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## Subjectivity and Personhood in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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### **Abstract:**

The paper probes the description of subjectivity and personhood in the novel *The God of Small Things*. Arundhati Roy has meticulously observed social and political attitudes in India. The novel discusses a Syrian Christian family living in the village of Ayemenam in Kerala. The protagonist Rahel lives with her twin brother Estha, mother Ammu, grand-aunt baby Kochamma, maternal Grandmother, Mommachi, uncle Chacko maid Kochu Maria. The family runs a pickle factory. They live in a time when communist parties have gained a foothold in Kerala, as certainly in their village. One of the communist party members is Velutha, an untouchable who loves the twins and adore, despite Baby Cochamma severely, resenting him for having privileges that should rightfully be denied for untouchable.

Ammu's struggle is very much example of subjectivity and personhood. She got married a man Baba who worked in a tea estate. She was treated badly by her husband. After the birth of Estha and Rahel, then she returns to her mother's home. But here, her life is full of misery and suffering. She comes close to Velutha but this closeness is also painful. She is being locked and Velutha is beaten by police. The death of Sophie Mol forces Ammu to leave her mother's home. Velutha also died. She sends her son Estha to her husband. She works for her livelihood. She tries to maintain her personhood but because of bad health she dies in the a hotel room.

**Keywords: Resenting, staunch, activist, numerous, transgression, determination, disposition, anti-globalization, personhood, summoned, inductive, obliterate, accomplish.**

Arundhati Roy a famous Indian novelist who won The Booker Prize in 1997 for her first well-known novel, *The God of Small Things*. She is a social activist. She writes on political issues. She is associated with anti-globalization movement and is a staunch critic of neo-imperialism. She wrote screen play in movies. She worked for television. She has written on culture and contributed to the book *We are one : A Celebration of Tribal Peoples*. This book explores the culture of people around the world. It also portrays their diversity and the threats of their existence. She wrote *The End of Imagination* (1988) which criticizes the Indian Government's nuclear policies. It was published in her collection, *The Cost of Living* (1999).

Many critics as Julie Mullaney, Alex Tickell, Graham Huggan, Noy Thrupkaew have studied Roy by applying their perspectives differently. As Julie Mulie Mullaney points out

in her essay "Globalizing Dissent" that Roy as "the public voice of India's anti-globalization movement." (57 ,emphasis in original). Tickell states that Roy's novel highlights its political quality critically. Graham Huggan views as Roy's lush depictions of the tristes tropiques, her explicit representations of the exotic, and the numerous instances of transgression and excess in the novel answer to a certain desire in the West for an authentic India, full of dark secrets and strange customs. In a similar vein, Noy Thrupkaew points out that Third World women writers such as Roy are marketed as exotic beauties who produce pen delicious tales of kitchen squabbles and sparkly saris.

Even, earlier studies were particular but they did not study Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* as tracing subjectivity and personhood as well as Roy in this line of exploration. The present study draws a lots of critical attentions. As Madalina Nicolof echoes Murphy views and asserts "act of first naming thereby allows the freedom of personhood through its determination "(Nicolof 93). As subjectivity is the condition of being a subject : i.e. the quality of possessing perspectives experiences, feelings, beliefs, desires and/or power. J.P. Moreland clarifies "It is because an entity has an essence and falls within a natural kind that it can possess a unity of dispositions capacities, parts and properties at a given time and can maintain identity through change (Moreland 86).

Arundhati Roy's seminal novel *The God of Small Things* illustrates the trials and tribulations of a social milieu through the descriptions of twins Rahel and Estha with undertones of the callousness of the caste system, class exploitation and the feminine woes in the period of old patriarchal social set-up where the heroine of the novel Ammu struggles for her status in the society. Roy imbibed Ammu as an image of subjectivity and personhood. The novel narrates the tragic tale of love between an untouchable and his upper caste (Syrian Christian ) beloved.

The novel explains how especially small things govern the big things in life. It revolves around the life of Ammu, who married Baba, a worker in a tea estate and divorced. She has twins Rahel and Estha. Her parents are Mammachi and Pappachi. They have son Chacho whose wife is Margaret Kochamma. Chacho's daughter is Sophie Mol. Baby Kochamma is Pappachi's sister. Then, there are other characters as Velutha is notable because much of the action of the novel revolves around him. He is an untouchable carpenter.

The novel begins to cover the main events of twenty three years earlier while the funeral of Sophie Mol was happened. Ammu reached the village of Ayemenem in Kerala. Ammu was allowed to attend the funeral with her son Estha and daughter Rahel. But no one looked at them. The situation is very panic, Ammu's stand in this matter carries her personhood. She is feeling nervousness, trying to recount herself, As:

Her skin was cold. Estha stood close to her, barely awake, his aching eyes glittering like glass, his burning cheek against the bare skin of Ammu's trembling, hymnbook-holding arm. (Roy 5).

Roy reveals the subjectivity in the novel while she describes Ammu. Ammu completed her education in Delhi and moved to Ayemenem. Pappachi, her father did not have enough money for dowry to her. Then she got married Baba, a person who worked at tea estate in Assam. They lived some time together. Ammu gives birth two twins-Rahel & Estha. Her husband was full-blown alcoholic person. He treated Ammu badly. He faced fear of his English manager, Mr. Hollick who summoned him. Mr. Hollick's behavior over Baba was surprising. He wants that Ammu has been sent to his bungalow to be looked after. Here, Ammu is treated in a form of subjects. But, this conduct has shaken down Ammu and she decides to leave her husband.

Ammu reached her father's home with her children. She tries to reaffirm her personhood. She feels a lots of troublesome and miserable plights at this place. Baby Kochamma who is grand-aunt of twins. She disliked them and resented Ammu because she found that Ammu was quarrelling with a fate that she. Ammu's fate was known as the wretched Man-less woman. The family had a traditional business of Pickle making. Chacko studied at Oxford. Velutha who was untouchable was put as a factory carpenter by Mammachi. He was younger than Ammu. Velutha had grown friendship to Rahel and Estha. Ammu continues her efforts to remember her time with Baba which forces her to construct personhood. Roy portrays, as :

Ammu said that he had only carried them for the photograph and even then had been so drunk that she was scared he'd drop them. Ammu said she'd been standing just outside

the photograph, ready to catch them if he did. Still, except for their cheeks, Estha and Rahel thought it was a nice photograph. ( 84-85).

The novel advances to interpret how Ammu has been considered as a subject and her personhood is embodied with her. Ammu works in her parents' factory-Paradise Pickles. Chacko meets his ex-wife Margaret Kochamma with his daughter Sophie Mol. They attend Abhilash Talkies where Estha is molested .There was Comrade K.N.M. Pillai whom Velutha had been seeing and he had become a card-holding member of the Marxist Party. Comrade K.N.M Pillai visited Paradise Pickle and tried to use the workers of Paradise Pickle for his political purpose. Ammu guesses a future trouble for the factory. She passes her time at this place. She has pitiable stage of life. But her attempt to recount herself to over win on miseries and sufferings is inductive in the novel. It leads a sense of courage to her so that she may depict her personhood. As Roy points out :

Ammu held the back of Rahel's head with one hand. With her thumb in her handkerchief she blocked the beadless nostril. All eyes in the waiting room were on Rahel. It was to be the performance of her life. Estha's expression prepared to blow its nose. Furrows gathered on his forehead and he took a deep breath. (133).

The novel unfolds the harshness of Ammu. She wants to do a job to fulfill her children's needs. One day she was caught by the eyes of Velutha. Velutha felt that he had seen her in such way as he never saw her before. It is being seen through Ammu's gaze, which "over determines his physicality". (Singh 14). Here, the narrator stresses that Ammu is the subject of the gaze, while Velutha is known for its object. They become close to each other. They spend some time in the haunted house of the across river. Baby Kochamma is incited to see this affair and feels jealousy to them. She obliterates her twins badly. While Velutha's father Vellya Paapan is also in constant fear for his son. Baby Kochamma grimly degrades this relation. There is police complains. Velutha has been caught by the police. He is beaten savagely. Later, he dies of police beating. Then, there is another callousness in the life of Ammu as boat drowning. Rahel and Estha have been saved but Sophie Mol dies. Ammu is upset and leaves this house. But her affection towards Velutha is haunted. She felt safe in his arms besides Baby Kochamma's utmost severity. Ammu let her spirit of subjectivity and personhood alive here as Roy remarks:

His arms were still around her, she could feel the muscles move while his hands played with a dry palm frond. Ammu smiled to herself in the dark, thinking how much she loved his arms—the shape and strength of them, how safe she felt resting in them when actually it was the most dangerous place she could be. (338).

Therefore, Arundhati Roy, through *The God of Small Things* has accomplished myriad themes on the cultural spectrum of Kerala. The novel is the most eloquent one. It will ever be ranked the greatest works in English literature. My findings are humble attempt to have a glance at how it deals with subjectivity and personhood.

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