

## Misogyny in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

<sup>a</sup>Sania Minhaj, <sup>b</sup>Diwakar Prahaladaiah

<sup>a</sup>St. Joseph's Evening College (Autonomous), Bengaluru, India

<sup>b</sup>HOD-English, St. Joseph's Evening College, Autonomous, Bengaluru, India

### Abstract

We as human beings respond to different situations. The response is through our emotions and actions. Those emotions and actions are the indicators of our being, without which we are considered dead or non-living. We may perform our tasks like the robots without understanding our feeling anything about the happenings around us. However, this is unacceptable, as god has given us the ability to think, act and feel which defeats the purpose of us being alive otherwise.

Suzanna Arundhati Roy, an Indian writer, essayist and activist who won the Man Booker Prize for fiction for the best-known novel, "The God of Small Things" in the 1997. The book is semi-autobiographical in nature. It reflects on her childhood experiences in Ayemenem.

*"There is really no such thing as voiceless. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard."*

The God of Small Things has the elements of the people from the margins- untouchables (Paravan) and women in particular.

Special attention is drawn on the condition of women. This work is supposed to be a post-colonial feminist writing. There are elements of feminism. Feminism is the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes especially in achieving political, economic, personal and social equality. India has a patriarchal society where the power is in the hands of male members. They are the decision makers and the authority of taking care of the women and children of the family lies in their hands. They over power women in different aspects- religion, finance, politics etc.

Many novels that throw light on the exploitation of women in the society. It shows the reality of the status of women in the society so far. This novel was written post colonialism. The writing shows that the exploitation did not end with colonialism. The setting of the novel is supposed to be in the third world, which portrays the struggle, torture, exploitation that a woman has to undergo in the male dominated conservative society.

**KEYWORDS:** untouchables, Feminism, post colonialism, struggle, torture, exploitation

### INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy is the social system in which the primary power rests in the hands of males, and they also play dominant roles in political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of the property; and in the domain of the family, fathers or father-figures have mastery over women and children. Patriarchy historically displays itself in the social, legal, political, religious and economic organization of different cultures and most contemporary societies practices patriarchy even though not explicitly defined to be by

their own constitutions and laws. In the lives of human beings, gender plays a pivotal role, from the very first breaths strict code of behavior that differs according to their sex will be inculcated in their minds. Compelling men and women to fit into gender roles in a patriarchal society, males lead a privileged life and females lead a subdued, submissive life; women experience life far differently from men and suffer because of it. Art being the reflections of life, present worlds in which these gender roles exist and represents women's experience of life and suffering. We can regard the preoccupation with the issues of women and downtrodden, both marginalized social groups in the Third World countries as an astounding facet of postcolonial writing in English.

Indian writing in English has been more than hundred and fifty years of age today. All types of literary writings are available in Indian English literature. Indian English fiction has acquired new dimensions after globalization and liberalization of Indian Economy. Indian fiction writers have got national and international awards in recognition of their achievements in the field. Advent of new information technology in India connected them with literary forces outside and within India. All this enhanced their awareness, communication skills and responses to the changes in the field. Arundhati Roy is one of the few Indian English writers actively interested in contemporary sociopolitical issues as is amply evidenced in a number of articles, interviews and books she has written on various topics in recent years. The impact of her novel *The God of Small Things* is all the more significant considering that the author has so far produced only one novel, which won her the Booker Mc Connell in 1997. This was the first Booker Awarded to a non-expatriate Indian woman writer.

It deals with the exploitation of women in India, wretched condition of an untouchable boy in the society, faces that wear masks etc. In fact, the greatness of a novel depends on the effective handling of various themes in the same work. *The God of Small Things* does not merely transcribe reality, but makes it come alive. Roy renders her varied experience of Indian reality through subjective mental lenses by aptly employing experimental narrative techniques. She views the socio-political situations of South India with ironic detachment but highlights almost each and every incident happening around her with a fidelity to reality which an ordinary eye is prone to miss.

### **About The Novel**

Roy portrays the plights of women in three dimensions. They are:

1. Ammu's suffocating pre-marital stay in Ayemenem, her return with two children to an unwelcoming family and finally her brief affair with Velutha which cuts her life short.
2. Mammachi's extremely disturbed conjugal tie with Pappachi, which results from Chako's attempt to stop Pappachi's regular beating of Mammachi.
3. Baby Kochamma's unrequited love for Father Mulligan and her eventual spinsterhood.

The main events in *The God of Small Things* take place during some December weeks in 1969 and the setting is Ayemenem, a town in the equatorial south Indian state of Kerala. Seen for the most part through the eyes of Rahel, Ammu's daughter, the narrative moves between two points in time, 1969 and 1993, and the perspective subsequently switches between Rahel seeing things as a seven year old girl and as an adult woman. 1993 is the

year when Rahel returns to Ayemenem to meet her brother Estha after being separated for 31 years. Haunted by memories from the past, the novel is something of an excavation of a trauma; Rahel looks back at her life to examine it. Postmodern in its handling of time, the plot circles between the 'present' and the past, digging deeper and deeper into the tragic secrets of Rahel's life with an effect similar to that of a detective story, keeping the reader anxious and curious about how things really happened to the very end. More and more details are added, more and more perspectives are offered as the narrator flashes restlessly forwards and backwards. Out of the many qualities about her novel one is that the reader has the privilege to see a course of events from several very different vantage points, and this is also reflected in the novel's epigraph: "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one" (John Berger). Roy weaves her plot, thread by thread, into a colorful, multifaceted story; added to the narrative are different cultural references to Shakespeare, *The Sound of Music*, Kathakali (traditional drama-dance) and the music of The Rolling Stones which create a patchwork of associations and connotations. But the novel is not just a beautiful and intricate postmodern saga; it is definitely an intervention into (especially Indian) culture with its close, almost overdone description of caste transgressive intimacy, and its critical account of the local communist leader and Kerala communism in general.

The novel throws light on some important things of life like how love is always associated with sadness, how a person's childhood experiences affect his/her perspectives and whole life. The novel shows the ugly face of people and society as a whole, a vivid description of the black and sarcastic world especially with reference to women that dwells around us.

### **Women's Place in Patriarchal Society**

"..... family is a dominant ideology, through which a particular set of household and gender relationships are universalized and naturalized... and through which unequal power relations are observed and legitimized" (Patricia Oberai. Qtd in *The God of Small Things. A Critical Study*, 2004)

In the novel every woman suffers in her own way. Right at the centre is the doleful tale of Ammu, mother of Rahel and Estha, whose suffering starts in her own house and slowly contributes to her ignoble death. The other two victims of oppression, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, fit into the oppressive family system that blatantly victimizes Ammu. They become her active oppressors, seeking to corner her and then drive her to her miserable death. Rahel, the youngest sufferer among all the female characters, experiences ostracism at home and school which disrupts her normal upbringing. In a country like India, where the patriarchal system is very strong women suffer mentally, physically and sexually.

Ammu presents the most pathetic picture of woman who seeks happiness and love in a world that turns its back on her. Having abandoned her husband for his debauched tendencies, and having returned to her family she loses all normal status as a family member and is thrown into a dark corner. Ammu falls prey to the vicious trap set by Mammachi and Baby Kochamma because of her relationship with Velutha. The sheer animosity towards the Untouchables finds double force in the Ammu-Velutha liaison and breaks out into expressions of moral outrage even though Chako's sexual indulgences

with low-caste women is overlooked as 'Men's Needs'. This is typical of the double standard of morality practiced in a traditional Indian family. While men enjoy greater laxity and freedom, the family's 'dignity' and 'honour' rest on woman's blemish less moral conduct. Men are privileged, women the cross-bearers!

Ng Shing Yi, a Singapore writer, wrote in the Quarterly Literary Review, "Peripheral Beings and Loss in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" states "The God of Small Things is a novel that carries shades of incipient socialism and feminism, the postcolonial condition is reinforced by the added drawback of being an untouchable or a woman, as Velutha, Ammu. ...are, their marginality is so acute that leitmotifs of absence and loss accompany them in the novel".

Another victim of patriarchal society is Rahel's maternal grandmother Mammachi whose all potentials were destroyed by her husband's brutishness. She had pioneered pickle making into something commercially viable which is not supported by her husband who retired as a scientist without discovering anything. Mammachi is exceptionally talented in music. When her talent was revealed to her husband by her teacher, he released all the animal fury of jealousy in him on her. Within the family in conjugal relationship these tendencies assume another dimension. What is painful is the male attempt to break the spirit of women's sense of independence and progress. Without protesting against the chauvinism, she starts exercising her authority over her daughter and grandchildren with qualms.

The concept of women against each other reaches full scale in Roy's character Aunt Baby Kochamma. Her unfortunate past controls her miserable future Male Chauvinistic society molds Baby's psyche to a cruel perfection. The embittered, jealous, and ignorant spinster is the worst enemy of all women fighting for civil rights or at least the womanly right to live as a woman without control or suppression. Baby Kochamma shrewdly dehumanizes Rahel and Ammu, secretly envies Mammachi, and feels inferior to free white women like Margaret Kochamma, Dr. Ambreen Hai, an Assistant Professor of English at Smith College, writes convincingly on the matter regarding Baby Kochamma's betrayal of other women. Baby Kochamma herself felt the fate of the wretched Man-less Woman. Unhappy Baby grudges Ammu and her children, her love affair, her divorce, essentially all the womanly things that Ammu should be entitled to that Baby never attempted to obtain due to her environment. The resentment festers in the barren woman. She is barren not because she has no children, but for discontentment and never experiencing true love. So she scales her niece's fate by destroying Ammu's lover and beginning Ammu's own rapid descent into self destruction and death. In this vicious circle everyone is involved. In traditional society such forces flourish and find encouragement in maintaining their hold over the weak.

## CONCLUSION

*The God of Small Things* fascinatingly depict the marginalization of women in the patriarchal society and high lights their confinement in their home, denial of their social roles and their overlooked desires and the miseries they endure due to this. The novel manifest that women's suffering starts from their family and in a male- chauvinistic society women will not be treated as an equivalent, and the social structures are so made that they sanctify women's victimization. Even though women suffer in the hands of male

dominated society. In *The God of Small Things*, only Ammu and Rahel dares to challenge the society and Ammu miserably fails in it. The novels also portray the unjust treatment meted out to the low section of social hierarchy.

#### REFERENCES

1. Roy, Arundhati, *The God of Small Things*, New Delhi, Indialink, 1997.
2. Rajimwale, Sharad, ed. *The God of Small Things (A Critical Study)*, New Delhi, Rama Brothers, 2001
3. Jha, Narayan, Surendra. “Dreams Redreamed: A Study of *The God of Small Things*”, *Indian Women in English*, Atlantic Publishers, 2001
4. Prasad, Amar Nath. *Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things: a critical appraisal* New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2004.
5. Altaf Ahmad Ganaie & Dr. R.S. Chauhan, *Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things: A Feminist Perspective*