

# Resonating the Unheard Voice through Ammu in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: A Postcolonial Feminist Study

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**Abstract** – This paper focuses on the mechanism of patriarchy - the cultural mindset of society as a barrier to female and social identity formation in society in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* through Ammu. The author from postcolonial contexts portrays female character Ammu who struggles with the normative gender identity and eventually eliminates the traditions and conventions of Victorian stereotype 'angel' woman to provide voices to the silenced women in her contemporary society. Roy's protagonist Ammu suffers through the strictly rigid patriarchal norms for female power and social identity formation. Based on the postcolonial feminist perspective, this study analyzes how Ammu breaks the double –bind of patriarchy and colonial legacy by voicing up her desires against all the odds of a male-dominated society and try to form her own identity according to her preferences. Nevertheless, Ammu finally tries to confront the existing social inequalities to bring about a social change despite the post-colonial power structure of the society merely by her involvement in different issues. It further exposes the universal parameters of highly conventional society which Ammu faces as a subaltern and compels her to resonate with her unheard voice.

**Keywords** – Patriarchy, Feminism, Subaltern, Postcolonial, Power, Identity

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the post-colonial context, society has adapted many colonial constructs. Among them marginalizing the subaltern women as others are one of the vital issues to discuss and draw the substantial picture of women's position through our different oppressive constructs. Through ideological and cultural manipulation and control such as through the hegemony of family, school, church, factory, police, etc., women adapt themselves to the prevailing system of assumption and values of society. thus women being subjugated and subordinated overages and ended up being a 'subaltern other'. The aim of this paper to expose the social, political, economic and cultural factors through Ammu as a 'subaltern other' in Arundhati Roy's novel *A God of Small Things*(and to depict the unheard voices as well as to reclaim Ammu's social identity as an individual being.

To achieve the goal, I have organized my paper into four main sections such as literary theoretical knowledge of subaltern based on different post-colonial and feminist critics namely Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Antonio Gramsci, Pierre

Macherry's point of view. Then in the second section, I have analyzed the position of subaltern Ammu through two grand narratives colonial legacy and patriarchy. The colonial legacy underlines the sexism and patriarchy points out gender bias, lack of education, refusal of women's need for sexual urges. I conclude my paper with the exploration of the question's answer to the two grand narratives poses. I also include the Works Cited that contains the list of handbooks I examined.

## II. LITERARY THEORITICAL CONCEPT OF SUBALTERN

In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H.Abrams mentions about its Latin origin and meanings: subaltern is a combination of two Latin terms for 'under(sub)' and 'other(alter)'. It is a British word for someone of inferior rank. The 'subaltern' owes its origin to Antonio Gramsci's (1971) note on 'History of the Subaltern Classes: Methodological Criteria' and it refers to classes such as the peasantry and the working class- social classes other than the ruling class. Gramsci's theoretical groundwork has significance in the field of post-colonial studies.

The term 'subaltern' was popularized by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay titled, "*Can the subaltern speak?*" (1988:35) she says: "The subaltern cannot speak." Subaltern means the colonized and oppressed subject whose voice has been silenced-what Edward Said has termed 'the permission to narrate'(286). She deals with the consciousness of the oppressed, marginal and subordinate groups based on Pierre Machery's suggestion to 'measure up the silences(286)'. For Spivak women are doubly oppressed in a colonial context: 'in the context of colonial production, the subaltern ... cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow'(287). The main aim of subaltern studies is to retrieve the mute, erased or shadowy voices of the subaltern. In *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* Hawthorne mentions her drawing attention to the paradoxical situation that 'measuring silences can involve speaking for the subaltern and continuing her voicelessness'(346).

## III. COLONIAL LEGACY

Sexism is another socio-political factor and is often linked to the practice of patriarchy. It involves not just a form of insult

but a means of repression. To save the job, Ammu's alcoholic husband asks her to sleep with his boss Mr. Hollick, then she realized that the ugly, chauvinistic nature of male society. She protested against the physical assault and she divorced her husband. After returning to Ayemenem, she told her father the attempted assaulting proposal of Englishmen, her father refused to believe that 'any Englishmen would covet another man's wife'(p-42). Inspector Thomas Mathew's tapping of Ammu's breast with his police baton is a postcolonial perversion of sex perpetuated by an Englishman – a colonizer Mr. Hollick does it with the native Indian women; Mathew's physical assault on Ammu and addressing her a 'Veshya' is a sign of seeing women as a spectacle or sexual object comes from colonial concept of consumerism of objects or products in global market. Michel Foucault (1980) in his concept of 'discourse' shows how people use different discourses to execute power in the society by using their knowledge. He states that power controls sexuality and uses knowledge to rule over society. Mr. Hollick and Mathew know that the powerless have no voice to rise. So Mr. Hollick uses his colonial status and Inspector Mathew his knowledge of criminology to harass Ammu. Roy delineates how the colonial concept of sexism adapted by post-colonial people.

#### IV. PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy marginalizes females' experience and subjugates females to such a degree that women consolidate with the patriarchal power through domesticity thus invalidate their experiences. Its functions are double-edged-on the basis of gender or culture or both.

As Spivak in her work entitled *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*(1987)demonstrated that subaltern or proletarian woman(women with an inferior position, rank or caste and non-wage earning women whose material conditions are substantially inferior to those we associate with working-class life), who may end up worse off than they were under colonial rule. In the socio-economic system, industrialization plays a significant role in progression in society. But in reality, the industrial factories never brings hope for the proletariat or powerless people in society. The Paradise, Pickle and Preserves factory stands a lesser chance for Ammu as always being lacked any position in the factory.

Gender biases have always been the major factor for the suppression of women in society. Chacko misses no chance of showing his sense of belongingness to his father's property. Though Ammu does as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as 'my factory', 'my pineapples', 'my pickles'.(57) Chacko's assertion of possessing reminds Ammu as a daughter has no claim of property in that post-colonial Indian society. She becomes a gendered subaltern in her family and a marginalized other in the factory. Her position in Paradise Pickles as a business partner illustrates the status of corporate women in India. Justice Bradley wrote,

the natural and proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex evidently unfits it for many of the occupations of civil life.

and protested against Mary Bradwell's practicing law in Illinois and insisted upon playing the role of wife and mother as a part of 'civil law' and nature herself.

Deprivation of women's education is another tool of dominance and promoting the agenda of the subjugation of women in patriarchy. Ammu never gets the same opportunity to educate herself while her brother Chacko gets to study in Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. Since her father Pappachi being an orthodox patriarch, he thinks that college education is an unnecessary expense for a girl (38). Pappachi's discriminating attitude towards her since childhood makes her feel 'subaltern other' in her own family.

Moreover, Ammu's position becomes more vulnerable after her divorce. Her aunt Baby Kochamma resented her presence and said:

"She 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 anywhere at all." (45-46).

After her separation from her husband, Ammu was compelled to come back to Ayemenem, her father's house, her brother's house only to live like a colonized subject and an exile in her land (Kundu, 2001: 43). Here, Roy exposes all these beliefs and assumptions of RSA(Regressive State Apparatus) and masculine prerogatives which seems to shape up Ammu's identity in a complex web of oppressive post-colonial society.

In a patriarchal society, women's choice of sexual desire over chastity is often considered taboo. In a caste system, if the choices are being made from a lower caste community, then it is forbidden to make such violations of the social system. One who chooses the man-made taboo over societal norms and regulations of 'who should be loved. And how and how much.'; she or he has to pay the price of it. Ammu's relation with Velutha is such a case where she defies all the social rules, struggles to emerge as an individual being in her own right and death is only compensation she and Velutha could make up. On the other side, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma easily accept her brother Chacko's illegitimate sexual relationships with women working in his factory. They call it 'man's need' for sexual desires. While Ammu's urge for Velutha is absurd for them. In spite of having an already vulnerable position in her life as a divorcee, she tries to follow her desires and makes a relationship with a person who belongs to lower caste is the main transgression of social laws which both of them did consciously:

"Even later, on the thirteen nights that followed this one, instinctively they stuck to the Small Things. The Big Things ever lurked inside.Theyknew that there

was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things.” (338)

The only price she could make up for violating social norms is living her rest of life like an isolated, marginalized being or an exile and miserably dies. Death may seem the ultimate penalty for lawbreakers or ‘subaltern other’ or ‘marginalized other’ by social lawmakers but their love lives up to the emblematic figure of courageous love.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Ammu is one of the vital characters in *The God of Small Things* through which Roy portrays the marginalized, suppressed and subjugated soul of a woman who resonates its voiceless outcry for social, political, economic and cultural independence and identity. Based on analyses from Spivak, Gramsci, Althusser, Machareys’ point of views I think it seems in every sector, women more or less encounter different social or cultural manipulations from different Repressive or Ideological State Apparatuses such as patriarchy, social discrimination, gender bias, sexism, caste system and so on. Through Ammu Roy tries to show woman despite being ‘subaltern other’, she struggles against all odds, stands up as an individual being instead opting for consolidation of people and reclaims her position in society. Thus by promoting unheard, peripheral voices even through death and Ammu’s offsprings Rahel and Estha’s incestuous lovemaking acts as an outlet to their psychological trauma and gives the potent force to subaltern to reach their suppressed voices for their social identity. Roy shows how the powerless other being caught up

in a web of ideologies resist all the pervasive social systems of hegemony to reclaim her position in the society.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We cordially thank our colleagues of Uttara University who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted the research, although they may not agree with all of the interpretations of this paper. We highly show our heartfelt gratitude to Professor Fayez M. Serajul Hoque, Adviser, Uttara University, and Professor Haspia Bashirullah, Dean, School of Arts and Social Science, Uttara University for sharing their pearls of wisdom with us during this research although any errors are our own and should not defile the reputations of this esteemed persons.

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