



*Journal of Advances and  
Scholarly Researches in  
Allied Education*

*Vol. VII, Issue No. XIII,  
January-2014, ISSN 2230-  
7540*

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# TRANSGRESSIONS, CONFLICTS AND RECONCILIATIONS IN “THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS”

AN  
INTERNATIONALLY  
INDEXED PEER  
REVIEWED &  
REFEREED JOURNAL

# Transgressions, Conflicts and Reconciliations in “The God of Small Things”

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## INTRODUCTION

The title of the novel, “THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS” strikes a great deal of artistic significance as it is a vivid depiction of how the small things in life affect people’s behavior and their lives. In turn the novel shows how certain incidents in life lead to a series of conflicts necessitating a gamut of reconciliations.

Arundhati Roy’s method of presentation of conflicts and reconciliations in her novel “THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS” revolves round a pathetic story of the childhood experiences of fraternal twins whose lives are destroyed by the ‘Love Laws’ that lay down “Who should be loved” and “how” and “how much”. The novel is a Vivid depiction of how the small things in life affect people’s behavior and their lives interwoven with a series of conflicts craving for possible reconciliations at the end of the novel.

The story of the novel occurs in a town called ‘Ayemenem’ or ‘Aymanam’, a part of Kottayam District in Kerala State of South India. The whole story revolves round a character named ‘Ammulpe’ whose entire life is full of a series of conflicts and a plethora of reconciliations causing a great deal of influence upon the lives of other characters in the novel.

Ammu Ipe is a young girl of marriageable age. Pappachi, her father is ever ill tempered, and Mammachi, her mother, is ever bitter and long suffering. Thus her parents are source of conflict in the beginning of the novel. When Ammu Ipe gets a marriage proposal her parents do not have adequate amount to pay dowry. As she becomes helpless, she succeeds in persuading her parents to allow her to go to Kolkata where she plans to spend a summer with her distant aunt. In order to avoid returning to her hometown, Ayemenem, she marries a gentleman of charm, but with dubious deception who works in a tea estate. But soon to her utter dismay and great shock she finds him to be a chronic alcoholic. He even starts beating her, humiliating and insulting her. He stoops down to such a level as to offer her to his boss for the latter’s physical gratification so that he thinks that he can continue in his job.

These two characters represent numerous conflicts and at the same time an equal numbers of reconciliations in the novel. After she given birth to two children, fraternal twins, Esha and Rahel, she leaves her husband for good and returns to Ayemenem to live with her mother’s brother, Chacko and her aunt Baby Kochamma whose real name is Navomilpe. The irony of it is that she is called Baby because she has become old enough to become an aunt.

A series of conflicts revolve round the characters of Ammu Ipe and Baby Kochamma. As a young girl Kochamma falls in love with Father Mulligan, a young Irish Priest who arrives in India in order to study Hindu Scriptures Kochamma embraces Roman Catholicism against her father’s wishes so as to get closer to Father Mulligan. After a few months in convent, Kochamma realizes that her vows do not bring her closer to the man whom she deeply loves. Her father rescues her from the convent and sends her to America where she successfully pursues a Diploma in ornamental gardening. She remains unmarried for the rest of her life. Thus a sense of reconciliation overtakes her. But soon there is an internal conflict within her mind. Owing to her failure in her love, bitterness and envy enter her mind. So she becomes a cynic who derives immense delight in the suffering and misfortunes of others. She even does not hesitate to bring down calamity upon Estha and Rahel and their mother wantonly estranged from her husband.

While at Oxford, Chacko falls in love with an English woman, Margaret and marries her. Soon after the birth of their daughter Sophie Mol, Margaret reveals to her husband that she has had an affair with another man, Joe soon conflict occurs. So they divorce. Chacko who fails to get a job returns to India. After the death of Pappachi, Chacko returns to Ayemenem and takes over his mother’s business called Paradise Pickles and Preserves. Thus Chacko’s reconciliation with reality of situation is complete in the novel.

After Margaret’s divorce from her first husband, Chacko, she remarries her first lover, Joe and

reconciles herself with him. Soon another, conflict takes place when Margaret's second husband, Joe, dies in a car accident. Reconciliation soon follows when her first husband, Chacko, invites Margaret and her daughter, Sophie, to spend their time celebrating Christmas in Ayemenem. The day before Margaret and Sophie arrive, the entire family goes to a theater to see an English movie, "THE SOUND OF MUSIC", Estha is seduced by the orange drink lemon drink man, a beverage vendor.

Roy's novel is totally woven with conflicts and resultant reconciliations. An important conflict occurs when the family consisting of Chacko, Ammu, Estha, Rahel and Baby Kochamma encounters a group of communist protestors who surround the car and compel Baby Kochamma to wave a red flag and raise communist slogans. Surprisingly Rahel sees Velutha, an untouchable servant, who works in their pickle factory. Velutha's presence, with the communist mob makes baby Kochamma associate him with her humiliation at their hands. So she begins to develop a deep hatred towards him.

The character of Velutha is the symbol of Social and political conflict. He is an untouchable a dalit. His family has been working for the Ipc family for generations and generations. Velutha is a great carpenter and Mechanic. His technical skills make him indispensable at the pickle factory, but it rouses resentment and hostility from other touchable factory workers. Rahel and Estha develop a strong bond with Velutha and love him despite being an untouchable, another instance of reconciliation.

Another conflict is presented in a situation where Ammu, who is madly drawn towards Velutha, is locked with him inside her room, but they get caught and Velutha is banished from the pickle factory and the household of Ammu. Soon Ammu is in rage and she blames Rahel and Estha for this humiliating and embarrassing situation and subsequent misfortunes. She roars to avenge against Rachel and Estha. Being disturbed, they decide to run away.

Truth and its revelation becomes the source of a major conflict in the lives of certain characters as we find it so through the characters of Baby Kochamma, Ammu, Chacko, Estha and Rahel. It is a long journey of turbulent childhood and painful adolescence in India, Rahel goes to America for higher studies. She gets married there only to be divorced soon. At the end she returns to Ayemenem after working on dead end jobs for several years for ultimate reconciliation with her brother, Estha.

Estha and Rahel who stand for compulsive reconciliation at the age of thirty one years, get themselves reunited for the first time since their childhood. Both are haunted by their constant guilt and grief ridden pasts. Estha is perpetually silent while Rahel develops a haunted look in her eyes. Neither of the twins finds another person, who can understand

them in the way that they understand each other. They tend to renew their intimacy by sleeping together in the same bed. Much against all social and domestic norms their ultimate reconciliation materializes through a kind of fraternal incest.

Arundhati Roy is a unique writer who is anti capitalistic, Anti imperialistic, and monopolistic, anti fanatic in her tone and treatment of her characters and situations in her novel "The god of small things". To develop her story of the novel she creates several conflicts and a large number of reconciliations through diverse characters and numerous situations. Arundhati Roy's greatness as a writer lies in the fact that she has successfully presented a conflict in places as well as a reconciliations in places. She has also successfully presented a conflict in themes as well as a reconciliations in themes in her novel, "the god of small things".

If we look into the novel in detail we will find a conflict in places as well as reconciliation in places. Here it is proper to point out at the novel opens with a conflict in time and in place. May in Ayemenem, is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dust green trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. The conflict in time and in place as immediately followed by reconciliation in nature.

While presenting the conflict in characters Arundhati Rai has chosen the birth of two main characters, the fraternal twins, Estha and Rahel. They were nearly bond in a bus. The novelist has depicted well the conflict in situation. The car in which their father, Babu was taking their mother Ammu to hospital in Shillong broke down suddenly in the middle. Leaving the car, they stopped a crowded state transport bus in which Ammu was allowed by other passengers to deliver the twins.

How a barrier between the police authorities and commoner becomes a source of conflict is shown in *The God of Small Things* when Ammu goes the police station to make a statement before the station House Officer. The situation of conflict between the Inspector Thomas Mathew who represents the police authorities and Ammu who represents the commoner is vividly depicted. Inspector Thomas Mathew's mustaches bustled like the friendly Air India Maharajah's, but his eyes were sly and greedy.

"It's a little too late for all this, don't you think?" he said.

He spoke the coarse Kottayam dialect of Malayalam. He stared at Ammu's breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from veshyas or their illegitimate children. Ammu said she'd see

about that. Inspector Thomas Mathew came around his desk and approached Ammu with his baton.

The conflict in character is presented in the novel through the character of Rahel. At the age of eleven Rahel is blacklisted in Nazareth convent, her character is a character of conflict. Rahel was first blacklisted in Nazareth Convent at the age of eleven, when she was caught outside her Housemistress's garden gate decorating a knob of fresh cow dung with small flowers. At Assembly the next morning she was made to look up depravity in the Oxford Dictionary and read aloud its meaning. "*The quality or condition of being depraved or corrupt*," Rahel read, with a row of stern mouthed nuns seated behind her and a sea of sniggering schoolgirl faces in front. "Perverted quality; Moral perversion; The innate corruption of human nature due to original sin; Both the elect and the non-elect come into the world in a state of total d. and alienation from God, and can, of themselves do nothing but sin." - J. H. Blunt

How a difference in the composition of eyes and teeth between the twins, Rahel and Estha is made out to be a conflict by Roy strikes artistically significant. Estha had slanting, sleepy eyes and his new front teeth were still uneven on the ends. Rahel's new teeth were waiting inside her gums, like words in a pen. It puzzled everybody that an eighteen-minute age difference could cause such a discrepancy in front-tooth timing.

The meeting between Ammu and her 'husband-would be' is developed as a blend of conflict and reconciliation in order that it will lead to yet another major conflict in their future life leading to their permanent separation and Ammu's departure from Kolkata to Ayemenem.

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