

# Ethical dilemma and woman in Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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## Abstract

Arundhati Roy's not so conventional novel *The God of Small Things* was a huge success among readers and critics. The novel won Booker Prize in 1997. A lot of critics looked at this novel as novel of subjugated and marginalised. It was also praised for its postcolonial and political elements. A lot of work has been done on the novel based on caste, gender and society. However this novel also introduces us with the concept of Ethical Dilemma means to choose something which is morally discarded by society but is perfectly fine for the person of choice. In this novel it is evident that there are many characters who accepted the societies rules and norms and admit themselves to them like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma and there are others who came out of it like Ammu, Rahel and Estha. This paper is based on Ethical Dilemma of women in the novel and the conventional and unconventional approach of woman character for the same. The novel not only introduces us to such woman but depicts the psyche of these women to justify their choice of living and accepting society's rules or not to accept the same.

**Key words-** Ethical Dilemma, Woman, Unconventional approach, marginalisation , subjugation

The God of small thing is written by Arundhati Roy, a social activist and Booker prize winner for the same, depicts the ethical dilemma of many character. The story's focal point was death of Sophie Mol. The female characters of the novel are to be studied deeply because most of them are in a circle of accepting social norms or doing what they actually want. Rehal, Ammu and Margaret Kochamma are the not so conventional women of the novel. Where Rehal, Ammu and Margaret divorced their husbands Baby Kochamma never married. Ammu is very important and subaltern character of the novel. Ammu was born in family lead by patriarchy. Her father Pappachi ruled over her mother Mammachi and never let Ammu get good education. He was ruthless towards Ammu and her mother and often beat them with brass vase. Pappachi's thought about marriage were that of a traditional. According to him woman must obey her husband and men are important and prime in family. Ammu didn't like the idea of her father and wanted to get rid of his patriarchal father and her mother who was taking all this from these many years. Ammu find the way out of this hell hole by marring Baba , whom she met in a wedding. In spite her family's disagreement she married Baba and lived in East of India for some time. Ammu's character's true spirit was seen when she left Baba because he wanted her to sleep with his employer Mr. Hollick. Ammu was disgust by this and left Baba ad came to live with her family. Ammu decided a very important thing and stick to it she was having a choice

to either be with her husband and be a traditional wife who is always be with her husband no matter what or challenged society's norms and limitation for woman, she chose later. Although she was not welcome at her parents' home and her brother who was raised under the influence of his father and has the same outlook towards woman. For him Ammu and her children were no more than a weight he has to bare on his shoulder. Although Ammu had a lot of criticism from various aspects of her life she choose not to be bothered about it and being more of a modern woman. Ammu however was not educated but had more free thoughts then her England return brother. She emerged as a new woman in the novel.

The new woman Ammu can be seen breaking all the walls of patriarchy and society by not only divorcing her husband but having a romantic relationship with a lower classes known as Dalit. Ammu's relationship with Velutha led to Velutha's death. Ammu was not successful to change society's way altogether but she was successful to present thoughts of a woman in the society. She was able to raise a question in readers mind about subjugation of woman and that a woman can challenge these if she wants. Although Ammu was seen as a fallen character who had no one to rely on whose children were taken from her but we can observe that she was not that grounded. She emerged as a woman against when she challenged her husband's decision and left him for her pride and self-respect. She in spite societies' norm of not having any kind of relationship with lower class challenged this very notion and indulged in romantic relationship with Valutha. All together If one observe Ammu as a female character of the novel. She is a marginalised woman who has been put through ethical dilemma all the time and submerged as being the one who throw away the rubbish society norms and chose to do which she wants rather being that thing immoral in the eyes of society.

However Margaret Kochamma serves as foil to Ammu. Where Ammu was not welcomed in her own house Margaret being a divorcee to the only son of Mammachi Chacko she was welcomed by everyone. She in spite of marring someone else was looked as if a esteem guest in Ayemenem. It looks like her being from Britain wiped out all the society norms on her. Sophie Mol her daughter was welcomed by everyone and was welcomed by saying 'Welcome our Sophie Mol' Rehal did not understand why they said 'Our' Sophie Mol. Where Baby Kochamma hated the twins calling them "Half-Hindu Hybrids"(45), she had a big smile on her face while welcoming Sophie Mol. This particular division of emotions of the people around Ammu represented society's hypocrisy. Everyone was willing to welcome Margaret who after divorce with Chacko even married another man, but that was not for Ammu who has left her husband for her self-respect.

In the world of 'The God of Small things' things are unpredictable and can change suddenly. Same happened with the centre character Rahel, daughter of Ammu. Ammu had survived subjugation of her father. Rehal survived far worse than that. Her life was tormented same as her twin brother Esthas'. Childhood of Rehal was particularly not as one child's should be. It was very different in fact than that of any other child. She had witnessed death of her cousin Sophie Mol which shattered her life into pieces. She was separated from her brother whom she thing as her part. She never thought that both of them are separate. She recognised both as one individual. Rehal's mother died in her childhood but her lack of affection towards her did not bothered her during that time. However adult Rehal was disturbed by so many deaths happened

during her childhood. Rehal adapted rebellious nature while growing up whereas Estha kept quit. Rehal was suspended from so many schools because of her rebellious nature or mischiefs she had done. The worst was that she was not accepting any. Rehal can be seen as unconventional woman who unlike her mother was able to break through the chains of rigid social norms and set herself free from all of it.

She went to school of architecture where she married her senior and went to Boston without even completing her degree. She married according to her wish. She married where there was no traditional marriage, no one to give her dowry. The marriage itself broke all the conventional norms of society. She then divorced her husband and worked in Indian restaurant until the news of Estha's return reached her. She decided what was best for her without any interference of others. The incident that shackled every single society's moral establishment was her making love to her twin brother. Roy called all 'Braking love laws'(328) to unconventional relationship of Ammu and Velutha and incest of Estha and Rehal. It seems like Estha was unable to say anything about death of Velutha, Sophie Mol and Ammu and they communicated with the bodies to reveal the pain of it.

Rehal's position in the novel cannot be questioned by her only but that of the society where Rehal and Estha was neglected as children. Her rebellious nature was one way escape from the harsh reality of her life. Her being bold in the school, smoking cigarette and setting headmistress's fake bun on fire represented her psychology. Her husband felt dissatisfaction in her eyes. As if her eyes were searching for someone else. A question can be raised here that whether those eyes were searching Estha or not. Estha and Rehal's Character description is that of a suppressed character. They both suffer and find peace among each other. Their incest relationship though abandoned yet it seems like neither society nor Ayemenem cared about it. It seems like all the social norms were thrown in gutter to achieve the peace which Estha and Rehal were searching since their childhood.

Baby Kochamma however is a character to try to break some rules of society by trying to seduce a father of church in her young days. However she was failed to do so thus lived life alone. She is very important character in the story as she is directly responsible for Velutha's death. She went to police and told that it was Velutha who killed Sophie Mol, because she was aware of relationship of Velutha and Ammu and thought this as a disgusting thing because of social status of Velutha. Baby Kochamma is portrait as villain of the story. She can also be seen as mirror of society.

Roy's novel represented the darkest and deepest realities and desire of Indian society. It has depicted beautifully about how choices play important role in one's life. The unacceptable relationship according to the society represent as one not to care about all the society.

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