

**A STUDY ON THE USE OF IRONY TO EXPRESS POSTCOLONIALITY IN ARUNDHATY ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS**  
**(KAJIAN PENGGUNAAN IRONI UNTUK MENGEKSPRESIKAN POSKOLONIALITAS DALAM NOVEL THE GOD OF SMALL THING KARYA ARUNDHATY ROY)**

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**Abstract**

This research discusses the irony in *The God of Small Things* and how irony expresses postcoloniality in novel. *The God of Small Things* is the first and the only novel written by Arundhaty Roy in April 1997 which got Booker Prize. The novel raises caste theme and proposes postcolonial issue. The problems that are discussed mostly highlight the violation of human rights. To criticize the social and cultural issues, Arundhaty Roy employs irony in writing the novel. This research uses theory of irony from Stanton that is used to determine the definition and clarification of irony. In this research, I employ qualitative research method and qualitative data. Finally in this research, I find caste system is the root underlying the emergence of irony in this novel. The caste system fertilizes patriarchal society and also takes side on the bourgeois. Furthermore, the ironies lead this novel to postcoloniality.

**Keywords:** Irony, Postcoloniality, Caste System, Indian

**Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mendiskusikan ironi dalam *The God of Small Things* dan bagaimana ironi mengekspresikan poskolonialitas dalam novel. *The God of Small Things* adalah novel pertama dan satu-satunya yang ditulis oleh Arundhaty Roy pada bulan April tahun 1997 yang mana novel ini mendapatkan penghargaan Booker Prize. Novel ini mengangkat tema kasta dan membahas isu poskolonial. Masalah yang dibahas kebanyakan menyoroti pelanggaran hak asasi manusia. Untuk mengkritik isu sosial dan budaya, Arundhaty Roy menggunakan ironi dalam menulis novelnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori dari Stanton yang digunakan untuk menentukan pengertian dan klarifikasi dari ironi. Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dan data kualitatif. Akhirnya dalam penelitian ini, peneliti menemukan bahwa kasta sistem adalah akar yang mendasari kemunculan ironi dalam novel. Kasta sitem menyuburkan masyarakat patriarki dan juga berpihak kepada para borjuis. Selain itu, ironi mengarahkan novel ini pada postkolonialitas.

**Kata kunci:** Ironi, Poskolonialitas, Kasta Sistem, Orang India

**Introduction**

*The God of Small Things* by Arundhaty Roy is a novel that tells about a family that lives in India after the declaration of independence. The novel raises caste theme and it also proposes postcolonial issue. In the novel, caste system which was originally born from Hindu religion is applied not only by the Hindu religion but also by other religions namely Protestant and Catholic. In addition, caste system affects both socio-economic and socio-cultural system of Indian society and people that suffer most are the Untouchable because they are socially, economically, culturally and even politically suppressed, oppressed, and exploited.

Furthermore, *The God of Small Things* contains ironic words and events. The irony is portrayed through the dialogues, statements, actions or events that are

contradictory to real meaning. Irony is a literary device that is commonly used in fiction. Irony can be found in many prose, drama and poetry. Stanton (1964:34) states that irony is something opposite from expectation. Irony can be in the form of words or situation. Irony spreads on *The God of Small Things* which influences the story because irony affects other intrinsic elements such as theme, plot and character. Irony supports the basic elements of a story like theme, plot and character because it functions as the flavour of a story in order to make the story artistic and rhetorical (Abrams, 1999: 134 -135). Any irony (verbal or dramatic) has different levels of roles in the story that depend on how the irony is created by author.

Through this novel, Roy criticizes any kind of hypocrisy done by the characters that reflects Indian society. With *The God of Small Things*, she expresses her disagreement to

tradition that only benefits one side and the tradition produces social inequalities. This novel therefore tries to show how the caste system has been deeply entrenched in Indian society that give more benefits to higher caste and less benefits to lowest caste. In addition, a big role of western thought and culture still colonizes Indian mentally even though at that time India has already been independent. Thus, this research discusses irony in the novel and more deeply about the roles of irony in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and how irony expresses postcoloniality in this novel.

### Research Method

From the problems mentioned above, this research tries to find irony in the novel and its classification and the role of irony in expressing postcoloniality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Therefore the data of this research are words, phrases, clauses and or sentences written in of *The God of Small Things*. Consequently, this research is classified as qualitative research. The analysis performs a descriptive analysis toward the sorted data.

This research applies two main data. The primary data are obtained from statements and dialogues in the novel that contain irony. The undergoing research will employ Stanton's theory to discover irony in the novel and its classification and the role of irony in expressing postcoloniality. Finally, base on Stanton's theory, I apply two kinds of irony consisting of verbal, and dramatic. To analyze the irony in the novel; this research uses four steps of analysis. Firstly, I collect the irony found in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Secondly, the data of irony are classified into two types based on varieties of irony by using the theory of Stanton. Thirdly, I look for background underlying the emergence of irony in the novel. The last, I examines the irony as a means to express postcoloniality in the novel.

### Result of Data Analysis

Existence of irony in the novel founded by caste system. Roy in this novel does show the suffering of Untouchable in Indian society. Roy shows that this suffering is experienced not only by the lowest caste-called Untouchable but also on women and religion. Caste system fertilizes patriarchal society and takes side of the bourgeoisie because the bourgeoisie are the high caste. Roy criticizes Indian society that is discriminatory and rigid. The novel becomes controversial because it raises taboo issue in Indian society that is about forbidden love. In addition, mental colonization still exists in Indian society. It is also not free from Roy's criticism. Indian people love anything related to the west and consider themselves belong to the traditional. Those ironies express postcoloniality.

### Discussion

Irony is divided into two types namely verbal and dramatic based on Stanton theory. Verbal irony appears when one conveys his meaning by expressing its opposite.

Verbal irony is the contrast between the words that the author says and what the author means. Verbal irony can be in various forms. Some forms are easier to detect because they can only be like a joke or sarcasm in one word or sentence. The other form have to understand the whole story to find and understand verbal irony. In this research, verbal irony is revealed through the word, phrase or context that contains ironic words that are Jolly, Police, Lucky and Freedom.

The word "jolly" belongs to irony because it does not refer to the real meaning that is happiness.

"If you ever," Ammu said, "and I mean this, EVER, ever again disobey me in Public, I will see to it that you are sent away to somewhere where you will jolly well learn to behave. Is that clear?" (Roy, 1997:71)

Jolly is meant as warnings for severe punishment for the twins. The twins understand the ironic meaning of the word jolly as an extremely scary well that contains dead people in it.

The ideal image of a policeman in the novel.

*Politeness      Obedience      Loyalty*  
*Intelligence      Courtesy      Efficiency.* (Roy, 1997:5)

The Kottayam policemen do not fit the ideal image of an ideal policeman according to mission of policemen in the novel. Lecherous action of Inspector Thomas to Ammu and her children clearly collides against polite and courtesy characters that should be owned by a good policeman. The absence of obedient and loyal characters comes into light when the policemen conspire with Baby Kochamma. Intelligence is just an empty word for the policemen because they do not solve problems with their brain. They use strength instead by torturing Velutha until he is dying without even listening to his explanation. The last is efficiency. It has double meanings in this novel. The first meaning lies on the fact that the policemen are fast in listening to victims' complaint although the one that complains is Veishya. Although they listen to the complaint, they do not respond and judge people with equal treatment. In the end, policemen still favor the Touchable than the Untouchable.

The word "lucky" becomes irony because what The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man thinks about Estha is different from what actually happen in the story.

"...You're a lucky rich boy, with porketmunny and a grandmother's factory to inherit. You should thank God that you have no worries..." (Roy, 1997:50)

Estha is not as lucky as other characters think. The first factor is because he was born from a divorced and half-Hindu mother which means they will not inherit anything because they are regarded as a disgrace to family. The second factor is the harassment of The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man that Estha loathes himself and plans for running away. Third, Estha's plan for running away causes

Sophie Mol's death when she rides the boat. As a result, Estha is beaten by Sophie's mother, Margaret, and Estha is returned to his father in Calcutta. Fourth, still related to the escape plan, Estha has to see his close friend, Velutha, tortured until dying. Besides, he is still asked to lie by Baby Kochamma to save Ammu's life. Those bad events that happen in Estha's life make traumatic. The trauma triggers him to stop talk and live with his own way.

Irony is found in the clause India's a free country because the author juxtaposed the story which is very contrast to the reality.

Why're you rowing your jam?" Rahel asked. "India's a Free Country," Estha said" (Roy, 1997:94)

India is a country that still discriminates lower caste, religion and women. Besides discrimination, Indian society also loses their true identity as a free country. Even if they have been independent country but they are still mentally colonized. To understand those verbal ironies (police, lucky and freedom), a reader has understand the whole story.

Dramatic irony is the contrast to occurs in the novel between appearance and reality, a character's attention and what he accomplishes, or between his expectation and what actually occurs. That definition will be used as keywords in the description of dramatic irony in this research.

In keyword appearance versus reality, there are two characters namely Baby Kochamma and Comrade Pillai who pretend basically upon some diametrical contrast between appearances and reality. Those characters indicate the difference between their action and their intention. They can be called hypocritical.

In keyword a character's attention versus what accomplishes, there are one character namely Chacko. He is a hypocrite. He claims himself as a Marxist and joins Marxist-Communist party's activities but his attitude towards the lower class people is bad. He even sleeps with his laborers although he says he wants to help them. It shows that what Chacko says and what he does is very contrast.

In keyword expectation versus reality, there are seven characters that depend basically upon some diametrical contrast between expectations and what actually occurs. The characters expect to do something for the better but even getting worse than ever. They are Ammu, Velutha, Paravans, Sophie Mol, Margaret Kochamma, Estha and Pappachi.

In this research, I found that caste system as background underlying the emergence of the ironies in this novel. Socially, economically, and culturally Indian society is organized by caste system. The novel presents caste system as the regulator of every issue in India. The system even rules out issues of marriage, employment, relationship, dressing, food, property, education, and etc. The Untouchability aspect of the caste system is one of the cruelest aspects of the caste system. This has become one of the strongest racist phenomena in the world. The Untouchable almost has no right in society. If the Untouchable pass the Touchable, the Touchable will feel that their ranks are unworthy. If there is contact between the

Untouchable and Touchable for any reason, the Touchable become defiled. Touchable shall purify themselves with water so they are pure back. If the Untouchable enter a house and touch the Touchable' items or property, the Touchable must wash or clean with water the place where the Untouchables touch and step. In addition, the Untouchables cannot wear gold jewelry, use umbrellas, and footwear. They cannot be enrolled in school where the Touchable study. They have to drag a thorny branch to wipe their footprint and have to bow down at distance when a Brahman is passing through so that they do not defile the shadow of the Brahman. In this novel, it happens to Velutha, Velutha's father and Velutha's grandfather that belongs to lower caste named Paravan. With the caste system as the cause of irony existing in the novel, it fertilizes patriarchal system and takes side on the bourgeoisie. In patriarchal system, men inherit social order where they hold power and authority. Therefore, every social activity is attributed to men. In patriarchal society women often experience subordination, discrimination, harassment, marginalization, violence, and exploitation. In addition, caste system is also in favor of the bourgeoisie so that the rich get richer and the poor more miserable. With the support of the caste system, the rules are even stronger because the Touchable who are also as bourgeoisie will do anything to sustain their power.

*The God of Small Things* is noted as a postcolonial novel because of the content, the author's background, and the setting of place that takes place in India which is the former colony of England. Postcolonial issue can also be seen in the caste system as reflection of discrimination between the eastern and the western that is influenced by western. In addition, adoring east to west is shown by some of the characters in the novel. *The God of Small Things* is also well known as a biography novel. There are many similarities between the author and character Rahel in the story such as their childhood, the divorce of their parents, the religion of their fathers and mothers and divorce with husbands. The novel is set in India in which India is a former British colony for 347 years and India obtains of independence in 1947. The history certainly gives a lot of scars on Indian society. *The God of Small Things* is one of the works that tells the story of the people of India after the British colonization and the process of finding their identity.

The use of verbal irony can give deep meaning because to understand verbal irony the readers have to understand the whole story such as Lucky, Freedom and Police. The use of dramatic irony can create depth to the characters like baby Kochamma, Paravans and Ammu. Sophie Mol and Margaret's characters are characters that are created by Arundhati Roy as a representation of the west and how they are adored by the east. Those characters express postcoloniality. While in the east characters of "*The Big Things*" are characters that reveal Postcoloniality. The characters include the provocateur and hypocrite Baby Kochamma, the Anglophile Pappachi, the traitor Comrade Pillai, the rude and unjust policemen, and the empty intellectual Chacko. Baby Kochamma and Comrade Pillai

are characters who show contrast between their appearance and reality. Those characters are dramatic irony which gives the effect on reading in assessing and even give judgment on the characters. It also creates implicit theme in the story that there is the theme of hypocrisy. In addition, dramatic and verbal also supports the main theme of the story that is caste system. The effect of using irony is to create a sense of sadness which happens to Velutha, Ammu, Rahel, and Estha. Velutha's life is so tragic from the beginning until the end of the story.

### **Conclusion**

In the Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things* found irony. The irony arises because the background by the caste system. Caste system fertilizes patriarchal society and also takes side on the bourgeois. The irony in this novel affects the interest, impact, depth to the characters and pathos of the novel. In addition, the irony also implied the theme and define the author's attitude. Therefore the irony in this novel expresses postcoloniality. Postcolonial characteristics are revealed in the novel *The God of Small Thing* through irony.

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