



RELOCATING GENDER BIAS IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

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Suzana Arundhati Roy is one of the well known representatives of contemporary Indian English Literature. She is well known for her Booker Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things*. The novel is a poignant satire on contemporary Indian society where women are treated as secondary things living in men's world. Roy depicts the miserable life of untouchables, outcasts as well as females of traditional Indian society such as Ammu, Mammachi and Velutha who are depicted suffering from the ill treatment of patriarchal society. Since time immemorial women have been treated as inferior to men. Moreover, whenever they tried to raise their voice against the patriarchy they were brutally suppressed either physically, mentally or sexually. While analysing the character of Ammu, the female protagonists, focus of the study will be the gender bias present in the novel.

Arundhati Roy, born on 24 November 1961 in Meghalaya, is India's foremost writers writing in English who exceptionally represent the social evil through their life like characters. She portrayed the conservative and despicable reality of society in her novel *The God of Small Things*. Untouchability, gender bias, class discrimination and political corruption are some of the major themes discussed in her novels.

Women are represented by several legends, mythology, history or tradition in several different aspects. Some call her Goddess, some called her temptress, some believed her to be



inferior or secondary to men, some regarded her as the angel of the house, and some treated her as a mere object. Moreover, women aspire not be a goddess or something else, she just wants to be a human, with equal rights as men, someone who deserves her own individual identity. Traditional society is the one who expect from a woman to be meek, pious, subjugated, modest, obedient and humble. The patriarchal society has constantly been dominating and suppressing women and depriving her from her individual rights and identity.

Nevertheless many strong women have been constantly fighting against the dominated patriarchy. Be it in reality or fictional world. Many authors like Jane Austen, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Mary Whole stone Craft, Maya Angelou, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and others have been the major feminist authors in English Literature who by representing contemporary society in their fictitious world have raised their voice against the maltreatment of women.

Virginia Woolf in her famous feminist work *A Room of One's Own* asserts that “The history of men’s opposition to women’s emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself” (Woolf 84). Whenever any woman tried to spread her wings in the open world the patriarchal society resisted it. Hence, women’s resistance against the patriarchal society and her constant struggle to seek equal rights and opportunities can be seen as feminism. Rebecca West, writing in the *Clarion* on November 14, 1913, said that, “I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat.”



In the novel *The God of Small Things* Roy represents the gender bias syndrome prevailing in social sphere. All the female characters suffered because of being secondary and inferior gender as suggested by society. This particular gender identity is given to woman by so called male chauvinist Society. Hence, gender is not biological as of sex, but social. This social identity of woman became the reason of her oppression. The Society expects a woman to be pure, shy, submissive, meek, modest, obedient and never ask for equality or any other rights in any societal sphere. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* asserts that, “one is not borne but rather becomes, a woman”. Her idea takes us to the patriarchal realm where women are deprived of their individual rights only because of their gender. Simone de Beauvoir’s idea, that woman has been treated as “other” in the society, has been reflected by Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*, she announced, “patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set themselves as the human form, the subject and referent to which is the female is ‘other’ or alien”(Millett 25).

The God of Small Things is a realistic portrayal of class distinction and gender discrimination prevailing in the society. It shows the constant struggle of Ammu, Rahel and Mammachi to seek a sense of identity and individuality in the avaricious society.

The set up of the society is such that it has little or nothing to offer to the unfortunate forsaken women like Ammu, who are literally forsaken everywhere even in their own so called family. Ammu’s life is depicted by Roy from early childhood to her youth, till her death. Ammu is seen enduring a troubled childhood where she along with her mother Mammachi was tormented and even beaten up by her father, Pappachi. Once her father in a sheer fit of schizophrenia tore her new pair of shoes. Pappachi was a man who was never satisfied after



beating up his wife and children. He used to cruelly beat them up and whenever he was unable to calm his anger he tore the curtains, kicked the furniture and broke the table lamp. To Pappachi marriage was not a tie of equality, love or respect between the partners but rather, marriage, to him, was a licence of domination of man over woman. He never respected his wife Mammachi. Nevertheless, Mammachi was the victim of patriarchy and male chauvinism; she never demonstrated any kind of repulsion or resistance towards her husband even she never coincided with Ammu who too was the victim of same male chauvinistic society in future. Mammachi even after undergoing and tolerating a lot of her husband's ruthlessness, does not rebel against him. She was, writes Roy, a typical, "Indian woman who does not exhibit any repulsion towards her husband and adopts herself properly into the conventional scheme of things" (Roy 122). While her husband died she did not cry out of grief but because the societal dogmas expected it of her. Roy writes that, "Ammu told the twins that Mammachi was crying more because she was used to him than because she loved him. She was used to...being beaten from time to time" (Roy 50).

Deep rooted patriarchy in Indian traditional society can be seen in the present novel where the female protagonis, Ammu suffered since her early childhood till her death. Along with her mother she was beaten up by her father. She witnessed the ferocious reality of society through the image of her father. Roy States, "Pappahi is an orthodox, jealous husband. He is a fanatic who terrorizes his own family. He is a habitual wife beater, hits his wife pitilessly..." (Roy 50).

Not only that but Ammu was deprived of her basic right of education. While her brother, Chacko was sent to receive higher education in Oxford, being a woman she was refused to go to



college, “Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl; she would wait for a marriage proposal while she helped her mother with the housework. Since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry” (Roy 38). This hypocrite sense of justice reflects the heinous gender bias in the novel, Pappachi did not have money for Ammu’s education whereas he could gladly bear the expenses of Chacko’s education in Oxford.

Therefore, Ammu realised the hypocrisy of gender discrimination in the society and in order to emancipate herself from this miserable condition she strived for freedom from that claustrophobic life. This desire led her to marry a Hindu Bengali man, without the consent of her family she hastened to settle with him thinking that marriage will give her freedom. Anyhow she wanted to run away from her miserable past.

Unable to recognise the duplicity of patriarchal society she once again found herself entrapped in a gloomy relationship. Similar to her father, her husband too was used to beat her mercilessly. Her tolerance crossed the limit when her husband tried to force her to sleep with his superior. Conserving her self esteem, she strongly protested her husband’s perverse demand and left him and his house.

When Ammu went to live with her family after getting divorce, she was continuously contributing to the growth of family business, yet she was humiliated by every member of the family. Irony of situation is that she was humiliated and insulted even by her own mother who herself had withstood the tyranny of Pappachi in her past. All the property and legal rights of family fortune was entrusted to Chacko only and Ammu was deprived of right of property too.



Once Chacko haughtily said to Ammu, “what’s your is mine and what’s mine is also mine” (Roy 57).

Besides this she received discriminatory treatment in comparison to her brother regarding her love affair with Velutha. Where Chacko’s wicked flirtation with a lowly woman was labelled as “man’s need” (Roy 268) by Baby Kochamma, Ammu’s love affair with low class Velutha was brutally opposed by the family. Velutha was brutally beaten up in police custody to death by falsely accusing him for abduction and murder of Sophie Mol.

Ammu was severely threatened and abused by her family. Her freedom was taken away and she was forced to live a miserable life without any love and affection. Her pathetic condition even after her death can be noticed from these lines when her dead body was dragged outside, “A platoon of ants carried a dead cockroach sedately through the door demonstrating what should be done with corpses” (Roy 162). For her cremation Chacko brought her where, “nobody except beggars, derelicts and police custody dead were cremated” (Roy 162). On her death there was no sign of grief or remorse in the family. The author said, “the door of the furnace clanged shut. There were no tears” (Roy 163).

Conclusion - The neglect and exploitation of females and special treatment for males in *The God of Small Things* is a satire on gender bias prevailing in the society. Male chauvinism is the deepest root stimulating such evil and corrupted mentality. The *God of Small Things* is a highly intellectual and socially realistic novel where Arundhati Roy satirized the traditional Indian male chauvinistic society in a very realistic manner.



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