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Rewriting the Past, Repairing the Present: Chronopolitics and Reparative Storytelling in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy is a story in which tragedy disrupts the consistency of lived experience, memory eludes closure, and time refuses to stay linear. This paper explores how the novel addressed suppresses histories of caste, gender and forbidden love by upending traditional chronology and emphasizing broken temporalities. The goal is to investigate how the tale navigates the past as a place of loss as well as one that may be repaired, where creating stories turns into a way to regain control and provide opportunities for recovery. Mapping the time breaks that organized narrative, exploring the reparative techniques woven into the aesthetic of fragmented storytelling, and analyzing how memory and pain are returned through shifting narrative sequences are among the goals. In order to interpret how disturbed timelines disclose the politics of caste and personal mourning, the study employs a methodological approach that involves close textual analysis influenced by the larger fields of memory studies, trauma discourse, chronopolitical thinking and cultural studies. According to the paradigm, the analysis shows how the novel's narrative form itself serves a reparative purpose by exposing oppressive structures and generating creative opportunities for survival through its fractured temporality. In addition to criticizing the brutality of social hierarchies, the author implies that the broken narrative function as subdues yet potent acts of healing by fusing memory, time and storytelling.

Keywords: Memory, Trauma, Time, Repair, Narrative

Introduction

Literature functions as a vast archive of memories. Silenced voices resurface with its space, and fractured histories find an opportunity to articulate themselves. Postcolonial studies explore that dimension in greater depth. Fiction become more than mere narration ^[4]; it interrogates culture, addressing the residues of colonial violence and the ruptures within society. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), awarded the Booker prize, is emblematic of this mode of writing. Through its broken temporality and layering of memory ^[11], it foregrounds the difficult intersections of personal and collective histories. The narrative for of the novel challenges the notion of linear time, emphasizing how trauma endures and echoes across successive generations. At its core, the literary piece dramatizes how acts of remembering, retelling and fragmenting temporal flow destabilize dominant social orders while simultaneously offering glimpses of alternative ways of imagining repair. This paper looks at how the novel handles time, trauma, and repair. It plays out what Elizabeth Freeman called chronopolitics in 2010 ^[5]. That's the politics of time basically. How we order time ties into power, who belongs and who is left out. In Roy's book breaking the straight line shows caste systems, male dominance and politics huts marking personal lives and group ones too. Resisting reveals trauma's unfinished side. It lingers in memories and daily routines. But the story does not stop at loss. It points to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's idea from 2003 about reparative impulses ^[8]. Storytelling helps survival, it cracks open a bit toward healing. This doesn't wipe out the pain. It makes room for empathy, imagination, resilience amid old wounds. Thus, the study aims to achieve three goals. In order to examine the chronopolitical aspects of Roy's story, we must first examine how the disruption of temporality mirrors the wounds of individual trauma as well as the larger politics of exclusion.

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Second, to place the novel's discussion of memory and trauma in broader societal history demonstrating the close connection between individual memory and mass violence. Third, to examine Roy's storytelling's reparative elements while taking into account how narrative reconstruction itself might serve as a delicate yet important gesture toward change. This study's methodology is based on interdisciplinary approaches and is critical and interpretive. Rather than confining itself to a single theoretical model, the analysis draws on memory studies, trauma theory and postcolonial cultural criticism, alongside Freeman's theorization of Chronopolitics and Sedgwick's reparative reading practices. Such a framework is necessary because Roy's text resists singular interpretation, it is not reducible to a narrative of suffering or a straightforward story of redemption. Instead, the novel operates at the intersection of disrupted time, fracture memory, and tentative repair, making a layered analysis both appropriate and necessary. By positioning *the god of small things* as both a chronopolitical critique and a reparative act, this paper argues that Roy expands the role of postcolonial fiction. The novel not only exposes the structural violence of caste, gender and political repression but also reimagines the potential of literature to hold open fragile spaces of empathy and survival. In this sense, Roy's narrative becomes more than the story of disrupted lives; it is also an imaginative reconstruction that insists on the possibility of repair, however incomplete or precarious.

Disrupted Temporality and Structures of Power

The chronopolitical framework highlights how time itself becomes a site of power shaping what is remembered, forgotten and silenced. In Arundhati Roy's *the god of small things* fractured temporality functions not as a mere stylistic device but as a social hierarchies and traumatic repression. The novel's narrative structure- constantly shifting between childhood and adulthood - shows how memory resists linear progressing and how caste politics manipulate temporal belonging. Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma in *Unclaimed Experienced* (1996) illuminates this disturbance. According to Caruth, trauma cannot be assimilated to a sense of chronological order and recurs in intrusive, fragmented form. This condition is reflected in Roy's narrative. What happens around Sophie Mol's drowning or Velutha's senseless killing is not something that occurs once and then disappears into the past. Rather, it keeps surfacing, seen anew so that closure is impossible. For instance, Sophie Mol's funeral does not seem like a single instant but rather as an event perpetually re-imagined- through the twins' perception, through family shame, and through the social gaze. In the same way Estha's childhood trauma in the movie theatre with the orange drink lemon drink man later recovers decades afterwards informing his adult silence. These repetitions illustrate how trauma shatters time leaving the past to intrude on the present randomly. The very form of the novel performs what Caruth refers to as trauma's belatedness, its resistance to being enclosed within the past. But chronopolitics in the novel is more than individual trauma and challenges to ask how time is stratified by social hierarchy. Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe* (2000) contends that modernity generates uneven temporalities- some formations are placed in the present while others are confined to a past that has to repeat itself indefinitely [2]. Roy illustrates this in the illicit love between

Ammu and Velutha. Their love shatters caste temporality, which hinges on repetition and continuity over generations. Velutha even with his talent as a carpenter and his political awareness, is barred the future because caste reduces him to the state of an already established past man. The state violence response- the police thrashing that killed him is a temporal imposition of the order of caste. By murdering Velutha, the system attempts to erase the discontinuity he embodies and recreate the proper continuity of caste time. Ammu as well ostracized and denied legitimacy is deprived of a future by the same chronopolitical logic. Roy resists, however this temporal violence with her narrative decisions. The novel does not conclude with the death of Velutha as the logic of caste would have it, but with the intimate description of his last night with Ammu. By their union after death in narrative order, Roy subverts linear chronology and will not let Velutha's memory be contained within erasure. The conclusion turns the novel into an act of retrieval: time is rearranged in a way that love rather than violence is the last note. This is an alternative that subverts what Frank Kermode calls the manufactured "sense of an ending" [12] of traditional narratives, opening instead a temporality in which hidden lives continue. Thus, *The God of Small Things* proves that fragmented time is not only a literary conceit but a chronopolitical move. Roy illustrates how trauma disrupts linearity, how caste institutes temporal hierarchies, and how narrative breach can testify against erasure. Through its relentless return to Velutha and refusal of closure, the novel subverts authorized temporalities and demands remembrance of lives that power wishes to forget. Through this broken temporality, Roy reveals the politics of time and reconfigures narrative as resistance.

Memory, Trauma and Reparative Fragmentation

Memory studies foreground the fact that memory as an active and affective process, formed by repression, desire, and social structures, rather than a passive repository of facts [3]. It is not often linear or stable in situations of trauma; instead, it becomes fragmented, repetitive, and resistant to closure. Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), characterizes trauma as belated and disjointed, a wound that comes back unexpectedly instead of staying locked in the past. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) performs this dynamic with its fractured narrative, where traumatic happenings come back in bits and pieces across various timelines. The story returns to episodes of violence—like the drowning of Sophie Mol, the savage murder of Velutha, and Ammu's social exclusion—instead of telling them once and then proceeding. Their repetition reflects how trauma defies incorporation, bursting into memory over and over again, dissolving boundaries between past and present. Estha's and Rahel's shattered lives incarnate this disruption. Their adulthood is haunted by the unsettled losses of their youth. Estha's grown-up silence stems from a childhood violation in the movie theater, an event which returns not as a memory but as a broken presence informing his identity twenty years later. Rahel's grown-up confusion also captures the manner in which childhood trauma echoes into adulthood. The murder of Sophie Mol and the punishment meted out to Velutha are not remembered in chronological fashion but come back in fragmented bits, indicating that memory is not linear remembering but a disruptive agency always disturbing the present. Marianne Hirsch's idea of post memory in *Family*

Frames (1997) comes into play here. Hirsch contends that trauma does not stay limited to the victims of the immediate event but crosses over generations, influencing identities long after the original event ^[7]. In the novel, trauma of Velutha's murder and Ammu's humiliation do not fall upon them alone; they get passed on to the lives of the twins, whose adult life is characterized by fragmentation and silence. Memory in the novel, then, is both personal and collective, connecting single experiences of suffering to larger histories of oppression of caste, subjugation of gender, and political violence. Ammu's affair with Velutha, recalled by the family and community as a social transgression, becomes part of the collective memory that forces caste lines across time. In this way, memory works as a social control, determining what is to be retained, what is to be abhorred, and what is to be forgotten.

Concurrently, Roy's aesthetics of fragmentation have reparative possibilities. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in *Touching Feeling* (2003), makes a distinction between paranoid readings that reveal wounding and reparative readings which try to find possibilities of survival and care within the breakage ^[9]. her novel performs this reparative role by not allowing memory to be only a place of hurt. Revisiting Velutha in the course of the narrative, for example, is both a reminder of the brutal erasure of his presence but also a recovery of his centrality. By bringing him back repeatedly throughout the broken narrative, the text refuses the disappearance of his presence from history and recovers his dignity into memory. Reparative storytelling ^[6] is also to be found in the twin connection between Rahel and Estha. Their reunion as adults, however traumatic and filled with muteness and disorientation, is a show of strength. Their mutual memories, painful as they were, tie them together and defy erasure. Even their bodily closeness as adults, contentious as it is, can be seen as a move to mend the breaks made by trauma, to recover intimacy in the place of loss. Roy presents their relationship as both damaged and sustained, a threadbare continuity of connection in an unconnected story. The redemptive desire also appears in aesthetic decisions within the novel. Roy's writing tends to linger on sensory shreds, lighthearted linguistic distortions, and the minutiae of daily life. These narrative techniques do not remove trauma but generate tiny reservoirs of beauty and intimacy within its heaviness. The observance of small things in the world of children, the repetition of motifs, and the lyrical re-vision of memory all work to balance suffering with moments of imaginative consolation. These narrative fragments ^[13] imply that even in rupture, there can be resilience, creativity, and survival. By denying closure in linear narrative, Roy places fragmentation in alliance with responsibility. The form recognizes the impossibility of representing trauma without reducing its complexity, as well as providing reparative acts in the form of recognition and remembrance. The novel refuses to recount occurrences that official narratives and social hierarchies would rather repress. In so doing, it makes memory a political action, one that refuses caste violence and patriarchal disappearance.

Therefore, in *The God of Small Things*, fragmentation is not dissociable from memory and trauma, but fragmentation itself is a reparative practice. Fragmentation mirrors the instability of traumatic memory, disrupts the temporal power of caste and society, and creates imaginative freedom for healing ^[4]. Roy shows that narrative does not have to

repair linear coherence in order to be reparative; rather, it can respect fracture, keep the affective density of memory intact, and refuse erasure. The novel therefore fuses aesthetics, ethics, and politics, showing how fragmented memory can function simultaneously as a critique of violence and as a space of resilience.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that *The God of Small Things* is not merely a story of private grief but a narrative that foregrounds the chronopolitics of memory, trauma, and repair. By fracturing time, the writer disrupts the presumption that history moves in an unproblematic, linear fashion. Rather, the novel illustrates that time itself is organized along lines of power: caste oppressions, gendered proscriptions, and state violence are maintained through control over time, by controlling who is relegated to the past, who is given presence, and who is foreclosed a future. The novel's temporal fragmentation is therefore a critique of such hierarchies, revealing how trauma unfixes the edges of time and will not stay in a completed past. Simultaneously, this research has also revealed that Roy does not merely disrupt. Through the aesthetics of fragmentation, she brings into visibility the insistence of trauma on the lives of Estha and Rahel, where memory comes back in fragmented, capricious terms. And yet, in these very fractures, the novel develops a reparative aspect. By insisting on coming back to Velutha, by maintaining Ammu's illicit love as a space of loss and opposition, and by keeping the closeness of the twins intact in spite of shattered lives, the narrative makes possible imaginative spaces for survival. Narrative itself becomes reparative: it refuses erasure, retrieves muted voices, and bestows dignity upon those whom history would otherwise exclude.

The central contribution of this essay, then, is to show how Roy's novel works in the space of chronopolitics and reparative narrative. Its disrupted temporality critiques the temporal violence of patriarchy and caste, while its reparative narration confirms the potential for resilience in the midst of breakdown. Here, literature is not merely reflexive but actually transformative, re-storying the past in a way that disrupts hegemonic histories and imagines other futures. By refusing closure in a linear fashion and accepting fragmentation, *The God of Small Things* demands repair to be possible—not in complete resolution, but through small, moral acts of remembering and saying that refuse silence and open up avenues of resistance.

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