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Innocent Victims of Marital Discords: A Peep in to the Lives of Ammu, Estha and Rahel in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* **Deepthy Mohan**

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Abstract

*Bitter childhood experiences wreak havoc upon the lives of people which will leave deep scars on their minds. These scars are really difficult to heal and they may require medical help to recover. They may lie buried in the unconscious strata of their minds which might come to the surface at a much later stage. Many psychological abnormalities are the result of bitter experiences faced at tender age. Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize winning novel, *The God of Small Things* demonstrates the hardships of the twins Estha and Rahel and their mother Ammu which is the result of the trauma they faced during their childhood days. The twins become victims of the ill-treatment by the family members and society which is mainly because of their mother Ammu's failed marriage. Ammu also had suffered a lot when she was very young because of the quarrels between her parents. The psychological trauma she suffers because of her parent's quarrels and her own unhappy married life haunts her throughout her life. The attitude of society towards a divorcee woman has never been good, especially in India. The bad experiences of their own personal life coupled with the arrows showered upon them by the society makes these people's life a hell. Those who have undergone a strained marital relationship, especially women, should get the support of law and society which will help them to lead a respectful life in future.*

Keywords: *Untouchable, Child Psychology, Marital discord, Trauma, Incestuous relationship.*

Children pay for the sins of their parents. Both physically and mentally they become the victims of the parental struggles which may have deep and far reaching effects on their future. The small world of children comprises of themselves and their parents. They look up to their parents for their love and care. We always talk about the dreams, wishes and happiness of parents being depended upon their children. But we simply tend to forget that the dreams, wishes and happiness of the children is also depended upon their parents.

A healthy surrounding is necessary for a mind to grow healthy. Such an atmosphere can be provided by the parents. Even a simple mistake on their part may have negative impact on their children. Children coming from broken families are treated badly by the society.

They may have certain psychological problems also. Feelings of inferiority complex and other unhealthy feelings are easily developed in them.

Though the central theme of Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* is the love between Ammu and the untouchable Velutha, there are many other issues that she deals with in her debut novel like marital problems, man-woman relationships, politics, religion, sexual exploitation of children, difference in the attitude towards male and female, hardships of a divorcee, attitude towards the untouchables, incestuous relationship, child psychology and so on. But one can see that most of these problems, if not all, arise from marital discords.

Child psychology has been used with great expertise by Arundhati Roy in the novel to make the reader empathize with the twins Estha and Rahel. She makes use of childish fantasies and imagination to showcase their innocence. Major parts of the novel are a revelation of the attitude of the twins to their varied experiences which show us their unusual characters.

In the very opening of the novel, one can see Pappachi's cruel attitude towards his own wife and children. The denial of the credit for his scientific discovery of a new moth is so devastating that he always takes out his anger on his wife and children. Its impact on the mind of Ammu, his daughter, is something which she carries all through her life and she can only remember those past days when she was nine years old with a shudder.

Ammu has to suffer a lot at the tender age of nine. Ammu and her mother used to hide in the hedge to escape from Pappachi's beatings. Not content with beating his wife and daughter he used to tear down curtains, kick furniture and smash table lamps. Ammu is a victim of the psychological trauma which she experienced in her childhood and also just after the marriage. These bitter experiences haunt her throughout her life and suffocate her. They torment her like a nightmare.

The other traumatic experiences, which the innocent minds of the novel have to suffer, are related to Rahel and Estha, the twins. Right from their birth, they have to live a life of fret and fever, cares and anxieties. They see the quarrels between their mother and father while in Assam where their father was an employee in the tea-plant. When they go to live in the Ayemenem house, they are treated as outsiders. They become the victim of the malice of Baby Kochamma, who constantly reminds them of their isolation. She disliked the twins for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. She tried her best to make them realize that they lived in their maternal grandmother's house, where they really had no right to be.

The twins were ill-treated by the other members of the family too. After the arrival of Sophie Mol, they are severely neglected and even denigrated. Psychological studies shows that a child who is neglected by the family develops a sense of isolation strong enough to create hurdles in the path of the child's moral, spiritual, physical and social development. Perhaps this is why all through the novel we see that the twins suffers from a feeling of anxiety which always haunts them.

The breakup of Ammu's marriage has its repercussions in the lives of her children. Both Estha and Rahel grew up to be abnormal adolescents. In early childhood itself they learnt that they were unwanted and a burden. Their backward reading habit is very symbolical. They represent their learning and maturing in the wrong direction.

The twins were in fact prisoners of war between their parents, among the family members and society. Children, deprived of love, look up to their uncle Chacko for fatherly love. But, when his daughter Sophie Mol arrives, his love is focused on her. Due to the psychological vacuum that has been created in their minds, they come to love Velutha with all their heart. Thus Velutha becomes a surrogate father. He is patient with them, very gentle and loving. When they understand that their mother has no objection, their affection for Velutha grows. Like plants grow in the direction of sunlight, the twins turn to Velutha for love and attention.

If one goes by the scenes depicted in the novel, Ammu is seen to be either very strict or not very vigilant about her children's activities and experiences. Like Baba, Ammu is utterly callous, at least initially, about the custodianship of the twins. And the feeling of hurt does not vanish from their memory:

They remembered being pushed around a room once, from Ammu to Baba to Ammu to Baba like billiard balls. Ammu pushing Estha away 'Here, you keep one of them. I can't look after them both'. Later, when Estha asked Ammu about that, she hugged him and said he mustn't imagine things. (84)

Estha is possessed with such a psychological trauma that for him using a surname is a problem. This is because Ammu was uncertain as to whether she should resume her parental title or continue with her husband's surname. That is why Estha writes his name as Esthappen unknown which reflects his confused mind.

Once it so happened that a stranger took Chacko to be the father of the twins. It gave much pleasure to the twins. This really looks abnormal in a normal family. It is the psychological truth that a child who is constantly neglected by the family develops some severe kind of traumatic and terrible nature strong enough to shake the roots of his life. Rahel is also subject to the same tyranny and injustice as meted out to Estha. But the basic difference between the two is that Rahel is more aggressive and active than Estha. She is a girl of rebellion like her mother.

The psychological damage that Ammu and Baba inflicts on the twins is irreparable. Estha returned to his father in Calcutta and later again returned to Ayemenem after he had finished school. He became a quiet child. When he grew up, he stops talking altogether. This is all because of the repercussions of bitter childhood experiences that he had faced.

Rahel, Estha's twin sister, also grows up into no less abnormal a person. She is expelled from school thrice for moral depravity. She just appears to drift around in her adult life, studying architecture simply because she happens to pass the entrance examination. She spends eight years in the college without finishing her five year's course, and taking a

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degree. The other students, particularly the boys, were intimidated by Rahel's behavior. She has no ambition in her life. She has no friends and even her professors were a little wary of her. She is just like an anchorless ship.

Even in her adult life, due to the wounds left in her mind during her disturbed childhood, Rahel is unable to find peace when she is in the arms of her American lover. As soon as she knows that Estha has gone back to Ayemenem, she rushes back to Ayemenem to meet Estha. She feels that the love between them is the only reality she could live for. When she returns, she still finds Estha silent and withdrawn. But her sense of emptiness disappears only when she is near her brother. In a moment of silent communication, the twins indulge in an incestuous relationship, where her emptiness seems to be complemented by his silence. Neither of them suffers any guilt and Rahel seems to feel they are parts of a whole, and only in their physical union, do they experience their sense of completeness.

The brutality and persecution Ammu and Velutha underwent, is also operative against Estha and Rahel. They are treated by the family as outsiders. The first traumatic experience which the sensitive mind of Estha encounters is the misbehaviour of the Orange drink Lemon drink Man in the Abhilash Talkies who forces the boy to masturbate him. Deprived of the shade of a caring family, Estha is left alone to tremble with fear by this nightmarish experience throughout his life. This sexual harassment doubles his feeling of insecurity. Ammu loves her children but she is not capable of fully understanding their feelings. It is this fear that prevents Estha from telling Ammu about his experience at Abhilash Talkies. He believes that if Ammu found out about what he had happened, she would love him less. They had already lost the love of their father and now they could not risk the love of their mother.

The second powerful trauma felt by the innocent twins is the emotional blackmail by the family, state and administration to betray Velutha, the person whom they loved dearly. Velutha dies because of the cruel beatings of the police. The readers also come to know how Estha has to lead a miserable life in Calcutta at his father's residence, how he feels a sense of isolation, how at meal times when he wants something, he gets up and helps himself and how, much to the initial embarrassment of his father and stepmother, he begins to do the housework. Estha's loneliness is the result of his traumatic childhood experiences.

Estha is more comfortable with Rahel and discloses his secrets to her and Rahel knows it. Chacko notices the closeness between them. But unfortunately Ammu does not fully realize the depth of affection the twins have for each other and she is unable to see their single soul. One can say that the person who wreaks the greatest havoc on Rahel and Estha is the one who loves them most. Unfortunately Ammu appears to be not even aware of the depth of the sorrow of the children from broken families. She expressed her anger of being locked up in a bedroom for hours by shouting and flinging stinging words on the twins:

Ammu had screamed. 'If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here! None of this would have happened! I wouldn't be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! You're the mill stones round my neck!' (253)

It was only later she realized the full meaning of her own words. She knew that she had not meant that. But the damage had already done. Everyone else made the twins feel that they are burden. Their only refuge was their mother on whom their life itself was depended. Now that she also considered them as a burden to her, their tender heart was shattered. Her extreme reactions and shouting left deep wounds on their souls.

Sophie Mol is also a child coming from a broken family. But she was a bit more fortunate than the twins. Her mother married Joe after divorcing Chacko and from Sophie Mol's feelings towards Joe, it is clear that he loved her very much. Because of this she does not miss a father's love. But that joy was short lived as Joe died in an accident. The depth of her love towards Joe is clear from her considering him to be her father.

Sophie Mol did not feel herself to be a burden as she receives the love and consideration of everyone unlike in the case of the twins. Nobody ill-treats her. But she is destined to live only for a brief spell of time. She was only nine when she died. She did not live long enough to suffer the bitter reactions of society.

Most of the psychological abnormalities of people are the result of bitter childhood experiences. These experiences leave deep impacts on their tender hearts which may lie buried under the unconscious mind and they will come out mostly after they grow up. The wounds received at a tender age are more serious than those received at a much older age. This is clearly seen in the case of Ammu, Estha and Rahel. The wounds they received in their childhood remain unhealed. They are not fortunate enough to enjoy the love of any of their relatives also. Instead they suffer from fresh wounds inflicted by them.

Not finding anyone else, Estha and Rahel found comfort in each other's arms. But this incestuous relationship is not healthy either. They themselves are well aware of this because they are aware that what they felt is not happiness but hideous grief. The empty space created in their heart due to lack of love and concern remains the same throughout. They had to face bitterness from everywhere.

The attitude of the society towards a divorcee woman should change. Women who escape a suffocating relationship should be facilitated to live the rest of their lives with dignity and purpose. In a society like India, remarriage should be encouraged, as women should not be allowed to suffer like Ammu and they should not select their life partners out of compulsion. A re-examination must be made of the laws governing marriage and divorce. This is not to break down the sanctity of marriage as an institution, but to reform the evils in the age-old traditions and to provide open happy homes to secure the future of our children.

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