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Predicaments of Ammu in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy (Suzanna Arundhati Roy) is an Indian author best known for her Booker prize winning novel *The God of the Small Things* (1997). In this novel, there is depiction of the psychological sufferings of the female characters especially of those of the housewives. As well as that of the oppressed and repressed lives of the females in India. Women characters as well as their problems have been given due importance. Full efforts have been made to understand the problems of women as well as their conditions in the society. Roy has highlighted the fact that how the life of women in India is governed by the customs of a family and society. The society only accepts that woman who proves herself a good woman.

Keywords: Exploitation, alienation, psychological disturbance, struggle for identity, patriarchal society, disharmony

Introduction

Arundhati Roy (Suzanna Arundhati Roy) is an Indian author best known for her Booker prize winning novel *The God of the Small Things* (1997). She was born on November 24, 1961 in Shilong (Meghalaya), India. She is undoubtedly a well acclaimed contemporary writer, trained architect, and social activist. Arundhati Roy is the first Indian citizen to win the Booker Prize. Arundhati Roy's debut novel, *The God of the Small Things*, won the Booker Prize for fiction in 1997. Over six million copies of the novel were sold worldwide. It was published in 19 countries and in 16 languages.

The novelist has handled various themes related to the life of woman and her status in the male dominated society. For instance, suffering, exploitation, struggle for identity, gender equality, alienation, psychological disturbance, disharmony between the relationship of husband and wife, mother daughter relationship. She has portrayed the various images of women.

Ammu faces several problems. She witnesses a number of difficulties both in her private life as well as social life. She is destined to face various hurdles in her day to day life. The situation of Ammu and other female characters represent the problems women in India generally face. Roy has highlighted the fact that how the life of women in India is governed by the customs of a family and society. The society only accepts that woman who proves herself a good woman. In order to become a good woman, she must be a good daughter, good wife and a good mother. That means she must be of meek nature and self - sacrificing to become a good woman.

Ammu is the protagonist of the novel, *The God of Small Things*. She is the daughter of Pappachi and Mammachi. Her story in the novel is a tragic story. Since her childhood, she faces a lot of difficulties. Her father (Pappachi) used to misbehave with her and beat her mother (Mammachi) with a brass vase.

She suffers from an oppressive and repressive sense of loneliness. She suffers the tortures, taunts of her family and of her husband. She is lonely and frustrated. The society in which she lives, forces her to fight and struggle for her rights and survival.

She feels captive in her own house. She has a keen desire to fly high and freely like a bird and live an independent life and carefree life. She thinks that after marriage, her situation will definitely change, if not completely but to some extent. She has many expectations from her marriage.

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She believes that her marriage will give her all the happiness for which she always craved for. She will have a carefree life after marriage. She will enjoy freedom to the fullest. She will have her own individual identity and dignity. And the patriarchal order will not be able to restrict or bound her anymore. She marries Baba in a hope of better future. She marries him at the earliest without her parents' permission. She breaks the religious laws, social laws, caste laws and love laws and marries a Bengali.

But all the dreams of Ammu shatter when she comes to know that Baba is just like her own father. He proves to be another man who abuses Ammu and makes use of his power over his wife. He leaves no chance to humiliate Ammu.

Suddenly he lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her and then passed out from the effort. Ammu took down the heaviest book she could find in the bookshelf – The Reader's Digest World Atlas – and hit him with it as hard as she could. (Roy 20)

She divorces him and comes back to her father's house with her twins. She comes back to her parents' house as an unwelcomed guest. Her family does not treat her and her twins well. They are nothing more than just outsiders. Mammachi, Ammu's own mother let her to die a terrible and tragic death. Baby Kochamma, Mammachi and even the servant of the house do not give proper treatment to Ammu and her children. Baby Kochamma does not like Ammu and her children because she is of the opinion that a divorced daughter is not supposed to get any kind of respect or place in the family as well as in the society.

Her tragic days begin from the day when she comes in contact with Velutha. The huge caste difference between the two does not create any kind of obstacle in their union. Her relation with Velutha is contrary to the love laws laid down by the society. According to the society, she has committed punishable act. Her ultimate tragedy commences from this very particular act. Ammu and Velutha are very well aware of that there exists a caste difference between them but nothing could stop their sexual passion towards each other. This act of societal crime completely changes the life of Ammu as well as of Velutha. Ammu is looked in the room as she has crossed the boundaries of high caste. Roy has honestly portrayed the evil of gender discrimination. Though both Ammu and Chacko have crossed their boundaries and dared to love outside their religion. But only Ammu is found guilty in the eyes of her family and society. Ammu dies untimely and tragic death. The family tortures her to the extent that she is forced to find a job for herself and her children. She goes to Alleppey for the interview of a secretary.

Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey, where she had gone for a job interview as someone's secretary. She died alone. With a noisy ceiling fan for company and no Estha to lie at the back of her and talk to her. She was thirty-one. Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age (Roy 161).

That night in the lodge, Ammu sat up in the strange bed in the strange room in the strange town. She didn't know where she was, she recognized nothing around her. Only her fear was familiar. The faraway man inside her began to shout. This time the steely fist never loosened its grip. Shadows gathered like bats in the steep hollows near her collarbone (Roy 162).

The sweeper found her in the morning. He switched off the fan:

She had a deep blue sac under eye that was bloated like a bubble. As though her eye had tried to do what her lungs couldn't. Sometime close to midnight, the faraway man who lived in her chest had stopped shouting. A platoon of ants carried a dead cockroach sedately through the door, demonstrating what should be done with corpses (Roy 162). Even the church does not agree to bury Ammu in its churchyard. After her death, her dead body is wrapped in a dirty bed sheet:

The church refused to bury Ammu. On several counts. So Chacko hired a can to transport the body to the electric crematorium. He had her wrapped in a dirty bed sheet and laid out on a stretcher (Roy 162).

The novelist has tried to expose the contemporary religious leaders. The refusal of Ammu's body to bury in the church cemetery exposes the religious body of that time. They deny to bury her in the church cemetery because she has an affair with an untouchable. Religion is not free from controversies. Through the character of Ammu, the novelist has tried to show that if a woman is incapable of taking right decision in her life then she must pay a great value for her mistake. She is not supposed to make choices in her life. She is not at all free to do whatever she wants to do. If she does then she must be prepared for the consequences. One wrong decision of Ammu creates so many blunders in her life. She herself spoils her own life as well as of her children's. The man of her own choice i.e. her husband treats her brutally, her family does not accept her after her failed marriage, she becomes an unwelcomed guest in her own house. Her children suffer the negative impact of her wrong decision. And finally, she dies an unexpected death.

Ammu tries her best to speak out against the wrong doings of people around as well as the patriarchal order. But she is powerless. She lives the life of a disgraced woman. The reason behind this is that she is divorced. Also, she is the new woman who is aware of her rights. She dares to take her own choices and not afraid to bear the consequences. She goes against her family and the patriarchal society. She steps outside her home in search of new self. She is the victim of the domestic violence. But she does not compromise with the norms set by the patriarchal society.

In *The God of Small Things*, the novelist has highlighted gender discrimination and social injustice in the patrilineal patriarchal society. It is a bitter truth that a divorced woman/daughter like Ammu is never accepted by the society. She is always oppressed by her own family and the society where she lives. Gender discrimination and social injustice is clearly visible that estranged son Chacko is treated well by all the family members while Ammu feels totally helpless and homeless in her own house and around her own family. Roy has also highlighted gender discrimination in deprivation of women characters especially Ammu in the parental property. Being a daughter of Pappachi and Mammachi, Ammu does not have any right to claim her father's property. Chacko proudly calls himself the only inheritor of the family property. Only, Chacko owns the factory and other property of his parents.

K.V.Surendran in his book *The God of Small Things: A Saga of Lost Dreams* views that all the female characters have their own issues, sufferings, and problems. The novel is a deep study of mind and the psychological condition of the women characters in a country like India. These characters want to achieve their dreams and simultaneously they also witness the collapsing of those dreams.

A close study of Ammu reveals that she is the victim of male domination in almost every sphere of life. Only men dominate the household as well as other fields. In the novel, *The God of Small Things*, Roy's women characters, especially Ammu are the victims of torture, humiliation and exploitation. They are just regarded as mothers and wives and inferior to the males in the society. In the name of socio cultural practices and religion, they are denied of various opportunities. Ammu faces unequal treatment both in her house as well as in the society. Also she faces repression, inferior and unequal status. She submits herself to the male authority: maternal grandfather, father, brother, husband and son. She faces injustice, oppression, exploitation, humiliation, suppression and subjugation in the world of men. In each and every form, she is oppressed and exploited. Her dreams, opinions, identity, aspirations, desire are suppressed in the patriarchal society. She is not allowed to enjoy the dignity and status of being an individual. She is miles away from the freedom from the deep rooted male domination. As a woman of the Ayemenem house, she does not have enough freedom.

Arundhati Roy has tried to show a society where men hold the power. Men have the power of decision. They are the real rulers of the house. They rule the lives of the women of the house. They only want to suppress women in every possible ways. They are of the opinion that they have full dominance over women. They have full rights to do whatever they want. They beat women to show their dominance and maintain their power over women. They dominate every sphere of the society. They enjoy special privilege and have full control over the ancestral property. Roy has very well highlighted the powerful and unfair male dominated society or patriarchal order that always treats women and people of low caste mercilessly.

We usually speak for the equal rights and equality between men and women. But this goal of equality is still a far cry. The novelist has shown how the female characters face all the challenges. She has shown the true position of women. Arundhati Roy has tried to show a society where men hold the power. They dominate every sphere of the society. They enjoy special privilege and have full control over the ancestral property.

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