, India's Dalits, minorities, and Backward Classes exerted their social and political influence, advocating for their rightful portion of the country's development resources in a newly established welfare state. Meanwhile, the traditionally dominant higher castes and national elite formulated political discourse and a policy agenda that not only favoured their own interests but also actively suppressed the aspirations of the emerging proactive social classes. Initially, the language of politics was used to instill fear, uncertainty, and instability in the collective mindset of the nation. This was done to justify the argument that replacing the traditionally powerful ruling elite from higher castes with leaders from new social groups would result in a period of economic and political instability, social conflict, and unethical politics. Furthermore, the implementation of the free-market system led to a heightened involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as a reassessment of the constitution. These changes were based on the belief that the issue was in the policies and institutions, rather than the individuals in positions of authority. (Pankaj)

Based on the aforementioned criteria, it may be concluded that neoliberalism, as a kind of governmentality, produces outcomes that its proponents see as exclusively economic in nature. Its objective is to create a society that prioritizes capital over labor, grants privileges to the affluent over the poor, and regards any efforts to restore economic balance in favor of the



working class or middle class as unscientific, illogical, or both. This is seen in the rejection of labor markets that are characterized as "flexible," government control, and privatization, in favor of labor markets that are nationalized or unionized. Neoliberalism, as a form of governance, establishes and maintains cognitive obstacles that hinder individuals from seeing and rectifying the unequal distribution of power between capital and labor. Subalterns experience a dual kind of marginalization, primarily based on their social class, caste, and gender, and secondarily, they are not given a voice.

In the inaugural chapter, Roy astutely directs focus toward the inexorable nature of historical events, both within the confines of local contexts and on a global scale. This is achieved through the deliberate implementation of abrupt transitions between disparate moments, thereby intricately entangling the narrative structure. This particular narrative strategy compels the audience to engage in attentive reading and deliberate decision-making. As she narrates, "In a purely practical sense it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem. Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcomes of whole lifetimes" (Roy 32) The utilization of the pronoun "it" in the initial sentence may engender a sense of ambiguity regarding the specific referent to which the author is alluding. However, Roy appears to posit the notion that routine choices possess the potential to irrevocably transform one's existence. However, Roy's analysis delves beyond a simplistic interpretation, as she alludes to overarching historical dynamics that surpass mere political and religious movements. She posits that the origins of history may extend back millennia, suggesting a more complex and nuanced understanding. (Bonnor and Duggan)

In the historical timeline predating the emergence of Marxist ideology, Before the British colonization of Malabar, the period of Dutch Ascendancy, the arrival of Vasco da Gama, and the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut, it can be contended that the historical origins of this region trace back to a time preceding the introduction of Christianity, "It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a tea bag" (Roy 33). This passage, culminating in the mention of the impact and dissemination of Christianity, alludes to the ironic nature of the characters' existence, particularly in the context of the Untouchables, whose adoption of the faith fails to liberate them from their marginalized social status.

The individuals within Rahel's familial unit who are perceived as deficient in some manners are those who have been involved in tumultuous marital unions, divorces, and illicit romantic entanglements. Rahel endeavors to ascertain a satisfactory elucidation pertaining to the decline of her familial unit, which she perceives as a significant phenomenon warranting investigation. The presence of symptoms indicative of an underlying issue is evident in the statement: "They all broke the rules. They all crossed forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down, who should be loved and how. And how much. The laws that make grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam, jelly jelly" (Roy 31) The author asserts that there exist laws, which govern the familial relationships of individuals, specifically designating individuals as grandmothers, uncles, mothers, cousins, jam, and jelly. The emergence of Paradise Pickles & Preserves sheds light on the additional challenges faced by the family, specifically the harshness exhibited by



Pappachi and Chacko's inadequate management of the enterprise. In Rahel's pursuit of elucidation, she elucidates the intricate interconnection between the public and private spheres, highlighting the profound entanglement between them. This entanglement becomes evident within the realm of commercial public space, where the convergence of class, gender, and politics takes place, albeit in a disconcerting manner. The intersection of tragedy is particularly pronounced in the context of Ammu and Velutha's clandestine relationship, which ultimately leads to their transformation into individuals deemed as criminals. A notable illustration of the state's influence on the transformation of these characters becomes evident shortly after the discovery of Sophie Mol's lifeless body, which was found adrift in the river.

In the interaction between Inspector Thomas Mathew and Ammu, it is observed that the former employs the "coarse Kottayam dialect of Malayalam" in his communication, potentially assuming Ammu's lack of proficiency in English and her limited education. Furthermore, Inspector Mathew's behavior towards Ammu is characterized by objectification, as he directs his attention towards her breasts and taps them with his baton. This conduct is incongruous with the displayed slogan in his office, which emphasizes values such as politeness, obedience, loyalty, intelligence, courtesy, and efficiency. The analysis of the slogan implies that the police, in their role as enforcers of governmental regulations, are purportedly dedicated to upholding societal order and prioritizing the welfare of the general populace.

However, the aforementioned interaction exposes the harsh reality that this order is enforced in a manner characterized by arrogance and a lack of regard for others. In light of Lisa Duggan's assertions regarding the intimate connection between neoliberalism and (British) imperialism, the historical precursor to the former, it becomes apparent that state agencies, which ostensibly exist for the betterment of society, employ persuasive rhetoric to convince citizens of the legitimacy of their endeavors. (Bonnor and Duggan) The interaction between Ammu and Mathew serves as a means to shed light on the complex dynamics existing between law enforcement and Indian society, as Mathew's background as a product of the colonizers becomes apparent. Mathew, in a more specific sense, serves as a manifestation of the legal structure established by the British colonizers within a particular local community. This community's identity is currently undergoing a process of definition, influenced by the far-reaching impacts of globalization.

Conclusion :

The novel's depiction of the present-day Ayemenem showcases a setting where individuals continue to bear the psychological scars of historical atrocities. It is a place where the remnants of caste violence, the exploitation of rural labourers, and the subjugation of women persist, indicating that these issues have not yet been eradicated. The novel portrays the effects of privatization, IMF structural adjustment, and various market-based policies implemented by the Indian government post-1991. These policies have led to a heightened regime of accumulation and commodification. The present analysis of the literary work titled *The God of Small Things* aims to elucidate its underlying nature as a subaltern critique of neoliberalism. The examination of contemporary India's current state provides insight into the profound impact on both the environment and marginalized communities residing in peripheral

regions. This impact can be attributed to the heightened levels of exploitation, which have been exacerbated by what can be argued as a reimagined manifestation of neoliberal globalization.

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