

Sense of Identity in A Patriarchal Society in Arundhati Roy's, 'The God of Small Things'

A.L.Rajkumar

Assistant Professor and Head Department of English, Annai Fathima College of Arts and Science Thirumagalam, India

Abstract

This paper exhibits the theme of women struggle for seeking the sense of identity in a patriarchal society, it also analyses the social structure of Indian women through the central character Ammu. She always seeks happiness and comfort but where life always offered her pure agony and constrains. Ammu's character presents the picture of the average woman character in the present day society. If we closely plunge deep into her character we can sort out three prestigious qualities she possess. First, she is a lady of chastity and purity. It is this powerful virtue, which makes her to divorce her husband. Second, she has a great capacity to tolerate suffering upon suffering. Third, she believes in the theory of etiquette and custom, modesty and decency. She never had any grudge against anybody. This paper highlights the hypocritical moral code of society, which makes a great difference between men and women. As a matter of truth both men and women are two sides of same coin but it is greater fault in the man's nature that he fails to understand and appreciate the nobler and untainted side of a woman's love. Man's love is just like a gush, which spends its force quickly, but woman's love streams steadily forever.

KEYWORDS: Identity, struggle, custom, society and modesty

Arundhati Roy came in to the picture of literature in the year 1997 when her first novel, the God of Small things won a Booker prize for literature. Though she was born in a Shilong, where her father was a tea planter, her early childhood was spent at a village, Aymanam, near by kottayam town in central Kerala. The theme of novel revolves round this village. Just after a few years of her birth, her father divorced his wife. Therefore the little child Arundhati had to come back to ayememem with her beloved mother. Her mother broke the tradition by marrying a Bengali and divorcing him. She also made a history by fighting the provisions of the Christian succession Act and in this connection; she even went to the supreme court. The favorable ruling allowed Christian women an equal share with their male siblings in their father's property.

Roy was thus a product of a broken family. She had to face several trauma during her childhood. The Ayemenam house was dominated by the traditional male dominated clutches. The men in and around the house were conservative in their outlook. This phenomenon can be beautifully seen in the novel where Ammu who represents her mother, has to undergo so many dilemma in this patriarchal society. Arundhati spent most of her time in her grandmother's pickle factory. She became a formidable curry powder packer and pickle label sticker. But inspite of all these odds and hazards, she was essentially an extra-ordinary genius who used to devote to the studies heart and soul. At the age of eighteen, she left for New Delhi for higher education. She joined the delhi

school of Architecture. But, there too she had to spend her life in poverty. After getting the degree of Architecture, Arundhati worked as a Research Assistant at the National Institute of Urban Affairs. She devoted herself to it in such a manner that she won a scholarship for going to Florence to study the Restoration of Monuments and Historical Urban Centers. She returned from Italy grimly determined to restore neither Monuments nor Historical Urban centers.

Her life took a turn when Pradeep Krishnan, a film director, spotted her riding a bicycle down the wrong side of the road. He offered her a small role in the film *Massey Saab* screened at the Venice Film Festival and she played the role of the tribe which she accepted after initial reservations, more out of curiosity than anything else. It is to be noted that during her short stay at Italy, she realized she was a writer. She used to write to Pradeep and she kept the copies of all the letters. The reason behind keeping the letters is only to make him say that she is a good writer. The letter correspondence between Arundhati Roy and Pradeep later on developed into a successful marriage. Arundhati Roy is also a great screenplay writer. She writes the screenplay for *The Banyan Tree*, a television serial. The serial consists of twenty six episodes and very beautifully deals with the story set in Uttar Pradesh in the years between 1921-1952. It shows the last riotous decades of British rule. But this famous TV serial was abandoned half way through the shoot as the production company ran into financial trouble. Subsequently their store rooms were broken into, and all the costumes and property stolen and sold. Actually speaking, the breaking of the serial in the middle was a very traumatic and painful thing for Roy. It is to be noted that during this critical juncture, the book *The God of Small Things* that was enveloped in the computer begins to gain momentum among man odds and hazards. After the completion of her book she considered going to an Indian publisher but they tend to give advance of rupees five thousand only. It was about this time that she met Mishra, who was an editor with Harper Collins in India. She requested Mishra for an opinion about her book. He read the book and was immensely excited. He called Roy and said that he wanted to publish the book and so he was going to send it to a few publishers abroad. Within three days of receiving copies of the manuscript, they were ready to make offers for British rights. Roy was surprised to see their enthusiasm. The book that raised her on a high foundation was her debut novel *The God of Small Things*. When this book came into existence Roy was never confident of its wide popularity. According to her opinion it was a very personal.

The God of Small Things, is the honest portrayal of the dilemma of the women in society and their struggle for seeking the sense of 'identity' in a male dominated conservative outline. The social structure of an Indian woman is full of many ups and downs. Life compromise destiny choice for a forsaken woman like Ammu, the central character, who yearns for preference and happiness and a life far from restraints. The narrator portrays a detailed picture of the Ammu's babyhood to adolescence, to the experience of marriage to a sympathetic and affectionate mother, to a rebel wife who challenges the age long hypocritical moral stand of a patriarchal family. As a little girl, Ammu had to face a lot of cares and anxieties in life. She had seen the meanness of her father, Pappachi who used to beat her and her mother, Mammachi with a brass container. Once her father tore her shoes she had brought for herself. She was also depressed of the

higher education because, according to Pappachi, college education is not at all useful for a girl. This shows that Pappachi is not a man of reality. He behaves like a decent man but demonstrates his male ego and middleclass mentality when he bullies his wife and child. Marriage for him is the male's domination over woman and women are nothing but the buds in the hands of male.

Once ammu paid a visit to one of her relatives in Calcutta where at someone's wedding reception she met her future husband who was on vacation from his job. He was an assistant manager of a tea estate in Assam. Ammu was in a hurry to marry him because she knew that in Ayemenem people were quite dead against her wishes and so something was better than nothing. She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision but none replied.

Soon after the marriage, Ammu discovered that she had hopped out from bad situation to worse one. Her husband whom she loved so much, proved to be an alcoholic. He even went to the extent of asking his wife to satisfy the sexual desire of his boss, so that his job could be saved. This extreme humiliation created a sense of great hatred in the heart of Ammu for her husband. In a fight, she hit her husband with a heavy book and left the place with the twins Estha and Rahel. Ammu returned to Ayemenem with her pulled out cheeks and there too she found welled up when she saw the miserable condition her two children.

It is to be noted that the woman has been the subject of great mystery and controversy in our society. She is allegedly charged with so many imaginary drawbacks. Symbolized more a fury than a fairy. Her charms are irresistible but they invariably spell ruin and disaster. But we should not forget that most of the charges cited above are mostly fictional. A woman is generally more emotional, sensitive and tender though she is also gifted with a greater power of strength and patience. She can be viewed in numerous ways, but none of her facts is so awe-inspiring as the physical attraction. In this field of love mating, she plays a role so exceedingly significant that the very basis of creation and procreation will come to an end. It is here that we find her in the role of a beloved, a wife and a mother. She may be less adventurous than man and stick to regulated form of existence. Without the presence of women, home is not a real home. Arundhati Roy slings a harsh sarcasm on the societal domination over woman. She seems to say that a woman is not a mere puppet but the noble assets of a man's life.

In this novel her brother Chacko, a deceitful male character of the novel, who is male person of the Ayemenem house was sent to Britain to study. However, Ammu on the other hand, was not allowed to study further. The reason is that she is a woman and so she has no right to go to college, because the college studies corrupt a woman. Even today, after lots and lots of revolution took place still in few villages of India that the conventional and superstitious mind of a large numbers is against the higher education of girls. In this novel we find a great irony that if daughter apart from the husband is tortured and tyrannized in her own parents' house, but a son parted from his wife, Chacko, receives warm welcome and also remains the rightful inheritor of the family's wealth and

fortune. Thus, the God of Small things is a realistic portrayal of the gender discrimination prevalent in Indian society.

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