God Of Small Things: Critique Of Colonialism

The first principle of Rule in India was the process of Anglicization or the act of making or becoming more English in character. While this process today predominantly carries negative connotations, it has still made its way for many great literary works, one of which is Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things." This essay is an analysis of the Anglicization processes throughout the book's characters, putting them within the framework of post-colonial discourse.

Throughout the novel Arundhati Roy criticizes the colonial past. Even so, in the anglicized, elite habits of looking at the non-marginalized, lower class and lower cast of inferiors, her critique cannot overrule her position. Roy employs an expression 'led out of the history house' in the novel "The God of Small Things," connotating various sense rates other than the superficial one. This means that we are pushed into an Anglicized pattern of thought and practice, which is enabled by the public-school education, and established by the colonial rulers. Roy herself is the spokeswoman for such a phenomenon.

In this novel, Roy appropriates the language not only for depicting complex characters and narrative structures, but also to create a postcolonial discourse that criticizes, challenges and subverts the dominance of the imperial colonizer. This shows the reader what it is like to have English enforced. Furthermore, the distinctive style of the author is often perceived as questioning the supremacy of recognized English grammatical norms. This is a novel completely written in English but from the point of view of characters who are not native speakers. Here, Roy uses many methods, including unconventionally positioned capitals, excessive use of sentence fragments, and subtle commentary on the sound or word structure, in order to offer the reader the perspective of characters that are not entirely comfortable in the English domain. (Torres 195)

Moreover, this novel also deals with the development of Anglicism through its characters. Chacko, the uncle of two protagonists, would be the prime example of such a character. He had studied at Oxford, and because of that, he was very proud of himself. "Chacko's room was stacked from floor to ceiling with books. He had read them all and quoted long passages from them for no apparent reason. Or at least none that anyone else could fathom. For instance, that morning, as they drove out through the gates, shouting their goodbyes to Mammachi in the verandah, Chacko suddenly said: "Gatsby turned out all right at the end." (p. 38) He had always read rather loudly, which was his way of expressing superiority towards other members of his family. In addition, it is established that the rest of the family values the former colonials. For instance, Pappachi, the late grandfather of the twins, refuses to believe his own daughter when she laments about her sexually abusive husband. The reason for his mistrust lies in the husband being. Ergo, you cannot challenge the moral integrity of a colonial.

Likewise, Chacko's English-speaking ex-wife Margaret Kochmamma and their daughter Sophie treat each other with undeniable respect and uncritical affection for Mammachi, the twins and Baby Kochamma. This is particularly interesting when it comes to punishing Rahel and Estha, where Baby Kochamma insists that they speak proper English. "The whole week, Baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twins' private conversations, and whenever she caught them speaking in Malayalam, she levied a small fine which was deducted at source.

From their pocket money. She made them write lines – “Impositions” she called them – I will always speak in English, I will always speak in English. A hundred times each. When they were done, she scored them out with her red pen to make sure that old lines were not recycled for new punishments. She had made them practice an English car song for the way back. They had to form the words properly and be particularly careful about their pronunciation. Prer NUN sea ayshun.” (p. 36) Baby Kochamma’s command for twins to speak in the English language is a possible case of imperative placed on educated Indians during the colonial period. Further, this scene is a potential allegory for the era of Anglicism in the higher Indian class and epistemic criticism of violence it took to place English as the dominant language. The twins must speak English, and they must do it properly. Otherwise, any resistance is being beaten out of them. For the seven-year-old twins, the adults’ actions remain beyond comprehension. Adults’ nonsensical and intimidating nature is suggestively related to the English language. In a dictionary, Rahel and Estha look for English words and they try to make sense of the vocabulary that the grown-ups are using. They mimic the pomposity of the English language in their family, which is how they discover and ridicule the reading of Chacko. Moreover, the twins undermine the authority and hegemony of the English language, by using it as a source for their own creativity. They focus on their phonetic accuracy and create their little fantasies from it. In the understanding of the twins, the English language is narrowed down to a pure sound that enables them to play, fragment words and create new meanings, just as in prer NUN sea ayshun, which refers to the history of Baby Kochamma as a nun, but also includes the meaningless sounds like prer and ayshun.

Roy’s innovative usage of the English language is a true post-colonial element of her novel. She adopts the ex-colonist’s vocabulary but also abolishes their hegemonic position as well. This is illustrated with Estha’s refusal to speak as he grows up.

Aspects of implied exoticism and its radical politics interweave throughout the book. By observing certain parts of the novel from a psychoanalytical side, one can say that the experience of Anglicization under colonialism can be compared to the establishment of what Jacques Lacan calls “The Name of the Father”, in which the subject is simultaneously deprived of their original object of love (mother) and tied to the social collective. What should also be highlighted are the multiple ways of submitting to the colonial Father and the critique of such a society through focusing on Roy’s innovative use of English language. This novel also underlines and highlights the colonial legacy through the presentation of nature as exotic and before all else, in construction of two inferior characters. This agrees with the binary of idealized and demonized ‘Other’: the untouchable carpenter Velutha is shown as generous, the one who gives and morally greater, the god of small things, while the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man appears a sadistic pedophile, the devil in gods stead.

In conclusion, the usage of English in this novel is an effort to reassert the Indian heritage and make the reader feel alienated from their native tongue. The important fact here is that the corruption of the colonized is not their admiration for the English or their attempts to emulate them, but their unwillingness to relate to neither the culture of the colonized nor to that of the colonizer. They are questioning their identity. For this reason they acquire a hybrid identity, a mix of native and colonial identity, neither wholly one nor the other. In other words, that ambivalent cultural identity does not belong to either the colonizer or the colonized. It is presented as an ‘other’ from both cultural identities.