

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* : A Study in Human Relationship

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Abstract. The present research article is an attempt to view the relationship of twins- Rahel and Estha from a different point of view. Arundhati Roy wrote her only novel *The God of Small Things* which deals with many small things – children and youth, women, untouchables etc. Roy in her novel beautifully depicted the love and relationship and the bond shared by the two siblings, Rahel and Estha, who are dizygotic. In this novel Roy shows a different kind of relation and bond shared by the siblings of opposite gender who are so much connected with each other that they cannot lead their life separately which made them suffer a lot after separation. Actually they are like a true lover who are not shy of each other's nakedness and they also became intimate and made sex relation, breaking the law of love which tells us whom to love, when to love and how much to love. It is a beautiful novel dealing with the theme of man-woman relationship. The main protagonist of the novel is Ammu, a divorced young Syrian lady and the mother of Rahel and Estha, who fall in love with Velutha, an untouchable. She breaks the law of love and the same law is also broken by these twins.

Keywords : Twins; siblings; dizygotic; sex; laws of love.

Roy's book is the only one I can think among Indian novels in English which can be comprehensively described as a protest novel. It is all about atrocities against minorities, small things : children and youth, women and untouchables.

(Rao *The Hindu* : 13)

"The East shall shake the West awake/ and you shall have night for morn", wrote James Joyce more than a century ago. His prophecy came to be true in the Golden Jubilee year of India's independence with the publication of Arundhati Roy's debut novel, *The God of Small Things* in 1997. The novel earned for her Britain's most prestigious award, The Booker Prize. Ever since its publication, *The God of Small Things* has been, on the whole, favourably received. It has sold 3,50,000 copies abroad, been on the bestseller list of both "The New York Times" and "London Times" for weeks and been translated into more than 37 languages including Lithuanian, Icelandic and Finnish. Speaking on the success of Arundhati Roy, R. K. Dhawan acclaims her as 'the novelist extraordinary'. He says:

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She is young, charming, rich and famous. She is the writer of the mega wonder novel *The God of Small Things*, a writer whose novel is authentically Indian as is her writing style. One who has put India on the map of the English - speaking world. She is Arundhati Roy, the novelist extraordinary.... Her victory for a first time novelist is the culmination of a fairy tale. (Dhawan 1999 : 11-12)

Arundhati Roy was born on November 24, 1962 in Kerala to a well-known social activist Mary Roy, a Syrian Christian who broke the tradition by marrying a Bengali Hindu , a tea-planter. Soon she divorced him and returned to her parental home. She had encountered many problems in the largely patriarchal set-up where all the men in the household were hard-core conservatives. It has been clearly presented in the character of Ammu who stands for Mary Roy in *The God of Small Things*.

The God of Small Things is a brave, gloomy, haunting, rebellious, heart-touching story written in her own eerie, humorous style against various ills of the society by cutting them down to the most basic human feelings that one would find only in children's book but still takes on the harshest of the prejudices in a powerful fashion like never before. It is a story of a woman through the eyes of her little girl and her Syrian Christian family set in Kerala, alternating between her childhood and the present. It takes through many issues as the family struggles to deal with divorce, many deaths, forbidden love, social prejudices and male dominance.

The whole novel revolves around two major characters – The twins – Rahel and Estha. They are twins separated by body connected with soul. Despite having been born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs, or being dizygotic or fraternal rather than identical twins, Rahel and Estha are so intertwined physically that even the science into which the brother Ethappen enters does not separate them. So intimately intertwined are the psyches of these two individuals that Rahel actually has a memory “of waking up one night giggling at Estha’s funny dream”. (Roy 2002 : 5)

The twins often share a stronger bond than normal siblings because they are together from birth throughout most, if not all, of their childhood. Identity fusion, a common reaction to being a twin is the loss of an individual identity. This reaction usually develops during infancy. The twins' yearning is the need to re-establish the twin relationship with others. They feel that other relationships should be just as intense as the primary relationship in their lives. But monozygotic twins usually display these traits more than dizygotic twins. Dizygotic twins are just like other siblings, having their own individuality and there is no harm in separating them:

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They consulted a Twin Expert in Hyderabad. She wrote back to say that it was not advisable to separate monozygotic twins ,but that two-egg twins were no different from ordinary siblings and that while they would certainly suffer the natural distress that children from broken homes underwent , it would be nothing more than that . Nothing out of the ordinary. (31-32)

Throughout the story , this young couple – and it is quite clear that they behave as a couple for much of their youth , Rahel and Estha struggle with how other people view them as a pair as well as how they view their own relationship . It is obvious that they share a special bond as twins, but they also gained independent identities especially as they grew up and were separated. Even so, they continued to share an intense connection through their emotions and thoughts. Being closer to each other than what is possible for any other two people caused the twins to harbour as unusual link. Other people, such as Baby Kochamma, view the twins as a single unit. Each person's life does not equal a normal life. Her view reinforces the idea that Estha and Rahel are two parts of one whole set:

Anyway, now she thinks of Estha and Rahel as *Them*, because separately, the two of them are no longer what They were or ever thought They'd be.(3)

Indeed, when Estha was re-returned and Rahel also came back from America, although they haven't met each other for a long period of 23 years , and by now they have developed their own individuality and identity, still Baby Kochamma starts thinking them as a one unit:

She didn't even trust the twins. She deemed them Capable of Anything. Anything at all. *They might even steal their present back*, she thought, and realized with a pang how quickly she had reverted to thinking of them as though they were a single unit once again. After all those years...(29)

According to Ammu, the relationship between the twins was more harmful than beneficial. She thinks that they are so involved with each other that they are not aware of how cruel the world can be. She figures that they feel like they can't be hurt as long as they have each other:

To Ammu her twins seemed like a pair of small bewildered frogs engrossed in each other's

company , lolling arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic. Entirely oblivious of what trucks can do to frogs.(43)

The depth of the twins' relation was so intense that it was impossible for anyone also to understand. Rahel's husband is an example of someone who didn't completely comprehend the connection between his wife and Estha. When he sensed that something was wrong, he assumed that it was Rahel who was in trouble, and not that Estha was such a huge part of her that she was affected by his status :

What Larry McCaslin saw in Rahel's eyes was not despair at all, but a sort of enforced optimism. And a hollow where Estha's words had been. He couldn't be expected to understand that. That the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons. Like familiar lovers' bodies.(19-20)

Rahel and Estha – they were two bodies and one soul. They themselves can't imagine their life without one other. They share a bond which they themselves were not able to understand and which affected their life after separation which resulted in isolation in Estha and broken marriage life of Rahel. One can see that Rahel is the other half of Estha which he was missing when they are separated which made him quiet, as if he has nothing to say. Estha occupied "very little space in the world."(Roy 6)When Estha is re-turned to Ayemenem, it seems like his life has got meaning once again . Now Rahel and Estha became more like one person than two because they feel that the only people who truly understand who they are and what they have gone through is each other:

It had been quiet in Estha's head until Rahel came. But with her she had brought the sound of passing trains, and the light and shade that falls on you if you have a window seat. The world, locked out for years, suddenly flooded in, and now Estha couldn't hear himself for the noise.(14-15)

This view contributes to their isolation during separation:

Rahel never wrote to him. There are things that you can't do – like writing letters to a part of yourself. To your feet or hair. Or heart. (163-164)

It seems that Rahel and Estha are more lovers than siblings. They share such a deep bond and feeling about each other that they had developed a sixth

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* : A Study in Human Relationship sense for each other. They were like 'दो जिस्म, एक जान' physically separate , but with joint identities. The confusion lay in a deeper, more secret place. (2) The emotions were so connected that they didn't need to use any other sense to find the other. At multiple points in the story, they are able to sense the presence of one another without seeing or hearing each other:

Something altered in the air. And Rahel knew that Estha had come... She didn't turn her head , but a glow spread inside her. *He's come*, she thought. *He's here. With me.* (234)

Rahel and Estha share an intimate bond :

They are brother and sister. They had never been shy of each other's bodies, but they had never been old enough (together) to know what shyness was. (92)

In the whole novel ,we find many incidents which clearly show the love - bond shared by the twins. Rahel herself described her feelings about Estha when she first saw him after 23 years. She can clearly feel him in her body:

She could feel the rhythm of Estha's rocking, and the wetness of rain on his skin. She could hear the raucous, scrambled world inside his head. (21)

In their childhood, they couldn't understand the nature of bond they were sharing. But there was something which only they could understand which we can see in the theatre Abhilash Talkies incident where after being sexually abused by the Orangedrink Lemondrink man, Estha became quiet and didn't say anything, but Rahel could feel him and when Ammu starts praising that Orangedrink Lemondrink man, Rahel suddenly outburst and asked Ammu to marry that man in anger :

So why don't you marry him then?" Rahel said petulantly. (112)

Again, in the night when everyone fell asleep, Rahel and Estha were just tossing in their bed. Estha came to Rahel's room , and Rahel without any knock at the door, opened it and then they both slept together with their arms around each other:

On the next bed, his niece and nephew slept with their arms around each other. A hot twin and a cold one. He and She (122)

All these are the signs of the love-bond they share. Their love doesn't disappear even after their separation for such a long period. After they met again, their love took a new shape. They also broke the law of love, which described whom to love, when to love and how much to love. In chapter 20, they are seen in the room of Ammu recalling their older memories:

Estha, sitting very straight, waiting to be arrested ,
takes his fingers to it. To touch the words it makes.
To keep the whisper. His fingers follow the shape
of it. The touch of teeth. His hand is held and
kissed. Pressed against the coldness of a cheek,
wet with shattered rain. (327)

Here we find the feelings of true lovers who meet after a long separation and are eager to merge into each other. They wanted to become one body, one soul. To cross all the limits, cross the Lakshmanrekha. Rahel and Estha just flow with the moment without thinking about anything else. They were just true lovers at that time and they broke all the laws:

There is very little that anyone could say to clarify
what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi's
book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs
from Feelings.(328)

So, we can say that the bond and relationship that Rahel and Estha share and their feelings of incompleteness in them without each other, leave us to consider them true lovers rather than mere siblings.

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