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The Plight of Women in Arundhati Roy's Novel
'The God of Small Things'

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ABSTRACT

This paper throws light on the hierarchical structures of power and oppression of women at various levels in patriarchal societies. The novel also highlights the fight against gender oppression and resistance to caste and class oppression. This paper exemplifies the ways in which the society challenges the traditional power structures in which women and lower castes are marginalized and suppressed by patriarchal hierarchy and caste system. It also aims at displaying the plight of Indian women, their sufferings and anxieties, their humble submission, persecution and humiliation in male patriarchal society.

Keywords: Marginalization, identity crisis, oppression and patriarchy

INTRODUCTION

The God of Small Things is the debut novel of Indian Writer Arundhati Roy. The God of Small Things is also a semi-autobiographical novel. Arundhati Roy is a novelist and activist who devoted most of her life for the upliftment of the downtrodden specially, women, lower caste, untouchables and raised slogans against the exploitation faced by women and labour class within the bourgeoisie dominated society. She was awarded the Booker Prize for the novel 'The God of Small Things' in 1997.

'The God of Small Things' also predominantly deals with the stereotypical, discriminatory and unfair treatment of certain gender and caste. It also clearly explores how the little things affect people's behaviour and their lives. In this novel, Roy brilliantly portrays the predicament of Indian women in a patriarchal society. The novelist attempts to sensitize the male chauvinist and extremely traditional society to the cruelty of mistreatment of women and struggles of lower caste people and protest against its dehumanizing taboos. She brings a freshness of imagination and presents the exploitation and plight of Indian women and untouchables. Arundhati Roy has brilliantly and effectively depicted the plight of women in Indian society. The structure of society presented in the novel is apparently patriarchal and man is the controller of the sexual, economic, political and physical power.

The Novel is set in Ayemenem, a small village in Kerala. The plot and theme as it unfolds with the stories of the characters specially Velutha, Ammu, Baby Kochamma, Chacko and twins Rahel and Estha. It displays the women's struggle for seeking their own 'identity' in a male- chauvinistic and envious society. It is evidently illustrated in some of the women characters like Ammu, Mammachi, Baby kochamma, Rahel and Margaret Kochamma.

PLIGHT OF WOMEN

Mammachi is the wife of Pappachi, has been a silent sufferer from the beginning of her marriage life. She is like a doll in the hands of her husband. Roy painted a pathetic picture of Mammachi's life. Mammachi is beaten, ill- treated and unable to protest against her husband's injustices to her. This suggests that women of her generation believed in their belief that their husband's is their supreme master and God. This is how women were considered to serve and submit to husband's wish. This shows women-dependency on male and the way they are subjugated in society as subalterns. Margaret kochamma after the wedding with Chacko, her

life becomes more frightful and more insecure than before. She has to undergo unbearable grief and sorrow. A chain of misfortunes make her life gloomy and desperate. Ammu is the central character of the novel. Her tragic story from the beginning to the end of the novel arouses a sense of compassion and catharsis. Ammu and her mother Mammachi tolerate the brutality of her father. Ammu hit her husband and left the place with the twins- Estha and Rahel. She goes to Ayemenem and tells her father the reason for her divorce but her father does not trust her. Her parents treated her and her children in a different manner. It shows how women are struggling against the barriers they are facing . Women like Ammu, Mammachi were abandoned in society. Gender roles and exploitation plays an important role after Ammu's marriage. Ammu was unable to bear the tortures and pressures of her husband to satisfy his boss. He dominates her and considers her a mere toy for pleasure. The rejection of Ammu by her circle of relatives compels her to seek for emotional refuge in Velutha, an untouchable carpenter. Ammu is the victim of male chauvinism and social discrimination.

The real tragedy in the life of Ammu happens when she comes in contact with velutha. Novelist highlights the position of women in India. They are forsaken everywhere they in and the bitterness comes when they are regulated by someone due to the thought of possessiveness. Apparently many incident focus on discrimination in this novel. This clearly indicates the wretched condition of Ammu and the subjugation of women in the male - dominated society. The novelist expresses the suppression of women in a poignant manner. Rahel was deserted by father, separated from mother, neglected by her maternal uncle, grandmother and grand aunt. Rachel faced a tough time in school and was expelled three times. Thus she is marginalized because of her caste, religion community and gender and can be truly labeled as subaltern. From the character of Ammu, it is witnessed that Ammu is the woman who tries to fight against the patriarchy system in society. It shows her feminine psyche's desire for liberty from the state of subjugation in her husband's home. He fails to know her emotional needs and she remains dissatisfied. She expresses her deep frustration over the loss of woman identity within the presence of a domineering male.

“Ammu learned to live with this cold, calculating cruelty.

She did nothing to avoid quarrels and confrontations. In fact it could be argued that she sought them out, perhaps even enjoyed them ” (pg.182).

Baby Kochamma, who seems to possess some wise words for each moment someone crosses societal boundaries. Chacko pursued his education in Oxford University but his sister Ammu being a woman was not allowed to study.

“A married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for a divorced daughter, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for divorced daughter from a love marriage, As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject ”

(pg.46)

After divorce, Chacko goes to his native place and claims the property and dominates his sister. Ammu as a daughter had no rights for the property. This suggests the various attitudes of society in gender roles. Women are treated in an unfair and suppressed manner and not providing equality. Roy frankly showed how women are treated by men in the male dominated society. The novel explores the varied treatments towards women within the patriarchal society. Throughout the novel, women characters struggle for their own identity. Ignoring women is additionally an unkind attitude towards her. It is also a kind of suppressing her voice and desires.

Every aspect of society is related to women is explored by novelist with the themes of gender bias, caste oppression, sexual Violence, patriarchy etc. It also displays the feminist struggle against gender discrimination. Even in modern days, women are struggling to establish their own identity and to gain self - assertion.

CONCLUSION

Thus Roy's female characters are torn between traditional boundaries and modern free zones. The novel clearly depicts the untold miseries and also the plight of women who must bear the burden of male domination silently and meekly. Thus the novel sheds enough light on the plight of women and the way they live under oppressive roles. The God of Small Things is the real depiction of the plight of women in society and their hardship in seeking identity in a male dominated conservative society. To conclude, it is evident that Arundathi Roy has a deep concern for minor issues leads to the victims of socio - political, economic and cultural practices. Thus novelist strike against the forces of patriarchal society which inhibits female freedom and identity.

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