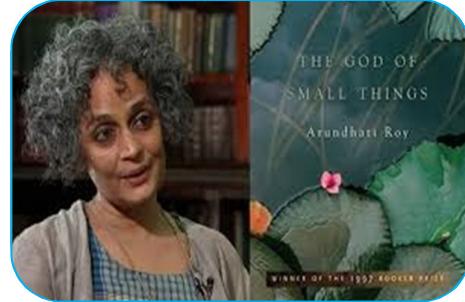


**FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN “THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS”****Dr. Shanthala A. C.**

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ABSTRACT:

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* offers a layered interrogation of gender, power, and identity through its female characters such as Ammu and Baby Kochamma. The novel reveals how patriarchy constricts women's choices, agency, and desires via both familial and societal norms. The narrative exposes the double standards and oppressive expectations placed on women—related to marriage, love, sexuality, and motherhood—and how deviation from these norms leads to marginalization, suppression, or even punishment. Alongside explicit gender inequities, Roy also attends to subtler mechanisms of oppression: gossip, shame, silence, objectification, and internalization of societal standards. Simultaneously the novel suggests resistance: Ammu's refusal to conform, Baby Kochamma's manipulation of agency within constraints, Rahel's eventual self-awareness, and the inherent critique of hierarchical systems show women negotiating, surviving, and at times subverting the structures that seek to define them. In doing so, *The God of Small Things* becomes a feminist text that scrutinises not only the overt forms of oppression but also the embedded beliefs, the small violations, and hidden violences that sustain gendered inequality in postcolonial India.



KEY WORDS: Feminism, Patriarchy, Gender Inequality, Female Agency, Resistance, Oppression, Identity, Motherhood, Marriage, Objectification, Shame, Postcolonial Womanhood.

INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is widely regarded as a richly layered exploration of gender, caste, class, and power in postcolonial Kerala. Embedded in its narrative are feminist concerns that interrogate the constraints imposed on women by patriarchal tradition, societal norms, and internalised familial power dynamics. The novel foregrounds the lives of Ammu, Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, and Rahel, whose experiences collectively expose the intersecting oppressions women face: expectations of obedience, lack of autonomy, marginalisation within family and society, and the harsh consequences of transgressing gender boundaries. A central tension in the novel arises from the conflict between inherited tradition and the possibility of self-definition. Ammu's attempts to assert her agency—through love, divorce, return, and resistance—are met with scorn, isolation, and ultimate destruction, underscoring how deeply patriarchy is woven into social, familial, and religious structures.

Roy also uses narrative structure—nonlinear time, the juxtaposition of childhood innocence with adult tragedy—to highlight how women's lives are shaped from early years, often before they understand the full weight of social expectations.

Memory, shame, love, desire, and loss recur as motifs emphasizing how gendered identities are formed, policed, and punished. Moreover, feminist readings of the text draw attention to the way Roy not only critiques overt patriarchal constraints but also reveals subtler modes of oppression: the internalized voices, silences, shame, and cultural prescriptions that limit women's expression of desire, freedom, and identity. The novel thereby becomes a site for questioning not only what women are prevented from doing, but what they are made to believe about themselves.^[1] In this light, The God of Small Things serves as more than a story of individual suffering; it becomes a feminist text that exposes the structures and logics of gendered power, narrates resistance in its many forms (small, whispered, forbidden), and invites reflection on how gender relations shape—and distort—the possibilities of love, identity, and belonging.^[2]

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

In Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, feminist perspectives can be explored through the experiences of women characters, the themes of patriarchy, gender roles, and the intersectionality of social hierarchies. Feminist literary analysis examines how these themes relate to power dynamics, societal expectations, and the emotional lives of the female characters in the novel.

Aim:

The primary aim of a feminist analysis of The God of Small Things is to examine how gender influences the characters' lives, decisions, and social mobility. Deconstructing Gender Norms investigate how traditional gender roles and societal expectations shape the fates of female characters. Exploring Patriarchy Understand how patriarchal structures dominate and oppress female characters and how they resist or comply with these structures. Representation of Women Analyze the portrayal of female characters, both central and secondary, and how their struggles reflect broader feminist issues. Intersectionality Examine how other factors, such as caste, class, and race, intersect with gender to affect the women's experiences and opportunities in the narrative.

Objectives:

1. To Analyze Gender Inequality in the Novel: Examine how the social and familial structures perpetuate gender inequalities. Identify the ways in which female characters are constrained by societal norms that prioritize male authority.

2. To Examine Female Agency and Resistance: Study the instances where female characters, such as Ammu, Velutha's mother, and others, resist or challenge patriarchal authority.

Explore their moments of empowerment or subversion and how they struggle with or overcome limitations placed upon them by society.

3. To Investigate the Role of Social Class and Caste: Consider how the intersection of gender with class and caste shapes the lives of women like Ammu, who is not only oppressed because of her gender but also by her lower caste status.

4. To Critique the Oppressive Nature of Love and Sexuality:

Investigate the restrictions imposed on female sexuality, such as the taboo surrounding Ammu and Velutha's love affair. Examine how the characters' sexual autonomy is punished and constrained by the societal and familial ideologies.

5. To Explore the Marginalization of Women: Analyze how female characters are marginalized both within the family and the broader social structure, especially in a post-colonial context.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

A literary review on feminist perspectives in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things involves analyzing how scholars, critics, and researchers have interpreted the novel through a feminist lens. The focus is often on the representation of women, the critique of patriarchy, female agency, sexuality, and the intersection of gender with caste and class.

1. Patriarchy and Gender Oppression :Chandra (2002) explores the oppressive patriarchal structures in The God of Small Things, emphasizing how female characters like Ammu and Rahel are subjugated by traditional norms. Ammu's experience as a divorced woman is seen as central to Roy's critique of a society that punishes women for asserting independence. Sangeeta Das (2008) similarly argues that the novel exposes the societal double standards concerning gender, where female transgression is punished more harshly than male transgression.

2. Female Sexuality and Societal Taboo :Nayar (2010) analyzes how Roy challenges patriarchal notions of female sexuality. Ammu's relationship with Velutha is viewed not only as a rebellion against caste norms but also as an assertion of her sexual agency—an act considered taboo in her cultural context.

Spivak's Postcolonial Feminism also becomes relevant in this context, especially when considering how female sexuality is policed within postcolonial Indian society. Ammu's fall from grace highlights how a woman's sexuality is controlled and censured by both colonial hangovers and traditional systems.

3. Intersectionality: Gender, Caste, and Class :Rege (1998) emphasizes the importance of an intersectional approach in Indian feminist studies. Applied to The God of Small Things, this approach reveals that Ammu is doubly marginalized—not only as a woman but also as a woman from a relatively powerless caste background. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham (2002) explores how caste and gender intersect in Ammu and Velutha's relationship. Velutha, a Dalit man, and Ammu, an upper-caste woman, both face social exile, reflecting Roy's attempt to critique rigid social structures.

4. Women's Agency and Resistance :Sharmila Rege (2006) asserts that Roy's narrative gives voice to women who resist oppression. Although Ammu's rebellion leads to her downfall, it is still portrayed as an act of courage and agency. Rahel, too, is seen by some scholars (e.g., Tharu and Lalita, 1993) as a character who internalizes the trauma of her mother's struggles, and her choices reflect a quiet subversion of norms rather than overt resistance.

5. The Silence and Marginalization of Women :Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is often applied to readings of The God of Small Things, especially in the context of Ammu's voicelessness and erasure after death. She is not given a proper cremation or remembrance, symbolizing how women who defy societal norms are silenced even after death.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To explore the feminist perspectives in The God of Small Things, this research follows a qualitative approach rooted in feminist literary criticism, focusing primarily on the text's representation of gender, power dynamics, and female agency. Arundhati Roy's novel critiques the patriarchal, caste-driven structures that dominate the lives of its characters, particularly the women. This analysis will be conducted through a close reading of the novel and an examination of secondary sources that offer feminist and postcolonial readings. The methodology begins with an in-depth textual analysis of key moments and characters in the novel, particularly focusing on Ammu, Rahel, and Velutha. These characters serve as sites of intersectionality, where gender, caste, and class interact in complex ways, shaping their lives and experiences. Ammu, as a divorced woman, embodies the struggle against societal norms, while Rahel's internal conflict speaks to the silencing and emotional trauma inflicted on women who defy or are denied traditional roles. Velutha's relationship with Ammu is pivotal for understanding the intersection of gender and caste, as it transgresses both the boundaries of social class and female sexuality. A critical element of the methodology is psychoanalytic feminism, which will be used to explore the psychological dimensions of the female characters' experiences. Ammu's tragic trajectory, from her illicit relationship with Velutha to her eventual marginalization and death, can be analyzed through a feminist psychoanalytic lens to understand the ways in which societal rejection and familial expectations distort and fracture her identity. Similarly, Rahel's psychological

state reflects the trauma of living in a world where women are expected to sacrifice their agency for the sake of familial honor and stability. Narratively, Roy's non-linear structure will also be analyzed for its feminist implications. The fragmented form of the novel reflects the fractured identities of its female characters, providing a narrative space in which the silencing of women is both exposed and subverted. The disruption of linear storytelling mirrors the instability of gender roles in a patriarchal society and highlights the complex, often contradictory experiences of women. The research methodology is designed to offer a multi-faceted feminist reading of *The God of Small Things*, utilizing close reading, intersectionality, feminist literary criticism, and psychoanalytic theory to reveal the novel's complex critique of gender, class, and caste oppression. Through this approach, the study aims to understand how Arundhati Roy's novel represents the struggles and resistances of women within the context of postcolonial India and how it challenges dominant patriarchal narratives.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* presents a powerful critique of patriarchal structures, gender inequality, and societal norms in postcolonial Indian society. While the novel has been widely acclaimed for its literary style and political commentary, there remains a critical need to explore how feminist perspectives are woven into the narrative—particularly through the experiences of female characters like Ammu and Rahel. These characters face systemic oppression, silencing, and marginalization due to their gender, class, and caste positions. Despite existing scholarship, many analyses tend to focus broadly on themes of caste, colonialism, and political unrest, often sidelining the nuanced feminist dimensions of the novel. There is a gap in understanding how Roy uses narrative structure, character development, and symbolic imagery to critique the patriarchy and give voice to women who are often rendered invisible in traditional literary and social discourses. The problem this study addresses is the underrepresentation or insufficient exploration of feminist issues such as female agency, sexuality, resistance, and intersectionality in existing literary criticism of *The God of Small Things*. The novel demands a focused feminist reading to uncover the layers of gendered oppression and resistance that shape its characters and themes. This research aims to investigate how Arundhati Roy constructs a feminist narrative within the novel by analyzing the lived experiences of women, the societal constraints they navigate, and the ways in which they resist, conform to, or are destroyed by patriarchal forces. Through this lens, the study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's feminist significance within the context of postcolonial Indian literature.

NEED OF THE STUDY

The study of feminist perspectives in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy is essential to deepen our understanding of how literature reflects, critiques, and challenges gender-based oppression within a specific socio-cultural and historical context. Although the novel has been extensively analyzed for its treatment of caste, colonialism, and politics, the feminist dimensions—particularly the nuanced portrayal of women's lives, agency, and resistance—require focused scholarly attention. Women in the novel, especially characters like Ammu and Rahel, are subjected to various forms of patriarchal control, societal stigma, and emotional marginalization. These experiences are not isolated incidents but are rooted in broader systems of caste, class, and gender-based discrimination. A feminist analysis is necessary to uncover these intersections and to understand how Roy uses literary tools such as symbolism, non-linear narrative, and inner monologues to highlight the silent suffering and subtle resistance of her female characters. This study is needed to explore how the novel critiques traditional gender roles, exposes the consequences of violating societal norms, and questions the power structures that maintain female subjugation. It is also important in the broader field of postcolonial feminist literature, where Indian women's voices and narratives are often overlooked or simplified. Furthermore, with the rise of intersectional feminism, there is an increasing need to study how multiple identities—such as gender, caste, and class—interact in shaping a character's social experience.

The God of Small Things provides a fertile ground for such exploration. In essence, this study will contribute to feminist literary criticism by offering a comprehensive analysis of gender dynamics in the novel and by highlighting how Arundhati Roy gives voice to the "small things"—the overlooked, silenced, and oppressed female experiences within Indian society.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

1. Feminist Psychoanalytic Reading of Female Trauma :

A deeper exploration of the psychological trauma experienced by female characters, especially Ammu and Rahel, through a feminist psychoanalytic lens would yield fresh insights. Research could focus on how societal expectations of femininity, motherhood, and sexuality impact their psychological well-being and behavior. This could explore The trauma Ammu faces as a divorced, lower-caste woman and the emotional scars it leaves on her relationship with Rahel. Rahel's psychological and emotional fragmentation, which mirrors her struggles with gendered repression and societal alienation.

2. Intersectional Feminism: Caste, Class, and Gender in the Lives of Women :

An in-depth intersectional analysis of how caste, class, and gender intersect in shaping the lives of women like Ammu and Velutha could further the conversation about gender oppression. Velutha's relationship with Ammu and the obstacles they face due to their respective caste and class positions provides a rich basis for understanding the multiple layers of discrimination that compound the female experience. Future research could examine How caste-related discrimination and social exclusion affect the reproductive, sexual, and social autonomy of women in the novel.

3. The Role of Motherhood and the Female Body :

Motherhood is a central theme in the novel, especially through characters like Ammu and her relationship with Rahel. However, motherhood in the novel is portrayed as both a source of empowerment and a mechanism of oppression. Further research could delve into how motherhood is constructed as a tool for both subjugation and resistance. Examine how Ammu's maternal love for her children is both empowering (a form of emotional connection) and oppressive (leading to her eventual social exile).

4. The Silence and Erasure of Female Voices: Posthumous Gender Studies :

A crucial aspect of feminist research on The God of Small Things could focus on the silencing and erasure of female voices. Ammu's death, her exclusion from the family after the scandal, and her erasure from memory reflect the patriarchal tendencies to dismiss women who break societal norms. Future research could examine The symbolic and literal silencing of Ammu and other female characters and its implications on feminist narratives.

5. Feminist Narratology: Roy's Subversion of Traditional Storytelling

A study of Roy's narrative style through a feminist narratological lens could provide valuable insights into how the unconventional narrative structure mirrors the fragmented, disrupted experiences of women in the novel. Future research could explore How the novel's non-linear narrative disrupts the traditional patriarchal story arc and emphasizes female subjectivity. The role of fragmented storytelling in expressing the complexity of women's experiences and how it allows for a subversion of patriarchal storytelling conventions.

RESEARCH STATEMENT

Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things offers a profound exploration of the intersections between gender, caste, and power in postcolonial India. Central to the novel is the portrayal of female characters—particularly Ammu and Rahel—who navigate the oppressive structures of patriarchy, caste discrimination, and societal expectations. This research aims to investigate the feminist dimensions of the novel by analyzing how Roy portrays the gendered experiences of women and critiques the socio-

cultural norms that shape their lives. Through a feminist lens, the research will examine the ways in which The God of Small Things challenges traditional gender roles, exposes the marginalization and silencing of women, and portrays female agency and resistance within a restrictive society. The study will focus on the experiences of Ammu, whose desire and defiance lead to her social and familial alienation, and Rahel, who contends with the emotional and psychological scars of growing up in a patriarchal household. The research will also consider how the novel critiques the construction of womanhood in a society that restricts women's sexualities, bodies, and choices. This feminist analysis will also be framed by an intersectional approach, investigating how caste, class, and gender converge in shaping the experiences of the female characters. The relationship between Ammu, an upper-caste woman, and Velutha, a Dalit man, serves as a central motif for exploring the ways in which gender oppression cannot be disentangled from the larger forces of caste and class. Furthermore, the study will explore how Roy's narrative structure—marked by fragmentation and non-linearity—mirrors the fractured identities of women and challenges traditional patriarchal storytelling. The symbolic use of space, silence, and memory will be examined to understand how the novel gives voice to the "small things"—the overlooked and silenced aspects of women's lives, struggles, and resistance. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the feminist themes in The God of Small Things, offering a critical reading that illuminates the complex ways in which Arundhati Roy's narrative challenges and subverts patriarchal structures, while giving voice to women's resistance in a postcolonial context.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Scope

The scope of this research on feminist perspectives in The God of Small Things is broad, aiming to explore the ways in which Arundhati Roy critiques gender, power, and societal norms through the experiences of her female characters. The study will focus primarily on the following key areas:

- 1. Gender and Power Dynamics:** The research will investigate how gender relations in the novel are shaped by the patriarchal structures of postcolonial Indian society. It will explore how female characters such as Ammu, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma challenge, comply with, or suffer under patriarchal expectations. The analysis will delve into their roles as daughters, mothers, and lovers, emphasizing how gender determines their social status, autonomy, and agency.
- 2. Female Agency and Resistance:** The study will explore the subtle forms of resistance that female characters engage in, despite the oppressive systems around them. This includes Ammu's defiance of her family's traditional expectations, her relationship with Velutha, and Rahel's own struggles with identity and social alienation. The research will assess how these acts of resistance are represented in the narrative and what they reveal about the limitations of female agency in a rigid social structure.
- 3. Intersectionality:** An intersectional feminist approach will be employed to analyze how caste, class, and gender intersect in shaping the lives of the female characters. This will include the analysis of Ammu's position as a woman and a member of a higher caste, as well as Velutha's caste identity, which complicates their relationship and demonstrates how caste-based discrimination interlocks with gender oppression.
- 4. Narrative Structure and Feminist Representation:** Roy's use of a fragmented, non-linear narrative structure will be critically analyzed to understand how the disruption of conventional storytelling serves feminist purposes. The study will examine how this narrative style reflects the psychological fragmentation of female characters, the silencing of women, and the disintegration of traditional gendered roles.

5. Symbolism and Space: The symbolic representation of space—particularly the Ayemenem House—and the metaphorical use of the “small things” in the lives of the female characters will be studied to understand how Roy highlights the marginalized experiences of women. The way physical and emotional spaces are gendered and how women’s experiences are often relegated to the periphery will be explored.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the research aims to provide a comprehensive feminist analysis of The God of Small Things, there are certain limitations to be aware of:

1. Limited Scope of Characters: The study primarily focuses on the female characters (Ammu, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma), with limited engagement with male characters and their roles in the patriarchal structures. While men like Chacko and Pappachi play important roles in shaping gender dynamics, the research’s feminist focus restricts a detailed examination of their experiences. The male characters’ perspectives on patriarchy and gender are acknowledged, but the study prioritizes the female experience.

2. Contextual Limitations: The research is grounded in a postcolonial and Indian feminist framework. While the novel’s feminist themes are universal in many respects, the focus on postcolonial India might limit the ability to generalize findings across different global feminist discourses. Readers from other cultural contexts may interpret certain gender dynamics differently, and this research is limited to a South Asian postcolonial reading.

3. Non-linear Narrative Structure: The fragmented structure of The God of Small Things may present challenges for traditional analysis, as the novel’s temporality is not straightforward. This non-linear approach mirrors the fractured identities of the female characters, but it may also complicate the task of drawing clear, linear conclusions. The research will address this challenge, but some interpretations may remain open-ended.

4. Posthumous and Psychoanalytic Analysis: The novel’s treatment of death, memory, and trauma, particularly regarding Ammu’s fate and Rahel’s psychological struggles, limits the ability to engage with the characters in a conventional manner. Ammu’s posthumous narrative presence complicates direct feminist readings of her experience, and psychoanalytic interpretations may not fully encompass the complexities of gender oppression. The study will focus on textual analysis and secondary research to navigate these complexities, but a more in-depth psychoanalytic approach might be beyond the study’s scope.

5. Language and Translation: For non-native readers, the translations of Malayalam cultural terms and nuances in the novel may sometimes obscure the full meaning of gendered experiences. The study will work within the limitations of English translations but acknowledges that some elements of language and culture are lost in translation, which might affect interpretations of gender roles and identity in the novel.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The scope of this research is primarily focused on examining feminist themes and gender dynamics within The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy. The study aims to explore how Roy’s narrative critiques and challenges the patriarchal structures that shape the lives of the novel’s female characters. Through a feminist lens, the research will analyze the representation of women in the novel, focusing on their roles, relationships, and resistance within a patriarchal, postcolonial Indian society.

1. Analysis of Female Characters: Ammu, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma

The tragic protagonist who defies societal expectations of femininity, motherhood, and caste. Her relationship with Velutha and her subsequent marginalization will be explored to understand her agency within the rigid confines of a patriarchal society. Ammu's daughter, who grapples with the emotional and psychological trauma of growing up in a patriarchal and caste-based society. The study will examine her struggles for identity, sexual agency, and personal fulfillment. A secondary but significant character whose role in perpetuating patriarchy and maintaining social order will be analyzed.

2. Feminist Examination of Gender and Power Dynamics

A key focus will be on gender relations in the novel. The study will explore how power dynamics are constructed along gender lines, particularly the ways in which patriarchal forces dominate and define the roles of women in family and society. Specific points of focus include The ways in which women are expected to conform to traditional roles such as motherhood, marriage, and chastity. The treatment of female sexuality as both taboo and subversive when it does not conform to these norms, particularly through Ammu's illicit relationship with Velutha.

3. Intersectionality: Gender, Caste, and Class

The study will incorporate intersectional feminist theory to understand how multiple identities—specifically gender, caste, and class—shape the female characters' experiences. Ammu's identity as a woman, a member of the higher caste, and a divorced, marginalized individual will be examined to explore how her struggles cannot be understood through gender alone but must also take caste and social class into account. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha, which transcends caste boundaries, is a critical point of intersectionality. This relationship will be studied in the context of caste-based discrimination, highlighting how caste oppression intersects with gender oppression to restrict the autonomy and freedom of women.

4. Feminist Narrative and Symbolism

The study will explore the narrative structure of The God of Small Things as a feminist tool. The novel's non-linear narrative, fragmented timelines, and alternating points of view will be analyzed for their role in Reflecting the fractured identities of the female characters. Representing the disjointed experiences of women in a patriarchal society that silences or distorts their voices. Additionally, the study will focus on the symbolism of space, memory, and silence, exploring how the novel's motifs—such as the Ayemenem House, the river, and the recurrent theme of small things—serve to highlight the ways in which women's lives are restricted, controlled, and often forgotten in the broader social landscape.

5. Feminist Psychoanalytic Criticism

The study will incorporate elements of feminist psychoanalytic theory to examine the psychological depth of the female characters. Psychoanalytic approaches can help explore The trauma that Ammu experiences due to societal rejection and familial betrayal, and how it affects her sense of identity and agency. The psychological complexity of Rahel as she navigates the aftermath of her mother's rejection, her own trauma, and the societal pressures placed on her as a woman. This approach will explore how the internalization of patriarchal values affects the emotional and psychological development of the characters, and how the trauma of marginalization affects female subjectivity and autonomy.

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I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have supported me throughout the course of this research on Feminist Perspectives in The God of Small Things. First and foremost, I am deeply thankful to Arundhati Roy, whose powerful and nuanced storytelling in The God of Small Things

has inspired this critical exploration of gender, caste, and power. Her vivid portrayal of women's experiences in postcolonial India has opened new avenues for feminist literary analysis. I extend my sincere appreciation to my mentors and academic advisors for their invaluable guidance, encouragement, and insightful feedback, which have greatly enriched this study. Their expertise in feminist theory and postcolonial literature has helped me shape the direction and depth of this research.

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DISCUSSION

In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the intricacies of gender, power, and societal norms are explored in depth, making the novel an ideal site for feminist analysis. Feminist perspectives reveal the complex relationships between gender, caste, and class, focusing particularly on the ways in which the female characters navigate, resist, and are shaped by patriarchal and oppressive structures.

1. Gender, Power, and Patriarchy

At the heart of the feminist critique in *The God of Small Things* lies the exploration of gender roles and patriarchal oppression. The novel paints a vivid picture of a society where women are subjected to stringent social norms and expectations. Ammu, for example, is constantly caught in a web of familial and societal expectations that stifle her desires and choices. As a divorced woman from a high caste, her life becomes marked by societal rejection and scorn. This marginalization is compounded by her sexual desires, which defy the expectations of a chaste, pure womanhood. Her relationship with Velutha, a lower-caste man, exemplifies her defiance against the rules of patriarchy, yet it leads to her downfall and isolation, symbolizing the brutal consequences for women who transgress the boundaries set by a patriarchal society. The power dynamics that underlie Ammu's and Rahel's lives are rooted in their gendered positions within their family and society. Both women are punished for their desires and their defiance of patriarchal authority. Rahel, as a child, experiences emotional neglect from her mother, who is ostracized for her relationship with Velutha.^[3]

2. Intersectionality: Gender, Caste, and Class

A critical feminist perspective in *The God of Small Things* must engage with the intersectionality of gender, caste, and class, as these overlapping systems of oppression shape the lives of the female characters. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha, a Dalit man, exemplifies the brutal consequences of caste-based and gender-based oppression. While Ammu's desire for Velutha is an act of resistance to both gender and caste-based norms, it also highlights the stark realities of caste discrimination in postcolonial India. Ammu's marginalization is not just a result of her gender, but also of her caste. As a woman from a privileged caste, her relationship with a Dalit man challenges both caste and gender hierarchies. The tragic end of their love affair and the subsequent destruction of Ammu's life reflect the impossibility of love and desire when caste and gender intersect. This examination of caste as it intersects with gender provides a deeper understanding of the multiple layers of oppression women face, showing that gender-based oppression cannot be understood in isolation from caste-based oppression.

3. The Representation of Motherhood

Motherhood is a central theme in the novel, and it is often presented as both a site of empowerment and a tool of oppression. Ammu's experience of motherhood is marked by love and devotion to her children but is also shaped by the sacrificial role that society demands of her. The novel critiques the idea of the self-sacrificing mother, a notion central to traditional gender roles, as being oppressive rather than empowering. Ammu's maternal love, though genuine, does not offer her freedom from the oppressive forces of society. Instead, her relationship with her children is a source of both emotional fulfillment and emotional pain. Her devotion to her children—especially Rahel—marks her as a loving mother, yet she is punished for her emotional expression and transgressive actions.^[4]

4. The Silence and Erasure of Women's Voices

In The God of Small Things, women's voices are often silenced or erased by the very structures of power that govern their lives. Ammu's fate, in particular, underscores the consequences of silencing women who refuse to conform to traditional gender norms. After her scandalous affair with Velutha, Ammu is not only ostracized by her family but also erased from the collective memory of her family and community. Her death in poverty, isolated and forgotten, serves as a commentary on the ways in which women's voices are erased when they do not conform to the prescribed roles of motherhood and chastity. Rahel's own silence, throughout much of the novel, also reflects the ways in which women are not allowed to fully express their trauma, desires, or identities. Her fragmented narrative and the disjointed structure of the novel suggest that women's experiences are often disjointed, disrupted, or dismissed by those in power.^[5]

5. The Role of Narrative Structure in Feminist Critique

Roy's use of a non-linear narrative plays a crucial role in the feminist themes of the novel. The fragmented structure, which shifts between past and present, reflects the disjointed, fractured lives of the female characters. The temporal fragmentation mirrors the emotional fragmentation that Ammu, Rahel, and the other women experience. The novel's refusal to follow a linear, orderly narrative is a direct challenge to the traditional, male-dominated forms of storytelling, which often impose coherence, clarity, and closure. This disruption of the narrative also serves to reflect the disruption of women's lives by patriarchal structures. Women's experiences, emotions, and desires cannot be contained within traditional, linear narratives—they are often fragmented, suppressed, and fragmented further by the very systems of power that seek to control them.^[6]

CONCLUSION/FINDINGS:

Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things offers a powerful and intricate critique of gender, power, and societal norms through a feminist lens, exposing the ways in which women are shaped, controlled, and often silenced by patriarchal and caste-based structures. Through the lives of the female characters—primarily Ammu, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma—Roy explores the intersectionality of gender, caste, and class, highlighting how these forces intertwine to oppress and marginalize women in postcolonial India. At the heart of the novel's feminist critique is the examination of gender roles and patriarchal oppression. Roy portrays the struggles of women who navigate and resist the rigid expectations placed upon them by society. Ammu, for instance, represents the tragic consequences of defying societal norms—her desires, her defiance of caste boundaries, and her attempt at self-determination lead to her alienation, isolation, and eventual destruction. In contrast, Rahel's journey offers a poignant exploration of emotional fragmentation and the lasting impact of maternal neglect and societal rejection. The feminist analysis of The God of Small Things also reveals the intersectionality of oppression faced by women, especially through the relationship between Ammu and Velutha, a Dalit man. The novel uncovers how gender-based discrimination is inseparable from caste and class struggles, with women like Ammu caught at the intersections of these intersecting identities. In this way, the narrative challenges the notion of gender oppression as a singular issue, instead highlighting the complexity of social hierarchies that bind women in multiple, often contradictory ways.

Moreover, the novel's portrayal of motherhood complicates traditional understandings of women's roles as caretakers. Ammu's maternal love is presented as both an empowering force and a source of her suffering, reflecting the tension between societal expectations of women as self-sacrificing mothers and the emotional needs and desires that are often repressed in the process. Similarly, Rahel's maternal relationship with her mother is marked by neglect, which emphasizes the emotional consequences of the erasure of women's identities and desires. Narrative fragmentation and silence play a crucial role in Roy's feminist critique. The non-linear structure of the novel mirrors the fragmented lives and emotional scars of its female characters, especially Ammu and Rahel, whose voices are marginalized, suppressed, or erased by the forces of patriarchy. Through this disruption of traditional storytelling, Roy challenges patriarchal forms of historical and narrative coherence, offering instead a complex and fragmented portrait of women's lives and struggles. In conclusion, a feminist perspective on *The God of Small Things* reveals the deep complexities of women's lives, both in their resistance to patriarchal forces and in their moments of vulnerability and suffering. Through its portrayal of female agency, love, desire, and trauma, the novel opens up a space for reflection on the ways in which women negotiate their identities and lives within a society that seeks to control and define them. Roy's work invites readers to reconsider traditional gender roles, to question the structures of power, and to reclaim the silenced and marginalized voices of women in literature and in life.

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