

A Sense of Ignominy in *The God Of Small Things*

R.A. Vats

(Research Scholar, Mewar University, Rajasthan)
(Assistant Professor, Accurate Institute of Management
& Technology, Greater Noida)

Rakhi Sharma

(Research Scholar, Mewar University, Rajasthan)
(Assistant Professor,
I.T.S. Engineering College, Greater Noida)

“The basis of shame is not some personal mistake of ours, but the ignominy, the humiliation we feel that we must be what we are without any choice in the matter, and that this humiliation is seen by everyone”.

- Milan Kundera

This is a disgrace to the rich father whose daughter would collect empty beer bottles and sell them in the market to pay her college fee and earn food. And it is the utter helplessness of the mother who couldn't help to afford her only daughter's study and food allowances. This is no other than the novelist herself, Arundhati Roy. She is humiliated by her friends and ignored by her kith and kin. This is all embarrassing if a daughter of a rich tea planter would live a miserable life. Roy has projected herself in one of Ammu's twins Rahel in the novel. Like her, Rahel with her mother and twin brother is deserted by her father who is also a tea planter in Assam. Her mother Ammu suffers bitter ignominy at the hands of her husband, her brother and her aunty, Baby Kochamma and the police officer at Kottayam police station. She bears the sting of humiliation wherever she goes and in whatever she does. An attempt has been made here to project Roy's sympathy with the ignored and her disgust against the ignorers in the novel. Ammu, the lady protagonist in the novel submits to her predicament. She admits that she is herself responsible to her plight and the misery of her offspring. She adapts to the abominable condition and never tries to come out of it. She marries a non-Christian, Bengali tea planter against the wishes of her parents; but very soon she gets divorced from him. She is now all alone, disappointed and in utter dilemma – of to be or not to be. She has no other option but to return to her parents' where she would never like to come back. She comes back to the wrath of her parents and cynicism of Baby Kochamma (also called Baby Aunt), her father's sister. Her decision to marry the Bengali tea planter against the wishes of parents brings ignominy and distress in her life. She didn't believe how a person pledging to lead whole life with her, to love her for ever and never hurt her sentiments, could ever think to offer his wife to his boss for saving his job. She remained taciturn over the chameleon change of her husband. She was shocked and somehow managed to flee from the husbandry humiliation. Eventually she “left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem. To everything that she had fled from only a few years ago” (Roy 42).

A person can never escape from his destiny. It brings Ammu to the place where she never wanted to come back; it brings her to the people whom she never wanted to see again. She finds herself as a stranger in the house of her own parents. They don't procure her as they would do her before she was a girl viz. an apple of their eyes. A kind of grudge seeps up their veins against their daughter and her inbreed children. They hold grudge against she got married to a non-Christian and eventually she abased the family name in the Christian society.

They hold grudge against Baba who proposed their daughter and vowed to steadily stand by her forever and divorced her. They feel ashamed that the society would look down upon their daughter as a divorcee and as an omen. As a social view is commonly held that a married woman has no place in her parents' home. Baby Aunty adds: "As for a *divorced* daughter she had no position anywhere at all (Roy,45). Ammu silently tolerates Baby Aunt's critical humiliation. She is so gentle; she never criticizes Baby Aunt for the latter's affair with a priest. Lady cynical viz. Baby Aunty is in Ayemenem house because her proposal was declined by a bishop. It is said that that Baby Kochamma fell in love with a clergyman. The two were seen infatuated towards each other but the bishop lost his interest in her. Still the parson continued amorous proximity with Baby through love billets. Baby Aunty was all set to do the same deed what was done by Ammu but unluckily she failed and couldn't be alleged to defile the image of the family earlier than her cousin. It seems that Ammu has confided with her destiny and wishes to purge her sins through deep disgrace. It is, as believes Ammu, the discomfiture that can wash out her all vices. Thus she is herself answerable to her fiasco. It is a sin if a marriage-fiasco-daughter claims her father's assets while a love-fiasco-sister is entitled to proclaim herself a prospective owner of her brother's property.

It is a shame upon an affluent family if it's one inmate dies a miserable death. Ammu's life ends in all shame. She dies all alone in a room of a hotel where she was called to face an interview for a waitress. She is doubted to be a sex worker. The news of her suspicious death spreads all over the hamlet like jungle fire; especially tidings of her ignominy that a whore found dead in the hotel room broke out far and wide. And this only inspires scorn in the people instead of sympathy with her. None comes forward to join her funeral ceremony. She is refused to burial in the churchyard. Nobody advocates for her basic right to have a land for eternal peace in the holy land of graveyard. Her brother Chacko solicits for her ritualistic burial, but the petition is declined on the grounds that the church solemnizes only sublime deaths, not shameful ones. This is ignominy of death. All through life Ammu struggled for survival, bore bitter humiliation within home and outside in the locus; but everywhere she attracted only public aversion and that only helped to estrange her from herself. Her dead body is wrapped in dirty sag and laid on a stretcher. It is electrocuted to ashes, and thus ends Ammu's episode of humiliation. Nobody but the daughter of the cremated, Rahel envisages the cremation like the final journey of Caesar, the Roman emperor. She calls up Estha as the Caesar who speaks the last words to his most trustworthy friend Brutus – "Et tu, Ammu?" It is very difficult to investigate who killed whom in actual. It is Ammu who virtually slays her children second time; first they were damned by Baba to lead live-death. Rahel feels herself and twin brother completely deserted and soberly blames her deceased mother to put them in such predicament. Now Ammu is reduced into complete taciturnity but her humiliation remains alive and accedes to her children. Chacko consoles Rahel but the child finds no comfort in his shallow sympathy. She badly misses presence of Estha, her twin brother. He could not bid final adieu to mother, his both 'Baba and Ammu' and couldn't observe last peace rituals. Nothing can be more ignominious for a woman who passes away without any of her twins "at her back in bed". All life she was humiliated but overall more humiliating was her end. Roy appears to grieve over the ceremony of Ammu's funeral. Ammu throughout life suffered disgust of her family and the society too; and Death also embarrassed and deprived her from the basic Christian right i.e. coffin-space earth for her eternal peace. The novelist seems to bitterly condemn the ignominy of Ammu's death and calls up Shakespeare's reproach against it: "Thy ignominy sleep with thee in the grave, But not remember'd in thy epitaph!" (Henry IV). The person whose death the dramatist bemoans is relatively luckier for at least it finds some place in the churchyard for eternal peace. Ammu's spirit couldn't get salvation for as per Christian code, only the burials are blessed and elevated to the heaven. She is not entitled to win kindness of Christ as well as of *Ishawar*, but nobody can drag back

her from the company of her ignominy, her fellow traveler and her own offspring born of her meekness.

A police officer also insults Ammu before her daughter. He taps “her breasts with his baton. Gently. *Tap, tap*. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket” (Roy,8). Her only crime was that she came to see Velutha, a criminal suspected to kill Sophie Mol. She is suspected to have illicit relation with the criminal. She, a lady of high birth, is behaved like a harlot. Chacko, her real brother doesn’t hesitate to reprimand her for she ridiculed his ex-wife, Margaret. Actually Margaret laughs at Maria, the maid who welcome-sniffs Sophie Mol’s palms. He insults Ammu publically and says: “I think you owe my wife an apology”(Roy, 179). This deeply hurt Ammu and she feels very low in her own eyes. She finds herself utterly desolate and all alone with her kith and kin around and calls herself and her twins “some damn godforsaken tribe”. It seems; she wants to redress all her sins taciturnly undergoing tough trials of life. Roy puts forth a paradigm of ignominy that caused unforgettable human massacre at Kurukshetra during the Mahabharat. The warrior, Karna was more sinned than a sinner. Roy sympathizes with the brave soldier and grieves over his destiny: “He *is* Karna, whom the world has abandoned.” He was “a prince raised in poverty” and “born to die unfairly, unarmed and alone at the hands of his brother” (Roy, 232).

Ammu’s vulnerability is the main cause which invites ignominy in her life and ruins her ‘millstones’ too. She is, to an extent, the cause to force her children adopt personal grudge and lead life like orphans. Like their mother, they are also molested and bitterly humiliated at the hands of the family and the society. Estha ever holds up his “right hand” – a *chhi-chhi* hand away from his left all the time; because at *Abhilash Talkies*, a vendor molested him for a cold drink. The boy hates himself. He more hates when he watches the movie “The Sound of Music” and finds the hero Clapp-Trapp-Christopher dislikes the dirty children. And he is very dirty with “right hand” smeared with the black man’s “soo-soo”, therefore he deserves no love. The unfortunate twins grew up unloved and uncontrolled. Paucity of love made them vagrants and indiscipline vagabonds. The family cynicism filled them with contempt, created a kind of void. Estha fears that mother would find out “...what he had done with the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, she’d love him less as well. Very much less” (Roy,114). Rahel feels “a cold moth” creep on her heart, for she ridiculed her brother’s xenophobia of and mother’s praise for the black vendor. She fears she would likely lose mother’s love. The twins never got father’s love. Now they fear to lose mother’s love. They feel alone and ignored by their mother too. They are considered as jinxes by their Aunt. Ammu is forced to leave the house. She goes to attend an interview for a waitress’s job and dies a suspicious death. Since she is found dead in a hotel room, she is labeled a sex worker. Life has no mercy on her. The scene of deep personal contempt is rampant in the novel.

Thus the novel is the urn of the dark ignominy. It is ignominy which brings disrespectful end to Ammu and horribly painful end to Velutha; it is this sense of ignominy that settles in the tender minds of the twins and turns them pessimistic. It is this –only this that draws Roy’s sympathy towards the humiliated and antipathy towards the disgusting tormentors of the novel.

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 (All subsequent citations to the edition are given in the text of the paper)