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**Riazul Hoque**  
Associate Professor, Deptt. Of  
English, Rupahi College P.O.  
Rupahi, District. Nagaon,  
Assam, India.

**Correspondence:**  
**Riazul Hoque**  
Associate Professor, Deptt. Of  
English, Rupahi College P.O.  
Rupahi, District. Nagaon,  
Assam, India.

## Predicament of the Women in Arundhati Roy's '*The God of Small Things*'

**Riazul Hoque**

### Abstract

Earlier the novelists projected a black and sarcastic picture particularly with reference to the women who lived surrounding us. They painted a gloomy and shadowy world for women. Women were portrayed as if they were devoid of artistic creation. They were only considered as the object of sex. This predicament of women in the 1970s compels the Indian women writers to pen down their voice against the male dominated patriarchal society. Women writers have succeeded in great extent in changing the attentions of the readers to the evil practice of patriarchy by describing the life of Indian women. My paper is a humble attempt to shown how female protagonists in Arundhati Roy's '*The God of Small Things*' struggle for their existence in the society in various roles against the male dominated patriarchal society.

**Keywords:** Patriarchal, andocentric, identity, marginalization, gender discrimination

### Introduction

Since ages women are being seen and portrayed in literature in negative way by the most of the male writers. The novelists project a black and sarcastic picture particularly with reference to women those live surrounding us. They paint a gloomy and shadowy world for women. Women are portrayed as if they are devoid of artistic creation. They are only considered as the object of sex. They do not have any choice. This predicament of women in the 1970s compels women writers to pen down their voice against the male dominated patriarchal society. Women writers like Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur and Arundhati Roy have succeeded in great extent in changing the attentions of the readers to the evil practice of patriarchy by describing the life of Indian women. They tell many tales of injustice and oppressions being faced by women within their house and beyond it in the andocentric and patriarchal society of India. They continue their struggle for establishment of their identity and their economic and social freedom.

### Review of Literature

People speak in derogatory manner about women all over the world. An old Italian saying is "as a horse, whether good or bad, requires spurs, so a woman whether good or bad, requires thrashing". The wise men in China also advise husbands in these words: "Listen to the counsel of your wife, but act against it". The old men of Russia say: "There is only one soul among ten women". The Spaniards say: "We shall save ourselves from wicked women and should never be captivated by any that have good looks" (Kidwai 20). Though the position of women has changed from culture to culture and from ages to age but one thing is common that in almost all culture, women have been treated as the beast of burden and never been equal to men. Mary Wollstonecraft in her masterpiece *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) demanded equal opportunities for women in the fields of education, economics and politics. She strongly advocated for women's education protection by laws. Renowned historian and feminist Uma Chakravarti, for her active participation and association with women's movement have been called the 'founding mother' of the Indian women's movement. She fought for the democratic rights of women and persistently worked to sensitize women regarding their rights. The efforts of such woman must have encouraged

and influenced the later women writers of the twentieth century stand up and voice their grievances. Neera Desai is also one such pioneers of feminist scholarship in India. In her book, named *Woman in Modern India* (1957), she justifies that there was no 'golden age' for women and women have always been under male domination since antiquity.

### Methodology

This paper is formulated to deal with the struggle of the women in gaining their individuality. This paper has tried to place Roy's *The God of Small Things* within an Indian culture-specific feminist framework. The paper is written with the help of Postcolonial feminist theory using comparative and analytical methods. The study is a literary work using primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources are based on library resources like reference books, scholarly journal and internet also. The study has been interpretative, descriptive and exploratory using various feminist theories put forward by feminist critics like Mary Wollstonecraft, Uma Chakravarti, Neera Desai.

### Discussion

*The God of Small Things* narrates the marginalization, gender discrimination and the struggle of women at the best possible ways. The story of the novel reflects the Indian patriarchal society that deprives women from what a male in society enjoys. The title of the novel justifies the portrayal of the oppressed, down trodden and marginalized female folk of the society. The narrative of the novel presents different perspectives by portraying different women characters. The main protagonist of the novel is Ammu. Basically, the novel is autobiographical in tone. Rahel represents Arundhati Roy and Ammu represents Mary Roy. A number of characters have been constructed and trapped in the net of patriarchy.

*The God of Small Things* reflects a true picture of the plight of the Indian women in the contemporary society. The novel unravels the constant fight of the marginalized and subdued women in the society which is controlled by patriarchal mindset. Ammu has been created by Roy as a pathetic character who represents rural woman. Ammu is born in such a society where the custodian of the family thinks about only baby-boy not about baby-girl. Interference of Ammu's father brings to an end of the dream of higher education for Ammu. To get rid of suffocation in her own family, Ammu marries an employee of a tea garden in Assam. Ammu does not get respite in her married life. Her husband happens to be a heavy drunkard and tortures her physically and mentally. Her husband does not hesitate to send her to his professional boss Mr. Hollick to satisfy his carnal desire in exchange for job benefit. This type of betrayal and gross injustice is also presented in literature by other female authors; particularly Kamala Das has reflected this ill-treatment by her husband in her poems. Being disgusted and humiliated by her husband, Ammu returns to her Ayemenem house along with two children. Ammu's father refuses to believe that an Englishman could ever deflower the chastity of a woman. Ammu's allegation to her father looks nothing special but an allegation of a woman where the former is not able to realize the sentiment and emotion of the latter.

How women are deprived from the paternal property is also aptly projected in the novel. Ammu has been deprived from

her paternal property by her brother Chacko not bothering about the rights of his own sister. Even Ammu gets shocked and stunned by the comments of her brother: "What's yours is mine and what mine is also mine" (57). This practice is rampant in the traditional Indian society. Daughters are always deprived from their due parental rights. Again, gender discrimination is reflected when Ammu is denied from higher education but her brother Chacko is sent to Oxford for higher study. This environment does not allow Ammu to take fresh breathing. Ammu is a symbol of woman who would like to protect her children for future, but reality is that she herself has been neglected and deprived by her own parents who represent the patriarchal structure, who make fun of the patriarchal system who wish to be learned and educated.

We cannot call Ammu a fallen woman because it is the society that controls the life of Ammu who has been deprived from her paternal property, sympathy and love of married life. Under the circumstances it would be a difficult job to maintain chastity and ultimately, she brings her own degradation being physically involved with Velutha who is a paravan. Ammu, like any other woman, has the reason to dream a small world of her own where she can procreate and lead a happy life. She discovers in Velutha some potentialities to be her life partner. But soon she becomes the victim of police, so called the guardian of law and her cherished dream of small world is trampled and destroyed. Ammu dies a premature death only at the age of thirty-one. Though it is not a die able age but she is compelled to die. Ammu's death symbolizes not only the death of one woman but it is the death of thousands of women who are in existence in our society and who are dying every moment and every day under the male dominated patriarchal society.

Ammu's daughter Rahel who symbolizes Arundhati Roy, undergoes tremendous mental and physical agonies and launches scathing attack against the prevalent social order as a protest. She herself becomes the victim of her drunkard and unruly father. Ammu's separation from her husband forces Rahel to leave home at the tender age. Ayamenem house becomes the shelter for Rahel and her brother. Their arrival at the Ayamenem house is not welcome by the inmates. Right from the childhood Rahel suffers many brutalities and misfortunes. She witnesses many mishaps in her life without knowing its reasons. At first, she witnesses her father's brutalities meted out to her mother. Separation of her parents becomes painful for her because it deprives her from the love of her parents. This separation affects her psychologically throughout her life. Next, the ill-treatment of the members of Ayamenem house to Ammu disturbs Rahel to a great extent. Instead of love, compassion and sympathy, they become neglected, disowned and despised at their maternal uncle's house. Finally, the illicit love affair between Ammu and Velutha serves as a huge blow for Rahel. It becomes unbearable when she has to identify Velutha as the main culprit after he gets killed by the police. Ammu's occasional interference in Rahel's life renders it impossible to live independently.

Baby Kochamma, who is a symbol of power, is also deprived and subjugated in the novel. She falls in love with a Christian monk, father Mulligan. She leaves no stone unturned to win his heart. She even converts to Roman Catholic for the sake of father Mulligan. The novelist observes: "That was all she wanted. All she dared to hope

for, just to be near him close enough to smell his beard. To love him just by looking him" (24). But all his endeavors prove futile and she realizes that her position is at lower level among the converts and she is far behind than the other girls to reach to Mulligan. Perhaps being failure in her love she showers her anger against Ammu and her children. Amitabh Roy opines: "Baby Kochamma subscribes to the commonly held view that a married daughter has no position in her parents' house and a divorced one, no position anywhere at all. It becomes worse if the divorce is from a love marriage and worst, if she is divorce from inter community marriage. Ammu, according to her, committed a serious offence by marrying a Bengali Hindu and the divorce turned it even more serious. In fact, she is jealous of Ammu for daring to exercise her right to choose the man she marries and to discard him when found unworthy" (Roy 62). Roy is absolutely right when he says: "Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarreling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman. The sad, father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma" (Roy 62-63).

Mammachi, Ammu's mother, is married with Pappachi who is much older than her. His marriage happens to be a trouble shooter for Mammachi who suffers from mental disorder. Mammachi is quite often beaten by her husband at the slightest possible cause. The cruelty and brutality come to an end at the intervention of Chacko who comes from Oxford during vacation and harshly reprimands his father for beating Mammachi: "I never want this to happen again" (48). Mammachi loses the sympathy of readers for her attitude to sex for younger people than her. She maintains different outlook to her divorce son and daughter. She approves her son's flirting with women whereas it becomes forbidden for her daughter.

We find that Arundhati Roy has projected a true picture of women who, under patriarchy, social construct and male chauvinism are suffering to a great extent. The author has shown how three female protagonists struggle for their existence in the society in various roles. They do not represent the type of women rather they represent the Indian women in broader sense. Every woman suffers in it in her own way. As one critic observes, "It can be called the story of sufferings of Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel. They all suffer in different ways. In a country like India where patriarchal system is very strong, women suffer mentally, physically and sexually" (Rajpal 66).

### **Conclusion**

Thus, we see that in this novel Arundhati Roy puts under focus the deliberately constructed agencies of cruelty that work against women's interests. In this all are involved, the so-called progressive politicians, the family members, the police, etc. In the traditional Indian society such forces flourish and find encouragement in maintaining their hold over the weaker people. As the famous British feminist theoretician Jennifer Mather Saw says, "Families both shape and are shaped by factors that are clearly of political significance. In particular, we shall see, their structures play a key role in impoverishing and disadvantaging women; and their structures are shaped, at least in part, by constraints imposed by laws, workplace, and the ways that children are educated" (Jennifer 89).

Social structures are so formed as to sanctify women's victimization. Arundhati Roy's depiction of the miserable lives of women in these novel critiques in unmistakable terms the perpetuation of these exploitative forces. What we find from the above discussion is that the novel with three main female characters reflects a perfect narrative of struggling women. Baby Kochamma, a victim of social prejudice is conditioned by society and identifies herself with the ideas and forces of suppression. Mammachi is dehumanized and her psyche is twisted as a result of suffering in a society dominated by men. Ammu, the main protagonist, is the rebel who represents the defiance of the present state of the society from educated, passionate and thinking women who are mulling for freedom and equality.

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