

Look



**Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* as a Tragedy of the Lack
of Love**

Dr Ravindra Kumar

Associate Professor, CCS University, Meerut

It is easier to talk about small things because the big things in life are almost out of reach and somehow painful. But even small things can loom large and can change the total course of life. Perhaps these are the sort of things Roy might have pondered about before writing her Booker Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things*. Set in the locale of Ayemenem, the book unfolds the tragic decline of a Syrian Christian family whose members suffer terribly due to the lack of love and understanding. Like other works of literary art, *The God of Small Things* has no single meaning. Roy has used a big canvas to color it with various shades of life and a multifarious variety of characters. Told from the view point of two fraternal twins-Rahel and Estha, the book reveals different aspects of life- religion, love, hatred, agony, ambition, temptation and sex. Feminism, Colonialism, Marxism and caste discrimination are the other aspects dealt by the author in the book. Apart from these issues the book deals with a family's tragedy resulting from a number of complexities of modern life. One can count a lot of reasons for the tragic decline of this family. Like William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, *The God of Small Things* also deals with a family's tragedy that results due to the lack of love. The paper aims to show that lack of love is the root cause responsible for the decline of the Ayemenem family.

The book consists of the story of five generations of a Syrian Christian family living in Ayemenem. Love, which is supposed to be the founding stone of all relationships, is lacking in the fictional world of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Roy has presented a tragic world in the book where most of the characters behave like waste landers and love is a far-off thing to them. Let us begin from Baby Kochamma, the first member of the third generation of this family for whom love has lost its meaning. Frustration in love during her youth turns her to be a sadist in her old age. Now she pours this frustration of unfulfilled love on all who show any sign of this emotion. Ammu and her twins are the worst affected victims of her poisonous





remarks. Being the oldest member of this family, Baby Kochamma should have supported Ammu and her twins. But she shows no sign of love towards them. To her a divorced lady with her children can't be given a respectable place inside the home. She thought that "a married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for a divorced daughter, according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage." (*The God of Small Things*, 45) She shows no affection to Rahel and Estha. Already shattered by fate, the twins needed sympathy and care from the oldest member of this family. But they receive only neglect and hurling comments from her. This behavior of Baby Kochamma contributes a lot in bringing about the tragic downfall of the family.

Pappachi, the other member of this family, also shows no sign of love towards anybody. He is a real waste lander for whom emotions have no importance. Perhaps the love of this man died the moment when the moth discovered by him was not named after him. Though a father of two children, he never seems to take the responsibility of a father. He can well be compared with Mr. Compson of *The Sound and the Fury*- cold and irresponsible.

A true artist is one, who, by the power of the written words, makes the readers hear, see and feel the very nerves of the characters of the book. Roy has been quite successful in making the readers hear, see and feel the very agony of the characters in *The God of Small Things*. The novel is a poetic tale of the twins- Rahel and Estha and their family's tragedy. The focal point of the story is undoubtedly the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society. The book deals with the world of women seen from the eyes of a woman about women. Though Roy never tries to be a feminist, but we certainly find some feminine aspects in the novel. Even a cursory reading of the book reveals that most of the characters suffer for they don't know the language of love. The worst sufferer in *The God of Small Things* is Ammu who is treated like a doll almost by all the characters of the book. We know that Ammu's father Pappachi was a self-conscious Imperial Entomologist at the Pusa Institute. He was a frustrated man in his life because the moth that he had discovered was not named after him. Failure in personal life made him a sadist. When in public he behaves like a sophisticated gentleman and a caring husband and father. But when



alone with his wife and children he becomes a careless caretaker. Soon he starts beating and humiliating Mammachi in all the possible ways he could. The worst victim of this callous atmosphere of the family is Ammu as she is an eyewitness to this parental conflict. Moreover, she is taken like burden both by Mammachi and Pappachi. She is also denied the college education while her brother is sent to Rhodes for higher education. When things become unbearable to her, she craves to get rid of her own home. The only escape for Ammu from this hellish situation was through marriage. During her stay in Calcutta she accepts the marriage proposal of a man whom she does not love at all. But this was the only option left to this girl as she thought that anything anywhere would be better than going back to Ayemenem. Soon she realizes that she committed a great mistake as her husband turned out to be a drunkard and started torturing her physically as well as mentally. One day he crossed all the limitations when he forced Ammu to go to his English boss in order to satisfy his instinctual gratification. Now Ammu had little option except leaving her husband and coming back to Ayemenem. Here she is received as an unwanted woman as she has been divorced. Both Ammu and Chacko are now in the same situation- separated from their life-partners. But Chacko is the head of the family just because he is a male and Ammu works like a servant in the pickle factory of Chacko just because she is a female. Moreover, she witnesses the harshest treatment given to her twins in the family. Not having any support from anyone in the family, Ammu seeks the emotional support of Velutha, the parvan. Now Velutha becomes her world and she tries to fulfill herself through the untamed passion of this man. Every night she goes to meet her lover at the dead dark of night. Unfortunately, the things are revealed to the family members due to the death of Sophie Mol. Velutha is falsely arrested on the charge of murdering Sophie Mol and for kidnapping Ammu. The god of small things is beaten to death. Finally we come to know about the death of Ammu. Even Church denies to bury her body and Chacko had to take the dead body to the electric crematorium where she becomes a receipt no 498693. Thus Ammu suffers throughout her life due to the male dominated patriarchal society and the very lack of love from her own family members. Moreover, she suffers due to the biased attitude of the male-dominated patriarchal society. Her brother can enjoy the girls on the name of "man's need", but Ammu cannot have any relationship like that.





Thus Ammu is mistreated by her father, is forced to satisfy Mr. Hollic by her own husband, is not treated like a sister by her brother and finally is called a prostitute by the police officer. The irony lies in the fact that she is mistreated by her mother too. Life gives little scope to women in traditional Indian society and it's true in the case of Ammu. She can well be compared with Edie in Jefferies' short story, "Snowed Up: A Milestone Story":

"A poor girl is just like a shuttlecock or a tennis ball with all these gentlemen tossing her about one to the other. It is laughable when I think of it to see fat Mr. Thrigg jump up and open the door for me, and Lord Bilberton screwing up his face into a smile of approval (though he hates the Alderman) and Lieut. Aurells scowling at them both, and trying oh, so hard to play chess- which he does not understand- with papa; and all just because. Well, I suppose I am pretty." (20)

The book is a subjective account of Arundhati Roy where she unfolds the complexities of man-woman relationship. Being an unprotected child in her early life Roy wants to give message that the children brought up in callous and loveless atmosphere are bound to suffer. Ammu is a strong example of this bitter fact. She never gets the type of love from her parents that a child is supposed to get from them during the early years of life. Had Ammu got the much required love from her parents, the story of her life would not have ended so tragically. As a result of the lack of love and affection from her careless mother and hypochondriac father, Ammu suffers throughout her life and finally dies tragically.

Mammachi, the other emotionally barren character in *The God of Small Things*, is the unfortunate wife of Pappachi who remains loveless throughout her life. She gets no love from her husband. Often she was a soft target of the outbursts of Pappachi's physical and mental violence. She is frequently beaten by her husband and is forced to remain outside the home on a number of occasions. The fact that Mammachi is running the pickle factory successfully causes much irritation to Pappachi, a male. But the problem is that she is committing the same crime she has been fighting against throughout her life. In a way, she proves the famous statement of the Gujarati novelist, Kundanika Kapadia that woman is the greatest enemy of a woman. Generally a mother tries to protect her child in all the possible ways. But Mammachi never seems to help her





own daughter and leaves her to be lynched by the sharp daggers of the cruel time. She is like Mrs. Compson of *The Sound and the Fury*- cynical and self-absorbed. Perhaps she does not understand the value of love and motherly affection. She is harsh not only to Ammu and her twins but to the factory workers also. She reacts very harshly to the demand of the factory workers, "Tell them to read the papers. There is a famine on. There are no jobs. People are starving to death. They should be very grateful they have any work at all." (245) She shows no human love and sympathy while dealing with Velutha. At one place she spits into Veutha's face and threatens him saying that she would get him castrated like the pariah dog. In short this lady has no place for love in her heart and this contributes in bringing about the downfall of the Ayemenem family to a great extent. Chacko is the other member of this family who destroys his own family members due to the lack of love. He is a practical materialist who could develop no permanent bond with his wife. His attitude to his niece and nephew is also indifferent and loveless. Perhaps he is a true son of his father as, like his father, he also believes in male domination over female. His lack of love and understanding alienates him not only from his own wife and daughter but also from the other members of the family.

Ammu's Bengali husband, Baba is also responsible for the tragic downfall of the Ayemenem family. If Ammu and her twins suffer, Baba is to be blamed mainly. His was a love marriage with Ammu and from this viewpoint he should have taken great care of his wife. But he turns out to be a modern waste lander who even goes to the extent of forcing his wife to please another man. He is perhaps the worst husband of the world who uses his wife for trivial worldly benefit. He is the root cause for the suffering of Ammu and her twins. The novel can be well compared with William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, which, like *The God of Small Things*, is a tragedy of lack of love. In both the books, parents are mainly responsible for the tragic downfall of the children and the family. Rahel and Estha of *The God of Small Things* are like the Compson children of *The Sound and the Fury*. In both the books, children suffer due to the irresponsible and loveless behavior of the parents. Velutha, the Parvan of *The God of Small Things* can be compared with the black Dilsey of *The Sound and the Fury*. If Dilsey is a ray of light and hope for the Compson children, Velutha is the very source of love to Ammu and her twins.





Roy has presented a bleak and tragic vision of life in *The God of Small Things*. Love, which is the base of all human bonds, is hardly expressed by any of the characters of the Ayemenem family and marriage, which seals the bond of love, turns out to be a social obligation. Roy tries to draw the attention to the fact that the family which is dominated by male ego and supremacy is bound to suffer and the children brought up in such atmosphere may suffer mentally throughout the life. Benji in *The Sound and the Fury* and Estha in *The God of Small Things* are the best examples of this fact. Due to the lack of love and understanding most of the members of this Syrian Christian family suffer, feel alienated and finally end up chaotically. For them life becomes a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. All the pairs of the book-Mammachi-Pappachi, Ammu-Baba, Chacko-Margaret Kochamma, and Rahel- Larry McCaslin suffer and develop no fecund relationship due to the lack of love and understanding. Most of them are the victims of self-love and contribute well in bringing about the downfall of the family. They all forget that love is the kelson of creation.

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