

DEPICTION OF FOOD AND CULTURE IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

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Abstract

Food represents the part of national heritage, identity and the stories that passed generations of generations. The food itself acts as a link to historical and cultural origins, serving as reminder of the past through the related culinary methods and social rituals. Indian cuisine is distinct from other cuisines in terms of both flavor and preparation on techniques. It perfectly captures the fusion of many ages and cultures. This article entitled "Depiction of food and culture in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things" examines how food symbolizes a hidden culture of Kerala society. By representing various indigenous cuisines like mango pickles, jelly, jam, appam, preserves, tapioca, pepper etc., Roy tracks the culture exclusively for Keralites. The portrayal of common people living a genuine existence despite being in a fantastical setting, Roy's attention to small things is remarkable.

Keywords: *cultural cuisines, hidden culture, emotions, identity, family, hybridity and culture.*

Food is a cultural asset that has the capacity to provide numerous benefits for the community. When it comes to South Asians, food frequently influences how the issues of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and national identity are imagined and how the national belongings are reinforced or opposed. The cultural diversity of India is reflected in its culinary repertoire. The phrase "Indian food" refers to fusion of flavors from all part of the nation and highlights centuries of cultural interaction with other regions of the world.

Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" is a novel that weaves together complex themes of family, love, social norms, and the impact of historical events on individuals. While the novel primarily focuses on the lives of the twins, Estha and Rahel, and their dysfunctional family in Kerala, India, it also touches upon aspects of food and culture. Food, in particular, is used as a powerful tool to convey cultural nuances and social hierarchies in the novel. It

creates a deep link between the host and the guest, who should be the best host and take good care of guest.

The novel provides a vivid portrayal of traditional Kerala cuisine, which is deeply rooted in the region's cultural fabric. Descriptions of meals, flavors, and cooking techniques are woven into the narrative. The characters engage in rituals surrounding food, and the culinary traditions become a means to connect with the cultural heritage of the region. Kerala is regarded as the land of diversity when it comes to cuisine, dress, dialects, customs, rituals, and faiths. Its traditional dishes, such as rice and curry, tapioca, spiced pickles, appam, and fish fries, depict the state's rich culinary heritage.

The social structure in the novel is reflected in the way characters interact with food. There are clear distinctions between the culinary practices of different social classes. Roy used the title 'Paradise Pickles &

Preserves' for her first chapter in an effort to elevate her female characters by giving them specific roles in society. Thus, she remarks, "Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria, the vinegar-hearted, short-tempered, midget cook, were the only people left in the Ayemenem house." (Roy, 15). Moreover, the social hierarchy is portrayed through the Ipes, who belong to the upper castes, have certain expectations regarding food and dining etiquette. This creates a stark contrast with the lives of characters like Velutha, who comes from a lower social class, and whose access to certain foods is restricted due to societal norms.

In the Kerala context, a family's cultivation of different agricultural food products like as bananas, jackfruits, pepper, rice, paddy fields, sugar cane, mangoes, and tomatoes symbolize their place in society in that particular culture. Roy presented a number of goods, including milk products, products like teabags, Coca-Cola, Fanta, and liquors are examples of the western origin and its effect on Kerala food markets after the British colonization in Kerala.

Additionally, the cuisines changed from the natural, indigenous Kerala society to "an artificial commercialized overseas market society" where wealth became more important (Thulasan and sighn rai). Thus, food is often used symbolically in the novel. For example, the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, who sells aerated drinks, becomes a symbol of changing times and Western influence. The forbidden love affair between Ammu and Velutha is also expressed through the sharing of forbidden foods, breaking the social and cultural boundaries that surround them.

The pickles represent the notion of preservation, but the pickle plant next to the Ipe house becomes a story feature as its workers flirt with Marxism and rebellion. Pickling the fruits and vegetables is

effectively preserving them so they last forever, in the same way that the Ipe family works to maintain the past, particularly the memory of Sophie Mol's death and the historical divisions between landlords and laborers, Touchables and Untouchables. The banana jam Mammachi prepares within the pickle plant is also symbolic because it is not allowed to be sold as jam or jelly because it does not fit into either category.

In Roy's narrative, the Ipe family in Ayemenem holds a prominent position. They are viewed as a cross between western and eastern culture. The family continued to practice both pickle manufacturing business and home gardening according to extremely traditional practices. The pickle factory called 'Paradise Pickles & Preserves' symbolizes the Ipe family's conservative Christian religious practices. Roy discovers that Keralans adhered to a rigorously disciplined religion that was derived either from Christian philosophy or from mythological Hindu epics. However, Ipe family beliefs, where Jesus Christ's sins, and his curses are all depicted in this story.

Kerala's dining system draws up images of social as well as familial customs. It is evident from the narration that Ipe and his family adhered to the joint family arrangement, which was common among Keralan traditional households. Family members who were women could only eat after the meals of the young and the elderly men. According to Indian traditional system in wives are customed to serve their husbands their meals. If a woman disobeys such customs, she is not considered the ideal homemaker in Keralan society as per these meal regulations.

The novel explores the prohibition era in Kerala, and the characters are involved in the Illegal brewing of alcohol. This activity is not only a plot device but also a reflection of the characters' defiance of societal

norms. It brings to light the clash between tradition and modernity, as well as the impact of political and social changes on the culture of the region. Various cultural rituals and ceremonies involve the preparation and sharing of food. These events provide insight into the cultural practices and traditions of the characters. The novel uses these moments to explore the impact of societal expectations on individuals and families.

In summary, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy skillfully integrates food and culture into its narrative, using these elements to delve into the complexities of Indian society, traditions, and the changing dynamics of a post-colonial world. The novel presents a rich tapestry of experiences, where the depiction of food becomes a metaphor for the larger social and cultural landscape. Roy's novel started with the traditional home-cultivated Kerala cuisine culture and ends into a culture representing the transplantation to an artificial western impact of readymade and packed instant cuisines. So, this shift portrayed the influence of so called modern or western or we can call Edward Said's concept of Orientalism in cuisines. Ipe family shows the hybridity

of both eastern and western culture, thus showed the hybridity in cuisine changing habitat also.

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