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PROBLEM OF VICTIMIZATION AND WOMEN IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S  
*THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

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ABSTRACT

Position of women in the century of knowledge has seen a marked development due to the momentous changes in the field of Science & Technology. But this progress is never inclusive and balanced. There are still regions in the world where we have little effect of these developments. A large section of woman is still discriminated & victimized in every society across world. Men all over the world look women from a male chauvinistic point of view. Even they have taught and in many cases forced women to look at themselves from male point of view. As a developing economy, India must try to uplift this section of the society. It is felt more in India due to the large scale plurality and age old tradition in the society. In spite of the slogans like 'India Shining', 'Rising India', 'Inclusive growth' and various special schemes for the women folk by the central and state governments, the position of women still remains an issue to be addressed. Women in India comprise around half of its population. Their talents and potentials should be honored like that of their male counterpart and it should be utilized for the development of the nation.

There is a natural reflection of these point of views in literature. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*(1997) is a candid saga of suffering of women. With a rare sensitivity, the writer has portrayed the Indian social taboo and gender discrimination in her debut novel.

KEYWORDS: Women, Victimization, Arundhati Roy, The God of Small Things.

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The victim subject is a worldwide phenomenon. 'It occurs, at least within legal discourse, in both the 'West' and the Third World'. The question of victimization and the victim subject has a primordial origin. In ancient time, man offered gifts, sacrifices to get blessings from the natural forces. Man slowly used these offerings to appease or to get sympathy from the divinity. This method of appeasement of natural forces gradually took multiple forms. Man himself wanted to be offerings to these powers. These became a tool of bargain to get supernatural powers. Through this practice, man gradually believed that he could get unfettered power and can manipulate the natural forces to his advantage. We get numerous historical accounts of this

practice during the times of Sumers, Mayas and Greeks. At times when they failed to satisfy the natural forces or the divine power, they even sought blessings from the evil forces. Thus, a Doctor Faustus made a bargain by selling his soul to Lucifer, the devil to gain power and knowledge. Man even used to offer his body parts as offerings to satisfy these powers. He believed by doing so, he can bring good life, a good harvest, and seasonal changes in advance for the whole tribe. In these acts of offering the tribe-head chose different animals as sacrifice and sometimes even a human being. There are instances of accounts like, how an outsider, when illegally entered into the tribal territory, was given punishment by offering his head as a gift to the gods. These rituals were there both in pagan and monolithic religions. These gifts to god, whether he was a tribe-head or a chosen-one from the tribe or an outsider, were considered as holy. Thus, these rituals became a process of victimization and the victims were the instruments or tools used to bring solace, holiness, vitality to a community or a tribe. In these acts of victimization one can observe the death and rebirth cycle. The victim is sacrificed to bring vitality to the soil. There are ancient accounts of offering of animal blood or human blood to the holy power. In some cases this blood was spread on the soil to make it more fertile. Here the victim's blood was treated as something sacred and it purified the earth. In this way the subject of victimization has got a historical as well as religious origin.

In modern time, the victim question has undertaken a few changes. In this era the victims are chosen based on their race, class, color and gender. They are chosen so to maintain certain social rules and customs. The upper echelon of the society never wants to sacrifice anything in the name of equality, fraternity, democracy and socialism. Therefore they always search some victim to keep the system to flow and maintain their position without any harm to themselves. They get easy victims in the form of dalits, women and the 'have-nots'.

The present paper examines various social factors that make women a victim in Arundhati Roy's debut novel *The God of Small Things* (1996). It primarily tries to focus on the subject of violence against women vis-à-vis gender issues in the society. It raises some of the burning problems related to gender issues and the existing laws and rights of women. On reading the novel, one will definitely sympathize with almost all the female characters who are victims to some or other factors. It is a narration of the suffering of women seen through the eyes of a woman. Here we observe the account of unhappiness, humiliation and brutal treatment of Ammu, Mammachi Baby Kochamma and Rahel. This study primarily attempts to look at three things in the novel while examining the above issues - (a) Why/How woman is a victim in the society? (b) Who/What is responsible for their victimization? and (c) What are the social or legal remedies for this problem?

Position of woman in the century of knowledge has seen a marked development due to the significant changes in the field of science & technology. But this progress is never inclusive and balanced. There are still regions in the world where we have little effect of these developments. A large section of woman is still discriminated & victimized in every society across the world. In most part of the world men look women from a male chauvinistic point of view. Even they have taught and in many cases forced women to look at themselves from a male point of view. As a developing economy, India must try to bring a great development to this section of the society. It is felt more in India due to the large scale plurality and age old tradition in the society. In spite of the slogans like 'India shining', 'rising India' etc. the position of women still remains an issue to be addressed. Women in India comprise around half of its population. Their talent and potential should be honored like that of their male counterpart and it should be utilized for the development of the nation. There is a natural reflection of these points of view in literature. Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*(1996) is a candid saga of suffering of women. With a rare but powerful sensitivity, the writer has portrayed the Indian social taboo and gender discrimination in her debut novel.

Arundhati Roy, a novelist and social activist, has instilled new vitality and great impetus into the struggle to fight social evils. Besides worldwide accolades, the novel fetched the coveted *Booker prize* (1997) for its writer. The novel focuses on the plight of the women in Indian society and questions the big claims of the success of Indian democracy by exposing the routine violence on them. It has championed the cause of the women by opposing social violence and bringing to the fore the stark reality of gender discrimination and the

atrocities on women. The novel can be called a unique saga of suffering of have-nots in Indian society. It brings out many burning social issues for an open debate. Most of the initial media hype and sudden popularity of Arundhati Roy from an obscure writer to a very popular one is due to the big money, the book fetched for her. But unfortunately, all these things shadowed many serious social issues raised by the writer in this novel.

Over the last two decades, violence against women have increased manifold. The present novel under discussion is a testimony to this kind of suffering of women. Among all of them Mammachi's suffering is pre-dominant in the novel. A stressing effect on women by the patriarchal mentalities is evident in this novel. The brilliant narration of Ammu's struggle against the male dominated society makes the main story. Since childhood, she had been a victim to the patriarchal value system. It was a very unpleasant childhood. Her father Shri Benaan John Ipe or Pappachi was working as the Joint Director, Entomology at Pusa Institute, Delhi. He was very charming and generous to others. He donated money to orphanages and leprosy clinics, but he was very brutal to his own people in his house. Ammu and her mother Mammachi (Sochamma) were the easy target of this male chauvinist. In her childhood, Ammu often saw his father beating her mother mercilessly. She had spent many cold nights outside their Delhi house after this kind of heavy beating along with her mother. Thus, Ammu

As a child, she had learned very quickly to disregard the Father Bear Mother Bear stories she was given to read. In her version, Father Bear beat Mother Bear with brass vases. Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation.

In her growing years, Ammu had watched her father weave his hideous web. He was charming and urbane with visitors, and stopped just short of fawning on them if they happened to be white. He donated money to orphanages and leprosy clinics. He worked hard on his public profile as a sophisticated, generous, moral man. But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father. (The God of Small Things, 180)

After her school education, her father did not want her to continue further. He considered the education of women an "unnecessary expense". Where as he decided to send his son Chacko to Oxford for higher education. It clearly indicates, how our society gives importance to the education of a boy as compared to a girl. It can be termed a kind of human rights violation. So, Ammu had to return to Ayemenem with her father after his retirement. Here in this typical Kerala town, she felt restless. She always wanted to escape. She quite understood that marriage was not possible in her case.

All day she dreamed 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 her summer with a distant aunt who lived in Calcutta. (GST, 38-39)

And here in Calcutta, she met a young Bengali man. He was working in a tea estate. In the words of Mohit K.Roy, *Ammu accepted the proposal of a man who she had known so little and for a short time, not because she had really fallen in love with him but simply because, in a fit of desperation*. This was better for her than going back to Ayemenem. But she soon realized that she had "married a wrong man". She became a victim to an alcoholic husband. Ammu had to tolerate the attack of a drunkard husband. Her husband was even ready to prostitute her to his English boss Mr. Hollick in order to protect his job. But when his husband started beating her twin children then she decided to break off and she came back to Ayemenem as a divorcee with her twins- Estha and Rahel. As a divorced woman, she was unwelcome to Ayemenem house. She had no right in this house. Her brother Chacko used to say, "What's yours is mine, and what's mine is also mine" (GST, 57). She was also humiliated at the hands of her relatives, who came to sympathize on her case. She realized that she had no "Locusts Stand I" (GST, 159) in her ancestral house. The dismissal view of the patriarchal society is very clear from Baby Kochamma's regarding Ammu's status in the house, who

...subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parent's home. As for a divorced daughter, according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position at all. And for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's

outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an inter-community love marriage—Baby Kochamma chose to remain quivering silent on the subject. (GST, 45-46)

She found herself in a miserable situation. And here, she met Velutha the male protagonist of the novel and what we learn is; they turned deep lovers of each other. Ammu realized that Velutha was the only person, who really loved her children. She dared to meet Velutha at the haunted house on the riverbank. But this was soon found. Their love was considered sinful as Velutha was a paravan and so he was an untouchable. He was targeted and arrested in a false case of Sophie Mol's death. When Ammu knew this, she rushed to the police station to tell the truth. But Inspector Thomas Mathew behaved in a very insulting manner with her. The police inspector's language and behavior was very offensive as,

He stared at Ammu's breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from veshyas or their illegitimate children. Ammu said she'd see about that. Inspector Thomas Mathew came around his desk and approached Ammu with his baton.

"If I were you," he said, "I'd go home quietly." Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered. Inspector Thomas Mathew seemed to know whom he could pick on and whom he couldn't. Policemen have that instinct. (GST,5)

It seemed as if everybody had a right to insult her, as she was a divorcee. Velutha became an easy target of the touchables and he had to pay a big price with his annihilation at the hands of the police. She also forfeited her right to stay in her ancestral house for her love with an untouchable. Ammu was emotionally shattered. Still, she wanted to support her children and she went in search of a job in spite of all these pain. But she was defeated at the hand of destiny. She died alone in a grimy room of a lodge at the age of thirty-one—"Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age" (GST,154). Even, the church refused to bury her as she was a shame for everyone. So, Chacko had to hire a van to transport her dead body to the electric crematorium. Thus, Ammu did not even receive any kind sympathy from anybody while dying alone helpless and miserable. Her pain and trauma leaves indelible mark on the society reminding the callousness of people towards the plight of a hapless woman.

Ammu is a symbol for all the women, who are subject to many inhuman treatments such as sexual and physical assault, psychological depression etc. They have no place to go. One thing is noteworthy that she always wanted to protect her children until her last breath. Even after Velutha's death, she wanted to live for her children. Whenever she received a shock, she wanted to rise above that. At last, she became a victim to a caste conscious and male dominated society. Even in her home, she did not get any affection. For instance, Mammachi fulfilled "Man's needs" of Chocko by secretly arranging women for him through the back door of Ayemenem house. But she considered Ammu's relation with Velutha a disgrace to their family. This shows that woman often acts as the enemy of another woman. It is very clear from the two characters like Baby Kochamma and Mammachi. Being women, they themselves were victim to male prejudice but they became instrumental to kill Velutha and compel Ammu to die a miserable death. For Ammu, the story of frustration and suffering had no end.

Ammu's plight brings to the surface many social issues for sensitization like domestic violence against women, right to property of women, abolition of dowry, right to education of girl child, gender discrimination etc. Ammu reminds us the condition of many Indian women, both educated and uneducated, who suffer silently inside their home atrocities by their husbands, in-laws. Many women don't have any choice but to suffer psychological and physical atrocities. And those who like Ammu tries to raise voice are either silenced by various ways or they are brutally killed by patriarchy system. In this regard, we can take the help of Domestic violence act, 2005 to rescue many women like Ammu from domestic atrocities, get compensation from husband after divorce and even get their right to parental property after marriage. Ratna Kapur describes the restriction imposed on women in the name their safety is questionable.

For example, in most societies, the belief that a woman's chastity is the most important aspect of her identity leads to "safety measures" that limit her freedom of movement in the name of protecting her

from sexual violence. She is "safe," but she is not free, and certainly not equal. "Safety" and protection are often the guises used to deprive women of other rights: movement, information, participation, work, choice of partners. (Ratna Kapur)

As the narration of Ammu's story evokes great concern for the safety and welfare of millions of women in India, it will be prudent here to mention various existing laws to protect them. Acts like Protection of women from Domestic violence act 2005, The Married women's Property Act 1874, The Indian succession act 1925, The Indian Divorce act 1969, The Equal Remuneration Act 1976, The Family courts act 1986 etc. are very helpful for women to protect their rights. In spite of a number of laws, women in 21<sup>st</sup> century is still not completely secure in our society. We have several instances of death of women due to these atrocities. These things are further strengthened by the recent reporting of honor killing of young women in several parts of India. It is a matter of concern that family members of the victim woman are the perpetrators in these incidents. Prof. Neelima Desmukh in the essay *Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act 2005: A legal perspective and challenges for women's empowerment*, describes the fear and helplessness of a victim.

The term domestic violence is wide and encompass in its scope the types of violence resorted to within a household. Most of the women prefer to suffer silently rather than reporting such matters to police and unwilling to admit the causes of their injuries for the fear of further victimization or bringing dishonor to the family. (Essays on Contemporary Gender Issues, 178)

The writer has also focused her light on other female characters in the book. One of them is Baby Kochamma. She has a diploma in Ornamental Gardening and she could speak very good English. She enjoyed her life watching TV shows. In spite of all these privileges, she felt lonelier throughout her life. She is a victim to an unfulfilled love relation that she developed a one-sided love fantasy with a young handsome Irish monk Father Mulligan. She used all her tricks to impress the Father. She even became a Roman Catholic against her father wish. But everything failed. She did not forget Mulligan even after a long gap. She could not materialize her love relation with the Father. Ultimately she developed a kind of sadistic and narcissistic nature; after her failure in love, she remained unmarried. This turned her into a different personality. She never wanted Ammu to succeed in her relation with Velutha. Thus in the character of Baby Kochamma, we find a woman who lived a life of complete failure, frustration and she always tried to suppress them by living in past. "As a young woman she had renounced the material world... as an old one, she seemed to embrace it. She hugged it and it hugged her back" (GST, 23). So, at the age of eighty-three, she wanted to look like a young woman. She used make up, lipstick and all the Jewelry of her mother to look beautiful. She even wore gorgeous saree to satisfy herself. All these indicate her complete frustration and a desire to return to her past. She always tried to acknowledge her present, which made her miserable inwardly.

Then we come across another woman in the novel. She is Ammu's mother Mammachi. Her story is a bit different. She married Pappachi, who was seventeen years older than she was. From the beginning, she became a victim to male dominance where she lost her own identity. Every night, she received heavy beating from her husband for no reason. She tolerated this without any revolt. Once her son Chacko prevented Pappachi from beating her. Since that day, her husband stopped talking with her. He publicly insulted her for some or other manner. Most of the time, he tried to give the impression that his wife did not care him. But Mammachi submissively accepted all these without uttering a word. As she did not get any love from her husband, she became more possessive on her son Chacko. So she never liked Chako's marriage with Margaret. And when Ammu returned to this house as a divorcee, she did not show any sympathy to her. Here we observe that, both Mammachi and Baby Kochamma were so frustrated in their own life that they could not allow other women to enjoy any kind of love in their life. Both developed a kind of bitter envy to all other women.

Mammachi and Ammu are the victims of regular and extreme domestic violence. The only difference between them is that Mammachi suffered everything silently but Ammu strongly opposed them. For Mammachi "The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place" (GST, 47). She developed "raised, crescent-shaped ridges. Scars of old beatings from an old marriage" (GST, 159). Ammu's

suffering is similar to Mammachi as she endures violence due to her divorce. Her family member “squeezed her knee and gloated” (GST, 43)

The question of oppression of women in this book is incomplete without discussing Rahel’s character. Rahel, Ammu’s daughter, is a silent observer of all the suffering her mother faced. She understood her mother more than anybody else. She faced emotional blackmail as Baby Kochamma, Mammachi and Chacko compelled her to speak against Velutha, which ultimately proved Velutha’s crime. For this she felt guilty throughout her life for the death of Velutha. By the time her mother died, she was eleven years old. She felt neglected in Ayemenem house. She moved from school to school. Being a girl, many restrictions were imposed upon her. She was even expelled from her school for several trivial things. Actually, she needed proper counseling as a teenager at that stage, but nobody did that. Even the school where she studied simply dismissed her declaring mischievous. Meanwhile, she did not get the love and care from her elders, what a child of her age badly needed at that time. She saw all kinds of insult that were inflicted on her mother. This haunted her memory at every stage of her life. That is why she even could not complete her degree in the required duration. Somehow she finished her degree and married Larry Mcsalin. They moved to America, where Rahel got a job. But very soon, she felt something missing, a kind of loneliness and something hollowness in this alien culture. All the dark memories of Ayemenem haunted her in America also. After living an exile life of twenty three years since the tragic death of Ammu and Velutha, she returned to Ayemenem. Even though she obeyed the rules of the patriarchy system, she didn’t get any result. Then she tried to get her own independence by coming out from the oppressive environment. She wanted to live her own life by sidelining the diktats of the male dominated society. Rahel’s character represents those women, who are victim to the deprivation of parental love and care at a tender age.

#### CONCLUSION

A major part of the novel depicts the story of suffering of women. All of them have suffered indignity and humiliation at the hands of man. We come to know various women characteristics in the novel like obedient, tradition-bound, irrational, innocent, and so on. But none of them escaped from some or other type of atrocities in the patriarchy society. Womanhood has been violated in all their cases. Roy’s narration of severe psychological and physical suffering of woman is a proof of victimization of women in our society. Through Ammu’s character, the writer tries to sensitize many issues related to women and their rights. Ammu’s subversive identity is a symbol for the Third world women who are raising their voice against the system and revolts to be confined by tradition and patriarchal regulations.

The writer brings this burning issue with all her mighty expressions. Even though, the setting of the novel has a strong Kerala background, Ammu’s story is a testimony for the suffering marginalization and oppression of any Indian woman. Her language is straight while describing the attitude of man towards woman. By her powerful narrative and innovative style, the writer has presented the pathetic tale of Ammu. As a woman herself, Arundhati Roy has distinctly recorded the suffering of woman in different roles-as a daughter, as a wife, as a widow, as a sister and as a lover. Through the characters of Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Rahel, she narrates woman as a helpless victim in the male dominated society. The victimization of women in the novel represents a conflict between the tradition and modernity. It can be concluded that nothing has changed even in 21<sup>st</sup> century as far as “women’s problems” are concerned

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