



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**English Literature**

**HUMAN EQUATIONS IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S 'THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS'**

**KEY WORDS:** Society, Equation, Relation, Struggle

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**ABSTRACT**

Arundhati Roy, a prolific fiction writer was awarded the prestigious Booker Prize for literature in 1997 for the novel *The God of Small Things* which earned fame for her worldwide. She has depicted vivid portrayal of contemporary social life of India in it. The novel attempts Man-Woman relationships with particular and peculiar angles of equations. Three generations of women have been represented in it to find out their roots of identity and existence. In the gradual growth of the story one can also find some traces of feminine cult of woman empowerment.

**INTRODUCTION:**

The portrayal of human equations is as old as the 'novel' form itself. Richardson and fielding on the one hand D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Wolf, Hemingway and Faulkner on the other have been primarily concerned with this fundamental relationship. As D. H. Lawrence points out: "The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman..." (p. 130). R. K. Narayan embodies the incompatible man-woman equations in *The Dark Room* and *The Guide*, Raja Rao in *The Serpent and The Rope*, Mulk Raj Anand in *Gauri*, Bhabani Bhattacharya in *Music For Mohini*, Manohar Malgaonkar in *A Bend in The Ganges*, Arun Joshi in *The Foreigner* and *The Strange Case of Billy Bishwas* and Nayantara Sahgal in *Storm in Chandigarh*.

**MAN-WOMAN EQUATION:**

Man-Woman equations are one of the major issues in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. She explores the psychic depth of her characters and analyses in detail their motives. The plot or story of the novel is not as important as the depiction of fragile and tenuous matrimonial ties that bind her hyper sensitive women and their practical, over busy husband. Her main concern is the existential predicament of an individual which is projected through the incompatible couples-acutely sensitive wives and dismal, callous inconsiderable, ill-chosen husbands.

The story element in the *The God of Small Things* is rather copious. It centers round fraternal twins, Estha and Rahel, and their mother Ammu who has been ostracized by her family and society in the small town of Ayemenem, near Kottayam, because she had the audacity to divorce the drunken and abusive man she had married and, in due course evolving love and affinity for untouchable.

Set in Kerala, India in 1969, *The God of Small Things* is the story of seven-years-old twins Rahel and Estha, born of a wealthy family and literally joined at the soul. Rahel and Estha are cared for by a host of compelling characters: their beautiful mother, Ammu, who has left a violent husband; their Marxist uncle, Chacko, still pining for his English wife and daughter who left him. We have in the novel Rahel and Estha's prickly grandaunt, Baby Kochamma, still preserving her virginity; and the volatile Velutha, a member of the Untouchable caste. When Chacko's ex-wife, Margaret, and lovely daughter, Sophie Mol, unexpectedly return, the household turns into disarray.

**MAJOR CHARACTERS:**

Marriage for Ammu's father **Pappachi** signifies the male's domination over woman. For Ammu the plight of a suffering

**Mammachi**, her mother was too horrible an experience. For the outsider he was "sophisticated, generous moral man" (p. 180) whereas for the mother and the daughter he was "a monstrous suspicious bully" (p. 180). Both the mother as well as the daughter were "beaten humiliated" and more painful were the fact that they were considered an enviable lot "for having such a wonderful husband and father" (p. 180).

One is dazed to watch the atrocious behavior of the noble beast that would turn the two out of the house in the wintery nights of Delhi. They could not complain, and the two would seek shelter behind "the mehndi hedge" (p. 181) so that their discomfort remained unknown "to people from good family" (p. 181). The brute was adamant in exacting his punishment and when Ammu dares to risk the flogging to save her gumboots she is not only flogged but also ordered to bring shears from her mother's cupboard to see her loved possession "shred into a sea of twisting rubber snakes" (p. 181). This dotting father showered on his terrified daughter cold, calculating, cruelty.

The typical Indian feminine psyche of a wife does not rear contempt in Mammachi. She continues to worship her 'late' husband feels satisfied to notice "Pappachi nose" in Sophie Mol and very carefully preserves the obituary cutting from the news-paper. Pappachi, would donate money to orphanages and leprosy clinics. But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous suspicious bully. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer. Moreover, he had always been a jealous man.

However, **Ammu** is not in her mother's image of a submissive wife. She strongly protests to oblige the boss for his "indecent proposal" and prefers to seek divorce much to the sadistic relief of the village people. Those who change Ammu of waywardness, governed by animal instincts, fail to realize that all her life she had been looking for a man who would be a good father-unlike her own father. Her first marriage was an attempt to escape from her father in which her immature adolescence blundered. However, in her choice of her lover she was torn between the "infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of suicide bomber" (p. 44). In fact, she wanted a person who would be equally devoted and acceptable to her children. In **Velutha** she had the satisfaction of having found a person 'who loved her by night and her children by the day'.

Ammu's experiences of conjugal life were almost equally pulverizing. She had to live with a "cold calculating cruelty" (p. 181) throughout her life-"Drunken violence followed by post drunken badgering" (p. 42) at the hand of her Bengali

husband. By the time she realized that "life had been lived. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man". (p. 47) what is, however, worth noting in Ammu's case is that marriage, motherhood and divorce did not kill the mother in her.

**ARCHANA BHATTACHARJEE RIGHTLY REMARKS:**

Ammu is an entirely tragic character tortured and abused by the police, family and politics. Amu's character presents the picture of the average women in the present day social set-up. If we minutely dive deep into her character, we detect three important features. First she is a lady of chastity and purity. It is this virtue which makes her divorce her husband. Secondly, she has a great capacity to endure sufferings upon sufferings. Thirdly she believes in the theory of etiquette and manner, decorum and decency. She never harbors any grudge in her heart against anybody.<sup>2</sup> (p. 70)

Ammu's act of marrying out of the Syrian Christian community itself is said to be a quite assertion of her right over her body. She would not go to satisfy the white sahib even if it results in her leaving her husband forever and coming to her parental house where she has "no claim to her property" and has "no Locusts stand I". (p. 57) As the full master of her body, she would shrug off her own children if she "wanted her body back" (p. 222). Moreover, she would play a full and major role in the sexual act. The active involvement on the dance of Ammu is emphasized through the following passage expressed in a highly passionate language:

Seven years of oblivion lifted off her and Flew into the shadows on weighty, quacking wings. Like a dull, steel peahen. And on Ammu's Road (to age and Death) a small, a small, sunny meadow appeared. Copper grass spangled with blue Butterflies. Beyond it, an abyss. (p. 337)

**Rahel**, the reprehensive of the third generation, who is still better off than her grandmother and mother. Rahel has been a 'rebel' right from her childhood. She wanted a watch which would show time according to her wishes. In the convent, she smoke, burnt her teacher's bun of hair and dashed against young girls to see if breasts could hurt one. She "grew up without anybody arranging a marriage for her, (p. 17) in fact, she has to be "drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts toward an unoccupied chair in an important lounge"(p. 18) Economic self-sufficiency gives her an edge over other women including her mother, and she deals her divorce in a very calm and cool manner.

As against Ammu and Rahel there is **Baby kochamma**, the mastermind behind all their problems. She tried to seduce the Irish monk, father Mulligan, with her "trembling kissable mouth and blazing coal-black eyes" (p. 23). Her biblical doubts and conversion to Catholicism were, however, of no help. Even this unfortunate experience fails to soften her attitude to Ammu and her twins. Through Baby Kochamma's example, the novelist conclusively shows that women are the worst perpetrators of suffering on women. Roy approves of women like Ammu and Rahel but has no sympathy for double-dealers like Baby Kochamma and Mammachi.

**AMOROUS DESCRIPTION:**

The treatment of man-woman equations would remain incomplete unless the description of carnal love is not added to it. For Arundhati Roy, sex ceases to be a private matter. All her references are to probe the reason for one's behavior, moods and attitudes. Through such description of biological urge she probably tells herself:

Everything that concern the interplay of innumerable pleasures sensations and thoughts which throw the body and the soul had some affinity with sex. (p. 338)

The novelist's titillating depiction of the sexual act may seem

indecent and objectionable but it is not so since she has a point to discuss and to confess sexuality. It is not only an act challenging the social and moral code but a vital feminine desire to transform her sexual urge into an open discussion. This scintillating sexual urge can be best seen in the following carnal act of Velutha and Ammu:

She unbuttoned her shirt. They stood there. Skin to skin. Her brownness against his blackness. Her softness against his hardness. Her nut-brown breasts (that wouldn't support a tooth-brush) against his smooth ebony chest. She smelled the river on him. His particular paravan smell that so disgusted Baby Kochamma. Ammu put out her tongue and taste it, in the hollow of his throat. On the lobe of his ear. She pulled his head down towards her and kissed his mouth. A cloudy kiss. A kiss that demanded a kiss-back. He kissed her back. First cautiously. Then urgently. Slowly his arms came up behind her. He stroked her back. Very gently. (pp. 334, 335)

**CONCLUSION:**

The man-woman equations in *The God of Small Things* are either imbalanced or non-balanced. The tendency of Arundhati Roy's protagonists is often out of order. Since they are determined to maintain their identity and individuality, they fail to achieve fulfillment in human relationships. Yet, the desire to love and to be loved is equally strong in them. However, due to their temperamental peculiarities their actions generate negative emotions. Their actions are often individualistic, separating and withdraw from each other in order to disentangle themselves from stifling ties. Thus the mutual interaction between the spouses neither makes them feel close and united nor infuses them with a sense of security or rootedness.

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