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**Homes of Oppression, Sites of Resistance: Exploring Resilience in Domestic Spaces in *The God of Small Things* and *That Long Silence***

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the themes of oppression, resistance, and resilience in domestic spaces in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. The selected novels situate these novels within a sociocultural context to analyze the influence of the caste system, familial expectations, and political frameworks on the protagonist's lives. By employing a comparative approach, the study delves into the struggles the protagonists face within domestic spaces and their navigation against systemic oppression. The study emphasizes feminist literary theory to investigate gender inequalities and patriarchal domination in the family structure, revealing how women resist and demonstrate resilience within domestic spaces. This study highlights how to resist and demonstrate resilience within oppressive domestic environments. By doing so, this study underscores how Roy and Deshpande portray homes as both sites of suppression and resistance domains.

**Keywords:** Domestic, Oppression, Resistance, Resilience. Patriarchy.

**Introduction:**

In contemporary Indian literature, the exploration of domestic spaces as sites of both oppression and resistance has emerged as a powerful theme, particularly in works that examine the complex interplay of gender, caste, and societal expectations. This study delves into two seminal novels, Arundhati Roy's "*The God of Small Things*" and Shashi Deshpande's "*That Long Silence*," to investigate how the protagonists navigate and challenge the oppressive structures within their homes. The domestic sphere, traditionally viewed as a sanctuary, often becomes a battleground for women in patriarchal societies.

Roy and Deshpande, through their nuanced portrayals, illuminate the multifaceted nature of oppression within familial contexts while simultaneously highlighting the resilience and resistance strategies employed by their female characters. By using a sociocultural lens and feminist literary theory, this comparative analysis seeks to uncover the

intricate ways in which caste dynamics, familial expectations, and political influences shape the experiences of women within domestic spaces.

**Literature Review:**

- Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) argues on marginalised voices particularly women how they are often silenced and even they are unable to articulate lately which forms resistance in postcolonial societies.
- Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (1984) critiques of women's writings frequently look into sociocultural contexts, particularly in postcolonial societies. He emphasizes how gender inequalities in domestic spaces are shaped by patriarchal and postcolonial conditions. Kaur, R. (2020) observes how silence manipulates to form resistance for women characters through this agency within patriarchal dominations.
- Rani, M. (2019) examines the different forms of feminine resistance portrayed in the novel with a detailed study of navigating society's expectations and the individual struggle of Jaya. Bhargava, A. (2021) highlights that domestic spaces serve as a sight of oppression and resilience, observing the interaction between gender roles and resistance.

**Methodology:**

This study employs a comparative literary analysis approach to examine the representation of domestic spaces as sites of oppression and resistance in TGST and TLS. The research utilizes close reading techniques to identify themes, character development, and narrative structures within the domestic sphere. Textual evidence is collected and categorized to explore the intersection of gender, caste, and societal expectations in shaping the experiences of their female protagonists. Additionally, contextual analysis is used to situate sociocultural and historical frameworks and understand the power structures and resistance strategies depicted in the narratives.

**Theoretical framework:**

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon *Feminist Literary Theory* and *Postcolonial Criticism* to interpret the selected texts. This paper referred to feminist theorists such as Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Elaine Showalter's *Gynocriticism*, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

For this study, Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) has referred to uncovering the oppression and resistance within the domestic sphere. These theoretical approaches are complemented by sociocultural theories that explore the construction of identity and agency within oppressive systems.

**Sociocultural Contextualization**

*The God of Small Things* (TGST) demonstrates the combat of socio-political, caste, and cultural aspects in Kerala Society. The novel sheds light upon the cultural disruption of class-caste, untouchable, and gender disparities. The story is set up in the backdrop of the south Indian context in the state of Kerala. Where upper-caste Syrian Christians have a strong influence on traditional beliefs. The story is predominated by the family of Ipe of Ayemenem house in the village of Kottayam district of Kerala, which has rigid social practices. In Kerala's society, the concept of marriage is a highly regarded and respected practice.

Whereas, in Ayemenem, it seems different as observed; Syrian Christian families of this house restricted elopements or divorces.

Characters such as Ammu, Mammachi, and Baby Kochamma seem to be deprived of women's desires because of strong, rigid social norms. According to their wishes, if they act, they are observed, punished, or banned by the people in the village. Considering familial expectations, women of Ayemenem have lost their love, marriage, and any worldly pleasures because of caste or class issues. Velutha, representing a lower-class Paravan, was targeted, tortured, and killed for having a relationship with a higher-caste woman, Ammu. Treating Paravans as outcasts, they were used as slaves and restricted from entering upper-class houses. Witnessing these losses, Roy sets this novel in these cultural backdrops to enhance the serious tension of caste and class clashes in society.

*That Long Silence* is carved in a middle-class family set up located in Mumbai, Maharashtra, where Jaya and Mohan, as husband and wife together, lead their marital relationship. Both struggle to prove their identity and existence throughout the novel. Jaya is portrayed as a Modern Indian middle-class housewife who knows all her days adjusting and understanding her husband. Many times, she questions herself about gender disparity and the priorities of men in common in the family and society. She experiences complexities, obligations, societal boundaries, and violence against men's treatment of women. Mohan, representing patriarchal Indian societal beliefs, expects Jaya to perform and obey according to the sociocultural traditional practices. He tries to cope with Jaya to balance the marital understanding. Mohan married Jaya because she is modern and speaks and writes well in English. This may enhance his social standards and make him equal to those of his colleagues' wives. Unknown about this matter, Jaya was skeptical about his expectations of her to follow the strict traditional rules of society and her family.

Deshpande highlights Jaya's character to demonstrate men's attitude, demands, and societal obligations to women to project themselves as good wives in the family. Mohan, with a male chauvinistic ideology, had taught to act as a typical Indian husband towards Jaya. In contrast, Jaya, as a modern English-educated woman, was raised by a literate father in her family who taught her to be independent and literate in society without any obligations upon her. After marriage, women may go through several mental adjustments, but men usually have less. Jaya partially felt as if she was trapped inside her marriage, taking the role of wife and mother; she was suffering to get out of the issues. Domestic oppression and subjugation lead women to suffer, resist, and endure for longer periods. Jaya is represented as most of the middle-class women in this novel. As a result, with these socio-cultural, traditional, and political barriers, women fit into these societal conditions, in which we observe the family dynamics that are considered homes of oppression for women.

Ammu and Jaya, representing women of the Indian societal cultural set, go through similar familial issues. Both struggled to be liberated. Lack of love and discrimination in the family and society suppressed their voice and trained themselves to submerge. Later, both resisted being the same for a certain period and established their own identity through their actions.

**Thematic Analysis:**

This study highlights how *The God of Small Things* and *That Long Silence* portray domestic spaces as sites of both oppression and resistance, where women challenge sociocultural restraints and assert their agency. This study emphasizes Maya and Ammu's marital and familial conditions, which are characterized by oppression and resistance inside their domestic spaces, and provides glimpses of their sufferings.

**1. Domestic Spaces as a Site of Oppression**

**The God of Small Things:**

Ammu was traumatized and brutally tortured by the drunkard husband who pimped her to his boss to get a promotion. Tormented by all of this, she rejected him and returned to Ayemenem with her twin kids, "In the pit of her stomach she carried the cold knowledge that, for her life had been she lived. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man" (Roy 38) As rigid traditional motifs of Ayemenem she did not receive decent welcome by her family but, "Ammu quickly learned to recognize and despise the ugly face of sympathy." (Roy 43) she fought with rejection and disparity from her family members for over crossing the family system. Hence, she found herself trapped, neglected, and subjugated.

Ayemenem house symbolizing an old, decaying state stands as autonomy under patriarchy and fixed stereotype beliefs women are expected to be mature, manipulated, and bound by norms. Here Ammu is significantly represented as Ayemenem where she was alone, decaying without marital happiness, suppressed under the manipulations.

**That Long Silence:**

'Jaya,' the name given by her father when she was born, always looked victorious in all her studies and work. When she got married to Mohan, he changed her name from Jaya to 'Suhasini.' Despite Jaya/victory, she failed to find her identity and forgot to smile/ Suhasini after her marriage. The initial days of marital life were challenging for her, as she had to adjust, understand, and learn new things about Mohan's family. After their shift to Dadar, Mumbai, she started to relate to herself as '*Seeta*,' who hid her desires, priorities, and needs. She listened and obeyed her elders. As Vanitamami teaches to Jaya as follows,

"a husband is like a sheltering tree," [...] Without the tree, you're dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. This followed logically. And you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies. This too followed equally logically." (Deshpande 32)"

She was confused and skeptical about the system of her in-law's familial culture, their domestic practices, and behavioral modifications toward their husbands. Vanita Mami's words played a major role in Jaya's life, taming her anger and silencing her from speaking against Mohan. Jaya believed in protecting their marital relationship through her silence. But this new behavior infuriated Mohan, as he was outspoken about her silence. He says, "Why don't you say something? You don't seem interested. It seems to me you just don't care." (Deshpande 32). All that time, she followed her elders' advice, but she never gave a thought to questioning them; that is why she had to follow them all. She confronted his anger many times, but she never forgot to remember her elders' advice to "*Take your pain between your teeth, bite on it, don't let it escape.*" (Deshpande 125) Jaya carried her silence throughout her married period, which became suffocating and oppressive. Even though she could

express her anger towards Mohan's deeds, decisions, and views, she was not part of any of them.

This domestic violence has been discussed in feminist critiques such as Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, where she concentrates on women's roles in the households as an object tied up with domestic duties. Judith Butler's *Gender Performativity* gives the idea of how women have been expected to behave and follow cultural norms. Therefore, Jaya has shaped and constructed herself as a subject; she has changed her behavior and molded it according to her husband's and family's expectations. Ammu seems entrapped and expected to follow the traditional practices. In the above interpretations, we see how patriarchy is demonstrated in the domestic spaces.

## **2. Domestic Space as a Site of Resistance**

### **The God of Small Things:**

Raised by a strict family base, Ammu had a marriage with an inter-caste-religion Bengali man, which was forbidden in Kerala Society. Her oppressed condition forced her to decide and liberate herself, "Ammu grew desperate. All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother" (Roy 38-39). Later, she suffered and was traumatized by the marriage. She was mocked and humiliated by the people of her village for returning after crossing her family's boundary. Later, she felt a solid love and affection with Velutha, who is from a lower caste. Paravan worked for Ayemenem's House and in the Mammachi factory. Kerala Society has had strong objections towards class and caste cross-marriage or relationship for centuries. Ammu had a strong feeling towards Velutha's physic and increased sexual drive towards him. This love for a Dalit man is considered taboo, which is a punishable crime. Her choice to follow her desire is a bold decision rejecting her family's expectations of being trapped as subservient. Her physical call, yearning for love, seeking freedom, dignity, and emotional support marginalized Ammu and Velutha.

Ayemenem represented as a patriarchal station, often witnessed brutal treatment for all the women in the house. Ammu was silenced and deprived, particularly of her father and brother. She resisted the system of the house and eloped with a Bengali man, seeking freedom from her father's torture. She rebuked and stood against the law of Ayemenem and turned it into a space of resistance where her desire was constructed and challenged by society.

The House of Ayemenem is situated right beside the River Minachil, which signifies the space of liberation for Ammu. She used to reach out to the river and release all the traumatic pressure from her family. It's the same as Velutha used to spend his time near the river, too. They met for the first time by the river, and both were innocent and intimate. As the river signifies the flow of their feelings from the manipulations of caste, class, and societal expectations, they just share their intimate moment. Their unspoken understanding formed as companionship, which they did not get in their houses. The frequent secret meetings signify a temporary liberation to escape from familial oppression. They expressed deep love, lust, and love, hiding from all the watchful eyes of their family and social scrutiny.

Here, Minachil River holds unseen unions, the tragic death scene of Sophie Mol, Estha, and Rahel's playful days in the river. Before, the river represented freedom, but after the Death of Sophie, it no longer served as a symbol of liberation for Ammu and Velutha. The Death caused the end of their love, which ended tragically and ultimately separated them. Therefore, the river becomes a complex symbol of both its love potential and its tragic consequences. Ammu redefines her freedom not just as a site of oppression but as a space of resistance, too.

**That Long Silence:**

As she says, "Nobody had bothered to tell me what to do when a marriage was over" (TLS, 138), Jaya penned down all the experiences she faced in a magazine column entitled '*Sita*.' She believed and led her life almost the same as the original Sita. Emotionally unconnected with her husband and children. She thinks women lose their identity and existence after they get married. Because of a lack of support from society and people in the domestic areas, they treated them as objects. Indian society follows an upbringing system where parents have never supported girl children to learn or grow their interests. Instead, they just push things to let the girl know everything when she gets married. Jaya had a similar experience at her parents' house to be patient and to get the answers to all of her questions after her marriage occurred. She asks herself,

"For women, the waiting game starts early in childhood. *Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-law's home. Wait until you have kids.* Yes, ever since I got married, I have done nothing but wait. Waiting for Mohan to come home, waiting for the children to be born, for them to start school, waiting for them to come home, waiting for the milk, the servant, the lunch-carrier man..." (Deshpande 30)

She did exactly all of the above as she questions herself, and she respected whatever Mohan was deciding, or sharing his thoughts and plans. But she never spoke back to him or shared her opinions, hence, this was a bit shocking to Mohan.

Deshpande portrayed Jaya as a modern, urban, and educated woman who seeks liberation, positivity, and progress in all her steps. Instead, Jaya has been stuck in familial restrictions, serving her family as a typical uneducated household woman. She didn't realize her role until she was confronted with an incident. While narrating 'A Crow and a Sparrow' story to her children, unknowingly, she connected her with a Sparrow. She related her duties as a typical mother to her children; she seemed more like a Sparrow to her. As she narrates and realizes,

"There's the foolish, improvident, irresponsible, gullible crow, and there's the cautious, self-centered, worldly-wise, dutiful, shrewd sparrow. The survivor is the sparrow [...] the crow, is a male, and the victorious sparrow a female! [...] insufferably priggish sparrow looking after their homes, their babies... and to hell with the rest of the world. Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you're safe. That poor idiotic woman Suhasini believed in this. I know better now. I

know that safety is always unattainable. You're never safe." (Deshpande 16)

Mohan, being more of an egoistic and status-oriented man, always made his own choices. But Jaya was unaware of his professional commitments or his sacrifices towards family. Therefore, the scandalous affair in his work brought huge trouble to his continued work. As a result, they had to move to Dadar, Mumbai. When he tries to convince her of a cause, she rejects it. She had never inquired about his deeds before; hence, for this status of their life, she did not even ask or enquire about him. Thus, she gives her answer for not taking the blame on her head.

"If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband, could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn't want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay, that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools that I could have the things we needed...." (Deshpande 62)

Deshpande enforces a proverb, 'Two bullocks yoked together,' which plays a pivotal role in shaping Jaya's perception of married relationships. She practices and follows faithfully without opposing, like all the mythical women in the epic, to balance their relationship with her husbands. When her patience exceeded, she was overwhelmed by the adjustments and conflicts within the marriage. In anger, she monologues,

"No, what have I to do with these mythical women? I can't fool myself. The truth is simpler. Two bullocks yoked together, and it was more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful, and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?" (Deshpande 12)

Jaya eventually used her writing as a tool to evoke her anger into words. She wrote about her household suppression in newspaper and magazine columns with a pseudonym under the title 'Seeta.' Her friend Kamath helped her put out her anger and experiences in her writing using broader perspectives. His ideas and support motivated her to make positive decisions and empower herself.

The above interpretations remind Michel Foucault's concept of "Power and Resistance" where Foucault talks about how oppression takes place within the domestic spaces. Here Jaya significantly portrayed where she pressurised and found ways to resist the oppression. Ammu found a way to resist her oppression uniting with Velutha by Minachil River.

### **3. Ammu and Jaya: Two Journeys of Oppression, Resistance, and Resilience The God of Small Things:**

Ammu realized that the social discrimination and ostracised treatment given to Velutha, she was no longer the same Ammu, "The fear of nature, the fear of women, and the fear of powerlessness within civilization all played a role in this injustice" (Roy 308). She felt lost, traumatized, and neglected by society and family completely. After the tragic Death of her love, she abandoned herself in a decrepit lodge, rejecting every social expectation she lived alone with dignity.

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“In the lodge, Ammu sat up in the strange bed in the strange room in the strange town. She didn't know where she was; she recognized nothing around her. Only her fear was familiar. The faraway man inside her began to shout. This time, the steely fist never loosened its grip. Shadows gathered like bats in the steep hollows near her collarbone.” (Roy, 162)

She died in the same lodge shortly then, and she was rejected to cremate in the church. She chose her Death, her life, and her desires all by herself, and ultimately, she was burnt. "Ammu was fed to it. Her hair, her skin, her smile. Her voice" (Roy 163) and seized her life. This shows the "small things," highlighting how Ammu is projected as an unwanted human thing who fought for her love and freedom to live on her terms. She was defeated by the societal manipulations, and despite losing, she was asserted to retain her identity. Therefore, she rejected everything to be controlled and embraced Death in the end.

#### **That Long Silence:**

Jaya was considered an exhibition object to Mohan; he showcased her in front of his colleagues' wives to match their status. He never understood her needs and desires. Instead, he granted himself as a decision-maker. Thus, he operated and expected his family members. She speculates on her position and existence, and she questions herself,

“He had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans, so had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails...” (Deshpande 11)

She never shared her inner feelings and suppressed emotions with Mohan. She realizes that there is nothing in between them. They just lived together with emptiness. She confirmed it too, "Yes, it was all Mohan's fault. I had shaped myself so resolutely to his desires all these years, yet what was I left with now? Nothing. Just emptiness and silence." (Deshpande 144) Resisting her being like a puppet in a relationship, she had no choice but to follow Mohan's words. In between all of it, she forgot about *Suhasini*, whom she rarely remembered.

"No, the fact was that I'd finally done it – I'd killed her. No, that was no right, either; we had killed her between us, Mohan and I. But dying, she'd given me back the burden she'd been carrying for me all these years. I had finally no bear it myself, the burden of wifhood." (Deshpande 121)

All of Jaya's resistance shows that even though she wanted to outburst them, she couldn't. She wanted to get all her voice, liberation, representation, and identity she held back. Though she looks rebellious in her writings, she never utters or breaks her silence. Jaya's internal battles, her space, voiceless status, and sociocultural expectations directly connect us with Virginia Wolf's *Room of One's Own* (1929), where Woolf argues women's liberation and intellectual freedom are indeed necessary for resilience in a patriarchal society. Deshpande's views are reflected through Jaya, showing how women's conditions within the domestic spaces are oppressed and controlled.

#### **4. Comparative Analysis: Commonalities and Differences**

Roy and Deshpande bring out the common factor to show how society operates and controls women in domestic spaces. The system of society navigates and expects women to be under the control of men/ patriarchy. Regulating through traditional practices and cultural



beliefs of society, women commonly experience oppression and gender discrimination within their households. Jaya and Ammu's responses on the above issues seem similar to these constraints. We see Ammu as rebellious, which is external, whereas Jaya is more internalized and submissive towards oppression.

These two protagonists operate in domestic spaces, which are reflected by their socio-economic and cultural settings. For example, Ammu were uneducated, rural bases, and rebellious and went against the rigid caste, class, and religious practices of Kerala. She unaccepted the rules, eloped with marriage with inter-religion, divorced, over-crossed the class-caste barrier, had a clandestine affair with a lower caste Paravan, and died to her wish.

In contrast, we see Jaya as an educated, modern, urban woman who accepts the traditional norms of Maharashtra. She survived and struggled within her middle-class social structure in urban India. She was suppressed, obeyed, silent, adjusted, compromised, and followed her husband's words. She never tried to escape; rather, she observed and analyzed the manipulations.

TGST & TLS show how domestic sites cause suffering and space to exhibit resistance within the boundary. Both Ammu and Jaya bring out signifies these two acts. This comparative study gives a broader sociocultural import of women's roles within Indian society. The protagonists' struggle is more significantly related to feminist theories, where domestic and gender oppression intersect in the selected novels. The analysis helped to reconnect the women's roles to the broader theoretical significances of feminist theory, power, and resistance theories.

#### **Conclusion:**

The above analysis gives a glimpse into how the domestic spaces are considered both prisons and sanctuaries, holding everything within but failing to escape. This study helped to find the similar consequences of a social atmosphere where every woman faces domestic manipulation and oppression. Jaya and Ammu's struggle is reflected in this study to know the gender dynamics and domestic oppression presented in Indian literature. A similar concept can be researched and discussed in relation to the relevance of today's Indian society. The future research on the contemporary Indian women's role in the modern developing societal standards. The status of women has been changing from post-independence to today. As women are exposed to education and modern society, they expect and rebel against mistreatment. Whereas till today, most of the rural and urban domestic governance expects women to be followed and perform household wifely duties to protect the family prestige. In this aspect, women are traumatized and bullied or manipulated at the hands of male authorities. This study forces us to think and question ourselves to analyze whether every woman in the household has domestic freedom or is still silently suffering.

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