

# A Journey Towards Self-Realization in the Novel God of Small Things

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**Abstract** - Booker prize winner Arundhati Roy's novel *God of Small Things* speaks about casteism, discrimination, marital issues, childhood struggles, marginalization, and woman subjugation. The plot is centered on the life of the twins Rahel and Estha who face traumatic childhood experiences because of their parental mistakes, social construct, and patriarchal society. The psychological issue that they face is the feeling of not being loved and also they were tormented physically and emotionally. The setting of the story is set in Kerala which follows the old patriarchal order. The novel is in third person narrative to give the readers a better perspective of the feeling and emotions of the characters. The various characters in the novel make mistakes that directly and indirectly affect the lives of the twins. Each character in the novel has a traumatizing past.

The founder of analytical psychology Carl Jung has explained the impact of the consciousness and unconsciousness, which became a great breakthrough in the field of psychology. He is known for the concept of collective unconsciousness which in simple terms means that every individual has a similar psychological construct and he also explains the influence of the unconscious in day to day situations. The article explains through *God of Small Things* and Carl Jung's theory that an unconscious traumatic experience faced by an individual has an effect on one's actions and thought process.

**Index Terms** - Culture, identity, feminism, psychology, understanding, dreams, self-realization, Caste, society, marginalization, unconscious, conscious, Carl Jung.

## INTRODUCTION

Booker prize winner Suzanne Arundhati Roy has occupied a prominent place among the contemporary literary world's prominent figures. Women's rights, gender politics, and identity are among the major themes in Roy's debut novel. The condition of the

society, communism, untouchability, strained human relationships, loss of identity, and a constant quest to achieve it are woven into the fictitious fabric of *The God of Small Things*. Women and other vulnerable groups have made their space for themselves by fighting against all forms of exclusion.

The oppression structures in this novel differ depending on the context. Applying Carl Jung's psychological theory to the novel, the gender issues faced by the characters, their struggle to create an identity during a patriarchal era are analyzed. There is a strong focus on the horrors of caste and gender discrimination that is prevalent in India. There is also a focus on how women, generally, are marginalized and oppressed. The article examines the discourse of marginality and the resistance towards it. This theme is evident in each of the novel's generations, which emphasizes women's subjugation. A male-dominated society, broken homes, and caste discrimination are all depicted in *The God of Small Things*, along with the problems faced by women in it.

Gender does not only refer to social and cultural constructions of being female or male. Feminism and masculinity are viewed as cultural and social constructions. Since it is a product of culture, it can hardly be separated. Judith Butler introduced the notion of gender performativity in her book *Gender Trouble* in 1990. In her view, a person's behavior is not determined by being born male or female. Rather than fitting in, people learn how to act in certain ways. In her female characters, Roy portrays gender as irreproachable, as Judith Butler makes clear in *Gender Is a Performance*.

As a patriarchal society, Indian women have always suffered and have been suppressed, this is evident in the novel *The God of Small Things*. The novel focuses on the experiences of women across three generations. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are the first

generations, Ammu is the second generation, and finally Rahel. The novel is set in a patriarchal system which indicates the women characters struggle to find their identity in a society that is quite hostile towards them.

In a patriarchal society, the women fall victim to three generations. Compared to the current generation of women, the first generation is at ease with their subordination and approves of patriarchy. This story opens in Ayemenem, a town in Kerala, the story is narrated in fragments. It is a place where there is a strong patriarchal bias that gives a hint to the character's struggle for seeking an identity in a hostile society. Rahel is one of the twins and the protagonist of the novel perspective shifts between being a seven-year-old and an adult. Throughout her life, she has been excavating the traumatizing past.

Characters in *The God of Small Things* portray the lives of oppressed, marginalized people. The protagonist Ammu drives the story forward. Throughout it, we see her aspirations, frustrations, and rebelliousness against patriarchal society, culminating in her expiration. Women's rights are suppressed from within the home. Ammu was born into a family of Syrian Catholic Christians. In her childhood, she was subjected to patriarchy.

Literature and psychology have a long-standing connection dating back to psychology's origins. Carl Jung's analytical psychology helps to understand the character of each individual by learning how they differ from one another regarding their personality. It can be a useful tool for exploring humanity by analyzing the unconscious desires, feelings, emotions, and thoughts of the individual. The psychoanalytical theory introduced by Carl Jung has a mystical aspect. The concept of personality types was also introduced by Jung, as well as how people develop their personalities throughout life. At least from a Western perspective, Jung believes that the human psyche contains psychological constructs developed throughout evolution. It is Jung's concept of the collective unconscious that provided the framework for psychodynamic thought. Quite simply, this is the unconscious mind structures that are found in the mind of people all over the world or the patterns and reactions they share in the mind. Across all societies and sections of society, Jung considered introverts and extroverts to be the same. Considering our basic tendency toward introversion or extraversion, Jung's

four functions describe how we adapt to our external environment. Feeling and thinking are the first two opposing functions. Thinking teaches you how to understand something, but feeling teaches you how to understand something through values.

The protagonist, Ammu, watched her mother being ill-treated by the protagonist's father, Pappachi. Having been victimized by Ammu's father's extreme cruelty and marginalization, both Ammu and Mammachi lived lives filled with extreme levels of oppression and marginalization. Throughout her family, Ammu is subjected to male prejudice and gender bias. The brutality of masculine power has been a part of her life since an early age. It is believed that Pappachi, Ammu's father, beat his wife with a brass vase as an expression of his imperial power.

Mommachi, Ammu's mother, was a brilliant violinist. Pappachi made Mammachi discontinue the lessons when her violin teacher told her that she was exceptionally talented and had the potential to become a famous violinist. Pappachi has always felt inferior to Mammachi, and he did not want her to outshine him. This was the first time they experienced male dominance Mammachi didn't like the fact that she was a good cook when she started to sell pickles. In this story, Mammachi plays the part of an idealized suffering wife submitting herself to patriarchal dominance. Her daughter Ammu is also affected by her repressed anger of a frustrated and unsatisfying marriage.

A famous entomologist and former government employee, Papachi discovered a new species of moth but the significance of the discovery was understandable only after his retirement. Following official science protocol, a moth wasn't named after him. A family curse is pictured by Papachi's moth, which comes to visit each member of the family over generations. All through the novel, it is a symbol of fear and unhappiness. During the cold winter nights in Delhi, Papachi hurled Mammachi and Ammu out of the house on purpose to cause psychological disturbance to them. In the fight between Ammu and Mammachi, Pappachi ripped apart Ammu's favorite shoes. Roy depicts the cruelty of Pappachi through the lines, "Not content with having beaten his wife and daughter, he tore down curtains, kicked furniture and smashed a table lamp" (181). Ammu's character formed by the discordant atmosphere in her family prepares her for this intentional cruelty. Susan

Friedman observes: "the problem for women who identify with their nation in its struggles against outside domination has been how to bring about changes in the gender system without being discredited as traitors to their own people."(114) Pappachi has a complex character and is introverted. Despite his best efforts, he's a terror in his family who attempts to portray himself as a good, giving man. He treated his wife and daughter coldly and bitterly after the moth incident. "The moth "haunted every house that he ever lived in" and "tormented" him, his children and his grandchildren." (49). Chacko never talked to or touched Mammachi again after Chacko stopped Pappachi from beating Mammachi. Whenever he needed anything, Baby Kochamma or the servant Kochu Maria helped him. The Plymouth car he used as a weapon of vengeance was not allowed to be driven by any family members.

Pickle factories like Mammachi's are another means of freezing time, like Rahel's watch. The main purpose of pickling and preserving is to extend the shelf life of items that have a limited shelf life. Considering Sophie Mol's banana jam and the family business, the result cannot be an accident. The pickles factory is the centerpiece of Ayemenem's house, reminding readers of the theme of the novel: the preservation of memories. Jung posited a profound concept: relative time. To achieve synchronistic experiences, a multidimensional approach is needed. An important factor is to appreciate our experience when we understand the time and how time affects personality. By exploring meaning and connection beyond our daily routines with Jung's theory of time, we gain a much deeper understanding of meaning and existence than we would have with Jung's dichotomous view. In his adult years, Estha became silent due to the trauma he endured as a child. The theory of Jung shows that when the distressing memories are suppressed for a long time, they gradually affect a person's personality. Estha has been traumatized to the point of not being able to speak. As Estha recounts the traumatic incident involving the Orangedrink Lemondrink man, readers are brought back to the Orangedrink Lemondrink incident.

She suffers a similar feeling of security loss to Estha after experiencing this incident too. Though Estha hasn't told Rahel anything about the incident, the twins have a deep subconscious connection. Rahel senses that the Orangedrink Lemondrink man has done

something to damage Estha. Estha wants to hide in the History House rather than take a boat across the river because of her fear of the Orangedrink Lemondrink man. This history house turns into a venue of both violence and love as these incidents continue to occur. As mention in Man and his symbols,

The sad truth is that man's real life consists of a complex of inexorable opposites-day and night, birth and death, happiness and misery, good and evil. We are not even sure that one will prevail against the other, that good will overcome evil, or joy defeat pain. Life is a battleground. It always has been, and always will be. (75)

Individuals must realize that ideas and memories can have greater power than the actual people in them. In their lifetimes, the twins are haunted by the death of Sophie Mol, a trauma that is central to their daily lives. Margaret Kochamma's grief over the death of her daughter adds to the already built-up guilt feelings of the twins, which had already been built up by Baby Kochamma. Through the incident they called "Terror," the twins learned that their fate changed in a few hours as punishment for walking into forbidden territory by breaking the love laws. Similar to Rahel's watch, the events in the novel are frozen in time. The watch always displays at the same time, just as it does in the novel. Rahel's watch symbolizes the end of a very brief time in Sophie Mol's life, which centered on her death.

The characters in *God of Small Things* are shaped by social constructs based on gender. Rahel, one of Ammu's twins, is the next character to experience the psychological torment of sexism and patriarchal dominance in this novel. In the years following the death of Rahel's mother, Mammachi and Chacko cared for her, providing her with food, fees for school, clothing, and extracurricular activities. Her family treats her as an outsider, which leads to isolation and suffocation in that house. In the aftermath of her divorce from Larry, Rahel returns to her hometown to meet her twin brother, Estha. While to some, it was amusing, to others, it was disgraceful, to follow the same old conceptions and prejudices in Ayemenem.

The unconscious mind and the effect of repressed trauma are discussed in Carl Jung's theory. In the unconscious region of the mind, traumatic experiences that have taken place during the early stages of a person's life are stored as memories. As a result of the damage they undergo, the ego fails to repress these

experiences in the unconscious mind. Therefore, it interferes with their actions, which results in lasting impressions of their behavior. The twins are raised by Ammu as their father and mother. To prove that a woman is capable of raising children without a man's help, she shows her fierce love for her children. Besides being their baba, she was also their Ammu. Rather than morality, Jung believed that consciousness would save us from these menacing, dark forces. An individual must develop psychologically. As a result, Ammu's decision disrupts racial and gender stratifications within her immediate family and beyond. Consequently, the community retaliates violently to maintain their integrity and power, which has devastating consequences for both Ammu and her lover.

Elleke Boehmer observes:

The God of Small Things tirelessly worries at problems of responsibility ... the individual and the community is positioned within crises-crossing causal webs of transnational as well as national interrelationship; which commit them to particular actions and choices. Bodies and desires, as in the repeated reference to the 'Love Laws', are strongly conceived as political" (183)

The journey individuals take in many ways structures their lives and impact their experiences unconsciously. It is evident from the characters of *The God of Small things*; each character takes their road based on their experiences and difficulties. Each juncture in their lives paves way towards self-discovery. A story is created from fragments of memories, facts, and experiences set against the backdrop of a rural, high-tension Indian town. Throughout the story, the author expresses faith in the persistence of fragile things, the value of love for people, and the likelihood of ethics of tolerance, humility, and forgiveness. As Roy appears to believe, these little things are what can alleviate the ailments of the contemporary human condition and, by doing so, form a new sensibility, one which is not postmodern, but rather, a journey towards self-realization.

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