

## SENSUALITY – A CATALYST IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

Rakhi Sharma \*,Dr. Pradeep Kumar Talan\*\*

### ABSTRACT

*Arundhati Roy's sensational novel, The God of Small Things, which won the Booker Prize(1997), revolves around sensuality. The whole universe appears to fulfill the role of gratification of senses. Sensuality mainly serves as a stimulus to sexuality, the carnal desire of a human being. For Roy, sensuality is an art. She employs it very skillfully and keeps it away from vulgarity. A comparison has been made between John Keats expression of sensuality vis-a-vis Roy's expressions. The paper examines the two writers upon this vital aspect of expression meant to generate aesthetic savouring among the readers.*

**Keywords:** *Sensuality, goosebump, sexual perk, Ammu, Velutha, metaphor*

“Sensuality, my lovelies, is much more encompassing than just a mere sexual perk. To be sensual means to be acutely aware of your surroundings. It's the joyous preoccupation with what you smell, touch, hear, taste and see. With the right state of mind, you can make anything a sensual experience—eating, walking, dancing, gardening, laundry—you name it.” *L. B. Woolridge*

The moment we hear the term ‘sensuality’, the very first word that pops into our mind is often ‘sex’. If it is so, we are not wrong; we are not much close to the polysemy characteristics of the term. Most of us think sensuality and sexuality are synonymous. Our minds are trained that way. The former is an ingredient of the latter. The first is a free agent that influences the process of sexuality and remains unaffected all through the reaction. Sexuality is not possible without sensuality. To be sensual is not necessarily to be sexual. But it is a necessary condition for a sexual person first to be sensual. So only a sensual person can be sexual. Sensuality works like a catalyst in the process of sense gratification. It is “a key ingredient in achieving a richer, more satisfying sexual experience”(Woolridge). It's not a sexual experience in itself, while it catalyses the human senses. As per Merriam- Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, “sensuality” pertains to “senses” and “sensual” explicitly implies “preoccupied with senses” or “devoted to senses”. Thus a sensual person is caught up in his all five senses and enthralled by them. What he does is credited to the satisfaction of the senses. For an instance, a person is proclaimed to be a sensualist, if he is fascinated by the beauty of a wild rose, is enchanted by its sweet fragrance and exalted to extreme bliss by its soft touch on the cheeks, on the breasts and on other sensitive organs of the body. The objects which gratify the senses are named as sensuous and the persons gratified are called sensual. Woolridge adds: “Sensual people savor the world around them, not simply observe it. They experience each task rather than rush through it to get at some imagined end, and in so doing, live a more passionate and appreciative existence”(Woolridge). The moment one starts living sensually one begins to experience the world in all hues and hilarity.

\* **Rakhi Sharma** is an Asst. Professor of English at Department of Applied Sciences & Humanities ITS, Engineering College, Greater Noida and a research scholar at Mewar University, Rajasthan.

\*\* Dr. **Pradeep Kumar Talan** is an Asst. Professor of English at Accurate Institute of Management & Technology, Gr. Noida.

Roy has adeptly dealt with “sensuality” in the captioned novel *The God of Small Things* (for which she was conferred with the Booker Prize circa 1997). If a person, who has read the novel, would call her ‘the queen of sensuality’, it is not a hyperbole. She confirms everyone is sensual more or less, only degree matters. To be sensual is to be an epitome of leading fulsome life. In the novel, sensuality mainly serves as a stimulus to sexuality, the carnal desire of a human being. It aids to satisfy genital hunger of Ammu and Velutha. For Roy, sensuality is an art. She employs it very skillfully and keeps away it from vulgarity. She doesn’t allow her man and woman to make love openly. They are never seen making love. They make love either in the dream or imagination of one another. Thus sensuality is not in the activities of the characters-in-chief but lies in their thoughts and dreams as well. It is in the dream of Ammu or in her melancholy speculation. It is in the contempt of Mammachi for her daughter and in her bitter disdain for the Paravan. It is in the interrogation of SHO Thomas Mathew. It lives in the thoughts of Velutha and in his impatient waiting for his beloved Ammu. In the chapter “The God of Small Things”, the novelist paints on canvas, Ammu’s sensual images nude. The lady sensual is described walking by the light of the oil lamp towards the riverside cottage of her subaltern lover. She approaches the place and crouches with her lover, not in actual but in her feel and imagination. Roy beautifully paints her trying to touch the lover and never touching him. Her desire is ever young. The scene reminds us “Ode on A Grecian Urn” wherein the “Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss” (Keats). Ammu sits there on the river bank and envisages her man with “chocolate ridges” and “strength in the arms”. She touches his body “lightly with her fingers” and his ebony skin turns to all goosebumps. She relishes on how her man sighs and responds to her every twist and turn. She slides her seductive fingers on the “chocolate ridges” to “the base of his stomach”. As she moves on, she experiences the “trails of bumpy gooseflesh on his body, like flat chalk on a black board, like a swathe of breeze in a paddy-field, like jet streaks in a blue church-sky” (Roy). The lady envisages him and touches his sensitive organs; she feels her body shudder. As if a sweet shivering seeps through the fingers to her brain. In another scene, Ammu sips “the last of the river from the hollow of his navel” (Roy). She calls up the happy days enjoyed with Velutha. She feels totally desperate and ignored by all. She feels alone and unsafe without her man in “mundu” and with “might”. Velutha is brutally killed and departs from her life forever. Ammu conjures her “God of small things” – Velutha who used to give her small things like reed toys and other tiny things made of wood when she was a small girl and he also a small boy –and is sensualized by his presence. She finds her twins who she used to call “millstones” no more burdens but calls them “twin midwives”. They come forth to assist her mother in her sublime deed. They appear to “prepare the ground for them” for their love making. Velutha collects her hair and makes a hide for the safe play. He touches on and around her swanlike neck and goes all crazy. The lady is mesmerized and finds herself “naked” and “crouches over him” slowly and urgently. She slides further down and force introduces herself to “the rest of him”. As a true sensual, she revels in every part of him and enjoys his every ‘coil and curve’ in the darkness beyond “the oil lamp”. Then she tastes him “salty in the mouth”. She lick-cools down his sensual fire and experiences the bliss in the act.

As in the novel, it seems that Roy herself has experienced the world around from “a sensual perspective”. She doesn’t seem to take “sensuality” as “a sexual perk”, but enjoys it all the time in its every aspect and spec. We find it in the way Ammu serves herself to her “luminous man”. It lies in the metaphors, the novelist uses to depict the seductive images of the lovers. Ammu feels herself as ‘a wide and deep river’ and her lover as ‘a rower of the deep waters’. She envisages her man with “chocolate chest” sailing on her waters. He sails forth and back, sideways and across Ammu, the deep and silent river. She enjoys the moments the sailor dives deep, deeper and the deepest, and exhausts his all strength to fathom her depth. The farther she lets him delve and dive, more she enjoys him rowing upon herself. The farther he sails on her the more she gets wayward and sot. They perform foreplay under the deep waters. How much sensuous is to imagine about the water fore-play! She lies against him on the sandy bank of the river. He gently but “urgently” turns her over the back. Then he “wipes the sweat and grit from her” (Roy). The lover shows his prudence during the play while to do that is a tough job. He proves himself a man of senses, not as of animal instincts. He handles his beloved very

carefully and holds up her softly on his arms and softly but “urgently” gets into her. Ammu as the river is bottomless and Velutha as the rower has his limits –of skill and strength. The moment he touches “the deepest of her”; he is all tired of the excursion. Yet he regrets over his failure not to touch the bottom of the river. He knows that none could gauge the depth of the lady river and none can ever do, yet like a fly around the flame he goes deeper and much deeper, and finally drowns and dies.

Dance is a sense- triggering and tension -exorcising exercise. It is an art to arouse sexual desire at spur. Roy has beautifully employed “dance” in this book. Ammu dances for her lover. One dances to display one’s strong passion of grief, gaiety, love, hatred etc. Kunti (of The Mahabharata) dances for expressing her ‘utter humiliation’ and ‘penitence’ she committed having let her first son live life of a waif. Ammu dances here to express her passionate love for the sailor. She dances and involves the lover in her dance and pulls him to dance with her. She dancingly drags in and bends him to suck joy from “the innermost part of her” (Roy). He drinks “long and deep from the bowl of her” (Roy).She lived “seven years of oblivion”(Roy)at the sublime moment and cried with pleasure and laughed insanely. She reached the apex of the bliss from where she couldn’t go ahead anymore and similarly was impossible for her to come down too. Thus Ammu and her man enjoyed to the fullest, the eternity of the “five minutes”. But this carnal journey leads to “Age and Death”. It provided the lovers five immortal minutes to live whole life and ultimately took Velutha to his tragic end. It was very late when he realized the act anti-social and felt himself guilty: “Slowly, felt he, the terror seeped back into him. At what he had done. At what he knew he would do again” (Roy).Despite the man finds himself in the clutch of sensuality. He is aware of the deed but finds helpless to do it again and again. Because he can’t run away from his nature and that is his Ammu. He confesses his guilt and also foresees its deadly consequence; but can’t stop to rethink of it. She is the source of energy, as he confirms, to recharge him every night. He believes he can not live another round the clock if she doesn’t let him suck the revival juice from “the innermost part of her”. The lady is also aware of her illicit relation with a low caste Paravan and its fatal consequence. So she seems a bit worried about her safety and social image. But simultaneously she cannot keep away from sensual bliss. She feels unsafe everywhere in “the old house” and in the society for where she is mentally and physically tortured by her own kiths and outsiders too. That’s why she finds relatively safe in the arms of her lover.

Velutha wants to nibble on the bait but fears the hook at the same time. A person, who eats the dish, can’t spare it. If the man wishes to eye-drink “the seductive nudity” of the lady, he can’ be deprived of being sensualized. As Velutha dares enjoy the scene, terror seeps into his veins: *I could lose everything, My job. My family. My livelihood, Everything* (Roy).Sensation subjugates reason. He is tempted to touch her, feel her shuddering and her “aching desire”. He is required urgently to take “the bait”. He wants to feed on her urgently without caring for his brutal end. Her “brownness” against his “blackness” electrified desire. Her “softness” against his “hardness” made him more careful and considerate towards her. Her “slant gaze” across the succinct breast made him rock from inside out. The vista served a sensuous dinner to his sensual eyes. He listens to the throbs of her heart fast and faster. She likes “smooth ebony chest” and relishes unto the core and savors the saltiness of the river on him. She savors his “particular smell”; the same which was disgusted by Baby Kochamma, her aunt. Ammu puts her tongue and tastes it in “the hollow of his throat” and on “the lobe of his ear”. She gathers him into her, pulls his head and drinks his salty lips. Unlike Rahel, her daughter, she demands “a kiss-back”. Rahel, as a child kissed Velutha several times for the small things he gave her and her brother Estha; but she never demanded “a kiss-back” from him. Velutha returns it (to Ammu) “First cautiously and Then urgently” (Roy).He remains careful how to avoid any hurts during the play. A rough and black Paravan should ever be cautious against a soft brownish Syrian Christian. To give any hurt to a high born tender and tidy girl is a more serious crime than the deed. It will rather deeply stain his soul, which can never be blotted away. So he is all considerate for her, her beloved. She also cannot imagine her existence without him. She experienced herself alive only in those parts which he sensually touched –and “the

rest was smoke". In another tryst the lovers are envisaged coiled and lip-locked. The view flows thrill in the onlookers too. Velutha touches her on "haunches" and "shudder" flows into her body. She falls into the "strength of his arms" and feels her lips automatically pulled unto his. Then she thinks to know how much he wants her and measures her fidelity towards him.

Keats is studied as the gratifier of five human senses –touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing. The poet ever intends to sensualize the readers on the sensuous objects in his works. Roy sensually portrays the seductive images of Ammu; similarly Keats also beautifully draws bewitching poses of Madeline (of *The Eve of St. Agnes*). Like Ammu, Madeline undresses herself and electrifies sensuality in her lover Porphyro. Keats inspires 'senses' gradually and steadily while Roy seems impatient; so she ever gets ready to gratify them "urgently". Mammachi's rage at "the old one eyed Paravan" displays her cold contempt for her daughter and bitter disgust for her lover. The old lady also envisages her daughter untying her top and letting the lower creep 'rustling to the knees'; and then coupling "in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie"(Roy).The man was "filthy" only for the old lady; but for Ammu a man with "chocolate ridges" and "the carpenter's arms". The more the old lady depicts her contempt the more Ammu rejoices in. The former further imagines grope for "a Paravan's coarse black hand on her daughter's breast" (Roy).

Hence Roy is discovered as a lady of quick senses and the queen of sensuality as well. Unlike Roy, Keats who suggests his people relish on sensuous things gradually and steadily is a man of slow and steady senses. Apart from, one thing is common: both are the great dealers of sensual pleasure and both are preoccupied with and devoted to the five human senses. Thus Roy has successfully employed 'sensuality' as a catalyst in the process of 'sense gratification' and especially in 'genital satiation'. So a sensual person can be sexual but it is not a necessary condition for a sexual person to be sensual. Really the world is awesome if we experience it from "a sensual perspective".

#### **References:**

Woolridge, L Bryant. *Weapons of Mass Seduction*. United States: Broadway, 2007.

Ramji Lal.ed. John Keats, *Studies in Poets: An Evaluation of His Poetry*. New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 1998.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002.

(All citations in the text are from the same book)