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## **Patriarchal Suffocation of Women: A Study of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things***

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Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* unfolds the subjective politics which has ordered the subjugation of women in a 'man-owned' world. The novelist has successfully demonstrated the injustice inflicted upon women through the means of patriarchy, caste taboos and love-laws. The mother of twins is smothered with pain and misery for not honouring the painful love-laws prescribed by the phallic community. The practice of inequality in man-woman relationship and caste system has strongly rooted in the social system. The plot of the story is pillared upon the discrimination against women and a paravan which may be the result of many factors-economic, political and social.

Roy is quite sceptical about the celebration of emancipation of women as she studies intensively various social institutions like caste, joint family and religious operations only to understand the subordinate position of women coping with the observation of Meitreyi; Mukhopadhyay, "The inequality and subordination of women is an instrument or function of the social structure"(82). On the ground of feminist perspective, *The God of Small Things* delineates the violence imposed on women and how Ammu got victimized by the parental tyranny. It betrays the morality in society taking different colours with men and women, inferior role of a wife and the violent role of a woman in directing the humiliation of another woman by a male.

Roy depicts the cruel realities of life and the consequent mounting of tension in an upper-class Syrian Christian family at Ayemenem in Kerala. The twins of Ammu were unfortunate to have bitter childhood which traumatized the growth of their being ; the sudden death of their nine year old cousin Sophie Mal wrecked the entire family causing emotional breakdown particularly to the twins, and sending shock waves to Ammu. It shook the very root of their lives causing the urge to "prepare to prepare to be prepared"(200). Suffering had been pulling Ammu down for long . She was not privileged for college education and for marriage too as dowry was a difficult proposition. Subsequently, She became domesticated depriving of privacy and freedom.

Virginia Woolf as quoted by Herbert Marder depicts the predicament of home-confined woman as a domestic prisoner:

The son of the house may be granted freedom to develop his mind, he may have a room of his own, but the daughter is expected to be at everyone's beck and call.... For domestic life cultivates the irrational side of a woman's nature; it is distinguished by the primacy of feeling as science is distinguished by the primacy of intellect. The domestic arts involve mainly the fine discrimination of

feelings and the ability to bring about adjustments in personal relations.(34-35)

Stink of suffocating atmosphere of the house had long been felt by Ammu with her Pappachi's outbursts of physical violence inflicted upon Mammachi. These irrational outbursts were most unbecoming of a man of higher rank of rational standards, an Imperial Entomologist. No night passed without his beating of wife. His deep-rooted frustrations of empty retired life must have been augmented with his jealous over Mammachi's success as a violinist and phenomenal popularity in the pickle -making business.

Marriage for Ammu became an escapist mechanism to take a flight from the oppressive and punctured home climate. So she volunteered matrimony with a Hindu Bengali from the tea-estate in Assam. Simon de Beauvoir remarks "There is a unianimous agreement that getting a husband or in some cases a 'protector' is for her the most important of undertakings.... she will free herself from the parental home, from her mother's hold, she will open up her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master"(352). But the fate of drudgery followed her to the new life falling a victim to the rages of her drunkard husband. Finding no viable solution to his drunken stupor, Ammu returned, though reluctantly to the old hell of parental dwelling.. She felt empty and lack of belongingness there as she was treated only as an intruder and her aunt Baby Kochamma yelled at Ammu. "she had no position at all"(45).

Ammu's inter-religious marriage bond advantaged Baby Kochamma to ignore her and her twins. Taking her as a potential rival, Baby Kochamma was haunted with the sense of insecurity and of being dispossessed in the swelling up of the family: " In the way that the unfortunate sometimes dislike the co-unfortunate, Baby Kochamma disliked the twins,for she considered them doomed,fatherless waifs.Worse still, they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry".(45) Frustrations of Baby Kochamma had its origin in her hopes as a novice of winning , the heart of Father Mulligan in a convent had failed. She had her life deserted.Her sadistic temperament got its bloom in creating opportunities to ditch Ammu and in exercising harsh imposition of discipline on the unfortunate twins.

Chacko like Ammu, resorted to the parental home in Ayemenem after getting discarded by his wife for his unproductive ways. But he,being a male , kept his grip in the entire operation of the house. Ammu was at his mercy for her and her children's subsistence. She was granted the status of a slave working in her mother's pickle factory which Chacko made patriarchic claim as "my factory, my pine apples, my pickles"(57). Ammu had no legal gravity of claim on the property due to outdated and outmoded inheritance rights.There was only lukewarm response from even Mammachi to the needs of Ammu and her children. She approved the lead of Chacko, the only male support after her husband's death and winked at her son's "unwarranted" relationships with women in the factory. Mammachi gave a great celebration of the reception of Margaret, Chacko's.English ex-wife and their daughter Sophie Mol but remained unconcerned about Ammu and her twins.

The ill-fate of her wrong marriage out smarted the struggles of Ammu to dump her in the whirlpool of miseries-her personal misery,inability to afford good upbringing to her children, indifference of her mother and aunt, unjust treatment of her brother.She was made too timid to assert herself. There was no one for her to rely on. Colette Dowling rightly observes. "Any woman who looks within knows that she was never trained to feel comfortable with the idea of taking care of herself, standing up for herself, asserting herself " (13). Ammu inevitably remained paralysed in all respects. The male tyranny hammered upon her took cruel form beyond tolerance. The preferential treatment accorded to Chacko's ex-wife and their daughter left Ammu and her children feel alienated.Ammu was a tender dangling creeper looking for a support. In this context, the gaze of Velutha, a paravan, meant the ray of light in her cloudy life.

Ammu hoped to have a world of warmth and sincerity with Velutha who reciprocated the sentiments of Ammu. Velutha's meaningful gaze was an oasis in a desert promising a new lease of life to her. This made her break all the constraints to take asylum in the pro-life company of the despised paravan. Consequences of this dreadful union were under-weighed by Ammu against more gruesome hardships she had already passed through. She felt relieved of pangs of her predicament in parental home when she placed herself and her twins in a tactile world of smiles and laughter created by Velutha. The twin children found god's world in the company of Velutha, a genuine kind of life which neither their father nor Chacko offered. Velutha played their games, satisfied their longing for stories and above all comforted them with true love. The world pivoted upon Velutha was heavenly for Ammu and the children where hostility, materialism and inhumanism had no space to play.

Ammu rejected the life of empty appearances and turned to Velutha for a fillip so desperately needed. The class and caste minded Ayemenem family roaringly condemned Ammu's choice of 'untouchable' life. The overstepped daughter Ammu earned her Mammachi's severe contempt as the mother feared the severe blow on the dignity of the family and the possible ostracization from the surrounds shedding the glory of ancestral achievements.

Every bit of hostility forced upon Ammu that she was disowned and disinherited by the Ayemenem family. She was removed from Rahel fearing her bad influence on the child. Being alienated, she was alone in death in a dingy room of Bharat Lodge in Allepey. She was denied of dignified funeral as "The Church refused to bury Ammu. so, Chacko had her wrapped in a dirty bed sheet and laid out on a stretcher"(162) and cremated in an electric crematorium where beggars, derelicts and the police custody were taken.

Velutha was thrown to the hands of police on the false charge of rape conspired by malicious Baby Kochamma and got tortured in their hands till he bled to death. But graver sins of this nature by Chacko a 'touchable' enjoyed the social approval and stood unpunished even in minor measure. Sincere confession of Ammu to the police Inspector stood ineffective to establish the innocence of Velutha. Rahel and Estha became psychologically sick. This syndrome did not allow Rahel to stick on to single school but to series of schools. The same condition ended her marriage in divorce due to her inability to relate authentically with her American husband.

Roy depicts how the intimacy surging from the heart that overpowers Ammu and Velutha met pains and miseries in the heartless male world. The novelist has drawn the bare bones of the characters from the family as her own mother experienced the 'pangs of crisis' in her parental home for being separated from her husband. Thus Roy's novel *The God of small Things* exposes the hypocrisy and entrenched prejudices of traditional Indian society deepened in consciousness of class distinction and female inferiority.

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