

**ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*;
AN EPITOME OF GENDER, CLASS AND CASTE INEQUALITIES**

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy's Booker prize award winning novel **The God of Small Things** is a masterpiece with its artistic description of various concepts of life in Indian society through a story of a Syrian Christian family with a south Indian background. Roy gives a vivid picture of Indian life through the voice of women, children and also the voice of the socially deprived sections. The novel portrays the bitter life and its atrocities of all the characters. The world teaches everything and man has to go through many physical, emotional, social and psychological challenges to learn the lessons of life. Life is fraught with joy and sorrow and the goal of life is to get relieved from the cycle of birth. This is believed as a basic Indian concept of life. Various aspects of life –happiness, hope, frustration, prejudice, injustice, pain, hypocrisy and helplessness are skillfully portrayed. The novel projects various themes; love, separation, marital discord, child abuse, social injustice and struggle for existence.

Keywords: Indian society, atrocity, hypocrisy, love.

Many Indian novelists in English have depicted Indian way of life in their novels. Their approach is oriental. The same approach is found in the novel *The God of Small Things*. Arundhati Roy's this debut novel portrays the theme that everything in nature has its own identity and significance yet they are interdependent. This theory resembles that the characters are united against their individual point of view. Every character has its own significance but none is protagonist. In the novel the feel, sensitivity, bitterness and humanism are clearly visible to the reader's eyes. The hopeless struggle of human beings is vividly depicted through all the characters. O.P. Dwivedi thinks that "Arundhati Roy has (un)consciously also extended the views of this [Subaltern Studies Collective] group by highlighting the pathetic condition of these subaltern in India." 387)

In the opening chapter there is a clear indication of imminent calamity that affects the lives of Ammu, Rahel, Estha, Velutha, and Sophie Mol. The novel, as a matter of fact, is a vivid elucidation of depravity of Ammu's identity and childhood of Rahel and Estha.

Women characters Ammu, Rahel, Mammachi, and Baby Kochamma reveal their consciousness. Ammu, the major character, born and brought up in a Syrian Christian family of Kerala, struggles relentlessly for her individual freedom in the Indian society which suppresses her as she is a woman. She struggles against the social system and its brutality, and is finally defeated by life. She witnesses the ugly realities and atrocities of life. The novelist narrates the entire story focusing on the negative things.

Ammu, the daughter of Bennan Ipe, is the entomologist. Throughout her early years she faces harsh treatment from her father, Pappachi. Her father retires and the same year Ammu finishes her schooling. The family shifts from Delhi to Ayemenem. Ammu's father considers that the college education is unnecessary expense for a girl. So Ammu is in the house waiting for marriage proposals. When she is with her distant aunt in Calcutta, she meets a pleasant looking young man working as an assistant manager of a tea estate in Assam. The man proposes to Ammu. She weighs everything analyzing that her father doesn't accept her for further education and arrange dowry for her marriage. Based on the behavior of her father she thinks that anything, anyone is better than returning to Ayemenem. She is so disgusted with her father's cruelty towards her mother and towards herself. So she accepts the proposal and informs her parents about it. As her parents do no reply Ammu and Baba get married.

The new couple begin to live in Assam. Baba proves himself as a complete drunkard and outrageous liar. Baba's unusual habit of lying horrifies Ammu. She gives birth to the twins. Her married life becomes a short lived as the drunken husband becomes violent with children when Ammu refuses to accept to sleep with his boss, Mr. Hollick, as a compensation for his laziness and irresponsibility towards the tea estate. Mr. Hollick has already committed the same with the tea pickers. When Ammu is being asked to go to this man she leaves her husband and returns to Ayemenem. It is a tendency in India that a wife bears when her husband neglects household responsibilities, she suffers silently when she faces physical violence in the hands of her husband but she never accepts to lie with another man. It is proved with this incident.

Even though Ammu's return is not welcomed by the members of her family, she never regrets to have quit her husband. Ammu perfectly knows that her marriage is not based on love but on the basis of 'comfort'. She wanted to go away from "the clutches of her ill tempered father and bitter, long suffering mother"⁴ (P.39) The character of Ammu is projected as an emotional complexity struggling for self-identity. She is forced to act as a single parent. She continues to be tender as a mother towards her children Rahel and Estha. Though the position of Chacko her brother, changes her into an aggressive personality. As hers is an inter-caste marriage against her parents wish her brother and mother does not show care concern. For the mistake of marrying a wrong man she gives up all her dreams and hopes.

Ammu is not educated enough to earn livelihood.. Ammu shows no signs of regret to have left her husband. This is the major reason for Ammu's inner feelings of hopelessness and insecurity. The past memories do not linger on her mind. But she loves her children. It is common sight in India more over sacred thing to say that in spite of many repeated pathetic situations and hurdles and hurts a mother wants and does for welfare wellbeing of the children. Aijaj Ahmad calls her a woman of great grit (Prasad 2006 p.36)

Roy portrays depravity of the women in the Indian society not having education and economic independence. Ammu faces worst situation when she returns to Ayemenem as a married woman has no right to stay at her parental house. tries to understand Ammu's suffering. Ammu's grand aunt, turns to be a villain towards Ammu's identity at Ayemenem.

.Beginning with Mammachi the victimization continues to all the three generations. Mammachi's husband, Pappachi, oppresses her. She leads a dissatisfactory married life. It is a terrific nightmare to her. When her teacher praises her for the exceptional talent in playing violin he becomes jealous of his wife. Mammachi runs a pickle factory without the help of her husband. The success makes physically strong Pappachi unbearable so he beats her physically weak wife. He continues till Chacko threatens Pappachi not to beat his mother. Mammachi never rebels against her husband's cruelty. Mammachi is projected to be a woman of indomitable strength. Her strength is in accepting violence of her husband. She never thinks to leave her husband. Amitabh Roy comments succinctly: "It is a pity that she submits in the name of decency and honour to the very sexist, casteist and communal prejudices that have stood in her way and denied fulfillment to her."(2005, p.62)

Though the marriage of Mammachi and Pappachi is long lasting, the relation is a total failure as there no mutual understanding. The marriages of Ammu and Baba, Rahel and Larry and of Chacko and Margaret are short lived. Each of the three couples enjoy a sort of freedom in choosing their partners but ironically make wrong choices. Ammu marries a wrong man. She puts up with his alcoholism and compulsive lying and other weaknesses for more than three years. Finally their marriage breaks when Baba's drunken violence includes the children too.

Marital life of Rahel and Larry Mc Caslin is also short lived. Larry holds his wife as if she was a gift given to him in love. Rahel's 'strange look' appears to be someone else's. she lives with Larry without any commitment to their marriage. Her indifference towards him leads to divorce so she returns to Ayemenem.

Without the knowledge of Chacko's parents Margaret's parents the marriage of Chacko and Margaret takes place. Their marital life is also the same as others. Chacko is not in love with Margaret. It fails as they have racial misunderstandings. After Sophie Mol is born Margaret Kochanmia realizes that it is impossible for her to put up with Chacko.

Amitabh Roy comments: "Thus, despite his professed Marxism, Chacko follows Manu and the tradition in asserting the son's domination over mother in old age. Mammachi submits to it as such ideas are so familiar to her."(2005, p.67)

She divorces him and marries Joe. all the four marital relationships are projected as a complete failure. All the marriages except that of Pappachi and Mammachi are short lived.

Roy projects sex and violence throughout the novel. Baba tries to make Ammu sleep with his boss. Estha is so traumatized that he cannot communicate through words, so the twins use their bodies to express their deep sorrow for the deaths of Velutha, Ammu, and Sophie Mol.

The love affair of Ammu and Velutha gives knowledge of the strict Indian caste system entire novel is projected towards a negative end of defeat, death, and discomfiture. The deaths of Velutha and Sophie Mol affect the lives of Rahel and Estha. They suffer an incurable damage. They are unable to forget the terrible images.

In Roy's world, things are illogical and unpredictable. the novel seeped into the hearts of the readers as Roy throws light on a variety of 'disorders' found in the society, Roy successfully desecrates religion, denounces communism, lambastes casteism, degrades family and denigrates decency in personal, public and professional conduct.

The portrayal of the family that Roy gives us is more intimate. The novel speaks of the forbidden sex, of the cultural repression, of child abuse, of suppressing casteism, or of marital incompatibility, all are realities that we witness around us.

The twins Estha and Rahel are in awe of their mother Ammu, admiring her beauty and guts. As their divorced father's presence is missing, both the children and their mother seem to

visualize him in Velutha, a perfect loving playmate for the twins, conspiring and helping them in their games. Velutha emerges as an ideal lover spicing the lackluster drifting existence of Ammu.' The 'minority' woman Ammu is drawn towards the Ultimate Indian minority, the Dalit, Velutha, who is targeted to take revenge mistakenly. He bears many hurdles for his relationship with Ammu. Even though he has a good relationship with the children they are forced to give false evidence when Konchamma lodges a false complaint. Even though Velutha's innocence is evident as he is an untouchable Konchamma forces the twins for false evidence only to save her face.

In her non-fictional writings, Roy deals with specific issues and comments sparsely in a theoretical mode about their interrelationship. She seldom makes comments like these: "Deep at the heart of the horror of what's going on lies the caste system: this layered, horizontally divided society with no vertical bolts, no glue, no intermarriage, no social mingling; no human-*humane*-interaction that holds the layers together.(2009, p. 6)

They rely on each other for the sustenance and for assurance which they were missing from other corners of the society. There is a perfect harmony between Estha and Rahel. each one sensing or approving what the other feels or wants to do, the tendency to which the elders of Ayemenem pay no attention or almost ignore.

The novel is a patchwork of flash backs and lengthy side tracks that weave together to tell the story of the Ayemenem family. The non-sequential narrative style, which determines the form of the novel, is an extremely useful authorial tool. It allows Roy a great deal of flexibility as she chooses the themes and events that are most important to pursue. The main events of the novel are traced back through the complex history of their causes, and memories are revealed as they relate to each other thematically.

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