

Critical analysis of the two primal characters Ammu(as tragic heroine) and Velutha (as tragic hero) in Arundhati Roy's novel The God of Small Things

Ramen Goswami(Scholar)

*Magadh University, Bodh Gaya
(English Department)*

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ABSTRACT: In particular, Arundhati Roy, after receiving the 1997 “Booker Prize” for her first novel ‘ The God of Small Things ‘, has earned a place among the contemporary literary jewels of the world like Amitav Ghosh, Shobha De, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai etc. In it, she tells the story about love and death and women’s right in society. The story of the novel moves around its central characters – Ammu, her son Estha and daughter Rahel. Ammu often painfully watches in the market of Kottayam, many helpless women with vacant eyes and being forcibly saved by policeman. This was the reason that Ammu prefers to die unnoticed and lonely in a grim room of Bharat Lodge in Alleppey where she had gone for a job interview.

Keywords: male dominated society, mortified, captive, sexual relation, pivotal, family, independent, traditional, socially discarded

Amu as tragic heroine:

Ammu is the awful heroine of the novel. She is the element of the fourth generation of the Ayemenem family. This granddaughter of Rev. I, the daughter of Pappachia and Mammachi and Chacko’s sister has a very disastrous life. Because of her character, the novel emerges as ‘the truthful depiction of the dilemma of the women in society. Though her character, the novelist succeeds in presenting the effort and suffering of the Indian women who seek distinctiveness in a male dominated society in traditional framework. She shows properly and sufficiently how the life offers little choice to a forsaken woman like Ammu, the central character.

Ammu is the most conspicuous representative of the fourth generation. She is a tragic figure, mortified and insulted and harassed by her father, literally and misbehaved by her

husband, badly insulted by the police, and abandoned and rendered destitute by her brother. She dies at the very young age of thirty one. Her catastrophic story, right from the beginning to the end aroused our sense of sympathy and catharsis like tragic her sense of - Shakespeare she has to face so many trials and harms, cares and anxieties. Like Shakespeare’s characteristics tragic flaw, she has one fatal flaw in her nature that ultimately leads her to death is that she didn’t follow the age long unyielding tradition of a patriotically love laws. But before we analyse the diverse sunglasses of Ammu’s character, we should try to find out the task and aim of the novelist regarding the portraying the representation of a great character. Arundhati Roy helps us to discover some the unplumbed depths of woman character mostly in Ammu who at times, seems to classify her emotions to rest of the common women of our day today life. Ammu’s suffering started at a very young age. Ranjana Harish says: “As soon as Ammu gets a chance to go out after Sophie Mol’s memorial service, she goes to Kottayam police station with her twins and gives a statement to the effect that Velutha was not a rapist. In other words, she admits that whatever happened between them had happened with joint consent! In return she has to face insults and disgrace from Inspector Mathew who takes it as his holy duty to protect tangible wombs for the purity of future generations. Such an account given at the police station plays havoc in Ammu’s life. She is thrown out of her mother’s house. Chacko, her brother does so. Her son is sent went to his father. The offspring Rahel is allowed to be with the family. “They provided the care (food, clothes, fees) but withdrew the concern” (157). Her tragic tale begins with her very early days. Contrary her child like behaviour ignorance, and effortlessness she suffers like a “mombatti” of the big house. As a little girl, Ammu had to endure

some awful nightmarish experiences. She saw with her open eyes the cruelty of her father, Pappachi, who used to beat her and her mother with a impudence vase. She completed her schooling in the same year that her father retired from his job in Delhi, and moved to Ayemenem. He insisted that college education was unnecessary for a girl. So, she had to leave Delhi. Once, it so happened that her father tore apart her shoes she had brought for herself. She had nothing to do at Ayemenem other than waiting for marriage proposals. This shows the truthful portrayal of the woman of the society who find nothing, but a step monthly treatment in a male dominated family. Even her fundamental rights to take education is deprived. Roy depicts the cruelty and such zophrenia of Pappachi in a very fine way show says: “ Not content with having beaten his wife and daughter, he tore down curtains, kicked furniture and smashed a table lamp.”

In an atmosphere of different type, she began to feel like a captive in a big Ayemenem House. There again problems waited her. Pappachi, her father, did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, so no proposal came her way soon, she became the victim of frustration due to the disruption of education, unoriginal atmosphere, and an antipathetic attitude of the family members. She dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem from the ill tempered father, and bitter long suffering mother. “She hatched several wretched little plans.” Finally, her father agreed to let her spend the summer with a distant aunt, who lived in Calcutta, and in someone’s wedding reception, Ammu met her future husband. Her future husband was an Assistant Manager of a tea estate in Assam. Ammu was in a hurry to marry him because she knew that in Ayemenem people were quite dead against her wishes. She, then, had an elaborate Calcutta wedding. But very soon, things began to take a very bad shape. Her husband was misfit in more ways than one. He lied outrageously, was an alcoholic, made her smoke; soon, she discovered that she had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. At that time, twins were born. Meanwhile, Mr. Hollick, the English manager of the tea-plant summoned him to resign. The Manager, Mr. Hollick, developed his weakness towards Ammu. Mad with sex, he summoned him. Actually, the manager wanted to have the sexual relation with Ammu. He told “ You are a very lucky man. You have a wonderful family, beautiful children, such an attractive wife.” The manger had his eye on her, and suggested Ammu’s husband to send her to his house. He put this proposal before his wife. This extreme humiliation created a sense of great hatred

in the heart of Ammu. She, after a scuffle, left him with twins Estha and Rahel.

As we know, the novelist Arundhati Roy has made Ammu’s character, “ a great champion of the cause of the women. She, raises a number of question marks on our age long myths and traditions, history and legend’s through Ammu, she knows the right from the beginning of creation. Women as is taken, “ as a symbol of temptation. But she is, generally, more emotional, sensitive and tender, though is endowed with greater power of endurance and patience. The novelist wants, as to see, that a woman forms the pivotal and a nucleus of family life. In the ‘ Ayemenem ‘, her father treats her as a step motherly person. He didn’t believe that in English man like Mr. Hillock would covet another man’s wife. Her brother, Chacko, treats Estha and Rahel indecently healthy. Chacko, after studying at oxford, returns to Ayemenem, and takes the charge of the house. He is received with a warm welcome in the family. He also remains the rightful inheritor of the family’s wealth and fortune. When he is found with women of low morality, he is encouraged by Pappachi in the name of ‘man’s needs’, whereas the same behaviour of Ammu is termed as illicit and sinful. She is being locked in a room and is beaten mercilessly.

Thus, at the age of 24, an age of enjoyment and merriment, Ammu’s life came to standstill. The novelist describes... “She spoke to none. She spent hours on the river bank with her little plastic transistor shaped like a tangerine. She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swim.” Moreover Kochamma, who herself passed through deep distress, is against Ammu. But her real tragedy begins to take its toll, when Ammu comes in contact with Velutha, a Paravan, untouchable of the village. Ammu loved Velutha from her very childhood, but not so much for his exceptional talents but for his fiery spirit of protest. Ammu is drawn towards the fiery spirit of Velutha because she wanted to identify her emotions of revolt with that of Velutha. She loved him with heart and soul for his indomitable spirit of protest which she also nursed in her heart. Gradually, this personal relationship of Ammu and Velutha leads them into illicit sexual relation. “She pulled his head down towards her and kissed his mouth”. One night, when Sophie Mol was drowned, Ammu went to Velutha’s abode. Ammu, without her knowledge, becomes instrumental in participating the tragedy which confronts two generations of Ayemenem House. ut this happy and secret moment did not last long. One day, Vellyappan, Velutha’s father witnessed their illicit love making and he rushed to Ayemenem house to give a full detail factual report

to Kochamma. Consequently, Ammu was locked up in a room. Kochamma thought : “Ammu had defiled generations of breeding and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, the new people would point at them at weddings and funerals, at baptism and birthday parties.”

Ammu died in filthy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey, where she had gone for a job interview as someone’s secretary. “She died alone, with a noisy ceiling fan for company, no Estha to lie at the back of her or back to her. She was thirty one.” On the previous day, she had woken up at night to escape from familiar recurrent dreams in which policemen came to her with a scissors to hack off her hair. They prostituted her and branded. “She sat up in the strange bed, in the strange room in the strange town. . . Only her fear was familiar.” The sweeper found her in the morning. Ammu is such a tragic character that it has been characterized even in the burial of hers. So, Chacko hired a van to transport the body to the electric crematorium, where “nobody except beggars, and police custody dead were cremated there.” Chacko had wrapped her in a dirty bed-sheet, and laid out on a stretcher. Finally, she became a number, Receipt No. 498673. Chacko and Rahel collected Ammu’s remains as ashes. Further generations would say. . . “There was Ammu, married a Bengali, went quite mad, died young in a cheap lodge somewhere.”

Thus, Ammu is entirely a tragic character, tortured and abused by the police, family and politics. It is not the Male folk alone responsible for her tragic plight, but mostly, the women characters like Mammachi and Kochamma who may be called real culprits to engender suffering in Ammu’s life. Thus, through the character of Ammu, Arundhati Roy lashes out at the hypocritical moral code of society, which makes a great difference between men and women even to her death bed.

Velutha - A tragic hero

The New Indian novel in English is marked by unrestrained experimentation in the field of characterization, narrative technique and language. Gradual development of fantasy and reality contravention (breaking) unveils (expose) the layers of meanings of the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. Essentially, ‘The God of Small Things’, the Booker Prize winning work, is a novel of ‘The Small Gods ‘ or ‘Mombatties’ like Ammu, Velutha and Estha. In particular, in Velutha’s character, the novelist has woven the themes of love fulfillment, untouchability, police corruptions and inhuman politician and casteism in Indian social orders. Like Bakha of Mulk Raj Anand’s ‘Untouchable’ he has

to struggle hard to achieve identity in society. Velutha moreover, is assigned to highlight the problems of the conversion of Dalits into Christianity and the feelings of untouchability that remains the prime concern of the novelist. Arundhati appears supremely sensitive to the various social corruptions such as untouchability, involuntary conversion of religions, abuse of official positions by police and politicians, deprivations of human rights to sexworkers and dalits. Velutha-an instrumental character, thus exposes, through suffering and death, the political hypocrisy, snobbery and treachery of the ‘haves’ against ‘have nots’-the small good.

Though the novel concerns with the life of lost dreams of Ayemenem family members outside it, Velutha is also drawn a person of lost dreams and hopes. He was full of a life of aspirations. Arundhati Roy develops Velutha’s character to the level of a tragic hero. He represents the own torridness (a sexual emotion), which was the most privileged (restricted) in the society. Velutha a self made man was excellent and outstanding in his profession. He was a communist follower and did not take active part in the party activities seriously. We study the tragedy of Velutha struck in the form of Ammu and from that moment, there was no one to help him not even party comrade. Velutha was mercilessly fractured to death by the police for no legitimate reason. Velutha-a Mombatti suffers severely, the burnt of casteism, social injustice and callous police administration. He is a loving character, an untouchable Paravan, the Dalit of the village. His piteous (pathetic) plight reminds us of the downtrodden sufferer Bakha in ‘The Untouchable ‘ and Ganga in ‘Two Leaves and a Bud and Munoo in ‘Coolie’. This man of outcast has human virtues. He is called Velutha which means ‘white’ in Malayalam. Symbolically, he stands for ‘The God of Small Things’. The novelist has raised his character to a level of a tragic hero who suffer and attains tragic grandeur.

His tragic death arouses a sense of pity in us. The novelist calls him “The God of Loss”. Velutha is an expert mechanic and crafts man. When he was 14, a carpenter namely John Klein came to Kottayam and guided him in the art of carpentry. After school, Velutha worked with Klein till dusk. At the age of 16 he finished his high school and became an accomplished carpenter. He built a dining table with twelve dining chairs. Even as a young boy, he would come with Vellya Pappen, his father, to the back entrance of the Ayemenem House to deliver the coconuts. Apart from the skill of carpentry, Velutha has a special knowledge of repairing machines like radios,

clocks, and water pumps. Once Mammachi said. . . “If only he hadn’t been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer.”

Velutha too had a strong sense of uplifting from bottom to top, while his father is a traditional and conservative man. Velutha, along with a number of Dalit untouchables converts himself into the Christian religion only to immune (protect) from the victimization of a casteist society. When Velutha along with his father goes to the Ayemenem House to deliver coconut plucked from trees they were not allowed to enter the room. Arundhati Roy comments here. . . . “The untouchable were not allowed to touch anything that touchables touched.” Velutha and other untouchables were not allowed to walk on public roads in Mammachi’s time; they were not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. Velutha has to undergo so many insults and abuses engendered by police politics and people of society. Unlike Bakha, Velutha is a man of sober nature behaviour. He is a silent sufferer without any emotional rages. He is a man of innocence and ignorance. But unfortunately he is badly caught in the web of casteist men and corrupt police administration. He thought that it was his mission in the life to change the existing conditions. He became a rebel and very often even declined to pay need to what father said. Velutha, though is a great carpenter, still does not get respect in society. His father is dead against any types of education or advance knowledge in a Paravan. There grows a sense of unpleasantness between the father and the son. Suddenly he is not seen at least for five months. When he comes to Ayemenem, Mammachi again reemploys him as a factory carpenter. But the touchable workers of the factory were wild to casteism. He is therefore paid less. Madhumalti Adhikari holds the view. . . . “In Velutha’s case, it is class and caste discrimination that makes him powerless and not his gender.” Indeed, “his greatest crime is that while being a Karna he has dreamt of Draupadi”. This poor untouchable does not sweep off his foot prints as his forefather used to do. In this independent democratic country, his foot prints are erased by the establishment the police, state and tradition.

The real tragedy begins in his life, when he comes in contact with Ammu. Velutha develops his weakness for Ammu. As a result they spend their vulgar pleasurable nights on the bank of Theruver, just beside the History House. This illicit relation was dead against the attitude of both Marxism and socialism. Comrade Pillai, the Ayemenem Leader does not give his approval. He plays a double game. Velutha goes to Pillai for help

when events took an unexpected turn and he was stamped the real villain. The humiliation that he suffers, at the hands of Mammachi was simply unbearable to him, perhaps worse than the torture to death at the hands of police. On that fateful night when Estha and Rahel went for boating in the night, Sophie was drowned and Ammu came to Velutha, they had the most fulfilling love making which was indirectly witnessed by Ammu’s children. Then, there was a forged case formed against Velutha. To save Ammu and the family name, Velutha was charged for abducting the children and molesting Sophie. The police administration is also not happy to see the illicit relation between Velutha and Ammu. The police swooped upon Velutha and next day the headlines said. “Desperado caught in Police Dragnet on the previous night.

Touchable policemen had caught up with the untouchable. Velutha is severely beaten by the police in custody. He is wrongly charged with the alleged murder of Sophie Mol. The police beat Velutha mercilessly. Estha and Rahel witness Velutha’s punishment. Arundhati Roy narrates: “Velutha appeared on the scummy, slippery floor. A mangled genie invoked by a modern lamp. He was naked, his soiled mundu had come undone. Blood spilled from his skull like a secret. His face was swollen and his head look liked a pumpkin, too large and heavy for the slender stem it grew from. A pumpkin with a monstrous upside-down smile. Police boots stepped back from the rim of a pool of urine spreading from him, the bright, bare electric bulb reflected in it.” (303) When his stomach is kicked in the crouch of his skull on cement, the gurgle of blood on man’s breath come out, “His skull was fractured in three places.” His spine was damaged badly. When

Estha was made to go to police station to identify Velutha as an abductor Velutha was unconscious. He died soon. Suguna Ramnathan says: “To begin with, Velutha is a carpenter (Roy, 75-77). Jesus of Nazareth was the son of Joseph, a carpenter, and the trade is intimately linked with the figure of Jesus. A cluster of associations (poverty, carpentry, social ostracism, and suffering) comes from Christ’s life to shape Velutha.

Throughout he is portrayed as creative, utterly courteous, and immensely dignified.” 3 Hence Velutha is the silent sufferer. He is socially discarded, politically neglected and physically tortured character who wants to rise above his stature but he is mercilessly put down to the lowly ground, is not properly rewarded. Velutha, the brave, is one of the very well drawn characters of the novel. He lived such a fateful and tragic life to

see that his dreams were shattered and smashed even before their fulfilment. Indeed Velutha deserves to be the tragic hero of the novel.

Conclusion: Indeed, how much importance Arundhati Roy attached to the structure and technique, comes out emphatically in her interview taken by Alex Wilbur. In an interview, about narrative telling of a tale Arundhati Roy says.: “For me, language is a skin on my thought and I was thinking about it as story and was thinking of a way of telling it.” True to say, the narrative technique of Roy, as we study, is so much different from the old tradition. Even the Booker Citation Panel says.: “Roy funnels the history of South India, Through the eyes of seven year old twins.” But the ample study of the novel clearly tells that the consciousness and the point of view are not singular but plural. There are many passages, criticism, satires, explosions, virus and points of view, which laid outside the point of view of the twins Rahel and Estha. Before going to discuss and assess her narrative techniques employed in the novel, we must quite Alice Traut, who views in New York Times Book Review. “The quality of Ms. Roy’s narration is so extra ordinary, so morally strenuous and so imaginative, supple that the reader, remains enthralled all the way through.”

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