

## The Filaments of Intertextuality in the God of Small Things

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### Abstract

Intertextuality is the approach to representing things from literary or extra-literary resources without following traditional notions of authorship. It undermines the idea of the text as independent and foregrounding. The principal focus is on the way that how artistic creations occur within the presence of other texts. The laser light of research is set onto the prism of the complex phenomenon of intertextuality to ransack the detail to brighten the abyss for readers, to enlighten the desiderium when and why the speaker or author detects the required ways to relate the message from another resource, how they are interconnected to create new messages fit to new conditions, and lastly how the new text reinforces the significance and cast an impression on the reader by extending the conception of the scene concerned.

**Keywords:** *Atrocity, Exploitation, Intertextuality, Nostalgia, Optimistic.*

### INTRODUCTION

An author intends to convey a message or idea to his/her reader behind the writing, and for that, he tries his/her best by exploring all available sources so that the reader can understand the message according to the author's intention and respond accordingly. The ardour, that the message should be conveyed and responded to as desired intention paves a way to explore greatly the available resources thereby automatically occurs the concept of intertextuality. When the aim behind writing is amelioration, intertextuality becomes crucial. Roy "has a mammoth contribution to monitoring the major complexities and concerns in society."

The intertextual threads in *The God of Small Things* have a very important place to

understand the text. Intertextuality is the forming of a text's connotation by another text. Intertextuality includes parody, illusions, citations, calque, counterfeiting, interpretations, satire, and pastiche. The way a writer adapts an earlier work or makes references to one book while reading another is an example of intertextuality.

The Oxford Dictionary described it as a "relation between texts, especially literary ones" (Pearsall, ed. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* 956). The term intertextuality is derivative of the Latin *intertexto*, which means to intermix. The term was introduced by French semiotician Julia Kristeva in the late sixties. In the essay "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," Kristeva renounced traditional concepts of the author's 'influences' and the 'sources' of a text'. Writing, then, isn't

just the result of a solitary writer, but of its relationship to different texts and to the designs of language itself. “Any text, she argues, is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.” (Megan Becker-Leckrone, *Julia Kristeva and Literary Theory* 93)

In his book *Intertextuality*, Graham Allen writes that “the text is not an individual, isolated object, but a compilation of cultural textuality (Allen, *Intertextuality* 36). By implication, all cultures and thus the world itself becomes a text. All discourses, therefore, are interpretations of the world, as Bakhtin puts it, “responses and calls to other discourses” (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevski's Poetics* 53). Intertextuality is, thus, an approach to representing things from literary or extra-literary resources without following traditional notions of authorship. It undermines the idea of the text as independent and foregrounding. All literary creations take place in the presence of other texts. Consequently, it surprises no one that *The God of Small Things*, is packed with intertextual recourses.

The device intertextuality in any literary text can be viewed at various levels: passing references from different texts or occasions may spin the context for a text; expanded and rehashed references may work as a theme or an image, or its unavoidable presence in the background of main text may create diverse suggestions. Intertextuality would maybe be more straightforward to understand on the off chance that its sources were from a single culture with a homogeneous interpretative society. It turns out to be significantly more perplexing on the off chance that the sources are multifaceted or cross-cultural, however, such a view is very normal in the present global situation. The resonances of diverse intertextuality are probably more prominent in postcolonial social set-ups in a liminal space — neither completely customary nor completely modern — as is the picture of contemporary

India. Arundhati Roy, even before her career as a writer, experienced migratory experiences inside the Indian sub-continent, which is itself a mosaic of different traditions and social set-ups. Thus, she has numerous intercultural and multicultural experiences. These encounters reflect in her writings which in a real sense resound with intertextuality, both intra-social and culturally diverse, drawing from both Eastern and Western sources, sensationalizing all the while the rationalization of the old and the new. One may here refer to “the stereographic plurality of the weave of signifiers in the text's tissue.” (Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* 159). As he makes the point that the text not only initiates a variety of meanings but also weaves together several discourses and spins meanings that already exist. Arundhati Roy uses a variety of texts and discourses to generate drastically varied intertextual effects in her writing, which is noteworthy to observe. Arundhati Roy decides to use intertextuality to expose the naked dance of exploitation and breath-choking atrocities and the ensuing yearning for the past way of life. She has “attempted to cut the chains that chained the marginalized peoples by attacking the nexus between criminals and government and anti-democratic working of the bureaucracy.” She also uses intertextuality to build a worldview of decadence along with patriarchal arrogance. She uses a variety of tales, points of view, and sources to build a compelling tale. Because of this, some of them get the status of fact and fiction, giving them the status of history and myth, while others foster an omnipresent feeling of mystery. In view of this “Definitely the reader feels a friendly Indian voice, with no humbug in it, no artificiality, nearly an implicit assumption that marginalized are all alike — destined to doom.”

Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality highlights the importance and the formative influences that other texts have in shaping a particular work. It is not only other works of literature but also other texts such as films,

advertisements, and media whose presence can be noticed in the novel. According to Rajewsky intermediality is - "those configurations that have to do with a crossing of borders between media" intermedial references in a specific medium point to aspects of another medium. Furthermore, Rajewsky suggests that:

"The media product uses its own media-specific means, either to refer to a specific, individual work produced, in another medium (i.e., what in the German tradition is called Einzelreferenz, 'individual reference'), or to refer to a specific medial subsystem (such as a certain film genre) or to another medium qua system (Systemreferenz, 'system reference')."

### Discussion on Sources

When and why the speaker or writer feels the need to relate the other text, how they are connected to infer new messages in response to new circumstances, and finally how they strengthen the meaning and have an impact on the reader by extending their understanding of the scene in question are all things that research is used to illuminate through the prism of the complex phenomenon of intertextuality.

An analysis of the Intertextuality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* may answer the question of what and how Intertextuality speaks in *The God of Small Things*.

Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* creates a women's genealogy through a re-creation of the family story or text. She emphasises the role of women which has been eradicated. A virtual polyphony/multiplicity of histories, stories, and selves appear through the many voices that people the novel. Fact and fiction merge to produce a complex intertext having a basically optimistic outlook with probably never comes to an end.

History, in *The God of Small Things* is consciously constructed with intertexts wherein family histories are rewritten imaginatively. Velutha the protagonist, and Ammu re-imagine

several versions of their own and their parents' ordeals and even deaths. The different viewpoints which range from sin to benevolence to pity are attempts to link them up with popular mythical figures from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and with literary figures from many texts. An extended reflection on the meaning of history and its links with myth and legend is perhaps inevitable in a land of many oral traditions like India.

"While Kunti revealed her secret to Karna on the riverbank, courting couples rubbed suntan oil on each other. While fathers played sublimated sexual games with their nubile teenaged daughters, Poothana suckled young Krishna at her poisoned breast. Bhima disemboweled Dushasana and bathed Draupadi's hair in his blood." (*The God of Small Things* 127)

There are several comments in *The God of Small Things* that suggest that Arundhati Roy makes intertextuality a conscious motif and device for instance, the remark made on the twins in the context of the Kathakali performance: "Trapped in the bog of a story that was and wasn't theirs. That had set out with the semblance of structure and order, then bolted like a frightened horse into anarchy" (*The God of Small Things* 236). Similarly, a rewriting of texts is suggested in the description of the twins, "Hansel and Gretel, in a ghastly fairy tale in which their dreams would be captured and re-dreamed" (*The God of Small Things* 293). Arundhati Roy makes extended references to texts as different as the popular film *The Sound of Music* (*The God of Small Things* 105-11), *Heart of Darkness* (*The God of Small Things* 125-26, 199-200, 305-06), *Chemmeen* (*The God of Small Things* 218-20), the Kathakali man and his "Great" texts like *Kama Shabadam* (*The God of Small Things* 234) and *Duryodhana Vadham* (*The God of Small Things* 229, 234). Many passing allusions are made to texts as disparate as

popular soap operas like WWF's Hulk Hogan and Mr. Perfect (The God of Small Things 28), Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *The Jungle Book*, *The Adventures of Susie Squirrel* (The God of Small Things 58-59), *Sinbad: The Last Voyage* (The God of Small Things 80), *Julius Caesar* (The God of Small Things 83), *Ulysses and Penelope* (The God of Small Things 157), the fairy tales about the Three Bears (The God of Small Things 180) or the Ugly Toad who turns into a handsome prince, *Rumpelstiltskin* (The God of Small Things 182), *Hansel and Gretel*, and even literary texts like *A Tale of Two Cities* (The God of Small Things 61), *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (The God of Small Things 182) and so on. Arundhati Roy, a master of the casual conversational style, extracts the meaning from idioms and proverbs also. "Big Man the Lantern. Small man the Tallow-stick". (The God of Small Things 89) "But Rome was not built in a day." (The God of Small Things 279) "A professional omeletteer" (The God of Small Things 14) refers to a famous idiom – you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs (Break anybody's eggs to make an omelette for oneself).

"The former apple of Peking's eye." (The apple of his/her eye) (The God of Small Things 301), "As ye sow, so shall ye reap." (The God of Small Things 31) "Let's bell the cat once and for all." (The God of Small Things 184) In general, these texts are employed in depressing or pessimistic circumstances.

Another instance of intertextuality arises in Sophie Mol's words when the children run away together to History House. Her words are so akin to Tom Sawyer's thoughts and his dramatic escapades in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* that one almost sees the three cousins transformed into those pranksters:

"... that the absence of children would heighten the adults' remorse. It would make them truly sorry, like the grownups in Hamelin after the Pied Piper took away all their children. They

would search everywhere; just when they were sure that all three of them were dead, they would all return home in triumph. Valued, loved, and needed more than ever. Her clinching argument was that if she were left behind she might be tortured and forced to reveal their hiding place" (The God of Small Things 292).

Here, the dream gets the shape of a full-scale nightmare unlike in Mark Twain. There is a good attempt for creating the local colour, i.e., the atmosphere of Kerala in the novel, with the reference to Kathakali and its traditions, the temple elephants, as well as the boat songs of Kerala, and the boat races during which they are sung. The romantic tragedy *Chemmeen* with its patriarchal overtones and the epics *Kama Shabadam* and *Duryodhana Vadham* are re-told by the Kathakali dancer to suit the "ungodly human heart." The retelling is connected to the experience that Rahel and Estha have had, shaped by the controlling viewpoint of Ammu-Velutha affair and its aftermath as experienced by the twins. Thus, Kunti and Ammu get linked in the commonality of their motherhood. Similarly, the "madness" of the early-morning performance of Bhima drinking Dushyasana's blood is transformed and transferred into the frenzy of another morning: "the brutal extravagance of this" is matched by "the savage economy" (The God of Small Things 235) of that morning, an obvious reference to "Velutha's arrest" (The God of Small Things 307-12).

Another important point that needs to be discussed here is the similarity between Arundhati Roy's narrative and Faulknerian texts: though there may not be the same kind of multiple-narrator perspective that he employs, the story of Ammu, Velutha, and twins is retold by the omniscient third-person narrator from the point of view of Baby Kochamma, the twins, the police inspector and so on. The reference to Ammu's illicit affair, forbidden

love, the view of the devastated childhood of the twins, and the family's history are comparable to Faulkner's narrative in *The Sound and the Fury* or *Light in August* or *Absalom, Absalom!*

Indeed, there are many similarities in structure, character, and attitude between Faulkner's magnum opus *Absalom, Absalom!*, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The twins Rahel and Estha have a twin soul or rather a single soul, and two bodies that are akin to the sole/integrated identity shared by Judith/Charles Bon/Henry Sutpen triumvirate in *Absalom, Absalom!* The incestuous relationship between Rahel and Estha has a clear affinity in the *Absalom, Absalom!* "that single personality with two bodies both of which had been deduced by a man whom at the time Judith had never even seen" (Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 91-92). Velutha in *The God of Small Things*, though much older than the twins and not entangled in the incestuous relationship (since he has been dead and gone) could be said to have a similar place to that occupied by Charles Bon in Faulkner's novel, since both are discarded in different ways because of the racist/casteist views of the other characters. Baby Kochamma the old, unfulfilled virgin of *The God of Small Things* is not far different from Rosa Coldfield of *Absalom, Absalom!* who suffers "an itching winter's discontent and dries up even as she wishes to bloom" (Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 145). For instance, there are similar overtones of long frustrated years in Kochamma's "waiting" for Father Mulligan and Rosa's "waiting," not "for light but for that doom which we call female victory..." (Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 144), a victory firstly to be realized through Sutpen, and later as a shocking imaginary substitute to Judith, through Charles Bon. The analogous situations between the ineffectual Ammu in *The God of Small Things* and Sutpen's first wife Ellen who hardly ever acts with any initiative in *Absalom, Absalom!* are notable too.

William Faulkner's general worldview is animalistic and perverted and Arundhati Roy's fourth chapter "Abhilash Talkies" (94-123), delineates the sexual abuse with Estha, an eight-year-old boy and the facility for fulfilling of the man's needs for Chacko are not far different. Again, the narrative of *The God of Small Things* is controlled by the views of the twins and Baby Kochamma, besides the omniscient third-person narrator, just as Faulkner's. Similarly, the survivors at the end of *The God of Small Things* viz., Baby Kochamma, Rahel, and Estha are half insane, on a parallel to the howling idiot Jim Bond who screams in the ruins of the burnt Sutpen mansion in *Absalom, Absalom*. The (sub)text and the intertext of *The God of Small Things* are thus permeated with considerable decadence and pessimism; the worldview that emerges is not very positive.

Cinema is the new God of modern Indian society then how can Arundhati Roy lag behind so far as the matter of intermedial references is concerned? In *The God of Small Things* the whole fourth chapter viz "Abhilash Talkies" is dedicated to the movie.

## CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, Intertextuality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, is used to emphasize a pessimistic worldview and the tragic fate of virtually all the important characters in the novel. She uses intertextuality as a means to build up an atmosphere against the genealogy of corruption and plunder, emphasizing the role of duty-divorced democracy cum bureaucracy workings versus the longings of the poor. Postcolonial impulses thus manifest themselves in *The God of Small Things* in varied shapes due to their varied use in varied situations.

"The narrative framing of the story is supported by features that suggest the immediacy of oral storytelling, for instance, the direct address of the implied audience, repetitions, allusion to the further development of the story, or

(possibly) dramatic embellishments. At the same time, the exclusion of the fictional addressee creates a sense of theatrical artificiality.” Certainly, the Intertextuality greatly contributes to “the overall effect that the novel appears as a kind of mirror for the reader” , a medium reflecting the reader’s fears, stereotypes and presuppositions. As Mohsin Hamid acknowledges, “the ending (of the novel) is determined by the way a reader reads it and by the preconceptions and prejudices and fears that a reader has.”

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