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## LOST ETHOS AND DREAMS IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S WRITINGS

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### Abstract :

*Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things is about the sense of lost ethos. She has relocated this lost ethos through her story based on Ayemenem village. She has widened her awareness and activity beyond the village onto the national and global level. Her political activism is its manifestation. For Arundhati Roy, fiction is a nucleus and a mode to find out the problems and non-fiction is the remedy to such problems. So she has emerged as a serious human rights activist in the country and abroad. There is an intellectual thread between fiction and non-fiction. Therefore, understanding her fiction, one needs to understand her non-fiction also. Arundhati Roy deals with the relationship between power and powerlessness both in fiction and non-fiction. So her fiction reflects the lost ethos and non-fiction reflects her activism for her dreams.*

**Keywords:** Lost ethos, dreams, power, powerlessness, politics

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Arundhati Roy's first novel, The God of Small Things has become a highly admired and immensely popular work. On one occasion, she even declared that The God of Small Things is her first and last novel. It was difficult to predict whether she would write a second novel. Her second novel is a political allegory, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. However, she was definite that she does not want to write about the village Ayemenem again. She felt that the sense of loss is relocated through her novel. It is clear from the affirmation that the novel The God of Small Things is about the sense of loss-the lost ethos. The sense of loss is relocated, in the sense that Arundhati Roy had widened her sensibility and activity beyond the village, onto national and global levels. Hereafter Arundhati Roy would fight to identify and relieve the sense of loss in the larger perspective and issues elsewhere. Her later political activism was its manifestation. Nevertheless, the novel is still the nucleus, from where the writer located the micro-source of the lost paths.

Like the novel, The God of Small Things is her first fictional work; readers become curious to understand more about the novel as well as its writer. It is to be acknowledged that a work of art, especially a novel does not necessarily supply the remedial measures for the problems dealt with within it. Arundhati Roy reveals the excruciating sense of lost ethos in the superb novel, The God of Small Things. She attempts to suggest the remedial measures for such irreparable situations in life through her non-fiction. She has emerged as a serious social activist, participating in the protests against political, social and religious suppressions of human rights in any form and anywhere in the country and abroad. Her concern and empathy

with the victims and her indignation against those causes of oppression are well known. Her commitment is manifested. This peculiar stature of the novelist encourages us of *The God of Small Things* to probe into beyond her first work of fiction. Arundhati Roy enjoys semi-formal methods, outside fiction. For her, these semi-formal instruments like conversations are “a flexible way of thinking aloud, exploring ideas, personal as well as political, without having to nail them down with an artificially structured cohesion and fit them into an unassailable grand thesis”. (*The Shape of the Beast* p. viii-ix) Arundhati Roy concedes that there exists a vast world of materials, somewhere between the spoken and the written word. The curious student requires this material to explain the lost ethos and its possible reclamation. In such a predicament, the only source available to him is Roy’s non-fictional writings, free-lance essays, articles and her vibrant outbursts.

It must be admitted that Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* can be enjoyed and admired as it is, without resorting to her other works of non-fiction. However, it is equally true that the knowledge of Arundhati Roy’s political stands, social attitudes and human concerns, shall enable us to derive more aesthetic enjoyment and intellectual satisfaction. Hence, in this article, all possible efforts are made to enlarge and enlighten the implied issues found in her fiction, with the help of Roy’s pronouncements found in her non-fiction.

Arundhati Roy confesses that fiction and non-fiction are different methods of storytelling. However, at the same time, she says that fiction dances out of me and non-fiction are wrenched out by the agony and suffering of this shattered society. She adds that the theme of her fiction and non-fiction is similar to the relationship between power and powerlessness. At the same time, creative fiction and wrenched non-fiction suggest the qualitative difference between them. It is interesting to note that Arundhati Roy is not happy when she is described as an activist. According to her, the term writer-activist is strategically targeted to paralyse both writer and activist. It suggests that a writer has shyness to publicly take a political position. Similarly, the term activist implies a coarse and crude end of the intellectual spectrum. It can be easily understood as to why she deprecates the distinction. Her concern for the predicament of the present Dalits and Adivasis drives her to involve in every issue. She asserts that she is not involved by being a writer or an activist. On the other hand, she is involved because she is a human being.

Arundhati Roy, in her conversation with N.Ram, *Scimitars of the Sun*, reveals the underlying principles of her both fictional and political writings. She affirms that she was writing on behalf of herself. In her writings, if she romanticizes, it is freedom. Her writings are advocating political positions for the powerless class and supporting the people’s movement. She has just added a loud voice for the struggling class and her intention of writing for the people is to be heard their problems worldwide through her. Her political essays are not about her but the burning issues of the people.

If *The God of Small Things* is the statement of the problem, the non-fictional works are the possible solutions suggested to annihilate the problem. If the novel is the body, the political essays are its public apparel. In an exclusive interview by Urvashi Butalia, published in *Outlook* magazine, titled, *I had two options writing or madness*, Arundhati Roy said: “I’m not

unduly worried because I believe in literature. You judge a writer by her writings. My book is my best ambassador.” This statement is a clear indication of understanding her fiction and non-fiction. The post-colonial literature in India abounds with the theme of marginalization and the oppression of subaltern groups and individuals. However, the writers of this branch of literature highlighted the desperate sufferings and the helplessness of powerlessness that these groups or individuals usually undergo in today’s world. Arundhati Roy also successfully draws such a picture in, *The God of Small Things*. What makes her different from others is her philosophy, a governing ideology, not diminished by either fame or wealth that came to her after the publication of her first novel. In this novel, she has beautifully drawn a wonderful silhouette of a few oppressed and depressed characters in Ammu, Velutha, Rahel and Estha along with angelic Sophie Mol. These characters embody the social and political vision of the writer. However, unlike other fiction writers, she unambiguously states her social and political stand without fear, favour or appeasement in her political essays.

Murari Prasad, in his essay, *Articulating the Marginal: Arundhati Roy*, said that Arundhati Roy simply enlarges her concerns about the manifold maladies of the most oppressed classes in the society with focused energy. This phenomenon, we can see in both fiction and non-fiction such as feminism, caste discrimination, and the practice of untouchability, American hegemony and neo-colonial impositions.

In her non-fiction, Arundhati Roy seeks to resurrect the spirit of the dead characters—Ammu, Velutha and Sophie Mol, who epitomize the spirits of feminine aspirations and transgressions, subaltern aspirations and transgressions and artless innocence respectively. In the novel, their lives come to an immediate and unlucky end. These characters embody the spirit of the writer. Hence, the writer does not wish to leave them dead. In her non-fiction, spanning several talks and essays, she seeks to kindle the flame of the burning spirit of these characters in the minds of not just the marginalized but also humanity as a whole without any sort of discrimination.

While studying and evaluating Roy’s fiction and non-fiction, the most glaring aspect noticeable is her concept of politics and style. In the literary appreciation and assessment, a convenient division is made as subject and style, or theme and technique. The theme of her work is the lost ethos but what is her technique in the larger sense. It is mentioned that Arundhati Roy’s technique lies in the use of these two words politics and style. She does not use these terms in their normal and current meaning. For example, the statement that politics and fiction are two sides of the same coin would not concur with the present conception of politics. She also does not show any interest in politics as a party-based activity to grab power or as participation in the governmental machinery.

Similarly, she does not connote the term for that cunning intelligence or divisive craft to gain selfish and personal progress and profit. It is something germinal and intrinsic involving clash, the encounter between individuals, classes, especially among the powerful and the powerless; to participate in this fight on behalf of the powerless seems to be her notion of politics. The most sorrowful thing is that politics has lost its meaning, its utility and method as conceived earlier. It was a local or national procedure for choosing a future and working

towards one, but now politics has been robbed of this primary function; it has become truly the last resort of the plebeian scoundrels, who mostly lives from opinion-poll to opinion-poll. The more far-seeing project to the end of their term of office, no further.

This seems to be the reason why Arundhati Roy wants to infuse the new term with new meaning and vigour. Arundhati Roy hints at her conception of politics on one occasion that what we need to search for and find, what we need to hone and perfect into the magnificent, shining thing, is a new kind of politics. It is not the politics of governance, but it is the politics of resistance. The politics of opposition. The politics of forcing accountability. The politics of unity across the world and avoiding certain devastation. Such cross-references between her fiction and non-fiction throw more light on each other. Such a study reveals the creative vision of the writer and her ideal of the world-order.

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