



THE CONDITION AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S 'THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS'

MD ATIULLAH

Research Scholar, BRABU, Muzaffarpur

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MD ATIULLAH

ABSTRACT

In this research paper an attempt has been made to explore the condition and position of women in Arundhati Roy's enigmatic novel *The God of Small Things*. In our society which is an orthodox and conservative minded society, women have been tortured and undervalued since time immemorial. They have always been demoralized and kept deprived of their rights. This paper seeks to explore the novel as a piece of 'feminine writing'. The women in this patriarchal society have been told that their greatness lies in their sufferings. Due to this, happiness of others is always prioritized to their own happiness. Arundhati Roy has raised the issue of feminism to fight for the identity and social and economic freedom of the women. So this paper also depicts the inner life and conflicts of the self-sacrificing women who restlessly crave for their identity waging their battle against patriarchal norms and tries to establish their conclusive destiny.

Keywords: Conservative, orthodox, Patriarchal deprived, Undervalued, Sacrificing.

Although Arundhati Roy has finally silenced the critics (who considered her a one novel wonder) with *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, her second novel, *The God of Small Things* continues to attract readers for its enigmatic character and thematic depth as well as technical innovations. As Mohit K. Roy says, "It is a modern novel in its theme and the treatment of the theme, a postmodern novel in its knotting and knitting of narrative threads, manipulation of expressive literary forms and creative 'play' with words, a feminist novel in the pity and terror that it evokes for the condition of women in a particular culture milieu, a political novel in its criticism of the hypocrisy of the communist party, an autobiographical novel in the way the facts of the author's life have been distilled into a verbal artifact and so on. In fact the novel is eminently amenable to multiple approaches and interpretations" (Dhawan: 49). One aspect of the

novel that gives it thematic depth is "The structure of despair that emerges out of a feminine discourse on the sad tale of a hapless woman seen through the eyes of her daughter. (Dhawan: 49-50).

As a matter of fact, *The God of Small Things*, the truthful pictures of the condition of women, their great sufferings, their humble submission and undeserved humiliation have been powerfully described. In this novel women are found running for their identity in a society completely dominated by males. The position and condition for average women is full of ifs and buts, ups and downs. We find women trapped in completely adverse situation. Therefore, although in different ways all women characters like Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Rahel, Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma are found struggling to get their status and position in

the patriarchal society. While the protest is subdued in some characters, it is louder in other cases.

This novel tells the story of four generations. Nothing special is found about the first generation women in the novel. It is seen that Aleyooty Ammachi is Pappachi's mother who lived with her husband Rev. Ipe. Her suppressed condition can be seen in the fact that she even hesitated to smile at her husband. It shows that she was not completely free socially and emotionally. The novel shows Mammachi and Baby Kochamma in the second generation. Mammachi, the wife of an entomologist Pappachi has been a silent sufferer from the beginning of her life. When she got married with Pappachi she was a talented lady but when she came in the life of Pappachi, she became a puppet in the hands of her husband. Her husband had no respect for her. Mammachi's pathetic picture has been described in images which are concrete and sublime.

"Mammachi was almost blind and wore dark glasses when she went out of the house. Her tears tickled down from behind, trembled down from behind them and trembled along her jaw like raindrops on the edge of a roof (P.5).

Mammachi's husband is sixteen years senior to her. This may be one reason of her frustration. Her husband Pappachi is a respectable person in society and a famous entomologist but when Mammachi gets positive appraisal from her violine teacher, Pappachi becomes jealous. Mammachi was an able violinist but due to the adverse remarks of her husband she could not fulfill her dream. Pappachi used to beat Mammachi every day with a flower vase to show her down.

Baby Kochamma also belongs to second generation. She is the daughter of Reverend E. John Ipe. The real name of Baby Kochamma is Novomy Ipe but every one called her baby. She remained unmarried for her whole life. Earlier she was in love with a young and handsome Irish monk, Father Mulligan. At that time she was only 18 years old. When she couldn't achieve her dream of loving Father Mulligan she entered a convent in Madras after becoming a Roman Catholic. She hoped that it would provide her opportunities to be with Father

Mulligan. Her love affair didn't come into existence and returned back to her father repenting. Her father sent her abroad for studies. She did Diploma in Ornamental Gardening and came back to India. Baby Kochamma didn't forget Father Mulligan's love. She used to maintain herself by makeup every day.

She used to express her love for Father Mulligan in her diary: 'I love you I love you'. She remained in contact with Father Mulligan and she also used to send greetings on Diwali. Even after the death of Father Mulligan she did not stop doing make up. Baby Kochamma could not find her love so she used to be jealous of Ammu when she got her liked husband.

So it is seen that the suppression was so powerful on women that Baby Kochamma, though converts to the Roman Catholic faith but doesn't dare to challenge the traditional ideas of love and marriage prevalent in post-colonial India. To quote R. K. Dhawan, "Baby Kochamma, Pappachi's sister too suffers in silence carrying the burden of unstated desires buried in the depth of her heart. (P.125)

At the last stage of her life Baby Kochamma seems to be confined both mentally and physically. To quote Aida Balvannandhan, "Baby Kochamma is often represented in a setting of physical and mental imprisonment. First, she is seen in closed, confined quarters such as the monastery and later the closed Ayemenem home." (Page.55)

In the third generation the women characters are Ammu and Margaret Kochamma. They are actually Mombattis. Ammu and Margaret Kochamma suffer and lose their dreams in male dominated society. After the marriage of Ammu with a Hindu Bengali Tea Plantation Manager Rajib Roy her life becomes frightful and more insecure than before. The same fate greets Margaret Kochamma after marrying with Chacko.

Ammu who is the central character of the novel 'The God of Small Things' has a tragic story from the very beginning of her life. As a little girl Ammu had to endure some unbearable nightmarish experiences. Ammu used to be beaten along with her mother Mammachi by her father Pappachi with

brass vase. Ammu was deprived of higher education because according to Pappachi college education was not useful for a girl. This shows the appalling circumstances of women in the male dominated society. She had to help her mother in house hold works and wait for marriage proposal. She felt frustrated due to sudden disruption of education. In search of peace and to breathe fresh air she goes to Calcutta to spend summer with a distant aunt. There she got married to Rajib Roy and finally came back to Ayemenem with her twins, Estha and Rahel after divorce.

Her trial did not end even when Ammu reached Ayemenem, her father's house. She felt stranger in her own house. Law did not give a daughter any claim to property, yet Ammu did as much work as Chacko who considered that he was the only owner of the factory. Gender discrimination is clearly evidenced in *The God of Small Things*. At one hand Chacko is also a man divorced by his wife Margaret Kochamma but still he takes advantage of being a male member of the family.

Ammu's real tragedy starts when she comes in contact with Velutha. When Ammu shows her love for Velutha, the whole community becomes hostile. Ammu loved Velutha from childhood not for his exceptional talent but for his fiery spirit of protest. When Velutha returns after many years, Ammu takes a fatal decision to "love by night the man her children loved by day" (P.77). Secretly Ammu and Velutha make their secret love for thirteen days which is ultimately revealed by Velutha's father. Then Ammu is tricked into her bedroom and locked and Velutha is implicated in false case of kidnapping of children and murder of Sophie Mol. When Ammu goes to police station to see Velutha and tell the truth, she is humiliated by the police. Chocko, the brother of Ammu takes over the charge of everything and tells Ammu to leave the house. Rahel is allowed to live in Ayemenem house. Estha returns to his father and Ammu is separated from them. Ammu wanders here and there in search of a job so that she could keep her children with her. She tries a number of jobs and dies alone in the Bharat Lodge in Aleppy where she had gone for a job interview. Even the church refused to bury her for the mistakes

she had committed. So Chacko sends her body to the electric crematorium by a hired van.

For the suffering of Ammu only the men are not responsible. Even so many women characters like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma who may be called the real culprit, are responsible for the tragic condition of Ammu. She was made a monster and met her end in a very tragic manner and even her last ritual was not done properly.

Chacko, the brother of Ammu was the same type of crime doer. He used to take advantage from the female workers for his factory. He was also divorced by his wife Margaret Kochamma. But in this patriarchal society Chacko exhibits his full claim over the factory as well as the house and lives life as an honorable person in the society but Ammu is treated like a poor relative living off the family income. Chacko says "What's yours is mine and what is mine is also mine" (P.57)

In the fourth generation the main characters like Rahel and Sophie Mol are the deserving characters who attract our attention. Rahel is Ammu's daughter and Sophie Mol is Chacko's daughter. Rahel is also a tragic character. She was deserted by her father, separated from her mother, neglected by her maternal uncle, grandmother and grand aunt. But the neglect of them made Rahel free, independent, daring and capable of doing everything by herself.

Tortured by the family where she was unwanted, she got admitted in College of Architecture in Delhi. She didn't go there for her interest in Architecture but because she wanted to be free from Ayemenem. There she meets Larry Meecham and marries him. Her marriage too was not different from her uncle's and her mother's. Larry values her but fails to understand her. So, Rahel refused to continue her relationship with him.

Rahel's life is made by her own. No one helped her when she went out of her home. She grew up into young woman on her own. To quote R K Dhawan, "Rahel grew up without a brief. Without anybody to arrange a marriage for her without anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore without an obligatory husband looming on her

horizon. Later on she spent 8 years in college of Architecture in Delhi without completing the five year degree course".P.68.

Another character who belongs to Rahel's generation is Sophie Mol. She is also an important character in the novel. She is the daughter of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma. When Sophie Mol comes to India, the twins (Rahel & Estha) don't particularly like her because she makes them feel inferior. But actually Sophie Mol wants to be friend with twins. Sophie Mol feels herself neglected when twins don't talk to her. So she tries to win their hearts. She gives those presents and even insults Chacko and Margaret Kochamma. The other members of the family like Sophie Mol except the twins were always compared with Sophie Mol by Baby Kochamma. This was the reason of dislike of twins towards Mol. Sophie Mol was sensitive and fundamentally lonely little girl of 9 years. She dies by drowning in river when she decided to run away with twins.

So the novel 'The God of Small Things' depicts the condition and position of women as subalterns, suppressed by the norms and customs of the caste in the society which is governed by the patriarchal system. Arundhati Roy's female characters are suppressed between traditional boundaries and modern free zone. Roy has tried to show that women too are living entities not a puppet in the hands of men. They have the ability to do everything they want. Roy has tried to show how a woman in patriarchal set up pines for pleasure and happiness and a life far from the shackles and constraints. But all of a sudden, her wings are cut down by the callous society and are left on this earth to crawl on the dust.

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