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**PORTRAYAL OF MARRIED LIFE IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S  
*GOD OF SMALL THINGS***

Prin. Dr. S. Y. Hongekar  
Vivekanand College,  
Kolhapur, MS  
[syhongekar13@gmail.com](mailto:syhongekar13@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** “With extraordinary linguistic inventiveness, Roy funnels the history of South India through the eyes of seven year old twins”, Gillian Beer, the chairwoman of the Booker judges said. “The story she tells is fundamental as well as local. It is about love and death, about lies and laws. Her narrative crackles with riddles and yet tells its tale quite clearly”. Arundhati Roy’s *God of Small Things* claimed immense critical acclaim from readers and critics throughout the world. Arundhati Roy adopts a narrative which is satiric in tone and lashes her anger on the rigid age old caste system which dominates our society. The theme of marriage and familial relations find exquisite manifestation in *The God of Small Things*. The women of the previous generation willingly or out of compulsion submit themselves to the domineering attitude of men. The mother of Ammu succumbs to the secondary status relegated to her. She also tutors and grooms her daughter towards such a sacrificial marital life. It is truly dark, dreary, and disturbing novel. The present paper is an attempt made to throw light on the portrayal of married life depicted in *God of Small Things*.

**Key-Words:** Married life, Familial relations, Arundhati Roy, patriarchal society, *God of Small Things*.

**Introduction:** “For me language is a skin on my thought and was thinking of way of telling... I wrote it... the way an architect designs a building”, says Arundhati Roy about *God of Small Things*, the Booker Prize Winner novel in 1997. ‘The story she tells is fundamental as well as local; it is about love and death, about lies and laws. Her narrative crackles with riddles and yet tells its tale quite clearly.’ Arundhati Roy twists and reshapes language to create an arresting, startling sort of precision. The familial relations that haunt the narrative, however, are portrayed by Roy in a fascinatingly distinct form. The novel narrates the tragic story of Velutha, the protagonist, whose life is ultimately destroyed by the combined forces of religion, tradition and society. Apart from Velutha’s tragedy the novel focuses on the anguished world of Esther and Rahel, the twins, who become the part of this tragedy.

The concept of marriage which is related to a delicate union of two different minds has not been properly realized in most of the Indian male dominated families. As most of the marriages are arranged without their consent, the women become transplanted wives subjected to harassment by husband, in-laws and societal expectations. During the last few decades, the family in general and in particular in India, has been under a process of social change. This has tremendously affected the man-woman relationship. Finesse, delicacy and refinement seem to have gone away and in their place materialism reigns. The security of joint families is lost as nuclear families outnumber them.

### **The Ayemenem House: A Symbol Of Patriarchal Culture And Its Oppression:**

The Ayemenem House of 1969 is haunted by the cruelty and abuse of Pappachi, symbolizing the oppressiveness of a patriarchal society. Pappachi haunts the Ayemenem House with his presence. A photograph of Pappachi in Vienna hangs in the drawing room: “There was a watchful stillness to the photograph that lent an underlying chill to the warm room in which it hung” (50). The evil of Pappachi pervades the room as the evil of oppression pervades the nation. The Ayemenem House of the past, as the present-day house, is uninviting. When Ammu divorces her husband, she returns to the Ayemenem House “unwelcomed” by her parents (42). Baby Kochamma often reminds the twins that they live on “sufferance” in the Ayemenem House, “where they really had no right to be” (44). Ammu is a prisoner in her own home, much like the oppressed people of India are prisoners in their own country. Roy effectively utilizes the gruesome qualities of the patriarchal culture and its oppression haunts the Ayemenem House of the past.

The hunger for love and the theme of alienation dominates *The God of Small Things*. Ammu never experiences love and security at home. Bitter childhood experiences have created rough edges of a rebel in her. She starts her new life with her husband with great expectations. Her dreams are shattered because of the absence of love. In this loveless marriage, there is nothing for her to cling on. History repeats itself when Ammu too like her mother, suffers beatings from her husband. She however fares better than her mother. She refuses to be a silent sufferer and retaliates violently when her husband is willing to send her to his English boss. The final outcome is that she leaves her husband and returns unwelcomed to her parents in Ayemenem, “to everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams” (GST 42).

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* shows the complete breakdown of familial bond and filial relationships. In Pappachi, Roy has created an ill – honoured, selfish bully who believes in male supremacy. He is dictatorial and brutal. Mammachi his wife is a silent sufferer who accepts the high – handed treatment meted out to her by her husband without protest. She possesses a kind of inner strength which helps her to withstand patriarchal dominance. In her parental home, Ammu receives harsh treatment from her father and indifference from her mother than love and concern. She grows as a rebellious daughter on account of the disharmonious relationship between her parents. Man-Woman relationships come to a breaking-point due to a lack of mutual trust and understanding between the partners. The wrong choices of partners entail suffering and moral degradation.

### **Portrayal Of Married Life In Arundhati Roy's *God Of Small Things*:**

The theme of marriage and familial relations find exquisite manifestation in Roy's *God of Small Things*. A marriage partner should be everything: best friend, terrific sex partner, sympathetic confidante, good provider. Failure of this results in broken relationships. Ammu's marriage is a marriage of convenience. She has been waiting to get married to escape from her home where there is no scope for her for a settled life as far as she is considered. 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 to escape. Eventually, one worked. Pappachi agrees to let her spend the summer with a distant aunt who lived in Calcutta. (GST 38-39)

In a wedding reception in Calcutta, Ammu comes across a well-built, pleasant looking young man of twenty five working as an assistant manager of a tea estate in Assam. The man proposes to Ammu, she does not pretend to be in love with him. But she considers the odds, viz.; her father would not allow her further education or be in a position to arrange a dowry for her marriage. She thought that “anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem” (GST 39). So, she accepts the proposal and informs her parents about it. Such marriages rarely get parental approval in a traditional Indian set-up like in the Ayemenem family.

In Roy's fictional world, man and woman remain islands. They are parallels because their relationship lacks mutual love, understanding and adjustment. This is very much the case of Ammu. She hopes that her marriage with Baba would give her the comfort, affection and love

that was lacking in her parental home. She leaves her parents home and enters into another to be independent. But Ammu receives no warmth or affection from her husband Baba. In spite of having a decent job, his family faces enormous problems because of his drinking habit. Apart from this, he has other vices like telling lies, behaving boorishly, cheating, torturing, badgering and so on. Ammu gets disillusioned after her marriage when she learns of her husband's alcoholic deviousness. His usual habit and pleasure is to swindle her.

Increasing rifts and use of falsehood widen the distance between the couple. In the planters' colony where her husband is employed, her smartness and new fashioned activities raise the eyebrows of others. On account of Chinese aggression of India in October 1962, planters' families had to evacuate Assam. Ammu leaves for Calcutta but on the way she gives birth to twins in a hospital at Shillong. While she writhes in labour pain, her husband is found sleeping on the corridor of the hospital in an inebriated state. His behaviour in such a critical condition only aggravates her mental tension and bitter feelings. She finds in him lack of any concern for her and the children. Thus, even when she gives birth to twins in a hospital at Shillong, she receives no help from her drunkard husband. His drinking habit becomes vigorous in the loneliness of the tea estate when Ammu and children are away after delivery.

Even after they come back, his violent treatment continues whenever he is in an alcoholic stupor. "The Kathakali men took off their make-up and went home to beat their wives" (*GST* 236). With make-up on "he tells stories of the Gods, but his yarn is spun from the ungodly, human heart" (*GST* 230). This reveals the hypocritical attitude of men. Baba's bouts of violence do not even spare his little children. And yet Ammu puts up with all this mutely. Ammu realizes that she had actually fallen out of the frying pan into the fire. Her disappointment becomes unbearable when her husband, suspended from his job for alcoholism, sought to bargain by providing Ammu for his boss, Mr. Hollick, the English Manager of the tea estate. Mr. Hollick suggests that he go on leave and "Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be looked after" (*GST* 42). Her refusal aggravates physical and mental torture. Her husband "grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence. Suddenly he lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her and then passed out from the effort" (*GST* 42). Her hasty marriage soon reveals to her the darker side of his life. She realizes the marriage is no guarantee for happiness.

Ammu realizes the futility of their relationship. The Pakistan War that broke out heat ended and accomplished the process of segregation. The force that has destroyed Ammu's

marriage, is the age-old Indian social convention that the wife is only a part of the goods, articles, a man owns.

### **Conclusions:**

*God of Small Things* depicts Arundhati Roy's concern with the social predicament of women in India. Roy undoubtedly exhibits her capability of probing deep into the human psyche by exploring vast tracks of human experience in a unique manner. The novelist follows the protagonist from her childhood days to adolescence, to the experience of marriage to a loving and caring mother to an estranged wife to a rebel who challenges the hypocritical moral standards of society. She shows how in the absence of meaningful relationships the individual suffer. Bitter childhood experience and the urge to flee from the ill-treatment of her father lead Ammu to take a decision that proves to be a wrong one. "She had had one chance. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man" (GST 38). The past experience of eighteen long years made her strong enough to opt for anything, anyone at all. Her acceptance of the proposal from a man about whom she had no authentic information as such shows her frivolity. But a close look justifies her decision.

Though her husband is a drunkard, she resigns to herself to her fate mutely. But she decides to leave him when he tries to exploit her by sending her to his boss for his selfish progress. May be she is destined to be deprived of happiness in married life. Though Ammu quarrels with her fate, yet she does not achieve anything concrete. She has too many fronts to cope with – her personal misery and her children's upbringing. She has to love them double because they don't have a Baba. So to some extent, the strong hand of Fate indeed had designed a rift in her life. In *The God a Small Things* Ammu's life is illustrative of the wrong choice of partners. In defying the authority of parents, daughters sometimes plunge into a relationship overlooking so many negative aspects in the partner. In an attempt to escape from a tyrannical father and domineering mother, Ammu enters in a relationship that leads to total disintegration.

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