

Imbroglia of the Women in Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things'

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Abstract: Previously, novelists painted a dark and caustic picture of the ladies who lived in our immediate vicinity. They depicted a bleak society for women. Women were portrayed as if they lacked artistic creativity. They were exclusively seen as a sexual object. This is an all-universe. Women were portrayed as if they lacked artistic creativity. They were exclusively seen as a sexual object. This position of women in the 1970s compels Indian women writers to write down their protests against a patriarchal society dominated by men. By depicting the lives of Indian women, women writers have succeeded in drawing readers' attention to the awful practice of patriarchy to a large extent. My thesis is a naive attempt to demonstrate how female protagonists in Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things' struggle for survival in varied roles in a male-dominated patriarchal society.

Keywords: Identity, Marginalization, Gender Discrimination.

1. INTRODUCTION

People speak in derogatory manner about women all over the world. An Old Italian saying is "as a horse, whether good or bad, requires spurs, so a woman whether good or bad, requires thrashing". The wise men in China also advise husbands in these words: "Listen to the council of your wife, but act against it". The old men of Russia say: "There is only one soul among ten women". The Spaniards say: "We shall save ourselves from wicked women and should never be captivated by any that have good looks" (Kidwai 20). Though the position of women has changed from culture to culture and from ages to age but one thing is common that in almost all culture, women have been treated as the beast of burden and never been equal to men. Mary Wollstonecraft in her masterpiece *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) demanded equal opportunities for women in the fields of education, economics and politics. She strongly advocated for women's education protection by laws.

Renowned historian and feminist Uma Chakravarti, for her active participation and association with women's movement have been called the 'founding mother' of the Indian women's movement. She fought for the democratic rights of women and persistently worked to sensitize women regarding their rights. The efforts encouraged and influenced the later women writers of the twentieth century stand up and voice their grievance and influenced the later women writers of the twentieth century stand up and voice their grievances. Neera Desai is also one such pioneers of feminist scholarship in India. In her book, named *Woman in Modern India* (1957), she justifies that there was no 'golden age' for women and women have always been under male domination since antiquity. This paper is formulated to deal with the struggle of the women in gaining their individuality. This paper has tried to place Roy's *The God of Small Things* within an Indian culture-specific feminist framework. The paper is written with the help of Postcolonial feminist theory using comparative and analytical methods. The study is a

literary work using primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources are based on library resources like reference books, scholarly journal and internet also. The study has been interpretative, descriptive and exploratory using various feminist theories put forward by feminist critics like Mary Wollstonecraft, UmaChakravarti, and Neera Desai.

2. WOMEN'S STRUGGLES

The God of Small Things narrates the marginalization, gender discrimination and the struggle of women at the best possible ways. The story of the novel reflects the Indian patriarchal society that deprives women from what a male in society enjoys. The title of the novel justifies the portrayal of the oppressed, down trodden and marginalized female folk of the society. The narrative of the novel presents different perspectives by portraying different women characters. The main protagonist of the novel is Ammu. Basically the novel is autobiographical in tone. Rahel represents Arundhati Roy and Ammu represents Mary Roy. A numbers of characters have been constructed and trapped in the net of patriarch exchange for job benefit. This type of betrayal and gross injustice is also presented in literature by other female authors; particularly Kamala Das has reflected this ill-treatment by her husband in her poems. Being disgusted and humiliated by her husband, Ammu returns to her Ayemenem house along with two children. Ammu's father refuses to believe that an Englishman could ever deflower the chastity of a woman. Ammu's allegation to her father looks nothing special but an allegation of a woman where the former is not able to realize the sentiment and emotion of the latter. How women are deprived from the paternal property is also aptly projected in the novel. Ammu has been deprived from her paternal property by her brother Chacko not bothering about the rights of his own sister. Even Ammu gets shocked and stunned by the comments of her brother: "What's yours is mine and what mine is also mine" (57). This practice is rampant in the traditional Indian society. Daughters are always deprived from their due parental rights. Again gender discrimination is reflected when Ammu is denied from higher education but her brother Chacko is sent to Oxford for higher study. This environment does not allow Ammu to take fresh breathing. Ammu is a symbol of woman who would like to protect her children for future, but reality is that she herself has been neglected and deprived by her own parents who represent the patriarchal structure, who make fun of the matriarchal system who wish to be learned and educated. We cannot call Ammu a fallen woman because it is the society that controls the life of Ammu who has been deprived from her paternal property, sympathy and love of married life. Under the circumstances it would be a difficult job to maintain chastity and ultimately she brings her own degradation being physically involved with Velutha who is a paravan. Ammu, like any other woman, has the reason to dream a small world of her own where she can procreate and lead a happy life. She discovers in Velutha some potentialities to be her life partner. But soon she becomes the victim of police, so called the guardian of law and her cherished dream of small world is trampled and destroyed. Ammu dies a premature death only at the age of thirty one. Though it is not a die able age but she is compelled to die. Ammu's death symbolizes not only the death of one woman but it is the death of thousands of women who are in existence in our society and who are dying every moment and every day under the male dominated patriarchal society.

Ammu's daughter Rahel, who symbolizes Arundhati Roy, undergoes tremendous mental and physical agonies and launches scathing attack against the prevalent social order as a protest. She herself becomes the victim of her drunkard and unruly father. Ammu's separation from her husband forces Rahel to leave home at the tender age. Ayemenem house becomes the shelter for Rahel and her brother.. Their arrival at the Ayemenem house is not welcome by the inmates. Right from the childhood Rahel suffers many brutalities and misfortunes. She witnesses many mishaps in her life without knowing its reasons. At first, she witnesses her father's brutalities meted out to her mother. Separation of her parents becomes painful for her because it deprives her from the love of her parents. This separation affects her psychologically throughout her life. Next, the ill-treatment of the members of Ayemenem house to Ammu disturbs Rahel to a great

Special Issue on Proceedings of International Conference on Newer Trends and Innovation in Nanotechnology, Materials Science and Technology, March 2021, International Journal of Aquatic Science, Volume 2 Issue 1, April 2021. Instead of love, compassion and sympathy, they become neglected, disowned and despised at their maternal uncle's house.

Finally the illicit love affair between Ammu and Velutha serves as a huge blow for Rahel. It becomes unbearable when she has to identify Velutha as the main culprit after he gets killed by the police. Ammu's occasional interference in Rahel's life renders it impossible to live independently. We cannot call Ammu a fallen woman because it is the society that controls the life of Ammu who has been deprived from her paternal property, sympathy and love of married life. Under the circumstances it would be a difficult job to maintain chastity and ultimately she brings her own degradation being physically involved with Velutha who is a paravan. Ammu, like any other woman, has the reason to dream a small world of her own where she can procreate and lead a happy life. She discovers in Velutha some potentialities to be her life partner. But soon she becomes the victim of police, so called the guardian of law and her cherished dream of small world is trampled and destroyed. Ammu dies a premature death only at the age of thirty one. Though it is not a die able age but she is compelled to die.

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Perhaps being failure in her love she showers her anger against Ammu and her children. Amitabh Roy opines: "Baby Kochamma subscribes to the commonly held view that a married daughter has no position in her parents' house and a divorced one, no position anywhere at all. It becomes worse if the divorce is from a love marriage and worst, if she is divorce from inter community marriage. Ammu, according to her, committed a serious offence by marrying a Bengali Hindu and the divorce turned it even more serious. In fact, she is jealous of Ammu for daring to exercise her right to choose the man she marries and to discard him when found unworthy" (Roy 62). Roy is absolutely right when he says: "Baby Kochamma, resented Ammu, because she saw her quarreling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma, herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-fewer women. The sad, father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma," (Roy 62-63).

Mammachi, Ammu's mother, is married with Pappachi who is much older than her. His

Mammachi is quite often beaten by her husband at the slightest possible cause. The cruelty and brutality comes to an end at the intervention of Chacko who comes from Oxford during vacation and harshly reprimands his father for beating Mammachi: "I never want this to happen again" (48). Mammachi loses the sympathy of readers for her attitude to sex for younger people than her. She maintains different outlook to her divorce son and daughter. She approves her son's flirting with women whereas it becomes forbidden for her daughter. We find that Arundhati Roy has projected a true picture of women who, under patriarchy, social construct and male chauvinism are suffering to a great extent. The author has shown how three female protagonists struggle for their existence in the society in various roles. They do not represent the type of women rather they represent the Indian women in broader sense. Every woman suffers in it in her own way. As one critic observes, "It can be called the story of sufferings of Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel. They all suffer in different ways. In a country like India where patriarchal system is very strong, women suffer mentally, physically and sexually" (Rajpal66).

3. CONCLUSION

Thus we see that in this novel Arundhati Roy puts under focus the deliberately constructed agencies of cruelty that work against women's interests. In this all are involved, the so-called progressive politicians, the family members, the police, etc. In the traditional Indian society such forces flourish and find encouragement in maintaining their hold over the weaker people. As the famous British feminist theoretician Jennifer Mather Saw says, "Families both shape and are shaped by factors that are clearly of political significance. In particular, we shall see, their structures play a key role in improving and disadvantaging women; and their structures are shaped, at least in part, by constraints imposed by laws, workplace, and the ways that children are educated" (Jennifer 89). Social structures are so formed as to sanctify women's victimization. Arundhati Roy's depiction of the miserable lives of women in this novel critiques in unmistakable terms the perpetuation of these exploitative forces. What we find from the above discussion is that main female characters reflect a perfect narrative of struggling women. Baby Kochamma a victim.. Ammu, the main protagonist, is the rebel who represents the defiance of the present state of the society from educated, passionate and thinking women who are mulling for freedom and equality.

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