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## The Emotional Abusing and being Abused in Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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### **Abstract:**

Emotional Abuse is a psychological distress imposed on a submissive by ignoring, denying, aggressing, blaming, humiliating, belittling, bullying and rebuking. Emotional abuse either by neglect or by verbal assault attacks one's self-esteem Roy's *The God of Small Things* explores the brutal violence and social injustice enforced on the marginalized which subject them into psychological trauma. Roy takes her verbal weapon against the emotional and physical abuse of the underprivileged – the child, the woman and the untouchable in the Kerala society. The story revolves around the emotional distraught of the victims that entails disaster in their lives. The people in the power structure exploit the vulnerable state of the downtrodden entailing ethical dilemma which insists them to transgress the natural laws designed long before. This paper analyses the traumatized mindset of children, women, and the untouchables that becomes the root cause of their bleak future.

**Keywords: Emotional abuse, psychological trauma, abuse of women and children**

Misuse of power and mistreatment of the powerless is abusing; the abuse may start with the infliction of physical, sexual, financial, verbal or emotional violence. Any sort of abuse will be apparently obvious to the abuser and the abused; but it is very difficult for the persons who experience emotional abuse to identify that they are being abused; since the emotionally agitated abuser fails to sympathise the other whereas the unaware victim comprehends neither the intension of the abuser nor the effects of the abuse. Abusing especially emotionally distressing is a serious social evil since it makes the victim socially incompetent. Both children and adult are encountering mental torment that is more vicious than physical abuse.

Emotional Abuse is a psychological distress imposed on a submissive by ignoring, denying, aggressing, blaming, humiliating, belittling, bullying and rebuking. It is a kind of silent violence which causes invisible scars in the human mind intensifying psychological trauma eventually resulting in transgression. The motivation for such abusive behaviour may be associated with the situations of jealousy and power imbalance. Arundhathi Roy's *The God of Small Things* explores how the under privileged endures emotional abuse as a consequence of other forms of abuse. Roy takes her verbal weapon against the emotional and physical abuse of the underprivileged – the child, the woman and the untouchable in the Kerala society. The story revolves around the emotional distraught of the victims that entails disaster in their lives.

In the Indian social setup, Roy enunciates the three dichotomies – Man and Woman, Adult and Child, Gentry and Proletariat – in which the supreme execute exploitation, domination, and victimization on the vulnerable. For a long period of time, women are subjugated under the patriarchal power of men through physical violence, sexual assault and psychological abuse; the children are constantly exposed to the emotional and sexual fervour of the adults; the waged labourers are often exploited with the discriminatory, oppressive and bourgeois attitude.

## Man and Woman

Physical violence is a key hole to keep unemployed women emotionally and economically under the control of men. Roy's Mammachi, as a victim of patriarchy, encountered violent beatings from Pappachi. Pappachi, the Entomologist became frustrated by the fact that his discovery of a new species of moth was unrecognized and after twelve years the credit was bestowed to another director of Entomology. This disappointment infuriated Pappachi resulting in black moods and sudden bouts of temper for which he found vent in beating his wife Mammachi. Out of jealousy over her innate talent of playing violin, making pickles and efficient running of the Paradise pickles factory, Pappachi abused her physically. The music lessons were abruptly discontinued when Mammachi's teacher, Launsky-Tieffenthal, made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented. He even snapped her budding musical venture by breaking the violin into two mercilessly. His superiority complex as a man and as a Government officer prevented him to help Mammachi in her business and to appreciate her entrepreneurial skill. Besides her achievements, Mammachi did not protest his male arrogance rather accepted the insults and rejections and lives like a slave to his ego. She stands for the stereotypical traditional Indian woman remaining docile to any kind of repression.

When Chacko interfered into Pappachi's brass flower vase beatings of Mammachi, Pappachi's anger got manifested in "passive aggressive ways" and "less obvious modes of abuse and disparagement" (Azzam 144). When Mammachi became bread winner of the family and got the support of Chacko, Pappachi took revenge by ignoring her and spoiling her name in the town. He never touched Mammachi again. But he never spoke to her either as long as he lived. . . . In the evenings, when he knew visitors were expected, he would sit on the verandah and sew buttons that weren't missing onto his shirts, to create the impression that Mammachi neglected him. To some small degree he did succeed in further corroding Ayemenem's view of working wives. (Roy 47)

In order to retain his power over his wife Pappachi decided to abuse her psychologically neglecting her service and insulting her at public. The unassuming Mammachi endured the mistreatment passively. The motivation behind the passive aggressive behaviour is just to withhold the emotional support and nurturance from Mammachi. So she cried more at Pappachi's funeral because she was used to him than because she loved him.

The drastic consequence of this emotional abuse on Mammachi got reflected on herself when she attained power over the family after Pappachi's death. From the day Chacko rescued her, she "packed her wifely luggage and committed it to Chacko's care". (168). Chacko, the Marxist mind exploited the poverty of the pretty factory women in the name of Trade Union classes. His orthodox mother Mammachi who adhered to caste laws and other discriminatory cultural traditions accepted this "feudal libido" as "Man's needs" (168). She even offered them money to keep the libertine relationship secret. This kind of sexual abuse is tolerated and fostered by her for the sake of her own secured life under the shadow of Chacko - "Her Man. Her only Love" (80). But when she was aware of the clandestine affair of her daughter Ammu and the untouchable Velutha, she, as a subject of discriminatory abuse, drove her away from the house and him from the world.

"Emotional abuse", Alexander opines," includes verbal attacks, harassment, belittling, excessive possessiveness, isolation of partner, and deprivation of physical and economic resources". (qtd. in Packota) Ammu was the most victimized woman of all sorts of emotional abuse. Her instant decisions at the state of psychological trauma produced dire consequences not only in her life but also in that of people loved her most. The men she confronted from her

childhood expressed violence in any form. When she was exposed to the real face beneath their masks, she was psychologically harassed. Her father Pappachi worked hard to create a good public profile as a sophisticated, generous, moral man, wonderful husband and father. With the visitors, he was charming and urbane; but alone with wife and daughter, he was a monstrous, vicious and suspicious intimidator. Her silent endurance of his father's cold blooded atrocities at the age of nine in cold winters of Delhi taught her "to live with this cold, calculating cruelty. She developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big" (Roy 181-82).

This distressing and disgusting backdrop under the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother made Ammu desperate and think for escaping routes. Her exposure to her father's cruelty left her vulnerable before the mighty and her mind looked for escapism rather than to fight against it. In a hurry, she took four flights whenever she was subjugated.

- a) In her adolescence, to get rid of the dictatorship of her cruel father Pappachi, she took the flight of love marriage challenging the traditional system of arranged marriage.
- b) When her husband tried to trade her modesty for his job survival, leaving him to her parents' home, she took her second flight defying the age-old system of marital relationship.
- c) When she had to satisfy her needs as a woman, disobeying the hackneyed social demands, she pursued the forbidden fruit Velutha. It is the internal emotional flight which she took to restore her from emotional deprivation.
- d) When she failed in her quest to change her state from non-being to individual, losing all her relations and emotions, she quitted to another world.

It is highly pity that the decisions and flights Ammu took emotionally availing the space she could enter also involved her in many ways of abuse than ever.

Ammu being a girl child was denied higher education. The expensive marriage system and reckless father did not bring her any suitor. The unfortunate Ammu weighing the odds to marry the one who proposed accepted the strange Baba, whom she met at Calcutta. Roy writes, "She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem" (39). But marriage too cheated her in the form of a full-blown alcoholic husband. She endured his fraudulence but was exasperated to a degree she never thought herself capable of when he forced her to cater to the carnal desires of his manager Mr. Hollick. He tortured her in a pattern: "Drunken violence followed by postdrunken badgering." (42) When his bouts of violence began to include the children, Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem and to everything that she had fled from.

In Ayemenem, Ammu had to deal with emotional, discriminatory, verbal, financial exploitation instead of physical violence. It became a great blow to her that her father, an Anglophile could not believe that an Englishman would covet another man's wife. Next in the name of sympathizing, relatives visited Ayemenem to discuss about her divorce. She fought off the urge to slap them. The people of Ayemenem marginalised Ammu at four grounds. She was

- 1) "a married daughter" at parent's home
- 2) "a divorced daughter"
- 3) "a divorced daughter from a love marriage"
- 4) "a divorced daughter from a [sic] intercommunity love marriage" (45-46)

Along with that she was a mother of two Half-Hindu hybrids. However hard she worked in the pickles factory, she could not claim any partnership or any profit. Chacko used to abuse her verbally denoting the financial abuse, "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine." (57)

The fruitless marriage system seemed to be absurd and futile to Ammu. To overcome the alienation, frustration, and disillusionment about her future life, Ammu listened to songs that she loved on the radio. Roy vividly brings out the emotional ordeal and psychological trauma of Ammu, the divorced mother of twins in a poetic language. Ammu, for her emotional plight, fight and flight to reach out a happier place, “temporarily set aside the morality of motherhood and divorcehood.”(44) Roy calls the battle inside Ammu as an “unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber.” (44)When that fervour grew inside her and the ambiance urged her, Ammu “eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day” (44).

When Ammu was deprived of every relationship, she was fated to meet the Inspector Thomas Mathew who verbally and physically abused her. He called her “*veshya*” and her children “illegitimate” (8) and he tapped her breasts with his baton. Emotionally disturbed and embarrassed Ammu was unable to bear the humiliation and the fact that she could not save the life of Velutha. With a fervent guilty consciousness, she unconsciously whispered “He’s dead,” and “I’ve killed him.”(8) The hardship she endured in the police station and the alleged charge on her for violating the Love Laws of whom should be loved and how much affected her psyche. She became broken and felt lonely when she sent Estha to Calcutta and left Rahel in Ayemenem and this had the worst impact on her health with asthma. The recurrent dream of getting arrested by police with scissors to hack off her hair as a sign of prostitute tormented her psyche often. In the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey, the fearful Ammu made her last flight alone from the tormenting world life at the age of thirty one, “a viable, die-able age” (161). Her heavily tormented soul being daughter, wife, sister and mother was solemnly released at the end. Yet, her body was denied to be buried in the Church and it was cremated in the Electric Crematorium.

### **Adult and Child**

The worst effect of emotional abuse is that the victim is susceptible to commit crimes due to either the domination of the events occurred in early childhood or the frequent exposure to violence for a short or long term. The children Rahel and Estha, like their mother Ammu got influenced by the bizarre and weird ambiance in childhood that made them psychologically distinct from others. Generally, the abuser doesn’t have any problem with his/her anger; he/she would find problem with any kind of resistance from the person whom they want to be submissive. It was the case with Baby Kochamma who resented Ammu for quarrelling with “the fate of the wretched Man-less woman” (45) which she accepted graciously. Her unreturned love for Father Mulligan and her adherence to restraints developed jealousy and grudges over the happiness of the children. She expected from them some token of unhappiness.

The adults in Ayemenem failed to understand the world of children which ended the life of a child and spoiled that of two. The children were belittled, bullied, blamed and rebuked for what they did not know and which they did not cause. Estha and Rahel were reprimanded for reading backwards the title of the book presented to Baby Kochamma by her Australian missionary friend, Miss Mitten. When Estha referred her ignorance about the language of Kerala, she made a complaint as that she had seen Satan in their eyes. They were made to write “*In future we will not read backwards [emphasis in original]*” (60) for hundred times. Without enjoying the innocence and playfulness of the children, she in the name of education, punished them for silly things. She tried to impart the thought that the children were living on sufferance in the Ayemenem House, their maternal grandmother’s house, where they really had no right to be. It gave the servant maid Kochu Maria the guts to say “‘Tell your mother to take you to your father’s house,... There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren’t your beds. This



isn't your house" (83). This kind of constant belittling and denigrating caused the children to see themselves as unworthy of love and affection.

The ex-nun Kochamma lived her life backwards; her afflicted mind renounced the material world but later she chose to embrace it. At the age of eighty three, she decked her with gold and diamond jewels and coloured her lips and hair. Her psyche being distressed by the neglect of a man at younger age made a profound impact on her adult behaviour. Aichorn calls this kind of mental state as latent delinquency which "results from inadequate childhood socialization and manifests itself in the need for immediate gratification (impulsivity), a lack of empathy for others, and the inability to feel guilt" (qtd. in "Review"). Baby Kochamma took revenge on Velutha for no reason he had personally. After her public humiliation in the Marxist Procession, she focused all her fury on Velutha. "She sharpened it like a pencil." (Roy 82) In her mind he grew to represent the march and all the men who forced her to wave the Marxist Party flag, who christened her Modalali Mariakutty and who laughed at her. This bitter feeling got rejoiced when she came to know about Ammu's affair with Velutha.

Ammu, the single mother depending on her parent's home, wishing to withhold her clutches, expected her children to be well-behaved adults. The twins were too young to understand all this. Rahel, without finding the reason for the perspiration and marble look in her mother's face when she mentioned the name of Velutha in the Communist Procession, carried down the puzzle within her for a long period. Ammu watched over them fiercely which made her taut and tense. She was quick to reprimand her children, but even quicker to take offense on their behalf. In the course of educating and protecting the children, the only source of her life, she hurt their little heart by intimidating, "When you hurt people, they begin to love you less. That's what careless words do. They make people love you a little less." (112) Rahel was completely shattered by the thought that Ammu loved her less.

In order to safeguard the precious feelings of others, she failed to realize the feelings of her own children. This unfriendly rudeness made her son conceal the sexual abuse of the Orangedrink Lemondrink man. Even his twin Rahel could sense the unsmooth relation between Estha and the man that caused fever in him. Ammu failed to notice the evil desire behind his surprisingly sweetness with Estha. In the fear of encountering the man again, he often repeated saying that anything could happen to anyone; it's best to be prepared. To the children being abused emotionally, "the World became angry-colored" (85)

Ammu also made a mistake of emitting her outrage on the social setup at the innocent children who came forward to share about her worries. Ammu screamed, "'if it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here! None of this would have happened! I wouldn't be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! You're the millstones round my neck!'"(253) Her careless words hurt them and made them loving her less. Her emotional burst out directed the children to leave the house. Roy getting into the mindscape of children writes,

the absence of children, all children, would heighten the adults' remorse. It would make them truly sorry;... They would search everywhere and just when they were sure that all three of them were dead, they would return home in triumph. Valued, loved, and needed more than ever. (292) The children longing for true love and care like their mother kept the window open through which their father disappeared and welcomed Velutha who walked in.

The cyclonic disturbance in Ayemenem in December 1969 also evolved a disaster in the life of Ammu and her children. The revelation of Ammu's nightly tryst with Velutha separated the two-egg twins. Deprived of parents and paralysed by the separation of her twin brother Estha

and the death of Velutha, Rahel behaved wayward and was first blacklisted in Nazareth Convent at the age of eleven. She collided violently against the breasts of the senior girls, smoked and set fire on Housemistress's false-hair bun. The complaint that she didn't know how to be a girl and her moral perversion made her expelled from schools. Estha refusing to go to college, with all surprise did the household activities voluntarily. He became more and more gentle, calm and quiet whereas Rahel became aggressive and violent. Their childhood psychological trauma provoked emotional and conduct disorders in them. Rahel was divorced by her husband Larry McCaslin after noticing a sort of enforced optimism in her eyes. Roy observes that "the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other." (20) Their emotions harmed in their childhood were rectified at the age of 34 by the physical and sexual reunion of the twins.

### **Gentry and Proletariat**

The Bourgeois mindset of Ipe family and the state machinery including political party and Police excised their power through the norms of social codes. They practised double standard of morality for the ruling and working class separately. They enacted double play in the life of the untouchables in Ayemenem. The political hypocrites extracted Velutha's physical labour and kicked him down and smashed when he attempted to climb up. This inhumane merciless treatment of Velutha would be an emotional threat to other untouchables who violate the taboos. Such brutal and violent practices might have trained Velutha's father Vellaya Pappen and his predecessors to be so submissive. The role of these terrifying experiences made an imprint in their psyche. Hence Vellaya Pappen considered Velutha's relation with Ammu as an act of ingratitude and voluntarily informed it to Mammachi regarding it as his duty as a Paravan. In return to his duty consciousness and truthfulness, Mammachi pushed him down and spat on him calling him drunken-dog and drunken-paravan.

The complete destruction of Velutha and his wings was because of "Man's", Roy writes, "subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify." (308) It was Baby Kochamma who designed the list of accusation of kidnapping the children, molesting their mother, murdering a child, and threatening the lonely women at home on Velutha and made the case strong with the help of the fake witnesses Estha and Rahel. She intimidated them and played with their love for Ammu and got them to say what she wished. The psychoanalysts call this kind of interpersonal relationship of hostages with captors as Stockholm Syndrome (Berg-Cross n.p). Estha on seeing no way to save Ammu from the arrest created special bond with his grandaunt. Even after twenty three years, he returned to her sensing no other go. Estha's "Yes" put an end to the fate of Velutha who after enduring physical violence left the world. Roy finds that "childhood tiptoed out" in Estha and points out the venomous plots of Baby Kochamma as "Irrigating her fields, nourishing her crops with other people's passions." (Roy 321)

The novelist devises a well-framed story on the play with emotions and passions of the characters with dual identity, double life, ironic disposition, unmixable desires, resenting grudges and so on. The novel emotively demonstrates that the silent sufferers too have emotions and just because they yearn to reach out, the same emotions are verbally and violently crushed under the hands of malicious feelings. The most corrosive effect of nonphysical or psychological abuse is that it creates impact not only on the life of the abused but also his/her generation as well. The abusive tactics of Pappachi, Baby Kochamma and Chacko on Ammu and her children exert control over them and destroy their self-esteem. They involve deliberate or unintended infliction of mental and emotional harm on the victim's feelings.

Linda Berg-Cross in her “Intimate Relationships, Psychological Abuse and Mental Health Problems”, enumerates the components of Psychological abuse – Intimidating / denigrating, Withholding (Passive aggressive behaviour), Restricting and Isolating, Control/ domination. Pappachi’s passive aggressive ways to damage Mammachi’s name, Baby Kochamma’s constant criticism denigrating the children to impart sense of worthless and insignificance and her tactics intimidating them to obey her are the parts of emotional abuse. Ammu was controlled and dominated in all the four spheres of her life – her decisions, her relationships, her surroundings and her self-image.

Roy enunciates the patterns of domestic violence unleashed on the marginalized in the society. She explained how the Individual and institutional power structures instill fear through violence with invisible scars, that later provokes contempt out of fear in the newer generation. This contempt for the subjugating paradigms of power triggers the abused to transgress. Roy’s three generation of characters belong to the Ipe family pass through all these emotional transitions.

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