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STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE: A CRITICAL STUDY ON ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy's novel The God of Small Things brings out the struggle of various people on the land. The tradition and customs ruins the people and creates envy among the society. Hatred and jealousy dominate and curtail the lives of the weaker sections. Loneliness and darkness cover the weaker section in the name of casteism. This paper brings out the tribulations of such characters and their destiny.

The *God of Small Things* is a story about a helpless, lonely lady Ammu who abandoned by her husband and totally neglected by her family meets her sad fate. It brings out her constant struggle to make both ends meet. She struggles, repels but in the end succumbs to the harms done to her. It also shows the struggle between the rich and the poor, high and mighty and the poor and the weak. The ongoing conflict inherent of social stratification at various levels (English vs. Indian, Touchable vs. Untouchable, Emotional vs. Social) creates 'bad' people who live life and experience emotion from inward, introspective and individual and various 'good' people who move through life, looking outward and gauging their success by the others' opinion of their work, achieve position and special abilities (Baby Kochamma's violin playing). Velutha, the God of Small Things, loving Ammu, Rahel and Estha, is destroyed physically maliciously by the enforcers of the law. Ammu is deprived for loving all untraceable, forced to split her children and dies alone. Finally, Rahel and Estha form a dysfunctional product who are created by the events like Sophie Mol's death; Velutha's destruction, and the anger frustration from their relatives.

Suzanna Arundhati Roy was born in north eastern state of Meghalaya, in Shillong on 24th November 1961. Her parent's marriage ended in a divorce and Arundhati came to live in Ayemenem, Kottayam District, Kerala along with her mother and brother. Mary Roy, her mother, recalls Arundhati's student-days. In an interview she says, "She joined a formal school only at the age of eleven. I believe that you learn much more in the absence of a rigorous syllabus. Arundhati literally educated herself. She did not

need a textbook with an exam at the end of it. I try to do this for other kids as well. ([http://www. rediff. com/news/at/18booker. htm](http://www.rediff.com/news/at/18booker.htm)). Roy however grew disenchanted with the film world and took on odd jobs including running aerobic classes. She began writing the novel *The God of Small Things* in 1992 and she completed it in 1996. It won the Booker Prize in 1997, catapulting Arundhati Roy to status hitherto unheard of in the Indian literary scenario. She got instant world-wide fame. The book was lapped by the International audience. The Toronto star heaped praises on the novel terming it 'a lush, magical novel'. Simon says "The stylistic innovation make the novel unique and this aspect brings vitality and exuberance to the novel" (123).

Roy, with no visible trace of diffidence normally perceived in a first-time writer, pens the story, with gay abandon in a gripping fashion using her verbal innovation and stylistic tricks. Her verbal exuberance is all that makes this novel a real pleasure. The tale describes how Ammu, the unconventional woman and mother of Rahel and Estha, is punished by death for her transgression triggered by passion and how her love Velutha, 'an untouchable' is meted out injustice dying at the hands of the police. It also describes how Rahel evolves as a tough woman and survivor, forging a path for herself and comes back to reclaim her brother with whom there develops an incestuous relationship. Obviously one can trace a lot of autobiographical elements in the story. And it can be seen as a novel in the tradition of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

The central character of the novel Ammu is very poignantly depicted as the daughter of Pappachi and

Mammachi. She was witness to the severe crudity meted out to her mother by her father as, "Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place. One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi's violin and threw it in the river" (47-48). Ammu saw the extreme temper of father when he tore a pair of shoes that she had brought for herself. She was also denied proper higher education because Pappachi thought it was unnecessary for girls. Pappachi became tyrant for his wife and children. The man Ammu married was an alcoholic and went to an extent to satisfy the carnal desires of his boss, Mr. Hollick, so as to save his job. At this juncture Ammu is completely shocked and it seemed as if she had jumped out of a frying pan into the fire. She hated her husband and left the place with her twins – Rahel and Estha to Ayemenem house. She attempts to resume her life but the family gives her a cold reception.

Ammu develops a sense of gratitude for Velutha. This sense of gratitude also slowly kindles the woman in her and her pent-up feelings begin to show, when her eyes begin to rejoice at the sight of Velutha as "Ridges of muscle on his stomach rose under his skin like divisions on a slab of chocolate" (215). His chiselled body also rouses in Ammu, an intense desire for physical proximity and intimacy. His caste status does not bother her. Her experiences have been different from a typical caste-obsessed member of her own community. So she relates to Velutha only with affection and aversion does not rise at all. The affair with Velutha comes as a welcome relief to Ammu. She also starts moving in and out of home in an inconspicuous manner to be with Velutha. Vellya Pappan, Velutha's father, spills the happenings to Baby Kochamma. Kochamma feels that this is act of transgression that is unpardonable to fall in love with a 'low caste Paravan' which would damage social status of the Ipe family. And so Kochamma seizes this opportunity with alacrity and decide to punish both Ammu and Velutha at one stroke.

Ammu's aunt Baby Kochamma locks her in a room and Velutha is taken to the police station where he is mercilessly tortured and beaten as, "Blood spilled from his skull like a secret. His face was swollen and his head looked like a pumpkin, too large and heavy for the slender stem it grew from. A pumpkin with a monstrous upside down smile. Police boots stepped back from the rim of a pool of urine spreading from him, the bright bare electric bulb reflected in it" (319-20).

He is falsely charged with the murder of Sophie Mol, who as a matter of fact dies a natural death of drowning.

Comrade Pillai, the leader of Ayemenem, fails to rescue Velutha despite the fact that he was this party worker. Policemen insulted Ammu by calling her 'vesya' when she goes to the police station to see Velutha because they view their relationship with a lot of contempt. Baby Kochamma too forces the twins to give their witness against Velutha concealing the truth. And Ammu is separated from her children and she dies alone at the 'viable die-able' age of thirty-one, impoverished and emaciated by tuberculosis.

Estha and Rahel have to lead a very suffocated, isolated and conservative life in the Ayemenem House. As a result Estha, the more submissive of the two, becomes isolated and frigid. She was the one who was more aggressive, assertive and the more rebellious of the two, like her mother. Rahel is haunted all her life by the unfulfilled desire of love which she always craved for as a child. She was a child of a broken home, a child of a single parent who though capable of giving love to her, is not able to, due to the cold and indifferent attitude of her family. Her neglected personality thus leads her to grow up into a rebellious lady who does not conform to the rules of the society. Estha too faces many traumatic experiences which haunt him throughout his life, and which make him retire to his own shell keeping little concern with the outside world. The incident at Talkies prompts him for an extremely weird behaviour. This incident has a deep impression on Estha's little mind and it has a great psychological impact on his mind. The little Estha's mind is full of his dark experiences and painful sufferings. And the second traumatic experience which haunts the mind of Estha and Rahel is that of the betrayal of Velutha for being prompted by Kochamma. The merciless death of Velutha and their mother as Estha says "Yes, childhood tiptoed out. Silence slid in like a bolt. Some one switched off the light and Velutha disappeared" (320).

This is a story clearly depicting the confrontation between the haves and have not of the society, between the high and the weak, 'Big Man, the Laltain and Small man the Mombatti, between the 'God of Big Things' and God of Small Things'. The mighty are well-protected and well-fed to survive the gush of wind whereas the mombatti representing the marginalised, the down-trodden are easily blown-away by the gush of wind. Hence, "The God of Small Things" conflicts exists at the individuals and the societal levels. It graphically shows that the helpless people resolve these levels of friction. Velutha, the outcaste can never co-exist peacefully with the "touchable" communities and still there is the stigma of untouchability

in the society. Ammu's pathetic condition is revealed in these lines, "A platoon of ants carried a dead cockroach sedately through the door, demonstrating what should be done with corpses" (162). People should cultivate a broader mindset so as to consider that all are equal by shunning away all barriers in the name of caste, communion, religion and nationality.

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