

THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMINISM IN SELECTED WORKS OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S "THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS"

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ABSTRACT

The author expresses not only Velutha's suffering but also the suffering of another character called Ammu. Her illegal relationship with Velutha, an untouchable brings disaster to her family. She is also an important character in the novel. It is perhaps the plight of Ammu, her trials and tribulations as a woman who happens to love an outcaste is one of the major problems in this novel. Ammu can be considered to represent the voice of dissent of women community of Kerala Society in general and her own community in particular.

She marries a Hindu and later leaves him when she finds him unchaste and she loves an untouchable, Velutha. She is also depicted as a protagonist. She boldly faces the aftermath of her own dissident acts even at the face of severe criticism and protest of the male-centred social system. Ammu is not ready to suffer as a silent woman. Her protest and resistance continue until death. Ammu is not ready to submit to the dominant system. Ammu's psyche is incurably wounded when she knows that the social system in which she lives has separate law for men and women.

Apart from the subordination of the untouchable classes, the novel talks about the subordination of women and the wounded feminine consciousness. Velutha who represents the untouchables in the novel is a craftsman with abilities, which envy others. The society in which he lives wants his abilities but not him. The novelist presents both these characters with equal vigour in *The God of Small Things*. Like Arundhati Raoy, Mahesweta Devi, a Bengali writer also contributed much through her writings for the upliftment of the so called untouchables.

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The novel *The God of Small Things* is written by Arundhati Roy and published in the year 1997. It has won Booker Prize award. It tells the story of a Syrian Christian family of Kottayam in Kerala. The specialty of this novel is its novelty and character portrayal. No such novel is ever published.

Firstly, the novel vehemently attacks the inhuman treatment of untouchable classes by the rest of the society. Secondly, it condemns some of the pseudo-socialist pretensions of communist party. Thirdly, it raises a question about the way in which women are treated in male – centered social system.

This novel is a typical example to reveal the fact that the women writers in India are not weak. Their novels can withstand the literary standards mostly set by male writers. *The God of Small Things* reveals the problems of Indian Women to the internal readers.

The author presents an untouchable character called Velutha in this novel. Apart from Velutha, the novel treats the other female characters like Ammu, Mammachi and Baby Koachamma to bring out how the feminine psyche is wounded in a male-centred, oppressive social system. Ammu, the protagonist and her mother, Mammachi are fully wounded by the Society's bad ideologies like caste and colour. The socio-economic and political conditions in the Indian Society wounds the psyche of Ammu and also Velutha.

Vellyapaapen was working for several years in Mammachi's house. When Velutha, his son was eleven years old, he used to do craft work well. Mammachi wondered seeing his talents. Velutha used to give many small gifts to Mammachi's daughter, Ammu. He used to call her Ammukutty and was very cautious while giving her the gift. He used to keep in his palm and without touching his hand Ammu will take the gift. Even in the trivial matter, the author describes the sense of untouchability in this novel.

Secondly; Mammachi is acknowledging the extraordinary talents of Velutha. His talents are fully utilized by Mammachi. When Mammachi's son Chacko returns from London to Ayemenem; velutha reassembles Bharat bottle-sealing machine and set it up.

Ammu is portrayed with a special nature that she is able to tolerate all the tortures of her father. She is ignored even in ordinary matters of her family. Ammu's father does not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry. Therefore, Ammu has to wait for her marriage proposals. After her 18th birthday, she dreams of escaping from the severe clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter long-suffering mother.

The Ammu's mind is her married life. Her husband works as an assistant Manager of a tea-estate in Assam. He is a Hindu and twenty-five years old. He has already been working in the tea estate for six years. He proposes to Ammu five days after their first meeting. She marries him against her parents' will. Within a short period, she understands the true colour of her husband. He turns out to be not just a heavy drinker but full-blown alcoholic. His words are quite contrary to his deeds. In the meantime, Ammu becomes pregnant. When she is eight months, a war breaks out with China in October 1962. In November, she gives birth to two little ones Estha and Rahel. There is only eighteen minutes difference between the twins.

When they are two years old, their father's drinking habit aggravates and one day he just lay in bed, without going to work. So his English Manager, Mr. Hollick insists him to resign his job for his mistake or send Ammu to his bungalow to be 'looked after'.

Ammu too suffered in the hands of her husband like her mother, Mammachi. Her husband compels her to act according to the words of Mr.Hollick. But Ammu hesitates to do. Her refusal infuriates her husband and he beats her severely. Ammu cannot bear the pain and she too hates him. But his violence continued and extends even to the children. In order to protect her children from him, she leaves her husband and returns to Ayemenem, her parental house. But she is received coldly by her relatives. The irresponsible behaviour of Ammu's husband is one of the predominant reasons for the failure of Ammu's marriage.

Another prominent factor which causes trouble is her love and sex with Velutha, a Paravan by birth, and an untouchable in Indian caste system. Since Velutha is very close to the

family, he respects her feelings as a woman. He is affectionate to her children, Estha and Rahel. He teaches them sailing, swimming and fishing. Ammu is not like her mother, Mammachi. She is very kind and affectionate mother. She worries about the future of her children. She expects that her children must be protected and educated well. When she returns to Ayemenem, she finds that her children are happy in the company of Velutha.

They like to spend most of their time with Velutha. Rahel is very happy to be with him always. She used to jump on his back and play with him. She has a possessive feeling she does not like Velutha seeing other children expect her. Once when Velutha tires to see Chacko's daughter Sophie Mol, Rahel claps her hands over his eyes and prevents him seeing Sophie Mol. Day by day the intimacy between Velutha and the Children becomes deepened. Once Estha and Rahel sail in a little boat and Velutha's hut. On seeing the children, Velutha is very happy. They want to mend the boat which has a small hole in it.

Here the author beautifully describes the intimate relationship between the so-called upper class children and Velutha, an untouchable. The author also shows the fact, if there is kindness and affection among the people the cruel feeling of untouchability will never be a barrier among them. The powerful feeling of kindness has the capacity to break the wall of untouchability from our society. She always faces her life with disappointment. She has insecure feeling for ever. She fails to get the chance of experiencing kindness both in her childhood days and marital life.

So she has a longing for kindness from someone. Her thirst for love is quenched by Velutha by being affectionate to her children and herself. She is happy to have relationship with Velutha. Ammu has a soft corner for Velutha since her childhood. Hence she starts meeting Velutha during night time. She feels secure in the company of Velutha.

The illicit relationship of Ammu with Velutha, a paravan by birth is another important factor which causes unimaginable troubles in Ammu's life. This simple human desire of love affects the social life of Ammu. The society gives much importance to ideologies which are traditionally followed and doesn't accept when a norm of it is over-stepped.

Ammu is not an ordinary, traditional woman like other women of Indian society. She is a non-conformist. She has revolutionary views over the society. She marries a person from outside her community and loves an untouchable. But her love with Velutha is a real one and it is necessary for her. Vanajan Ravindran in the essay *All's in the telling of a story of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things* gives the reason for Ammu's passion with Velutha.

Ammu's broken marriage the limitation is made to suffer by her folks are responsible causes of her love for Velutha. The different shades of human thought, feelings and behaviour can be found in Arundhati Roy's novel. Reality can be found in every character of this novel. For example, Baby Kochamma's love affair with Father Mulligan becomes a failure. Hence her 'un-Christian passion' for father Mulligan turns her into a hypocrite. Baby Kochamma is insulted by Velutha in the public place. So, she decides to take vengeance against Velutha also. She suggests Mammachi, to lock up Ammu in her bedroom. She is responsible for Ammu's confinement inside the house. She is prevented from meeting Velutha.

It is a cruel, inhuman act of Mammachi towards her own daughter Ammu, The basic reason behind this cruel act is that Ammu loves a Paravan called Velutha. She has the fear that the society will not accept it. If Velutha does not belong to Dalit community, the love affair would have been accepted by Mammachi. The community has become the major obstacle in the relationship between Ammu and Velutha. When Ammu is kept in house arrest, her children, Estha and Rahel come to her bedroom door and ask her why she has been locked up.

On hearing Ammu's angry words, they decide to leave the house and they should not return until Ammu begs to return. Here, the author portrays the pure innocence of the children. They are unaware of their mother's miserable situation. Really, Ammu's situation is highly pathetic. Her own parental house becomes a jail to her. She has no freedom. Food is served inside the house without allowing her to come out. She is unable to get any consolation from her children. Her children are the greatest source of consolation to her. She gets the support neither from Velutha nor from her children. Mammachi utilized the talents of Velutha for all household works. But she ill-treats Velutha, for his relationship with Ammu. Though she has no right to control Velutha she often insults him. On seeing the approach of Mammachi towards Velutha,

Ammu develops a soft corner for Velutha. She knows Velutha well. When she returns to Ayemenem, she admires and wonders at his masculine charms.

Ammu is weak in financial conditions too. She seeks good employment and tries to fulfill the aspirations of her children. She is a lovable mother unlike her own mother, Mammachi. She is not so lovable towards her. She is not able to tolerate her daughter's love with a lower-class untouchable, Velutha, So Mammachi and Baby Kochamma think that punishment should be given to Ammu and Velutha.

According to the plan of Baby Kochamma, Mammachi has locked up Ammu in her room. Being unaware of the fact, the children come to her bedroom door ask her why she has been locked up. Ammu answers them angrily to go away from that place. On hearing Ammu's angry words, the children decide to leave the house. Chacko's daughter Sophie Mol joins them in order to increase the tension of the eiders of the house. They believe that their absence would certainly agitate the elders. When they begin to row the boat, unfortunately it moves in the wrong lane and collides with a floating log.

Estha and Rahel swim across the river and reach the shore but poor sophile Mol drowns. Estha and Rahel fail to find Sophie Mol. Here, the death of sophie Mol is also an added advantage to Baby kochamma. Sophie Mol's natural death has been transformed into a murder by Baby kochamma. As she wants to take revenge on velutha, she puts the blame on velutha. Actually, velutha has gone to kottayam to repair the canning machine. Even chacko and his ex-wife Margaret kochamma went to Cochin to confirm their ticket. In the meantime, baby Kochamma made a complaint against Velutha to the Inspector, Thomas Mathew. She constructed her story against Velutha. After hearing the illicit relationship between Velutha and Ammu, Mammachi wants to meet Velutha. As soon as her returns from Kottyam, he goes straight to Ayemenem to meet Mammachi. Mammachi uses foul language on seeing Velutha.

The punishment he gets from Mammachi is worse that of what he had from the policemen. Mammachi is cruel towards him. This cruel treatment does not ruin the face of Velutha but hurts the fully alienated psyche of Ammu. Mammachi degrades Velutha only because he is a Paravan. The hypocrisy of Mammachi plays a vital role in building the

disillusionment of Ammu. *In The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy proves that women cause problems to other women in the society. Mammachi has a biased opinion on the extra – marital affairs of her children. Chacko does not live with his wife, Margaret Kochamma, a foreigner on account of some misunderstanding with her. After returning to Ayemenem, he involves himself in family business, Paradise Pickles at Ayemenem. He finds an outlet for his sexual gratification from the labour class women of his pickle factory. This extramarital relationship of Chacko does not make Mammachi feel angry or regret over him. This shows Mammachi's special care for her son rather than her husband. Mammachi is aware of the illegal relationship of Chacko with the women of the factory. But Mammachi is unable to tolerate Ammu's love towards Velutha. This is owing to the male dominance of Indian society as observed by Jidendra Tuli. The Indian male is now suffering from double standards; one code of ethics and morality for himself and the other for his wife and daughters. While he feels it is perfectly all right for him to indulge in pre marital and extramarital relationship to visit prostitutes and call girls, he would kill his wife or daughter if she indulged in pre or extra marital relationship.

Therefore, it is clear that Mammachi treats her son's relationship with other women as natural. But she cannot digest the love affair between Velutha and Ammu, because Velutha belong to the untouchable Baby Kochamma's complaint against Velutha is a mere foolishness. The complaint leads to the death of Velutha, which eventually ends Ammu's life too. Ammu is tortured by Baby Kochamma and Mammachi in the name of caste, religion and customs or traditional background. The economic problems too have depressed the inner psyche of Ammu. She is not given her share of property from her ancestral house. But Chacko, her brother enjoys all the privileges in the pickle factory.

This act of partiality against women is common in Indian society. Ammu is subjected to all atrocities. Though Ammu experiences a lot of sufferings, she never loses her confidence. She decides to face boldly the blind ideologies of the society. Her poverty and need of money to fulfill certain basic needs forces her to seek good employment and prepare herself for interviews. Her poor economic status makes her to send Estha to her husband. She feels depressed when she packs the belonging of Estha. She is a lovable mother who expects Estha to get education. After

getting a promise from Estha Ammu tells “Estha I have written our address on don't have news?”... (226)

Ammu is deeply wounded when she sees off her son at the Railway Station. She feels very sorry to send the small boy alone. But due to fate she is unable to avoid it. But innocent Estha cannot understand the feelings of Ammu and he eagerly looks forward to his future journey. Rahel, also is unable to tolerate the separation of Estha, her brother. But Ammu's dream of meeting never comes true. The society which is poisoned by the caste and religion, does not allow Ammu to be happy. It has spoilt Ammu's dreams and aspirations of a happy life in this world. After sending Estha she starts searching for employment. In search of her job, she dies at a lodge at Allepey, a town in Kerala. Arudhati Roy describes her end.

"She died alone. With a noisy ceiling fan for company and no Estha to lie at the back of her and talk to her... Her lungs couldn't." (161-162)

The heartless police of the town included Ammu's name in the list of prostitutes after her death. The police considered her so because she died at a lodge in the town. According to the code of the police, this action of the police may be accepted. But it is pathetic that the church authority refuses to bury Ammu's body in the Church symmetry. The political atmosphere also adds to the condition of the wounded psyche of Ammu. The conversion of untouchables by Christian missionaries is done not out of love but it is done as a political strategy.

Though Velutha converts himself to Christianity, the society especially people like Mammachi and Kochamma do not accept him as a Christian. The prejudice is only because of the difference in caste. It prevents the society from treating him as a dignified human being and lover of Ammu. The conversion of velutha to a new religion does not give him any status or privilege in the society. The conversion to a new religion does not give him any status or privilege in the society. In the modern society, the religious aspect is based on political strategy which does not permit the love of ammu and velutha. On the hand it kills velutha and on the hand it

ends in the tragic death of Ammu. The political situation affects the lives of people like velutha. but it does not affect Ammu.

Velutha is an active member of the communist party. As a leader, Pillai has the responsibility to help him. If Pillai had helped him out of the false allegation of an attempted murder, Velutha would have lead a happy life. The brutal death of Velutha results in the mental depression of Ammu. The troubles that Ammu faced in her life are memorable. She is not able to give any pleasure to her children. They get happiness in the company of velutha. It is a difficult task to the Indo-Anglian writers to create an authentic Indian environment through English language in their works. But Arundhati Roy manages this problem by using her own mother tongue Malayalam with English meanings.

There are destructive elements of caste and religious divide and violent politics in the book. This novel also contains trauma suffered by children and adults, uprooted lives and victims of mental and physical insecurity. Thus as a social reformer and an explorer of the feminine sensibility, Roy has made her *The God of Small Things* successful. By and large her novel is remarkably different from other novels of the present day. Her maiden novel constitutes a welcome contribution to the Indo-Anglian fiction.

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