

# Violence on Women: A Comparative Study of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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**Abstract** -In the middle class Indian society woman is trapped in the clutches of patriarchal ideology that denies her the autonomy and individuality. The male domineering set-up makes her the subservient partner to her male counterpart, ultimately providing her route to identity crisis. Man becomes the controller of every aspect of her life, subsequently offering her a life full of violence-psycho as well as physical. Through their writings some of the Indian female writers raise their voice against the maltreatment of the woman and advocate for her liberty. The purpose of the present paper is to administer a comparative study of the novels, *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande and the *God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy. The correlative analysis of both the novels brings out the different kinds of violence inflicted on the woman in the patriarchal society. Deshpande reveals how the woman is subjected to mental torment in the marital relationships, while Arundhati Roy brings to light the stark reality of the society where she faces atrocity psychologically as well as physically by her male counterpart at every stage of life.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, Individuality, Patriarchy, Violence, Subservient partner and Maltreatment.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The middle class Indian society has been patriarchal in nature where man is the head of the family, and woman is put at the inferior status to her masculine counterpart. The male- controlled culture has rendered the woman to the secondary position to her male counterpart, subsequently leading her to identity crisis. Man becomes the controller of social, economic, sexual and physical power, consequently subjecting her to physical and psychological torture. At every stage of her life she becomes a victim of violence - physical or psychological due to male chauvinism. Through their works some of the Indian female writers raise a feminist voice to provide her the equality that may treat her as a human being. The writers like Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande etc make their writings a tool to make her aware of the afflictions being inflicted on her so that she may come out of the domineering set-up by rebelling against the patriarchal ideology, and carve her identity.

Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy in the novels, *The God of Small Things* and *That Long Silence* respectively, explore the different kinds of violence proffered to the woman by the male dominated society where in an attempt to make her a submissive creature her aspiration for attaining autonomy and individuality is rejected. Both the writers construct the plots of their novels in a manner as their protagonists, instead of getting fulfilment, get pain and agony in man-woman relationship. Through the journey of the lives of their leading female characters the authors bring to light the torture done to them by their male counterpart, and the cruelty varies in nature in both the novels. Through the means of their literary works both the writers want to bring a transformation in the society. Kate Millet, a leading feminist points out, "When a system of power is thoroughly in command, it has rarely a need to speak itself aloud. When its working is exposed it becomes not only subjected to discussion, but even to change" (qtd. in Swami 115).

Through the painful story of the characters of Ammu and Mammachi, the protagonist and her mother in the novel, *The God of Small Things* respectively, Arundhati Roy evidently delineates the victimization of the woman in patriarchal society. In her life Ammu becomes a prey to psychological as well as physical violence. When her urge for getting higher education, that is necessary for her

emancipation, is curbed, and she is forced by her father to sit at home waiting for marriage, she is subjected to psychological torture exposing how a father becomes an agent of patriarchy for her daughter as Roy depicts:

Pappachi insists that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl. Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with housework. Since her father didn't have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposal come Ammu's way (38).

It is explicit that marriage is the ultimate destiny for a woman. In this regard Simone de Beauvoir aptly remarks: "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society" (445). Through the plight of Ammu the writer points out the fact that the issue of marriage becomes a source of psychic torment for a girl child in orthodox society.

The author vehemently condemns the discrimination and brutality proffered to the woman in her childhood as well as in the wedlock. Both Ammu and Mammachi are subjected to physical violence by their husbands. Ammu gets married with a drunkard. He goes even to the extent to offer his beautiful wife to his boss Mr. Hollicks. When Ammu protests it, her husband "grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence, suddenly lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her" (Roy 42). It evidently exposes the absurdity of the male-controlled culture where woman is considered as an object and not a human being. Not only the husband, but her brother, Chacko also commits psychological violence on her. Unable to get fulfilment in marital relationship she tries to attain the bliss of life in the company of Valutha, a low caste carpenter, but patriarchal attitude in her brother can't tolerate this love affair. Inflicting a psychological torture he threatens her "Get out of my house before I break every bone in your body" (Roy 225). Reena observes, "The author explicitly highlights that in the patriarchal society a brother, as being the male member of the society, emerges as an authoritative and suffocating figure for her sister" (Domestic 178). It also brings to light the absolute reality of the culture where the woman has no moorings, consequently driving her to the cobweb of atrocities.

Similarly, Mammachi also becomes a prey of brutality as Pappachi-Mammachi relationship is not based on understanding, sharing and equality. She has an exceptional talent of playing violin. She also runs a pickle factory successfully. Her growing potential and talent creates a sense of hatred and jealousy in her husband, consequently making her a victim of physical violence. Roy alleges that, "the beatings weren't new what was new was only the frequency with which they took place" (47-48). The writer explicitly uncovers the stark reality of the patriarchal society where wedlock becomes a web of cruelty and ferocity, and marital relations are based on discrimination and domination, subsequently offering woman a fettered existence. In this regard Uma Vasudev, a famous sociologist clearly remarks, "Even the poorest Indian male is fortunate in having opportunities for releasing his impulse to domination and the fury of his frustrated ego, because he always has a wife whom he can treat as an inferior" (62).

In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande unearths the inner turmoil of Jaya, the heroine of the novel. Through her story the writer vehemently condemns the psychological torture being inflicted on the woman in the male-controlled culture. Jaya used to be exemplary talented and bold before marriage, but after getting married her potential and talent of writing poetry is trampled down because her husband, Mohan doesn't want her to bloom up to the mark. She can't feel the togetherness and warmth of the relationship with her husband, consequently suffering from an emotional vacuum that is a psychic torment on her. In an attempt of bullying her Mohan warns her, "my mother never raised her voice against my father however badly he behaved to her" (Deshpande 83). The tone uncovers the patriarchal attitude of man who thinks that her wife should suffer silently. Now for her husband's

happiness she adopts a forced silence and becomes a silent sufferer. How explicitly Reena brings to light Jaya's inner torture when she asserts:

Though outwardly she keeps smiling but inwardly she is hurt. None can understand her suffering caused by forced silence. In the male dominating society the woman, who keeps smiling in all circumstances and tolerates all sufferings silently without making any complaint, is considered an ideal woman...and similar is the case with Jaya (From Self-Annihilation 79).

The wedlock becomes a cage of mental atrocities for Jaya as her feeling and emotions are not catered to. Now she becomes Suhasini who silently tolerates whims and fancies of her husband because she is told, "The happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you" (Deshpande 138). But the absurdity of this hackneyed culture, where a woman's aspirations and dreams get no significance, rests on her psyche, ultimately subjecting her to cruelty psychologically. Sheela Saravanan aptly observes:

Violence against women is partly a result of gender relations that assumes men superior to women. Given the subordinate status to women, much of gender violence is considered normal and enjoys social sanction. Manifestations of violence include physical aggression...psychological violence through insults, humiliation, coercion, blackmail, economic or emotional threats and control over speech and actions (qtd. in Manju 89).

Thus, the comparative study of both the novels, *That Long Silence* and *The God of Small Things* reveals that the writers, Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy bring into the open the misery of the woman in the male-dominated society where she is subjected to psychical as well as physical violence. Deshpande cracks wide open only the psychological torment from which a woman suffers in the middle class Indian patriarchal society. The inner turmoil is offered to her only by her husband, who denies her the autonomy and individuality, not by her father or brother. In this work the writer depicts physical violence nowhere else. Whereas Arundhati Roy holds up to view that the woman embedded in the male-controlled culture becomes a victim of both types of violence- psychological as well as physical. The female characters, Ammu and Mammachi, in the novel become victims of psychic as well as physical violence in the hands of their male counterparts, subsequently rejecting their aspiration to establish the identity. Moreover, here the torment and ferocity is proffered to the women by every male counterpart whether he is a father, a husband or a brother. None can appreciate her human feelings and emotions.

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