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Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: A Feminist Perspective

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The present research paper has been attempted to explore the elements of Feminism in Arundhati Roy's novel "The God of Small Things". The paper seeks to study the work of Arundhati Roy, 'The God of Small Things' as a text of 'feminine writing'. It throws light on some important things of life like how love is always associated with sadness, how a person's childhood experiences affect his/her perspectives and whole life. It also presents the constant struggle of women against their incessant exploitation, torture and struggle which they undergo because of the male dominated conservative society.

About the Author:

Arundhati Roy, recipient of Booker Prize award was born on November 24, 1961 in Shillong, Meghalaya, India. Her full name is Suzanna Arundhati Roy. Her mother Mary Roy, well-known as social activist is from Kerala, and her father a Bengali Hindu tea planter. She spent her crucial childhood years in Ayamanam a small town near Kotlayam, followed by the Lawrence school, Lovedale, in Bilgris, Tamil Nadu. She then studied architecture at the school of Planning and Architecture, Delhi, where she met her first husband, architect Gerard da Cunha. Roy met her second husband, filmmaker Pradip Krishen, in 1984, and played a village girl in his award winning movie Massey Sahib. It was a fruitful association for she soon got involved in preparing T.V. serials for Doordarshan and got attention for ITV also. Roy is a cousin of prominent media personality Prannoy Roy, the head of the Leading Indian TV media group NDTV. She lives in New Delhi.

Feminist Perspective:

Though the novel is undeniably about the twins; Esthappen and Rahel, who can be considered as the protagonists of the novel and the narrative view of the authoress, intrinsically this novel is an argument for and against the good and evil in society with special reference to women.

The novel throws light on some important things of life like how love is always associated with sadness, how a person's childhood experiences affect his/her perspectives and whole life. The novel shows the ugly face of people and society as a whole, a vivid description of the black and sarcastic world especially with reference to women that dwells around us.

The God of small things highlights the position of women folk in India. It presents before us the constant struggle of women against their incessant exploitation, torture and struggle which they undergo because of the male dominated conservative society.

In the novel "The God Of Small Things", there are three generations of women. Each of them was born and raised under different circumstances. Each of them was born and raised under different circumstances. Starting from the oldest generation, there is Mammachi, then the generation of Ammu, and the youngest generation is Rahel. These

women live according to the prevailing customs of Hinduism. Susan Wadley and Doranne Jacobson conclude that according to Hindu culture, there are dual views on women. First, woman is considered benevolent and bestower, second view is that, woman is aggressive, malevolent and a destroyer.

Maachi's family although they are Syrian Christians, since they live in India, they cannot avoid being influenced by Hinduism. Mammachi lives under the control of men. She got married in puberty with a man seventeen-years older to her who has nearly controlled every step of hers. Mammachi was a promising violinist; she had to leave her career because Papachi asked her to do so.

It was during those few months they spent in Vienna that Mammachi took her first lessons on the violin. The lessons were abruptly discontinued when Mammachi's teacher Launsky Tieffenthal was exceptionally talented and in his opinion, potentially concert class.

This is not the only case that shows the domination of man as a husband on a woman. Domestic violence was also a part of life. Papachi, often beat Mammachi with a brass flower vase. In addition, Papachi insulted Mammachi as she was never allowed to sit in his Plymouth, until after his death.

The other man who dominated Mammachi's life was Chacko, her privileged and Oxford educated son. When he returned home after his divorce from Margaret, she takes over Mammachi's pickle factory and referring to the factory as "..... my factory, my pineapples, my pickles" (57) without regarding Mamachi who had started and developed the factory before Chacko returned home. Mamachi did nothing but accept it passively. Whatever her husband did, being a virtuous woman, she had to accept it because it was sanctioned by the society.

Ammu, the woman in the second generation in the novel is also confined. Because of her parent's traditional beliefs, she lives as the second. As a matter of fact, her parents give more affection to his brother for being a man than her as a woman. Moreover, being single parents of two children, her position in society is worse. She had no other choice but to live in her parent's house controlled by men.

When another marriage took place, Ammu leaves Ayemenem and lives in Calcutta with her second husband. But, unfortunately, her second husband is not well employed and one day he sold Ammu to his manager. This forced Ammu for the second divorce and that makes her position worse in society. It is because the society believes that a good woman should live with her husband and accept her husband unconditionally. A divorced woman is considered equal to an un-virtuous woman.

From the character of Ammu, we can learn that Ammu is the woman who tries to rebel against the Hindu values and patriarchy system in Indian society. Unlike her mother, she cannot accept the bad attitude and actions of her husband and prefers divorce than keeping her marriage. Ammu is also the example of a member of society who breaks the communal mores of India.

Rahel, Ammu's daughter is the woman who has no place in either her family or society. Living in her grandparent's house, she does not live like a normal child. She lives as a witness to injustices done to on her mother's. As Rahel is growing up unwanted, she never experiences the real Hindu tradition because no one regards her presence, so that, Rahel becomes a free woman who unlike her mother, is not restricted by mental restrictions of the Hindu traditions. This is why, on her return to Ayemenem, she replies to an old man who asked about her marital status "We are divorced" (130) without worrying what the old man will think about her answer.

Chacko is a representative of exploitative male who oppresses women. He troubles his mother, his sister and even his wife. Ammu's inter-religious marriage is abused but Chacko's relation with low caste woman is accepted in the name of Man's needs. In this novel, marriage is a trap for all and no marriage is successful.

In the novel, Arundhati Roy has depicted the worst social and economic conditions of women. Ammu is divorced and lives with her parents and brother, Chacko, who treat her as well as her children in a terrible manner. She is divorced and a divorced woman has no respectable place in society while her brother is also divorced, but no one tells anything to him and he leads life cheerfully. This demonstrates the dissimilar conditions for man and woman in the society. Chacko takes charge of the whole Ayemenem House and asserts his right over the whole property and even deprives his sister of her share. Ammu is forever under mental stress and strain and is tortured by the people most dear to her. Roy wants to prove that a woman is the pivotal character of a family and she forms the heart of the family and if we break the heart of a woman, the whole family can disintegrate into nothingness. This is what happens to Ammu and then to her children who have this unfortunate descent from broken families and in turn lead a disintegrated and disturbed life.

Simone de Beauvoir in her famous work “The Second Sex” remarks, “woman has always been man’s dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality” (20). Commenting on the condition of the married women, Beauvoir avers, “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society”. She further says in her work “The Second Sex” as “One is not born’ but rather becomes, a woman” (445).

From this perspective, Arundhati Roy’s Novel “The God of Small Things” focuses on the above-mentioned points. Roy, through the character of Ammu has portrayed, that the female sex is completely neglected in society. When Ammu makes the physical relationship with an untouchable man Velutha, their relationship exceeded to an extent that it came to be labeled as illicit. In this novel, it is found that both male and female are treated differently as Chacko, being a man lives happily even after divorce but on the other hand, Ammu, after divorce, suffers in the whole novel. It shows different social conditions of men and women in the society which is very decisive.

This novel was a revolutionary attempt on the part of Arundhati who tried to open the eyes of Indian community towards the callousness of treating women as objects. Women thus treated are considered soulless beings, sub-human and playthings for men. This imbalance in society explains much of the unhappiness prevailing in our families and the battered lives of children who are exposed to this very partial and unjust view of life. The end result is a paralysed society unable and unwilling to grow.

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