



# COMPLICATED AND DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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**ABSTRACT:** Relationships are necessary for humans not only to have somebody by their side but also to make themselves firm in the storm of life. Family is the stem of man, which gives strength in their ups and downs. One's life is incomplete without family; if there is no unity and empathy towards each other in a members of family, it will surely be torn apart into pieces. This novel is full of human relationships, a big family chain. *God of Small Things* is the novel about an Ipe family and the relationships among the family members, caste and political system of India. In this novel we find complicated relationships among Ipe family members and how dysfunctional families snatched peace and happiness and pushed them toward dark pit. We also find love laws that are assigned by society or caste and gender discrimination in the novel, which is the core reason for destruction in the story. The eye-catching characters are the twins in the novel, who appear as one soul in two bodies. We get to see colours of different types of family relationships in this book, "where we laugh for a moment, it also makes us cry for another moment". Roy's each character is unique in itself and which tells their own sad stories. This research paper brings into light all the above aspects of the novel in a detailed way.

**KEYWORDS:** Politics, love laws, Patriarchy, Family and Caste

## INTRODUCTION

In India, one feels blessed who have family, family who supports and believes them. The importance of family and familial relationships were depicted in Indian English novels with warmth. As we Indians are tie in the knot of several types of relationships, we do believe in the knot of that strength and are well projected by Indian English authors like Kamala Markandaya, one of the well known literary figure and who wrote *Nectar in the Sieve* reflects entangled relationships and *A Silence of Desire* depicts relationships between husband and wife. Familial kinship was also found in Anita Desai's fictions, too. Authors from the very inside of society filtered out the theme of relationships among people. Unlike others, Arundhati Roy remarkably shows complicated relationships in her award-winning book *God of Small Things*. It's the debut novel by Arundhati Roy. She uses Montage Technique to build her plot. The novel consist of twenty one chapters. In the novel we find Indian familial relationship.

Arundhati Roy is the novelist and activist of India; she is the renowned writer among contemporary Indian English novelists. In 1997 this book achieved booker prize and also became most read in India. Along with this, Roy contributes in political as well as social activities. Recently she came out with her new book *Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, which shows her interest in politics. This research paper makes a lucrative effort to bring how a distorted family is torn apart into pieces because of differences among family members and how it affects them mentally and emotionally. In the novel we find complicated relationships among the three generations of Ipe family. In this novel we perceive multiple colours of relationships. This novel is about family relationships, politics, caste system and love. In general, the dynamics of human relationships change with the passage of time, but if the changing scenario is in a negative direction than it might ruin peace and lives of people, which we also witness in this book. Roy fabricated her each character in a unique way which told their individual life stories in their own lives.

The story is set in Ayemenem, a town in Kerala. We find soothing description of nature and weather of Kerala. The beautiful description of Kerala in the month of summer and monsoon. Ipe family is Syrian Christian. Roy's narrative unfolds by the twins of the novel, the innocence of children spread from the beginning, who are unheeded by societal and political cyclones. The twins, Rahel and Estha are attached to each other so closely that they appear as one soul in two bodies. The fragmentation of family harms twins not only physically but also emotionally and mentally; their erstwhile memories haunted them, which torn Estha in "Quietness" and Rahel in "Emptiness". The twins were deprived of the niche of their parents. They were nurtured in a very stressful environment by Ipe family.

Social and political factors play a dominant role in the lives of each character in the novel. Those who suffered extremely were the twins; their lives were torn apart because of the love laws that prevailed in Indian society. Estha being a quiet child, he appeals to be calm and composed. "Estha had always been a quite child"(10). He refuses to go to college because his father divorced his mother and re-married. He was a mediocre, "an average student" at school, who did not participate in any curriculum of the school. Rahel was opposite to Estha. She was a rebellious child and restricted form the school. Her mischief makes her different from the other girls in the school. Ammu tried hard to become a mother and father, both for twins, but she didn't succeed

in her parenthood. After Ammu's death, Rahel was ignored by her uncle Chacko and grandmother Mammachi; they only provided necessarily things to Rahel and not love and concern.

This research paper also emphasizes dysfunctional Ipe family dynamics. The interesting character in the novel is Baby Kochamma, the head of the family who joggled Ipe family towards destruction. Baby Kochamma is Ammu's paternal aunt, an unmarried snooty old lady. She appears like the antagonist of the novel, as she has grudges for her own family members, and in her eighties she puts on all the jewelleries and puts on lots of makeup. Roy fabricates baby kochamma life as a materialistic old woman, who only loves her wealth despite of her loved one "Baby Kochamma loved the Ayemenem house and cherished the furniture that she inherited by outliving everybody else. Mammachi's violin and violin stand, the Ooty cupboards, the plastic basket hairs, the Delhi beds, the dressing table from Vienna with cracked ivory knobs" (28). People don't value the importance and strength of the family. They don't value their own members of the family. Baby Kochamma did not like twins, nor Ammu; as a woman; she was incapable of understanding Ammu's feelings and turmoil. Her disliking towards the twins roars clear and loud. Family is like a tree, and the members are like branches of the tree; this sense of togetherness lacks in the character of baby kochamma.

Gender discrimination plays a vital role in the plot. The novel transcribe patriarchal dominance in society. Its show vulnerable condition of women in Social and Political discourse. Women's subservience starts from family and goes along with life and the outer world. Ammu, the daughter of Ipe family, became the prey in the hand of this social and political system. Ammu's relationship in the novel is fatally bitter, although she's portrait as a strong lady with the headstrong opinion that's the reason for her drastic downfall. Since her childhood, she has been deprived of her parents' love and affection. Ammu's own relationship with her father Pappachi and mother Mammachi was bitter since she was young. Ammu was fed up of her father's bad behaviour, as he beats her mother brutally "every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beating weren't new"(46). She wanted to flew away from that toxic environment; she went to Calcutta at her aunt's place. She meets Baba there and decides to marry him without knowing him fully. Later on she encounters his drinking habits and ill behaviour, which have torn their married life apart. Baba, a drunkard abuses Ammu morally and physically. When Ammu gave birth to twins, her relationship with Baba didn't flourish; he decided to leave her husband and go to Ayemenem. Ammu's life is affected when she raises her voice against injustice with her and stands up for herself. She tries to decipher her identity in her marriage. Ammu breaks society's taboos and becomes a villain in everybody's eyes. The plight of Ammu is in an unhappy marriage; her plight not even ends when she leaves her husband. Along with her twins, she was unwelcome in Ipe family. She was prohibited from every kind of love and support; she felt lonely and finds herself in disparity.

Ammu is the strong opinionated woman with keen interest in life. Her opinion was reflected when she gave her thought about Chacko being clever and having ministerial qualities. Ammu encountered that society was biased towards women. She works hard as much as Chacko does, but still he thinks he's the owner of the factory." Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society"(57). Ammu and her twins were not welcome in the Ipe family. They were seen as unwelcome guests in the house. They don't even treat them as family members. We find complicated relationships in the novels between Ammu and members of her

family. Rahel after her mother's death found herself in disparity; no one in the Ipe family loves or cares for her. She grew up without motherly love. "largely ignored by Chacko and Mammachi and largely ignoring Baby Kochamma"(15).

Ammu being in patriarchy society seen male dominance in all walks of life. Whether it is in Ipe family, in her married life, and in the societal frame. Baba wanted her to sleep with his boss to make his job secure. Ammu violated his will as she didn't want to compromise with her honour and respect. Ammu didn't want to be a play thing in the hands of a male; she took the hardest decision of her life and left her husband's house without caring for societal norms and traditions. She knows no one is going to take care of their expense so Ammu also started working in their pickle factory. Ammu, being an Indian mother, melted her golden jewellery into bangles for Rahel's wedding as she knows no one is going to do all this for her daughter. Ammu sent Estha to her father, when she finds helpless in giving a good life to her twins. Rahel married an Englishman and soon she got divorced; she got a letter from Baby Kochamma informing her about Estha re-returned to Ayemenem. Twins meet each other after twenty three years in Ayemenem.

Mammachi was Chacko and Ammu's mother. She appears as a typical Indian house wife, who holds strings for her family, even being in an abusive marriage. Her plight ends when Chacko takes the stands for her; he holds his father's hand for not beating Mammachi. "I never want this to happen again"(48). For Mammachi, Chacko was intelligent and "clever men in India". She added a point by saying that during his stay in aboard people thought that Chacko had ministerial qualities. Along with others, she also did not like Ammu's decision to leave her husband. Mammachi thought the twins had suffered due to their parents. Distorted family leaves scratches in children's lives. Mammachi hired Velutha in their factory as a carpenter. She paid him less than the other carpenters in the factory because he was Paravan.

We also witness patriarchal dominance in the novel. Pappachi is a drunkard man who thinks higher education is not necessary for female and a waste of money. Swami Vivekananda in 1893 wrote in one of his letters to Haripada, "Can you better the condition of your women? Then there will be hope for your well-being. Otherwise you will remain as backwards as you are now"(4). This advice stands true even in the current Indian scenario. If we desire to develop the nation, we ought to develop the status of women first.

Casteism plays a dominant role in the novel. The caste system of India deeply imprinted in the mind of people so that they cannot think beyond social obligation because of the sensitive issue of caste system and anti-communism theme, this work was criticized by people but there are people who appreciates Roy's artistic discourse. In the novel Velutha is the God of Small Things. Velutha is the "Paravan", an untouchable in the story carved by Roy. Velutha means "white in Malayalam". The irony is that Velutha is black. Untouchables were not allowed to touch anything of "touchable". This discrimination is an inhuman act and a real side of our society, which Roy showed impeccably. The ill treatment, oppression, and discrimination of untouchable well depicted by Roy in this novel.

Velutha feels attached to the twins; he used to do all that Ammu wanted her family to do for her twins. He plays with them, shows his love, and cares for the twins. Ammu loves knowing that her twins are getting so much love and affection. For Ammu's microcosm god of small things is all Velutha. She falls in love with him, and as Velutha was untouchable, he has to pay the price for loving the upper cast of women. We find bigotry and love laws of society in the novel which takes Velutha's life. When Velutha was charged with Sophie Mol's death, Ammu wants him freed from bars. She went to Kottayam police station. With the big mustaches inspector Thomas Mathew, insulted Ammu in front of her twins. She felt ashamed and devastated by his ill behaviour. "He stared at Ammu's breasts... police didn't take statements from Veshyas or their illegitimate children"(8). She cried and feels humiliated for the misbehaviour that happens to her. Her twins were so innocent that they didn't even know the meaning of Veshyas and were illegitimate. Ammu finds herself guilty for Velutha's death " I 've killed him"(8).

We find partial behaviour among people of Ipe family. Margaret Kochamma was the ex-wife of Chacko, who lives in England. According to Chacko, their Ipe family is "Anglophiles". Chacko still had soft corner for her, so he invites her and her daughter Sophie Mol to India to celebrate Christmas as he doesn't want them to be alone in England. Whole Ipe family starts preparations for their welcome; everybody looks excited except Ammu and her kids. Between those happy days, tragedy occurs in an Ipe family when Sophie Mol drowns in the river. Everybody blames the twins for the loss and behaves fatally; maybe they were the soft target to them. Margaret's only daughter's death shakes her up like hell. Margaret Kochamma, a divorced and marrying other man still welcomed in the Ipe family. The double standard of the Ipe family toward women has been witnesses in the novel.

## CONCLUSION

While analyzing the novel *God of Small Things*, we come across multiple relationships between the characters. These relationships are bitter inside and out whether its Baby Kochamma's relationships with Ammu and Ammu's twins, Pappachi with Mammachi, Chacko and Mammachi's with the twins, and Ammu's relationships with her parents, Baby Kochamma and Baba. The only relationship which came out truthful was Velutha's relationship with twins; it was heart touching and gives us warmth. He's the only character in Arundhati Roy who had an unconditional love and affection for the twins. He brings a ray of hope and a smile for the twins While critically encountering the novel, we also find references to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Shakespeare's *Tempest*. The use of the figure of speech is well crafted by Roy in the novel. She uses metaphors to show characteristics of the characters, like comparing Comrade Pillai to a chameleon. The person who hides his real sides. Roy carved her award-winning book keenly, which shows her artistic quality. Being an Indian, she's well aware of Indian society, their values and predominant set norms followed by people which greatly helped her to knit this novel *God of Small Things*.

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