

# The Creative Launcher

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## Feminine World in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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### Abstract

The research paper has been endeavored to explore the essentials of Feminism in Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Thing*. The paper tries to study the work of Arundhati Roy, '*The God of Small Things*' as a text of 'Feminine Writing'. She has wonderfully and effectively shown the dilemma of women in Indian society. Arundhati has taken up the issue of feminism to quest for their identity and economical and social liberty. Her female characters in the novel *The God of Small Things* stands out as personnel and not as role-players. Through this novel, she flashes a light on some important things of life like how love is always linked with sadness, how a person's childhood experiences influence one's perspectives and whole life.

**Keywords-** *Marriage, Chauvinism, Relationships, Indifferent, Man Dominated Society*

Arundhati Roy is one of the gigantic stars in the firmament of Indian writing in English. She was born in Meghalaya, India. Her father Rajib Roy, was a Bengali Hindu and her mother Mary Roy, was a Syrian Christian. *The God of Small Things* is her unveiling novel and is also a semi-autobiographical work. She was awarded the Booker Prize for the novel *The God of Small Things* in the year 1997. She was the first Indian Women to win the Booker Prize. In the year 2006, she was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award. She as an Indian English writer enters contemporary social-political issues that are sufficiently noticeable in number of articles, interviews and books. In the opinion of many sensitive readers of the novel, *The God of Small Things* is characterized as an astonishing art of imagination.

*The God of Small Things* showcases the actual picture of the plight of Indian women, their great anguish, cares and anxieties, their humble surrender, harassment and undeserved humiliation in patriarchical society. It shows the women's continuous struggle for seeking the sense of *identity* in a totally averse and envious society. The social structure of an average Indian woman is full of ups and downs, ifs and buts. It can be very clearly seen in some of the

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female characters like Ammu, Mammachi, Baby kochamma, Rahel and Margaret Kochamma.

The novel records four generation. The novelist does not say about the women in the first generation. Aleyoooty Ammachi is Pappachi's mother. She continued to live in an oil portrait also her husband Rev. Ipe's painting. While Ipe smiled Aleyoooty Ammachi looked more timid. Baby kochamma and Mammachi belong to second generation. Baby Kochamma is the daughter of Reverend E. John Ipe, who is the priest of the Mar Thomas Church. He had seven children but only two of them survived. Baby is one of those survivors, and other is her brother, Benan John Ipe. Her real name is Navomy Ipe but everybody called her baby. She fell in love with a handsome, young Irish priest, Father Mulligan when she was 18. The young girl and the fearless Jesuit both were quacking with unchristian passion. She entered a convent in Madras after becoming a Roman Catholic with special allowance from the Vatican. She hoped that it would provide her opportunities to be with Father Mulligan. The love affair did not become visible. She was sent abroad for studies and two years later she returned with a diploma in attractive gardening. She does not however forget Father Mulligan. She takes care of her body and makes a fresh entry in her dairy everyday: *I love you I love you*. Moreover she tries to remain in contact with him who as well stays in touch with her. He had begun studying Hindu scriptures to criticize them intelligently but the study eventually leads him to a change of faith. He turns into the Vaishnavas and joins an Ashram North of Rishikesh. He writes to her every Diwali and sends greeting card every New Year. Baby preserves those things. Father Mulligan dies, the death of her beloved does not turn her to a widow like living. Instead she becomes more intense about make up takes much interest in lotteries and enjoys watching color TV and she totally discarded gardening. And now she behaves like a teenager at the age of eighty three. After fifty years she abandoned the gardening and fell in love with dish-antennae.

She is snobbish in all sense and imitation that she had great knowledge of literary sense. She strongly believed in theory that a detached daughter had no position anywhere at all. A divorced daughter from a love marriage was shameful. A divorced daughter from an inter community marriage love marriage was simply unbearable to her. So she never tolerated the presence of Ammu and twins in her house. Baby takes drastic steps of change in order to meet man of her choices dislikes Ammu for similar reasons. She allows her brother to have illegal relationship with unfamiliar women but frowns upon Ammu for uneasy the ethical boundaries of the family. This shows Roy does not present her female characters as ideal ones. She is neither exploited by the man nor devastated by the customs in the society.

Mammachi is the spouse of Pappachi, an entomologist. She has been a silent sufferer from the beginning of her marriage life. Though she is not bothered in love like Baby but she is an unhappy character. She is like a doll in the hands of Pappachi. Her husband has a very

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poor opinion about her. In the beginning Roy presents a pathetic picture of Mammachi's life. Roy observes, "Mammachi was almost blind and wore dark glasses when she went out of the house. Her tears tickled down from behind them, trembled down from behind them and tremble along her jaw like raindrops on the edge of a roof" (p:5)

The frustrated and unsatisfied marriage life of Mammachi shows reader a different tale of woe. Her husband is 17 years older than her. He is a respectable man in society and a famous entomologist. He is a very jealous husband. Mammachi takes lesson in violin when her teacher praises her he becomes sad and abruptly discontinues her lessons. Every night he beats Mammachi with a brass flower vase. One day Pappachi bet Mammachi with brass vase, Chacko had come to Ayemenem for summer vacation and he saw Pappachi beating Mammachi and he strode Pappachi to room and twisted his hand back. This episode created hatred in mind of Pappachi and he never touched or sought any help from Mammachi.

Mammachi showed unsympathetic attitude towards Margaret Kochamma. She shows female envy for woman whom her son had loved and married. She never met Margaret but looked down upon her. She was unkind towards the workers of the factory paradise pickles and preservers. But she was meek with Chacko. She had a separate entrance built for Chacko's room, so that the object of his 'need' would not have to go traipsing through the house. Mammachi is not crafty as baby kochamma but her mind is hardly less pervert than that of baby kochamma. She promises to the logic and ethics of the male bigotry in toto. Her conservative turns her brutal, nasty and brutish.

The third generation of women characters are Ammu and Chacko's alien wife Margaret Kochamma. Margaret is a minor but remarkable character. She is the wife of Chacko and mother of Sophie Mol. Similar to the other *Mombattis* of the book she also suffers and loses her dreams in male dominated society. After the marriage with Chacko her life becomes more horrible and more insecure than before. She has to undergo intolerable grief and sorrow. A chain of calamity makes her life sad and gloom.

Margaret was working as a waitress in a café in London when she first met Chacko. Like Ammu, she left the house of her parents 'for no greater reason than a youthful declaration of independence' (p: 240).

She had an passionate desire to be good and gentle lady with enough money. So she had to face with the real world. One day when Chacko came to café, she all of a sudden drew towards him like how Ammu drew towards Baba. Margaret and Chacko had an affair and they both married without their family consent. But this untraditional rebellious marriage as a bad luck did not prosper in a fertile way. To crowd the effect, Margaret's parents refused to see her. Her father disliked Indians as he thought Indians as sly, dishonest people. He could not believe that his daughter marrying such a man. Moreover Margaret was also fed up with the living of Chacko and she separated to Chacko and married Joe. Though Margaret is a

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tragic character partly tormented by the powerful character but mostly devastated and harassed by her own erratic mind and incapable conduct.

Ammu is the central character of the novel. Her tragic story, right from the beginning to the end arouses our sense of pity and catharsis. Her tragic tale begins in her childhood. As a little girl Ammu had to tolerate some unbearable terrifying experiences. She and her mother Mammachi suffered from the cruelty of her father. Pappachi used to beat Ammu and her mother Mammachi with a brass vase. Ammu was disadvantaged of higher education because according to Pappachi college education is not useful for a girl. This shows the truthful portrayal of the women of the society who find nothing but the step motherly treatment in the male dominated- society. In an atmosphere fully different she has to feel like captive in a Big Ayemenem house. She has to help her mother in house works and wait for marriage proposals. She has become the victim of frustration due to sudden disruption of education. She wants to fly liberally in the sky.

To seek flee from she goes to Calcutta to spend summer with an aunt and ends marrying a Bengali Hindu there. She marries him as she does not want to go to Ayemenem. Ammu shows her strength of mind not only in marrying the man of her choice but also in divorcing him when the choice confirms eventually wrong. Her husband whom she loved was intoxicating and even made her to smoke. As he neglects his duty, he is threatened with dismissal by his manager, Mr.Hollick and acquiesces in to his proposal to go away for a while and send his wife to his bungalow to be *looked after*. Her husband put his proposal before his wife. This severe dishonor created a sense of great hatred in the heart of Ammu. In a fight, she hit her husband with a heavy book and left the place with the twins- Estha and Rahel. She goes to Ayemenem and tells her father the story of the reason for her separation but her father does not believe her. Her parents were uncaring to her and her family. She was step motherly treated in her own house. She imagined her twin, “ like a pair of bewildered frogs engrossed in each other’s company lolloping arm in arm down a high way full of hurtling traffic”(p:43)

Ammu defys the androcentric notion of the society which avoids the surname after divorce. Estha and Rahel has no surname because Ammu is considering reverting to her maiden name, though she feels that choosing between her husband’s name and her maiden name ‘does not give a woman much of a choice’. Law does not give a daughter any state to property. Though Ammu does as hard work as Chacko, the latter feels free to declare the factory as his individual.

As a mother, Ammu loves her children. She is worried about their innocence which makes them willingly to love people who do not love them. She not only wants to impart them academic knowledge but also cares to teach them correct manners too. The rebel in Ammu does not permit her to remain contented with motherhood and divorcee hood. So she

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proceeds to reclaim her body. The other factor which blend her is the dream of the one armed man, suggests her that it is no use seeking perfection in life, the small and powerless peoples like her can satisfy themselves with the little time provides them. The special treatment shown towards Chacko's ex-wife and their daughter is openly displayed in front of all and sundry, throwing Ammu and her twins in complete remoteness. This is too severe a blow for Ammu to bear. The arrival of Margaret Kochamma proves Ammu's sexual desires.

The real tragedy in life of Ammu starts when she comes in contact with Velutha, a Parayan. Ammu loves Velutha from childhood not for his outstanding talents but for his fiery spirit of protest. Velutha's return after many years makes her take a deadly decision to "love by night the man her children loved by day" (p: 77).

The secret love goes for thirteen days until it is reported to Mammachi by Velutha's father and compounded by the unplanned death of Sophie Mol. When the relationship was revealed she was tricked into her bedroom and locked. Velutha is implicated in false cases of attempted rape. Kidnapping of children and murder of Sophie Mol. After Sophie's funeral Ammu goes to police station to set the case right. After four days of the interment, Chacko assumes the role of a protector of morality and asks Ammu to pack up and leave. The penalty is unjust as it ruins three lives for the supposed offence of one. Ammu is separated from her children as Estha is returned to her father and Rahel alone was permitted to live in Ayemenem but Ammu is not allowed to visit her often. Desperately wanting to have a good job that allows her to bring her children with her she tries a number of job and dies alone in the Bharat lodge in Aleppy where she has gone for a job interview. After her death the church refused to bury her on several counts. So Chacko hired a van to transport the body to the emotional crematorium.

Ammu is such a tragic character that even her last ritual is not done properly with traditional rituals. Ammu, the tragic character tortured and ill-treated by police, family and politics. It is not only the men folk alone responsible for her tragic plight but mostly the women characters like Mammachi and baby kochamma who may be called the real culprit to engender sufferings in Ammu's life.

The fourth group of women characters are Rahel and Sophie. Ammu's daughter Rahel too deserves our notice. The story deals with her life only to the age of thirty-one and most of the stories belong to her childhood. She was isolated by father, separated from mother, disused by her maternal uncle, grandmother and grand aunt. The neglect has accidentally resulted in a 'release of the spirit'. She has grown independent, daring and capable of thinking idea.

After completing schooling, she gets herself admitted into a college of Architecture in Delhi. The verdict is taken not out of importance in Architecture but as she wanted to stay away from Ayemenem where she is useless. Through her stay at the school of Architecture

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she gets together Larry McCaslin in Delhi and weds wiith him. The decision of marriage was hers, it is not taken under model circumstances because she knew that there is no one to arrange marriage and pay offering for her. Her marriage was also like that of her mother and uncle is outside her society. Larry is an American research scholar. Larry is not a male chauvinistic but the marriage proves prosaic. He adores her but fails to comprehend her. Rahel rejects to continue her relationship with him. To her, marriage is not a burden so she breaks it soon. She doesn't feel shame or moral limitation for the divorce. The divorce does not leave her depressed she works as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York. And then she serves as a night clerk in bullet—proof cabin at a gas station outside Washington.

Rahel has a great sense of responsibility for her brother Estha, who is the part of her own self to her. As soon as she received letter from Baby Kochamma that Estha has returned, she leaves her job and goes to Ayemenem. Unlike her divorce mother she has no burden of children with her. But she has to look after her brother, Estha whom shocking experiences of life have turned speechless. She because of mental and psychological tortures, has become an abnormal character; that even creates a breach in her merry and jocund marriage life; that makes her a rebel student during her school days; that makes her so mad that in a fit of sexual passion, she even goes to the level of making an illicit or incestuous relation with her own brother Estha.

Sophie Mol is a pivotal character in the novel. Sophie's character comes through the way in which particularly Estha and Rahel perceive her. She is the half-English, half-Indian daughter of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma. The twins do not particularly like her because she makes them feel lower. Other members of the family, chiefly Baby Kochamma, continually evaluate them to Sophie in ways that makes her appear better. Rahel and Estha dislike her based on the presumptions about her rather than really she is. Sophie actually wants to be friend with twins, and that she's the one who feels left out. She tries to win them over the best way she knows. She gathers up presents and gives them. She also tries to win the heart of the twins like insulting Chacko and baby Kochamma. She also begs to tag along with them when they decide to run away. This decision proves to be a fatal for her. She at the immature age of nine, dies by drowning in river. At the end we see a very human, sensitive and basically lonely little girl in Sophie Mol.

Roy's *The God of Small Things* is feminine creation of distinctive in nature. The novel clearly shows the untold miseries and the undeserved sufferings of women who have to bear the brunt of patriarchal silently and humbly. She exceeds the ordinary concept of feminine world. The novel examines the feminist jealousy between the woman and woman, the plight of woman in male dominated scaffold. Roy shows how a woman in patriarchal set up yearns for pleasure and happiness and a life far from the shackles and constraints. She is like a free bird that wants to fly freely in the open skies. But all of a sudden, her wings are cut

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down by the heartless society and thus she is pulled down to this earth where she has to 'grovel in the lowly dust.'

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