

Historical Constraints on Women: Representation of Ammu in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is an emotional attack on the systems that have always made life hard for Indian women. The main focus of this study is Ammu's character and her life, which shows how gender, race, and class can all be used to oppress people. This novel puts Ammu in a very male-centered and traditional social setting where her attempts to be independent are met with anger, punishment, and isolation. She lost her marriage, her fortune, and her shameful relationship with Velutha, a lower-caste man. These things show how society's strict rules limit women's freedom and keep things the same. The focus of this paper is on Ammu as a figure who stands up against the normalised relegation of women. It talks about how her choices, even though they are very personal, are politicised by a world that wants to stay powerful by controlling women's bodies and wants. Roy shows how women lie and carry a heavy burden through the story of Ammu, especially when they try to go against set rules. The study looks at Ammu's situation in the context of postcolonial Kerala's social and political background. It shows that Roy targets not only family and cultural traditions, but also postcolonial modernity, which often upheld patriarchal values. Ammu is not only a victim; her fight makes us think about how we need to rethink what it means to be a woman while breaking the usual rules of what is good and bad. Her representation is a plot device that challenges the prevailing ideas and brings to the fore, the silent words of many women who have been lost in history.

Keywords: Post-colonial Kerala, historical limitations, gender, exclusion, social expectations.

Background of the Study

The God of Small Things, by Arundhati Roy, was published in 1997 and won the Booker Prize. It is a deeply rooted work in the social, political, and historical setting of post-colonial India. The story takes place in Kerala in the late 1960s and is about a society that is run by strict social rules, old-fashioned ways of living, and complicated moral codes, especially when it comes to gender roles. In this situation, Ammu stands out as both the main character and a powerful symbol of resistance against the historical conditions that made it hard for women to fight. One need to look into the cultural, historical, and political background that makes up Ammu's world and its limits in order to understand what her journey means and what it all means in a bigger picture.

In India, men have always been in charge, and women have generally been expected to stay at home, be chaste, obey their husbands, and be mothers. While colonialism did bring about some changes, like Western schooling and changes to the law, it also made it easier for women to be stifled in the name of "civilising missions". In British colonies, the government relied on the opinions of the elite males and ignored or didn't pay attention to the views of indigenous women. In many ways, the colonial era preserved Indian customs and praised a 'respectable' time in Indian womanhood when women were passive, loyal, and morally good. This thought was used in the nationalist struggle, where women were mostly seen as symbols of the country and not as independent people with free will.

In the years after independence, the constitutions offered equal rights for men and women, but society didn't always change the way it was supposed to. Women were still pushed to the edges of society, the economy, and the law, especially in rural and semi-urban places like the one in Roy's Ayemenem. The rights to receive, the freedom to go to school, the freedom to marry, and the freedom to move around were still issues. Caste and class tyranny made things even more complicated between men and women. This was especially true for poor women

who tried to break the rules. This is the background against which Ammu's story grows, both progressive laws and deeply backward behaviour on the part of people.

Introduction

The God of Small Things (1997) by Arundhati Roy is a groundbreaking work in the vast and complicated field of postcolonial Indian writing. It challenges long-standing power structures, such as the gendered hierarchies that shape women's lives. Roy's first novel is hard to put into a single category because it has elements of political critique, cultural memory, and personal pain. At the centre of this complicated novel is Ammu, a woman whose life is stifled by patriarchal custom, family duty, and a society that is very aware of what it does. Her portrayal isn't just for show or as a metaphor for something deeper; it comes from a direct, very real understanding. She is a fully realised character whose life shows how women are oppressed by society as a whole, especially in places where history, gender, caste, and class all come together in a harsh way.

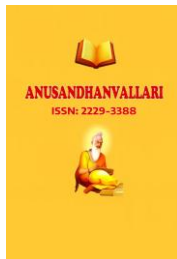
Ammu's character isn't formed by some vague idea of feminism. Instead, it's formed by the touching, personal, and sexy parts of her life. The story is told through changes in time and parts of narration that show how society controls her feelings and wills. This article doesn't just want to record Ammu's experience as a victim of the historical restrictions placed on women. It also wants to look at the more subtle ways that she was portrayed as both repressed and resistant. Ammu's journey from a daughter who was held back, a wife who was abused, and an embarrassing single mother to a woman who has the guts to love beyond what is expected of her gives us a lot to think about when we look at how gender enforces order through real history.

In the novel, Ayemenem, Kerala, is actually more than just a place where the story takes place. It shows how India's society and culture are at odds with each other in a small way. People often say that the area is progressive because of its matrilineal heritage, high literacy rates, and leftist history. However, Roy (2006) shows through the stories of her characters, especially Ammu, that these so-called signs of social progress don't do much to stop the violence women face in the workplace. In a strange world, Ammu's life is falling apart. There is an uncanny connection between the family's power and its morals as a public body, which act as two opposing forces that control how women behave. These forces make it okay for her not to receive, for her sexuality to be controlled, and for her to not be a person. They write the rules for women's roles based on the rigidities of the past.

In Indian fiction, most female main characters find strength in making sacrifices, suffering in silence, or giving up their identity to protect family honour. Ammu, on the other hand, fights her marginalisation by refusing to follow. Being turned down is not a win, though. It comes with a lot of risks. When she tried to date Velutha, an Untouchable man who is also from the same working-class family as her, she did something wrong that makes her incapable of forgiving him. In this way, she not only breaks social norms, but she also attacks the idea of cleanliness, which supports both gender norms and caste norms. The violence and shame that follow show how a society works where a woman's attempts to control her body or wants are met with horrible repression. Ammu's fall is not a coincidence; it was planned in such a way.

This paper places Ammu as a fictional character who is left out because of both the way she makes decisions and the way history has set things up so that women can't make choices. In this case, a postmodern feminist theory helps to explain why Ammu is double-marginalized because she is a woman and a woman who breaks class and caste rules. Some people, like Gayatri Spivak, have talked about the 'subaltern woman', whose voice is often not heard, even in messages of freedom. The buildings (i.e. the city of Ranchipur) around Ammu constantly misunderstand, judge, or write her off, even though she has a voice.

Another important thing about how Ammu is described is how the novel is called "The God of Small Things". She lives in a world of 'small things', where dreams are silent and hopes can't be touched. There is short-lived happiness and crushing effects. Roy's focus on the small things in her daily life-the looks, gestures, and



silences-suggests that the politics of oppression show up not only in big, planned acts of violence, but also in small, everyday rejections and humiliations. The tragedy for Ammu is not that she suffers, but that the systems that are meant to keep things in order make her suffering seem less important. By putting Ammu at the centre of the novel's thoughts and actions, Roy is challenging the idea that he is not there.

By looking at how Ammu is portrayed in the bigger picture of history, this study aims to untangle the complicated threads of personal tragedy and being left out of a place. This woman's story is not unique; it shows how women are taught to carry guilt, shame, and quiet inside them in all social situations. The little things Ammu does to fight back-like not being quiet and trying to love on her own terms-are criticisms of this oppressive continuity. Roy doesn't give simple answers or happy endings, but she does leave room for recognition, which is a type of writing that makes the reader see, remember, and ask.

This paper tries to find the turning points that define female identity in Indian literature by placing Ammu's story in the context of postcolonial feminism, regional history, and literary structures. It's not true that Ammu is stuck in the past. She is a comment on how deeply the past is rooted in the present. Shining a light on the hidden stories of women like her, Roy starts a bigger conversation about gender, memory, and justice in Indian and other literatures.

Objective

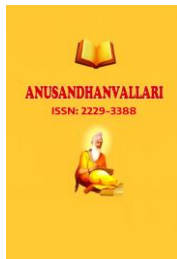
The main point of this paper is to look closely at how the character of Ammu in Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* shows one's understanding of the political and cultural barriers that women faced in India. This study will look at how gender, caste, class, and colonial legacies all interact to show how Ammu's character reflects the everyday lives of women who don't follow patriarchal norms but are still bound by them. This paper also looks at how Roy criticises the way women are stifled in postcolonial (and caste-fixed) settings by using a non-linear story and detailed accounts of Ammu's situation. The article also wants to add to the larger discussion of postcolonial feminist criticism by showing Ammu as more than just a victim. It wants to show how historical injustices have changed women's identities and choices in many ways.

Literature Review

Since it came out in 1997, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy has gotten a lot of academic attention. Critics love the novel's style, political themes, and complicated characters. One of the characters in the novel that has been closely looked at is Ammu. She is a woman who is stuck between the strictures of race, class, and patriarchy, so she has been criticised from many points of view. This review of the literature looks at important research works that talk about how Ammu is portrayed, especially in feminist, postcolonial, and cultural settings.

Early feminist readings of the novel include those by Mary E. John (1998) and Sara Suleri (1999), who talk about how the novel challenges the male-centred structure of families by focussing on the female lead who goes against social norms and suffers as a result. They say that Ammu's not getting to inherit anything, her failed marriage, and her sexually inappropriate love are all signs of bigger restrictions on Indian women. These studies tell us that Ammu's exclusion cannot be seen as a personal tragedy because it is part of a larger pattern of cultural oppression that is rooted in history and the law.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty looks at how 'Third World women' are pigeonholed in feminism discussions in her 2003 work, *Under Western Eyes*. She stresses the importance of both localising and historicising readings. In particular, this theoretical understanding helps one to see Ammu not as a universal symbol of female suffering, but as an Indian woman with a postcolonial past and a regional identity shaped by social norms. Critics such as Meenakshi Mukherjee and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan have used similar frameworks to look at how *The God of Small Things* fights against deeply rooted systems like religious orthodoxy and caste sexism.



The idea of the ‘subaltern woman’ which was created by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, is also very important when looked at from a postcolonial point of view. As a person who has been oppressed and is now socially disenfranchised, economically weak, and silenced in the family, Ammu speaks for what Spivak calls the “impossibility of the subaltern to speak”. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and other experts have added to Spivak’s ideas by saying that Roy’s use of fragmented timeline, multiple voices, and nonlinear memory gives women like Ammu who have been pushed to the edges of society a voice in their stories. These choices about how the novel is put together allow it to go against the traditional story structure by using male agency and historical importance.

Symbolism, child narration, and intertextuality are some of the literary techniques that Roy uses. Critics like Sissy Helff (2002) and John Thieme (2001) say that these techniques help readers get a deeper understanding of female pain and memory. But Ammu’s relationship with Velutha is seen as more than just breaking the rules of caste and sex. It is also seen as a political act that questions social boundaries as acceptable. Helff says that Ammu becomes a “textual site of resistance” where people make choices that fight against institutional oppression.

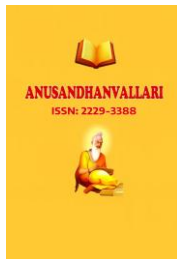
Ecofeminism and spatial theory have been used in new readings, like in the works of Priyamvada Gopal and Elleke Boehmer, who use Ammu’s imprisonment, both physically in places like the Ayemenem House and socially because of legal and moral boundaries, as proof of the corporeal nature of things. Gopal, in particular, says that Ammu’s environment reflects and reinforces his or her exclusion.

Some new works on feminism have made these readings more difficult to understand. Some writers, like Brinda Bose and Ania Loomba, have looked at how Roy purposely breaks down Ammu’s roles as victim and rebel. Ammu isn’t normal strong feminist. Her quiet defiance, intense emotions, and refusal to follow society’s rules show a different kind of resistance. Many people say that Roy creates ‘an ethics of disorder’ by having characters like Ammu challenge the dominant stories of family, country, and identity.

There is still a lot to say, but there are also some gaps that need to be filled. Especially when it comes to how Ammu’s individual resistance fits into the bigger historical and legal contexts that keep women in India from voting. A very small number of scholars have made a clear map of the colonial and postcolonial legal exclusions that shape Ammu’s social environment. These include property rights, marriage rules, and morals based on caste. Also, while some critics have talked about her sad ending, not many have seen her emotional freedom and personal decisions as delicate ways of defying the cruel world. So, the point of this paper is, to add to the discussion that is already going on by focussing on how Ammu’s personal story is affected by historical constraints such as colonial inheritance laws, caste hierarchies, regional patriarchies, and so on. Feminist theory and historical analysis will be used to dig deeper into the meanings of Ammu as a figure who both weakens and strengthens individuals, carrying history on her back and defying its power through defiant silence.

Research Methodology

A qualitative interpretive method is used in this study. It is based on literary criticism, with a focus on feminist and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. A close study of *The God of Small Things* is used as the major method for textual analysis, which looks at how Ammu is portrayed in the context of Indian society’s historical, cultural, and social ideas about gender. The method is based on secondary sources like books, scholarly papers, and critical essays that talk about feminist theory, gender studies, postcolonialism, and Indian social history. A lot of attention is paid to the writings of thinkers like Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Their ideas about subalternity, intersectionality, and gender performativity help one to understand Ammu’s character. These theoretical points of view help one to understand Ammu’s experiences in the context of power, tradition, and defiance in a broader way. There is also a historical context part to this study, and the socio-political history of Kerala and India after independence is used to make sense of the inherited gender roles



that are shown in the novel. Putting literary representations next to facts about society and history helps to bridge the gap between fantasy and real life.

Problem discussion:

The inner depth of Ammu's character shows how hard it is for a woman to find her own identity when she is surrounded by things that make it hard for her to do so. Just because she is a daughter, her family won't let her receive. She does terrible things to try to get away from her birth home so she can marry the man she wants, but she ends up in a violent and humiliating marriage. She is seen as an albatross around her parents' necks when she goes back to live with them with her two kids. She is a social risk who brings shame to the family instead of honour. These bad things that happen to women are not their own fault; they are signs of the system that judges a woman's worth by how well she can meet the standards of men.

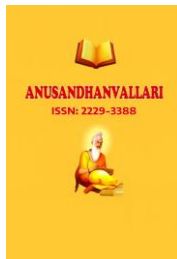
In any case, Ammu's rebellion-falling in love with Velutha, an Untouchable-is not a love story; it's a political one. It calls into question both the caste system and the way that gender rules try to control a woman's sexuality. People see the connection as a threat to the social order as it stands, so they respond violently: Velutha is beaten to death, and Ammu is shamed and thrown out of the group. This reaction is typical of how people have felt about women's independence in the past, especially when it comes to issues of caste and class. Most of the time, women, especially those from high caste or respectable Christian families like Ammu's, are expected to keep the family honour by following the rules. People saw any deviation, but especially ones that had to do with sexual choice, as a stain that could only be cleaned up by punishment or erasing.

But even Kerala, which is where the story takes place and has a rich culture, adds another level of complexity. Many people think of Kerala as a state with a high literacy rate, progressive politics, and better gender indicators than most other states in the country. However, Kerala also has its own problems. There was a strong history of matrilineal in some communities, but that did not always mean that men and women were equal. Roy shows this contradiction by showing that even in a country where people think society is advanced, stereotypes and unfair practices persist below the surface. Ammu's experiences show the difference between how things look and how they are, as well as the truth of growth and the persistence of traditional control over women's lives.

Religion is also a big part of why Ammu is limited in what she can do. The Ipe family in Syria is a Christian family that sees itself as very important in society. However, their treatment of women is not very different from that of a Hindu or Muslim family. It's hard for Ammu to be a woman and a divorced woman at the same time. Her return home is not a welcome haven, but a cautious accommodation. The novel is based on the idea that a woman who is not married is flawed, unattractive, or dangerous. So, her relationship with Velutha is not a sign of love; it is a sin that needs to be kept from everyone at all costs.

The quietness that surrounds the historical limits that the women in the novel have to deal with makes those limits even stronger. *The God of Small Things* is the title of the novel that refers to the small, hidden, and ignored parts of Ammu's personality. Her goals, desires, and sense of self are always pushed to the sidelines. She is often pushed to the side in the family in favour of the guys. Roy shows the unfinished and ignored stories of women like Ammu by using broken stories and different points of view. These women's lives are never told in full in strong histories.

What makes Roy's picture of Ammu so powerful is that there is no idealising around her. There is no such thing as a perfect victim. She is a difficult person who is sometimes even contradictory. People can connect to her because she is angry, bad, and has temper tantrums. Making them more like people is also a political act. When writers write about women who are abused, they often fall into melodrama or suffering. Roy doesn't like this and gives Ammu a voice that is flawed, defiant, and fatally human. The way she tells her story makes the reader think about how systems of violence and control that affect women's lives in different places and times become normalised.



From this point on, Ammu stands for fight and the cost that comes with it. Not only is society punishing her, but so are the past forces that make women suffer, give up things, and keep quiet. This makes the novel a place of memory and sadness for women like her whose lives are controlled and stifled by rules and traditions they can't see. At the same time, it gives us glimpses of hope through small acts of defiance, short bursts of love, and the constant presence of those floors one doesn't want to forget.

By focussing on Ammu's story, Roy criticises not only the obvious ways that women are oppressed, but also the sneaky ways that history, family, and society work together to stop women from making their own decisions. Therefore, the novel's setting is more than just a background; it becomes a living, breathing being that shapes characters, decides fates, and shows the complicated facts of women's lives in a society trying to deal with the effects of its past.

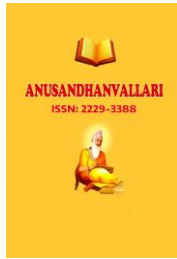
Ammu's picture shows a small part of the bigger problem that women in India face in society as a whole. Her story is an attack on the deeply rooted patriarchal structures, the discrimination based on caste, and the social rules that make it hard for women to make their own decisions. With Ammu's voice, Roy gives a strong critical analysis of how history and culture have shaped women's lives and pushes for society to change in a way that is more thoughtful.

The fact that Ammu is a divorced single mother makes her gender status even more complicated. This makes her stand out not only in her community but also in her own family. Because of this, getting divorced was socially unacceptable in Kerala in the 1960s, especially for women. Of course, her society looks down on her because she left her husband, which is often seen as a brave act of self-preservation in feminist discussions today. Roy stresses this point with great sadness: "She had no locus standi. No claim to anything. It was a little too late for her to retrace her steps" (*The God of Small Things*, p. 44). "No locus standi" is a legal phrase that means that Ammu does not have any right to be in a public or private place because of the rules of society, whether they are written down or not.

People still treat Ammu's wants and dreams as not important or safe, which shows that they don't value his true personality. Her need for love, safety, and respect is not made more human; it is made more moral. These effects are felt in society and in the mind. She feels ashamed of herself and has to hold back her power. Later, she becomes lonely and her health gets worse. Because she died alone in a lodge in Bharat Lodge, no one remembers her. Her body is burned without any of the family rituals that are done for dead members. Roy tells the story, "She died alone. With a noisy ceiling fan for company and a cricket to tell her a bedtime story" (p. 161). This dark picture shows not only how alone she was, but also how she was gagging as a woman who was brave enough to break the rules.

Although Roy doesn't just criticise men, she does so in general. It also includes the women who observe patriarchy even though they seem to be following the rules. Characters like Baby Kochamma are a sad reminder that institutional sexism doesn't just need male actors to stay alive. Baby Kochamma was manipulated, and she betrayed Ammu because she has spent her whole life trying to please others and not getting what she wants. Because she is angry with Ammu, she is an enemy, not a friend. This shows how sexism teaches women to control each other, using fear and social punishment instead of physical force. Under Western Eyes by Chandra Talpade Mohanty says that systems of gender injustice are usually set up by many layers of men and women working together (Mohanty, 1991).

Therefore, Roy's story puts Ammu at the middle of a larger critique of how societies keep order by keeping an eye on women's lives. The rules of caste, family history, and proper language all serve to tell Ammu and readers that women who don't follow the rules will have to pay the price. "It was a little cold. A little wet. A little quiet. The Air. That Afternoon. The Afternoon of the Day she Died. The Air was full of Thoughts and Things to Say. But at times like these, only the Small Things are ever said. Big Things lurk unsaid inside" (p. 120). This scary



piece captures the worst part of Ammu's life: how the "Big Things," the truths that people were afraid to face, were silenced.

Ammu's death is not the end; it's a wake-up call that things are still not over. Her children will always feel the emotional effects of her trauma, and the book's last scenes, which take place some time after the event, don't bring up her affair with Velutha as a secret, but as a holy memory. Roy gives readers a glimpse of love that isn't bound by rules, laws, or history in that quiet, soft moment in the river. It's short-lived, but it stays in memory and story. Even though society has thrown Ammu away, she finds immortality in the room Roy has given her in the emotional structure of the novel.

Conclusion

In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu's life shows how history, gender, race, and the way families are set up can push women who don't follow the rules to the edges. Ammu is not only a character who is going through a terrible situation, but she is also a symbol of how society judges a woman's worth by how well she follows cultural norms. Her fight against the sexist and caste-based standards of society shows the hidden cost of freedom in a society that judges and punishes women who choose to be independent. Her journey from young hope to defiance and finally erasure shows the big holes in the standards that are supposed to protect family and order at all costs, drowning out any protest, especially women's opinions.

Roy doesn't write about Ammu in a stereotypically victimised way. Instead, shows the different shades of resistance, emotional truth, and the pain that wasn't said. Along with her, Roy looks at the tough situations women face when they have to choose between submission and rebellion and still want to be free and respected. Ammu's life turns into a scary symbol for people whose lives are stuck between 'allowed' and 'possible'. Roy not only rewrites the story of the pushed-to the edges femininity by giving Ammu's experiences a voice, but she also asks a deep question about how historical and cultural systems continue to control people's lives. Ammu's story, which is full of love, loss, and defiance, is still a sad reminder of lives lived outside the lines of what is acceptable. From this point of view, Roy wants readers to change how they think about the "small things" that make up human history and how they think about the quiet but strong resistance of women like Ammu. Their stories need to be remembered, retold, and changed.

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