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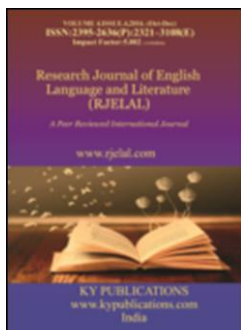
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**PATRIARCHAL DOMINATION IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *GOD OF SMALL THINGS* AND  
ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE***

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**ABSTRACT**

Patriarchy is the social system in which the primary power rests in the hands of males, and they also play dominant roles in political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of the property; and in the domain of the family, fathers or father-figures have mastery over women and children. Art being the reflections of life, present worlds in which these gender roles exist and also represents women's experience of life and suffering. We can regard the preoccupation with the issues of women and downtrodden, both marginalized social groups in the Third World countries as an astounding facet of postcolonial writing in English. The novels *The Color Purple* and *The God of Small Things* assume the dimension of protest novels which are keenly alert to the social injustice that goes sanctioned by the prevalent traditional norms. Acclaimed writers Arundhati Roy and Alice Walker depict skilfully the consciousness of female characters to present their plight, fears, dilemmas, contradictions, and ambitions. This article focuses on how Arundhati Roy and Alice Walker portray patriarchal dominations in their novels.

Key Words: Patriarchy, tradition, suffering, liberation.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Patriarchy is the social system in which the primary power rests in the hands of males, and they also play dominant roles in political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of the property; and in the domain of the family, fathers or father-figures have mastery over women and children. Patriarchy historically displays itself in the social, legal, political, religious and economic organization of different cultures and most contemporary societies practices patriarchy even though not explicitly defined to be by their own constitutions and laws. In the lives of human beings, gender plays a pivotal role, from the very first breaths strict code of behaviour that differs according to their sex will be inculcated in their minds. Compelling men and women to fit into

gender roles in a patriarchal society, males lead a privileged life and females lead a subdued, submissive life; women experience life far differently from men and suffer because of it. Art being the reflections of life, present worlds in which these gender roles exist and also represents women's experience of life and suffering. We can regard the preoccupation with the issues of women and downtrodden, both marginalized social groups in the Third World countries as an astounding facet of postcolonial writing in English. Male and female writers both have accentuated the plight of women and backward classes in conservative and tradition-bound societies where both experience discrimination and treated as subservient and subdued groups in hierarchical social structure. The novels *The Color Purple* and *The God of Small Things*

assume the dimension of protest novels which are keenly alert to the social injustice that goes sanctioned by the prevalent traditional norms. Acclaimed writers Arundhati Roy and Alice Walker depict skilfully the consciousness of female characters to present their plight, fears, dilemmas, contradictions, and ambitions. Enmeshed between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand, and self-expression, individuality, and independence on the other, the protagonists of these novels feel lost and baffled and explore ways to fulfil themselves as a human beings. The novelists delineate their women characters in the light of their hopes, fears, aspirations and frustrations. These novels analyze gender oppression through the examination of the marital and inter-gender relations of female characters.

Arundhati Roy, the celebrated post-colonial Indian novelist who won the Booker prize for her debut novel 'The God of Small Things' published in 1997, admirably portrays the predicament of Indian women setting against Ayemenem, a southern Indian state of Kerala where the complex network of relationships ensnared the female characters submitting them to repeated subjugation and curbing their individual freedom. In this novel, Roy celebrates the female in the diversity of female experience, and she has no aim of being moralistic and is pragmatic and down to earth in her creation of her female characters, some of whom discernibly delineating a novel culture that differs from the traditional. This novel being a structural representation of patriarchal cultural imagery presents both the subjectification of men and the objectification of women. In this novel, Roy seeks to sensitize the male chauvinist and exceedingly traditional society to the brutality of its treatment of women and low caste people and indicate her protest against its dehumanizing taboos which impede individual's dreams, longings, and claims for justice and respectability.

The prominent African-American writer Alice Walker in her acclaimed work *The Color Purple* deals with the story of the life of black women in the southern United States in the 1930s, addressing various issues including their extremely low position in American social culture. The novel offers a lucid,

wrenching portrayal of the harsh circumstances and restricted opportunities of deprived, uneducated African-American women in the South and also chronicles a woman's inspirational struggle for survival, wholeness, and sexual, political, and racial equality. The novel upholds women-bonding and female creativity to acquire strength and inspiration to survive the plethora of brutality endured by the triply burdened Afro-American women.

Traditionally India can be regarded as a male dominated society, and for ages, the patriarchal society has suppressed, confined and oppressed the women within the four walls of the house with no identity of their own. But in Post- Independence India, due to the commencement of women's education life started changing, then the new woman started emerging with a sense of identity and individuality. The patriarchal society believes that women identify the real status in the society- as a mother, wife, and daughter, but the new women challenge the traditional notions and have awareness about their rights. In her novel *God of Small Things* we can see Roy's efforts by the way she portrays the desires, agonies, and needs of women as well as the hypocrisy and double standards of men. Set in Kerala the novel deals with the tragic tale of Ammu, a Syrian Christian divorcee who dare to challenge the "Love Laws" and establishes an illegitimate relationship with an untouchable Velutha, a fellow sufferer, stinging under the unfair laws of the society. This novel depicts a realistic picture of the sufferings of Indian women and their cares, worries, desires and the indignity they face in the patriarchal society. It also depicts their struggle to seek a sense of identity in a totally malignant society in which the male counterparts treats women as chattels. Even though she primarily focuses on the predicament of women she also covertly criticise the social discrimination meted out to the low-castes, the exploitations carried out in the name of class struggle, the snobbery of the upper castes, the religiosity of the clergy and the alien cravings of the Anglophiles.

Roy depicts the female subalternity through three successive generations of women. Mammachi and Baby Kochhama are representatives of the first generation. Patriarchy becomes a dominant tool to

influence control and conformity in the family. Even though dead we can see absentee patriarch Rev. Ipe's precedence as he smiled his confident ancestor smile over the threshold, while his wife Aleyooty Ammachi looked dubious,

With her eyes she looked in the direction that her husband looked. With her heart she looked away ( *GOST*, 30).

It becomes evident from the fact that Mammachi got married to a man older than her by seventeen years shows her unquestioning obedience to the authority of her parents. Later in the novel, we see several other incidents that reveal her unquestioning submission to the dominant patriarchal structure. She endures her husband's violence without any complaint and always lived under the control of men. Mammachi being a promising violinist had to leave her career merely because Pappachi asked her to do so. Domestic violence becomes a part of her life: "Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase" (small Things, 50).

Another man who dominated Mammachi's life was her Oxford educated son, Chacko who when returned home after his divorce from Margaret takes over Mammachi's pickle factory without respecting Mamachi who had started and developed the factory.

Baby Kochamma was comparatively less docile than her sister-in-law for she dares to fall in love with Father Mulligan, an Irish monk, and becomes a Roman Catholic against her father's wishes and followed him from seminary to seminary. Baby Kochamma soon realizes the hopelessness of her venture, and her powerlessness to give voice to her oppressed desires due to her fear of conservative society force her to lead a disturbed life and she becomes stubborn. Her stubbornness obtains her a bad reputation because of that her father thought she was unlikely to find a husband, so he sent her America to do a course in Ornamental Gardening. The decision of her father highlights society's typical notion that marriage is the ultimate aim of a woman's life and education suits only an unmarried girl. Because of her powerlessness to surpass patriarchal limits, she remains repressed, and her vindictive attitude towards Ammu and her children results from her

innate: "...an ancient, age-old fear. The fear of being dispossessed" (*GOST*, 70). She becomes the very embodiment of patriarchal authority and instills order in the patriarchal world.

Ammu, the tragic central character of the novel faces humiliation, insult, and misbehaviour first by her father then by her husband and afterward by her family members and society. The narrator gives a sympathetic picture of her growth from childhood to adolescence, to the experience of marriage, to a sympathetic and loving mother, and to rebel wife who challenges the hypocritical moral stand of a patriarchal family. Starting from childhood Ammu had to face a lot of trials and tribulations, despite being a highly educated man, her father fails to give love and affection to his daughter and enjoys thrashing his daughter with the ivory handled baton. Ammu was denied the opportunity to study further for her father considered education for girls an: "*unnecessary expense*" (*GOST* 38), while her brother Chako gets the opportunity to go to Oxford for higher studies. She becomes frustrated by sudden obstruction of education and unpleasant atmosphere at home and *wished to leave Ayemenem, and thus liberating herself from "the clutches of her ill tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother"* (*GOST*, 38). *Eventually, she meets a young man while she was spending her summer vacation with a distant aunt in Assam and she agrees to marry him as "she thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Aynemenem"* (*GOST* 39). Her marriage ends up as a failure because her drunkard husband attempted to offer her to his boss, Mr. Hollicks in order to secure his job. But Ammu shows an impressive sense of self-respect as she refuses to compromise and walks out of her marriage when he physically assaulted Ammu and children. She comes back to Aynemenem from which she tried to escape now as an unwelcomed person along with "*two young children and no more dreams*" (*GOST* 42). Ammu and her children become a burden for her family and *legally "Ammu as a daughter had no claim to property"* (*GOST* 57). On the other hand, Ammu's brother Chako a divorcee like her remains the rightful inheritor of the family property as he is a

man. Being a divorcee she has been ostracized by the society, and Baby Kochamma's view:

a married daughter had no position in her parent's home. As for a divorced daughter....she had no position anywhere at all (GOST 45-46)

highlights society's general view regarding Ammu. Due to the hypocrisy of the 'Male Chauvinist' society and neglect and injustice of her family, Ammu slowly turns into a rebel and begins smoking and had midnight swims. Ammu's repressed existence forces her to violate the established norms of society and starts an affair with a low caste Paravan, Velutha, a fellow sufferer because of his low class status in society. Her mother who facilitates her brother's illicit relationship with factory women saying it as "a Man's needs" creates hurdles in her relationship with Velutha and she has to pay a high price for it as it resulted in Velutha's death, separation of twins and finally her life. When she approaches police to get justice for the death of Velutha, Inspector Mathew harassed her, and this shows how patriarchy works at the administrative level, and also reveals women's position in the society. Ammu meets a tragic death at the age of thirty- one in a grubby hotel room with nobody to help her. Even death cannot put an end to her humiliation, "The church refused to bury Ammu. On several counts" (GOST, 162), and Chacko hires a van to transport her body to the electric crematorium, and nobody except Rahel and Chacko attends her funeral. Ammu had a tragic life tortured and abused by the police, her family, and society. Even though victims themselves women like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma in have internalized the biased notions of the prevailing patriarchal systems, and along with the male chauvinists they are also responsible for Ammu's tragedy.

Ammu's daughter Rahel who belongs to the third generation is far different in temperament and attitude from other females in her family, and also rebels against the injustices of patriarchal society. She becomes the symbol of the emancipated and liberated woman who likes to live according to her own whims and fancies confronting all the traditions, customs, and laws delineated to suppress women. Even Rahel has suffered a lot due to the

patriarchal society; starting from her birth, she is deprived of love and affection first by her father later by her family in Ayemenem House. She has undergone through traumatic experiences in her childhood and has witnessed her mother's unendurable sufferings and miseries in the Ayemenem House, and also seen her mother's body reduced to ashes. She hardly forgets the agony of Baby Kochamma's making them instrumental to the death of Velutha. After the dejected death of Ammu her only support, she becomes helpless and become more neglected by her maternal uncle, grandmother, and grandaunt. She leads a lonely life after her mother's death, and nobody in the family cared for her wellbeing, and as a result of these adverse circumstances and excessive negligence she learned to be patient and becomes reckless, daring and independent. Later she married Larry McCaslin, a Research Scholar in Architecture from Boston and although not a male chauvinist she divorces him when she understood the futility of their relationship. Due to the optimism in her, she leads a confident life in her own way and has awareness about the destructive consequences of going against the orthodox society for she has seen the tragedy of her mother. Well aware of these consequences, she has done something more dangerous in society's moral eyes than what her mother does. At the age of thirty-one, she dares to have an incestuous relationship with her brother which society never accepts. Roy presents Rahel as a liberated Indian woman who doesn't care about the patriarchal structure and here lies the victory for women which Rahel wins. Through the portrayal of Rahel Roy finds optimism in the liberation of women from patriarchal dominance. Trough this novel Roy lashes out at the patriarchal society which inhibits female freedom and thus by giving her a subservient role adds to her misery.

Alice Walker in her novels portrays the pain and struggle of black people and in the novel, *The Color Purple* she deals with the brutality of oppression faced by the Afro-American women. *The Color Purple* can be regarded as a woman's novel in terms of theme and narrative strategies, and chiefly that of lesbian writing. In the novel, Walker explores themes like gender discrimination, racial

discrimination, sexism and rape and also shows how gender discrimination can influence black women's subjectivity and lead them into dejection. Black men being the margins of white society, black women become margins of the margins and become slaves of white and black men. Even though the novelist's primarily concerned with the misery of black women she also examines the influence of racism in black people's social and personal lives. The story mainly focuses on Celie, who is caught in a racist and sexist society and the way she attempts to elucidate herself through the use of language.

The setting of the novel, black rural South community being exceedingly patriarchal most of the black male characters dominate women in a fierce and repressive manner. Celie being constantly subjected to abuse and considered as ugly by society leads a silent and invisible life and are her only outlet and means of self-expression are the letters she addresses to God. These letters serve as means through which the reader can perceive Celie's traumatized, guilty and shame ridden personal emotions. The males of her community being physically violent and sexually and emotionally abusive, makes the women feel fearful, worthless and inferior. Celie's step father Alphonso rapes the fourteen year old Celie, and she gets impregnated by him. He not only rapes her but also separates her children from her and she bears all these without any protest. He merely treats her as a chattel, and when he got tired of her, he encourages Mr.\_ to marry her. Mr.\_ also treats her like a slave, and she lives a loveless married life by taking care of Mr.\_'s children, working in the fields, and yielding herself to unhappy sexual encounters with a man who treats her like an unpaid whore.

The novel vividly expresses male's dominant attitude, and due to this attitude, Harpo mistakenly thinks that he can make his wife Sofia obedient to him by thrashing her and also find no mistake in doing so. We can see Mr.\_ and even Celie supporting him. When Harpo's lover Mary Agnes wished to establish herself as a singer, he failed to understand why she wants to become an independent woman when he provides 'everything' in their marriage. Society considers Shug Avery, a beautiful and seemingly empowered woman as

"nasty woman disease," for she never allowed herself to be dominated by anyone. Another fiercely independent woman is Sofia who refuses to submit to whites, men, or anyone else who tries to dominate her. For defying the town's mayor, Sophia gets punishment, and the hardships Sofia endures as she resists cultural and institutional racism highlights the fact that it won't spare anyone who tries to defy it. Through Nettie's letters, Walker also portrays the plight of African women. As a missionary, Nettie goes to Africa and sees the oppression faced by African women. Olinka's never believed in the girl's education, and when Nettie asked a mother about her opinion she replays: "A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something" (Walker, 1983a, p. 235), which highlights the low status of African women. There she also witnesses white's racial discrimination towards blacks.

The novel also exhibits female companionship and solidarity and thus laying great emphasis on female bonding. All these women become each other's strength in during their distress times. Celie befriends Shug Avery when she moves into Celie and Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s home, and with the help of Shug, she learns to enjoy herself, began to know her body and started to cherish her female productive organs. Actually,

with Shug's encouragement, Celie's self reclamation begins as she sees her own genitals for the first time (Pifer & Slusser, p. 48).

When Celie becomes aware of her productive organs she got the courage to express her repressed desires as well and therefore, she revolts against Mr.\_'s patriarchal ideology, which restricts her all the time and began to pursue her dream of freedom along with Shug. Shug also helped Celie to form new ideas about religion, and to believe in a non-traditional, non-patriarchal version of God. Gradually she transformed into a happy, successful and independent woman. The novel also shows the relationship between Sofia, Harpo's wife and Mary Agnes, Harpo's girl friend after Sofia and latter helped Sofia while she was in prison. The great friendship among Olinka women, the relation between Nettie and Celie, and Olivia supporting Tashi in Africa also serves as good examples of

female bonding. In the novel, women tolerate sexism, racism and gender discrimination, and stands united with each other and through their sisterhood, they realize their talents, verbalize them and follow them.

The novel also portrays strong women who challenge the traditional male-female roles. In the relationship between Sofia and Harpo, we can see Sofia doing traditionally masculine work and Harpo enjoying domestic tasks. Another strong character like Sofia in the novel is Shug who like Sofia never succumb before anyone. We can also consider Celie's sister Nettie as a strong woman for she never succumbs to Alphonso's and Mr.-'s desire. Later Celie with the help of Shug also becomes a strong independent woman and her business enterprise, making trousers for women, becomes a declaration of equality, even though sewing is regarded as conventionally feminine. After the reconciliation between Albert and Celie, he also comes to her aid. The novelist severely criticises the brutality of the male dominant society and provides black female characters an opportunity to defend themselves in the patriarchal system and obtain individuality and social role. The novel underlines the fact that through sisterhood women can realize their dreams, follow them in society and achieve them.

#### CONCLUSION

Both novels, *The Color Purple* and *The God of Small Things* fascinatingly depict the marginalization of women in the patriarchal society and high lights their confinement in their home, denial of their social roles and their overlooked desires and the miseries they endure due to this. These novels manifest that women's suffering starts from their family and in a male- chauvinistic society women will not be treated as an equivalent, and the social structures are so made that they sanctify women's victimization. Even though women in both these novels suffer in the hands of male dominated society women in *The Color Purple* shows more audacity to challenge the patriarchal system and has solidarity that becomes their strength, and it also shows men's transformation. In *The God of Small Things*, only Ammu and Rahel dares to challenge the society and Ammu miserably fails in it. Both the

novels also portray the unjust treatment meted out to the low section of social hierarchy.

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