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A Feminist Reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: Analyzing Gender, Power, and Resistance

Mohd. Rashid

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0212-9444>

Corresponding Author: Mohd. Rashid, Lecturer in English, University Polytechnic, Integral University, Lucknow, mdrashid15sep@gmail.com

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Abstract

Aims: *The paper analyzes the feminist aspects of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, focusing on how gender, caste, and socio-cultural issues affect women in India's postcolonial period. The study attempts to scrutinize the depiction of women and their struggles and resistance to oppression in the framework of a patriarchal society.*

Methodology and Approaches: *The study revolves around qualitative research methodology, applying feminist literary theory to analyze the text. The course of the study employs close reading, which emphasizes the organization of the discourse, the building of the characters, and the development of the ideas.*

Outcome: *Roy's depiction of women in the work exposes societal constraints and norms set by a patriarchal society and challenges them. The characters Ammu and Velutha are victims of gender and social hierarchy, but they resist it. Their existence illustrates the social and gender inequalities embedded in caste discrimination and the multifaceted nature of gendered oppression throughout India.*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *The analysis of *The God of Small Things* reveals the gendered subjugation resultant from colonial practices and the profoundly entrenched caste systems in postcolonial India. While pursuing a feminist discourse, the novel creates awareness of women's sufferings in a society filled with oppression from every direction. Subsequent research should look into this study using a postcolonial feminist or queer theory approach regarding the intertwining of gender, identity, and resistance. A deeper analysis of Roy's impact on feminist movements and her relevance to modern-day India must also be done.*

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Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) tells an intricate story interwoven with family, love, and society in postcolonial India. At the centre of Roy's focus is social, political, and cultural analysis, particularly emphasizing gender and power dynamics. The novel's characters' grapple with caste, gender, and colonialism's legacy in the fictional town of Ayemenem, Kerala, during the 1960s. Among these characters, women like Ammu and Rahel wrestle with reality as they occupy the dual and often conflicting positions of oppression and resistance.

This paper seeks to scrutinize the narrative with particular attention to Roy's feminism, especially regarding how gender affects the characters' lives and the story's overarching statement characters' lives and the story's overarching statement. Using feminist literary theory, this research analyses how the female figure, especially Ammu, defies the boundaries set by the male-dominated society. It also looks at how Roy engages the concepts of gender, caste, and class and their interplay to disempower women by denying them freedom and self-determination.

The research objectives are twofold: to analyze the portrayal of women in the novel and to examine feminist interventions within the framework of the plot that subvert traditional gender expectations. Through close reading, this paper seeks to demonstrate that Roy employs feminist themes to critique the social order and give voice to the voiceless. Ultimately, the study seeks to show that *The God of Small Things* articulates the ongoing battles over gender issues in a postcolonial world and advances the feminist agenda in Indian literature.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* has been the focus of rigorous scrutiny, particularly regarding its depiction of feministic issues like gender, caste, and power relations. In their essays, critics pointed out Roy's skilful depiction of women's realities in a postcolonial India where patriarchal forces dominate societal relationships. Shifting the focus of Mukherjee's and Nair's feminist critiques of the novel to early Amitav Ghosh, Ammu's striving for love and freedom singlehandedly goes against and challenges societal gender norms. They notice the suppression of Roy's female characters within the envelope of the caste system, most notably in the case of Ammu and Velutha, which transgresses the boundaries of feminism and casteism in all their conservativeness.

For Menon, the boundaries of feminism are radically stretched when analyzing how Roy's novel dismantles traditional notions of gender and bestows power and dominion in the hands of women controlled by complex fictional females. For Gayatri Spivak and other postcolonial scholars, Roy's novels attack the remains of the colonial posture and patriarchal outlook, which, alongside other feminist and postcolonial debates, gives credit to the author for constructing the narratives that dominate her works.

While differing in many aspects, the literature also acknowledges the striking feminist presence within the novel, which stands out in the rest of Indian literature regarding gender, class and power relations. Rahel has afflicted eyes; see Chacko's ejection of Ammu and her twins from Ayemenem's home, Ammu's final sickness, and her burning in an electric furnace. Ammu's observations are divided into two portions in *The God of Small Things*: her hidden passion and frustration, her anxieties and forebodings, and her fantasies and realities. There are sections where she recounts her unusual marriage, divorce, and return to Ayemenem. Several parts of the novel are devoted to Baby Kochamma's inner thoughts. Her hate of Ammu due to her hybrid marriage, her disruption of the twins, and her hypocrisies are all exposed. Roy observes:

She did not even trust the twins. She deemed them capable of anything. Anything at all. They might even steal their present back. She thought and realized with a pang how quickly she had reverted to thinking of them as though they were a single unit once again. (29)

Ammu's dislike of Velutha is also seen in the passage when she goes to Cochin to participate in the procession of revolutionary Marxists. In the following days, Baby Kochamma focused entirely on her public humiliation of Velutha. She sharpened it like a pencil. In her mind, he grew to represent the march. Furthermore, the man who had forced her to wave the Marxist party flag.

This hatred was the catalyst for her fake complaint, an FIR against Velutha to Inspector Mathew, which set the stage for the night of horror at the History House. Ammu goes to the police station to clear the air after Baby Kochamma files a fake FIR against Velutha. When Baby Kochamma learns about Ammu's visit to the police station, she is afraid. In Ammu, she senses the earth crumbling under her feet and a sense of impending danger. Baby Kochamma

knew she needed to get Ammu out of Ayemenem as quickly as possible. She managed that by doing what she was best at: Irrigating her fields and nourishing her crops with other people's passions. She graved like an eat into the godown of Chacko's grief.

Her pickle business, obsessive affection for her son Chacko, hate for his English ex-wife Margret, and moral ambiguity for Chacko and Ammu are all told from her perspective. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma have a certain resemblance. They both agree on the requirements of men." Mammachi had a separate entrance built for Chacko's room, which was at the eastern end of the house so that the objects of his needs would not have to go traipsing through the house." (169) They are both debating what should be done to restore the family's honour, which the Ammu-Velutha issue has tarnished, "they locked Ammu up (tricked her into her bedroom) before they sent for Velutha. They knew that they had to get him to leave Ayemenem before Chacko returned." (258)

Arundhati Roy, a hybrid, has said that she, too, grew up realizing that there would be no planned marriage for her at the end of the rainbow, that she was an outsider, and that she was on her own. Rahel, too, is dragged into marginalized areas where she meets and marries a foreigner and lives a wandering and meaningless life in distant lands until she returns to her brother Estha in Ayemenem. She talks about societal critique as a feminist writer. We can notice her use of irony in her work." It was not entirely his (Chacko's) fault that he lived in a society where man's death could be more profitable than his life had ever been." (28) Daughters had no claim to the property in our culture. Ammu is also without her father's possessions. Chacko stated:

What is yours is mine, and what is mine is also mine. The property is always divided among the sons. Our society is male-dominated. In Ayemenem, a male is superior to a female. Ammu said in one paragraph." thanks to our outstanding male Chauvinist Society. (57)

Her proclivity for profiting from the holy is consistent with her efforts to reveal the flaws in religious and cultural orthodoxies. The blasphemous treatment of Baby Kochamma's sexual repressions and her amorous desires for the Irish monk who was unsure about his holy defense is meant to bring about the defrocking of false religion-cultural institutions dependent on persistent suppression of erotic

drives. Roy uses the primitive force unleashed from the sly limpidity of a magnificent barbarian to smash the manufactured and jaded world. As a feminist writer, she writes about specific challenges in every caste-based system. The implications of Simon de Beauvoir's phrase have been questioned by feminist theorists woman is not a box.

However, it becomes one by emphasizing the lived body. Moreover, feminist politics, focusing just on social control and seeing women as socially manufactured bodies, is insufficient. When this view is pushed to a logical conclusion, the female person's agential ability diminishes. As a result, it is maintained that the lived body, in its diverse everyday activities and experiences in its location, should be seen as an essential part of a person's identity. The point is that feminist analysis should include both socially produced and professional bodies. This understanding may be applied to the image complex in the book under discussion. Ammu and Velutha's image complex in *The God of Small Things* opens up two possibilities.

One is achieved when we concentrate on the staging of subversion; this has to do with Ammu and Velutha's use of the lived body to declare themselves agential bodies. The second is achieved in the class by the power regimes it establishes and the re-imposition of social control on their bodies- via Ammu's imprisonment and Velutha's bodily breaking. The question of social control and lived practice is also raised when these two concerns arise from the image complex of Ammu and Velutha's romance. Years later, Rahel returned to Ayemenem, God's nation of Kerala, to the same river. It welcomed her with a hideous grin, holes where teeth should have been, and a limp hand lifted from a hospital bed.

Arundhati Roy's striking of the socio-political balls has produced a flutter in Kerala. Some who responded emotionally and angrily to her work as accompanying rhetoric of pure denunciation neglected to recognize the novel's other equally essential concerns. *The God of Small Things* is neither anti-communist propaganda nor a simple projection of the orientalist image, but rather a portrayal of Kerala society from the inside.

An exemplary literary account of feminism intently springs from Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. It equally attempts to fathom the

social systems that control lives, especially the feminine dimensions of an Indian's life. It features active females who challenge the rigid patriarchal order and highlights the consequences of being a victim of gender discrimination, both at the micro and macro levels. *The God of Small Things* represents a still profoundly feminist novel in the sense that it seeks to overturn the hierarchy of power known to be dominant in society, aims to redefine the role of a woman, and examines how caste, class, and gender combine to constitute a woman's subordination. This analysis aims to demonstrate the various ways the text incorporates feminist critique and how this form of critique is effective within the narrative.

Roy's feminist approach in *The God of Small Things* is identifiable from the beginning of the book while describing Ammu, the main character who, like many women, grapples with far imposing expectations. For Ammu, life is an incessant battle to achieve some semblance of freedom from her family and society. She falls in love with Velutha, a lower caste man, which is considered blasphemy. Their love, while pure, becomes defiant due to society's rigid caste system. Velutha's unjust and brutal death represents the terrible violence of the caste system and patriarchy done to Ammu and all women who dare to live beyond socially constructed boundaries.

Ammu's life offers a glimpse into how a patriarchal society works to suppress the wishes and ambitions of women. She is a woman with a steadfast personality, but her defiance of social expectations leads to her demise. This explains one of Roy's tenets of feminist critique: the retribution in store for women who deviate from the prescribed performance of gender. In the novel, women like Ammu suffer for simply exercising their will, either through expressing their romantic and sexual interests or in their attempts to gain more independence. While Roy does not hold back from the depiction of the violence that comes with such defiance, these portrayals capture the violence of patriarchy and highlight the depth of the feminist struggle.

Alongside studying gender relations, Roy further analyzes the issue of women and the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender. Velutha, whom Ammu loves dearly, illustrates the complexities of social relations. He is a lower caste man, and his affection towards Ammu is not only frowned upon because of

prevailing patriarchal attitudes but also due to his caste. In the framework of the novel set in contemporary post-colonial, post-Indian Independence India, the combination of caste with gender is instrumental in determining the conditions of life of women. For Ammu, loving Velutha represents not only defiance but also an insurrection against the multi-faceted domination of caste and female suppression. Their relationship tragically ends, showing how intensely social control can dictate and punish those who attempt to challenge deeply rooted societal structures.

Through Ammu's twin children, Estha and Rahel, Roy demonstrates the effect these societal norms have across generations. Even as infants, the twins carry the burden of their mother's struggles. Estha, in particular, embodies a kind of quiet defiance. He is a traumatized child, a result of the experiences he encounters, and bears the brunt of a society plagued by stereotypical gender roles that constrict freedom of expression. Rahel, however, moves through the domains of gender and power more actively, subverting norms and seeking answers. Though young, these characters embody the spirit of feminism. They are not simply on the receiving end of their circumstances but are instead actively engaged in determining their fate and illustrating that the battle for feminism is inter-generational and each fights in its manner against the oppressive patriarchy that seeks to silence them.

In Roy's work, another prominent feminist topic is the representation of motherhood and the responsibilities that society expects of women. Ammu's life as a mother is tragic, not only because she fails to execute her maternal roles as and when they are most needed, but because of the overwhelming guilt that accompanies the choices she makes. Ammu's motherhood is a form of resistance to patriarchy, but it is also one of her alienation and suffering. She cannot attain the mythical status of a selfless mother and hence is rejected by her family as well as society. With the tale of Ammu, Roy tries to illustrate the harsh reality that women are expected to conform to a mother figure, even when they do not want to. The novel attempts to defy such singular glorified definitions of motherhood and the injustice of how motherhood is forced upon a woman without considering her feelings and aspirations.

Roy has her own set of critiques about the concept of female friendship and women's solidarity from the perspective of feminism. Even though female characters such as Ammu and Baby Kochamma are depicted in sharp opposition to one another, the novel looks at how women, in the broadest sense, are trapped within the confines of patriarchy. Baby Kochamma, for example, is a woman who accepts a patriarchal set of values and actively aids in the oppression of other women. She becomes a symbol of how some women, due to social and familial conditioning, become victims of their environment. This analysis of women as victims and perpetrators simultaneously indicates Roy's understanding of the need for feminism to confront the reality of internalized misogyny and the intricacies of women's interactions with one another.

Roy's story resists simple answers regarding gender imbalance. The feminist themes in *The God of Small Things* are complex, depicting women 'caught' between their needs and expectations, self-determination and family devotion, and modernity and traditionalism. Leaving many character fates unresolved compels readers to acknowledge the perpetuity of the fight for gender equality. The salient feature of feminist themes in Roy's work is not answering questions but in silencing debates on the mystification of women's lives.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* reflects deeply on feminist notions by intricately addressing issues of gender, power, caste, and social order. With her rich and diverse depiction of females, Roy goes beyond the expected boundaries of women's roles and reveals the grim realities beneath the masks of such defiance. These formantionist approaches have far-reaching impacts not only on the characterizations of the novel but also on its attempt to stimulate the audience on the mixture of self, power, and society. By depicting both the violence of submission and the courage of resistance, *The God of Small Things* remains an emotive work of feminism and its issues, like many others in the fight for equal rights for women and men.

The previously drawn discussions can be summarized as follows: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is an intricate examination of feminist issues that paints a vivid picture of the pain-filled existence of women in India after colonialism. From Roy's characters Ammu and Rahel, we see the merging of gender, caste, and class in which women are imprisoned, and freedom is enabled

simultaneously. The novel's feminist viewpoint disputes the customary and subjugating views of women in a patriarchal society, revealing the complexities of female identity within the context.

This paper has engaged with the feminist aspects of the novel in a way that is more nuanced than a single reading that stops at the subordination, agency, or resistance of women. One of the most significant interventions in Roy's work is the depiction of personal wishes against the backdrop of societal order. Ammu, the primary woman character, epitomizes women's love for freedom and the attempt to break out of the deeply entrenched walls of caste and gender. Her love affair with Velutha, an 'illegitimate' lower caste man, demonstrates the discrimination of caste but also shows the power of Ammu's will and desires. Although the end of her story is quite tragic, the disobedience of social structures by such a character as Ammu can be considered a measure of opposition to a reality that endlessly attempts to suppress and erase her existence.

Beyond the personal, Roy critiques the societal subjugation of women from a political lens, which encompasses her feminist perspective in the novel. Roy's criticism also includes how a woman's body and desires are reduced to being controlled by men. Baby Kochamma and Mammachi embody patriarchy but respond to it differently. The first one defends its principles, while the latter is voiceless and suffers in its grasp. These characters resonate with multiple responses, from acceptance to resistance women exhibit toward their surroundings.

Similarly, the study has analyzed Roy's concern about women and the language and narrative form, which deepens feminist issues. As non-linear as the plot may be, the novel's structure is fractal, representing the female's life. The changes in voice and point of view used to suggest a woman's reality where they are mostly gagged or wiped out but has a strong desire to express themselves. Instead of answering the hardships, Roy allows the audience to experience a character's life after being battered by the harsh reality of oppression, showcasing the systemic obstacles in a woman's life.

In a nutshell, *The God of Small Things* is a narrative unfurling feminist issues in a deeply personal and politically oriented manner. While deconstructing the gender-caste-colonial interplay, Roy compellingly critiques how the systems

constrict women's lives. Feminist readings discussed in this paper affirm that, though the novel's characters are decisively overpowered, they seize moments of calculated defiance and resistance beyond the text. In the end, Roy's novel reinforces the value of feminism in postcolonial literature by illuminating the unrelenting fight for gender equity and the intricate realities of women in modern India.

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Mohd Rashid

Dr. Mohd Rashid is an Indian author of *Freudian Framework of Psychoanalysis: A Comparative Study of Literature and Dream* (Cavemark Publications, 2022). He is a lecturer in English at Polytechnic University, Integral University, Lucknow. He earned his PhD in English from the University of Lucknow in 2021 with a dissertation titled *The Social as Literary: A Study of Arundhati's Writings*. Rashid received the 2021–22 Yuva Acharya Award from the Bharat Education Excellence Awards for his contributions to research and education. He has served as an Assistant Professor of English at SDSN Postgraduate Degree College, Lucknow, and as a visiting Assistant Professor at Juris Law College, Lucknow. His research interests include Freudian psychoanalysis, comparative literature, Indian English literature, and world literature. With six years of research experience, he has organized and participated in numerous national and international seminars and workshops. He has edited two literary books and published five research papers in peer-reviewed, UGC-approved journals.