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## Socio-Cultural issues in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Anita Mudkanna

### Abstract

Arundhati Roy is an Indian author best known for her novel 'The God of Small Things'. She was born in 24<sup>th</sup> November 1961. The present novel published in 1997. She also got the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 1997. She is one of the socially committed traditions. She is a dynamic political activist. 'The God of Small Things' is the debut novel of Indian writer. It is a story about the childhood experiences of fraternal twins. The present novel set in Ayemenem.

Arundhati Roy's concern for women and the environment is to be found in her first novel itself. Women belong to one of the categories of small things portrayed by Arundhati Roy. Despite socio-economic development, women have not achieved an enviable position in the society. They were kept in subordination and relegated to the status of the second sex. The Indian society is based on male predominance and female subordination. Though woman is praised for her wife-mother role, she is treated as the legal economic and sexual property of her husband. Even parents did not treat male and female children equally. 'The God of Small Things' is the plight of a woman called Ammu divorced by her husband and neglected by her own family members. The novel presents socio-cultural issues and the search for a personal, social and human identity in the society.

### Socio-Cultural Issues

In the modern era, novel a genre of expression has become a tool at the hands of writers to communicate with the readers about the burning issues relating to society, politics, economy and so on. Roy was born in Shillong, Meghalaya, India, to a Bengali Hindu father and a Keralite Christian mother. Roy in her novel "The God of Small things" analyses the problems of acculturation of different ethnic groups without damaging the communal harmony. The term ethnicity is best understood as a way of viewing human life. It is from this standpoint that this paper analyses the concept of ethnicity with reference to Roy's "The God of Small Things". Right from early days Indian English writing has been so far hesitant to deal with the diverse and complex depth of various Indian cultures or ethnic groups. In this novel, the central characters are striving to represent various groups. They have been slowly visiting Assam, Bengal, Madras, New Delhi, Australia, America and England. The work has cultural contacts of the past and present and paves way for better future. The story is narrated from Rahel's perspectives when she makes a come back to her ancestral house in Kerela, Aynemenem House and speculates over the many changes there. The novel is based on the past history of the Aynemenam family and slowly moves on to fragment the changing situation there. Arundhati Roy's concern for women and the environment is to be found in her first novel itself. According to certain western feministic critics, nature is equated with women to show that both have been exploited by men in more than one way. Nature, in its comprehensive sense means not only the physical environment but also man's social relationship, his artistic aspirations, his religious persuasions and even his recreations. In "The God of Small Things" Arundhati Roy proves that all creations are equally important and they must arise out of specific problems with a spirit Women belong to one of the categories of small things portrayed by Arundhati Roy. Despite socio-economic development, women have not achieved an enviable position in the society. They were kept in subordination and relegated to

  
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the status of the second sex. The Indian society is based on male predominance and female subordination. Though a woman is praised for her wife-mother role, she is treated as the legal economic and sexual property of her husband. Even parents did not treat male and female children equally. The 'God of Small Things' is the plight of a woman called Ammu divorced by her husband and neglected by her own family members. Ammu is the daughter of Pappachi and Mammachi. Her brother is Chacko. As a child, she had witnessed the cruelty of her father towards her mother. During her stay in Calcutta, she met her future husband. She fell in love with him and decided to marry him. She just informed her parents and got married. After her marriage, she understood that her husband was not a good man. He was willing to send his wife to his boss Mr. Hollister in order to safeguard his job. Ammu left her husband with her twins Rahel and Estha. But in Ayemenem, family members treated her and her children with indifference.

Though she was denied education, her brother Chacko was sent to Oxford for higher education. He married Margaret and begot Sophie Mol. When Margaret divorced him, he came to Ayemenem to live with his parents. Meanwhile, Ammu had an affair with Velutha, an untouchable. When things became known, Ammu was locked up in a room. Velutha was taken to the police station. He was charged with the murder of Sophie Mol, who had died accidentally by getting drowned in the river. Velutha died in police custody. The twins who knew the truth were forced to conceal it while discussing the character of Ammu. Arundhati Roy says, "She stands for those women who are aspiring for freedom and equality. This section of women is challenging traditional ideas and conventions. The hopes for the future lie with this section only." Rahel is a girl of rebellion like her mother. She was eleven years when her mother died. This is to be seen in three of her activities. She dashes against the convent girls to find out if her breasts hurt." She was accused (quite rightly) of hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors. When she was questioned by the principal about her behavior (cajoled, caned, starved), she eventually admitted that she had done it to find out whether breasts hurt. In that Christian institution, breast was not acknowledged. They weren't supposed to exist, and if they did not, could they hurt?" She decorates a ball of dung with flowers. She burns the hair bun of her house mistress as a protest against vanity and artificiality. During her stay at the college hostel, Rahel occasionally wrote to Chacko and Mammachi. But she never returned to Ayemenem. Why? Because she thought that in Ayemenem, people were quite cool and indifferent to her. She didn't return when Mammachi died. During this period, she fell in love with Larry McCaslin who was in Delhi collecting material for his doctoral thesis. The author observes: "Rahel drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge, with a sitting down sense. She returned with him to Boston". Rahel's past terrible memories even hunted her happy marriage life. Her husband was very happy to find so good and beautiful a girl like Rahel: "He held her as though she was a gift, given to him in love something still and small. Unbearably precious". Well, their love marriage did not exist for a long time. Within a few days, Rahel was divorced like her mother Ammu. Estha also had a traumatic experience in life. Baby Kochamma has her own story. She loved Father Mulligan whom she tried to seduce. She becomes a Roman Catholic so as to be near him forever.

In "The God of Small Things", the story mainly concerns Ammu. She is the mother of Rahel and Mammachi is the mother of Ammu. In the novel, these three characters have been portrayed very distinctly. We shall consider the other characters later in a cluster but for the time being, let us concentrate on Ammu. She became a victim of male-dominated patriarchal society and was not allowed to pursue her studies. She finished her schooling when she was not

  
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allowed to pursue her higher studies. She finished her school education and had suddenly come to a stop, and she had no other alternative idea than to come with her father to Ayemenem and wait for marriage and meanwhile to help her mother with housework. When no suitable marriage proposal came in a reasonable time Ammu began to grow desperate "All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother. She hatched several wretched little plans. Eventually, one worked. Pappachi agreed to let her spend the summer with a distant aunt who lived in Calcutta."

After the death of Ammu, Rahel was invited by Baby Kochamma to stay with her in Ayemenem house. Rahel became very weak and exhausted from her battle against life. Rahel and her brother reunited after twenty three years. Rahel finds her ancestral house rather empty. She finds her grandaunt Baby Kochamma alive. In the process of exploring she unwraps a story that is woven with flash backs. It unveils individual and social histories, politics, melody, myth, sex and violence. Her coming return exhibits their seeking for identity. Loss, particularly their roots, their bond with Motherland, is implied. This leads to the character's search for identity. Thus there is a sense of homelessness and a feeling of insecurity. They search for a personal, social and human identity and they personify the history of their society. In the novel "The God of small things" all the characters were "culturally lost". Pappachi in "The God of small Things" wore a western suit even after his retirement at home it shows that he considered a symbol of superiority. Chacko's ex-wife Margret Kochamma when she returned after nine years with her daughter she wore bell-bottom and hat. Thus, we see an unceremonious blending of tradition and modernity. "The God of small Things" is the good example of multi-cultural and mixed marriage. Chacko marries Margret Kochamma English lady. Ammu, first marries a Bengali Hindu and gets divorced. Afterwards she loved Velutha being low caste though she was a Syrian Christian. Baby Kochamma a grandaunt, was attracted by the Irish Monk. Thus the novel presents a socio-cultural issues between the characters. The story filled with the memories of sorrow, love, tragedy, exploitation, sex and violence. Roy begins her narrative in the middle of things, she pointed one particular family. Arundhati Roy's "The God of small Things" is a brilliant exposition of socio-cultural, post-colonial and Multi-cultural perception.

Arundhati Roy in her works highlights the concept of social realism that can be defined as works which represent racial and social injustice and economic inequality through a presentation of characters that are facing such issues. By protesting against such inequalities and injustice, it is clear that Roy is using social realism to critique a number of different aspects of the contemporary world. Arundhati Roy traces out how the Indian society makes out a great difference between men and women. The novelist hints at the hypocritical code poignantly.

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