

## Loss of childhood, Deprivation of love: A Psychoanalytic study of The God of Small Things

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### Abstract

#### ABSTRACT

Background of study: This paper explores the psychological impact of the childhood trauma and loss of love in Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* (1997). Using the psychoanalytic paradigm by Sigmund Freud (1917), it is observed that the fragmented childhood of the twins Estha and Rahel where they endure neglect, abuse, and repression greatly influence their developmental trajectories and their adult identity.

Aims and scope of paper: The deep silence of Estha, caused by molestation and the feeling of guilt when Velutha died, is an example of the hidden defense mechanism and repression, but the indifference of the emotions of Rahel is an example of the permanent scarring of loss. The study also indicates that violence, parental apathy, and discrimination by society trigger depression, neurosis, and post-traumatic stress disorder and leaves the characters in a time loop. Although the context of literature has explored the class struggle, cultural feminism, sexism and gender discrimination, this exploration prefigures the psychoanalytic aspects of repressed trauma and the ensuing psychoanalytic sequela.

Methods: A qualitative descriptive approach was used, and a close textual analysis of the novel to explain the psychological torments of the characters.

Result: The research shows that the loss of the naivety of childhood, supported by patriarchal ideals and cultural limitations, has long lasting effects on identity development, emotional health, and patterns of relationships in the adult stage.

Conclusion: To sum up, *The God of Small Things* is not just a socio-political commentary but a substantive psychological analysis of the development of humans blocked by the effects of trauma, guilt, and repression. The research highlights the need to be more aware and cautiously interacted to limit childhood trauma and forestall the psychological sequela throughout life.

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## INTRODUCTION

The renowned Indian author Arundhati Roy's (1997) novel 'The God of Small Things' is a story of tragic childhood and its serious effect on twin children, Rahel and Estha (Estha). The plot moves back and forth looking like their agonizing childhood memory and mirroring the intricacies in the lives of the heroes. The novel merits unique adoration for portraying the weakness and sufferings of children from broken homes and their battle to get by through viciousness.

We begin with the Arundhati Roy's take on her novel *The God of Small Things*: "*The book really delves, very deep I think, into human nature. The story tells of the brutality we're capable of, but also*

*that aching, intimate love. And for me the twins are what that is about...the ability to dream each other's dreams and to share each other's happiness and pain (Roy, 1977).*

It is the narrative of two friendly twins, Rahel and Estha, trapped in the entrapments of grown-up defilement, rebuffed for the wrongdoings of a world beyond their control. Roy relates the occasions that lead to this disastrous end, where one mix-up can twist crazy and can involve the most guileless. A large part of the story is told through the eyes, the delicate discernments, of these two kids. They are battling to get a protected climate, the genuine love of a parent and the commitment of a bearable future. Their battle to defend themselves and the youth closes one day, a day after which fates are deserted, and recuperation is incomprehensible. The psychological viewpoints and obstructions to learning have been examined in various literary works. The Booker Prize-winning book "The God of Small Things" has resolved two major issues likewise how do upsetting circumstances influence children's psychology, and how horrendous might a brutal home environment at some point be? Rahel and Estha experience the dispute of their elders. The relatives misuse and face one another, making antagonism. Their mom, Ammu, can't endure the torment of her alcoholic spouse and separations him, which constrained the children to take cover in their maternal home. The children are treated as weight; Baby Kochamma doesn't incline toward them since they had a place with inter-communal love marriage. The children are in the objective of grown-ups' outrage; they develop with dismissal, scorn and brutality. Replicating the grown-up conduct, they time after time include serious battles and vicious squabbles. The children feel depression and vulnerability; they are even rebuffed for perusing the words in reverse. Dissimilar to typical children, they must think about the complexities around their world.

The original theorist of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, has viewed a repressed memory of childhood sexual abuse or molestation as the fundamental predeterminant in the emergence of hysterical or obsessional symptomatology. It is clear in the story that Estha subconsciously carries the bitter and unpleasant experiences of his youth, and they later appear in his muteness and dehumanization. Estha undergoes deep trauma in his childhood life, among which there is the molestation by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, and other traumatic events like the death of Sophie Mol. All these experiences influence all his decisions in the rest of his life.

The post-traumatic affective reactions that Estha experiences lead him to the extremes of behavior where he isolates himself, shuns the actual process of social interaction, and resorts to a condition of utter silence. Such post-traumatic stress symptoms trigger additional mental disturbance. The family members cause further trauma to Estha. Baby Kochamma puts Estha and Rahel at a juncture where they have to lie about Velutha, a step that was meant to help them and their mother out of self-exposure. Estha is deeply guilty of this lie, and it is made evident when he goes and remembers his incriminating version of Velutha. The memory of a swollen face and a broken, upside-down smile, haunts Estha through his head, as he admits to committing this torture on an innocent man (Roy 102).

These feelings of guilt are very negative with long lasting effects especially among the weak kids. Constant guilt due to giving false testimony about Velutha and his experience with the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man is a persistent feeling that is entrenched in the mind of Estha, hence, leading to a depressive psychological state which is full of hopelessness. The continued existence of the feeling of guilt worsens his psychological health, as it undermines his ability to stay resilient and act as a motivating factor to disengage with the active life. All the factors mentioned above lead to the loss of innocence and the ruin of childhood integrity.

#### Exposure to violence and enforced separation

The self-respect of children is similarly substantial as in the grown-ups. Children even feel, notice, and see things more seriously than the developed ones. Ammu faults the children for their destiny and regrets for taking their liability. She even lets them know that she ought to have abandoned and sent them to orphanage. They are stunned to find the amount they are undesirable by their mom. They venture out from home with the goal that it causes the adults to feel sorry and choose to

return if Ammu asks. Sadly, Sophie is cleared away in the current. The children likewise witness the police pounding the life out of Velutha. They are taken to police headquarters for cross examination. They are compelled to give misleading articulation against Velutha to save themselves. Baby undermines them to inform the adjudicator concerning their taking of the things from home and the homicide of Sophie. Estha is taken to the lock up to give the assertion. There, he is terrorized by seeing the half-dead Velutha. Lamenting, Margaret slaps Estha until somebody stops her. The children see the police inspector harassing and offending Ammu. Seeing their mom defenseless and unnerved, they get stunned severely. Every one of them has responsibility for being liable for Velutha's passing. Estha and Rahel are depleted battling the pressure and dread. Chaco shows up with a handle and undermines Ammu expressing, 'escape my home before I break each bone in your body'. Then, at that point, for quite a long time, Rahel dreams an executioner and corpse, and this shows the bad effects of childhood traumas on young children and how they were unable to move forward in time and live a normal life like other adults around them.

The novel describes trauma and its profound distress in child psychology. The novel comprises of numerous traumas. Rahel and Estha, the two significant characters are haunted by previous events all through their life. I consider child psychology to be impacted by trauma, its causes, side effects and reactions are analyzed comparable to the experience of the children especially Rahel and Estha. In this paper, I utilize the theoretical framework of mental trauma and loss of innocence concentrated on corresponding to childhood. It gives translations of mental trauma in childhood and its durable influences even in the grown-up life.

#### Psychoanalytic theory

Sigmund Freud claims that human behavior is complex and cannot be sufficiently described using one construct. Freud in his pioneer psychoanalytic model finds three constitutive parts id, ego and superego that interact to generate complex human behavior.

#### The Id

Freud describes the id as the reservoir of psychic energy, and it is the main component of personality. It is the only constituent that appears at birth. The id is all unconsciousness, and it captures instinctual and primeval drives.

#### The Ego

Freud holds that the ego is the result of the id and lies between the id drives, which must be expressed in accordance with the external reality. The ego functions at conscious, preconscious and unconscious levels where it oversees adapting to reality.

#### Superego

This latter aspect comes out in early childhood, at the age of about five years. It represents the innerized moral norms and ideals that are developed under the influence of parents and society, the sense of good and evil, and provides the moral judgment standards.

#### Defense Mechanism

In the current research, the scholar concentrated on only one of the mechanisms proposed by Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud: repression.

#### Impact of Repression

Empirical studies confirm the hypothesis that selective forgetting is one of the channels in which people suppress the consciousness of unwanted thoughts or memories. Retrieval-induced forgetting is one of such processes in which recall of specific memories facilitates the weakening of the associated, non-recalled information. In turn, the repetitive evocation of memories may also make other memories less active. An example is that traumatic or unpleasant memories can be softened by multiple recollections of more pleasant information.

#### Dreams

According to Freud, dreams give us a peep into the unconscious. Through the study of the manifest content of dreams, the obvious, literal events, they can reveal latent content the symbolic intrusions of the unconscious. The repressed emotions can be reflected in anxieties, fears, and desires that can be realized in the dream experience.

The objectives of this research are to explain the negative psychological effects of neglected and molested childhood as depicted in *The God of Small Things*, drawing upon Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework, and to identify the ways in which the characters, particularly Estha, respond to experiences of childhood trauma in their adulthood. Accordingly, the study seeks to answer two main research questions: what factors contribute to the loss of childhood in the selected text, and how and why the main character, Estha, becomes psychologically "stuck in time."

The major task of the current study is to analyze the twin characters of the chosen novel using the psychoanalytic theory developed by Sigmund Freud, and to elucidate the underlying factors likely to explain the unstable personalities of the relevant. In the next chapter of the literature review, the literature on the same novel, namely, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy is surveyed and the literature is analyzed with the help of varied theoretical perspectives and approaches to the research.

The Marxist Approach to Reading the God of Small Things.

(Afzal et al., 2022) state that the novel is an excellent exploration of social issues that represent a Marxist analytical trade system. According to them, the story is a vivid description of Indian culture, where different social institutions place themselves ahead of others, and therefore, it is a commentary of an empire class system. The authors recognize a vivid representation of the dichotomy between the accessible and the untouchables and suggest that the Roy work represents politics in a very Marxist perspective, thus indicating the ingrained class structure that permeates in the Indian society. As they put it, the novel represents a division of a class struggle to the rest of the population and how material possessions divide people into bourgeois and proletariats. According to them, the bourgeoisie is the privileged layer of society which creates a kind of philosophy aimed at winning its privileges and at exploiting the lower layers. At the same time, the novel presents a myriad of criticism of the modern situation such as commentary on socialism, the effects of bourgeois ideology, exploitation of the lower classes by the higher ones, a feminist activist approach, and radicals of Marxist thinking. The authors argue that the novel reflects what the author sees the Indian culture, and that the study takes a subjective approach to the Marxist theory and attempts to explore the inner workings of the Indian society. The analysis in the review is limited to Roy, *The God of Small Things*, and the theoretical paradigm of Karl Marx to explain the processes in the society.

### Class Struggle

In the book under consideration, Arundhati Roy acknowledges the Marxist perspective of the conflict of classes in modern India (Bibi et al., 2021). The authors suggest that the Marxist vision of life is not devoid of vices as communists have always considered the lower stratum as deprived of material wealth but having ideological unity. In this approach, the worker-class has no honor in India, and this deprivation is a key driving factor in the study which shows a feeling of weakness on those who are marginalized in the society and who are largely looked down upon by the society below the standards of humanity. The second paragraph looks at the fact that the authors discuss that the origin of communism needs the complete involvement of specialists and the fair distribution of resources among the general population. This reading suggests that the novel is full of struggle between classes, and, in fact, the class struggle is represented as not just a conflict, but also as testament on how privileged societies exploit the lower classes to their advantage on a regular basis. The novel has tried to portray through its characters that the privileged class oppresses the lower one. Velutha, the main character in the novel, represents the voice of the lower classes and is invisible as a human being. He does not even get a chance to interact even with people, as his status as untouchable caste alienates him. Roy therefore tries to suggest that high society has defined some norms, and they use these norms to their own benefit. Conversely, the

authors suggest that the social tragedies that exist in India are exceptional, in the sense that they portray individuals related to an anomalous society who deal with an untouchable will invite vice. Similarly, it is regarded as a crime when an individual of the lower caste is trying to form relations in the privileged society. Such individuals are, therefore, repelled by society at large. Velutha is untouchable in this regard since he does not have a right to be loved by an available woman. He belongs to the socialist coalition as well since he is an employee in a processing plant. His death is also political because he is killed by a woman who is affiliated with the high social taboo. The bourgeoisie enjoys all freedoms, and the working class even does not have basic needs. The novel also outlines the way the Indian culture should be addressed. As a communist, Roy is horrified about the situation of the common folks where everyday actions are off-putting to the point that individuals do not find themselves on a playing field. At the same time, the novel inquires that provincial rules are imperfect and that ordinary person obtains nothing out of freedom- completely he is transformed therefore. Having been a former employee under the veil of white labour, he now serves in terms of even darker circumstances, and even worse than before. In the same manner, the class system is suggested to establish the foundations of Indian culture which is left in stark contrast against the rest of the world which is empty. This institutional structure makes the masses drained internally.

#### The God of Small Things: A Study of Individual and Social Psychology

Dr. Neelam Bhardwaj (2016)

The last 50 years have been marked with radical changes in global society. The same thing happened to Indian culture, which experienced much modification having transformed its aesthetic manifestations and intellectual arguments. Fundamental values and deep beliefs in various settings were put under severe examination and challenge. Thus, the Indian women came into a state of acuteness of the tension of retaining their own identity in the context of being a spouse, mother and a person. Women authors analyzed the development of social and family systems and showed anxiety about mechanisms that help lie and suppress the weak. Ironically, they were intellectually resilient and practiced experimental narrative. By such attempts, they penetrated into the depths of psychology previously unexplored. This paper provides a humble questioning of God of Small things as a book of personal and societal psychology.

Fetishism of Commodities, Patriarchal Repression and Psychic Deprivation (September.2009)

This paper explores how the depiction of monetary deceit and gender oppression in the book The God of Small things use commodities as a subject matter around which the subordination of characters suffering under the structures of production and exchange develops a desire to be dominant and in charge. The novel, however, proposes possible solutions to counter capitalist exploitation and patriarchal dominance by impersonating the socially assigned roles to discover alternatives means of struggle against oppressive forces (2009).

Cultural Constituents that have led to Women Suppression

A Feministic Approach an Analysis of the Novel the God of Small Things According to the Lenses of the Cultural Radical Feminism.

Saman Salah (2018) redefines society as a dynamic and driving element of human activity. The feminist activists assume that something is not fixed in the social structures, thus, it is necessary to study it in the short run as well as in more general contexts, especially when females are placed in new settings characterized by high rates of social mobility, or when they are placed in new social settings by emigrating to new locations. The god of Small Things by Arundhati Roy is a feminist novel which gives a complex picture of the women facing the conditions of oppression by the community. The current review attempts to clarify the masking of women who are promoted by social and cultural constructions in the novel in a subjective, exploratory and interpretive approach. The novel clearly highlights the social and cultural processes, which oppress women. The paper, which is founded on radical feminist point of view, will seek to highlight how cultural feminism is depicted in feminist literature using the book The God of Small Things. In this regard, it aims to

prove the relevance of radical feminism as a particular type of feminism which implies the reflection of the current socio-cultural reality.

#### Post-colonialism and Counter Discourse

The analysis of Arundhati Roy of the novel *The God of Small Things* through the prism of counter-discourse (Iesar Ahmad, 2015) is based on how the author carefully forms the counter-desultory practices into the narrative. It attempts to find out how Roy subverts colonial hegemonic norms in her text. The researcher read the stories within the context of the post-colonial counter-talk. The review concludes that etymological hybridity and social syncreticity is one of the critical barriers, opposites, and grey areas in the face of the Euro-centric hegemonic paradigms during the age of cultural convergence and neo-imperialism.

#### Gender Discrimination

Dr. Sandeep Kumar Sharma (2018) describes Arundhati Roy as an Indian author, social activist, and influential political figure who addresses the issue of systemic injustice through her literary and protest actions. *The God of Small Things* foreshadows the horrors of gender discrimination in India, as it shows the depreciation and mistreatment of women in a systemic manner, as they are treated in a man-centered world. Roy foreshadows the inequity of classes, gender, color, and racial distinction using socio-cultural paradigms, highlighting their effects on human relations, and patterns of individual behavior. Conservative traditions create stubbornness, and Roy uses her characters to speak out and portrays the injustices of those who are socially oppressed due to their gender in such a vivid way.

Even though the academic discussion of *The God of Small Things* has included Marxist, feminist, post-colonial, and socio-political prisms, there is an obvious gap in the understanding of the psychological aspect of the novel especially when the Freudian paradigm is applied. Previous studies have examined the issue of class struggle, cultural repression, gender discrimination, and social hierarchies, but have not given much scholarly consideration to psychoanalytical studies on childhood trauma, repression, and loss of innocence in the case of Estha and Rahel. This gap is the subject of the current paper, as it will specifically focus on the psychological consequences of child neglect and molestation, examine the processes of repression and defense mechanisms, and clarify how the traumatic experiences disorganize personality development and affect it in adulthood.

In the book *The God of Small Things*, we have a glimpse of how a child views the world, both the mundane events and the most terrifying ones. In general, the concepts of innocence cause a naive vision of the world; the paper criticizes the painful process of personality creation in children who are growing up in abusive families. Additionally, the novel discusses elusive love, inability to keep boundaries, pride and shame, the role of women in the Indian society, insecurity of women, the untouchables who are marginalized in the society, Indian society workers who work to earn a living, societal discrimination, betrayal, misogyny, and patriarchy. The research therefore focuses on the erosive nature of childhood traumas and ensuing consequences of assault and trauma on adult personality as per Freudian account.

### METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative research methodology for the analysis of Novel "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) "The goal of qualitative research is not to generalize but to explore and understand particular phenomena." Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) states that "Qualitative research is the study of things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." More precisely Creswell (2013) describes it as "Qualitative research is about the human experience, how people interpret and make sense of their world". (Creswell, 2013)

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) states that "Qualitative research allows for the exploration of complex social phenomena in context." A good research design should be well-planned and well-executed,



with a clear focus on the research question or problem. It should include a clear definition of the variables being studied, a clear description of the methodology to be used, and a clear plan for data collection and analysis. [Albert Szent-Gyorgyi \(1960\)](#) explains that "Research is to see what everybody else has seen, and to think what nobody else has thought." Whereas [Neuman \(2006\)](#) states that "Descriptive research is designed to create a snapshot of the current thoughts, feelings, or behavior of individuals". ([Neuman, W.L. 2006](#))

#### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frame that is used to carry out this exploration of the deprivation of childhood in the context of Arundhati Roy in her book *The God of little Things* is based on the psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud. Freud assumes that the behavior of humans is prearranged by unconscious desires, and childhood experiences can affect the development of personality in adult life. In line with this, this paper questions how childhood is being eroded by employing Freudian ideas of personality organization and psychosexual growth that outline a series of developmental progression that is characterized by a specific locus of pleasure. The traumatic events that the novel describes as having occurred to both twins Estha and Rahel explain the derailment of normative developmental paths, which leads to psychological sequelae that are permanently experienced. Along with the idea of the Oedipus complex, the analysis assumes that Freud said that children develop sexualized feelings towards the opposite sex parent and treat the same sex parent as a threat. The conflicted relationship of the twins with their mother in the story who is alienated by her husband and imposes the demands of ideal femininity by society offers a rich platform upon which this relationship can be explored. Moreover, the paper makes use of the defense mechanism concept to explain the adaptive or maladaptive reactions of characters to traumatic stimuli with specific references to repression as a maladaptive coping style. Together, the implementation of the psychoanalytic lens to the work of Freud can provide a detailed insight into the ways in which childhood trauma can take a specific form in the psychological set-ups of the adult life in the work, *The God of Small Things*.

#### Research type

The current investigation is a qualitative research project that will explain the lived experiences of characters with a history of childhood trauma. It is considered the qualitative approach is the suitable methodology, which possesses the ability to explore the subjective experiences of the participants, as well as their meanings they attach to such experiences. Through a descriptive method, the paper aims at developing a subtle understanding of the experiences of characters, as well as how they relate to the loss of childhood. As a methodology, the study employs the textual analysis of the novel as a primary source of data, which will produce rich data points that are contextually based. The general aim of this study is to shed light on the psychological outcome of trauma in childhood and to contribute to the scientific evidence which can be used to design the supportive measures to the people who have experienced the same misfortunes.

#### Selected text

*The God of Small Things* is a novel book written by an Indian novelist Arundhati Roy that was first published in 1997 and later won Booker Prize also in 1997. The story is presented in the backdrop of Kerala, India and traverses across decades and challenges the questions of love and loss, betrayal, caste subjugation and political instability. We read the story through the lens of several characters, hinting at the lives of fraternal twins Estha and Rahel, who must endure the vagaries of childhood, as well as, in adulthood. Although highly praised in terms of linguistic prose, rich description, and sophisticated characterization, the primary importance of the novel in the long term is that the author explains how the loss of childhood innocence may occur in a series of traumatic events. The text also questions how much of the norms and prejudices that a society possesses influence the experiential and perceptual framework of the children in a society. In addition, the novel describes the harmful consequences of maltreatment and neglect, as well as how these events can foster enduring psychological trauma.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The analysis and discussion chapter of the research work on childhood loss in the book *The God of Small Things* carries an intensive scrutiny and way out of the empirical data collected. It gives a detailed description of the research results and clarifies the influences of deprivation and loss occurring in early adulthood and consequences of its role on the paths of the characters of the novel. The chapter provides a foreground of the psychoanalytic theory on childhood development by Sigmund Freud, which focused on the shaping of adult behavior by early experiences. It also questions the defense mechanisms that the characters use to cope with traumatic events and their resultant effect on psychological wellbeing. Lastly, it highlights the role of cultural and societal pressures in perpetuating the cyclic nature of childhood trauma and hence promotes sociopolitical change to break the cycle.

### Background of the writer

Arundhati Roy, a renowned Indian novelist, political commentator and activist has written a voluminous body of work in the genres of fiction, essays, and reporting writing about politics, social equity, and environmental issues. Her first novel, *The God of Small Things*, earned her the Booker Prize in 1997 and is an expression of a semi-autobiographical story about life in Kerala, challenging the matters of family structure, social hierarchy, love, separation, and trauma. Roy in his non-fiction works such as *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, *Broken Republic* and *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* has a critical evaluation of socio-political and economical systems of India. Besides her literary work, she has also been active in environmental, human-rights and anti-globalization activism, which has maintained her influence in the modern Indian and world politics despite some of the controversy.

### Selected text

*The God of Small Things* is a novel by Arundhati Roy, which was first published in 1997. The story is set in the south Indian state of Kerala and is a story of two fraternal twins Estha and Rahel who reconnect as adults after a lengthy separation. The novel questions forbidden love, hierarchy of classes, and psychological effects of traumatic events. It has its unique structure that mixes time changes with a stream-of-consciousness and other aspects and apply several points of view and the magical realism style to its narration. The novel was widely praised at the time of its publication, as well as being the winner of the Booker Prize in 1997, it has been hailed as a classic of modern literature, particularly in its rich description of Kerala and its sensitive treatment of complex human relationships.

### Development of personality of twins.

The novel explores the complex relationship between twin siblings Rahel and Estha, and the way in which the experiences of traumatic events influence their psychological growth. Using the psychoanalytic model of Sigmund Freud, we determine the personality of the twins because of early misfortune. According to the theory of Freud, adult personality is formed by unconscious and early experiences, and it is developed in the phases of oral, anal, phallic, and genital stages of the development with psychosexual conflicts observed. In the case of Rahel and Estha, childhood traumas, which include observing the death of their cousin, Sophie Mol, experiencing abuse and neglect by their father and being exposed to the secret affair between their mother and Velutha, come in between the developmental processes. These incidences are manifested through a sustained lack of emotional attachment in Rahel and shyness in Estha. Furthermore, Freudian sociocognitive approach implies that impaired parent child interaction interferes with identity development and self-concept, hence interfering further with future relational functioning. Thus, the psychological profiles of the twins are indicative of leftover effects of early trauma, and it is important to note the deeper implications of childhood experience in adult personality and capacity to form relationships.

### Loss of childhood



Several factors leading to childhood loss were shown in the novel, as the case with social norms and expectations.

#### Trauma and abuse

Many of the characters experience trauma or abuse in various levels, which have a devastating impact on their sense of self-maturing. To illustrate, Ammu is physically and emotionally abused by her father and the abusive condition she is subjected to is transferred to the relations with her own children.

[Rita Pierson, TED Talk \(2013\)](#), Every Child Deserves a Champion, an adult who never gives up on them, who realizes the power of connection and demands that they become the best that they can possibly be. *"Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be."* ([Rita Pierson, TED Talk, 2013](#)).

#### Social hierarchies and discrimination

The novel is set in a society that is deeply divided by social hierarchies and discrimination based on caste, religion, and race. These divisions create a sense of "otherness" and can limit opportunities for the characters, particularly the children.

#### Parental expectations

The parents in the novel have high expectations for their children, particularly in terms of academic achievement and social status. This pressure can be overwhelming for children and can lead to a loss of childhood innocence and spontaneity.

#### Taboo relationships

The novel explores taboo relationships, such as the relationship between Ammu and Velutha, and the impact these relationships can have on the characters. These relationships challenge social norms and can lead to severe consequences for the characters involved.

The loss of childhood in "The God of Small Things" is caused by a combination of social and personal factors that limit the characters' ability to grow and develop in a healthy, nurturing environment. The novel highlights the damaging effects of trauma, discrimination, and societal expectations on the development of children and the formation of meaningful relationships.

#### Traumatic childhood

[Dave Pelzer, A Child Called "It" \(1995\)](#), *"Childhood should be carefree, playing in the sun; not living a nightmare in the darkness of the soul."*

The whole novel is filled with a range of traumatic events that the characters undergo, and which influence their growth in various ways and have long-lasting impact on their mental health. Among the notable examples of traumatic childhood experience in the story, there is the death of the cousin of twins Sophie Mol. Her drowning is observed by the children, and they cannot do anything to save her, so they become traumatized and not processed enough as seen in the excerpt below.

"The memory of Sophie Mol, sticky with Love-in-the-Mist and crumpled like a satin ballerina, twirled and tripped inside Rahel's head. She was surrounded by all the other memories that she had not yet forgotten. Each time she brushed against them, the sleeping memories woke up briefly, like disturbed infants in a creche." (Roy, 1977)

The quote portrays the tremendous influence of the death of Sophie Mol on the psyche of Rahel and how she tries to incorporate the incident into her overall autobiographical account. The trauma also weakens the relationship of the twins because they react to the loss through the different coping strategies. The other specimen case of childhood trauma is the sexual abuse that Estha faced

with the help of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. The episode leaves an unending impression on Estha that causes withdrawal and communication disability, as demonstrated in the next section.

"Estha was silent. He had become silenter in the past two weeks than he had ever been in his life. His face was smooth, almost a stranger's face. It held nothing familiar. The mouth was tightly closed, like a door that had been slammed shut." (Roy, 1977)

Estha was silent. He was becoming more silent in the last two weeks than he had ever been in his life. His features were smooth, as though those of a stranger. It held nothing familiar. The mouth was closed firmly, as a door that had been banged behind. The passage indicates how the trauma experienced by Estha has spawned a communication vacuum and a sense of detachment towards others, which are common symptoms of a person who has experienced traumatic events in early childhood. The novel *The God of Small Things* provides a powerful exploration of the subject of the traumatic childhood, and the text can be interpreted through the lens of psychoanalytic thinking.

#### Defense mechanism

The aspect of defense mechanisms is something that is important in the lives of the characters of the novel *The God of small things* by Arundhati Roy. They are used, in most instances, unconsciously, to control the traumas and misery of the characters. This process is consistent with the psychoanalytic theory, as per which, people use strategies to shield themselves against anxiety, guilt, and other unpleasant feelings. An example of a defense mechanism in the novel is repression used to deal with traumatic experiences. Repression is the process of pushing painful memories out of conscious memory; both Estha and Rahel can employ this mechanism to address the loss of Sophie Mol and sexual abuse by Estha. The other defense mechanism evident in the novel is the denial which involves refusing to accept a painful reality, supposedly because it is too painful or scary. When Baby Kochamma understands that her love towards Father Mulligan is not reciprocal she refuses to accept it and persuades herself that he will alter his position at some point. Projection is another kind of defense mechanism. In the process, a person blames his/her unwanted thoughts or emotions on someone. As an example, Ammu finds herself in a position of likeing Velutha and transfers malice on to him and he is accused of playing with her, thus escaping continuity with her own guilt and disgrace. Lastly, the other defense mechanism that is observable in the text is that of displacement whereby a person shifts the feelings or impulses of the original source to a more acceptable target. To illustrate, the Baby Kochamma does not know how to express her anger towards the father Mulligan, so she finds other ways to channel the anger elsewhere, the twins are blamed as they cause her misery.

In the book *The God of Small Things*, defense mechanisms represent a rather crucial aspect of characterization. These unrecognized tactics enable the characters to protect themselves against the uncomfortable feelings that are companions to trauma, but at the same time, help to increase emotional turmoil.

#### Silence; Coping mechanism, Repression.

The fact that Estha is silent in *The God of Small Things* could be explained by the psychological defense mechanism of repression and it is a typical trauma reaction. Estha undergoes considerable childhood trauma and is raped as well as having a close family member die. He, in turn, represses memories and emotions, thus, eliminating them out of the conscious mind. Repression takes the form of inability to articulate and communicate leading to state of stagnation. Besides, his silence acts as a coping mechanism to contain the excessive feelings and thoughts related to his trauma. Through silence, Estha avoids facing the horrors that he went through. In turn, the traumatic silence of Estha is a multifaceted response to his childhood trauma and the bright example of the severe psychological consequences of trauma in a person.

#### PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

Estha and Rahel both as adults are profoundly impacted by the traumatic childhood experiences as the adult forms of their personalities can be analyzed in the frames of PTSD. Indicatively, Estha, as

an adult, is withdrawn and emotionless. He has problems with close relationships and is unable to express his thoughts and feelings to other people. The psychological traumas caused by the traumatic event centered on witnessing a violent death of his beloved mentor, Velutha have created lasting psychological wounds and flashbacks, nightmares, and a feeling of guilt and shame of not having been able to save the life of Velutha. In contrast, Rahel is a nervous and disappointed adult who is unable to find her identity and her purpose in life. The traumatic events of her life, the murder of Velutha and the fact that she was separated from her brother cause her to be lost and lost in the world around her. She is experiencing anxiety, depression, hopelessness and despair. The issues of PTSD in Estha and Rahel are also complicated by the sociocultural pressures which restrict their decision-making and do not allow them to express themselves fully. Accordingly, they are forced to suppress feelings and thoughts, and it may lead to the development of alienation and isolation. The description of PTSD in Estha and Rahel provides insight into the long-lasting implications of traumatic experiences on personal mental conditions and the importance of increased awareness and support of individuals who have undergone traumatic events, as well as the potential of offering them resources and therapeutic interventions to help them deal with PTSD symptoms and eventually overcome them. This will impede the ability to provide healthcare to the target population soon. This will have a negative effect on access to healthcare to the target population in the future.

*"PTSD in children and adolescents is a real disorder and can have devastating consequences if left untreated."* Whereas Child Welfare Information Gateway (2018) explains that *"Children who experience multiple traumatic events, particularly those that occur in the context of caregiving relationships, may be at higher risk for developing PTSD."* ([University of Michigan Health System 2017](#)).

#### Stuck in Time

Estha is theorized as being chronologically paralyzed by the traumatic incidents experienced in his childhood. The novel also uses the non-linear narrative structure to show how Estha is never able to move forward or forward in his path in life. The sexual abuse that the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man has done on him is one of the central traumas that have deeply transformed his psychological terrain. Being in the position of a child, Estha was unable to conceptualize the essence of the violation and had no agency against it, this experience of powerlessness created the impression of being trapped and contributed to the development of dissociative coping strategies. Thus, Estha forms a false chronological sense and the inability to overcome the events of his early years. He is trapped in a continuous present place whereby he is not allowed to create new memories or create meaningful interpersonal attachments. The lack of emotional and psychological maturation that has made him remain at a temporal standstill highlights the thematic insistence of this novel that unresolved trauma can always keep one in previous experiences. This non-linear reality, which is disjointed and fragmented, is reflected in the literary form, which resembles the tapestry of flashbacks and fragmented recollections, thus the structure form is in its place. It is only by facing and working through the trauma that Estha does start a path of development and release out of the temporal circle that has thus dominated him.

#### Interpretation of Dreams

Another theoretical framework that can be used to question The God of Small Things is the theory of the interpretation of dreams, which was created by Sigmund Freud. In his theory, Freud argued that dreams comprise the royal road to the unconscious and that they do entrench latent meanings that reveal the repressed desires, anxieties and internal struggles of the individual. The use of this lens enables the scholars to unravel the dream imagery of the characters of the novel. As an example, the symbolic interpretation of Ammu narrating to Velutha about how she saw a moth trapped in a web at night is allegorical and can be translated to mean that she is desperate to get out of the oppressive situations of her life; the moth is her unwilling entrapment as the web is the socio-cultural set up that does not allow her the freedom to act on her own. On a similar note, the dream of a river running backward that Velutha tells Ammu about can be viewed as a wish to have his tragic destiny overturned and regain a bygone and more joyful age. The constant nightmare of

persecution that the twins experience by the orange drink Lemondrink Man can be interpreted as the projection of their fear of the authoritarian people and, in a broader sense, their fear of the repressive social order they are born to. The very novel could be considered a long dream that does not distinguish between the real world and dreams, the past and the present. Its discontinuous, non-linear story resembles the practical workings of the unconscious mind and challenges the reader to indulge in interpretive reading and symbolic deconstruction. Therefore, the symbolism and visual imagery, as well as the overall themes illustrated in *The God of Small Things*, can be dissected into a valuable tool that allows tracing the hidden desires of the characters and inner struggles that lead them to behave in a certain way, as developed by Freud in his theory.

### Implications

The empirical results obtained as a result of this investigation have far-reaching implications for the study of literature and psychology. Combining the Freudian psychoanalytic perspective and the discussion of *The God of Small Things*, the analysis has proven that the first trauma and repressions and loss of innocence are critical determinants of forming the identity and further adult actions. This understanding implies that works of literature can serve as an effective pedagogical resource that can be used to explain psychological disorders and thus provide a corpus that can inform the study of trauma, child development, and clinical practice. Furthermore, the paper highlights the need to be extra sensitive about the long-term consequences of neglecting and abusing children, especially in those sociocultural settings where these challenges are habitually shrouded in highly powerful taboos. The study thus recommends social education and governmental policies to help reduce long term effects of early abuse. Besides that, the work presents new interpretative horizons into the literary criticism that promote inter disciplinary cooperation, as a meeting point of psychoanalytic theory and literary criticism. These integrative approaches have the capacity of enhancing the academic understanding of the trauma narratives and creating academic curiosity about the psychological aspect of literature.

### Limitations

This academic study is limited by its narrowed down approach to Arundhati Roy as the exclusive authorial prism and its narrowed down approach to Freudian psychoanalytic ideas. The text allows itself to be interpreted through a variety of different interpretive strategies, such as postcolonial, feminist, and Marxist approaches to the subject matter but the current work sets out specifically to discuss the topic of childhood trauma, repression, and loss of innocence, as they emerge through the character of Estha and Rahel. The research method is also narrowed down to textual analysis, thereby failing to provide empirical support, prohibiting the extrapolation of the findings. Moreover, the psychoanalytic interpretive apparatus is theoretically in nature and meaning might differ in different schools of thought which also puts greater interpretive ambiguity on the results.

## CONCLUSION

The story focuses on the lives of the main characters, Estha and Rahel, who must face the harsh reality of their life in early childhood. Using flashback sequences and first-person narrational perspectives, the text clarifies the complex psychological processes aroused by traumatic events. There is empirical research recognizing the “Loss of Childhood motif in the novel *The God of Small Things* that the novel can be analyzed using the psychoanalytic theory specifically the works of Sigmund Freud. The results clearly show that childhood loss has far-reaching and long-term consequences for the psychological state of a person and his or her general well-being. In addition, the novel is a strong reminder highlighting the importance of nurturing and protecting children, and the need to deal with the psychological consequences of childhood trauma. Overall, it can be stated that *The God of Small Things* is a heartrending critique of the intricacies of human experience and the ongoing effects of childhood trauma. The current paper attempted to question how Arundhati Roy has explored the theme of childhood loss and the loss of affection in her context in the book *The God of Small Things* by placing her narrative within a psychoanalytic framework by Freud. In our analysis, the traumatic events that took place to both Estha and Rahel not only deny them their

innocence but also greatly influence their personalities in adulthood and reflect the underlying psychological trauma. The devastating power of uncompleted trauma is evident in the silence of Estha who is repressed after sexual abuse and guilty about betraying Velutha. The emotional aloofness and displacement that Rahel experiences are also another good example of the consequences of the unattended childhoods in the disintegration of identity. Together, the characters depict how repression, guilt and violence may lock people in a stagnant psychological position that is unable to advance beyond the experience of childhood trauma. These results also indicate that the lack of familial care, deeply rooted social hierarchies and the patriarchy compound the situation of the children therefore supporting the argument put forward by Freud that unfinished childhood experiences are the lead to deplorable adulthood. The defense structures that include repressions, denials, and displacement can be traced in the character reaction to traumas which supports the relevance of Freudian psychoanalysis to the text. Interestingly, the study supports the idea that the novel transcends the social inequalities and political tensions with the world, but it is a psychologically deep observation of the traumatic consequences over a length of time. To sum up, *The God of Small Things* shows how the loss of love, experiencing violence and repressed memories of traumatic events destroy the childhood innocence and create unerasable scars on the adult life. In turn, the novel indeed functions as a tragic command to recognize the trauma of childhood in the context of literary and real life, thus preventing the repetition of generations in silence, shame, and psychological discontinuity.

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#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The research was conducted under the guidance and the scholarly guidance of Sir Rahil Kashif at the City University. The researcher took the role of defining the research problem, a systematic literature review of the relevant literature, developing specific research objectives and questions, and conducting a psychoanalytic study of *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy. The overseeing scholar provided advice on how to narrow down the design of the research, maintain methodological rigour and provide critical feedback during the writing and revision procedures. The analytical procedure, result interpretation and drafting of the final manuscript are all indicative of the independent work of the researcher, which was, however, greatly aided and supported by the academic supervision of the supervisor.

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