



## ***The God of Small Things: A Symbol of Indian Society***

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### **Abstract**

This research focuses on the Indianness in the novel *The God of Small Things*. Arundhati Roy reveals the truthful picture of the Indian patriarchal society. It beautifully depicts the plight of women in the traditional Indian society. The novel also focuses on the ill-treatment and violence on the daughters caused by the parents. It brings forth the plights of the innocent children. The novel shows the internal conflicts, modern social problems and different human tendencies. It also presents the predicament of the Indian women, their sufferings and plights from social, religious, cultural and economical points of view. The novel is the best example of the picture of the Indian society.

Key words: patriarchal, tradition, convention, divorce, society.

Arundhati Roy, one of the greatest Indian writers, was rewarded with the most prestigious British awards- The Booker Prize for her novel, "The God of Small Things". The novel was published in 1997 by Indian Link, New Delhi. The novel that was translated in twenty one languages became world's most favorite novel. For her incomparable contribution to struggle against intolerance, racism and sexism, Roy was awarded French Prize of the Universal Academy of Cultures in November 2001. She has also lion's share in fighting against globalization and the construction of dams in the Narmada valley. Court ordered her six months imprisonment and she was actually sent to prison for three months.

The novel *The God of Small Things* focuses on corruption of the independence ideals, internal conflicts, modern social problems and different human tendencies. Undoubtedly, the old problems of India remained unchanged in the independent India. Moreover, the novel deals with the women's alienation and self-identification. By questioning the

system of power, patriarchy, its rules and laws, Roy tries to change it through the medium of the Novel. The novel also presents the predicament of the Indian women, their sufferings and plights from social, religious, cultural and economical points of view. The title of the novel is appropriate and suggestive. It covers a symbolic significance. There are two opinions for the identification of the God in charge of small things. The most important figure is Velutha, the untouchable and his sensitivity and ability to make small wooden toys, with which he delights his friends. Undoubtedly, Velutha, the untouchable, is the God of small things. The small things of the novelist, Arundhati Roy are feelings, emotions, attitudes, memories, private desires and affection.

The novel is the perfect symbol of Indianness where a woman is always disrespected and blamed. In the Indian society where on the one hand women are not respected and blamed (for everything for example, even in a family, a husband blames the wife even for his own carelessness or faults), on the

other hand, the Indian society has divided women in groups like – married woman and unmarried woman, woman having issue and an issueless woman, married and divorced etc. A question remains: Is it merely the fault of the woman? Actually it is not the fault of the woman but it is the fault of the society, the deep-rooted traditions and the patriarchal society. Though the traditional and conservative women accept it without revolt and rebel, the awakened, aware, and broad-minded women realize the need for individuality and freedom, they revolt against the tradition and the patriarchal society.

Especially a divorced woman is always blamed for her plight. No man is questioned for his divorce. Though, it is said that “Marriage is the union of two souls”, in Indian social picture the phrase proves to be wrong and false every now and then. But “Every coin has two sides”. The outlook of some women and a part of the society is changing now-a-days. Though, the conservative and traditional part of the society disrespect and blame women for divorce and for their issues, at the same time, the other part of the society i.e. the rational, unconventional and untraditional, broad-minded people have very different attitude as far divorce is concerned.

The novel reveals Roy’s thoughts about individual sensitivity, critical awareness and emotional bond of people across caste barriers and beyond the patriarchal order and customs, which can bring an impressive change and reform in traditional and male dominated society. The plot of the novel moves around the life of four generations of the same family in their house, Ayemenem, near the river in Kerala, South India. Great grandparents Rev. E. John Ipe and his wife belong to the oldest generation in the novel. They are not primary but secondary. The plot actually moves around the last three generations of the Kochamma family. Since Ammu is divorced, Estha and Rahel are living with Kochamma family. The arrival of the children’s uncle Chacko’s ex-wife- Margaret and their daughter Sophie Mol brings a turning point in the life of Estha and Rahel. Chacko is shameless. There is not any loss of his. But Ammu’s life is destructed at the age of 24. The strong attachment of the Kochamma family

with the British relatives indicates the sign of development and superior attitude. There is total despair in her life. She has to spend lonely, isolated and bore life. Ammu realizes that though she lives in her parent’s house with mother and brother, she has not her own place. At the age of twenty four she comes to know the frustration and pains of life. She gets the perfect punishment of fruit of choosing the wrong husband. She is treated like an untouchable in the home of her parents, in her family and in the patriarchal society, only because she is divorced. The male dominated society is perfectly depicted in the views of Baby Kochamma.

“She subscribed whole heartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parent’s home. As for divorced daughter –according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for divorced daughter from love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage –Baby Kochamma chose to remain quivering silent as the subject”. (45-46)

In Indian society divorce is considered as the right of a man and not of a woman. “A woman has no choice for choice.” In this male-dominated society, the chains of customs and traditions bind the life of women. The novel perfectly reveals the Indianness in the form of Baby Kochamma. She feels no sympathy for her relatives and also for other suffering women. The patriarchal impact is so great that Ammu’s own mother feels no sympathy for her own frustrated and unlucky daughter. Here, I remember the essay of a famous social worker and writer Margaret Alva – “Thy Worst Enemy” where she has very effectively focused how women are their own enemies. Women need no enemies, since they are their strong enemies. Because a suffering woman, a divorced woman or a woman who is a victim of rape is strongly hated and ill-treated by women and not by men. In a family it is a woman more responsible for domestic violence. But another element of Indianness or Indian Spirit is revealed in the form of Ammu as she is the symbol of rebel and resistance. There are several instances of rebel and revolt of Indian women who fought against the social evils like Child Marriage, Dowry

Deaths, Girls' Education and so on. Historical RUKHMABAI case is known to all. Here, in the novel, Ammu strongly revolted against the established ideas. She rejects to imitate the English ways and manners. She secretly develops a love affair with an untouchable Velutha. Her attitude and stand make her the important character in the novel. She challenges the deep-rooted customs and traditions and transgresses the established myths, social codes and caste barriers. The novel reveals various examples of activities, like the organization of trade union, workers demonstrations, and discussion of communist ideology. The reflection of Roy's views about politics and communism is seen Ammu's irony against English ways. The central figure of the novel Ammu's attitude to rebel against the casteism is seen in her love affair with Velutha, an untouchable. According to Roy change and reform of patriarchal thinking and behavior does not depend on party politics, but on political awareness and more individual liberty. Velutha who is talented, educated, having the skills like an engineer, falls in love with a high caste woman, Ammu. Velutha as a person has the right to get respect, love and job opportunities. But, interferes with tender and sensitive areas in the Indian traditional society. Ammu is also clever, bold, courageous and rebellious. She refuses to tolerate the violence of marriage institution and despite being the mother of two children, takes her own decision to get divorce. The problem of Velutha and Ammu is that their private desires and love clashes with caste code and caste differences. Private feelings have no value in the eyes the society. Especially in India, there are specific social codes of conduct. One cannot easily transgress the rules established by the society. Individuality is not accepted by the deep-rooted traditions and customs. A person who opposes the social codes is punished. The novel reaches to its tragic culmination, when Ammu and Velutha die. Their death is the emotional shock to Estha and Rahel. The novel seems to end without a positive and self assertive element. Ammu dies alone, in tragic and miserable condition and is separated from her children and Velutha is killed by the police.

The novel reveals another element of Indian Society that it is a common understanding in the

Indian society that daughter's education is the waste of money since they are to be married in another family. And husband will get the advantage from that education. Some families think that because of higher education the girl will not adapt the in-laws family. It is the reason that the high caste Kochamma family stops Ammu's education and sends Chacko to Oxford.

Further, the treatment that Sophie Mol gets and the treatment Estha and Rahel get are diametrically opposite. In Indian society, there is a sea-difference in the treatment of son's children and daughter's children. Sophie gets good treatment as she is daughter of son whereas Estha and Rahel are ill-treated because they are the children of daughter who is divorced. For the family Sophie is the girl i. e. the future head of the family due to the absence of brothers. But Estha and Rahel are the continuous source of nuisance and embarrassment for the family. The only cause is that they are not in their father's home. In the view Indian patriarchal society, father's home is the right and logical place for the children to live in. But here Ammu dares to divorce and expects support from her parents. The culmination of this tendency is seen in the treatment that Estha and Rahel receive from the servant Kochu Maria.

In the novel *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy perfectly represents the Indian society. The novel is seething with several examples revealing the picture of the Indian society like female's powerlessness, their helplessness in neglecting the property rights and educational opportunities, the status of women inside their own blood families, women's inability in expressing their opinions, traditional male dominance. However, the novel also reveals that the human feelings and emotions are of great importance. Traditions and conventions are made for the betterment of human life. So no traditions and conventions have the rights to destroy the life.

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