
The Silent Suffering of Estha: A Trauma-Informed Analysis of Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things"

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Paper Received on 03-11-2024, Accepted on 05-12-2024
Published on 06-12-24; DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2024.9.4.372

Abstract

Arundhati Roy celebrated for her bold socio-political stances, reveals deep-rooted societal issues through her unique narrative style. In *The God of Small Things*, she explores how the words and actions of adults profoundly affect children. Estha and Rahel, the twin protagonists, endure deep psychological scars from their childhood, marked by the torment inflicted by both family and society. Even as adults, they continue to carry the burden of their traumatic pasts. Roy's novel offers a psychoanalytic exploration of childhood trauma, particularly through Estha's character.

Keywords: Estha, Trauma, Childhood, Silence- aftermath.

Introduction

Anyone can tell a story, but not like Arundhati Roy, who brought India its first Booker Prize in 1997 with her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*. This work elevated Indian literature to global recognition. Set in the small village of Ayemenem in Kerala, the novel unravels the lives of five generations of a family burdened by lost dreams. The main characters, Rahel and Estha, twins of Ammu, represent the present-day Ayemenem house. Through a complex narrative style, Roy uses memories and foreshadowing to tell the intertwined stories of Ammu, Velutha, Rahel, and Estha. The novel addresses the fallout of Ammu's transgression with Velutha and its impact on their lives.

Roy's storytelling transforms the novel into a multifaceted work, blending satire on colonialism and bureaucracy with a tale of lost dreams. While many critics have examined the novel through a feminist lens, focusing on the emotions of the female characters, Estha's silent suffering has often been overlooked. With the rise of trauma studies in literature, his character has gained more critical attention. This article attempts a psychological reading of Estha's silence, tracing the roots of his trauma from childhood.

Estha's Trauma and Silence

Estha, the quieter of the two twins, suffers in silence. He is burdened by trauma

without fully understanding who to blame. His silence permeates the entire novel, and this section analyzes the events that shaped his withdrawal from the world.

Parental Separation

Estha's parents separated when he was just two years old, depriving him of a stable family environment. His father's alcoholism and violent behavior left deep scars. Estha's childhood memories are filled with episodes of his parents arguing about who would take care of the twins, which heightened his sense of insecurity. The lack of a clear cultural and religious identity, compounded by Baby Kochamma's disdain for their mixed heritage, further worsened his inferiority complex.

The Orange Drink Lemon Drink Man

One of the most traumatic events in Estha's life occurred at Abhilash Talkies, where he encountered the predatory "Orange Drink Lemon Drink Man." The man sexually abused him, leaving a deep psychological wound. Estha's inability to speak about this assault, coupled with his fear that revealing it would make his mother love him less, exacerbated his trauma. This event marked the beginning of his withdrawal into silence, a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). His belief that "anything can happen at any time" reflects the hypervigilance common in PTSD sufferers.

Sophie Mol's Death and Velutha's Betrayal

The drowning of Sophie Mol and the brutal beating of Velutha by the police were pivotal moments in Estha's life. The twins, especially Estha, were coerced into implicating Velutha in crimes he did not commit. This betrayal, along with Ammu's harsh words, left Estha feeling guilty and ashamed. The psychological impact of these events was so severe that Estha began to retreat further into silence, seeking refuge in fantasy and imagination as a means of coping with his guilt and grief.

The People Around Estha

Several people in Estha's life contributed to his suffering:

Rahel, the Twin Sister

While Estha shared a deep bond with Rahel, her inability to fully understand his pain isolated him further. Though she escaped into the fantasy that Velutha's "twin" committed the crime, Estha was left to grapple with the reality of their betrayal alone.

Ammu, the Mother

Ammu's ambivalent relationship with Estha compounded his trauma. While she loved him, she also lashed out in moments of frustration, which left Estha feeling unloved and responsible for the family's suffering. Her affair with Velutha and the subsequent fallout forced Estha into situations where he had to lie to protect her, deepening his feelings of guilt.

The Orange Drink Lemon Drink Man

This man represents the epitome of Estha's trauma. His abuse not only stole Estha's innocence but also set in motion a series of psychological defenses that would culminate in his lifelong silence.

Research Journal Of English (RJOE)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal Impact Factor: 8.16(SJIF)Vol-9, Issue-4(Oct-Dec),2024
Indexed in: International Citation Indexing (ICI), Cite factor, International Scientific Indexing (ISI),
Directory of Research Journal Indexing (DRJI) Google Scholar, Cosmos and Internet Archives.

Velutha, Baby Kochamma, and Others

Velutha's affair with Ammu shattered Estha's world. Though the twins adored him, his betrayal—real or perceived—left Estha feeling even more isolated. Baby Kochamma, with her constant reminders of their lack of identity, and other family members like Chacko and Margaret Kochamma, who treated Estha as an outsider, reinforced his sense of worthlessness.

Conclusion

Estha, a sensitive child, endured more than any young mind should bear. His silence became a defense mechanism, a way of coping with the overwhelming trauma of his childhood. From the sexual abuse at Abhilash Talkies to the death of Sophie Mol and Velutha's betrayal, Estha's life was marked by loss, guilt, and shame. His silence, which slid in "like a bolt," was not just a symptom of his suffering but a profound reflection of how the actions of adults can shatter the innocence of a child.

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How to cite this article?

Athira S, "The Silent Suffering of Estha: A Trauma-Informed Analysis of Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" Research Journal Of English (RJOE)9(4),PP:371-373,2024, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2024.9.4.373