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Silent Screams: The Impact of Sexual Violence in Women's Bodies in *The God of Small Things* and *Breast Givers*

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Abstract:

Sexual violence has long haunted the lives of women and continues to be a critical and ever-persistent issue, both personally and socio-politically. This paper aims to explore the theme of sexual violence on women's bodies in two critically acclaimed literary works, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Givers*. Utilizing a comparative analysis, this paper will delve into the poignant manner in which each author portrays the devastating consequences of sexual violence on the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of their female characters. *The God of Small Things* reveals the tumultuous unravelling of a family dealing with the systemic and cultural barriers that allow for the perpetuation of sexual violence. In contrast, *Breast Givers* discloses a disconcerting tale of labour exploitation and abuse faced by a poor Indian wet-nurse. Through these two narratives, we attempt to discern the ways sexual violence manifests itself within familial and occupational spaces. By examining the female characters' experiences in both novels, we seek to understand the interconnectedness of their traumas with the inflicted violence. The paper also emphasizes the authors' use of language and unique narrative techniques as tools to express the raw, visceral emotions embedded within their stories. Furthermore, we analyze how societal norms, caste systems, and patriarchal structures contribute to the reinforcement of sexual violence in these narratives. Lastly, the paper aims to shed light on the resilience and strength demonstrated by these characters in the face of adversities arising due to sexual violence. Through the exploration of these themes, we hope to contribute to a broader understanding of sexual violence's impact on the lives of women in literary works and societies at large.

Keywords: Sexual Violence, women's bodies, exploitation, patriarchy, societal norms.

The God of Small Things:

Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* delves into the theme of sexual violence on women's bodies. The book takes place in India and explores the lives of several female characters who experience sexual violence and the deep, long-lasting impact it has on their lives. Through her writing, Roy shows how sexual violence is both a deeply personal trauma and a systemic issue that affects women's physical and mental well-being, as well as their social standing. One of the most prominent examples of sexual violence in the novel is the forced sexual relationship between Ammu and Velutha, an untouchable member of the community. Velutha, who is also a father figure to

Ammu's children, is punished for this transgression by the powerful, Brahmin Ipe family and Ammu is ostracized and shamed for the rest of her life. Through her writing, Roy highlights how societal power dynamics perpetuate and reinforce the cycle of sexual violence against women. Although Velutha and Ammu's relationship is consensual, the Ipe family uses their power to label Velutha as a rapist and effectively silence Ammu's voice. The novel also explores the impact of sexual violence on children. Sophie Mol, Ammu's daughter, is raped and killed by a group of men in a brutal act of sexual violence. The loss of Sophie Mol deeply affects the entire family, and Ammu's son Estha, who is present during the assault on Sophie Mol, is emotionally damaged and disengaged from the world. Sophie Mol's death is a stark reminder of the vulnerability of women's bodies and the trauma that can be inflicted upon them. Throughout the novel, Roy shows how women who experience sexual violence are further marginalized by their communities. Ammu, for example, is ostracized and labeled a "fallen woman" for having consensual sex with Velutha. By contrast, the men who perpetrate acts of sexual violence against women in the novel receive little to no punishment or censure. The clear disparity in punishment reinforces the idea that women's bodies are expendable and that men's consensual, out-of-marriage actions reinforce the "untouchable" status. Overall, *The God of Small Things* highlights the destructive impact of sexual violence on women's bodies and suggests that it is a systemic issue that needs to be addressed holistically. Through her portrayal of the lives of her female characters, Roy points to the need for greater awareness, education, and gender sensitivity. Her writing shows that only through a concerted effort to change societal attitudes and behaviors can we hope to curtail the violence against women that is so pervasive in our world today.

The novel explores the theme of social pressure on women's bodies. The book takes place in India, and the main female character, Ammu, navigates societal expectations related to her appearance, sexuality, and motherhood. The novel addresses the various ways in which social pressures are exerted on women's bodies, and how this can lead to women being mistreated, abused, or marginalized. One way in which women in the novel experience social pressure is through their appearance. In the Indian society depicted in the book, there are rigid standards of beauty that dictate how women should dress and present themselves. These standards are perpetuated by the media, by family members, and by other women in the community. For example, Baby Kochamma, Ammu's aunt, is obsessed with the idea of "fairness" and consistently pressures Ammu and her daughter, Sophie Mol, to use skin-lightening products. Roy writes, "Baby Kochamma's love for Sophie Mol was an extension of her love for the fairness cream that she applied to her own face - and to Ammu's" (p. 68).

The God of Small Things is a literary commentary on the theme of patriarchal domination over the female body. The novel shows how societal, cultural, and familial structures work

collaboratively to reinforce the idea of women's bodies as passive entities, often leading to their physical and emotional abuse. Roy's text shows the impact of patriarchal ideology on society and the individual lives of women. Throughout the novel, Roy portrays how patriarchal norms perpetuate the oppression of women's bodies, leading to their suffering and marginalization. For instance, female characters are denied the right to express themselves or their desires. Any form of an attempt to take the agency of their own lives and bodies is punished by society. For example, Ammu, the protagonist of the novel, is punished for having an affair with someone who is considered beneath her caste. As a punishment, the society labels her as shameless and immoral, and her body is subjected to physical and emotional abuse.

Overall, *The God of Small Things* presents a critical commentary on the patriarchal society where women's bodies have been politicized and oppressed, further perpetuating a cycle of violence and marginalization. The novel emphasizes the need to challenge and dismantle the patriarchal constructs and ideologies that govern women's lives and bodies. It calls for the reconstruction of an equitable and just society based on respect, equality, and agency for all genders. Through her work, Roy emphasizes the importance of gender equality, individual agency, and an inclusionary view of beauty and worth. It is only by raising societal consciousness and nurturing a shift in societal perspectives that we can hope to create a society in which the female body is celebrated, protected, and empowered.

Breast Stories:

Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories* explores the theme of patriarchal oppression of women's bodies through the lens of different female characters. The stories reveal how social, economic, and cultural structures are used to control and regulate women's bodies, often leading to their physical and emotional abuse. In "Draupadi," the protagonist's body is objectified and commodified when she is forced to work as a prostitute. Her body becomes a site of exploitation for men who patronize her, and she is repeatedly subjected to verbal and physical abuse. She is not respected as an individual but rather as a tool to fulfil men's desires. Her body is used and abused for the patriarchal system's benefit, which perpetuates a cycle of violence and oppression. Similarly, in "Breast-giver," Jashoda's body is used to nourish her husband's brother's children. However, she is expected to do so without pay, leading to her financial ruin. She is only valued for her body's ability to produce milk, whereas her intellect and other potentialities are ignored. Her body is not viewed as something that belongs to her but rather as an object that can be utilized by others. In "The Breast-Giver," Rani's body is objectified by a wealthy man who hires her to nurse his child. She is expected to work long hours for meager pay, exposing her to physical and emotional exhaustion. Her body is exploited and subjugated, with no regard for her well-being or dignity. Despite her efforts to organize nursing women against such exploitation, patriarchal values continue to undermine women's efforts to gain

agency over their own bodies. Overall, *Breast Stories* highlights the patriarchal oppression present in various forms in contemporary Indian society. Women's bodies are objectified and commodified, leading to their social, economic, and cultural marginalization. Such oppression reinforces the notion that women's bodies are a means of male gratification rather than a site of autonomy and self-worth.

In the collection of stories, the theme of cultural and social oppression of women through their bodies is consistently present throughout each narrative. The exploitation of women's bodies is further perpetuated by India's patriarchal society and patriarchal systems, creating a cyclical reinforcement of this subjugation. Women without privileges are considered as property, without any rights of their own. They are forced to serve the individuals who are higher in the social hierarchy, their bodies regarded as tools that may be used to perform sexual acts or to produce a child. Finally, "Behind the Bodice" speaks to the beauty standards that are prevalent in the world today. Women are expected to fit into certain body types and are often subjected to plastic surgery or other aesthetic treatments. This pressure to conform to beauty ideals is a form of social oppression that is subtly endorsed by society. These unrealistic expectations often lead to women feeling insecure and unattractive, leading them to believe that their worthiness is based solely on their physical appearance.

The short stories in the book reflect women's experiences with their bodies, depicting the social, economic, and cultural pressures that force them to use their bodies in ways that often subject them to exploitation and abuse. With the theme of the exploitation of women's bodies, Devi denounces the idea that women's bodies can be treated as a commodity for others to consume or receive their financial gains. These stories highlight the physical, mental, and emotional harm that is inflicted on women when they are treated as selling points, leading the readers to recognize the urgent need to redefine the relationship between women and their bodies. Women are portrayed as flawed yet beautiful, promoting this concept to grow cosmetic sales, leading women to chase the impossible image establishments set for them, leading to insecurities, eating disorders, and other social and psychological issues.

Conclusion:

The female body has always been a site of encroachment in Indian society. Patriarchal beliefs, customs, and practices have led to the objectification and reduction of women to their physical attributes, making them vulnerable to various forms of abuse and exploitation. This theme of women's bodies as a site of encroachment has been a recurring one in Indian texts written in English. Mahasweta Devi's "Breast Stories" is a short story collection that highlights the issue of women's bodies being used as objects of exploitation and commodification. The stories in the collection deal with women from marginalized communities who are forced to use their bodies as a means of survival due to poverty and societal oppression. Devi's stories highlight how the female

body is made vulnerable by the intersection of poverty, patriarchy, and caste. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is another significant text that deals with the theme of women's bodies as a site of encroachment. The novel is set in Kerala, where the caste system and patriarchal values are deeply embedded. The female protagonist, Ammu, is subjected to sexual and emotional abuse by men, and her body is reduced to an object of desire. The novel highlights how patriarchal beliefs and practices lead to the violation of women's bodies and the consequent trauma they experience. Moreover, poets in the Indian English literature also have explored the theme of women's bodies as a site of encroachment. These works highlight the ways in which patriarchal beliefs, the caste system, and socio-economic factors intersect to make women vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. With their power to challenge, explore and critique the social and cultural systems that enforce such hierarchical ideas while bringing to limelight the plight of women who bears the brunt of a complex intersecting reality they encourage society to reflect and urged for feminist activism. By expressing themselves through literature Indian women writers show that this understanding and exchange of ideas can and must continue to focus on creating with the idea of dismantling such oppressive practices that misrepresent the relationship between the female body and its worth in societal representation.

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