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**A STUDY OF CHILD ABUSE IN ARUNDHATI
ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS**

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A Study of Child Abuse in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things

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Abstract – Child abuse is the physical, sexual, emotional mistreatment or neglect of a child. In the United State the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define child maltreatment as any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm or threat of harm to a child. Child abuse can occur in a child's home or in the organizations, schools or communities the child interact with. There are four major categories of child abuse: neglect, physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse and child sexual abuse.

Different jurisdictions have developed their own definitions of what constitutes child abuse for the purpose of removing a child from his/her family and/or prosecuting a criminal charge. According to The Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect:

Child abuse is any recent act or failure to act on the part of parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, an act or failure to act which present and imminent risk of serious harm. (Herrenkohl, 2005)

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INTRODUCTION

Child abuse can take several forms. Child neglect is where the responsible adult does not provide adequately for various needs, including physical (not providing adequate food, clothing or hygiene), emotional (not providing nurturing or affection), educational (not enrolling a child in school), or medical (not medicating the child or taking him or her to the doctor). There are many effects of child neglect such as children not being able to interact with other children around him or her. The continuous refusal of a child's basic need is considered chronic neglect. The physical abuse is physical aggression directed at a child by an adult. It can involve punching, striking, kicking, shoving, slapping, burning, bruising, pulling ears or hair, stabbing, choking, belting or shaking a child. Most nations with child-abuse laws consider the infliction of physical injuries or actions that place the child in obvious risk of serious injury or death to be illegal. Beyond this, there is considerable variation. The distinction between child discipline and abuse is often poorly defined. Some human-service professionals claim that cultural norms that sanction physical punishment are one of the causes of child abuse, and have undertaken campaigns to redefine such norms.

Child sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent abuse a child for sexual

stimulation. Forms of child sexual abuse including asking or pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities indecent exposure of the genitals to a child, displaying pornography to a child, actual sexual contact against a child, physical contact with the child's genitals, viewing of the child's genitalia without physical contact or using a child to produce child pornography. Effects of child sexual abuse include guilt and self-blame, flashbacks, nightmares, insomnia, fear of things associated with abuse (including objects, smells, places, doctor's visits, etc), self-esteem issues, sexual dysfunction, chronic pain, addiction, self-injury, suicidal ideation, somatic complaints, depression, anxiety, other mental illnesses. Most sexual abuse offenders are acquainted with their victims; approximately 30% are relatives of the child, most often brothers, fathers, mothers, uncles or cousins; around 60% are other acquaintances such as friends of the family, babysitters or neighbours; strangers and the offenders in approximately 10% of child sexual abuse cases.

Out of the possible forms of abuse, psychological/emotional abuse is the hardest to define. It could include name-calling, ridicule, degradation, destruction of personal belongings, torture or destruction of a pet, excessive criticism, inappropriate or excessive demands, withholding communication and routine labeling or humiliation.

Victims of emotional abuse may react by distancing themselves from the abuser, internalizing the abusive words, or fighting back by insulting the abuser. Emotional abuse can result in abnormal or disrupted attachment development, a tendency for victims to blame themselves (self-blame) for the abuse, learned helplessness and overly passive behavior. A recent publication, *Hidden Costs in Health Care; The Economic Impact of Violence and Abuse* says:

Child abuse is a major life stress or that has consequences involving the mental health of an adult but, the majority of studies, examining the negative consequences of abuse have been focused on adolescences and young adults. Sexual abuse is the form of abuse that can cause the most damage as it is not seen, it can hurt a person emotionally, psychologically and physically. It has been identified that childhood sexual abuse is a risk factor for the development of substance related problems during adolescence and adulthood. (Dolezal T, McCollum, D; Callahan, M., 2009)

According to the (American) National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse, in 1997 neglect represented 54% of confirmed cases of child abuse, physical abuse 22%, sexual abuse 8%, emotional maltreatment 4%, and other forms of maltreatment 12%. A UNICEF report on child wellbeing stated that the United States and the United Kingdom ranked lowest among industrial nations with respect to the wellbeing of children. It also found that child neglect and child abuse were for more common in single-parent families than in families where both parents are present. In the USA, neglect is defined as the failure to meet the basic needs of children including housing, clothing, food and access to medical care. Neglect could also take the form of financial abuse by not buying the child adequate materials for survival.

Trauma – focused cognitive behavioral therapy, first developed to treat sexually abused children is now used for victims of any kind of trauma. Abuse – focused cognitive behavioral therapy was designed for children who have experienced physical abuse. It targets externalizing behaviours and strengthens prosocial behaviours. Other forms of treatment include group therapy, play therapy and art therapy. Each of these types of treatment can be used to better assist the client, depending on the form of abuse they have experienced.

There are organizations at national, state and country levels in the United States that provide community leadership in preventing child abuse and neglect. The National Alliance of Children's Trust Funds and Prevent Child Abuse America are two National Organizations with member organizations at the state level. Many investigations into child abuse are handled on the local level by child Advocacy Centers.

In *The God of Small Things*, the child abuse is used for Rahel and Estha, two-egg twins, as dizygotic

doctors called them, born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs. The twins are victims of child abuse. As we know that Ammu, their mother, is a divorcee and comes to live in her parent's home Ayemenem. They are unwelcomed by other members of Ayemenem family. As Baby Kochamma is of the view that a married daughter has no position in her parent's home. As for a divorced daughter she had no position anywhere at all, as well as for her children. For this reason, the twins are neglected by the family members.

Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. Worse still, they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry. She was keen for them to realize that they (like hereslef) lived on sufferance in the Ayemenem House, their maternal grandmother's house, where they really had no right to be. (45)

Though Ammu, Estha and Rahel are allowed to attend the funeral of Sophie Mol, they are made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family. Nobody would look at them. Chacko, their uncle, is in the habit of saying, "What's your's is mine, and what's mine is also mine" (57). After Ammu death's Rahel drifts between schools, receiving little attention from Chacko and Mammachi. Perhaps her being Ammu's child stigmatizes her, but also her being female deprives her of those basic conditions that are necessary for the healthy growth of any child. The family members provided the care (food, clothes, fees), but withdrew the concern. Even she is ignored by her classmates. She is never invited to their nice homes or noisy parties. She is accused of hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors. She occasionally writes to Chacko and Mammachi, but never returns to Aye Menem. Not when Mammachi dies, not when Chacko emigrates to Canada.

Rahel grew up without a brief. Without anybody to arrange a marriage for her. Without anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore without an obligatory husband looming on her horizon. (17)

There is little physical abuse as these two twins are concerned. Margaret Kochamma's grief and bitterness at her daughter's death coiled inside her like an angry spring. She says nothing, but slaps Estha wherever she can in the days she is there before she returns to England. Both twins are also victims of their parent's anger.

They remembered his anger. And Ammu's. 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'. (84)

Ammu is also victim of child abuse in her childhood. As a child she is much exposed to the family violence in the form of Pappachi exploding into fits of temper due to his frustrations in his professional career. Ammu is a

very small girl when Mammachi receives those beatings : "Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase" (47). Pappachi also beats Ammu, the little girl with iron topped riding crop and to add insult to injury cut with scissors her best gumboots into streds cold-bloodedly before her eyes and scattered them all around.

In her growing years, Ammu had watched her father weave his hideous web. He was charming and urbane with visitors, and stopped just short of fawning on them if they happened to be white. He donated money to orphanages and leprosy clinics. But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father. (180)

Estha is sexually abused by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man at the Abhilash Talkies theater. Estha goes behind the Refreshments counter for his free cold drink.

'Orange? Lemon' the Man said. 'Lemonorange?' 'Lemon, please,' Estha said politely. He got a cold bottle and a straw. So he held a bottle in one hand and a penis in the other. Hard, hot, veiny. Not a moonbeam. His hand closed tighter over Estha's. Tight and seaty. And faster still. Fast faster festNever let it restUntil the fast is faster,And the faster's fest. (103-104)

This incident made a great effect on Estha's mind. When Ammu asks Estha to stay with Orangedrink Lemondrink Uncle, he suddenly refuses the proposal. He knows that if Ammu finds out about what he has done with the Orangedrink Lemondrink man, she'll love him less. Also Rahel is sad because what the Orangedrink Lemondrink man has done to Estha in Abhilash Talkies. As Rahel says: "You're not the Sinners. You're the Sinned Against. You were only children. You had no control. You are the *victimms*, not the perpetrators" (191).

Both children are also victims of emotional abuse. At Cochin airport Ammu fuses over her daughter's behavior, for hiding in a dirty curtain and spoiling her clean dress. When Ammu is advising her daughter not to behave in an improper way at that moment, Baby Kochamma says: "It is useless, they're sly. They're uncouth. Deceitful. They're growing wild. You can't manage them" (149).

Everyone in Ayemenem family thinks that both these twins are responsible for Sophia Mol's death, Chacko is much upset and says:

Get out of my house before I break every bone in your body ! My house, my pineapple, my pickle. After that

for years Rahel would dream this dream: a fat man, faceless, kneeling beside a woman's corpse. Hacking its hair off. Breaking every bone in its body. Snapping even the little ones. The fingers. The ear bones cracked like twigs. (225)

Meanwhile Ammu makes an illicit relationship with Velutha, an untouchable paravan, with much dismay of Baby Kochamma and Mammachi that makes a psychological effect on both these twin. Now Ammu is locked in a room, by Baby Kochamma, when both twins ask the reason of this act Ammu says:

Because of you!' Ammu had screamed. 'If it wasn't for you 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 millstones round my neck! 'Just go away!' Ammu had said. 'Why can't you just go away and leave me alone? (253)

These words of Ammu, have an emotional effect on them and they decide to run away, from this houses, because Ammu doesn't want them anymore. After Ammu's death, there is no one in Ayemenem family to look after them. Estha never goes to college and acquires a number of habits, such as wondering as very long walks and obsessively cleaning his clothes. Rahel, a dizygotic twin returns to the place of her childhood and subsequently a place of unhappiness to see her brother, the other twin, after more than twenty years of separation. Estha, the brother, has stopped talking, and Rahel has stopped feeling. Their reunion allows for the remembrance and grieving of their disastrous childhood and youths. They recall small things, seemingly unimportant, yet vital to the reconstruction of their sense of inner peace. They broke 'the Love Laws'. That lay down who should be loved and how and how much.

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