

# GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE NOVEL “THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS” BY ARUNDHATI ROY

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## Abstract

Gender Discrimination refers to the practice of granting or denying rights or privileges to a person based on his/her gender. Attitudes toward gender discrimination can normally be traced back to the roots of certain segments of society. Arundhati Roy rightly puts forth how women, become victims of violence, exploitation, discrimination, alienation and exile. Ammu is the protagonist of the novel in “The God of small things”. It deals with the honors of the gender discrimination in India and how women in general are marginalized and oppressed by the society. It truly brings about the position of the womenfolk in India. It presents before us the constant struggle of the women against their exploitation, torture and struggle which they undergo because of the male dominated conservative framework. The central character of the novel Ammu is very poignantly subjected all the cruelties by the society are vividly portrayed in the novel.

## Key Words: Violence, exploitation, discrimination, alienation and exile

Arundhati Roy began writing her first novel, “The God of Small Things” in 1992, completing it in 1996. The book is semi-autobiographical and a major part captures her childhood experiences in Ayemenem. The publication of The God of Small Things catapulted Roy to instant international fame. It received the 1997 Booker Prize for fiction and was listed as one of the New York Times Notable Books of the year for 1997. Arundhati Roy flings a harsh irony on Gender Discrimination prevalent in Indian society. This novel is a true portrayal of the plight of women in society, man’s domination over women and their marathon struggle for seeking “identity” in a male-dominated conservative society. The social structure of an Indian woman is full of many ups and downs, Gender discrimination which have existed in our society for centuries.

This novel 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 shows her constant struggle to make both ends meet. This story shows the battle between the rich, high and mighty and the poor and the weak. Ammu life is depicted by Roy from her childhood to her youth, till the time she dies. Ammu is seen facing a very troubled childhood rather tormented nursery years where she had been subjected to all the cruelties caused by her father on her mother Mammachi whom her father hit with a brass vase. Her father in a sheer fit of schizophrenia tore her new pair of shoes. She was deprived of the decent education because she was a girl. Her father was such a frustrated man that he was not satisfied after beating up his wife and children,

tore the curtains, kicked the furniture and broke the table lamp. To him marriage was a pious relationship but a point of domination of a man over women. Further the height of Gender Discrimination and exploitation can be seen when Ammu receives a further shock after her marriage. She is seen being urged by her husband to satisfy the carnal desires of his boss Mr. Hollick so that his job remains. She could not take this extreme humiliation, she in tiff with her husband hit him with a heavy book and left the place with her twins reached Ayemenem, but to her horror she found out that her parents had a very cold and indifferent attitude towards her and her children. She wept when she saw the sorry condition of her two innocent kids who huddled to each other. But obviously all these things point to one thing “Bias”. There are the biases for women, harbored by various people at various ages and they present the rigid and very narrow outlook.

When Ammu returns from a broken marriage, instead of lending a sympathetic hand of support he refused to believe that any Englishman would make an indecent proposal to her through her husband. According to Chacko, Pappachi is an Anglophile- a person who was well disposed towards the British. His face reflected all the expressions and impressions of manic violence and even his portrait captures that expression. He is neither a loving husband nor an understanding father but all outsiders he was the pinnacle of kindness to his family. His father was a man blessed by a great priest and had the reputation of being a very pious man. He was an extremely charitable and was magnanimous towards the less privileged by building schools and vocational centers. Unfortunately both his children Pappachi and Baby Kochamma turned out to be the nemesis of the family. They are both selfish and self-centered individuals. Pappachi has the advantage of being born into a cultured family, educated highly, worked with the British, is well-travelled and has the exposure to be reasoning and good individual. Yet he is in the words of his granddaughter Raphel “a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning”.

As it is implicit in *The God of Small Things* that Ammu’s life is ruined because of her tormented childhood and the negligence of her parents, same fate befalls her own twins Estha and Raphel who turn to be sorry figures because all their lives they have hankered for love, affection, care and attention. Though Ammu she has shown that right from the beginning women have been subjected to all kind of atrocities, biases and partial behavior. Women are a part of the weaker gender, a belief nursed by majority of people. They do not view womenfolk to be equals but as a mere toy and a dust to be struggled off a doormat. Roy tries to defeat this notion by advocating the case of Ammu who is forever treated with bias and discrimination. She is forever under mental stress and strain and is tortured by the people most dear to her.

Due to male Chauvinistic thought, gender discrimination arises. Roy in her novel confronts boldly the male Chauvinism. She angrily replies the notion that women are the weaker sex and are inferior to men. They are possibly there to look after the needs and satisfy his baser instinct. She mocks at their attitude and registers her protest that woman is not a mere toy to be manipulated by a man as and when he likes. Chacko, a hypocritical male, brother of Ammu truly represents this picture. His selfish side and his false pride to be male are revealed many times in the story. He was sent to the Balliol College, Oxford to study by the virtue of the fact that he was the male member of the society. Ammu was not sent however because she was a girl and because of this simple fact she did not have access to higher studies as it was the popular belief that college studies corrupts a woman.

This chronic conservative problem is still there in India whereby a large number of people are against the education of woman. This hypocrisy and biased attitude is brought about excellently by Arundhati Roy in this work "The God of Small Things".

Woman is the one who steers a man as it is said behind every successful man there is a woman. She as a better half of a man gives him the much needed love strength and support. She is the one who shapes the destiny of her home and children. A contribution of a woman can be gauged from well brought up of her children to become worthy citizens of the country. As it is implicit in "The God of Small Things" that Ammu's life is ruined because of her tormented childhood and the negligence of her parents, same fate befalls her twins Estha and Raphael, who turned to be sorry figures because all their lives they have hungered for love affection, care attention.

Roy flings harsh irony on this male domination and wants to prove that a woman is the pivotal character of a family and she forms the heart of the family and if we break the heart of a woman, the whole family can disintegrate into nothing less. This is what happens to Ammu and then to her children, who decent from broken families and in turn lead a disintegrated, disturbed and stray life. Roy wants to propagate that what Ammu goes through both in her husband's and father's house is not based on the principle of equality. She seems to say that woman is not merely an object in a man's hand to be manipulated the way he likes but a woman is the most noble and beautiful creation of God. Even today, in spite of a fundamental improvement in women's position, we see in villages of India that the conservative and superstitious mind of a large number of people, against the higher education of girls.

Gender domination is also evidenced between Ammu's parents. Her father, a research officer is disgruntled for he cannot get the moth he has discovered named after himself. But after 12 years, the credit unfairly goes to his successor whom he has hated. His cruelty to his wife is probably due to the credit not falling to him.

Arundhati Roy has depicted a variety of men and powerful images. The image of man as it emerges in Roy's novel is a multiple one-showing the many faces of man ranging from the sensitive vulnerable Velutha, The God of Small Things to the vindictive Chacko, the tyrannical old grandfather Pappachi to the young boy Estha. The doubt is often expressed whether woman writers portray male characters with authenticity and objectivity? If Roy's portrayal of Chacko or the Marxist Pillai seems stridently anti-male, her portrayal of Velutha and Estha is extraordinary touching. Roy cannot be accused of having a bias against men in general. It is to be noticed that woman has been the subject of great mystery and controversy in our history and traditions, myths and legends. She is charged with so many imaginary drawbacks. Women are bundles of evils. But most of the charges are concocted. We must remember that she plays a very significant role as a beloved, wife and mother. A good wife is an angel in the house.

It is quite evident that The God of Small Things is an attack on Gender Discrimination prevalent in Indian society. In this respect, the author is very close to Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapoor. She is an expert advocate of social reform in this field. She has analyzed how the novelist lashes out at the hypocritical moral code of society which makes a great difference between man and woman. It is a great fault in man's nature that he fails to understand and appreciate the noble and pure side of a woman's love.

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