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Responsibility

“The God of small things” by Arundhati Roy is a set of events that happened in a small town of India known as Kerala. One of the various themes covered in the book is responsibility, which this paper delineates on. Roy projects his message by focusing on different scenes through physical description of her characters. The description of Kerala’s tropical landscape is also lush and vivid, adding flavor on the themes.

As quoted from Mullaney earlier, Roy displays women in her novel with various options and choices; whether resistant, complicit or both to the dominant order. She does not idealize women but rather exposes them as human beings that are complex in character, with the possibility of responsibility and agency towards their own actions. Various characters in the novel are portrayed as responsible, while others as irresponsible. For instance, Ammu could have been depicted as the good suffering hero with a cruel father, a drunken husband and a lover that gets killed. Roy luckily does not stereotype. An illustration where responsibility is exhibited is when Ammu quarrels with her husband when divorcing. What takes precedent in their quarrels is who would take responsibility of the children. Ammu demands her husband to take care of one of the children – Estha, but he refuses. Because of the guilty, Ammu hugs him and says “He mustn’t imagine things” (81).

The memory is painful to her and does not wish to remember it, leading her to the extent of telling lies. Likewise, Ammu's husband is irresponsible. As a father, he has the responsibility of taking good care of his family and remaining a responsible father.

Ammu's regret is connected to an episode she experienced when Mammachi and Baby Kochamma locked her in a room. She expressed her pain "incoherent with rage and disbelief at what was happening to her at being locked away like the family lunatic in a medieval household" (239). Depiction of her anguish is manifest through her screams towards her children when they inquire the reason why she is locked inside the room "...should have dumped you in an orphanage" (240). This housing makes the children run away and causes the premature death of her cousin Sophie. She is also chased away. Therefore, Roy brings out the consequences of an irresponsible person.

Apart from rejection from her children, Ammu is also guilty for the death of her lover Velutha. When she hears about his death, she whispers to the bus conductor when traveling back to Ayemenem "I've killed him". This happens after her efforts to solve the issue with the police become futile. One may ask why Ammu feels guilty about this death and seek to understand how she killed Velutha. The reason for feeling guilty is the fact that she had an affair with Velutha. There is also a social class difference between Velutha and Ammu. Velutha is more vulnerable and exposed owing to his status in society. He comes from a lower caste compared to Ammu who comes from an upper caste. The fears and concerns of Velutha are depicted from the way he becomes hesitant and scared to enter the relationship with Ammu. Velutha is more concerned about his job, family and livelihood. Even as Velutha is concerned about this, Ammu seems less concerned about the risks of her relationship as she knows that it happens with secrecy under the cover of night. Ammu's dreams of the cheerful man with one arm" but unfortunately in reality,

Velutha cannot fight the shadows but could only see them (205). Therefore, if Ammu had not dared to enter in the relationship, Velutha would not have died and would have no perception as the cause of his death. To most of the readers, Ammu's utterances that "I've killed him" is a clear insight of the burden or the responsibility that she believes she needs to carry for the demise of Velutha.

Responsibility of Mammachi is quite clear in the novel. Mammachi is a woman who acts openly according to her values and beliefs if told about the affair. Despite being described as submissive, she is equally portrayed as a victim of unawareness of her beliefs and values. She is also a woman that understands her responsibility as she runs a business. Therefore, she is a woman who to some extent is depicted as taking a responsibility of her actions.

Baby Kochamma is one of the characters depicted as cunning, vicious and energetic, even though she thinks that she is an innocent sufferer. The novel reads "in her mind she kept an organized, careful account of things she'd done for people, and things people hadn't done for her" (93). The quote depicts Baby Kochamma as a self-pitying mindset and self-righteous woman, which makes her deny her participation in the responsibility in various situations. For instance, she persuades Estha to betray Velutha to save Ammu from being taken to jail at the police station. The case of death of Velutha concludes by charging him for kidnapping. This situation therefore indicates clearly that Baby Kochamma played a role and she was responsible for the death of Velutha. She is the architect of drafting falsehood, which gets Velutha in trouble that causes his demise. She conspires with inspector Thomas Mathew and after realizing that this conspiracy could be revealed she still conspires to make Ammu leave Ayemenem because she knows the truth. She uses the death of Chako's daughter Sophie who died when the boat capsized by linking it to Ammu. Because of the anger, Chako attacks Ammu and orders her to pack

her things and leave 'pack the bags and leave' (305). Even as this happens, Baby Kochamma does not show any feelings of guilty about the role she played, but she is uncomfortable having the twins in the house as people that are grown up. Baby Kochamma feels guilty of the tragedy that happened in the family and this shows her responsibility in the various tragedies.

Even though Roy describes the structures of oppression in the novel clearly, she however allows the characters to have the freedom in their deeds and actions; the characters are not denied their agency and choices to comply or to resist. Most of the characters do not accept their responsibilities like Baby Kochamma, Ammu husband and Comrade Pillai, but they come to be haunted, as they remain guilty and remorseful. Comrade Pillai says 'through this part in the whole thing had by no means a small one, Comrade Pillai didn't hold himself in any way personally responsible for what had happened' (15). This is a clear manifestation of how the characters failed to take up their responsibility and later felt guilty. Therefore, the novel has precisely brought out the theme of responsibility through different characters.

Work Cited

Arundhati Roy. *The God of Small Things*, India, Indialnk Publisher. 1997.