

The Three Generations of Changing Woman in The God of Small Things

Dr. Vandana Sharma
Assit Proferssor
Dept of English J.K.P (P.G.) College Muzaffarnagar

ABSTRACT

The present paper seeks to explore the role and position of Indian woman in a patriarchal society as depicted by Arundhati Roy in The God of Small Things. Roy has presented the criticism of the deep rooted social conventions of exploitation of female living on the margin and has been neglected for decades. Arundhati Roy herself said in a recent interview with Huff Post: "Every freedom we have today, we have because of feminists."

The God of Small Things is a great work of Ms Roy, depicting the predicament of women through three generations. Mamachi, Ammu and Rahel are the symbolic characters of changing Indian woman, from a mere toy in the patriarchal society to a rebellions and free individual

KEY/WORDS-

Feminism, patriarchal, gender-bias, exploitation, discrimination, rebellions, freedom.

Gender-bias, discrimination in the rights of women and feminism are the relevant themes explored by post modern writers in their works. Undoubtedly , family and social as well as political customs play an important role in disadvantaging women. Social structure and institutions are so built up as to sanctify the persecution of women because in most of the civilizations social structures are basically patriarchal Arundhati Roy's novel The God of Small Things challenges this position and depicts women across the globe, worldwide, regionally and nationally capable of holding and constructive implications of their own femaleness and womanhood,

Many Indian women writers in English raise the question of

silencing and depriving of their existence in a patriarchal set up of Indian society. Their concern about women's liberation is quite visible in their works. To the postmodern feminist writers especially it is the human life, with its puzzled ambiance, which is to be discovered. So post modern feminists refused to confine themselves in depicting the subjugated, traumatized and bothered life of a woman, who has been the victim of the ill treatment in a man-made society. To them it is not only the dilemma of women but of human beings which gives out as a happy hunting ground. We can find traces of such treatment in the Dark holds No terror of Shashi Deshpande and in The God of Small Things of Arundhati Roy. In The God of Small Things, the Women characters are illustrated not only as women but also as human beings multipart and baffled in society. The characters like Ammu and Rahel move violently to dissect and decode the firm mysteries of our existence. They revolt against the patriarchal set up which is trying to deny them the right of existence. The three generations of The God of Small Things presented by Arundhati Roy are symbolic of the predicament of women

Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel They are subjugated and subjected to cruelty and inhuman handling. Pappachi, an imperial entomologist would donate money to orphanages and leprosy clinic but he has different attitude with the females in his family as:

'But alone with his wife and children, he turned into a monstrous bulley, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer" (The God of small Things P.180)

The novel presents the state of female in patriarchal set up of south Indian families. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu and Rahel are the executives of their own post modern culture and through them Roy gives the gradual change in the position of woman in the society.

Mammachi, the wife of imperial entomologist Pappachi, stands for the first generation woman She productively uses her kitchen talents into a business of pickle-making and turns it into a cottage industry. Pappachi, who is jealous of his wife's victory, turns more violent and beats her pitilessly.

Moreover, he feels insecure with the age-gap and his wife's youth. Mammachi had exceptional talent for music, especially violin, it was a mistake on the part of the Austrian teacher to tell Pappachi that his wife was talented, for this remark released all the animal fury of jealousy in him as Roy writes:

"The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place, One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi violin and threw it in the river."(The God of small Things P.48)

Arundhati Roy explains the various reasons of his jealousy as:

Pappachi for his part, was having trouble coping with the ignominy of retirement. He was 17 years older than Mammachi and realized with a shock that he was an old man, when his wife was still in her prime(The God of small Things P.47) The weal and bumps on mammachi's head were ample proofs of beatings with a brass vase by Pappachi, which has been considered as man's rights to justice in the Patriarchal set up of Indian society.

Ammu stands for the second generation presented in the god of small things by Arundhati Roy. She may be viewed as the mouth piece of the author herself. Through her character the author unfolds the place of separated or divorced women in our society. Everyone in the family looks down upon Ammu for the reason that she transgressed the custom of arranged marriage which ended in a divorce. We find a clear example of gender bias when we compare her position with her brother Chacko. He had done the same, still, he enjoys everything in his life. Ammu was denied on her college education for Pappachi thinks the college education corrupts a woman. To escape from her father's violence Ammu marries a man of her own choice as:

"She thought that anything anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem."(The God of small Things P.39)

But She jumps from a frying pan into a blaze, The charm of a happy married life soon disappeared and Ammu becomes a victim of her husband's drunken violence. When all these things start to affect the two year old twins, Ammu decides to leave her husband and returns reluctantly to her parent's home,

where she was never welcomed. She is permitted to Stay “ on sufferance.”Arundhati Roy writes:

“For herself –she knew that there would be no more chances.Only Ayemenem.A front verandah and a back verandah. A hot river and pickle factory and in the background of constant high winning mewl of local disapproval(The God of small Things P.43)

In the same condition, her brother chacko gets pleasure from love and esteem from the family members and the social order, where as Ammu and her kids are agonised and abandoned. The author also refers to the discriminatory approach of Mammachi towards Ammu,and chacko. Her state develops into worse when her family comes to identify about her banned relationship with a low caste Paravan Velutha. Whereas chacko is concerned his”men’s need” are well organized by his mother Mammachi. With his “needs” she is to generous but, no such “understanding” is extended to Ammu. There is no concept of A “woman’s need”. Infact, Mammachi thinks of Ammu’s relationship with Velutha as: **“like a dog with a bitch on heat”(The God of small Things P.257)**

Ammu has been dishonoured by her father, badly treated and deceived by her husband, abused by her own brother and badly treated by the police and society. Each of them Pronounced the male, chauvinist ideology that she should not exist anywhere as a wife, sister,daughter or even as a citizen or a human being. In the Indian society, a daughter has no claim to the assets, as:

“ Legally this was the case because Ammu as a daughter, has no claim to the property.”(The God of small Things P.57) and Chacko’s comments confirms this clearly:

“what is yours is mine and what is mine, is also mine.” (The God of small Things P.57) Baby Kochamma also has the similar opinion as Chacko:

“as for a divorced daughter,according to Baby Kochamma, She has no position anywhere at all .and as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage- well, words couldn't describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage.As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage, Baby Kochamma

chose to remain quiveringly silent of the subject"(The God of small Things P.45-46) ss

Ammu has been presented as a tragic figure, a woman struggling against her family and society As Ranga Rao puts it:

" In Ammu, the novelist has presented with compassion-a woman, a feminist locked in a struggle with her family its hidden morality, with society and tragically with herself."(Bhatt , Indira P.47)

The idiosyncratic handling between sons and daughters appears to be extended to their children. Arundhati Roy constructs most of the scenes of her novels upon the difference in treatment between daughters and sons In Ammu's character,the author has presented a rebellious woman. She demonstrates how a woman with high passion and strong will who creates a threat to the despotic order of society, is quickly branded as dangerous . Arundhati Roy often used metaphors of madness and animality while describing Ammu's nature, which shows that due to her spirit,Ammu feels no shame in satisfying her emotional and bodily desires. She is a woman who outrages society by her eccentric behaviour and pays the penalty for breaking the eventual taboo,by loving a man below her caste, All these things lead her to her premature death:

"Ammu died in a grimy room in th Bharat Lodge in Alleppey, where she had gone for a job interview as someone's secretary. She died alone.....she was thirty-one, not old, not young, but a via-able, die-able age(The God of small Things P.161)

In the third generation of females Arundhati Roy presented the character of Rahel, a representative of a woman of the post modern era Rahel is an attempt of the novelist to break the shackles of old customs and burdens of the orthodox society . A sense of antagonism against the readymade opinions, a type of female iconoclast, we can see here The division also infuses the different senses of identity among the different generations of women in the God of Small things, Mammachi or Amu is seen as complicit or as an antagonist to the male order or man made society. But for Rahel, there is no disparity stuck between the feminine self and the male order.

She represents the fourth wave feminism, for her attitude. Like Ammu, her mother, Rahel also moves in and moves out of a rushed marriage: but the only distinction between the two is that ,there is no trauma of physical abuse in the case of Rahel .She even breaks the laws of love morality by committing incest with her own brother Estha. Rahel is the twin sister of Estha , so she has natural bond with him that enables her to understand and feel what he thinks,, feels and experiences. They share their Mothers terrors and Rahel share his sorrows and purple moods. Rahel and Estha develop a peculiar attraction for one another. The two seek salvation in illicit relationship :

“They lay like that for a long time Awake in the dark Quietness and Emptiness . Not old Not young But a viable die-able age.(The God of small Things P.327) But Rahel in not worried or afraid of man-made laws or establishments She echoes the authors deepest passions about a woman and her position in the patriarchal set up of a society She also generates a line of clash between the older and the younger generation. The older generation is represented by Mammachi and Baby Kochamma who accept to function by the rules of the established social customs. But the younger generation. which is represented by Ammu and Rahel, become inspirational figure to think about the process of liberation and social alteration.

The God of small things is essentially a tale of those women or small Thing who have been relegated to the margin of society and have to pay a heavy price for being born as a woman.

Works consulted

1. Bhatt, Indira. Nityanandam,Indira (ed.) Explorations: Arundhati Roy’s The god of Small Things. Creative Books, New Delhi 1999.
2. The Language of “The god of small Things A post – Colonial Study “By Bijay Kumar Das in The Journal of Indian Writing in English vol 27

no 1 Jan 1999.

3. Mohapatra, Padmalaya, Mohanty, Bijoyini: Elite women of India : APH Publishing Corporation ,New Delhi 2002
4. Mother-Saw ,Jenifer: Feminism,issues,Arguments: Oxford Univ Press, Oxfond ,2009
5. Singh ,Rashmi R: Feminist Movement of the Nineties with special Reference to Arundhati Roy's The god of small Things unpublished U.G.C project :2002
- 6.