

# The Conflicts of Psycho Physical Needs and Socio Religious Barriers Faced by Ammu in God of Small Things

## Abstract

Woman is a symbol of Eve who tempted Adam and caused his fall from the coveted place in the height of glory to the most despicable condition. A woman, therefore, is an evil influence and a savage force to be curbed, controlled and conditioned. She is a mere object to be possessed and not an individual with needs of her own. All the established authorities imposed unsurmountable barriers to suppress her. Ammu, the woman protagonist is thus caught in the conflicts of psycho physical needs and socio religious barriers.

**Keywords:** Equality, Gratification, Psycho Physical needs, Reduction, Second sex

## Introduction

Feminism as a movement emerged because of the age old practice of marginalizing women as inferiors and depriving them opportunities of equality. Women needed freedom even to accomplish their dreams or to satisfy their bodily needs. The portrayal of Ammu gives a clear picture of the condition of women who were unjustly denied freedom, equality, right to one's own body and emotional gratification.

Being a girl child, she misses the equal right to study well, while her brother gets the chance to go abroad, she is not given the same kind of treatment. Marriage seems as the only option for her to escape from the strict parental authority which tried to curb her independence. Even after coming back to her parental house after her divorce, she is treated like an unwelcome guest. She has no right to get a share in her parents' property while her brother enjoys the right to inherit the wealth of the parents. When her mother understands the son's need to use the women workers in the pickle factory, she quickly arranges for a convenient atmosphere for him. Whereas when Ammu genuinely loves Velutha, Mammachi becomes very angry. The discriminatory behaviour of a mother, in the house, is not the only prejudiced condition faced by Ammu. All through her life she is tortured by the extreme measures of inequality. A woman is an inferior, the second citizen and the weak sex.

Simone de Beauvoir argues that there are no "biological, psychological, historical and cultural explanations for the reduction of women to a second and lesser sex".

Sometimes worshipped for virtue or beauty, the women generally had no autonomy. They did not get recognition as rational individuals. The maternal role is deeply entrenched in culture as well as society as the natural destiny of a woman. It is quite ironical that the long awaited marriage becomes another agent of oppression and exploitation. Escaping from a dominating father whose charity sustains the daughter, a woman now becomes the slave to her husband who has freedom to use her as a domestic aid unpaid for her services either at home or at bed.

The plight of Ammu becomes worse when her husband expects her to render sexual services not only to him but also to others. Her emotional, mental and physical inclinations and needs are just ignored by the husband. Since Ammu is his legal wife, he expects perfect obedience from her. Men like him did not consider women as individuals with a soul and mind of their own, since a woman can claim no direct lineage from God. She was but a rib of Adam, while every other creature was directly created by God. When Adam received the spirit of God as the animating soul of his clay body, Eve represents only the body of Adam. She, therefore is of a lesser origin and so stands as an object for Adam's gaze and use.

Ammu's individual self revolted against the exploitation of her body. Her soul longed for a perfect union with a kindred spirit and her mind

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thirsted for the soul quenching emotional compatibility which completes the union of two people. When her marriage fails to offer sufficient support to her psycho physical needs, she dares to step out of her house to return to her mother's house. The social sanctions that confined women to the bondage of marriage, did not permit her to take unconventional steps. It's not only men, but women also who perpetuate the discriminatory practice "Hordes of female relatives descend upon Ammu to gloat over her divorce."

Men in authority, like inspector Thomas Mathew, wanted to take advantage of Ammu's body. "His eyes were sly and greedy". (Pg.7).

"Then he tapped her breast with his baton, gently tap, tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket." (Pg.8)

The policemen were rude in their language and called Ammu a prostitute and her children illegitimate. The gestures suggested that Ammu had no right to love Velutha. She, as an individual, did not have an option to choose somebody as her lover. Psycho-physical needs were the result of the original sin inherited from Eve, the first mother.

The economic deprivation of Ammu, as a divorcee further adds to her muted agony.

"Though Ammu did 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. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter had no claim to the property." (Pg.57)

The rules of feminine subordination are made by the male dominated society. It is perpetuated by religious sanctions and church doctrines, women are conditioned from childhood to remain subservient to the men. The girl children were trained to wear clothes and ornaments; their games were different; their role in family and society is different; the food, the educational opportunities, the sharing of domestic labour, the outdoor games were all designed to differentiate a male and a female child.

The strictly orthodox conventions of the Churches in South India is clearly pictured in the treatment meted out to Ammu. Just because she divorced her husband and loved another man.

"When Ammu dies a pitiable death, the church refused to bury Ammu." (Pg.162)

She was cremated in an electric crematorium.

"Nobody except beggars, derelicts and the police custody dead were cremated there" (Pg.162)

Social, family and religious institutions are like the moral police, stationed to check the volition and condemn the helpless victims undefended by anyone. Authorities are like the watchdogs, ever alert to meet out the proper punishment to the offender. They alone can define love and say whom to love and how much to love. A woman has no choice of her own. She was denied rights to her own body. The husband was like the colonial ruler who had all the rights invested on him to chastise, educate, subordinate and use the savage spirited woman. If women are left alone to follow their own desires, then

another garden of Eden will be lost because of the anger of the avenging God.

The continuous practice of alienating the girl child and constant confinement within the constricting walls of 'moral' behaviour causes disorientation. Ammu was not only ill-treated but hated and disliked by the moral prims.

"A married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for divorced daughter .... she had no position anywhere at all". (Pg.43)

Ammu's father was very strict in the house and thus he tried to exert his authority in exercising his control over the three women in his house - wife, sister and daughter.

"In her growing years, Ammu had watched her father weave his hideous web. He was charming and urbane with visitors.... But alone with his wife and children, he turned into a monstrous suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning." (Pg.45)

Such early conditioning moulded Ammu's life and made her to feel like a caged animal bound within the prevalent social diktats. Locke, a philosopher, saw childhood as a state of blank tabula rasa, a state which placed heavy responsibility on parents and teachers. Supported by such views the strict parents justified their actions.

The child, the woman and the natives are inferiors and need parental supervision for the benevolent and supportive upbringing of them. The elders of the family church and society are like the colonial masters exhibiting continual and virtually obsessive debasement of the colonized subject. Women victims felt the acute pain of the dichotomy. The conflicts between their psycho physical needs and the socio religious barriers either turn them to be passive and silent or aggressive and revolting. The superficial attempt to accept the conventional social laws sometimes turn women into imbalanced mental patients with perversions in their minds. They become split personalities like Baby Kochamma who had suppressed her desires unnaturally. Ammu, who fails to heed the moral codes, listens to her heart. She crosses the boundary and thereby is consigned to the flames of the electric crematorium. Her resistance to social norms pushes her to a wretched destiny.

The social norms is a changing process. When we compare Ammu with her own mother, aunt, and daughter, we will come to know the gradual changes that have tried to redefine many conventional codes that mould and modify the existing laws. Mammachi, the mother of Ammu had no option but to obey her husband because in her generation disobedience to the patriarchal rules is never even dreamt of. All through her life she remained muted and mutilated; passive and submissive; exploited and tortured. Baby Kochamma, the aunt escaped the tortures of a married life. She escaped into her dream world. The irony of the situation is that though these two women were the victims of the socio-religious conventions, yet they themselves become the torch bearers of the cruel laws by criticising Ammu and causing untold miseries to her. Personal liberty of the other women individuals were not their concern. They

lived to uphold the essential virtues of the morality codes of the society.

Two generations later, Rahel, the daughter of Ammu daringly breaks away from the constricting social constitutions. Her giant leap into modern freedom of choice is neither so vehemently condemned nor cruelly punished. This change in public attitude is effected by the social and political changes that were happening throughout the world. The awakening of the minds of the people towards the evils of gender inferiorization and its unjust practices worked out tremendous changes. Women and political activists and protesters from every walk of life had tried to eliminate the evil so much so that even the iron walls of the church had tried to cope with the new demands of the changing time.

A study of this novel, brings out this new ray of hope that the socio religious laws can be altered and miserable plight of subordinated women can be changed. In support of the changing system, technology, globalization and other such modern mechanisms have contributed to liberate women from the shackles of slavery. Political laws are made to ensure equal opportunities for women to gain education, job opportunities, equal wages, birth control measures, laws to protect women's rights, small families, less interference by Church and Panchayat Authorities have greatly contributed towards women's liberty.

The psycho physical needs of individuals pertain not only to the victimised women but to all sorts of people with alternate sexual or biological needs. Such unconventional modes of physical relations were strictly prohibited and bitterly criticized by social and religious authorities. As the insight into human psychology gets deeper, philosophers and moralists have understood the need to tailor the laws according to the new findings. So advance research methods and progress in education helped women, gays, lesbians and other marginalised groups like caste inferiors to obtain freedom from oppressive laws.

Arundhati Roy thus portrays Ammu's plight in facing the unsurmountable barriers constructed by the social and religious authorities. At the same time, she also portrays the changing structure of the socio religious world and thereby the liberation of women. The centre, periphery equations are constantly shifting so that the marginalized woman is no more a second citizen.

The aesthetic and moral purpose of bringing out a comparison of Ammu's lack of freedom with Rahel's full liberty is to accentuate Ammu's suffering. The readers feel sorry for the helpless woman who was trapped in the vicious web of moral laws and strictly guarded by members of the family, the police, the religious leaders and even the politicians. Individuals, if they are women, had to submit themselves to the chastisement of laws that curbed their individuality.

Through the Character of Ammu, we learn that a woman is not a single self with her own personal identity. She is a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother and a dependant. The multiplicity of the

splintered selves permitted no personal freedom for her to gratify her psycho physical needs. One moment of a slippery lapse from the strict vigilance of virtue lands the women to a much more dangerous trap than the man. But the advance of medicine and biological health can now save a woman, from this despicable situation.

To conclude, we can say that Ammu was more sinned against than sinning. Her misery was the result of the gender discrimination. Velutha, her lover, suffered despite being a male, because he too was a caste inferior. Their suffering was wrought by the socio religious laws that attempted to torture them even beyond the graves.

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