

ROLE OF GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN THE ARUNDHATHI ROY'S NOVEL

Kunhambu . K

Lecturer

Department of English

Swami Nithynanda Polytechnic Kanhangad,

Kerala, India

Abstract

Roy offers the reader a slice of life with the dim symbolical and metaphorical relevance, which satisfies the artistic sensibility of the readers often. The inner world of sensibility rendered through splendid poetic prose gives a peculiar poetic quality. Indian Feminism is Men-friendly Feminism .Here the concept of freedom for woman and her objectives are totally different from that of the Western. As a woman she is a fighting spirited individual. Her feministic search for identity is a trend setter for the new generation of feministic writers of India. She dreams of a fragrant world full of beautiful flowers, where the polluted air of hatred and violence would have no entry.

Keywords:-Feminism- Indian and western, modernism and post-modernism, new generation of feministic writers.

1. Introduction

Arundhati Roy's debut novel "*The God of Small Things*" was launched on 4 April 1997 in Delhi and won the Booker Prize in London, on 14th Oct. 1997. In the intervening period, she received a reported \$500,000 in advance and the rights to her book were sold in 21 countries.

The book was completed in May 1996 and passed to an agent in June. She was not particularly confident about the publishing of the book because she felt:

It is a very fragile, personal book and I have never had any perspective about it. I considered going to an Indian publisher but they tend to give advances of Rs.5, 000. However I wasn't sure about finding a foreign publisher. I mean, why would anyone abroad be interested in the book? I am not very well educated. I haven't lived abroad. So its not as though I am like Salman Rushdie or Vikram Seth. ([http\www.arundhatiroy.org.uk](http://www.arundhatiroy.org.uk))

Arundhati Roy's novel would be a major contribution to literature. That is why the existential predicament in her novel has the unique touch of the universal appeal. The novel has a significant and proper link with the central plot and as such has a dim symbolical and metaphorical relevance, which satisfies the artistic sensibility of the readers often. Her hold on the reader's mind does not loosen till the last page. The readers identify themselves with her artistic sensibility, get fused to it. Roy offers the reader a slice of life.

Dealing with the thoughts, emotions and sensations at various levels of Consciousness, she found the technique used by D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner and Henry James quite suitable for her purpose of character delineation. Hence we have the use of flash backs and the stream of consciousness technique in her novel. The inner world of sensibility rendered through splendid poetic prose gives a peculiar poetic quality.

The terms "modernism" and "post-modernism" are becoming increasingly fashionable and the readers of the novel will be curious to know which label fits Roy's novel best. It may not be absurd if one says that much will depend on how one defines these terms. Perhaps post-modernism may be more a way of reading than a way of writing. Virtually any work can be said to have post-modern characteristics if we read it in the right spirit. Barth (1990) has rightly pointed out that however we draw our definitions, few writers are consistently anyone thing: "Joyce Carol Gates writes all over the aesthetical map...My own novels seem to me to have both modernist and post modernist attributes: my short story series, *Lost in the Funhouse*, strikes me as mainly late-modernist, though some critics have praised or damned it as conspicuously post-modernist" (p. 66). Similarly Me Hale (1987) has argued that modernism deals with epistemological concerns, post-moderns with ontological ones, so there is a "shift of dominant from problems of *knowing* to the problems of *modes of being*" (p. 10).

2. Gender Perspective

Feminism in the west is different from the Indian feminism. In the west the feminism is divided into Feminine phase, Feminist phase and Female phase. There are also several kinds of feminism like Myth feminism, Marxist feminism, Psycho analytic Feminism, Lesbian and Color Feminism. Amidst this the radical feminism and Lesbian Feminism are very vehement towards the patriarchal society. Such is not the case with the Indian Feminism. Here the concept of freedom for woman and her objective are totally different from that of the Western. Indian Feminism is Men-friendly Feminism. Indian modern look is by and large traditional. The

tradition gives a pre-eminent place without making her come into conflict with men's dominance. Unlike the west the roles are clearly understood. Concept of equality is not there instead the idea of togetherness prevails. The same reason is the cause of the family's intactness in spite of the conflicts.

Indian mythology deals with the concept of Arthanareeswara, where man and woman complement each other. There is no question of superior or inferior but one is the better half of the other. Gandhiji gave a new dimension and direction to the feminist movement in India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Pdt. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar also worked with the same intension, in the field of Indian Feminism. Even in the ancient times women had equal rights with that of men. In Indian literature we have Awaiyar, Kakkai Paadmiyaar who had excelled in their field in par with men. Avvair, even had the access of meeting many kings like Adiyamaan and counselling them whenever needed. The disparity between man and woman in India would have been the cause of the western influence- the after effects of the invasion. The changes that take place in the gender perspective of India is revealed through the lines

"A new perspective has dawned on the Indian Social horizon with the feminine psyche trying to redefine woman's role in the society and re-assert her self-identity" (Roots and Shadows- a Feminist study 49)

This chapter will deal with the search for identity under the Gender Perspective and others with special reference to the character of Ammu of "The God of Small Things". Viewed from gender perspective, the novel is about the sad plight of the deserted Ammu and her twins. The story is narrated as registered in the tiny eyes of the 7 year old twins, especially Rahel. The sudden death of their cousin Sophie Mol brings in a sea change in their lives. It rang a death knell in the lives of Ammu and the twins. As such their plight is not a cozy one but a troubled lot. This worsens after the death of Sophie mol.

Everything began with Ammu, accompanying her parents to Ayemenem after her father's retirement. She could neither continue her education nor could get married and settle in life. As dowry could not be afforded by her parents, marriage became a far fetched dream to Ammu. Her father had been an Imperial Entomologist under the British and after Independence, a Joint Director of Entomology. His discovery of a rare moth with unusually dense dorsal tufts was a great achievement to him but it could give him only partial fulfillment because the moth was not named after him. His disappointment resulted in beating his wife Mammachi, with brass vase every day. His failure in his field of entomology is juxtaposed with the success of his wife in her pickle business. Unable to hurt his invisible enemies in his field, he takes his revenge upon the visible opponent, his wife.

Ammu wished to get away from the suffocating oppressive atmosphere of Ayemenem, found refuge in her aunt's house in Calcutta. She chanced upon a sober-looking Hindu Bengali from tea-estates in Assam. When he proposed to marry her, she readily accepted without looking back.

Simon de Beauvoir remarks: There is a unanimous agreement that getting a husband -or in some cases a 'protector is for her [woman] the most important of undertakings.... She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother's hold, who will open up her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master..." (The Second Sex 352)

3. Arundhati Roy as an Indian Woman

Suzanna Roy was born on the 24thv. 1961, the child of a marriage between a Christian woman from Kerala and a Bengali Hindu tea planter. It was an unhappy marriage. She also does not like to discuss her father.

Arundhati Roy has been described as: charming, humorous, strong willed, independent, energetic, creative, with a great sense of fun, 1.55 m of doe-eyed delicateness, a down to earth 'girl next door', a towering intellect with a poetic fluency with words delivered in a soft modulated voice, a dog lover. She is 40 years old and describes her two favourite past times as writing and running. ([Http//website, line one. net/ ~jon. simmons/roy/tgost2.htm.](http://website.lineone.net/~jon.simmons/roy/tgost2.htm))

Arundhati spent her crucial childhood years in Ayemenem. Her mother Mary Roy ran an informal school named Corpus Christi where she developed her literary and intellectual abilities unconstrained by the set rules of formal education. The novel is set in the sixties but now Ayemenem is no longer the old-fashioned village but a bustling extension of Kottayam town, with 7,000 houses and a rash of dish antennae. Paradise Pickled still exists

Arundhati says:

I grew up in very similar circumstances to the children in the book. My mother was divorced. I lived on the edge of the community in a very vulnerable fashion. Then when I was 16 I left home and lived on my own, sort of...you know it wasn't awful, it was just sort of precarious... living in a squatter's colony in Delhi. (Ibid)

Eventually, she joined the Delhi school of architecture, moon lighting as an architect's artist. She married a fellow architecture student, Gerard Da Cunha. Their marriage lasted for 4 years. At this stage, neither had a great love for architecture and so they quit.

She acted in a small role in Pradeep Krishen's movie Massey Saab. Then she got a scholarship to go to Italy for eight months to study the restoration of monuments. Her stay in Italy made her to realise that she was a writer. She linked up with Krishen, now her husband and wrote some tele- serials. They were not commercial success. Her next piece of writing was to result in considerable controversy - being a criticism of Shekar Kapur's celebrated film 'Bandit Queen', about Phoolan Devi

The controversy escalated into a court case, after which she retired to private life to concentrate on her writing she kept shifting from one job to another. Architecture, movies, Teleserials, criticisms were some of the regions she made an entry into search for identity continued. Eventually she understood that it was writing. However she did not rate to please anybody or getting herself recognised in this vast world but it was for herself satisfaction. After winning the Booker prize she spent a year on a whirlwind tour of interviews and book readings. It was an artificial environment to her to be in the posh hotel room and it made her to laugh because of being so ridiculously posh. She had written that book only because she had an urge to write but not to change her life by rating. She does not want to trade her life in for another. So, the prize would make no difference to her.

Though she loves the entire world she prefers only India. After the whirlwind of tour she settled back to life in New Delhi. She remains an Indian woman. She feels that the prize is about her past and not her future. Having written a great book she is not sure whether she would write again. Still she is haunted by the noises of her novel. She is waiting for those noises in her head to stop. To her fiction is nothing but a way of the world as she knows it of trying to make sense.

As a woman she is a fighting spirited individual. She does not expect to make a cake walk in the smooth surface of life. Even on the rugged surface she is ready to march and pave the way for many others by being a good source of inspiration. Her feministic search for identity is a trend setter for the new generation of feministic writers of India. Without losing the gentleness of a female she gives a strong call for the awakening of not only women but in general the entire human kind from its long sleep of ignorance. She dreams of a fragrant world full of beautiful flowers, where the polluted air of hatred and violence would have no entry.

4. Conclusion

In short, the contemporary cultural scene as portrayed in the novel is far from satisfactory. As the novelist remarks in the sixth chapter of the novel the feeling one gets is that India (and of course Kerala) is going to the dogs. Basically all these have also to do with the social and economic life of the people. In the main money plays a very important role. The influence of the electronic media also may be playing a role to make matters worse.

Several other aspects of the contemporary society gets delineated in the novel. Next, we shall have a cursory glance at some of the other issues which are focussed in the novel. To begin with marginalisation of women will be considered.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- The God of Small Things, (New Delhi: Penguin Books 2002)
- The Algebra of infinite Justice, ([http:// www. guardian .co.uk/ Saturday review](http://www.guardian.co.uk/Saturdayreview))
- The End of Imagination, (The Nation selected feature Saturday, 2 Jan 1999)
- Instant Mix Imperial Democracy(Buy one get one Free) Lecture, Presented in N.York city, published on May 13, 2003)
- Learning Communities, [http.7/www. Guardian. co.uk/Iraq/story](http://www.Guardian.co.uk/Iraq/story).
- <http://website.lineone.net/Njon.sirnrons/roy/tgost2.htm>
- [http://www. arundhati roy. org.uk/](http://www.arundhati.roy.org.uk/)
- [http://www.arundhati roy.untitled](http://www.arundhati.roy.untitled).