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Narrating Childhood Trauma in *The God of Small Things*

Aradhya Maheshwari
UG student, Department of English, School of Liberal Education
Vivek Kumar
Professor, Department of English, School of Liberal Education

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Abstract

This paper explores the representation of childhood trauma in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* through a critical investigation of narrative form, character growth, and theoretical beliefs from trauma studies. Focusing on the twin protagonists, Estha and Rahel, the study examines how Roy portrays trauma not just as a thematic concern yet as an narrative composition marked by fragmentation, silence, and repetition. Drawing upon Cathy Caruth's inspiration of belatedness, Judith Herman's knowledge into trauma and identity loss, and Laurie Vickroy's model of trauma, the paper argues that Roy's nonlinear style and poetic diction reflect the psychological disorientation of her characters. Estha's muteness and Rahel's detachment illustrate the long-term effects of oppression, guilt, and familial shutdown. Supporting these readings with scholarly work by Krishanthi Anandawansa, Miriam Nandi, and Cécile Oumhani, the paper situates Roy's novel within improved discourses of post-colonial trauma. Ultimately, the study concludes that Roy's narrative technique is not merely expressive but transformative-turning trauma into a formal unit that demands new modes of studying and critical care.

Keywords: Childhood Trauma; Arundhati Roy; *The God of Small Things*; Narrative Structure; Trauma Theory; Gender and Patriarchy; Identity Formation; Estha and Rahel; Literary Representation of Silence

Introduction

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) stands as a closely great novel in post-colonial literature, one that has been praised for its lyrical narrative and its poignant view of societal oppression, memory, and identity. Set in the politically and culturally influenced landscape of Kerala, the novel weaves together personal and collective histories of trauma, centring on the twin protagonists, Estha and Rahel. These characters, separated by

time and silence, illustrate the lingering effects of unresolved childhood trauma. Through them, Roy investigates the long-lasting psychological wounds inflicted by neglect, disloyalty, and social constraints. What makes this novel so precise is that Roy does not treat trauma as a singular gathering, although as an proceeding, cyclical information-connected not only in the characters' memories each time in the overall composition and language of the novel.

Roy's way to trauma aligns closely with contemporary trauma account. Cathy Caruth, a foundational scholar in the field, emphasizes that trauma is depicted by belatedness: the notion that the traumatic gathering is not altogether grasped at the time of its occurrence, but in fact returns in divided and exhausting forms (Caruth 4). This opinion of "unclaimed skill" is reflected in Roy's use of nonlinear progression, circular narrative loops, and recurring imagery that appears almost compulsively throughout the novel. Estha's childhood oppression by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man and his coerced disloyalty of Velutha are not isolated incidents-they are moments that ripple across the intact narrative, disrupting time, identity, and speech.

In addition, Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* offers critical realization into how trauma manifests in silence and disconnection. Herman asserts that trauma often leads to numbing, muteness, and identity fragmentation-symptoms that Roy embeds in her portrayal of Estha and Rahel (Herman 133). Estha, for instance, adjusts into separate moment as an mute adult, not merely due to the pain he suffered, but because for him speech itself transforms into distinctively awful experience. Rahel, on the alternative hand, drifts through life detached and dislocated, unable to sustain sentimental intimacy or a logical sense of self. Their silence and separation are not only psychological-Roy withholds, fragments, and revisits their pasts in ways that mirror their internal disarray. Moreover, Roy's poetic and childlike style-full of broken syntax, capitalized repetitions, and metaphorical notion-recreates the perceptual manner of children processing trauma. This formal strategy resonates with Laurie Vickroy's proposition of trauma fiction, which holds that such histories often "mirror the dislocation of the traumatized mind" through nonlinearity and stylistic fragmentation (Vickroy 3). Roy's storytelling enacts trauma as much as it describes it.

This paper focuses distinctively on the theme of childhood trauma and asks: How does Arundhati Roy's narrative composition and characterization in *The God of Small Things* illustrate the lingering effects of childhood trauma? The study engages closely with trauma proposition as well as critical articles by Krishanthi Anandawansa, Cécile Oumhani, and Miriam Nandi, who highlight different scope of trauma, silence, and postcolonial identity in the novel. While these scholars have given vital contributions, this paper aims to bridge the clear and formal aspects of trauma, highlighting how Roy's individual narrative voice acts as a mirror to the psychological fragmentation of her characters.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* has been in sum scrutinized in terms of its treatment of memory, caste, gender, and identity. Yet, studies that situate childhood trauma with the intersection of personal grief and sociopolitical bases-while exclusively connecting narrative form to psychological pressure-remain relatively limited. This literature review evaluates the contributions of trauma inspiration and literary criticism to highlight Roy's treatment of childhood trauma, focusing on three critical articles-by Krishanthi Anandawansa, Cécile Oumhani, and Miriam Nandi-and foundational theoretical texts by Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, and Laurie Vickroy.

Krishanthi Anandawansa and Mahesh Hapugoda's essay "Traversing Over Postcolonial Identity: Symptomatic Self-Obliteration in *The God of Small Things*" offers an significant perception of Estha's collapse. They introduce the opinion of "symptomatic self-destruction," psychological feedback to trauma where the individual withdraws so quite from life that they transform sensitively and socially invisible (Anandawansa and Hapugoda 87). Estha's muteness and isolation are not only the consequences of sexual maltreatment and gap of reliance, furthermore as well forms of passive resistance and self-expunging. Their dissection highlights how Roy's characters internalize the structural violence of caste, gender, and familial neglect in ways that lead to deep psychological disintegration. While this composition is targeted on Estha's trauma, it opens up prime questions about how internalized trauma manifests as physical withdrawal and silence, and how the novel critiques the moral contradictions of post-colonial Indian society.

Complementing this psychological understanding is Cécile Oumhani's study, "Fictionalising the Postcolonial Trauma in *The God of Small Things*," which analyses the narrative form of the novel as a direct conveyance of traumatic skills. Oumhani argues that Roy's stylistic fragmentation, non-linear moment design, and obsessive use of repetition reflect the mental landscape of trauma survivors (Oumhani 128). She views the complete novel as a "mimetic rendering of trauma," suggesting that the looping of events, disordered series, and dramatic ruptures reflect the way trauma fragments memory and disrupts moment. Oumhani's work is particularly known for highlighting how Roy's writing choices-especially her use of sensory foundations and childlike diction-mimic the mental disorientation related with trauma. Her method aligns closely with Cathy Caruth's concept that trauma resists conventional narrative because it cannot become surely known at the moment of its occurrence (Caruth 4). For Caruth, trauma re-emerges behind schedule, in separate, lacklustre forms-an opinion mirrored in the way Roy's narrative returns obsessively to key traumatic events, like Estha's misuse and Velutha's death.

Further spreading this lens is Miriam Nandi's work, "Longing for the Lost (M)separate: Postcolonial Ambivalences in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*," which focuses on Rahel's psychological disconnection and the loss of maternal devotion.

Nandi connects Rahel's sentimental numbness and rootlessness to her disrupted relationship with Ammu, fighting that the mother-daughter tie in the novel is represented by both intimacy and withdrawal (Nandi 29). She uses psychoanalytic and postcolonial models to demonstrate how Rahel's trauma is both gendered and cultural-she is both strongly neglected and socially misunderstood. Nandi's interpretation is massive in showing how the blankness of maternal stability, in a patriarchal post-colonial society, leads to a destroyed sense of identity. Her work also helps distinguish Rahel's trauma from Estha's: while Estha retreats into silence, Rahel's return is affective detachment. Both, are denied the sentimental reliance significant for healing.

These critical evaluations are deepened through the use of core trauma. Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experiences* remains foundational for understanding the recursive framework of trauma. Caruth emphasizes that trauma does not lie in the festivity itself but in its delayed, divided return to perception. She writes, "It is the way it was with true accuracy not known in the first instance-that returns to haunt the survivor" (Caruth 4). Estha's and Rahel's inability to narrate or understand their trauma at the time it occurs-and their repetition of proper words, smells, and gestures-illustrate this opinion vividly. The form of the novel itself reflects the recursive nature of trauma, with flashbacks, sudden delicate ruptures, and the temporal looping of scenes.

Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* further supports this study by informing how trauma survivors often show symptoms such as withdrawal, silence, disconnection, and identity fragmentation. Herman explains that "trauma can cause a collapse of the inner narrative, producing rational self-statement" (Herman 133). Estha's lifelong muteness and Rahel's passive being after their mother's death can be seen as the consequences of unresolved trauma. Their stories do not "progress" in a conventional sense instead linger in moments of unhealed grief. Laurie Vickroy adds to this perception in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. She argues that trauma in fiction often disrupts linearity and authenticity in order to more meticulously portray a character's special psyche. According to Vickroy, trauma reports "foreground the effects of trauma on memory, identity, and language" and often use formal survey to depict the internal confusion of survivors (Vickroy 3). Roy's use of disjointed syntax, poetic diction, and sensory overload directly reflects these literary observations.

While these scholars offer supportive wisdom into individual aspects of trauma-psychological problem, narrative fragmentation, and gendered grief-few works deliver these outlooks together into a together narrative review. This study seeks to address that gap by closely connecting trauma assumption with narrative review and character study. It argues that Roy's form is inseparable from content-that the shape of the novel itself performs trauma, rather than merely depicting it. By merging theoretical insights with literary form and

expressive character arcs, this study contributes to a more holistic and interdisciplinary grasp of how trauma is represented, enacted, and perpetuated in Roy's text. This research paper employs a qualitative, interpretative method grounded in literary dissection. The central intention is to study how Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* narrates childhood trauma through its formal techniques, character construction, and thematic depth. Rather than assuming on calculated data, this study draws upon close textual studying benefited by critical principle to understand how trauma operates within the psychological and social framework of the novel.

The plan involves a complete scrutiny of narrative framework, language, and character growth to reveal the nuanced ways in which trauma is encoded within the text. Individual dedication is paid to the fragmentation of moment, the recurrence of traumatic imagery, the muting of speech, and the lyrical shifts in voice that reflects the internal disintegration of the protagonists. These characteristics are read in relation to Cathy Caruth's inspiration of unpunctual trauma, Judith Herman's work on trauma and touching dissociation, and Laurie Vickroy's review of trauma fiction's stylistic disruption. As well, the study references three key scholarly articles-by Krishanthi Anandawansa, Cécile Oumhani, and Miriam Nandi-that probe the intersections of trauma, silence, and identity in Roy's novel. These works are used to position this study within the existing critical debate and to identify gaps, such as the underexplored role of narrative form in illustrating psychological trauma.

In particular, the writings of Gayatri Spivak which frame trauma as not only a psychological phenomenon but as a symptom of systemic, cultural violence. This dual focus-on the internal involvement of trauma and its unconnected, structural causes-enables a more holistic realization of *The God of Small Things* as a trauma narrative rooted in both individual pain and post-colonial history. Through this interdisciplinary framework, the structure gives a multi-layered examination that moves above thematic commentary to consider how Roy's storytelling itself transforms into a medium of trauma. The form and content of the novel are treated as interdependent, revealing how trauma is not simply described in the novel, though enacted through its language, shape, and silences.

One of the most poignant portrayals of trauma in *The God of Small Things* is incarnated in the character of Estha, whose psychological disintegration manifests in a complete withdrawal from language and sentimental participation. Estha's trauma begins with the sexual neglect he suffers at the hands of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. Roy renders the scene with childlike simplicity and haunting understatement: "Now, if you're a helpful boy, and you don't say anything to anybody, you can have a free cold drink" (Roy 103). The manipulative tone and transactional nature of the harm administer secrecy and internalization. Cathy Caruth's debate that trauma "is not located in the ordinary savage or

likely affair" on another hand "in the way it's meticulously not known in the first instance" (Caruth 4) explains Estha's silence-not as a comment, but working as an proceeding symptom. Estha's muteness is not just a loss of voice, it is a refusal to participate in a world that forgot him. His trauma resurfaces ceaselessly through sensory triggers and nonverbal reactions. Judith Herman describes this as psychic numbing: when survivors of trauma detach from sensation and self to turn away pain (Herman 133). Estha's adult life, described as "a quiet bubble where words no longer gathered," reflects this numbness (Roy 12). His muteness develops into a form of passive resistance and sentimental survival. The disloyalty intensifies when Estha is forced to implicate Velutha in a crime he did not commit. The relaxed move-"Estha sat deeply straight and only just touched the policeman's moustache with his own finger... Then he said yes" (Roy 320)-is loaded with guilt and powerlessness. This coerced complicity contributes to Estha's collapse.

As Krishanthi Anandawansa explains, this represents "symptomatic self-ruin", where the individual responds to trauma by strongly erasing themselves (Anandawansa and Hapugoda 87). Unlike Estha, Rahel's trauma is expressed through shortage, drifting, and dramatic disconnection. After being separated from her twin and losing her mother, Rahel "drifted into marriage like a passenger drift toward an unoccupied chair in an aerodrome lounge" (Roy 19). Miriam Nandi highlights Rahel's divided identity as a result of maternal leaving and societal displacement (Nandi 29). Her trauma is relational; she is not silenced like Estha but lives in an warm limbo, a life "unmarked of expectation." Rahel's adult return to Ayemenem and reunion with Estha is structured as an struggle to reconstruct the lost wholeness. Trauma theorist Laurie Vickroy writes that trauma histories often operate in "nonlinear patterns to express divided memory and identity" (Vickroy 4). Rahel's memories develop not in order, but in sensuous flashbacks-colours, smells, sounds-suggesting a lingering trauma that cannot become processed verbally or linearly.

Cécile Oumhani explains that Roy's nonlinearity mimics this disruption of psychological time. The form is individual because the character's minds are separate; repetition, sudden flashbacks, and shifting theories mimic trauma's delayed unease (Oumhani 128). Rahel, like Estha, carries unspoken memories, level so hers manifest as touchy stasis rather than overt silence. Roy's narrative technique is not merely stylistic but deeply connected to trauma representation. The non-chronological shape and recurring motifs-"Anything can happen to anyone,"(Roy 198) or the sick sweet smell of old roses-mirror how trauma disrupts temporal logic and fixates the psyche on unresolved pain. Cathy Caruth asserts that trauma "speaks through a rupture in meaning," and Roy's individual storytelling transforms a structural operation of that rupture (Caruth 6).

In Estha's case, the narrative revisits the moment of misuse multiple times, separate moment with different mood hues. Rahel's memories of Ammu, Velutha, and Estha are not

shown in an orderly sequence regardlessly as separate notions. Judith Herman's goal on the inability of trauma victims to design memories into a solid narrative (Herman 137) strengthens this reading: the novel's form is dictated by trauma's logic, not linearity. The childlike diction and poetic repetition in Roy's prose mimic the way children workflow trauma. Words are often capitalized, twisted, and echoed "Esthapappychachen," "quietness," "Once upon a moment there was a faraway tree." These are not merely stylistic quirks but indicators of apprehended alteration and dissociative recall. Anandawansa emphasizes how Roy's prose transforms a site of expressive regression, capturing the strict mental state of trauma survivors (Anandawansa and Hapugoda 89).

Childhood trauma in *The God of Small Things* is not isolated-it is rooted in structural violence. Ammu's powerlessness as a divorced woman, Baby Kochamma's lifelong misery, and Velutha's caste-built persecution do an environmental step of repression. Rahel and Estha are not just victims of singular events although of an operation that invalidates branch, warmth, and individuality. The children's passionate suffering mirrors the full failure of the family, the church, and the law to protect the perishable. Gayatri Spivak's question-"Can the subaltern speak?"-is just poignant in Estha's muteness and Velutha's voicelessness (Spivak 104). The trauma of the children transforms into a metaphor for the silencing of marginalized identities. Roy shows that trauma is not just a wound stable so an area. Complete feature of the twins' childhood-religion, love, caste, gender-is shaped by expertise and denial. They are not given the tools to speak or heal, only to survive through silence, mimicry, and resolution withdrawal.

Conclusion

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a novel that transcends conventional borders of narrative to portray the separate realities of childhood trauma. Through her clear use of language, disjointed roadmaps, and poetic stylization, Roy offers not just a depiction of pain, rather a way of reacting to it, inhabiting it, and surviving it. The characters of Estha and Rahel stand at the heart of this study-two children coldly orphaned not just by family, but by society, history, and silence. Their trauma is not sealed to a single moment though is intertwined in an continuing cultural and psychological condition that the novel slowly unravels.

Estha's silence, as discussed, is not merely a lack of speech, still a resistance to the world that inflicted harm on him and forced complicity in injustice. It is a manifestation of what Cathy Caruth calls "tardy trauma"-an injury that reasserts itself through recurring disruptions rather than memory (Caruth 4). Rahel's detachment and directionless adulthood similarly represent a psychic dislocation, a symptom of trauma too deeply entrenched to become verbalized. Together, their fables show Judith Herman's framework of trauma that emphasizes passionate numbing, memory fragmentation, and a blighted sense of identity

(Herman 133–37). What distinguishes Roy's portrayal of trauma is the way form mirrors content. The non-linear narrative, repeated imagery, and childlike linguistic constructions do not merely convey the psychological impression of trauma-they become it. The narrative itself breaks apart as memory does; it folds in on itself like trauma looping through the unconscious. Laurie Vickroy's observations on trauma fiction explains this: the trauma narrative is marked not by linearity or coherence although by heartfelt rhythm and internal ruptures (Vickroy 4). Roy's prose, rich in sensory recall and poetic rhythm, develops into the vessel through which trauma is actualized. Moreover, Roy does not isolate trauma from its sociopolitical setting. She places it firmly within a post-colonial design marked by caste discrimination, gender violence, and religious hypocrisy. Estha and Rahel do not suffer in a vacuum-they suffer because the systems around them fail. The church refuses to tomb Ammu, the police coerce a child, the family breaks under patriarchal expectation, and Velutha's physical well-being transforms the final symbol of systemic cruelty. As Spivak suggest, violence opposing the marginalized is both intimate and structural, and Roy's novel forcefully illustrates how this violence reproduces itself through silence and repression (Spivak 104).

In highlighting these interwoven threads of trauma-personal, cultural, linguistic-this paper underscores Roy's expertise to narrate the un-narratable. Her work goes outside of description to do a poetics of pain, inviting public not to understand trauma from the outside despite that to feel its disorientation from within. Estha and Rahel do not recover. They do not find closure. What they find is a time of stillness, a quiet recognition of shared damage. And in that, Roy makes a subtle flat so radical statement: healing is not constantly loud or complete; sometimes, it is simply in the perform of remembering together.

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