

Arundhati Roy's Novel "The God of Small Things" as a Feministic Novel: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

The aim of the research is to recognize the feminist strains in the postmodern Indian Fiction, *The God of Small Things*. The researcher has planned to survey the text systematically for seeking feministic values. . The paper also depicts the inner life and conflicts of the self sacrificing women who desperately crave for their identity. How the female characters rebel towards the patriarchal norms and what is their ultimate fate is also highlighted in the present paper. 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 her perspectives and whole life.

**Key Words:** Feminism, The image of women, Discrimination, Breaking the boundaries, Postmodernism.

Introduction

Arundhati Roy, born November 24, 1961, Shillong, Meghalaya, India, is an Indian author, actress, and political activist. Her mother Mary Roy, well-known as social activist is from Kerala and her father is a Bengali Hindu tea planter. She spent her critical childhood years in Ayamanam a small town close to 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 valuable 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. In 1997 Roy published her debut novel, *The God of Small Things* to wide praise. The semiautobiographical work deceased from the conventional plots and light prose that had been typical among best-sellers. Composed in a lyrical language about South Asian themes and characters in a narrative that wandered through time, Roy's novel became the biggest-selling book by a non expatriate Indian author and won the 1998 Man Booker Prize for Fiction.

Statement of the problem:

Feminism is an attitude which considers the plight of women generously and good-naturedly. Feminism is one who set-up her

voice in support of women opposite mains in human remedy. Feminism in Indian literature particularly in Indian English writing is a byproduct of the western feminist motion but we cannot totally neglect the contribution made by our freedom struggle independence, spread of education, concern for economic development and firmness, employment opportunities and above all the resultant new awareness of our women. The Indian women caught in the fluidity of tradition and modernity tolerating the load of the past and the hope of the future is the crux of feminism in Indian literature. Among the women writers of 1990 the most famed name is that of Arundhati Roy. Rushdie remarks: "The Kerala writer Arundhati Roy has arrived to the accompaniment of loud fun fare. Her novel 'The God of Small Things' is full of aim and flash and written in extremely wrought and totally personal style." 'The God of small things' by Arundhati Roy is mainly a novel by a woman about a woman sees through the eyes of a woman.' Arundhati Roy's feminism is the feminism of a new age and it differs from the western concept of feminism which is based on copying masculine models of power and competition. Post independence Indian English fiction constitutes an important part of world literature today and women novelists have made important contribution to it. R.P. Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee for example just to name a few have presented their stories from a feminists point of view. Arundhati Roy's 'The God of small Things' is the latest and most useful addition

to the long list of feminists novels of women writers.

'The God of Small Things' is out and out a novel of coming feminism Arundhati Roy has portray women conflicting with pangs of male controlled society. Though she looks to be gender-biased, she has brought out women's leonine struggle opposite the exploitation. Ammu struggles to set-up above the odds. Ammu is humbled at the hands of protectors. Ammu is dangerously conflicts with established norms and finally she is killed in her conflict, she is the real forerunner of coming feminism. Of course there are other women too, who act on the ideology of coming feminism. Post colonial theory and feminist discussion often observes parellels in literature. Both concerns themselves with suppression and inequity – one with inequity towards the native and the other with female sex women are often relegated to an inferior position in the age old patriarchal societies Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things' deals with both these aspects on one hand it reveals the extensive majority of problems faced by women in a patriarchal society. The double standards of morality in society in honor of men and women, the passive compliant role of a wife in a man-woman relationship and the vindictive attitude of a woman in extending the suffering and disgrace of another woman by a male. In 'the God of Small Things' Arundhati Roy touched the subjects like social injustice, human right, untouchability, gender cornerwise and international politics. She also focused on gender biasness and class and caste inequalities. The saga of suffering begins with Ammu. She is regarded as a weaker sex

and hence inferior to man in all honor. Her family ceased her education and sent her brother Chacko to oxford for education. According to her father for women education is unnecessary. She is pushed back at home to groom herself in 'domestic arts' which include the chiefly the fine distinction of feelings and the capability to bring about adaptations in personal relations. In reality Ammu is more brilliant than Chacko, though she is disadvantaged from the educational chance in attempt to escape she receives the programme of a Hindu Bengali from Calcutta. She marries him not because of her love to him but only as a means of escape from Ayemenen house. But soon the charm of marital bliss evaporates as her alcoholic husband reduces her to the level of toy and desire her to go to his boss Mr. Hollick for gratifying his just. So that his job may be secure. Ammu cannot tolerate such humiliation and hits her husband in a mad frenzy and leaves the place with her two kids and comes back to Ayemenen house. She is given step motherly remedy in her own house. The character of Chacko nears her sister Ammu was also very aggressive and disregarded his sister's thinking that she had no claim to the property of the family. The female characters of this novel are elegant, resourceful and able of social change but they never get opportunities due to harsh social code and shape. Through this novel Arundhati Roy challenges the traditional inequity done to women because of their gender and class distinction. Through the novel she reminds the readers the results of neglecting the potentialities of women which are fifty percent of society.

### **Feministic Analysis of the God of Small Things**

The novel deals with the state of daughters in patriarchal families in Southern India. It is a type of social forum, which clues at the creation of masculinity as power figures. Roy's feminist visualization can also be well understood from her non-fictional works, The Great Indian Rape Trick I and The Great Indian Rape Trick II. In both the works, she powerfully makes her comment opposite Shekhar Kapur's popular film Bandit Queen. In this novel, Arundhati Roy portrays her feminist viewpoints through the generations of women characters -- Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu and Rahel. These characters are administrative of their own postmodern culture and through them Roy gives the slow change in the position of woman in the society. Repeatedly a woman is shown as 'the other' and 'the marginalized'. Roy through her novel recollects a young woman's agonizing journey into her childhood and it centers on a few themes and realities. Mammachi, the wife of the Imperial Entomologist Pappachi, stands for the first-generation woman character. She productively twists her kitchen talents into a business. Her pickle business is a grand success and soon it is established into a cottage industry. Pappachi, who is green-eyed of his wife's victory, turns into harsher during night time and he bangs her pitilessly. Moreover, Pappachi is bothered about the age variation between himself and his wife. "Pappachi, for his part, was having trouble coping with the ignominy of retirement. He was seventeen years older than Mammachi and realized with a shock that he was an old man when

his wife was still in her prime” (TGST, 47). When Pappachi knows that his wife is excellent at the violin, he discontinues her classes suddenly. Pappachi’s annoyance turns him to beat his wife brutally. Worst of all were Pappachi’s outbursts of physical violence inflicted on Mammachi from time to time. Ammu’s mother, Soshamma, known to Rahel and Estha as Mammachi, is a victim of prolonged physical violence. Mammachi has weals and bumps on her head as proof of defeating with a brass vase. We are told that the defeating she has routinely received at the hands of her husband rise directly in section to the degree of victory she acquires in her entrepreneurial project, Paradise Pickles and secures. Even though the Syrian Christian Community at Kerala in India is originally a matriarchal one, Mammachi remains a silent victim for years. When Pappachi dies, she even mourns. She feels a definite sense of loss. She is a creature of habit, Ammu tells Rahel. It is her son Chacko who protects her. Chacko finally sets a dot to his father’s behavior. One day he twists his father’s hand and suggests him not to repeat it. He comments, “I never want this to happen again,” he told his father ‘Ever.’”(TGST 48). After this event, Pappachi never talks to his wife. Even at this time, it is the son who saves his mother and not the daughter. Mammachi’s physical weakness and Pappachi’s primacy are recognized in the patriarchal construction where man is the ultimate authority of sexual, economical, political and physical power. Mammachi agrees all these submissively and obeys. Thus, she admits the female role forced on her by society. She is passive, submissive,

ungrudging and unresisting. The similar thing persists with her son Chacko also. After his homecoming from England, he turns into the owner of the pickle factory. But it is Mammachi who puts together all her efforts to run the factory without being closed. Chacko’s mixed up socialism and capitalist ideas make the factory run in the loss. Furthermore, when trouble emerges, it is informed only to Mammachi and not to Chacko. Mammachi is brave enough to employ Velutha, a low-caste paravan as the chief mechanic. Velutha is a downtrodden (Paravan), a Dalit. His ancestors have been serving for Chacko’s for more than a generation. Velutha is tremendously talented in his work, a skillful dynamic worker. Not like other downtrodden people, Velutha holds unique manner. While his talents with renovating the equipment have created him vital at the pickle factory, there are many antagonisms about the reality that he is a downtrodden serving in a factory of upper castes who dislike him. Thus, she performs a tightrope walking between her twin roles of a business woman and a submissive housewife without infringing their prescribed limits. Even though Mammachi has many unique qualities, she is suppressed in the male subjugated society. Ammu stands for the second generation. She may be viewed as the mouthpiece of the author. Ammu, the major leading role of the novel is not as subservient as her mother. Through the character of Ammu, Roy includes one more coating to her significant review of the Indian patriarchy when she comes with the place of separated women. Everyone in the family feels that Ammu is not a notable daughter for the reason that she transgresses

the custom of arranged marriage and it ends in divorce. At the same time, her brother Chacko enjoys everything in his life. His marriage is also a love marriage which also ends in divorce. Even during their young age, Ammu is not permitted to pursue her higher studies. But Chacko, the male person of the Ayemenem House is sent to pursue his higher studies in Britain. According to Pappachi, the college educations corrupt a woman. Being denied a college education, marriage for her also became a difficult proposition as dowry could not be afforded. So, she had to wait at home and become domesticated. To escape from her father's violence, she marries a man of own choice. The only let off for Ammu, in the muggy atmosphere, is a bridal tie. While considering a break in proceedings at an Aunt's place in Calcutta, she encounters a gentle Hindu Bengali in Assam (India) from the tea-estates, and without further consideration consents to wed him. "She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem" (TGST 39). But she jumps from a frying pan into the blaze. Finally, she decides to leave her husband, the charm of marital bliss soon vanishes and Ammu becomes a victim of her husband's drunken rages. When they start to affect the two years old twins, Ammu thinks it proper to desert her husband. Mr. Hollick, the employer, has also come up with an unacceptable suggestion for Ammu. Finding herself weak to male debauchery, she comes back reluctantly, to her parents' home. Here, she is more of a violation and less of a convict of the house as she has been married. In the same condition, her brother Chacko gets delight

from love and esteem among the family members and the social order whereas Ammu and her kids are agonized and deserted. As there is no other go, the protagonist Ammu becomes a total dependant on others. She is permitted to stay "on sufferance". As the text shows, "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 whining mewl of local disapproval" (TGST 43). In the Indian society, a daughter has no claim to the assets. "Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property" (TGST 57). Ammu remarks, "Thanks to our unbelievable male chauvinist society" (TGST 57) and Chacko's comments ratify this clearly, "What yours is mine and what's mine is also mine" (TGST 57). Thus, the individual space is overlooked to Ammu which she deserves in her own right. Not only man, women are also opposite women. Baby Kochamma confirms this. Her own Aunt abandons Ammu, Kochamma becomes Ammu's sworn foe as in her she sees a possible warning to the secure position she has shaped for herself more than the years. Her panic of being abandoned set-up in the midst of the raise number of persons in the home and she makes no frames about her sadness. Ammu walks roughly without being noticed. The male despotism that is set free on her takes a nasty turn in her parents' home -- it is a bettering that does not demonstrate but oxidizes one from within. The influx of Sophie Mol seems but to set fire to the so far controlled and covered up fight. The

privileged dealing exposed toward Chacko's widowed ex-wife and their daughter is frankly demonstrated, throwing Ammu and her twins into complete seclusion. Baby Kochamma also has the similar opinion as Chacko, "As for a divorced daughter -- according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage -- Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject" (TGST 45-46). Baby Kochamma turns into Ammu's furthest foe as in Ammu she pictures a possible hazard to the harmless position she has shaped for herself over the years. Ammu is depicted as a tragic figure, a woman struggling against her family, her motherhood 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" (Bhat 47). Her state develops into worse when her family comes to identify about her banned relationship with a low caste paravan. Velutha is harassed by the police on charges of rape lodged against him by the malicious Baby Kochamma and beat black and blue till he bled to death. His one sin appears to have been darker than Chacko's many sins of the similar nature. The actual facts of the scandal are camouflaged and never established even after Ammu's declaration of guilt to Inspector Thomas Mathew. As a result, Velutha, the Paravan is tortured and killed by the police. Ammu attempts her best

to save Velutha. She has enough bravery to visit the police station to rescue Velutha from the police custody. But she is called as a 'veshya' in the police station. Barbarities on women mainly by police are increasing day by day in India. At times it turns into very hard to give substantiation and proofs of barbarity on women committed by police personnel. After very soon of Sophie Mol cremation, Ammu is beckoned to the police station with her children for a complete investigation and extra action. While investigating her in this case, Inspector Matthews beats Ammu's breast frequently with a stick and goes on criticizing her inside the police station. "He said the police [...] didn't take statements from veshyas or their illegitimate children" (TGST 8). The self-respect of a woman charged with police supervision is resented. Her shaken quiet is taken as complicity. Chacko has illegitimate relations with the women working in the pickle factory. Chacko is young and crucial enough to hope for another possibility of love. Where Chacko is concerned, his "Men's Needs" (TGST 238) are well recognized by his generous mother. A separate door is made in the rear so that Chacko's fancy of the moment can come and go unremarkably. No such 'understanding' is extended to Ammu. There is no concept of a 'woman's needs'. In fact, Mammachi thinks of Ammu as "Like a dog with a bitch on heat" (TGST 257-258). She is "locked away like the family lunatic in a medieval household" (TGST 252). The thing is overlooked by the Ayemenen House women, especially Mammachi as 'Men's needs'. But when she thinks of Ammu's relation with Velutha she vomits: She

thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie. She imagined it in vivid detail: a Paravan's coarse black hand on her daughter's breast. His mouth on hers. His black hips jerking between her parted legs. The sound of their breathing. His particular Paravan smell. Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited (TGST 257). The novelist has depicted the double set of rules for the brother and the sister both of whom are separated. Roy hints at the discrimination to Ammu from the same mother who sanctions and facilitates Chacko's illicit relationship with the poor women of the factory. This too is offered through description; Mammachi had a separate entrance built for Chacko's room, which was at the eastern end of the house so that the objects of his 'Needs' wouldn't have to go traipsing through the house. She secretly slipped money to keep them happy. [...]The arrangement suited Mammachi because in her mind, a fee clarified things, Disjunct sex kind love. Needs from Feelings (TGST 169). The idiosyncratic handling between sons and daughters appears to be extended to their children. Roy constructs most of the scenes of her novel upon the difference in treatment between Ammu (daughter) and Chacko (son). The dissimilarity is vividly represented from the first chapter itself. At Sophie Mol's funeral, the whole family gathered in the church. Even if Rahel, Estha and Ammu permit to go to the funeral, they are restricted to place disjointedly, not with their rest of the family members. In Ammu's character, Roy commemorates the Supreme selfhood that a woman gets back by fighting against the

centuries-old domination that society has imposed upon her kin. Due to her free spirit, Ammu believes no shame in pleasing her emotional and bodily desires. She carries tragedy in her life by breaking the eventual taboo, by loving a man below her caste. She is a woman who outrages Society by her eccentric behaviour and pays the penalty of loss and suffering but remains to the last unapologetic and unbeatable. By often describing Ammu's nature with the metaphors of madness and animality, Roy 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. Growing up in an atmosphere of horror and brutality, Ammu developed the stubborn, wild streak that would later bring her in a quarrel with the world. Ammu's wrecked marriage, her unwillingness in her parental family, her care for her children and her female needs, led her to the premature death of Ammu, "Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey, where she had gone for a job interview as someone's secretary. She died alone. With a noisy ceiling fan for the company and no Estha to lie at the back of her and talk to her. She was thirty-one. Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age" (TGST 161). In the third generation, Rahel stands for the female character. Mammachi or Ammu is seen as complicit or as an antagonistic to the Male Other. But for Rahel, there is no disparity stuck between the feminine self and the male other. Rahel and Estha are not only brother and sister but they are identified as dizygotic "two-egg twins" (TGST 2). Like her mother Ammu, Rahel moves in and moves out of a rushed

marriage. But the only discrimination is there is no trauma of physical abuse. She even breaks the Love Laws again by committing incest with her brother. But she is not worried by fault or fear. Rahel neither worries nor receives man-made laws or establishments. She echoes the author's deepest passions about a woman and her position in the patriarchal society. Rahel is the representation of the postmodern era, a postmodern woman. Through the character of Rahel, Roy attempts to break the chains of the old customs. A sense of antagonism and division also infuses the different senses of identity among the different generation of women. It also generates a line of the clash between the older and younger generation. The older generation women, Baby Kochamma and Mammachi accept to function by the rules of the established social custom. But Rahel and Ammu, the younger generation, become inspirational figures to think about the processes of liberation and social alteration.

### **Breaking the Boundaries**

"Ammu", the female protagonist breaks the boundaries that confined and threatened her very existence and walks out of the unbearable circumstances. Thus, she moves from the feminist phase to the phase of displacement and self-identification. To escape the dictates of the patriarchy, the new woman comes out in more prominent contours. The new woman of India resorts to divorce as the only means of retrieving her lost life. That is what "Ammu" does in the novel. At Ayemenem, Ammu felt like a captive lady. She is forced to quit her education because Pappachi felt that college education for a girl is an unnecessary

expenditure. She gradually begins to grow desperate. "All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long suffering mother. She hatched several wretched little plans. Eventually, one worked. Pappachi agreed to let her spend the summer with a distant aunt who lived in Calcutta (P38-39). Ammu is not a "fallen" woman. She is pained to see the inability of her husband to protect her self-respect and therefore, decides to leave him. She returns to the same dark cellar "Ayemenem" from which she wanted to run away. Destiny, once again, brings her to the place of perpetual suffering. This reflects the sensitivity of woman who tolerates everything merely for her children's sake. The life of Ammu's mother is sandwiched between inhuman cruelties of her husband "Pappachi" and her responsibilities. That is probably the reason she embarks on a business of pickles. Thus, the novel presents an endless story of distress, pain and anguish that continues to the next generation of Rachel, Estha and Sophie Mol. Margaret fell for Chacko's irresponsible, optimistic ways but soon is tired of the same. She rushes into marriage with him and very soon divorces him and marries Joie. She loves her daughter Sophie Mol very much. After the accidental death of Sophie, she becomes a hysteric patient. Thus, the pressures, obligations, bindings etc of the women characters can be clearly noticed. Velutha, the son of Vellyapappen, is a talented young man, who has a spirit of protest. Ammu sees a great personality in him because he articulates everything which she could not herself express. She feels he is the God of small things. On the basis of this

realization and being the victims of the oppressed and marginalized, both Velutha and Ammu seek solace in each other's company. But for this very act, Velutha's put to death and Ammu is separated from her children. At the age of 31, she eventually leaves for her heavenly abode.

## 5. Conclusion

Family and political customs play a key role in disadvantaged women. Social compels are so built up as to sanctify the persecution of women. This is because, in most of the civilizations, social structures are basically patriarchal. Arundhati Roy's novel challenges this position, and feminism is one of the many strands in the novel.

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