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*The God of Small Things*, written by Arundhati Roy, a female author of Indian descent is a literary exploration of the psychological effects of the intertwining of “Love Laws” and Indian Methodology’s belief in “The Caste System”. The novel’s themes are quite controversial; anyone choosing to bring awareness to the practice of social discrimination, gender discrimination specifically in women in one’s own race must be prepared for backlash. However, the effect of Roy’s novel seems to be quite the opposite. This novel which was published in 1997, went on to win the Booker award, sold over six million copies and has been made available in 40 different languages. It was no surprise to have uncovered that, “Roy lives in New Delhi, where she first went to become an architect. But she’s not working as an architect or even a novelist these days. She’s thrown herself into political activism. In the central and western states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat, a series of dams threatens the homes and livelihoods of tens of millions. A huge, grassroots organization, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), has arisen to resist these dams, and Roy has joined it. Not only did she give her Booker Prize money (about $30,000) to the group, she has also protested many times with it, even getting arrested.” *(*Lawrence J. Trudeau). Roy’s novel paints a deathly picture of the injustices that the women in India endured because of India’s controversial views on societal norms within their culture. Throughout the story we are reminded that having to live within a society that imposes social barriers on human emotions inevitably causes human casualties, whether you physically die or not.

The tragic spiral of events in Roy’s novel takes place in Ayemenon, India a Syrian Christian community village. The story focuses primarily on two fraternal twins, Rahel and Estha and how they become victims of “love laws” from the moment they are born. Roy defines these laws as laws which“lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much.” (Roy). Roy also uses other characters in her book to illustrate the damage that living under India’s stringent Caste System has on the individual family members and the family as a whole. In an article published in Brandes Now, written by Max Pearlstein, the Caste System is descried as, “Caste segregates individuals at birth into predetermined social groups with Brahmins, who served society historically as academics and priests, at the top, while Dalits—previously known as “untouchables”—at the bottom performed menial work like street sweeping or cleaning sewers”. (Pearlstein, Max) It is said that the Caste System was abolished in 1950 on paper but yet remained very much a part of the Indian culture long after that. I felt that it was not a coincidence that the author chose to chronicle the events of the story between 1969 and 1996 to demonstrate how hard it is to escape cultural traditions when familial bond becomes secondary to social acceptance within your surroundings. Interestingly enough Roy isn’t telling us a story of what happened to the members of Ipe family in Ayemenon, but rather tells us the story of how they were affected by the “small things” in their lives.

Family and Love, many can argue that these words are synonymous. Synonymous indeed, but when love is forced upon us with rules and restrictions things become complicated. It becomes easy to replace love for hate and resentment. From an early age, many us are taught that family is our livelihood, the people you can turn to in bad times. However, despite what you’ve been taught, family can also be the people that you dread turning to during difficult times, especially when your actions do not align with your family’s core beliefs. Roy’s careful crafting of using the story of one family, specifically the events that happen in Ammu’s life, her relationship with her father, her divorce, her relationship with her children and an Untouchable as a way to express the need for social reform and acceptance, especially for women. It is not uncommon for women in cultures that exhibit strong gender disparities to be more likely to have emotional issues that lead to further destruction in their personal lives.

Early in the novel Ammu the only daughter of the Mammachi and Pappachu seems to be determined to escape not only her culture’s social theories but also the emotional constraints she feels within her family. She runs off to escape the physical abuse of her father that she endures alongside with her mother; she marries a man that ends up being an abusive alcoholic husband. She then divorces and returns home with her “two-egged” twins. She ironically brings the family shame for being a divorced woman, even though she was brave enough to escape the demon that has haunted her mother for so many years. Her choices may very well have to do with her need to rebel in how she was treated because of her sex and her desire to want different from the other women in her life. We see evidence of gender discrimination by how her brother Chacko was treated. While living at home his mother secretly covered up his indiscretions by allowing him to have women come in and out of the family home. Chacko was sent off to study at a University, he married a woman outside of his culture, had a child and divorced. When he returned home to live as an adult he was not ever made to feel that he shamed the family name like Ammu was made to feel. Here we have two siblings, same parents yet the siblings are held to completely different standards based upon the sex of their children. To an outsider the double standard that exists with Ammu and Chacko is unfair, but to the Ipe family this is simply the norm. Ammu unfortunately, is a victim of a culture that has refused to open their eyes to the injustices that have been done to women in their culture.

The abuse on Ammu continued by another family member, her aunt Baby Kochomma. Baby Kochomma takes great pleasure in making the lives of Ammu and her twins miserable because she herself was damaged by the “Love Laws” at a young age. As a young woman Baby Kochomma fell in love with a Catholic priest. In her quest to earn his affection she converted to Catholicism, and joined a convent. She had strong hopes of getting close to the Catholic priest and establishing a romantic relationship. Her plan did not work out, she returned home, still holding on to her rebellious act, she claimed that she would remain a devout Catholic. Despite the fact that she was a woman, she was sent to study at a University but allowed to pursue a degree that would be fitting of a woman, basket weaving. Baby Kochomma in her older years is classically portrayed as a bitter woman; you could say she fits the role of a classic old maid. Her mission seems to be to destroy any happiness that another woman may have, specifically Ammu. Eventually Baby Kochomma succeeds in her efforts when Ammu continues on her path to finding self-acceptance and perhaps intentional defiance. Making an unfathomable premeditated choice that brings further shame to her family by having an affair with Velutha, an Untouchable. Ammu and the Untouchable’s affair pave the way for what appears to be the end of Ipe family as they know it.

In an essay by entitled, A Third Space of Love-On Hybridity in Arundhati Roy’s "The God of Small Things” the relationship is and it’s outcome is well defined, “The Ammu-Velutha couple (like all the other couples in the book) follows the love-hate pattern, the Romeo and Juliet one, as they are brought together by the very fact that they belong to two different social categories: Ammu comes from a respected Christian Touchable (Brahmin) family, while Velutha is an Untouchable(an Out-Caste), a Paravan. Their extremely passionate love story will end tragically with Velutha’s violent death and the slow destruction of Ammu’s hope and, ultimately, life.” *(*Grosu-Radulescu, L) Ammu was destined to never be accepted by her family for the small things that transpired in her life. As a woman she was held to a certain standard. Rather than being able to count on family to help her get through the small things, they were swept under the rug. This affair was no exception.

Throughout the book the author successfully narrates how the small things begin to tear the Ipe family apart. Roy uses a chain reaction effect to demonstrate that social conformity is not always best. This family begins to dismantle based on conformity. I believe that our family lays down the foundation for our social development, after all our immediate family is our first social encounter. We learn how to interact with one another from our parents, as children we yearn for acceptance and most children choose to conform to what is considered acceptable by their family and culture. Roy’s older characters all seem to harbor resentment that perhaps has been transferred through generations. The patriarch of the family, Pappachi is a acrimonious man, he feels cheated from his bug discovery that he never received credit for. He takes out his frustration by beating his wife, Mammachi and only daughter, Ammu. As a result of his failures he loves them less. Mammachi turns her attention to her only son when he comes to her rescue after having been beat by Pappachi. She then evokes her focus on her only son Chacko, loving him in almost a sexual way. All along, this is the way thing are. No one speaks of anything, throughout their lives Ammu and Chacko simply adapt to this lifestyle. The enlightment comes when Roy introduces us to the children’s plan. Rahel and Estha the youngest generation of the Ipe family want to change the course of history within their family when their prized cousin, Sophie Mol arrives in Anneyemum. Roy’s choice to use the children to evoke change sends a message that sometimes it takes the views of an unpolluted mind to introduce change into our world.

I mentioned early on in this essay that this novel is primarily focused on a set of fraternal twins, Rahel and Estha but have yet to mention them until now. Quite deliberately I might add. Rahel and Estha, Ammu’s children born while in a legal marriage are in essence considered children born out of wedlock. They are loved slightly less because they are not being raised by both a mother and father. They are loved less by Ammu because she is unhappy and blames them for small things that have happened in her life. They learn to deal with the small things on their own, not ever speaking of things that would cause them to be loved less. Roy uses this quote on a couple of occasions and despite the fact that it is never used in direct reference Rahel and Estha it is quite fitting for them. “And the Air was full of Thoughts and Things to Say. But at times like these, only the Small Things are ever said. The Big Things lurk unsaid inside.” (Roy) The practice of silence is most prevalent when Estha is molested at a movie theatre. The young boy endures the molestation in silence. He pretends nothing has happened and chooses to remain silent. Unlike the other characters, Estha’s silence does not go unnoticed. His twin, Rahel, is able to connect with him in such a way that she knows that something bad has happened. Staying quiet, and doing nothing can either work against you or for you. In the case of the twins, the end result would be one of both destruction and resurrection.

The “Love Laws” would never play a stronger role in the book than at Sophie Mol’s death. The twins would learn that happiness is not dependent on how much one is loved or how they are loved. They will learn that love cannot, should not be dictated, it is felt from within and one loves according to how one feels another. Sophie Mol, Chacko’s daughter and the prized family member, the one that is loved more than one can imagine becomes the human causality of Rahel and Estha’s desire to change the way they are loved. Her tragic drowning is a pivotal moment in this family’s life. After the drowning the family resorts to what it knows best, silencing the truth and taking action to save the family name. Baby Kochomma uses this moment to emotionally damage the twins, Ammu is in essence ostracized by her family, the twins are separated and Velutha is beaten to the point where ends up dead. It is at Sophie Mol’s death that the reader is given a clear picture of how the “Love Laws” affected the entire family.

In Teaching The God of Small Things in Wisconsin by Tracy Lemaster she provides a clear conclusion of how the characters were affected. “Romantic/Sexual Love: Romantic love, sexual love, and desire are normally categories that seem distinct from familial love. Familial love relationships, including parent-to-child and sibling-to-sibling, lack a sexual component because they are platonic. However, when the family acts as agents of the state for enforcing social politics, these demarcations become intermingled.

* The family regulates Ammu’s sexuality and sexual relations with Velutha.
* Estha and Rahel ultimately have an incestuous encounter.

Familial Love: Love relationships between family members, traditionally based on care, support, and protection, can break down. In addition to the breaking down of familial love relationships, the family can literally divide.

* Ammu and Baby Kochamma make Rahel and Estha lie to the police, a lie that damages the children emotionally and psychologically.
* Ammu’s brother separates Ammu from Estha then banishes her, thus causing Ammu to die alone in poverty a few years later.

Future Love: Roy shows how the destruction and subversion of current love relationships can thwart future love relationships.

* Estha never marries and lives socially isolated.
* Rahel never leaves home and feels a permanent emptiness that thwarts her one

marriage.” (Lemaster, Tracy)

Arunhati Roy made a strong case in her novel and successfully got her message across that gender discrimination and social discrimination is deadly. The damage done carries consequences far beyond our imagination. Not only do we emotionally damage human beings but we halt our world from prospering. In this story all members had the opportunity to become contributing members of society, especially Rahel and Estha. They were entering an era that was going to provide them with all the opportunities that the other members of the Ipe family did not have. As a woman Rahel’s options were endless but she became a victim of her society and could never find happiness. Estha became a social outcast, permanently losing his voice in the world. Though this story sad, its message is profound, we must not be silent. We must let our thoughts be heard, we must choose equality over injustices. Change and acceptance is good.

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