

Representation of the Marginalised in Arundhati Roy's *the God of Smallthings*

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy emerged conspicuously as a public figure on the larger Indian literary stage and scene like some dramatic unforeseen comet. The novel is built around love and hate, body and sex, marriage and divorce, conflict and struggle and above all it is about women. The present study deals with plight of gender discrimination in India and how women in general are marginalised, objectified, persecuted and oppressed at the hands of patriarchy. This study examines Roy as a novelist who analyses the most problematic contemporary issues of sex, exploitation, violence, caste politics and power politics. She exhibits how the patriarchal system of marriage unleashes a reign of terror, misery and violence palpable in Pappachi's wrath thrashing Mammachi with a brass vase. Mammachi, Baby Kochama, Ammu are oppressed by patriarchy.

Keywords :Feminism, Discrimination, Marginalisation, Oppression, Exploitation, Power-politics etc.

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Introduction

Arundhati Roy in 'The God of Small Things' highlights plight of human conditions characterized by dehumanized environment and brutal discrimination that baffles human perception and that stuns our conscience; she also depicts gruesome pictures of moral deterioration, erosion of human values and reversion to savagery as a result of physical segregation.

Though the novel is uncontroversially about the twins: Esthappen and Rahel but intrinsically this novel is a forceful argument for and against the good and evil in society with special reference to women. In the novel there are three generations of women. Each of them was born and brought up under different circumstances. Beginning with the oldest generation there is Mammachi, then the generation of Ammu and the youngest generation of Rahel. Roy highlights a profound contrast between man and woman. For centuries man has been dominating over families, society and as well as over the other woman. The life course, action and mission of woman has been dictated and steered by man. In the same house and by the same parents and in the same society, woman is othered by male chauvinist ideology. In the novel, Ammu and Chacko are brother and sister of the same parents. But Ammu is not allowed to get proper education and go abroad while Chacko is admitted in Oxford. After the divorce of Ammu she is given a cold shoulder by her own parents. Meanwhile Chacko is warmly welcomed by the family members after divorce from an English woman, Margaret. Chacko always tries to display his macho tendencies and throwing his weight around. He haughtily tells his sister: "what is yours is mine and what is mine is also mine." In this way Chacko arrogantly asserts his power before his sister. The example of Chacko's claim to property is cited by his partnership with Ammu in running the pickle factory named "Paradise Pickle". Although Ammu works in the factory as much as Chacko did, the latter always claims the factory as his own. Arundhati Roy castigates this kind of gender discrimination not only as an act of gross injustice but also a kind of societal oppression and coercion to which she gives vent.

Ammu has to bear the brunt of discrimination for being female and is often regarded as an undesirable and worthless member of the family when education is denied to her on the basis of her gender. As a result of conventionalized dictates, Ammu the only daughter of Pappachi and Mammachi is unfairly deterred from continuing higher studies by her parents on the belief that higher education depraves a woman. This conventional misconception governed the mindset of Ammu's parents who deliberately deprived her of college education. But they on the contrary facilitated their son Chacko to continue his further studies at Oxford. Arundhati Roy berated

this kind of gender discrimination as gross injustice and tyranny. She castigates this grotesque and shameful tendency of parents who nourish the conventional outlook of daughters from having higher education and shockingly this narrow orthodox tendency still operates even in twenty first century. The real tragedy of Ammu begins when she comes in contact with Velutha . Though there was huge caste difference between Ammu and Velutha yet they indulged in sex act because of their passion and they threw the code of conduct of their respective castes to the winds. Such illicit affair was not frowned upon and was considered a societal crime not to be condoned.

Ammu is compelled to live in a loneliness because she has transcended the boundaries of her high caste and as a result she is unable to endure this agony and separation and ultimately dies in isolation. The prevailing societal structure does not ensure justice as we see that Ammu and Chacko both are guilty of breaking the love laws of the society but severe punishment is meted out only to Ammu but Chacko remains unpunished. One is kindled by an almost feminist sense of outrage against her plight.

She was swollen with cortisone, moonfaced, not the slender mother Rahel knew. Her skin was stretched over her puffy cheeks like shiny scar tissue that covers old vaccination marks. When she smiled her dimples looked as though they hurt.... Each breath she took like a war won against the steely fist that was trying to squeeze the air from her lungs (Roy 160).

The second hapless woman character is Mammachi, who is both Ammu's and Chacko's mother. She has the adept business skills and starts a pickle factory all by herself but her husband Pappachi "would not help her with the pickle making because he did not regard pickle making a suitable job for a ranking ex-government official." What is underlined in Mammachi's relationship with her husband Pappachi forces Mammachi into traditional moulds by ruthlessly thrashing her: Pappachi had always been a jealous man, so he despised the attention of his wife was suddenly getting.... Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings were not new, what was new was only the frequency with which they took place."

In case of Mammachi too Chacko her son thinks that he is the 'Man of the house' and reduces his mother to a 'sleeping partner'. The patriarchal fact of Pappachi's marriage is that he was married to a girl seventeen years younger than him. It was patriarchal setup by males to marry a young girl regardless of age difference. It results in dire consequences in his married life. It makes us begin with the relationship between Pappachi and Mammachi as husband and wife. From the

characteristic situation of his mind , occurs his relationship with his wife Mammachi.His pride system operates in multiple ways.He has strong patriarchal unconsciousness and a characteristic male chauvinist tendency against the wife and the daughter.The facts of his self actualisation -victory, honour and power got embedded in his unconscious mind in the course of time.Anything that flouts it,may it be a slight quantum, is retaliated in a violent manner.

As a male chauvinist,he can not endure any skilful activity or talent or performed by his wife..Hence ,a trait of jealousy is formed in his character .His jealousy functions on two levels:The skilful organizing of the pickle factory with all its aspects makes him jealous of Mammachi.Therefore he never lends her helping hand in her work after retirement(Roy 47).

He considers it as a work below his dignity .He neither appreciates her nor recognizes her service to the family progress.On the contrary,the jealousy is devolved into violence found in his thrashing her with brass flower vase with increased frequency. It turns out to be that Pappachi did not like recognition of his wife , her fame and appreciation by others.In his thought ,it turns out to be a threat to his status and standard of his respectability and gives a sense of emasculated status of his image.After his retirement,there is a strong realization in his mind , almost a shock that he is 'an old man' and his wife is 'still in her prime' .Pappachi is an extremely suspicious husband in her relation to his wife while his stay in Vienna,Mammachi as a student of music learning violin was applauded by her teacher as 'exceptionally talented'learner . Pappachi interprets this remark as interest of the teacher in his wife and hence an offence.Thus Mammachi has been grossly snubbed,neglected and exploited by Pappachi to his ends .In her relationship with him,she existed as a non entity .Her failing eyesight almost to the extent of getting blind did not concern Pappachi.Therefore she remained deprived of any help ,care , concern and love from him.Violence , beating,cynicism,jealousy are all his ways of treating her in their co-life.

Rahel who is the offspring of divorced parents,daughter of Ammu is robbed of conventional parental love . She lives with the stigma of a mixed parent age , both religious(as her father was Hindu and Ammu a Syrian Christian) and ethnic(as father was a Bengali and mother is keralite).Rahel who has no place in either her family or society.Living in her grandparents house , she doesn't live like a normal child.She lives as a witness to injustice done to her mother.As Rahel is growing up unwanted,she never experiences the real Hindu tradition,because no one acknowledges her presence , so Rahel becomes a free woman who unlike her mother ,is not confined to by

mental restrictions of the Hindu traditions. This is why On her return to Ayemenem ,she replies to an old man who asked about her marital status”we are divorced.”(130) without worrying what the old man will think about her answer .

Conclusion

This novel is thought provoking and a bold attempt on the part of Arundhati Roy who endeavoured to stir the collective consciousness of the Indian community towards the callousness of objectifying, invisibilizing and inferiorizing women . Women thus treated become aliens, soulless beings ,subhuman and chattels for men . This imbalance in society speaks volumes about the malaise rampant in our families and the battered lives of children who are exposed to this very prejudiced and unfair view of life .The end result is a dehumanized, demoralized and paralyzed society that is unwilling to grow and blossom into a classless, broadminded and cosmopolitan society.

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