

## **INTELLECTUAL SURGE TO DELVE INSURGENT EGALITARIAN BELIEFS: AN OBJECTIVE GENDER STUDY IN THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS**

**Dr. Ujjaval Pandit**

Assitant Professor

Shankersihn Vaghela Bapu Institute of Technology,  
Gujrat Technological University,  
Dist.Gandhinagar (Gujrat)

Every human being wants to live with the desired fame and dignity be or male or female. Generally, it has been observed that in spite of having awareness about the basic privileges of women, the fair opportunity of women to express their emotions are deliberately silenced and preferably unheard. Of course, we have few examples, who have successfully re-defined the role of women and established the lively and aspirant image in this rigid social framework. And, as a mark of respect we do celebrated ‘the women’s day’ on 8<sup>th</sup> March every year. But, as a matter of fact we have ample historical beliefs, incidents, examples, which prove that still the society has a biased and partial attitude. In Western culture, we do have few literary examples which prove the above notion true. Especially, in Tennessee William’s “The Street Car named Desire” we have the example of how insensitively a pair of woman is treated by the representative of male dominated society. The same patriarchal tendency is aggressively challenged by Virginal Woolf in her ‘A Room of One’s Own’, “I refused to allow you, Beadle though you are, to turn me off the grass. Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind”. (1)

But, in a gradual way the modern writers thoroughly followed the entirely novel tradition. Elaine Showalter, one of the pioneer writers in “Feminist Criticism in Wilderness” has conveyed the three phases- Imitation, Reaction and Self-Assertion. Thus, the modern woman is no longer wants to imitate the male mannerism neither she is interested in worth comparing herself with the male. Rather presenting herself in a belligerent way, she prefers to celebrate the difference by acknowledging the inner vitality and feminine potential. Along with these intellectuals Julia Kristeva, Kate Millet, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in ‘The Mad Woman in the Attic’, Toril Moi in ‘Sexual/Textual Politics’ have tremendously focused the awful situations of women and in short suggested to transcend the personality of a woman from a submissive, voiceless entity to a superwoman according to G.B. Shaw’s terminology. Moreover, in “The Bluest Eye” the unquenchable desire of Pecola, the female protagonist, leads her to devastation. And, Morrison was obliged to say: “Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion”. (2)

The similar flame of revolution was stupendously conveyed by the constellation of eminent Indo-English writers. Anita Desai’s “Cry the Peacock” is one of the suitable examples how three generations are the bitter victim of patriarchal injustice and humiliation. Moreover, Kundanika Kapadiya, one of the renowned Gujarati writers, in her “Seven Steps in the Sky” has explicitly stated the inherent emotions of any sensitive woman, “She didn’t want to learn music

or do any research in Sanskrit Literature or achieve anything in the outside world. All she wanted was a little time for herself, to knock on the gate of one's own life and see the force of a person within." (3)

The history of women in India shows that the girls in the past were considered to be feeble, that they needed man's protective sheath. Recently, there is a change in the public outlook and mindset. More than fifty years of Indian independence, continuous fights of the women's organization against their subordinate status, political gambit for reservation of seats of power, free education to girls, special legislation to safeguard the interest of women have together contributed to the improvement of their conditions to some extent.

There is a basic difference between female protagonist revolting against age-old traditions and the female characters revolting against the pressures of married life. The first category of writers holds broader perspective than the second ones. Most of the feminine writers in Indo-Anglican fiction have portrayed the individual woman's struggle to get free from male dominance in everyday affairs. Along with these writers, we have a fulgent literary star-Arundhati Roy, who is an unconventional modern writer revolting against social rigidity, especially the prevalent inhumane attitude of male chauvinism for woman in general. Especially, "The God of Small Things" glorifies womanhood in an unconventional way as it is a remarkable indictment of patriarchy and the injustice faced by woman in the androcentric society. Woman is victimized everywhere: as a daughter in her parent's house, as a wife in her husband's house, as a worker in a factory or as an employee in an office, whether in India or America. The other major issue of feminism covered by this novel is the struggle engaged in by women for the establishment of their identity and their economic and sexual freedom. Ammu, the female protagonist, is the valiant fighter of these causes, though the options open to her in the male dominated order are not viable at all. She grabs the first opportunity for escaping from the oppressive atmosphere of her parent's house in Ayemenem and rushes into a loveless marriage. And as a matter of fact, she finds herself out of the frying-pan into the fire. Her husband, whom she loved so much proved to be an alcoholic, who even made her smoke. At that time twins were born. Meanwhile Mr. Hollick, the English Manager of the tea planter expressed filthily his weakness towards Ammu. Mad with the passions of sex, one day he summoned her husband and asked him to resign. He was dumbfounded. Actually the manager wanted to have sexual relation with Ammu. Mr. Hollick told Ammu's husband that he is lucky being a husband of such an attractive wife. He suggested that Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be 'looked after'. His husband conveyed the same with his willingness to Ammu. This extreme humiliation created a sense of great hatred in heart of Ammu. In a scuffle, she hits her husband with a heavy book and left the place with the twins-Estha and Rahel. Ammu returned to Ayemenem with her pulled out cheek, and there too, she found her parents cold and indifferent to her and to her children. This definitely reminds us of one of the humiliating incidents of the epic "Mahabharata" when Yudhisthir offered Draupadi as a bet to Kauravas in the game of dice. Moreover, in "The Mayor of the Casterbridge" by Thomas Hardy, we have the identical example of insult for a submissive woman.

Moreover at the Ayemenem House, Ammu was constantly reminded that she and her children have no locus standi; she nonetheless continues her struggle in her own way. Another social discrepancy we find here is that the licentious and phallogocentric son of the family- Chako was constantly promoted by both Mammachi and Pappachi though he physically exploits the women working in the factory. On the other hand, Ammu- the discarded woman by her husband

and a helpless daughter by her family is wrongly punished just because she has violated the Love Laws and expressed her genuine love for the Untouchable- Velutha. Moreover, Mammachi doesn't feel shame in arranging some perverted women for Chako, but when she comes to know about the illicit sexual relationship of her daughter, she begins to suffer from the sense of shame and contempt:

She had defiled generations of breeding. For generations to come, forever now people would point at them at wedding, and funerals. At baptism and birthday parties. They would nudge and whisper. It was all finished now.  
(4)

Further, Rahel has equally grim odds to contend with. She indicates the falsehood of conventional attitudes through her symbolic actions. Both Ammu and Rahel have avoided the proper cause of feminist struggle for self-respect and freedom. They ultimately conduct themselves to a state of degraded sexual pleasure and extreme loneliness. One of them destroys herself in her illusory pursuit of redemption, although it must be granted that her intentions remain lofty and worth of praise. The other woman is also not in a better position. Her incestuous satisfaction promises no real breakthrough in the direction of feminist objective.

Mammachi, the dominating female character in the novel also becomes the victim of male injustice as Rahel remembers how her father beats her mother regularly. And every night he beats her with a brass flower vase. The beatings were not new. What was new only the frequency which took place! One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi's violin and throw it in the river. This episode clearly shows man's domineering nature over a docile, submissive, ungrudging and un-protesting woman. It also makes the famous entomologist an animal, even worse than an animal. Ammu further reminisces;

On one such night Ammu aged nine, hiding with her mother in the hedge, watched Pappachi's natty silhouette in the lit-windows as he lifted from room to room. Not content with having beaten his wife and daughter, he tore down curtains, kicked furniture and smashed a table lamp...while Ammu watched the Imperial Entomologist shred her new gumboots with her mother's pinking shears. (5)

Thus, the act of wife-battering is interpreted by Pappachi as a perverted pleasure and as a male prerogative. Due to the unsympathetic atmosphere in Ayemenem house, Baby Kochamma also expresses her filthy opinions about Ammu, "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 a 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." (6)

Thus, Baby Kochamma became Ammu's greatest rival as in Ammu she saw a potential threat to the safe niche she had created for herself over the years. Her fear of being disposed increased with the swelling up of numbers in the house and she made no bones about her displeasure. So, Ammu is considered as an object which can be placed anywhere or thrown out after being used. Ammu's humiliation is the result of her marriage having gone wrong. Simone de Beauvoir asserts that:

Marriage is not only an honourable career and one less tiring than many others: it alone permits a woman to keep her social dignity intact and at the same to find sexual fulfilment as loved one and mother.... (7)

Though, Ammu grapples with her fate, she does not achieve anything concrete. She has too many fronts to cope with- her personal misery and her children's upbringing. Thus, Ammu moves around without being heard. The male tyranny that is unleashed on her takes a cruel form in her parent's home- it is a battering that does not show but corrodes one from within. The arrival of Sophie Mol seems to ignite the so far contained and suppressed conflicts. The preferential treatment shown toward Chako's widowed ex-wife and their daughter is openly displayed in front of all and sundry, throwing Ammu and her twins into complete isolation. Not having any right on anything whatsoever and constantly being made to feel dejected and low, Ammu is lured by Veluth's meaningful gaze. Unable to hold herself she breaks free of all the constraints and barriers and walks across to the life-infusing company of the despised Paravan. She did not stop to gauge the consequences, for nothing could be worse than what she had already faced. So, throwing all the cares to the wind, she allows herself to be drenched in the love of Velutha every night for two weeks. She ultimately is able to become a part of 'the sub world' of her twins and Velutha from which she had earlier been excluded, 'a tactile world of smiles and laughter....'

Initially, she found her children's fondness for a man, who was subservient to the household somewhat odd. But he filled their days with a life they craved and hungered for. What their own father or Chako could not give, Velutha gave in plenty. Ammu was tricked into confinement, castigated vehemently and finally disowned and disinherited by the family. What she did and where she went was no one's concern. Even while taking her last breath, she was alone in a grimy, dingy room of Bharat Lodge in Allepey. She was denied dignity of a funeral as "The church refused to bury Ammu....So; Chako wrapped her in a dirty bed sheet and laid out on a stretcher." (8)

Thus, Ammu was cremated in an electric crematorium where beggars, derelicts and the police custody were taken. So, just because she was a woman by birth and expressed her genuine love for the untouchable much more against the wishes of her family, she met her doom in such a pathetic way. According to Christianity Jesus spread no occasion to denounce men for adultery, hypocrisy, pride or any other aberration. Throughout the Gospels he is seen as gentle, forgiving and understanding with women. But Paul more or less undid what Christ had done because long before the first century, belief in the inferiority of women had become embedded in the cultures in Europe, Asia and Africa, where he and the apostles preached the world. "In fact, the early church theologians too suffered from the existing bias against women and informing their thought systems they were influenced by the approach of Aristotle who placed women more or less next to slaves." (9)

Rahel too faced the injustice being one of the resilient and submissive women. She worked for several years as a night clerk in a bullet-proof cabin at a gas station outside Washington, where drunks occasionally vomited into the money tray, and pimps propositioned her with more lucrative job offers. It was only Rahel who could manage to cope with such a job as no self-respecting, young Indian lady would dare to work in such a degrading environment. She was shorn off the feminine virtues of sweetness, modesty, subservience and humility that were cultivated by women of cultured societies. To her nothing mattered and she did not bother of what people thought. Never having tasted a warm hearth of a stable home and being deprived of an adequate exposure, both Estha and Rahel were victims of a broken family. Roy has drawn the bare bones of the characters from the family as her own mother faced much trauma in her parental home for being separated from her husband.

Arundhati Roy's female characters in 'The God of Small Things' stand out as persons and not as role-players. Mammachi, Ammu, Margaret Kochamma and Baby Kocamma have independent existence. Ammu and Margaret get married with the boys of their choice. There is no controversial discussion on their decision. Their marriages do not divide families among groups, one supporting the move and the other opposing it. Such inter-caste, inter-state, international marriages would have raised hue and cry in other Indo-Anglican writers. The other novelists would have spent dozens of pages in order to describe 'Marriage' in the Indian context to prove the Indianness of their writings, making it melodramatic. Marriages and divorce in many Indian novels occupy such a central position that one begins to doubt if there is anything else in the novel. Roy's attitude demonstrates that man and woman are bound to come together and there is nothing describable in it. Jasbir Jain's remarks in this regard need to be quoted, "Women have been portrayed both by men and women writers as mothers and wives. It is within these roles that their new selves are born can be born. The areas of relationships remain the same but the relationship change." (10)

Evaluating Roy's 'The God of Small Things' from feminine perspective, we can definitely say that Roy transcends the ordinary concepts of feminism and hence becomes more convincing. What one likes about Roy is that she does not see opposition in all male-female encounters. Sometimes, as in above case, she finds a natural human impulse of both sexes to be voyeurs.

## REFERENCES

1. Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1998. (Pg.82)
2. Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Washington Square Publication, 1970. (Pg.97)
3. Kapadiya, Kundanika. *Seven Steps in the Sky*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1984.
4. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Penguin Book, 1997. (Pg. 258)
5. Ibid, (Pg. 181)
6. Ibid, (Pg.45-46)
7. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. London: Four Square Books, 1961, (Pg. 352)
8. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Penguin Book, 1997. (Pg. 162)
9. T.C. Joseph, "The Church is still very much male dominated". *The Times of India*, 13 September 1988, (Pg. 3)
10. Jain, Jasbir. *Problems of Postcolonial Literature and Other Essays*. Jaipur: Printwell, 1991, (Pg.33)