

MARGINALIZATION IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S "THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS"

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ABSTRACT

The concept of marginalization is a novel in the contemporary literary practice. Today marginal people are socially, politically, economically and legally deprived of their rights as a human being in every society. Historically women considered as more marginal entity in male dominated society. Taking this idea, the present research paper tries to explore marginalization of three generations of women in the novel *The God of Small Things*. Here the struggle for existence of women is presented skillfully by Arundhati Roy. She has shown keen awareness of the problems of women through her writing. Her debut novel *The God of Small Things* is a stunning tale of women who have been placed at margin of society. She rightly puts forth how women become victims of violence, exploitation, alienation and exile. The protagonist of novel is woman. She was divorced from an alcoholic husband, mother of twins, has disastrous love affair with untouchable. Her unusual love affair results into her banishment by her family. In the end of the novel she was found dead alone in a grimy room in lodge at age of thirty one. In short Roy truly reflects the marginal Indian woman in her novel *The God of Small things*.

KEYWORDS: Marginalization, Male Dominated Society, Indian Writing in English

INTRODUCTION

Motherhood is bliss. Your first priority is to care for your husband and children. homemaking can be exciting and fulfilling. Throughout the 1950s, educated middle class women heard advice like this from the time they born until they reached adulthood. But not every woman wanted to wear pearls and bring her husband his pipe and slipper when he came home from work. Some women wanted career of their own.

They demanded equal pay for equal work and pressured the government to support and enforce legislation that prohibited gender discrimination. The changing woman gave credit to the way of feminist theory. And it first emerged as early as 1794. People and activists who discussed or advanced women's equality prior to the existence of the feminist movement are sometimes labelled profeminist. Some scholars, however, criticize this terms usage. Some argue that it diminishes the importance of earlier contributions, while others argue that feminism does not have a single linear history as implied by terms such as profeminist or postfeminist.

Indian writing on feminism in English is being recognised as major contemporary current in English Language-Literature. The likes of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Gosh and Anita Desai have won worldwide acclaim for the quality of their writing and their imaginative use of English. These include the role of English as global lingua franca: the position of English in India. The Indian writers in English are writing, not in their native language but in a second language, and the resultant transcultural character of their texts.

Traditionally, the work of Indian Women Writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. The factors contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women writers have observed no domestic space. The Indian women's perceptions of their aspirations and expectations are within the framework of Indian social and moral commitments. Indian women writers in English are victims of a second prejudice vis-a-vis their regional counterpart's. Proficiency in English is available only to writers of the intelligent, affluent and educated classes. Writer's works are often therefore, belong to high social strata and cut off from the reality of Indian life. As, Chaman Nahal writes about feminism in India: "Both the awareness of woman's position in society as one of disadvantage or in generality compared with that of man and also a desire to remove those is advantages."(1)

The majority of novels written by Indian women writers depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated homemakers. This subject matter is often considered superficial compared to the depiction of the replaced and oppressed lives of women. Indian writing in English is now gaining ground rapidly. In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era and has earned many laurels both at home and abroad. Indian women writers have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination. They are no longer puppets in the hands of man. They have shown their worth in the field of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing it even today without any hurdle. Today, the works of Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Geetha Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur and many more have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English.

The last three decade has seen the emergence of prominent feminist in Indian literature. The famous and renowned novelist is Arundhati Roy, born in 1961 in Bengal. Arundhati grew up in Kerala; she trained herself as an architect at the Delhi school of Architecture but abandoned it in between. She believes that, a feminist is a woman who negotiates herself into a position where she has choices. *The God of small things* won Britain's premier Booker prize, the Booker McConnell in 1997. Roy is the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian woman to have won this prize. Roy's major essays 'The End of Imagination'. She is between the two Indian writers writing in English who has won the Booker Prize.

Arundhati has never admitted that she is a feminist but *The God of Small Things*, reveals at many places her feminist stance and her protagonist represent feminine sensibility. Arundhati Roy's mother says, Arundhati is a born talker and a born writer. While, she was studying in school, it was a problem to find a teacher, who could cope with her voracious appetite for reading and writing. Most of the time, she educated herself on her own. I can remember our vice-principle Sneha Zaharias resorting to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a text for the little fourth grade.

Roy seems to be iconoclast in, *The God of Small Thing*'. The stylistic innovations make the novel unique and bring vitality and exuberance to the novel. The novel is unique in every aspect and it is a linguistic experiment with the English language. The stylistic writings include the use of words, phrases and even sentences from vernacular language, use of italics, subject less sentences, faulty spellings ,topicalisation, deviation from normal word order, single word 'sentences,' change of word classes, clustering of word classes and a variety of other techniques. She has given prominence to ecology and subalternity as the major themes in the novel. The novel *The God of Small Things* directly deals with the marginalization of three generations of women in orthodox Syrian Christian family in Kerala. These three women are Mammachi, who is representative of old generation of women. Ammu, is representative of second generation and Rahel is a daughter of Ammu, representative of third generation of woman in same family. These three women are forcefully placed on the margin of society and intentionally deprived of human rights. They are severely marginalized by

male dominated society. Social institutions like family, marriage, religion and government are responsible factors for their marginalization.

Mammachi is significant character in the novel, representative of old generation of women. She is mother of Ammu and Chacko. She is brutally faced marginalization. The man who is responsible for the marginalization of Mammachi is no other than her own husband Pappachi. She was victim of her husband's brutality throughout her life. Mammachi is beaten either with a brass vase or an ivory handled riding crop by her husband. Mammachi had exceptional talent for music, especially violin; that arouses jealousy in the mind of her husband. The climax arouses when violin trainer makes the mistake of telling her husband that his wife is exceptionally talented and potentially concert class. Later he breaks the bow of the violin one night and throws it in the river. The same jealousy is expressed again when she started pickle making business, Pappachi refuses to help her because pickle-making is not "a suitable job for high-ranking ex-Government official". Thus the marriage of Mammachi with sadist Pappachi lacks understanding, love and co-operation. This results in her marginalization.

Ammu is a second important woman character, who emerges as a much marginalized character in the novel. She faces double marginalization in the hands of men as well as women. She is female protagonist of the novel, being born in rich family of Pappachi and Mammachi. We expect her upbringing is with full of care and love, but in reality it shocks the readers. Ammu received no love and affection from her parents. Her parent always denies her right of love and care as a daughter. Her childhood was full of suffering and hardship, as a child her father mercilessly beat her with iron-topped riding crop. This inhuman action of her father is clear indication of her marginalization in family with the help of violence. The marginalization of Ammu is made possible by traditional patriarchal family structure, where female child always unwelcomed and treated as burden on family. However her brother Chacko, is privileged in every strata of family life. After completion of schooling, Ammu is not allowed to take further education, while her brother is sent to Oxford University for higher education. This dual nature of her parent is prime factor for her marginalization. Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl. So Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them.

Her father's remark on her education clearly shows that she has secondary place in family. She intentionally deprived of higher education, which is a ray of hope in her future life. Her father remains as a hurdle between her freedom and future progress. When her family shifts from Delhi to Ayemenem, Ammu's life was engulfed in boredom, isolation and waiting for marriage proposal. The house at Ayemenem is like prison for her. "There was little for young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage Proposals while she helped her mother with the housework... All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her illtempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother." (Arundhati Roy 96). At Ayemenem, Ammu was desperately in search of opportunity. That will end her unbearable relation with parents. As she get an opportunity to meet her distant Aunt in Calcutta. She grabs this golden opportunity without hesitation and marries with young Hindu. Her husband is working as an Assistant Manager at tea estate in Assam. She marries with him with the hope that this marriage will bring up all the love and affection which she deprived at her parental house. But her bad luck continues as her husband turns out to be not just a heavy drunkard but a full-blown alcoholic. She gives birth to twins- Estha and Rahel. When her husband's boss had an evil eye on her and her husband wanted to push her into his bungalow to be looked after. So she runs away and returns unwelcomed to Ayemenem to everything she had fled from only a few years ago, except that now she had two young children and no more dreams.

Marriage for Ammu is a horrible experience; her husband is a reason for her physical and psychological suffering. Thus marriage institution becomes reason for marginalization of Ammu.

The divorce with drunkard husband leaves her no option but to return to her parents with two children. A divorcee woman has no place and respect in the traditional family. Thus, the family members were hostile, neglectful and unfriendly to her and her children. She receives mental torture from the ladies of her family. In spite of all these sufferings she loves and cares her innocent children. She plans for their future, their education and perfection of manners. She becomes mother and father for them. At this stage it is observed that mother in her character is predominated than a woman. When she meets untouchable Valutha, a Paravan after many years makes her take a fatal decision to love by night the man her children loved by day. This couple is neglected and discarded by the orthodox society, found solace in union. The secret love meeting goes on for thirteen days until it is reported by Valutha's father to Mammachi. When this disastrous affair is revealed, Valutha is grabbed by police and killed on false case of rape. When Ammu went to police station to set the record straight against Valutha, at that time the police officer insulted her with remark that, the Kottayam police does not take statement from Veshyas (prostitutes) and their illegitimate children. This brutal behavior of police shows that he used his power to marginalize Ammu.

At the end of novel, Ammu is exiled from home by her family members. She is separated from her children and not allowed to visit Ayemenem. She desperately tries to seek good job in anonymous places. Tired, exhausted, sick and finally defeated she is found dead in a grimy room in Bharat Lodge in Aleppy. After death her humiliation does not end, the church refused to bury Ammu. Finally cremated in electric crematorium were only beggars, derelicts and police custody dead are cremated. Throughout the course of Ammu's life, we observe that she was severely marginalized by social institutions like family, marriage, religion and police. We also observe that for her marginalization not only men are responsible but women like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma have equal share.

The third marginal woman character in the novel is Rahel. She is less marginal character in comparison with her mother and grandmother. She never faces domestic violence as Ammu and Mammachi had faced. Still she remains marginal character because of being a daughter of neglected Ammu. Like her mother, she also faced marginalization and its tormenting effects throughout her life. She too experienced insult and humiliation in the childhood as her mother witnessed. Her life totally disturbed and deserted because of tormenting memories of past. For her marginalization past memories associated with her mother plays key role. In nutshell, Arundhati Roy used marginalization as a medium to show the miserable lives of women in orthodox Indian society. Through the marginalized characters like Ammu, Mammachi and Rahel, Roy has presented sufferings, pain, physical and sexual violence of women in male dominated society. Even Roy bitterly criticized the social institutions like Family, Marriage, Religion and Police authority which are responsible factor for marginalization of women in the novel.

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