



ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*: A FEMINIST READING

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ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy is one of the greatest Indian novelists. She was awarded the Booker prize in 1997 for her novel *The God of Small Things*. A feminist reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is essentially by a woman about women, and it has been seen through the eyes of a woman. It is a women-centered novel in the sensibility of pity and fear. The research paper entitled **Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: A Feminist Reading** analyses the women as subjects who are oppressed physically, socially, culturally and economically and explores the voice of marginalized people in the Indian society.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender, Oppression, Revolution, Patriarchy, Domination.

Arundhati Roy is one of the best-known representatives of the contemporary generation of Indian writers who wrote in English. She was born in Shillong, Meghalaya, India. Roy obtained a position with the National Institute of Urban Affairs. She became financially secure with the success of her novel *The God of Small Things*, published in 1997. Roy began writing her first novel, *The God of Small Things*, in 1992, completing it in 1996. The book is semi-autobiographical, and a major part captures her childhood experiences in Ayemenem.

The publication of *The God of Small Things* catapulted Roy to international fame. It received the 1997 Booker Prize for fiction and was listed as one of *The New York Times* notable books of the year. It reached fourth position on *The New York Times*

Bestsellers list for independent fiction. From the beginning, the book was also a commercial success. Roy received half a million pounds as an advance. Roy won the National Film Award for the Best Screenplay in 1989, for *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones*, in which she captured the anguish among the eight students prevailing in professional institutions. In 2015, she returned the national award in protest religious intolerance and the growing violence by right wing groups in India.

The God of Small Things, a novel by Arundhati Roy represents an encounter between tradition and modernity and its consequences. Roy presents this interface as a problem to raise the voice of protest agonies and sufferings of the suppressed class people. Roy has spoken on behalf of the suffering subjects of India as their representative, and opposed tradition generating customs, culture, religion, systems and practices. In the novel, the conflict exists at individual as well as societal levels. The novel graphically shows how people are helpless to resolve these levels of frictions.

Roy suggests that the traditional social structure of India based on the caste system plays a role of an antagonist to destroy the lives of the marginalized and innocent human beings. This can be understood implicitly and explicitly by means of her presentation of a situation, in which a higher-caste woman Ammu and a lower caste man Velutha have fallen in love. This is the breaking of the social taboos. It is against the narrow orthodoxy of the caste system of India that prohibits the higher caste people to have relation with the lower caste people.

The study proposes to investigate how *The God of Small Things* creates a world and succeeds in articulating social oppression. Arundhati Roy's fresh perspective on age old traditions created waves as rebellion against the social injustice meted out to the downtrodden and to the women. *The God of Small Things* is read as a book, a book which becomes the voice of all those who are relegated to the margins of the society.

The significance of the study lies in the fact that Roy has strength and a passionate sense of justice. Roy's works catch out attention on social issues and injustice. If Roy holds anything specifically, it is social vision, a vision which has a little room for the suppression and exploitation of the individual by society, of woman by man, of

untouchables by touchable, of children by elders and political pawns by political parties. She was wholly committed to the voiceless millions of her country and became their voice at a huge risk to herself.

The world that is caught in the patriarchal society. the experience of women who undergo different types of suppression in the hands of patriarchy. Arundhati has taken up the issue of feminism to fight for their identity and economic and social freedom. Her female characters in the novel *The God of Small Things* stands out as persons and not as role-players.

Roy's *The God of Small Things* is feminine creation of unique nature. The novel clearly shows the untold miseries and the undeserved sufferings of women who must bear the brunt of male domination silently and meekly. She transcends the ordinary concept of feminism. The novel examines the feminist jealousy between the woman and woman, the plight of woman in male dominated framework. Roy shows how a woman in patriarchal set up yearns for pleasure and happiness and a life far from the shackles and constraints. She is like a free bird that wants to fly freely in the open skies. But suddenly, her wings are cut down by the callous society and thus she is pulled down to this earth where she must 'grovel in the lowly dust'. Despite the significant change in women's position in society in the post-Independence era, she is still not totally emancipated. These contradictions can best be understood by examining the Indian social structure which comprises institutions like caste, joint family and religious values and practices consolidating women's subordinate position. In this respect Maitreyi Mukhopadhyay says:

It should be emphasized that the poor status of women, their oppression and exploitation, cannot be examined as an isolated problem in Indian society. Although the status of women constitutes a problem in most societies in the rigidly hierarchical and inequitable social structure which exists in India, the relative Inferiority and superiority of various roles is much more clearly defined. The inequality and subordination of women is as instrument or function of the social structure. (82)

Arundhati Roy in her novel *The God of Small Things*, effortlessly dealt psychological trauma and scandal. The entire story revolves around the central figure of the novel Ammu. Roy made Ammu the pivot of the entire plot as the social insecurity combined with her unfulfilled social desires. The epiphany of her fraudulent affair brings a disastrous effect. She is tagged with the phrase prostitution by the police. She is thrown from home as she was responsible for Sophie's death. The psychological traumas have no end and poor Ammu's end also came. The fatal trauma continues in her funeral too. She was denied by the church for burial.

The psychological trauma and scandal infected Ammu's children also. They undergo similar hardships in life. Estha and Rahel suffer certain traumatic experience. In early life itself they evidence the breakup of their parents. They both brought up in a state of separation. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman offers a basic classification system for the symptoms of trauma, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. She attributes the range of symptoms to 'three main categories hyper arousal, intrusion and constriction' (35). Roy made evident the miseries of Estha in *The God of Small Things* through the molestation of the Orange drink Lemon drink man at Abhilash Talkies.

The twins world has certainly shaken by the arrival of their beautiful young cousin, Sophie. It has led them to have an illicit liaison. Roy intensifies the forces such as Cast- division, religious diversity, class, patriarchal family hierarchy, colonialism, communism, global travel and commerce by contrasting the small things with the big things of the novel. The intention of exploring one's life is to highlight how the inner mind of the individual plays a major role in one's life, which is controlled by certain external forces. The focus of the chapter Broken Bond is about how Trauma and Ethical Dilemma affect their mind and behaviour.

Even though Ammu pays for her relationship at the end, Velutha is far more vulnerable and exposed. This social distance between the communities, a difference in class and position in society proves to be fatal to Velutha. All these extracts substantiate that importance is given to the external identity but none to see beyond it. The killing of feelings, emotions, wishes and mind is crueller than the estranger. Henry David Thoreau

in his work *Civil Disobedience* talks very plainly about the imprisonment of the physical body while the mind goes around freely. Here he says about the nature of man comparing with plant as, “If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so, a man” (*Civil Disobedience* 128). It is not about physical death but the feelings. Every species has the right to live and live respectively.

Though the psychological trauma and scandal hits Ammu to its fuller effort she never gives up her courage and desires to attain the place she wishes for. She admires through her struggle to rise each time when she falls. She exhibits herself to be strong and stronger. Roy dooms ‘Subaltern consciousness’ as utterly hopeless. The real subaltern cannot rise in social hierarchy. Roy exemplifies the urge of subalternity in the form of ‘not speaking’. Roy makes the ‘not speakingness’ to speak through the paralysed brother of Velutha. Kuttappen who cries and screams in the novel. These are the symbols of agony which affects psychology.

The truthful picture of the plight of Indian women, their great suffering, anxieties, their humble submission, persecution and undeserved humiliation in a male dominated society. It shows women’s marathon struggle for seeking the sense of ‘identity’ in a totally averse and envious society. The social structure of an average Indian woman is full of ups and downs. It can be very clearly seen in some of the women characters like Ammu, Mammachi, Baby kochamma, Rahel and Margaret Kochamma. *The God of Small Things* is a feminist text foregrounding many invisible barriers which patriarchy has continued to raise in women’s way to gain parity with men. One of the key issues which very often figures in contemporary feminist discourse is the patriarchal powers within the household, the society and the economy.

Mammachi shows indifferent attitude towards Margaret kochamma. She was jealous of the women whom her son had loved and married. Although Mammachi has never met Margaret even for once looks down upon her. She is unkind towards the workers of the factory Paradise Pickles & Preservers. But she is meek with Chacko. Mammachi is not crafty as baby kochamma, but her mind is hardly less pervert than that of Baby Kochamma. She subscribes to the logic and ethics of the male chauvinism in

Toto. Her conservative idea turns her inhuman, nasty and brutish. In the novel, the characters Mammachi and Baby Kochamma suffer due to the institution of relationship. Their pathetic state guides their apathy towards Rahel. In this regard, Debjani Gangulay rightly comments:

Mammachi's own marital experience has not enabled her so empathize with her daughter's brutalized married life. Rather, she sees Ammu's failed marriage as just retribution for her daughter who dared to marry outside her community. Her firm emotional investment in the hierarchies of class, caste and gender is illustrated at several points in the novel. Like a young bride who couldn't believe her good fortune. (22)

Roy employs various literary devices, to intensify the trauma faced by the marginalized people of India. Hence, Roy's mastery over the art of writing contributes to the effective deliverance of the major theme of the novel, thereby proving herself as a novelist with a purpose, painfully concerned with the upliftment of the downtrodden.

Roy's *The God of Small Things* explores that every woman suffers in her own unique manner. The novel deals with the eternal sufferings, misery, and physical and sexual violence of women in a male-dominated society. It portrays how women suffer mentally, physically and sexually through male chauvinism. It also depicts a futile struggle of women for their fulfilment and their appalling conditions in a conventional patriarchal society. The author's feminist rage exposes how women become victim of violence, exploitation, estrangement, and isolation as well as how well-oiled exploitative machinery of patriarchal society put Ammu to death.

The major thematic concerns of Roy's *The God of Small Things*, apart from depiction of family life are Ammu's criticism of tradition, society and marginality (both untouchability and woman's suppression). This novel speaks of politics and criticizes the communist government in Kerala. It speaks of marginality of caste and sex, and incest and the obscene and provides diasporic experience: dislocation and identity crisis. It is a technical tour de force and known for feminist English and linguistic inventiveness. Roy presents several different female characters in her novel.

The God of Small Things a representation of the subaltern women by Roy has been made more varied, merely by presenting the various portraits of women who, despite their oppression and marginalization, are not without responsibility. Ammu represents people who dare to do the “unthinkable,” to transgress the very line that upholds the system of difference that casteism inherently maintains. She represents all those who have suffered due to transgressions against the “Love Laws” and gender-specific expectations imposed upon them. Ammu and Velutha are representatives of thousands of cross-caste relationships in the real India, a voice that resonates all over the world.

Thus, *The God of Small Things* is feminine creation of unique nature. The novel clearly shows the untold miseries and the undeserved sufferings of women who must bear the brunt of male domination silently and meekly. The novel *The God of Small Things* often associated with several categoric literary fiction, including feminist perception, postcolonialism, politics, literary tourism and Indian culture, is a complete reflection of the life and sufferings of women that voices out the trauma of marginalized people in the Indian society. It transcends the ordinary concept of feminism.

In a feminist reading of *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, often emphasizes the novel’s exploration of gender roles, power dynamics, and societal constraints. It highlights how characters like Ammu and Baby Kochamma navigate oppressive structures and rebel against traditional expectations. Additionally, the conclusion may discuss the novel's critique of patriarchy and its portrayal of women's struggles for autonomy and agency in a male-dominated society. Ultimately, it underscores the importance of challenging societal norms and advocating for gender equality. Thus, the novel is remarkable for the elements of feminist studies. It shows different kinds of discriminations one based on gender and sex. It provides multifaceted issues of suppression, oppression and tormenting activity against women in male dominated societies. Different kinds of structural and cultural points can be noted which make the research complete in the sense of feminism.

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