

Gender Discrimination in Arundhati Roy's

The God of Small Things

SARANYA.R ., MPhil English,

Aditanar College Of Arts and Science,

Saranya8010@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The novel, *The God of Small Things* depicts differences of gender discrimination, political and childhood exploitation. Arundhati Roy describes the struggle of women in the male chauvinistic society. In this novel, women of three generations are discussed. The first generation is about Mammachi, the second is about Ammu and finally Rahel. Roy deals with three generations of women and their struggle to lead a peaceful life. Mammachi is often beaten by her husband Pappachi. Ammu and Rahel are divorced in their life before they start their life, and both of them return to Ayemenem. They are the victims of the male dominant society. Through this Roy focuses the male dominance of patriarchal voice and treatment of Dalits in this novel.

KEYWORDS: Male chauvinism, Gender, untouchable, patriarchal, feminism.

Suzanna Arundhati Roy was born on 24th November 1961 in Shillong Meghalaya. She is an Indian author best known for her novel *The God of Small Things* which won The Man Booker prize for fiction in 1997 and became the biggest selling book by a non –expatriate Indian author. She is also a political and social activist involved in human rights, environmentalist and a supporter of minority culture.

She received many awards for her writings. In 2002 The Lannan Foundation Cultural Freedom Award, In 2006 Sahitya Academic Award for her collection of essays *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*. She is the first Indian woman writer to win the prestigious man Booker prize for her novel. *K.M.Pandey* describes the achievement of the novel.

The God Of Small Things is a polysemic novel which can be interpreted at several levels ...a satire on politics attacking specifically the communist establishment ... a family saga narration the story of four generations of a Christian family.. A novel having religious overtones... a protest novel which is subversive and taboo breaking a love story with tragic end... (2)

Arundhati Roy portrays the pathetic condition of women in the society and unexplainable struggle. In the novel *The God Of Small Things*, there are three generations of women born in different environments. The novel never offers any sort of happiness unless the suffering of Ammu, the protagonist along with Mammachi and Rahel. Mammachi, a talented violinist and wife of Pappachi is an entomologist. She suffers a lot from the first day of her marriage. Though he is a well educated man and behaves like a decent man, he ill-treats his wife.

Mammachi is always a puppet in the hands of Pappachi. He often beats his wife with a flower vase. He shows his ego and jealousy towards Mammachi. After retirement at home Pappachi never allowed her to sit in his plymouth car until his death. Mammachi is a successful business woman in a pickle factory, and becomes more powerful. Pappachi thinks women should not be superior to men and they should always depend on them. In the "Man –Woman Relationship in *The God Of Small Things*", critic Nirmala C Prakash points out Pappachi's view of marriage as "wife is a slave who can be driven out of the house at his will and whose precious possessions like a piano can be mercilessly broken..."(180) Pappachi cannot tolerate his wife's success as a

business woman who became popular in pickle making. Prakash, the critic argues that “Mammachi’s and Pappachi’s marriage is filled with hatred, jealous and violence”(80). In the beginning, Roy presents a pathetic picture of Mammachi’s life. Roy observes “Mammachi was almost blind and always wore dark glasses when she went out of the house. Her tears trickled down from behind them and trembled along her jaw like raindrops on the edge of a roof.”(TGST5). Mammachi is later dominated by her son Chacko. When he is educated in Oxford, She pawns her jewels and sends money to him. She is denied her own Properties ownership.

Ammu is the central character in this novel *The God of Small Things*. As a child Ammu has been tortured by her father Pappachi. Her higher studies is totally stopped by her father . Ammu belongs Syrian Catholic Christian family in the town Ayemenem in Kerala. Male chauvinism and gender biasness are the major obstacles in Ammu’s life. Pappachi does not allow her to educate herself at college. Arundhati Roy describes “Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for girls”(TGST 38). As a result of this she hates her father and moves to Calcutta .

Ammu and Chacko are not treated equally by their parents, still it happens in many countries and women denied opportunity of education. Ammu is denied education, whereas Chacko gets education at Oxford . Verma writes that “*every time Chacko is out of money, his mother send him more* “(180). Ammu and Margaret break moral rules of society. During her stay in Calcutta, She meets her future partner and falls in love with him, later she decides to marry Baba in a glamorous ceremony. Ammu believes that Ayemenem people will never agree to marry him, they will be against her desire. The writer observes,

Ammu didn’t pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning

to Ayemenem . She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision .They didn't reply. (TGST 39)

Ammu soon becomes disillusioned in her marriage because her husband is a drunkard and beats her frequently . He is willing to send his wife for one night to his boss Mr. Hollick in order to secure his job . She feels as she had jumped out of a frying pan into fire. She leaves her husband and returns to her parents in Ayemenem. In her own house Ammu and her fraternal twins are treated indifferent and all rights are denied. Ammu is a strict and loving mother ,she does not care about social rank. She likes to take care of them in right manner.

Baby Kochamma words added fuel to the fire “A married daughter had no position in her parents' home for divorced daughter”(TGST 45). The society trusts that the women who live with their husbands are good women . Everyone in Ayemenem ill-treats her. The women in this novel are seriously affected by the society. Chacko, Ammu's brother, he married an English woman Margaret but their marriage ends in divorce. He divorces his wife and comes back to Ayemenem to his father's house. Prakash, a critic claims that, “a divorced daughter is unwelcome in her parent's house whereas a divorced son is welcome home and becomes the inheritor of the family future” (81).

He never feels guilty he enjoys all kind of happiness in the society. Chacko says his sister Ammu “what's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine“(TGST57). Chacko clearly describes about male chauvinism, how cruelly they reject the role of women in the society even to their own blood relation. Verma thinks that,” Chacko does not believe that women should hold power over men “(182).

Ammu desires are not fulfilled as a women, she has an affair with Velutha a member of untouchable caste is considered a immoral love according to the caste system in Indian. When Baby Kochamma came to know about her affair ,she locked Ammu. Velutha was taken

to police custody. He was misunderstood that he killed Sophie Mol, who accidentally drowned in the river. Velutha died in custody, Ammu tried to save him but nothing could be done as he was an outcaste.

Rahel and Estha are totally disillusioned without love and protection. Even church refuses to bury her body, Ammu breaks the rules. The society agrees, if men marry many women it is acceptable but women has affair with another man she is called as prostitute. Ammu has observed rightly, "Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinistic society"(TGST57).

Finally the third generation Rahel is also a victim of male chauvinism. She is also denied the love and care by her Grandparents. She became fatherless at her young age. Ammu plays the role of father and mother to her. Rahel and Estha are the products of the inter community marriage, the family treats them as strangers.

After the arrival of Sophie Mol, Rahel denies all kind of love and care from her family. Sophie Mol and Rahel come from inter community marriage, but they are not treated equally. Verma points out that her family sees "Rahel as a demon while Sophie Mol is seen as an angel" (181). This made her to think Velutha as her father figure. "She knew his back she had been carried on it." When Velutha dies, After death of Ammu, Rahel separates by her grandmother. Rahel completes her studies and moves to U.S and lead a peaceful life. She marries a white man Larry mc Casin who is in Delhi collecting material for his Doctoral Thesis. Rahel is separated by religion, community, gender and identity because her father was Hindu and Mother was a Syrian Christian Rahel refuses to accept the fate of Ammu and Mammachi. Rahel husband is not suppressed her as Pappachi and her father has done to their wives, later she would have been oppressed if she stays with her husband she will force to stay in a loveless marriage.

At the age of 31, she hears that her brother Estha has come to Ayemenem. So she heads back to meet him. After long years both are reunited and spend long time as adults, They finally let go of their grief through action. They set themselves free from the burden of their “small things.” Rahel is a woman who breaks the social rules of Kerala, she lives her whole life, the way she likes and does not care about the society.

Through this novel women are treated more or less badly in all the generations. Thus Roy conveys the message that all people should be treated equal and no caste system or gender identity in the society does not revolve around fairness and opportunities. In this novel *The God Of Small Things* the author presents the undesired sufferings of women who have to face endless torture silently. Women should raise their voice against the male chauvinistic society.

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