

## **Review of Arundhati Roy's Novels "The God of Small Things" and Azadi**

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### **Abstract**

In "The God of Small Things," Arundhati Roy delicately weaves a narrative tapestry, exploring the intricacies of human relationships against the backdrop of social and political turbulence in Kerala, India. Through the eyes of twins Rahel and Estha, Roy examines the impact of societal norms, family dynamics, and forbidden love in a post-colonial setting. The novel traverses themes of caste, class, and colonialism, unraveling the complexities of power and privilege in a society bound by tradition and oppression. In "Azadi," Roy turns her gaze to the contemporary political landscape of India, offering a collection of essays that fiercely challenge dominant narratives and advocate for justice, equality, and freedom. With incisive critique, she exposes the erosion of democratic values, the marginalization of minority voices, and the rise of authoritarianism in the world's largest democracy. "Azadi" serves as a rallying cry for dissent and resistance, urging readers to confront injustice and envision a future built on principles of equity and solidarity. Together, these works form a powerful testament to Arundhati Roy's literary prowess and her commitment to social justice, illuminating the complexities of the human experience and the enduring struggle for liberation.

### **Introduction**

Arundhati Roy, an acclaimed Indian author and activist, stands as a prominent voice in contemporary literature and socio-political discourse. Through her novels, essays, and speeches, Roy deftly navigates the complex terrain of human experience, shedding light on issues of power, privilege, and resistance in the context of Indian society.

In "The God of Small Things," Roy transports readers to the lush landscapes of Kerala, India, where she unravels the intricacies of familial bonds amidst a backdrop of social upheaval. Through the lens of twins Rahel and Estha, Roy delves into the tangled web of love, caste, and

tradition, weaving a narrative that oscillates between innocence and despair. Set against the backdrop of post-colonial India, the novel confronts the lingering shadows of colonialism and the entrenched structures of caste oppression, offering a poignant exploration of the human cost of societal norms and expectations.

In her more recent work, "Azadi," Roy shifts her focus to the contemporary political landscape of India, where she confronts head-on the challenges posed by rising authoritarianism and the erosion of democratic values. Through a collection of essays, Roy exposes the fault lines of a society grappling with issues of identity, citizenship, and dissent. With unflinching courage, she critiques the injustices perpetuated by state power and advocates for the voices of the marginalized and disenfranchised. "Azadi" serves not only as a scathing indictment of oppressive regimes but also as a manifesto for collective action and resistance in the face of tyranny. In both "The God of Small Things" and "Azadi," Roy demonstrates her mastery of storytelling as a tool for social critique and transformation. Through her evocative prose and piercing insights, she invites readers to confront uncomfortable truths about power and privilege, while also inspiring them to imagine a world guided by principles of justice, equality, and freedom. As both a literary luminary and a fearless activist, Arundhati Roy continues to leave an indelible mark on the global literary landscape, challenging readers to question the status quo and strive for a more just and equitable society.

### **Importance of the Study**

The study of Arundhati Roy's novels "The God of Small Things" and "Azadi" holds significant importance in several dimensions. Roy's literary works serve as powerful vehicles for understanding the complexities of Indian society, offering nuanced insights into its history, culture, and socio-political dynamics. Through her storytelling, Roy illuminates the enduring legacies of colonialism, caste oppression, and class divisions, fostering deeper empathy and understanding among readers. Roy's works are deeply relevant to contemporary discussions on social justice and human rights. By exploring themes of power, privilege, and resistance, her novels compel readers to confront uncomfortable truths about systemic inequalities and the urgent need for collective action. In the context of "Azadi," Roy's essays provide critical analysis

of current events and political trends, empowering readers to engage in informed dialogue and advocacy for positive change. The study of Roy's literature contributes to the broader discourse on post-colonial literature and feminist literature. Her unique narrative style and thematic exploration challenge traditional literary conventions, inviting readers to interrogate dominant narratives and perspectives. Through the lens of gender, race, and class, Roy dismantles stereotypes and amplifies marginalized voices, enriching literary scholarship and fostering greater inclusivity in literary studies. The study of Arundhati Roy's novels "The God of Small Things" and "Azadi" offers not only literary enrichment but also serves as a catalyst for critical thinking, social awareness, and transformative action in pursuit of a more just and equitable world.

### **Literature Review**

**Suleman, D., & Mohamed, A. H. (2018).** Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" poignantly addresses critical social issues, particularly those concerning women and children, within the confines of a deeply stratified society. The novel unfolds in Kerala, India, where the legacies of colonialism and rigid caste systems persist, fostering a culture where women and children are often marginalized and subjected to abuse. Through the characters of Ammu and her twins, Rahel and Estha, Roy explores the harsh realities of gender discrimination and child abuse. Ammu, as a divorced woman, confronts societal scorn and systemic limitations, her desires and aspirations thwarted by the traditional roles assigned to women. Her relationship with Velutha, a man from a lower caste, not only defies social norms but also highlights the severe consequences women face when they challenge patriarchal structures. Meanwhile, the trauma of child abuse is vividly portrayed through the poignant narrative of Estha, who is molested, leading to a lifetime of silence and suffering. Roy uses these narratives to critique the social mores that perpetuate such abuses, illustrating how these issues are not isolated incidents but are interwoven with the broader social and political fabric that dictates the lives of the vulnerable.

**Outka, E. (2011).** Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" and "Azadi" delves deeply into the themes of trauma and temporal hybridity, showcasing how past events and emotions continuously bleed into the present, affecting the characters' lives in profound ways. The narrative structure of the novel itself defies linear temporality, as it intricately weaves between

various time frames, revealing how the traumas experienced by the characters, especially the twins Rahel and Estha, are not confined to a single moment but persist through time, influencing their thoughts and actions years later. This temporal hybridity is employed by Roy to highlight the lingering impacts of colonial legacies, societal norms, and personal tragedies. For instance, the traumatic death of their cousin Sophie Mol and the forbidden love affair between their mother Ammu and Velutha, a Dalit, have lasting repercussions that disrupt the conventional sequence of time in storytelling. The disjointed temporal structure reflects the psychological states of the characters, who are trapped in a cycle of revisiting past traumas that shape their present and future. Roy's narrative technique emphasizes that time is not linear but a mosaic of moments, memories, and experiences that coalesce to form the characters' identities and destinies, illustrating a powerful critique of how past injustices continue to echo in the lives of those affected.

**Tickell, A. (2007).** "Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things': A Routledge Study Guide" offers an extensive and insightful analysis into Roy's Booker Prize-winning novel, which is renowned for its intricate narrative structure and profound thematic depth. This guide provides readers with a comprehensive breakdown of the novel's complex themes, such as the rigid caste system, colonial impacts, gender politics, and the pervasive influence of socio-political norms on individual lives in Kerala, India. It also delves into the literary techniques Roy employs, including her use of non-linear timelines which underscore the thematic concerns of memory and trauma, and the poetic language that enhances the sensory experiences of the narrative. The study guide includes chapter-by-chapter summaries, which are invaluable for understanding the sequence of events and their interconnections. Critical analyses in the guide explore the symbolism used by Roy and the significance of her character development, which reveals broader social commentaries on issues like marginalization and resistance. Additionally, the guide offers a variety of viewpoints from different literary critiques, providing a well-rounded perspective on the novel's reception and its place in contemporary literature. This Routledge guide is an essential resource for students and scholars alike, offering the tools needed to fully appreciate and analyze Roy's complex narrative and thematic intricacies.

**Dingwaney Needham, A. (2005).** In Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things," the concept of 'The Small Voice of History' is pivotal, reflecting the nuanced and often overlooked narratives

that are overshadowed by grand historical events and dominant cultural narratives. Roy's novel masterfully amplifies these small voices, focusing on the intricacies and intimacies of a single family whose lives are deeply entwined with the socio-political changes in post-colonial India. The narrative brings to the forefront the marginalized and suppressed voices of those like Ammu, an estranged wife and mother, and Velutha, a Dalit man whose tragic love story with Ammu defies the rigid caste boundaries imposed by society. These personal stories of love, loss, and betrayal are set against the backdrop of larger historical forces, such as the lingering effects of British colonialism and the rise of the communist movement in Kerala. By juxtaposing these individual experiences with historical events, Roy underscores how history is not just shaped by the loud voices of the powerful but is also profoundly influenced by the quieter, smaller voices of ordinary people. Through its lyrical prose and shifting narrative perspectives, the novel captures the essence of these small yet significant historical voices, making a compelling case for their inclusion in our understanding of history.

**Fox, L. C. (2002).** In Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things," the concept of a "martyrology of the abject" serves as a poignant exploration of witnessing and trauma, presenting the characters as martyrs of their societal conditions. The abject—those cast down or degraded—such as the untouchable Velutha or the divorced and isolated Ammu, are central to the narrative, showcasing how the marginalized endure suffering that is often invisible to the broader society. Roy's narrative style, with its acute sensitivity to detail and emotion, turns the novel into a witness of these characters' silent and painful martyrdom under the oppressive structures of caste, gender, and class. The trauma experienced by these characters is not merely personal but is emblematic of broader social injustices. Velutha's tragic fate, culminating in a brutal death due to his forbidden love across caste lines, and Ammu's demise in destitution and obscurity, underscore their roles as martyrs in a society that refuses to acknowledge their humanity. Roy crafts their stories with a deep sense of witnessing, not just by the characters within the novel but also by the readers themselves, who are compelled to confront the uncomfortable realities of discrimination and injustice. This literary approach not only narrates trauma but also invites a reflective engagement with the abject, urging a reevaluation of the narratives often excluded from history.

**Prasad, A. N. (2004).** Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" and Azadi is a novel that stands out for its intricate narrative structure and profound thematic exploration, meriting a nuanced critical appraisal. The novel, which won the Booker Prize, delves deeply into the complexities of caste systems, forbidden love, and colonial legacies, set against the backdrop of Kerala, India. Roy's narrative is praised for its lyrical quality and innovative use of non-linear storytelling, which effectively mirrors the disjointed and cyclical nature of trauma and memory. Her language is both lush and precise, capturing the lush landscapes of Kerala while also conveying the constricting social norms that suffocate her characters. The novel has been both acclaimed and critiqued for its portrayal of complex themes through the lens of a single family's tragedy. Some critics argue that Roy's depiction of social issues sometimes overshadows individual character development, making the narrative seem more like a vehicle for broader social critique. However, the majority view is that Roy masterfully intertwines personal and political tragedy, making a poignant commentary on the human condition within repressive structures. Her ability to evoke empathy and provoke thought makes "The God of Small Things" a significant and enduring piece in contemporary literature, demonstrating how personal pain can reflect larger historical and social injustices.

**Oumhani, C. (2000).** In Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things," the themes of hybridity and transgression are vividly explored, serving as central elements that challenge societal norms and traditional boundaries. Hybridity in the novel is multifaceted, encompassing cultural, racial, and linguistic mixing that reflects the postcolonial context of Kerala, India. This blending is evident in the characters' identities and experiences, particularly in the family's diverse backgrounds and the influences of both local and colonial histories. The novel portrays these hybrid identities not as anomalies but as inherent realities of modern Indian life, where ancient customs intersect with the impacts of globalization. Transgression is another pivotal theme, depicted through the characters' violations of social and moral codes. The most striking act of transgression is the illicit love affair between Ammu and Velutha, which defies the strictures of caste and religion. This relationship, deemed unacceptable by the societal standards of the time, highlights the oppressive forces at play within their community. Roy uses their story to critique the rigid social hierarchies that dictate every aspect of personal conduct. Through these themes,

Roy not only questions the legitimacy of these societal norms but also illustrates the deep and often painful complexities involved in navigating identities in a rapidly changing world.

**Birgani, S., & Moosavinia, S. R. (2019).** Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" offers a rich terrain for a feminist analysis within the framework of postcolonial theory, skillfully intertwining the fight against colonial legacies with the struggle against patriarchal structures. Through its vivid portrayal of women characters, the novel explores how gender and power are articulated in a postcolonial Indian context, where colonial histories complicate traditional gender roles and expectations. The character of Ammu is central to this analysis. As a divorced woman seeking autonomy and love, Ammu challenges the strictures of a male-dominated society that seeks to confine her to subordinate roles. Her relationship with Velutha, a man from a lower caste, is not only a transgression of caste boundaries but also an assertion of her sexual agency, defying the patriarchal order that seeks to control female sexuality. This relationship, and the societal backlash it provokes, underscores the intersectionality of oppression experienced by women in postcolonial societies, where colonial legacies reinforce and are reinforced by indigenous patriarchal norms. Roy's narrative technique itself, which fluidly moves across time and perspectives, can be seen as a feminist method of subverting traditional linear storytelling, which often parallels patriarchal historical narratives. By presenting the story through multiple viewpoints, predominantly through the eyes of women and children, Roy emphasizes the importance of subjective experiences and emotional truths in challenging historical and cultural hegemonies. This approach not only enriches the feminist postcolonial critique but also highlights the enduring impacts of colonialism in shaping gender relations in contemporary India. Thus, "The God of Small Things" is not just a postcolonial narrative but also a profound feminist critique of the enduring effects of colonialism on the lives and freedoms of women.

**Bibi, A., et al (2019).** In "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy, class struggle emerges as a pervasive and critical theme, illustrating the deep divisions and the often tragic consequences of rigid social hierarchies. The novel vividly portrays how class intersects with other social categorizations such as caste, gender, and religion, to shape the destinies of its characters in profound and often devastating ways. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha epitomizes this struggle. Velutha, belonging to the untouchable Dalit caste, is depicted as a highly skilled and intelligent worker whose social status is pre-determined and restricted due to his low caste.

Despite his capabilities, he is confined to menial jobs and is subject to severe social discrimination. His illicit love affair with Ammu, who belongs to a higher but also troubled class, is portrayed as both an act of personal love and a transgressive challenge to the entrenched class and caste hierarchies. Their relationship defies the strict social codes of their time, highlighting the rigid class barriers that govern personal relationships and social mobility. Roy also critically examines the capitalist underpinnings of class disparity through the character of Mammachi, who runs a successful pickle factory. Despite her business success, she perpetuates class distinctions by exploiting lower caste workers like Velutha, which reflects the larger economic and social systems that benefit the few at the expense of the many.

**Al-Quaderi, G., & Islam, M. S. (2011).** In Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things," the portrayal of women is intricate, encapsulating themes of both complicity and resistance within the socio-cultural fabric of Kerala, India. The female characters in the novel, especially Ammu, Mammachi, and Baby Kochamma, represent various facets of both submission to and rebellion against societal norms that are deeply embedded in patriarchal and caste-based oppression. Ammu, the mother of the twins Estha and Rahel, embodies resistance. As a divorced woman who returns to her family home, she faces societal scorn and limited economic opportunities. Her affair with Velutha, a Dalit man, is a direct defiance of the strict social codes of caste and gender, demonstrating her refusal to conform to the oppressive structures that seek to dictate her life. However, this act of resistance also brings tragic consequences, reflecting the harsh penalties imposed on women who challenge societal expectations. Characters like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma exhibit complicity, upholding and enforcing the very social codes that oppress them. Mammachi, despite being a successful businesswoman, accepts the domestic abuse from her husband as a part of her life, and later, channels her frustrations into rigid control over her family. Baby Kochamma manipulates those around her to maintain her status within the family and the community, even if it means reinforcing harmful stereotypes and social norms against other women, including Ammu. Roy uses these characters to explore the complex dynamics of complicity and resistance within the framework of gender. By depicting their lives and choices, she highlights the double-edged sword of resisting oppressive structures: while resistance offers a path to personal liberation, it often comes at a great personal cost. This narrative framework serves not only as a critique of the societal norms that restrict women's lives



but also as a commentary on the intricate ways in which these norms are perpetuated by women themselves. The novel thus offers a nuanced view of women's roles in both perpetuating and challenging the patriarchal order, making it a compelling exploration of gender in a postcolonial context.

### **Scope of the Research**

The scope of research on Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" spans several critical domains, integrating both literary analysis and sociocultural critique. This research aims to dissect the intricate layers of caste discrimination, gender inequality, and the consequences of colonial legacies as depicted in the novel. By examining the portrayal of the caste system, the study will highlight how caste influences the personal and social relationships of the characters, contributing to their tragic destinies. Gender analysis will focus on the subversion and reinforcement of traditional gender roles through the character development of Ammu and Rahel, providing insights into the feminist undertones of the narrative. This research will explore Roy's use of a non-linear narrative structure and poetic language to enhance the emotive power of the novel. The stylistic devices employed by Roy, such as her use of metaphors and symbolism, will be analyzed to understand their impact on conveying complex social themes. The research will also consider the historical context of Kerala in the 1960s, assessing its influence on the events and characters depicted in the novel. Through a combination of literary criticism and cultural theory, the research will contribute to an enhanced understanding of how literature can challenge and reflect societal norms and injustices. This multifaceted approach will not only illuminate the depths of Roy's work but also engage with broader discussions about post-colonial identity, resistance, and the capacity of literary forms to influence social consciousness.

### **Justification of the Study**

The justification for studying Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" and Azadistems from its profound engagement with post-colonial themes and its meticulous critique of societal norms in India, particularly focusing on issues like caste, gender, and colonial legacies. This novel, set

in the state of Kerala, delves into the life of a multi-generational family, revealing the deep-seated prejudices and entrenched hierarchies that shape their lives. Its exploration of these themes provides critical insights into the complexities of Indian society, making it an essential study for understanding broader sociopolitical dynamics. The novel's relevance is amplified by its unique narrative style and linguistic innovation, which challenge traditional forms and enrich literary discourse. Roy's employment of a non-linear narrative and poetic prose invites an analysis of how form and content can interact to enhance thematic expression and emotional impact. Additionally, the novel's international acclaim and controversial reception within India highlight its cultural significance and its capacity to provoke discussion and debate about critical issues facing Indian society. Studying "The God of Small Things" is therefore justified as it not only broadens academic discussions around literature and society but also encourages a critical examination of how narratives can influence perceptions of identity, power, and resistance in a post-colonial context. This makes the novel an invaluable resource for scholars and students in fields like literary studies, cultural studies, and post-colonial studies.

### **Research Problem**

The central research problem addressed in the study of Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" revolves around understanding how deep-seated socio-cultural hierarchies and post-colonial legacies are articulated through the novel's narrative and how these elements influence individual identities and destinies within the text. Specifically, the research seeks to explore how the interplay of caste, gender, and colonial impacts in the novel reflect broader societal issues in India, examining the mechanisms through which oppression and resistance are manifested and negotiated in the lives of the characters. This study aims to dissect Roy's narrative structure and stylistic choices to assess how they contribute to the thematic depth and emotional resonance of the story. The problem extends to evaluating the implications of Roy's literary techniques for the reader's engagement with the social issues presented. This includes an investigation into how the non-linear timeline and poetic language affect the reader's perception of time, memory, and trauma, and how these narrative strategies serve to challenge conventional forms of storytelling and historical discourse. This research will enrich the understanding of literature's role in critiquing and reflecting societal norms and transformations.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of Arundhati Roy's novels "The God of Small Things" and "Azadi" reveals the enduring power of literature to provoke thought, inspire action, and effect change. Through her intricate storytelling and incisive critique, Roy navigates the complexities of Indian society with unparalleled insight and empathy. In "The God of Small Things," Roy masterfully captures the nuances of human relationships amidst a backdrop of societal turmoil, inviting readers to confront the legacies of colonialism, caste oppression, and patriarchy. Her portrayal of characters navigating the intersections of love, identity, and societal expectations resonates deeply, challenging readers to interrogate their own assumptions and prejudices. In "Azadi," Roy extends her literary prowess to the realm of political activism, offering a searing indictment of authoritarianism and advocating for the rights of the marginalized and disenfranchised. Through a collection of essays, she exposes the injustices perpetuated by state power and calls for a renewed commitment to democracy, justice, and freedom. These works form a testament to Roy's enduring legacy as both a literary luminary and a fearless activist. Through her words, she empowers readers to confront injustice, embrace empathy, and envision a world guided by principles of equality and solidarity. As we reflect on the rich tapestry of human experience woven by Arundhati Roy, we are reminded of the transformative potential of literature to ignite social change and pave the way for a more just and compassionate society.

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