Marital Discords and the Three couples in Arundhati Roy's the God of Small Things

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Abstract
The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy is a reputed novel which represents Indian society and its varied problems. This novel mainly deals with social issues: the dilemmas of married women, the consequences of divorced women and their children and caste system. The story deals with the Ipe family and the problems of its members. The high-ranking government officer Mr. Pappachi is married to Mammachi. They have two children Ammu and Chacko. Both are divorced and have children. Their mother Mammachi was in a strained marital life due to her abusive, mean, cruel, egoist, patriarchal husband. She did not have the courage to go out of her husband's life and children, and was with her partner till his death. Her daughter Ammu, the Syrian Christian, went for an inter-faith marriage with the Bangalee tea garden officer. She fell in love with him during her stay at Kolkata, and married him hastily against the parental opposition. She gave birth to two children, Rahel and Estha, and left the husband for his drinking habit, lies and violent temper. She came back to her parental house with the intention of remarriage with an 'untouchable' Velutha, the carpenter cum electrician of her mother's pickles factory. She could not marry him due to the family disagreement. She died a pathetic death and the children become the worst sufferers. Ammu's brother Chacko also married a European Christian Margaret, and the marriage ended in divorce. In the three couples, the wives are the sufferers and the husbands make them suffer. The paper seeks to find out the reasons of the marital discords of these three couples, and the types of sufferings of the married women through textual and feminist theory. It also aims to show who the worst suffering wife is.

Keywords: Pappachi-Mammachi, Ammu-BangaleeBabu, Chacko-Margaret, Marital discords, Consequences

1. Introduction

Arundhati Roy's master novel, *The God of Small Things*, was published in 1997 and received much acclaim for its story, narrative technique, and character portrayal. Based on Indian society and its people, Ray, in her semi- autobiographical novel, represents Indian married women and their sufferings pre and post-marriage. According to Tapan Kumar Ghosh, "Roy's purpose is "to write about an unfair, male-dominated society that treats women and low-caste people very badly" (184). In this novel, the three significant couples of different generations also do not portray happy couples.

The story of a family drama, where wives suffer terribly in married life, takes place in Ayemenem house in Kerala, a north Indian state. The story revolves around the Ipe family and the problems of its members. The head of the family is the ill-humored high-ranking government officer, Mr. Pappachi, or Sri Brennan John Ipe, who had "black moods and sudden bouts of temper"(Ray, 1997, 49). Pappachi married SoshammaMammachi, and they are the first couple of the novel. One day, "he discovered a special moth which fell into his drink," and he considered it a rare species. The next morning, he went to Delhi by train and took it to the Department of Entomology so that they could name the insect after his name.Pappachi's six-month waiting went in vain. The higher authority refused to do it. When Pappachi retired, they honored the Acting Director of the Department of Entomology by naming the moth after the Acting Director's name, who was Pappachi's junior at the Department. This news caused deep frustration in Pappachi as the honored person was his junior, "whom Pappachi had always disliked"(49). The news impacted him deeply, and he started releasing his frustration over his wife by abusing her physically and mentally.

After his retirement as the Director of the Pusa Institute of Entomology, Pappachi's wife, "Mammachi had started making pickles commercially soon after Pappachi retired from Government service in Delhi and came to live in Ayemenem"(47). She got busy with her pickle and jam-making business and "soon found herself busy all year round". Her husband was having trouble with his retirement. The couple had a seventeen–year age gap, and he "realized with a shock that he was an old man when his wife was still in her prime"(47). Although Mammachiwas almost blind and the free husband never thought of helping her in her pickle business "because he did not consider pickle-making a suitable job for a high-ranking ex

Government official" (47) and became jealous of the attention she received from the surrounding people. Mammachi had a talent for violin. During the couple's stay in Vienna, she took violin lessons from the reputed violinist LaunskyTieffenthal, who informed Pappachi about her exceptional talent. The information made him jealous, and "Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase . . . . One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi's violin and threw it in the river"(Roy, 1997,48). The beatings stopped when their only son, Chacko returned to the Ayemenem house from England after being divorced from his wife.

Mamamchi gave up her dream of becoming a violinist without showing her frustration to her husband. One day, Chacko found his father beating his mother in the study, and he "strode into the room, caught Pappachi's vase hand and twisted it around his back"(48). Pappachi stopped beating and talking to the wife till his death. To fulfill his small needs, "he used KochuMaria(helping hand) or Baby Kochamma(the sister) as intermediaries"(48). His wife adjusted to the awkward relationship.

In the words of Sheba, "Mammachi's relationship to Pappachi is male dominated because he is of the belief that a man should have authority over the woman. For him marriage is the male's authority over female. Therefore, he considers his wife like a slave"(2021). The blind wife put up with his distance, beatings without raising her voice against him like a typical Indian wife. He used to give the evening visitors the idea that she neglected him by sewing buttons onto his shirts. His efforts were to demean her. To take revenge on his wife, he bought a second-hand sky-blue Plymouth from an Englishman, and never allowed her to sit in it. She swallowed the insult coolly. When he died, "Mammachi pasted in the family photograph album, the clipping from the Indian Express that reported Pappachi's death"(50). At his funeral she cried deeply as she was "used to being beaten from time to time"(50). Later on, the submissive wife accepted the domination of her only son Chacko over her and her pickle factory. He changed the name of the factory, which his mother gave. In Pappachi-Mammachi marital discords, the self-centered, well-groomed, meanPappachi was unaffected by the pain he gave to the wife. The wife also remained unaffected by the marital discords.

The next couple is Ammu and her Bangalee husband, Baba. Before her marriage, she was facing brutality and neglect by her patriarchal father, who never gave importance to girls' education. Ammu, bored with waiting for her marriage, convinced her parents to send her to a relative's

house in Kolkatta. At a marriage reception, she met her future husband, who was twenty-five years old, and Ammu was eighteen. He worked in a tea garden as an assistant manager and came to Calcutta to spend the vacation. Five days after their first meeting, he proposed to her, and she accepted not for love but to escape from the "clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother" (39). After the secret marriage, she realizes," She made a mistake. She married the wrong man" (38) as they were ill-matched although he was from a wealthy Zamindar family, and the father-in-law was "Chairman of the Railway Board"(39). She started her married life in Assam, and "Her husband turned out to be not just a heavy drinker but a full-blown alcoholic"(40) and a liar to her. He never explained or apologized to her for the lies. They lacked understanding, compatibility, and respect in their relationship, and he used to infuriate "Ammu to a degree she never thought herself capable of" (40).

In her bitter married life, she gave birth to twins Rahel and Estha. When the twins became two years old "their father's drinking, aggravated by the loneliness of the tea estate life,had driven him into an alcoholic stupor. He stopped going to work and spent whole days lying in bed, compelled the boss Mr. Hollick to call him "to his bungalow for a 'serious chat"(41). The boss had impregnated some tea-pickers with light skinned children.Despite knowing about Mr. Hollick's debauchery, he agreed with his proposalto save his job. On his return, he informed Ammu about the proposal of his boss to send her to his bungalow in the absence of her husband from the family. In reply, "She said nothing.

He grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence. Suddenly, he lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her . . ."(42). She did not spare him from hitting back with the heaviest book from the bookshelf. Her attack made him unconscious as she attacked "On his head. His legs. His back and shoulders."(42). Unlike her docile, silent mother, she "left her husband and returned, unwelcomed. To her parents in Ayemenem.To everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. And no more dreams"(42).

Ammu's mother never thought of leaving her mean, egoist, violent husband, and kept the relationship intact till the death of her husband. She did not have the boldness to fight back, but her daughter showed fearlessness in defending her and divorcing the abusive, drunkard, liar husband. She suffered more terribly than that of her mother as she had a home of her own, which she got through her husband. Ammu became a burden to her parents' house with the twins. They

all were disliked by the family members. She started living a confined life without family support, love, and income, "For herself, she knew that there would be no more chances. There was only Ayemenem now. A front verandah and a back verandah"(43). In Ammu's case, she suffered before and after her marriage, and divorce. Her dream to restart her life with Velutha brought more suffering for her, and the children as she broke 'love law' by getting involved with an 'untouchable'.

Chacko-Margaret is the third significant couple of *The God of Small Things* for the discussion of this paper. Chacko is Ammu's only brother and the only son of Pappachi and Mammachi. He was a studious boy who earned the Rhodes scholarship in the United Kingdom. Hence, he left his country for his studies in England. He met the British waiter Margaret at a cafe' where "He always came with his invisible companion and his friendly smile"(244).

Gradually, they fell in love, and he used to come to her hostel and behave like an exiled prince. His room was always messy, "Books, empty wine bottles, dirty underwear, and cigarette butts, clingy nature. She was his first female friend with whom he shared the bed before marriage. So, he decided to marry her. Margaret made him her life partner without parental support. Chacko also kept the news a secret from his typical Indian parents.

He was happy with her, who "encouraged their differences in opinions and inwardly rejoiced at her occasional outbursts of exasperation at his decadence"(246). About his family, he did not speak anything. He was obsessed with his wife and rarely read the letter sent by his mother about her issues with her husband in India. Their marital discords started after the marriage due to cultural differences, his laziness, different mindsets, financial issues, and messy habits. After the marriage, Chacko moved to Margaret's flat and waited for a new job. He depended on her income due to his joblessness. He also did not do well in the exams at Balliol College. Earlier, the couple had no financial troubles as he was a Rhodes scholarship recipient. His stipend was generous.

After the marriage, "There was no scholarship money, and there was the full rent of the flat to be paid."(247). One year after the marriage, she lost charm for himbecause "Chacko became a Fat Man"(267).Moreover, she found the flat always messy from morning till her return from the job. He became careless of his looks before going to a job interview. He "seemed incapable of buttoning up his shirt, knotting his tie, and tying his shoelaces before presenting himself for a job

interview"(247). He never apologized to her for burning the new sofa with his cigarettes. Later, he got a low-salaried job, and they moved to a new home. Her parents became so displeased with her marriage with Chacko that they became inclined to see her.

During this miserable married life, she met her future husband, Joe, a biologist in her pregnant state. He was known to her through her brother. When he did not get another suitable job, he wrote his mother a letter informing his marriage to Margaret. The devastated mother Mammachi, pawned her jewelry so that she could send money to her only son. But the money was not enough for the couple. After the birth of their only child Sophie Mol, Margaret "realized that for herself and her daughter's sake, she had to leave Chacko. She asked him for a divorce"(249). After the divorce, he came back to India and taught at a college till his father's death. When he returned to the Ayemenem house, he behaved like a true patriarchal son, who renamed his mother's pickle factory without her permission, and became the man of the house. His mother willingly submitted herself to his domination.

In his married life, he only had financial issues, and caused Margaret to suffer emotionally for their behavioral differences, his irresponsibility, and filthy habits. The divorce liberated her from this unhappy marriage, and she found true love in her second husband. The divorce did not impact Chacko, who went to India to live with her mother and got a job as a college lecturer. After the father's demise, he behaved as if he had been the head of the house, claimed his mother's pickle factory as his own, and started flirting with the female factory workers.He enjoyed his patriarchal privilege over his sister Ammu, "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine"(57). He got encouragement to humiliate Ammu from his mother Mammachi, whose submissiveness made her accept her husband's brutality and her son's domination of her and her daughter.

Ammu and Margaret suffered in their married lives and were compelled to leave their husbands with children. Margaret found love with her second husband although her happiness was short-lived. But Ammu did not find true marital bliss with Velutha due to his low-caste background and the family's opposition to her relationship with a 'Paravan'. She suffered till the last breath with the twins.

2. Discussion

In this novel, all the three married women suffer at the hands of their husbands. Ammu suffers the most from her husband and family in her married life and her new life as a divorced, helpless woman with two helpless children. She had a home that did not belong to her. She stayed there like a pariah without love, support, care, and understanding. She got insulted by her only brother, Chacko and aunt Baby Kochamma. She also got discriminatory treatment from her mother. She helped her mother with her brother in the pickles factory but could not find recognition, admiration, love, or emotional support from her mother, Although Ammu and her divorced brother sought shelter in their parental house, nobody welcomed her to her rightful home. Their mother, "Mammachi joyfully welcomed [Chacko] back into her life" (248) and arranged his room with fresh flowers. She also ignored his lecherousness with the female factory workers and accepted the son as her protector. SaniaMinhaDiwakarPrahaladaiah states, "Ammu presents the most pathetic picture of a woman who seeks happiness and love in a world that turns its back on her. Having abandoned her husband for his debauched tendencies and having returned to her family, she loses all normal status as a family member and is thrown into a dark corner" (2019, 59). Chacko's divorced wife Margaret contacted him through regular correspondence, where she used to inform him about her new-found love, Joe, who bonded well with Sophie Mol. In her new life, she "was happy with Joe" till his death. But Ammudid not have correspondence or contact with her husband, although the son Estha lived with the father for some long years. She was in utter loneliness in the midst of her close family members, and the children were too small to feel her pains.

Ammu, "is fully aware of the conservative mindset of the members of her family and the society of which she is an integral part. Still, she enters "the forbidden territory to love and being loved by an untouchable- Velutha" (Prakash&Sujata, 2014, 74-78). But she never be happy in married or divorced life. Ammu "does not succeed in bringing about any tangible change but puts up a brave fight for realizing her dreams"(Al-Qaederi and Islam, 2011,65). In the end, she dies alone in a room far away from the children and family members. The dead body was not buried as a Christian. It was cremated for breaking the 'love law' with her involvement with an 'untouchable.' Mammachi received beatings from her husband. He could not tolerate her genius for violin playing and disallowed her from playing it. She accepted the abuse and meanness and stayed

back in a rocky, disrespectful married life. She passed her life in the same house after her husband's death. At least she had a place to live in. Similarly, Margaret Kochamma left Chacko's home and started a new, happy life with Joe, who accepted the daughter Sophie as his own. Thus, she got her love life, home, and happiness back. But among the three suffering wives, Ammu got nothing in married and divorced life except dream break and humiliation. The twins also suffer with the mother.

The three husbands Pappachi, Baba, and Chacko have patriarchal mindsets, who make their wives suffer in different ways. They never tried to read the minds of their partners. The imposing Pappachi and Baba abused the wives overlooking the presence of the children in the houses. Chacko, as a husband, did not abuse his wife Margaret. Nevertheless, his financial dependence on the wife, lack of responsibility as a husband and father, and indisciplined life caused a lot of suffering to the disciplined earning wife.

Like the different types of husbands, the sufferingsof the wives also differ from wife to wife. The reasons for their sufferings and discord handling are also not alike. Mammachi put up all the ill-treatment of her husband to her, but her daughter refused to stay with her husband, who lacked self-respect. Margaret's discords with Chacko were too much to bear for her. So are Ammu's. Both parted ways from their respective husbands with children. Ammu despite being financially insecure developed the courage to leave her husband in the hope of being well-received by her parents. Mammachi shows those wives who can take spousal abuse, meanness for survival, and showing respect to typical society. Her daughter Ammu disregards the notion that wives must put up with the nasty behavior of their husbands for the sake of their children and the criticism of society. Through Margaret, we know that wives can renew their lives after divorce.

The educated husbands, Pappachi, Chacko, and the not-so-educated husband Baba pained their wives knowingly or unknowingly. Papachi and Baba beat their respective wives mercilessly, but Chacko never abused his wife. They had emotional issues which Maragaret did not want to handle alone. The threehusbands never got worried about their marital troubles in the married life. Hence, they never tried to fix the spousal conflicts that they took for granted. They also failed as fathers to their children. From his return to his parental house, Chacko had to interfere in the nasty habit of his father's wife beating.Pappachi also had an unhealthy parental relationship with the only daughter Ammu, who wanted to escape from his patriarchal clasp.

Baba also showed his violence over the children when Ammu refused to accept the proposal of his boss, Mr. Hollicks. After remarriage to Joe, Margaret wrote to her ex-husband, "Joe made a wonderful, caring father and Sophie Mol loved him dearly"(249).Thus she tried to prove [Chacks]'s failure as a father.Baba kept the son Estha, according to his convenience, and never took the daughter Rahel to him. Ammu was a dotingmother with the children in her divorced life. Margaret was also a successful mother. After the tragic drowning of her daughter and the accidental death of her second husband, she became a devastated wife and mother. Instead of trying to resolve her marital discords, Mammachi accepted her bad marriage, remained with her husband till his last breath, and had been busy with her jam and pickles factory. Her husband left her a home, and financial security. She also had her son Chacko with her in the house. The other members were also with her. She was not happily married but was never lonely and had financial insecurity. Margaret was also a school teacher and could find peace in her job after losing her husband, and the daughter. Ammu suffered the most without love from her blood connections, family support, unfulfilled love with Velutha, and forced detachment from her only hope, the twins Rahel and Estha.

Ammu never had peace of mind before and after marriage. In her single state, she dreamed of escaping from her bullying father by marrying someone. Her dream did not come true as her husband Baba was not the right person for her. During her unhappy life, she did not want to submit to her ill-fated marriage. Her return to the parental house irritated all the paternal family members. The children were neglected, and criticized by all. Ammu's desire to remarry Velutha also got dashed due to his low-caste origin. She became a powerless woman and mother in her divorced life.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, I can say that the three fictional couples had varied marital discords, and the husbands put the wives to suffer, whose troubles did not affect them. The self-centered Pappachi was engrossed in his world till his demise. Ammu's husband Baba remarried, and Chacko went to Canada to start a new life there. Among the wives, Mammachi did not leave her husband, but Ammu and Margaret sought divorce as they did not want to stay in marital discords. The wives' problems were different from each other. Theirsuffering, discord management skills and levels of

patience differed from one another, and they also suffered differently and Ammusuffered the most compared to the other two wives.

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