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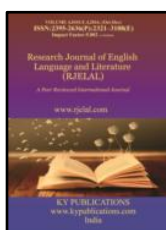
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PROTAGONIST'S CONDITION IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S NOVEL
THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy is one of the towering stars in the firmament of Indian fiction in English. Her novel *The God of Small Things* is characterized as an extraordinary art of imagination. It portrays the truthful picture of the plight of women, their great suffering, cares and anxieties, their humble submission, persecution and underserved humiliation in male dominating society. Arundhati has taken up the issue of feminism to fight for their identity and economic and social freedom. Through this novel, she throws light on some important things of life like how love is always associated with sadness, how a person's childhood experiences affect his/her perspectives and whole life.

Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small things* deals with feminism and gender discrimination in a conservative patriarchal domination where women have a very little share in the total happiness of the family; where they barely allowed to take education and where men always dominate over women, the possessed over the non-possessioned, the powerful over the weak and the touchable over the untouchable. A scholarly paper, observes.

Roy's book is the only one I can think of among Indian novels in English which can be comprehensively described as a protest novel. It is all about atrocities against minorities. Small things, children and youth, women and untouchable¹.

The God of Small Things portrays a truthful picture of the plight of the Indian women, their great sufferings, cares and anxieties, their humble submission, persecution and undeserved humiliation in a male dominating society. It also shows the women's marathon struggle for seeking the sense of identity in a totally averse and envious society. The social structure of an average Indian woman is full of

many ups and downs, ifs and buts. It can be very clearly seen in some of the women characters like Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Rahel and Margaret Kochamma. Education in society must be given to both men and women without any gender discrimination. Education develops all the faculties of man. It enlightens and broadens a person's outlook. So, keeping in mind the benefit of education, women should not be devoid of taking higher education. But what we find in this novel is somewhat different. Here, Ammu did not get higher education. It is only because her parents think that higher education corrupts a lady. Here the attribute Ammu's parents is very similar to what Sir Anthony, a conservative man of patriarchal domination observes in Sheridan's drama, *The Rival*: It is not to be wondered at ma'am-

all this is the natural consequence of teaching girls to read. Had I thousands daughter, by heaven I'd as soon have them taught the black art as their alphabet.²

Well, Ammu has to discard education, but on the other hand Chacko her brother is sent to Oxford to study further, though he did not do good there. What a great irony! Chacko is allowed to study

further because he is a male member. But Ammu, a female, is step motherly treated. In fact, even today, though in spite of a fundamental improvement in woman's position by our constitution and various amendments, we see in India, except a fistful section of society, that the conservative and superstitious mind of a large number of people are against the higher education of girls. This grave problem can be clearly seen in a conservative family where purdah is strictly maintained and also in the rural folks where women are supposed to be meant for only, mating and procreating, serving and nourishing and leaving their wishes aside and dead. Meena Usmani in her article *Violence against Woman* rightly remarks:

The Woman have frequently been ruthlessly exploited in our society and the problem is growing day by day. The case of eve teasing, sexual harassment, abduction, sati, rape, and wife battering in public and at the work place etc. have been more regularly reported since the 1960s and 1970s. The issue of violence against women has become the public problem as the women are discriminated at work, home and are denied their due in every field. The constitution of India promises freedom, equality, opportunity and protection to women and give them several rights. In spite of that, they enjoy an unequal status.³

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 and rendered destitute by her brother. Her tragic story, right from the beginning to the end, arouses our sense pity and catharsis. Like the tragic heroes of Shakespeare, she has to face so many trials and tribulations, cares and anxieties. The tragic tale of Ammu begins with her very childhood. A child is supposed to lead a life free from the encroachments of experience. Why? Because a child's world is the world of innocence, ignorance and the simplicity. She must not be tortured by the tormenting experience of the grown-up people. But the case of Ammu is somewhat different. In Roy's terminology she is a candle of the big house, which is unable to

face the surge of wind. As a little girl Ammu had to endure some unbearable nightmarish experiences. She saw with her open torment eyes the cruelty of her father Pappachi, who used to beat her and her mother, Mammachi with her brass vase. Once it so happened that her father tore her shoes she had brought for herself. This shows the truthful portrayal of the women of the society who find nothing but a step motherly treatment in a male dominated family. Even her Fundamental Right-the Right to take education is deprived. Arundhati depicts the cruelty and the schizophrenia of Pappachi in every fine way. She says:

Not content having beaten his wife and daughter, he tore down curtains, Kicked furniture and smashed a table lamp.⁴

In an atmosphere entirely different, she began to feel like a captive in the big Ayemenem House. She had to help her mother in housework. So, she became the victim of frustration due to the sudden disruption of education, uncongenial atmosphere and an antipathic attitude of the family members. She wanted to fly freely in the sky of liberty. Her wings fluttered:

All day she dreamt of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, 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.⁵

The queen of novel Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* deals with apart from many other things, the universal consciousness that is, class antagonism and class exploitation and the insult and the abuse, the women of society are subject to. It also launches a crusade against male chauvinism. After resigning from his job as a lecturer at the Madras Christian college, Chacko gets his parents' pickle factory registered in his name. Very shamelessly he tells Ammu:

What's your is mine and what's mine is also mine. Get out of my house Before I break every bone in your body!⁶

Mammachi is least hurt by her son Chacko's libertine relationship with the women in factory. She considers it as man's needs, and assists him. Neither

she nor Baby kochamma see any contradiction between Chacko's Marxist mind and feudal Libido' 'But the same Mammachi gets furious to learn about a Ammu's relation with a Paravan. since she had made the unthinkable, thinkable and the impossible really happen.

So Ammu paid a visit to Calcutta. There is someone wedding reception she met her future husband who was on vacation from his job. He was an assistant manager of a tea estate in Assam. Ammu was in a hurry to marry him because she knew that in Ayemenem people were quiet dead against her wishes. The author observes Ammu did not pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem. She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision. They did not reply.

But soon after the marriage, Ammu discovered that she jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. Her husband whom she loved so much prove to be an alcoholic who even made her smoke. At the time the twins were born. Meanwhile Mr. Hollick, the English Manager of the Tea plant develop his weakness towards Ammu. Mad with the passion of sex one day he summoned her husband and asked him to resign the post. He became dumb founded to hear his resignation. Actually, the manager wanted to have the sexual relation with Ammu. He told

You are very lucky man, you know, you have wonderful family, beautiful children, such an attractive wife.⁷

He suggested that Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be looked after. Her husband puts this proposal before his wife. This extreme humiliation created a sense of great hatred in the heart of Ammu. In a scuffle, she hits her husband with heavy book and left the place with the twins-Estha and Rahel. Ammu returned to Ayemenem with her pulled cheeks and their too, she found her parents cold and indifferent to her and her children. Her eyes welled up when she shows the miserable condition of the twins. She imagined her twins

Like a pair of bewildered frogs engrossed in each other's company lolloping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic.⁸

It is to be noted that through the character of Ammu, Arundhati Roy, a great champion of the cause of women, here raises a number of questions marks on our age long myths and traditions, history and legends. She shows that right from beginning of creation women have been the subject to many insults and abuses, as a matter of fact, a woman is allegedly charged with so many drawbacks mostly imaginary. It is said that she is temptation symbolized, more a fury than a fairy. Her charms are irresistible but they invariably spell ruin and disaster. But we should not forget that most of the charges cited above are concocted. A woman is generally more emotional, sensitive and tender, though she is also endowed with a greater power of endurance and patience. She can be viewed in numerous ways but none her facets are so overwhelming as physical attraction she arouses for herself in the heart of male sex. In this field of love and mating, she plays a role so exceedingly significant that the very basis of creation and procreation will come to a standstill. It is here we find her in the role of a beloved, a wife and a mother. She forms a pivot and nucleus of family life. Without the presence of women home is not home but a dreary wilderness. This is exactly what Arundhati Roy makes us feel, see for the women of society. But what Ammu has to see both her in her husband's house and in her own house in Ayemenem is not based on the fair principle of equality. In this way the author flings a harsh irony on the man's domination over woman. She seems to say that woman is not a mere toy, to whom parents and after marriage in-laws and husband consider her as an object at home and wish, woman to leave her wishes and live according to their own perception and choice. She is not an object of pleasure or a means of gratifying the man's baser passions but the noble and the richest part of man's life. She has her own wishes and she has full right to fulfill it rather than to remain subservient to anyone in her life. Well, even in the Ayemenem House in her own house, Ammu is step motherly treated. Her father did not believe that:

an Englishman, any Englishman would covet another man's wife.⁹

Her brother Chacko used to fling irony on the twins and said that:

Estha and Rahel were indecently healthy. And so was Sophie Mol. He said it was because they did not suffer from inbreeding like most other Syrian Christians and parsees.¹⁰

It is great irony that a daughter estranged from the husband is tortured and tyrannized in the parents' house. But on the other hand, an estranged son, Chacko, not only receives warm welcome but also remains the rightful inheritor of the family's wealth and fortune. When he flirts with low -women, he is encouraged by Pappachi in the name of man's need. Whereas, the same behavior of Ammu is termed as illicit, untraditional and sinful; she is being locked in a room and is beaten black and blue. Moreover, the distant relatives came to see Ammu in order to show their sympathy. But actually, what they do was not sympathy but only they chuckled at Ammu's discomfiture while outwardly they expressed their lip sympathy. As result:

Ammu quickly learnt to recognize and despise the ugly face of sympathy.¹⁰

Thus, Ammu is an entirely tragic character tortured and abused by the police, family, and politics. It is not the male folk alone responsible for the tragic plight but mostly the woman characters like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma who may be called the real culprit to engender sufferings in Ammu's life. We may quote famous observation of Luce Irigaray, a well-known French feminist, whose thought is quite applicable to Ammu:

..... The relationship of women to their mother and to other women thus, towards themselves-are rare subject to total narcissistic black out, these relationships are completely devalued. Indeed, I have never come across a woman who does not suffer from the problem of not being able to resolve in harmony, in the present system, her relationship with her mother and with another woman. Psychoanalysis has totally mythologized and censored the positive value of these relationships.¹¹

Ammu's character presents the picture of an average woman in the present day social set up. If we minutely dive deep into her character we dig out three important things. First, she is a lady of chastity

and purity. It is the powerful virtue, which makes her divorce her husband who doesn't value her as his wife and as a human being who wants her to sleep with another man just to save his job. She divorces him and she proudly becomes an independent and good mother. Secondly, she has a great capacity to endure sufferings upon sufferings. Third, she believes in the theory of etiquette and manner, decorum and decency. She never harbors in her heart any grudge against anybody. Through Ammu's character Arundhati Roy lashes out at the hypocritical moral code of society, which makes a great difference between men and women. As a matter of fact, a woman has a great place in the life of a man. If a man is a flower, its fragrance is woman; if a man is a ship, its radar is woman but no one understands it. A woman should be given proper place and equal status in society and in families. Her wishes and feelings should not be suppressed rather she should be given a sky to fly with merriment Marriage is not an end, and it does not mean to subservient to any one or making everyone happy around you, just to make others feel happy and neglecting our own happiness which is more important, rather it is a gateway to get an equal status and fulfilment of wishes.

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