

Women's Identity and Agency in *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

The present study explores the representation of women's identity and agency in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The novel examines the effects of patriarchy on female desire, motherhood, sexuality, trauma, and emotional expression. Characters in Roy's novel such as Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Rahel represent the spectrum of responses to patriarchal authority from resistance to compliance to complicity. The article explores the novel's portrayal of spousal violence, social judgement and emotional repression, as well as Roy's narrative method, symbolism and broken chronology. Ammu's relationship with Velutha is given special focus as a resistance to the constraints of caste and gender. The study concludes that Roy by critiquing the traditional concept of womanhood reveals the psychological impact of the denial of autonomy and freedom to women. The novel foregrounds female experience and embodied reality and so offers a significant contribution to feminist literary debate and postcolonial studies. *The God of Small Things* provides a profound insight into the identity of women in a patriarchal society. Roy analyzes the ways in which women confront systems of authority, violence and emotional repression in characters like Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Rahel and Ammu. The tragedy of Ammu shows the terrible fate that awaits women who break

social rules, while Mammachi and Baby Kochamma demonstrate diverse levels of accommodation and complicity. Roy's storytelling method heightens the feminist sensibilities of the text. She depicts feminine experience of emotional complexity using poetic language and symbolic images, fragmented memories. The work does not lend itself to facile moral dichotomies and women are presented as multidimensional individuals, trapped between opposing forces. Ultimately, Roy's work is a tribute to the need to reclaim lost voices and stories. *The God of Small Things* is a thorough analysis of women's identities in a patriarchal society. By focusing on individual feelings and neglected pain, it subverts dominant narratives and reveals the persisting truths of patriarchal despotism. Through Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Rahel Roy explores how women fight against systems of power, violence and emotional suppression. The novel interrogates patriarchal notions of marriage, parenting, sexuality and respectability. Ammu's tragedy is a lesson in the awful price women pay for challenging social norms. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are two illustrations of how women adjust and collude with the system. Roy's storytelling technique *The God of Small Things* is a penetrating exploration of feminine identity in a patriarchal culture. Through the characters of Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Rahel, Roy engages with the manner in which women manage systems of power, of violence and emotional repression. The novel interrogates patriarchal constructions of marriage, parenting, sexuality and respectability. The tragedy of Ammu is the tragedy of women who go against the social norm, and Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are other models of accommodation and complicity. Roy's narrative technique intensifies the feminist sensibility of this text. She uses fragmented recall, poetic language and symbolic pictures to portray feminine experience with emotional complexity. The novel refuses to succumb to easy moral binaries, and instead portrays women as multifaceted individuals shaped by conflicting demands. Finally, Roy's work celebrates the need to bring back the silenced voices and perspectives. *The God of Small Things* turns the usual

narratives on their heads as it explores the unexpressed feelings and ignored sorrows to reveal the eternal truths of patriarchal rule.

Keywords: Female Identity, Patriarchy, Women's Agency, Motherhood, Domesticity, Ammu, Feminist Criticism

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy is mostly about the identity and agency of women. The novel analyzes the emotional, social and psychological reality of women inside patriarchal structures that limit desire, sexuality, maternity and independence. Roy does not present the female experience as monolithic but as shaped by societal expectations, caste privilege, economic dependency and family obligation. The women in the novel belong to different rungs of the patriarchy. Ammu is resistance and fragility, Mammachi perseverance and submission, Baby Kochamma bitterness and complicity. Through these individuals Roy demonstrates how patriarchy affects women differently depending on their age, class background and social role. But they all have some limitations and emotional damage. The novel's formation of female identity works against idealised conceptions of womanhood. Roy does not want to represent the children and marriage or even domesticity as intrinsically joyful experiences. Instead, she demonstrates how often these systems crush female individuality. We see the emotional cost of denying women liberty and self-expression in Ammu's desires and disappointments. Roy also considers the part played by trauma in the construction of female subjectivity. The psychological fallout of her childhood violence, repression and society dishonesty has left Rahel shattered adulthood. The novel's non-linear structure reflects these shattered identities and emphasizes memory and emotional instability. This study discusses the development of female identity in *The God of Small Things* and analyzes Roy's criticism of patriarchal authority by narrative style, symbolism and characterization. It argues that Roy's work offers a profoundly feminist understanding of desire, resistance, motherhood and survival within restrictive society institutions. Women's identity and agency are among the central

topics of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The novel explores the emotional, sociological and psychological realities of women in patriarchal structures that define desire, sexuality, motherhood and independence. Roy offers a female experience not as a homogenous one but as one conditioned by social expectations, caste privilege, economic dependent and family obligation. The women in the novel have different sites within patriarchy. Ammu represents resistance and fragility; Mammachi is endurance and submission; Baby Kochamma is bitterness and complicity. Through these characters, Roy reveals how the patriarchate affects women differently depending on their age, class level and social role. But each has a specific limitation and a certain emotional hurt. The novel's depictions of female identity are a challenge to romanticised notions of womanhood. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is women's identity and autonomy. The novel tackles the emotional, social and psychological realities of women's existence inside patriarchal structures that limit desire, sexuality, childbearing and independence. Roy's representation of female experience is not homogenous but is shaped by societal expectation, caste privilege, economic dependent and family obligation. The women in the story are positioned differently within patriarchy. Ammu is resistance and fragility, Mammachi perseverance and submission, Baby Kochamma bitterness and complicity. Through these individuals Roy demonstrates how patriarchy affects women differently depending on their age, class background and social role. But they all have some limitations and emotional damage. The novel's formation of female identity works against idealised conceptions of womanhood. Roy will not be presenting children, marriage, or domesticity as intrinsically fulfilling experiences. Instead she demonstrates how frequently these structures stifle female creativity. Ammu's dreams and disillusionment highlight the emotional toll of depriving women of their agency and self-expression. Roy also examines the construction of female subjectivity in trauma. The psychological result of witnessing violence, oppression, and social dishonesty throughout childhood is Rahel's shattered adulthood. The

non-linear structure of the novel mirrors these fractured identities, emphasizing memory and emotional instability. This paper examines the development of female identity in *The God of Small Things* and analyzes Roy's critique of patriarchal authority through the use of narrative technique, symbolism and characterization. It argues that Roy's novel offers a profoundly feminist exploration of desire, resistance, motherhood and survival amid oppressive social systems. Ammu and the Politics of Desire.

Ammu is the emotional core of the story. Her life is a testament to the vulnerability of women who are not completely compliant with patriarchal norms. She runs away from an unhappy marriage and returns to the family home, where she is regarded as a burden, not a woman in possession of herself. Humiliation is the source of her divorce because society defines female worth in terms of marriage and obedience. Roy's presentation of Ammu's emotional existence is remarkably delicate. Ammu craves love, freedom, dignity yet every act of self assertion is penalized. Her relationship with Velutha represents a challenge to the caste structure and patriarchal authority. Their love subverts the social order because it allows Ammu to claim her sexual desire on her own terms. The fear of female liberty in the society is shown in the assault on Ammu after the romance. Her family tries to rob her of agency by portraying her as immoral and unstable. Roy demonstrates how patriarchal culture usually transforms women's desire into evidence of guilt. Thus Ammu's sorrow is both personal and social, related to broader mechanisms that control the female body and emotion. Ammu's motherhood adds to the complexity of her identity. She loves her children dearly and feels trapped by social and economic commitments. Roy refuses to sugar coat parenting and instead depicts it as emotionally exhausting and socially restrictive. The story critiques the over-expectation on women in patriarchal society through Ammu. Ammu is the emotional center of the tale. Her existence is a testament of the precariousness of women who are not completely willing to surrender to the dictates of the patriarchy. She flees an unhappy marriage and returns to the

family home where she is treated as a burden, not an autonomous woman. Humiliation is the source of her divorce because society defines female worth in terms of marriage and obedience. Roy's presentation of Ammu's emotional existence is remarkably delicate. Ammu desires love, independence and respect, yet any attempt to assert her uniqueness is penalized. Through her love, Velutha becomes a revolt against the caste hierarchy and the patriarchal dominance. Their love is a challenge to the social order because it allows Ammu to speak her sexual Ammu occupies the emotional heart of the tale. She illustrates the fragile position of women who do not fit neatly inside the bounds of patriarchal ideals. She escapes a bad marriage and returns to the family home where she is treated as a burden rather as an autonomous lady. Humiliation is the source of her divorce because society defines female worth in terms of marriage and obedience. Roy's presentation of Ammu's emotional existence is remarkably delicate. Ammu craves love, freedom, dignity yet every act of self assertion is penalized. Her relationship with Velutha represents a challenge to the caste structure and patriarchal authority. Their love subverts the social order because it allows Ammu to claim her sexual desire on her own terms. The assault on Ammu after the romance shows the fear of female liberty in society. Her family tries to rob her of agency by portraying her as immoral and unstable. Roy demonstrates how patriarchal culture usually transforms women's desire into evidence of guilt. Thus Ammu's sorrow is both personal and social, related to broader mechanisms that control the female body and emotion. Ammu's motherhood adds to the complexity of her identity. She loves her children a lot but she also feels trapped in social and economic responsibility. Roy does not idealize parenting but characterizes it as socially constraining and emotionally draining. The author criticizes unrealistic expectations for women in the patriarchal culture through Ammu's character. Domestic Violence and Patriarchal Power.

The story normalizes domestic abuse as a natural element of patriarchal existence. Mammachi's marriage to Pappachi demonstrates the mask of social respectability behind

which violence is hidden. However, Pappachi's physical abuse of Mammachi is socially sanctioned as an acceptable exercise of masculine dominance. Roy's approach to violence is more psychologically oriented. Mammachi internalizes her slavery and learns to repress her own thoughts and needs. Her pain is normalized, which is how women are conditioned to tolerate violence by the patriarchy. The narrative also illustrates how patriarchy is operationalized through economic dependence even after Pappachi's death and how his power continues to influence the family dynamic. Mammachi's imprisonment in her marriage represents the lack of options available to women who are not financially independent. Roy criticizes the socio-economic dynamics that force women to remain in abusive marriages to survive economically. The violence in the story is not only physical injury. Other controlling strategies include emotional humiliation, surveillance and social exclusion. Ammu's family is continuously criticizing her. Rahel is brought up in an atmosphere of fear and restraint. Thus, Roy describes patriarchy as a system that is maintained by both visible and invisible violence. Domestic violence is present throughout the novel as a normal facet of patriarchal living. Mammachi's marriage to Pappachi is an example of how violence is hidden by social acceptability. Pappachi beats Mammachi for years yet society believes that he has every right to do so as a man. Roy's treatment of violence is directed toward the psychological impacts of violence. Mammachi adopts the attitude of a slave, repressing her own thoughts and needs. Her pain becomes a norm, demonstrating how patriarchy has taught women to accept violence. Even after the death of Pappachi, his influence continues to affect the family atmosphere. The story also demonstrate Domestic violence is present throughout the story as a normal element of patriarchal existence. Mammachi's marriage with Pappachi shows us how violence is hidden behind social respectability. Pappachi beats Mammachi for years, although his behaviour is considered respectable masculine authority in society. Roy's interest in violence is its psychological effect. Mammachi begins to conceal her own thoughts and desires, internalizing

her service. Her suffering is normalized, showing how patriarchy teaches women to accept violence. The tale depicts how even after the death of Pappachi, patriarchy continues to exist through economic dependency and the lingering effect of his influence on the family structure. Mammachi's inability to walk out of her marriage is indicative of the lack of options for women without economic freedom. Roy attacks the social economic institutions that make women stay in abusive marriages for survival. The violence in the story involves more than just physical injury. Other control strategies are emotional humiliation, surveillance and social exclusion. Ammu is constantly condemned by her family while Rahel lives in a world of dread and oppression. Roy thus depicts patriarchy as a system that is sustained by both explicit and implicit violence. *Baby Kochamma and Feminine Collusion*.

In the feminist paradigm of the story, Baby Kochamma's position is equivocal. Unlike Ammu, she does not openly challenge the patriarchal customs. Instead, her strict social convictions provide her little power. Her fury is a product of emotional disappointment and social discontent, especially with regard to her unrequited love for Father Mulligan. Roy portrays Baby Kochamma as obsessed with preserving family respectability. She observes Ammu's activities and is complicit in the destruction of Velutha. Her acts are an illustration of how women can serve as agents of patriarchal rule. She does not question the repressive systems, but rather justifies them for social security and power. Baby Kochamma's emotional hole and loneliness is a mirror of the harmful repercussions of patriarchy as well. She is characterized by resentment, by repression and manipulation. Roy does not judge her in a simple moral way, but shows her as a victim of society mechanisms that do not allow for emotional satisfaction and independence. The story posits that patriarchy is maintained not just by male domination but also through the internalisation of beliefs that women themselves subscribe to, as in the case of Baby Kochamma. Baby Kochamma occupies a difficult position in the feminist paradigm of the book. She does not question patriarchal standards in public the

way Ammu does. Her strict adherence to conservative societal norms leaves her with little influence. Her fury is a product of emotional disappointment and social discontent, especially with regard to her unrequited love for Father Mulligan. Roy portrays Baby Kochamma as obsessed with preserving family respectability. She watches Ammu's doings, and is an accomplice to the destruction of Velutha. Her actions illustrate that women are capable of acting as agents of patriarchal authority. RBaby Kochamma is a complex character in the feminist paradigm of the novel. She does not challenge the patriarchal values openly unlike Ammu. Rather, her adherence to orthodox social ideas earns her very little authority. Her fury is a product of emotional disappointment and social discontent, especially with regard to her unrequited love for Father Mulligan. Roy portrays Baby Kochamma as obsessed with preserving family respectability. She observes Ammu's activities and is complicit in the destruction of Velutha. Her behavior demonstrates how women may be instruments of patriarchal oppression. She protects the oppressive structures in the name of social security and power and not challenges. Baby Kochamma's loneliness and emotional void is also a reflection of the negative repercussions of patriarchy. Her identity is shaped by bitterness, repression and manipulation. Roy does not moralize but presents her as a product of social mechanisms that limit emotional fulfillment and freedom. Through Baby Kochamma, the story reveals that patriarchy continues not just through male control, but also through internalized values perpetuated by women themselves. Rahel, Trauma and Disintegrated Identity.

Rahel is the long term psychological repercussions of trauma and repression. She sees her mother's life broken, her family in chaos and the social world hard as a child. These events form her disjointed sense of identity as an adult. Roy portrays Rahel as emotionally remote and rootless. She's unable to form real relationships, just floating through life without a real sense of direction. Her fractured memories echo the novel's non-linear structure. Trauma distorts chronology, such that the past is always now. Rahel's relationship with Estha also serves to

illustrate the need for emotional connection in a broken environment. “There is a relationship between them that goes beyond the normal social language, because they share experiences that cannot be simply put into words. Roy paints their reunion as emotionally complicated, not morally uncomplicated. The narrative implies that suffering is inherited throughout generations. Even after leaving Ayemenem, Rahel is plagued by patriarchal aggression. Her identity remained shaped by the memories of loss, of silence, of being judged by society. Rahel represents the long-term mental consequences of trauma and repression. As she grows up, she witnesses family discord, social harshness and the destruction of her mother's life. Such meetings shape her shattered adult personality. Roy shows Rahel as emotionally unmoored and detached. She has a hard time making long-term relationships and glides through life without any real purpose. Her fragmented memories are reflected in the novel’s non-linear narrative. Trauma messes up chronology, the past continuously intruding into the Rahel is the long term psychological impact of trauma and repression. As a child she sees familial discontent, social abuse, and the destruction of her mother's life. These events have formed her fractured sense of being as an adult. Roy portrays Rahel as emotionally detached and unmoored. She’s unable to make meaningful connections, just floating through life with no real sense of purpose. Her fractured memories echo the novel’s non-linear structure. Trauma distorts chronology, such that the past is always now. Rahel’s relationship with Estha also serves to illustrate the need for emotional connection in a broken environment. “There is a relationship between them that goes beyond the normal social language, because they share experiences that cannot be simply put into words. Roy presents their reunion as emotionally complex, not morally uncomplicated. The novel hints that pain is passed down through generations. When she leaves Ayemenem, Rahel is haunted by the emotional consequences of the patriarchal aggression. She is still shaped by memories of bereavement, silence and social critique. Women’s Sexuality and Bodily Autonomy.

Roy's depiction of female sexuality is an aberration from the standard representations of women in Indian society. The story tackles feminine desire, physicality and emotional intimacy head-on. Ammu's sexuality is shown as human, legitimate, and not to be ashamed of. But the brutal penalty she is subjected to is a reflection of a society that cannot tolerate female freedom. Patriarchal culture permits men sexual freedom, but punishes women who seek pleasure outside of socially sanctioned institutions, whether mental or physical. Ammu's annihilation is the exposure of the conflicting principles by which sexuality is organized. Roy also subtly points to the experience of the body. Touch, menstruation, pregnancy, and physiological vulnerability are threaded through the narrative. Roy is emphatic that feminine identity cannot be divorced from tangible reality, stressing embodied experience. The story challenges the notion of women as just symbols of family honor. The battle of society is fought on Ammu's body as her choices upset the patriarchal system. Roy therefore links sexuality to larger questions of freedom, dignity and power. Roy's treatment of female sexuality overturns traditional perceptions of women in Indian society. It is clear in the novel's recognition of female desire, bodily experience and emotional intimacy. The novel portrays Ammu's sexuality as human, as valid, as above shame. But the terrible retribution that she receives is a measure of society's hatred of female freedom. Patriarchal culture gives men freedom to be sexually active, but punishes women if they seek emotional or physical happiness outside socially sanctioned institutions. The destruction of Ammu reveals the way in which the dRoy treats female sexuality as opposed to the traditional images of women in Indian society. The insistence on female desire, physiological sensation and emotional intimacy is apparent in the story. The novel has the virtue of presenting Ammu's sexuality as human and legitimate, not something shameful. But her brutal punishment is a symbol of society's rejection of female liberty. Patriarchal culture permits men sexual freedom but punishes women who seek pleasure outside of socially sanctioned institutions, whether mental or physical. The annihilation of

Ammu shows the competing principles that govern sexuality. Roy also subtly underscores body experience. touch, menstruation, pregnancy, physiological vulnerability are intertwined into the story. By foregrounding embodied experience, Roy refuses to cleave feminine identity from material reality. The novel is a critique of the notion that women are only symbols of family honor. Ammu's body becomes a center of social conflict as her choices defy the hegemonic patriarchal. Sexuality, Roy suggests, is thus tied to larger questions of freedom, dignity, and power. Narrative Structure and Feminist Discourse.

Roy's manner of story-telling is important to the feminist dimensions of the work. The fractured timeline mirrors the ambiguous landscape of memory and identity traversed by female characters. Roy does not promote one authoritative position but instead offers a space where different voices and emotional states are able to coexist. The language of the work regularly moves between lyrical imagery and political critique, a contradiction that allows Roy to preserve emotional experience while also exposing institutional injustice. Her attention to sensory detail, however, establishes a more intimate connection with the female characters, bringing their inner worlds to the fore. Repetition is sometimes used to underscore pain and suppression. Some scenes repeat because they are not resolved psychologically. Thus, Roy's narrative form comes to embody the permanence of sadness and remembrance within female consciousness. By focusing on women's emotional experiences, Roy engages literary traditions that render female subjectivity inconsequential. The argument of the novel is that the common emotions and the domestic troubles and the private needs are given political importance. Roy's narrative style is an important component of the feminist aspect of the work. The fractured timeline reflects the female characters' doubt of memory and of identity. Roy allows for a multiplicity of voices and emotional states, rather than one authoritative perspective. The language of the novel often oscillates between poetic imagery and political critique. This combination allows Roy to portray emotional experience while at the same time exposing

institutional injustice. Roy's style, and contributes considerably to the feminist qualities of the work. The broken chronology shows the fragility of the female characters' memories and identity. Roy offers not one voice of authority but a diversity of voices and emotional states coexisting with one another. The language of the novel often oscillates between poetic imagery and political commentary. This combination allows Roy to stand up emotional experience and point to institutional injustice. Her focus in sensory description fosters connection with female characters and emphasizes their interior lives. The recurrence also points to trauma and repression. Some scenes are reoccurring because they are not resolved mentally. Thus Roy's narrative structure reflects the persistence of grief and remembrance in the awareness of women. By foregrounding women's emotional experience, Roy criticizes literary traditions that have ignored female subjectivity. The novel argues that everyday emotions, domestic disputes, and personal desires are politically important.

Another feature of women's identities in *The God of Small Things* is the struggle between quiet and speaking. Roy demonstrates how women are conditioned repeatedly to hide pain, deny desire and accept humiliation as a natural part of family life. But this quiet is not empty stillness, it is a type of forced discipline by the patriarchy. In all cases, the voices of Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and Rahel are constituted by social pressure and emotional injury, but each reveals a different attitude to silence.

Ammu's identity is particularly crucial because she refuses to be entirely submissive to her obligations as a daughter, wife, and mother. Her divorce from her husband and her attachment to Velutha distinguish her as a woman who tries to carve her own identity beyond the normal boundaries. But Roy does not make an easy story of release. Instead Ammu's desire for independence is met with ostracism and moral censure, implying that female power in a rigid social hierarchy often results not in liberty, but ruin. Her sadness is that she knows her own desire but is denied the social space in which to live it.

Rahel is also a contribution to the novel's depiction of female subjectivity because she is a result of inherited pain. Rahel, in contrast, withdraws emotionally, becomes restless and does not conform to the expectations of a woman, unlike Ammu who rebels directly. Her life beyond childhood indicates that patriarchal abuse is not confined to one generation, but lives on in memory, shattered relationships, psychological fragmentation. Roy shows, through Roy, that women are not only externally oppressed, but also carry the internal ramifications of that oppression within their identity. Thus female agency is portrayed as flawed, inadequate and under constant strain.

The tale also reveals the manipulation of social respectability to keep women in check. Female honor in the Quran is directly related to family reputation, marriage and sexual purity. These ideas are used to judge women more harshly than men, making their bodies and choices public property. Roy shows the double standard by illustrating how the same society that justifies male aggression punishes female independence. Thus, the novel calls into question the morality of a civilization that professes to protect women but in fact limits their autonomy.

A key feature of women's identities in the novel is the linkage between selfhood and parenthood. Roy does not regard motherhood as a natural or fulfilling condition. But rather, she depicts it as a job that may be emotionally confining particularly when women are stripped of personal independence. Ammu loves her children, but her devotion is compounded by poverty, solitude and social judgement. Mammachi is also constructed by her motherly function, but this role is not a protection from pain or shame. Roy, through these representations, suggests that motherhood alone cannot give dignity to women unless it is coupled with freedom and respect.

The other feminist element of the story is the refusal to depict women as mere victims or symbols of virtue. All female characters are endowed with inconsistencies, limitations and emotional complexity. This makes them feel human and not romanticized. For instance, Baby

Kochamma is cruel and harsh, yet her actions also reflect the frustration of a life molded by disappointment and repression. Roy therefore avoids simple moral dichotomies, instead showing how patriarchy warps women's personalities in diverse ways. Women are not outside the system, but formed inside it, often in difficult and devastating ways.

Roy's language expands this feminist critique, imbuing experiences often neglected in traditional narratives with emotional significance. The meaning of the novel is about private anguish, domestic frustration and wounded longing. This move directs focus away from acts of public heroism towards the more subtle ways in which resilience features in women's lives. This is significant because it contests the notion of political or male action as the exclusive kind of agency. Roy demonstrates that the inner life of women is political and that emotional survival may be resistance.

In the end, *The God of Small Things* shows women's identity as unstable, contested and strongly influenced by power. The novel reveals that agency is not just the power to act freely, but also the struggle to sustain a sense of self in a world that continuously attempts to dominate it. Through Ammu's resistance, Rahel's fragmented adulthood, Mammachi's pain, and Baby Kochamma's cooperation, Roy exposes the myriad ways that patriarchy manifests itself in private life. This results in a powerful feminist vision in which women are not silent objects nor fully emancipated subjects, but complex beings negotiating a hostile world.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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