

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

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Abstract

*The concept of marginalization is a very novel in the contemporary literary practice. It is an approach used to study the literature, giving emphasis to the voice of marginal people in the society. Today marginal people are socially, politically, economically and legally deprived of their 'rights' as a human being in every society. Historically women are considered as more marginal entity in a 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. Roy as a Booker Prize winning novelist belongs to new generation of Indian writers. 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 the margin of society. She rightly puts forth how women become victims of violence, exploitation, alienation and exile. The protagonist of the novel is a woman. She was divorced from an alcoholic husband, mother of twins, has disastrous love affair with an untouchable. She violates the 'love laws' which were constituted by age old casteist. 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 a lodge at the age of thirty one. In short Roy truly reflects the marginal Indian woman in her novel *The God of Small things*.

Indian novel after 1980's witnessed a new wave of writers, who potentially handled diversity of subjects. Their works are known for keen depiction of contemporary social and political issues. Majority of novelists realistically wrote about problems faced by women in a male dominated society. Arundhati Roy is one of them, who have been acclaimed as a leading interpreter of brutalities in rapidly changing Indian society. Her writing is exclusively about current controversial issues like caste discrimination, gender discrimination, environmental protection and marginalization. She has used marginalization as a literary device to explore sufferings of peripheral sections of society especially women. 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 a representative of old generation of women. Ammu, is the representative of second generation and Rahel is a daughter of Ammu, representative of third generation of woman in the 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 a significant character in the novel, representative of old generation of women. She is the 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 the 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. Mamachi 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 a 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 a 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 was 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 the 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". (38) Her father's remark on her education clearly shows that she has secondary place in family. She was 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.” (38-39)

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 him with the hope that this marriage will bring up all the love and affection which she was 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” (40). 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” (42). 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 both 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 Velutha, a Paravan after many years makes her take a fatal decision to “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 Velutha’s father to Mammachi. When this disastrous affair is revealed, Velutha is grabbed by police and killed on false case of rape. When Ammu went to police station to set the record straight against Velutha, 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.”(58).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 she is cremated in an electric crematorium where 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 as a marginalized character because of being a daughter of neglected Ammu. Like Ammu, 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 was totally disturbed and deserted because of tormenting memories of past. For her marginalization past memories associated with her mother plays key role.

To conclude, 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 factors for marginalization of women in the novel.

References

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