

## Illustration Of Social Activism And The God Of Small Things

K. Purushottam<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Varsha Saraswat<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam University, Indore, M.P., (India)

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, English, A. P. J. University, Indore, M.P., (India)

Keywords:	Abstract
Social Activism ,class and caste relations, social discrimination	<p>"The God of Small Things," Arundhati Roy's significant novel, has portrayed an unusual sort of antisocial connection among characters. Roy's narrative approach enables her to portray the challenges and truths of daily life in India, making the novel a potent critique of the social inequalities and unfairness that dominate the nation. Social Activism constitutes the fundamental theme of the Novel. Roy's novel serves as a social critique, increasing awareness regarding the injustices faced by marginalized groups and inspiring readers to question current power dynamics and societal standards.</p> <p>By examining the experiences of individuals like Velutha and Ammu, Roy emphasizes the systemic quality of disparity and inequity in Indian society, urging readers to consider the effect of these concerns on people's lives and the significance of social justice. The novel's investigation of subjects like affection, opposition, and the resilience of the human spirit offers a hint of optimism for a fairer and more equitable society.</p> <p>Roy's story investigates the themes of class and caste connections, societal prejudice, and gender-based power structures in the South Asian environment. This constitutes a very daring depiction on the part of South Asian fiction because we live in a convention-focused society where some taboos exist regardless of all communities, and people are compelled to adhere to them; breaking these norms means going against the society, which isn't acceptable to the masses.</p>

### 1. Introduction

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) is a groundbreaking novel that has garnered considerable praise for its rich narrative and deep exploration of complicated social issues. Through a non-linear narrative that shifts between the past and the present, Roy goes deep into the characters' psyches, revealing how broader societal forces shape personal histories. The study explores the various themes in *The God of Small Things*, examining how Roy utilizes her intricate storytelling to address social issues such as caste, colonialism, gender, memory, and the fragility of human relationships.

Gender-based marginalization is widespread, with women facing unequal chances and systematic discrimination. India's tribal populations in remote locales confront unique challenges, including land rights issues and restricted access to education. Arundhati Roy, a notable figure in contemporary Indian literature and activism, is known for her strong writing and passionate advocacy for social justice. Her literary career reached a milestone with her first novel, "*The God of Small Things*," explored family, love, and caste discrimination in Kerala, gaining international acclaim. While her literary career flourished, Arundhati Roy transitioned into activism, addressing human rights, environmental conservation, and underprivileged communities.

The story is mainly narrated through the perspective of Ammu's twins, Rahel and Estha. The story culminates in ancestral lovemaking between Estha and Rahel, when the two adolescents meet after decades. The novel explores how the Orange drink Lemon drink Man at the Abhilash Talkies sexually harasses a

seven-year-old boy, Estha. It shows how such an experience creates fear in Estha and later contributes to his silence. The scene sends chills down your spine; it makes us question whether our children are safe.

## **2. Background of the study**

Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" Set in the vibrant landscape of Kerala, India; the novel recounts the story of a fractured family, concentrating on the lives of two twins, Rahel and Estha. She highlighted how the children underwent sufferings from their past. She elucidates:

Rahel and Estha are perpetually dwelling with the ghosts of the past and because of the nature of their trauma, time for them has become frozen like Rahel's toy watch with the hands pointing out it at ten to two. (The God of small Things, P-12)

This is symbolic itself despite the text's fluid narrative movements between past and present. In the novel, Roy has recalled various traumas, loss and displacement of numerous individuals. Rahel and Estha both saw the complicated relationship of their parents leading towards their separation. When they tried, to adjust themselves in their maternal grandparent's house then they lost their mother and both of them were separated from each other as Estha was sent to his father and Rahel was left behind in Ayemenem. They were not able to meet each other for many years and happened to meet when they grew up. They are the ones who have narrated most parts of the story from childhood till adulthood. Their mother Ammu has brought up the twins, Estha and Rahel in an Anglophone atmosphere so their perspective towards goodness and acceptability was Anglophonic. Maybe this is one of the reasons that Roy has shown a peculiar kind of relationship between Estha and Rahel in The God of Small Things. After many decades when they meet as adolescents then their relationship changes, as there is no special bond of brother and sister between them. Though they feel connected towards each other differently; no restrictions in terms of physical acts at the end of the novel. We see that their relationship transformed into an incestuous one, which is not imagined in a traditional society like India. It is a kind of relationship, which breaks customary rules of society. They finally end in lovemaking, which is beyond the pure relationship of brother and sister.

## **3. Rationale of the study**

Arundhati Roy has touched upon a multitude of themes in this novel. The novel enlightens as to how communism flourished in "God's Own Country". Moreover, it portrays how petty politics snatches life away from people (without any regret). For, Velutha, the party that supported him, that advocated the well-being of the working class on the forefront, not only betrayed him but also caused his demise. Arundhati Roy impudently covers how caste prejudices existed even in the seemingly casteless religion of Christianity.

The concepts of male chauvinism and ingrained patriarchy in Indian society are vividly explored throughout the novel. For instance, Ammu's Father (Pappachi) is portrayed as an Imperial Entomologist who has a certain respect and status in society. However, his true colors are seen when he is home alone with his wife and children. He is a bitter man who is jealous when his wife (Mammachi) flinches the pickle factory and he loves to maintain his dominance in the house by physically assaulting her. Congruently,

'Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my factory, my pineapples, my pickles. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property.'

(The God of small Things, P-12)

The above lines from the novel reflect the Patriarchy in Indian society. Though the pickle factory was started by Mammachi, it was Chacko (her son) the rightful heir of the same, not Ammu. Even the law governing the matters of inheritance in the Christian community did not recognize her right at that time.

The novel expresses how love can surpass every boundary of social caste and class. However, the violators are never acknowledged by the society. Only time can tell.

#### **4. Thematic analysis of the novel**

The novel starts with a thirty-one-year-old Rahel (Not old. Not young. However, a viable die-able age) comes back to Ayemenem, Kerala to meet her brother Estha. Two di-zygotic twins, Estha and Rahel, born during the initial Sino-Indian War to a Syrian Christian mother and a Bengali Hindu father. Soon their mother departs her alcoholic and abusive husband and returns to her parent's place where she was unwelcomed, to say the least, and despised by some. As Roy inscribes

‘She (Baby Kochamma) subscribed wholeheartedly that a married daughter had no position in her parent’s home...As for a divorced daughter from an inter-community love marriage- Baby Kochamma chose to remain quaveringly silent on the subject.’

(The God of small Things, P-6)

Moreover, throughout the novel, Estha does not reveal this incident to anybody. It tells us how (some) children choose to suffer in silence rather than opening up in front of their parents or known ones. Due to the lack of a father figure in their lives, Estha and Rahel always craved paternal love. They looked for it in Chacko however; they soon realized that his love was reserved only for his biological daughter, Sophie Mol.

The story follows the events of Rahel and Estha's childhood before and after the arrival of Sophie Mol and the accompanying terror. The story vividly portrays the caste system and social scenario in the seemingly casteless society of Syrian Christians in Kerala. It narrated that love surpasses the boundaries of touchability and untouchability. In addition, two innocents paid their lives, as ‘human history, masquerading as God’s Purpose that reveal herself to an underage audience. It narrated that the life of all the characters in the story could not remain the same.

As Arundhati Roy stated it, ‘Perhaps it’s true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of a whole of lifetimes’.

(Roy, 2013)

Caste and Social hierarchy is one of the central themes in *The God of Small Things*. The oppressive caste system continues to dictate the lives of the characters. The novel provides a scathing critique of the rigid social hierarchy that exists in Indian society, where individuals are often judged and restricted based on their caste. The relationship between Ammu, a Syrian Christian woman, and Velutha, a Dalit, serves as the novel’s focal point for this theme. Their love, considered a transgression of social norms, brings catastrophic consequences, highlighting the brutal enforcement of caste boundaries. Velutha's tragic fate underscores the inhumanity of a system that denies people their basic dignity and rights based on birth.

He possessed a unique "German design sensibility" and was considered a prodigy. Back in Ayemenem, Ammu reconnected with Velutha, whom she had known since childhood. Feeling abandoned in the Ayemenem House, she found solace in his company. She was deeply drawn to him, believing that beneath his cheerful demeanor, he harbored a seething resentment toward the rigid and oppressive society she, too, struggled against.

(The God of Small things, P- 43)

Roy does not merely present the caste system as an abstract social construct; she shows its devastating impact on individuals and families. The novel analyzes how caste discrimination is perpetuated not only by society but also by individuals who internalize these prejudices, as seen in characters like Baby Kochamma and Mammachi, who uphold these oppressive norms. The theme of forbidden love also runs through the

novel, intertwined with the theme of caste. The love affair between Ammu and Velutha, though pure and genuine, is deemed unacceptable by societal standards. Their relationship is not just an act of personal defiance but a challenge to the deeply entrenched social order. This forbidden love leads to a series of tragic events, including Velutha's brutal death and the eventual unraveling of the family. The novel suggests that love, when it crosses societal boundaries, becomes a destructive force, not because of the love itself, but because of the harsh societal backlash against it. This theme is also reflected in the failed marriage of Ammu to Baba, a man outside her community, which further illustrates the novel's exploration of love and its limitations in a rigidly structured society.

Roy's maiden novel also delves into the lingering effects of colonialism on Indian society. The characters are depicted as grappling with the remnants of British colonial rule, which continue to influence their cultural identities and social structures. The novel portrays characters like Baby Kochamma, who is fixated with Western culture and clings to the remnants of colonial power, symbolized by her Anglophilia and her desire to emulate British customs. This internalization of colonial attitudes reflects the deep psychological impact of colonial rule, which continues to shape the characters' perceptions of themselves and their world.

Mammachi, nearly blind due to Pappachi's violence, tolerates the abuse because of the societal norms ingrained in her upbringing. Even after Pappachi's death, her emotional wounds remain, and she weeps bitterly, harboring a lingering resentment. Similarly, Baby Kochamma wrestles with societal expectations of love and marriage but eventually conforms to traditional norms. Comrade Pillai's mother, despite her old age, embodies the enduring pain and suffering experienced by many women, as reflected in her weary and pained expression.

(The God of small things, P- 87)

The novel also analyzes how colonialism has changed the cultural landscape of India, leaving behind a society that is conflicted between its native traditions and the remnants of colonial influence. This theme is particularly evident in the legal and social systems that govern the characters' lives, systems that were introduced by the British and continue to perpetuate inequality and injustice. Memory and trauma are central to the novel's narrative structure.

The God of Small Things unfolds in a non-linear fashion, with frequent shifts between the past and the present. This fragmented narrative mirrors the fragmented memories of the characters, particularly Rahel and Estha, whose lives have been irrevocably changed by the traumatic events of their childhood. The novel explores how memories of trauma can haunt individuals, shaping their identities and their relationships with others.

The return of Rahel to Ayemenem after many years serves as a catalyst for the resurfacing of these painful memories, as the past and present become inextricably linked. Roy's treatment of time as fluid and non-linear reflects the way trauma disrupts the natural flow of life. The characters are unable to move forward, trapped in the memories of their experiences. The novel suggests that the past is not a distant entity but a living presence that continues to influence the present, preventing the characters from finding closure or peace.

Gender and patriarchy are also critical themes in The God of Small Things. The novel portrays the systemic oppression of women in a patriarchal society, where they are expected to conform to rigid gender roles and are often punished for defying these expectations. Ammu's life is a stark illustration of the challenges faced by women in a male-dominated society. As a single mother, she is subjected to social ostracism and economic hardship. Her desire for love and autonomy is met with harsh judgment and ultimately leads to her downfall. Ammu's struggle reflects the broader plight of women in a society that restricts their freedoms and denies them the right to make choices about their own lives. When in opening scenes of the novel the Kottayam Police inspector Thomas Mathew addresses Ammu, his lecherous gaze expresses his authority making her wince. Here is the brief, naked truth of his coercive behavior:

"He started at Ammu's breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the

Kottayam police did not take statements from Veshyas or their illegitimate children... 'if I were you,' he said, 'I'd go home quietly'. Then he tapped her breasts with his baton Tap, tap ...

(The God of Small Things, P-8)

The novel also highlights how women themselves can perpetuate patriarchal values, as seen in characters like Baby Kochamma and Mammachi, who enforce societal norms and punish those who defy them. This theme underscores the complex dynamics of power and oppression within the family and society.

The theme of childhood and lost innocence is poignantly explored through the characters of Rahel and Estha. The novel captures the world through the eyes of the twins, whose innocence is gradually eroded by the harsh realities of the adult world. Roy contrasts the purity and simplicity of the twins' childhood with the corruption and hypocrisy of the society around them. The tragic events they witness, including the death of their beloved Velutha and the breakdown of their family, leave deep emotional scars, shattering their innocence and altering the course of their lives. The novel suggests that childhood is not a protected space but one that is vulnerable to the cruelties and injustices of the world. The loss of innocence is depicted as an inevitable consequence of growing up in a society marred by inequality, prejudice, and violence.

The significance of "small things" in the characters' lives. Roy emphasizes how seemingly insignificant moments, choices, and details can have profound effects on the characters' destinies. The "small things" refer to the everyday experiences and emotions that shape the characters' lives in subtle but powerful ways. These include the small acts of love, the moments of joy and sorrow, and the unspoken bonds between characters. Roy suggests that grand historical and social forces shape the broader context of the novel. The small, personal moments define the characters' lives. The novel thus invites readers to pay attention to the "small things" that often go unnoticed but are crucial to understanding the characters' inner lives and the dynamics of their relationships.

## 5. Conclusion

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a rich and multifaceted novel that explores a wide range of themes, from caste and social hierarchy to forbidden love, colonial legacy, memory, gender, and the loss of innocence. Through her intricate narrative structure and complex characters, Roy offers a powerful critique of the societal norms and structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression. The novel's exploration of the "small things" that shape human lives adds a layer of depth to its themes, highlighting the significance of personal experiences when facing larger social and historical forces.

*The God of Small Things* remains a profound and enduring work that continues to resonate with readers around the world, offering insights into the complexities of human relationships and the enduring impact of social injustice. *The God of Small Things* is a novel mirroring the hushed voice of subalterns, be they women or lower caste people. Consequently, it possesses a universal appeal since, by showing the voice of the unheard, their concealed and suppressed emotions. Highlighting the plight of women and untouchables, she has depicted their lifelong fight for happiness, identity and dignity in a society that resists their desires. A society that is hostile towards them and constantly attempts to quash their joy. Even all the laws are made against them and thus they perpetually feel abandoned and vulnerable. Being a panorama of the Indian social environment it has underscored some very relevant aspects related to existence. Roy has devoted her life to numerous social issues and, as a social activist, she challenges the existentialism of marginalized classes, whether women or lower class people, in direct and indirect manners in our democratic and unclear world. She has presented the continuous struggle of women for their identity through the characters.

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