



Depiction of Women Endurance in *The God of Small Things*

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ABSTRACT

The novel The God of Small Things portrays here are women characters in the present day social set up. If we minutely peep into the character sketches of Mammachi, Ammu or Rahel, we would come to know that they have a great capacity to endure sufferings upon sufferings. They all are believer in the theory of etiquette and manner, decorum and decency. They never harbor in their heart any ill will against anybody or the established moral code of society, which makes a great difference between men and women. It is all about the tolerance against the irrational codes which bind to us in our everyday miserable lives. The struggle against these codes, as expressed here, is the only righteous path, the only meaningful purpose to be survived in the society, that to be formed by ourselves.

KEYWORDS :

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Arundhati Roy, the Booker Prize winner novelist for her first and the only novel, 'The God of Small Things' in the year 1997, is known to all not only for her original style but also for her thought provoking attitude regarding social consciousness. It is all about the rebellion against the irrational codes which bind to us in our everyday miserable lives. The struggle against these codes, as expressed here, is the only righteous path, the only meaningful purpose to be survived in the society, that to be formed by ourselves. One such theme is of "The love Laws" that prescribe 'Who should be loved, and how. And how much'. It is captivating for any reader of the book. The book presents many things but its universal theme of social consciousness- confrontation between the "Laltain and Mombatti, class aggression and class exploitations, exposure to the tyranny and injustice because of which the untouchable have to suffer without any rhyme or reason, the insult and abuse the women of the society have to tolerate and above all, the trials and tribulations the deserted and defenseless have to pass through at the police station. This paper presents the women's endurance in this patriarchal society. Even though most of the modern women are found bold and courageous in their oral encounter with the male section of the society, in reality they suffer a lot due to their physical or emotional exploitation, sometimes by the society or sometimes by the own family members.

Women's struggle for seeking their identity is well described in the novel. The social structure of an Indian woman is full of many ups and downs in 'our male dominated conservative framework. Life offers little choice for a forsaken woman like Ammu, the central character, who yearns for pleasure and happiness. Ammu, the central character of the novel, is a tragic figure humiliated and insulted and misbehaved by her father; ill-treated and misbehaved by her husband, badly insulted by the police and deserted by her brother. Her tragic story, right from the beginning to the end, arouses our sense of pity and catharsis; she has to face so many trials and evils. She has all the good qualities which human being required except she is unknown to the patriarchal love laws that lay down "Who should be loved. And how. And how much?" 328 The novelist helps us to discover some of the bottomless depths of women character particularly in Ammu, who at times seems to identify her emotions to most of the common women we see in our day to day life. Similarly, whatever we see in the character of Ammu, has some relevance to our own attitude.

The narrator portrays a detail picture of the lady's childhood to adolescence, to the experience of marriage to an affectionate mother, to a rebellious wife who challenges the age long hypocritical moral stand of a patriarchal family. As a little girl, Ammu had to endure some unbearable nightmarish experiences. She saw with her open eyes the cruelty of her father, Pappachi, who used to beat her and her mother, Mammachi with a brass-vase. Once her father tore a part of her shoes which herself has purchased for her. She was also not given higher education by her father as he was of the opinion that it is meaningless for a girl child. Roy depicts the cruelty and the schizophrenia of Pappachi in a very fine way. She says: "not content with

having beaten his wife and daughter, he tore down curtains; Kicked furniture's and smashed a table lamp".¹⁸¹ He behaves like a decent man but demonstrates his male ego and mentality when he deals with his wife and daughter. In an atmosphere entirely different, she began to feel like captive. She became frustrated. She was not given any rights through which she could be blossomed. On the contrary she was asked to be helpful to her mother in the household work. As she was full of women consciousness, she was not ready to accept all these. She wanted to be free from it. She was always thinking to run away from her home to enjoy her life with liberty. Roy describes this as. "All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill tempered father and pungent, long suffering mother. She hatched several wretched little plans. Eventually one worked. Pappachi agreed to let her spend the summer with distant aunt who lived in Calcutta".³⁸

After receiving consent from her father, Ammu went Calcutta. There she met an Assistant Manager of a tea estate in Assam and she decided to marry him as early as possible as she knew well that people of Ayemenem would not listen to her. They had nothing to do with Ammu. The author observes, "Ammu didn't pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought than anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem. She wrote her parents informing them of her decision. They didn't reply".³⁹ But soon after her marriage she came to know that her decision of marriage with the manager was wrong as he didn't love her. On the contrary as he was alcoholic many times made Ammu smoke. At that time the twins were born. Mean while the English Manager Mr. Hollich was attracted towards Ammu. He wanted to have physical relation with Ammu. So one day he put the proposal of sending her to his bungalow regularly 'to be looked after' before her husband praising him. "You are very lucky man, you know, wonderful family, beautiful children, such an attractive wife".⁴² Listening to this Ammu's husband didn't feel odd. He had accepted the proposal without any hesitation and asked about to his wife. Listening to this Ammu's anger found no bound. Hitting her husband with a book, with her twins she left her home. She returned back to her home but all the members were so indifferent to her. They had not accepted her. She could not understand what to do with the twins- found so helpless and weak. She felt insulted.

Even in her own house, she is not treated properly. Her brother including her parents used to fling irony on the twins. Similarly we can see that her brother Chacko is sent to Oxford to get education. But on the other hand, Ammu is deprived of higher education even in India. The reason is that she is a female and so she has no right to have higher education as Pappachi was of the opinion that college education corrupts the girls. At her home, all the wealth of the house and patriarchal materialistic rights are given to her brother when he comes back from the study which makes him more mean- minded. He tells her sister, "What is your is mine and what is mine is also mine. He also told Rahel and Estha that Ammu had no Locust stand I".⁵⁷ Thus, it shows that daughters have no right in father's property even

if she stays with him for the whole life. She has to be dependent on his brother only (if she has) for her survival. Today also we see the same situation of women in the society. If a brother is there, he only will be given all the properties of his father in hierarchy.

Not only this when Chacko flirts with low-caste women, he is encouraged by Pappachi in the name of "Men's needs". Where as when Ammu falls in love with a low-caste but gentleman, Velutha, she is considered as sinful. Not only this, for this she is punished too. Terrifically she is beaten by her father. Her relatives came to see her in her traumatic situation. But that was only their lips sympathy. In reality they were chuckling at Ammu's misfortune and misdeed, according to them. Thus, at the age of 24, her life becomes very worst. She could not end her life or continue her life. Instead of enjoyment and merriment she was passing through a very tragic and sympathetic condition. "She spoke to no one. She spent hours on the riverbank with her little plastic transistor shaped like a tangerine. She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swim."⁴⁴ In other words, at her home and in her family and the society, she became virtually untouchable. She seemed with no position in her parents' home. As she was a divorcee, she had no position anywhere at all. In the novel, "As for a divorced daughter from inter-community love marriage- Baby Kochamma chose to remain silent on the subject." Here 'there is no sisterhood. A woman is against woman. Though she had to pass through deep distress, still she doesn't show sympathy to her own kin.

The situation becomes worst with Ammu when she falls in love with an untouchable Velutha. She loved him from her very childhood. On her return from Calcutta, leaving behind her status of married life. One day she saw Velutha marching with a red flag in a white shirt with wreath. Again her love for him blossomed. She likes his revolting nature. Perhaps she was identifying her emotions of revolt with that of Velutha. She loved him for his this spirit of protest. Moreover, while Velutha had held her daughter in his arms, she felt that he is not on the giver of gifts, but has also many gifts to give him. She describes her gift as, "Her brownness against his blackness. His softness against his hardness. Her nut-brown breasts against his smooth a bony chest."³³⁵ Thus see seems pulled toward Veluths. This soft feeling and attraction between them was resulted in extra-marital relationship-sexual relation. But this happy moment didn't last long. One day, Velutha's father, secretly saw their illicit lovemaking and told that all to Baby Ko Chamma. Consequently, she was locked up in a room. Baby was thinking, "Ammu had defiled generations of breeding and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, forever now, people would point at them at weddings and funerals at baptism and birthday parties.

As totally neglected and discarded from her own family, she was living with frustration and lots of despair; she was feeling lonely as she was not receiving financial or moral support from anyone in the society. So one day she "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."¹⁸¹ In the morning when the sweeper went to the room, he found her dead laying in a very pathetic condition on the floor. When her body was dragged outside the room, "A platoon of ants carried a dead cockroach sedately through the door, demonstrating what should be done with corpses."¹⁶² She is found such a tragic character that even after death too she was not respected. Her dead body was not burnt with the traditional rituals. When the Church, a religious place, too denied to bury Ammu, Chacko hired a van to transport the body to the electric crematorium, "where nobody except beggars, derelicts and the police-custody dead were cremated there."¹⁶² No one from the family was present there. "The door of the fur ace was shut. There was no tears".¹⁶³ Thus she is found tortured, abused, rejected and ill-treated by her own, the police and the society itself. In the novel we could find out that for her tragic and pitiful condition, not only men but some women were also responsible. The same brutality and persecution Ammu went through is found against, her litter daughter, Rahel. She is also treated by her family members as an outsider. She becomes an object of sufferance and pity. She is girl of rebellion like her mother. She too was suffering from women consciousness like her mother. But like her mother she too is found a silent protester against the conservative outlook for women in the patriarchal mindset of the society. She was nearly eleven years old when her loving mother died. As a child she had seen all the things which a child is not supposed to see- the sufferings of her mother, the

insult and abuse that were inflicted on her, the tortures she had been subjected to her betrayal of Velutha in the police custody, the cold not indifferent attitude of the family members. Not only this, with her brother, she was made instrumental to do wrong did to Velutha and her mother too by the Baby. These all memories were proved like hurdle in making her life conjugal. After her mother's death, she had lost the last hope of survival on the earth and she begins to wander from school to school. She used to spend her holidays at her maternal uncle's home but she was treated as almost an 'ignored object'. She was punished for decorating a fresh cow dung with small flowers and accused of hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors. Moreover, she was also caught smoking. The other abnormal nature which she exhibited in the school was setting fire to her House mistress's false hair bun. In each of the schools where she got herself admitted, the teacher noted two important things- her politeness and devoid of friendship. Whatever accusations she was charged upon, she never lost her dignity like her mother. As she had no friendship, she felt so isolated even in the so crowded city. This was resulted in an immature physical relationship with her own twin's brother.

Her college life experience is also important to understand her psychology and behavior. She got admitted in an Architecture College in Delhi after getting through the entrance exam where her first drawing was attracted because of its enormous size rather than skill. She spent their eight years without completing five years degree course. She was living in a cheap hostel eating the subsidized student mess. She hardly went to class. Her classmates and other college students didn't like her behavior and outlook. Instead of trying to understand her, they left her alone to tackle her traumatic life alone. She used to present her building plans etc. on cheap brown papers which her professors disliked and so, they become indifferent to her instead of trying to judge her behavior and giving her their warm and moral support to come out from the abnormality. Perhaps this negligence of teachers is more satirical and pathos creating.

She was writing to her maternal uncle and other members at village but they never responded her. So when Mammachi died, she didn't come to her village. Meanwhile she felt into love with Larry MC Caslin who was collecting material for his doctoral thesis. Her past terrible memories even hunted her happy marriage life. In the beginning her husband was very happy to find so good and beautiful girl like Rahel. He held her, "as though she was a gift. Given to him b in love. Something still and small. Urbearably precious."¹⁹ But sometimes he felt nervous as he could not understand her eyes expression. He was always feeling that even in his presence, her eyes had been in search of someone else. Perhaps this became reason of her divorce. Their love marriage did not exist for a long time. Within a few days, she was divorced like her mother Ammu. After that she worked as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York and, then as a night clerk in a bullet-proof cabin at a gas station outside Washington.

After her divorce, she too came to her maternal uncle's home. But there she had developed more causal and accepted approach towards each thing. She had no complaint to anyone. Right from her birth, she has been the sufferer of undeserved despair and desolation and has been victim of the Pappachi's abnormality.

Another character of the novel Mammachi is also an unhappy character. Here we could notice that in Vienna, she was taking lesson in violin. Her teacher praised her for her good quality, at that time which made her husband more jealous of her good qualities. Instead of appreciating and encouraging her, he became sad and abruptly discontinues her lessons. Moreover, every night he beats Mammachi with a brass flower vase. We know that in a patriarchal society, wife beating is a normal thing. One day Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi's violin and threw it in the river. During this period Chacko, her son was there. He found his father beating Mammachi. One day he entered into their room when his father was beating his mother and he caught his father's hand and twisted it around his back. This episode created a great hatred, in the mind of Pappachi. He never touched Mammachi. He never spoke to her or never allowed her to sit beside him in his car Despite of such indifferent behaviors to her by her husband she never complained him. On the contrary, like an ideal Indian traditional woman she endures all these patriarchal dominations passively and submissively.

Conclusion:

Thus, after going through the whole novel we could find out that most of the lady characters portrayed here are average women characters in the present day social set up. If we minutely peep into the character sketches of Mammachi, Ammu or Rahel, we would come to know that they have a great capacity to endure sufferings upon sufferings. They all are believer in the theory of etiquette and manner, decorum and decency. They never harbors in their heart any ill will against anybody or the established moral code of society, which makes a great difference between men and women.

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