

# Arundhati Roy's Feminist View in The God of Small Things: A Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

*The term Feminism refers to the sense of consciousness and awareness for their rights in females. It is a movement that gained potential in the 20th century and a struggle for cultural role, social-political rights, justice, and equal liberation for women in the society. It is a kind of philosophy stressing upon the enslavement, exploitation that has been clung women of the century. The occurrence of feminism in literature is a great blow for the patriarchal society because it was based on the principle of anti-feminist person Aristotle (Man is superior woman inferior), Darwin (woman biologically inferior), and Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine (non-significant other).*

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## Introduction

Feminism literature is basically related to female characters. In patriarchal society the central figure has been just man, he made all rules, law for his own favour and woman have no choice rather followed that rules. Because man was the centre, he had all the authority and facilities, but women were living in a state of ignorance, inaction. Sushila Singh states, "Human experience for centuries has been synonymous with the masculine experience with the result that the collective image of humanity... her own right, but merely has an entity that concerns man either in his real life or his fantasy life." [1]

The women gained her present position through the centuries and ages of pain. They remained inferior to men, but now they are enjoying a great deal of liberation, equal rights and independence. Feminist movement early started in the 1960's in the Western Countries. It produced woman as a writer and a reader also, therefore she became capable of understanding female problem better than men. Its major motif is to give the identification to women. Feminism isn't anti-men, it is simply against the dominance of men in the society. Merely it demands the freedom and existence of female individual personality. When anybody talked about feminism, the first thing came into one's mind that it is the social force, but understands this thing after that woman has been considered subordinate to man since ages. Feminism protecting women's interests by making them independent and teaching that they can change society.

Meaning: The word *Feminisme* coined by French Philosopher, Charles Fourier in 1837 and Alexander Dumas, French Dramatist firstly used the term *feminism* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It affected the whole world. Feminism word derived from the Latin word *Femina*, which means woman or female qualities. In 1890, it became *womanism* to refer the movement that concerned with women's rights. In western countries female came to the forefront as writer with new thoughts and ideas. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft, is one of the earliest works of Feminist Philosophy. They believed that women are able to do things as men. So social revolution is the result of this awareness. The

meaning of feminism understood in a wrong way by relating it to establish picture of female by male like she should be shy, weak, nervous, humble, fair colour etc. by showing himself as hero, strong, brave, confident, aggressive, man always proves the woman opposed to him.

Definition: Men and women are biologically equal, it is the society that makes the difference between them by creating the term Gender. It means both have the same qualities and potential. Feminism connects with the equivalence of men and women. Writers who believe in this concept are the feminist one. There are numerous definitions of feminism and its meaning, like Simone De Beauvoir, a French writer, political activist and feminist, defines, "In my definition, feminists are women-or even men, too-who are fighting to change women's condition, in association with the class struggle... we must fight for the situation of women, here and now, before our dreams of socialism come true." [2]

At present, feminism analyzes the cause of women's oppression. Writing about the Modern Feminism Hester Eistenstein asks, "Ought one to Castigate feminism because it is insufficiently revolutionary and geared to the concern of the working class? Or ought one to take a longer view, and ask what would become of present social arrangements in the...." [3]

Most of the previous literature presents the stereotypical image of women that has been fixed by orthodox writer. Only the western literature introduced the pious picture of them that are few in number. On the other hand women presented merely as an interest of men. As Josephine Donovan epitomize the dualism of women. Josephine describes the two categories of females, the positive and the negative side. For instance, Jesus mother Mary related to the pure picture of women and Adam's partner Eve considered the dark side of women, as following diagram:

"Spiritual | Material  
Spirit | Body  
Virgil ideal | Sex object  
Mary | Eve

Inspirational | Seductress  
Good | Evil " [4]

Male writers demonstrate the good side, including the women who obey the order and serve as the interest of their husbands and bad side involving them who didn't follow the men's decision and do whatever they want. In literature, feminist critic defined the female's situation as victimization.

Three Phases of Feminism: First Phase Feminism: The first phase dates from 1780-1880. This is the remarkable step for the women's status, which later changed their circumstances. It gave a right of writing to them and they stated imitated the work of male writers because they have not the basic idea for writing. Writers like George Eliot, Elizabeth Browning, Elizabeth Gaswell, and Charlotte Bronte were the popular writer of this time period. This phase characterized by the right to education, right to property, and right to employment, etc. A famous writer of this phase was Mary Wollstonecraft. She is also called the Grandmother of modern feminism. She states, "Women are more pleasure seeking and pleasure giving than men. If given the right education in utilitarian terms she will likely forge the disparity between man and woman.... She wastes no time and energy on useless and idle arguments or entertainment." [5]

Second Phase Feminism: This phase ranged from 1880-1920. The writers of this phase are Olive Schriener, Mrs. Craigie, Amelia Johnson, Sarah Grand, Mary Coleridge, George Egerton, Pauline Hoppine, and many others. They began writing as their own way and their writing protest against the traditional values, customs and beliefs. Right to vote, sexual freedom, equal liberation and integration in the workplace are its major achievements. Women's subjugation in the society became the main theme during this time. *The Origin of the Family* (1884), by Fredrich Engels and *Women and Labour* (1911), by Olive Schriener are the prominent work of this phase.

Third Phase Feminism: The Third and major phase of feminism have continued since 1920. There were lots of opportunities given to females. They introduced their own theories and experience in writing. It was the time that considered the self-assertion and self-discovery for women. Literary, philosophical, historical, psychological, sociological, and anthropological subjects included in this theory. Eminent writers of this phase are Juliet Mitchell, German Greer, Kate Millett, Mary Darly, Virginia Woolf, Elaine Showater, Toril Moi, Henrik Ibsen, Simone De Beauvoir, Margaret L. Anderson and many others. Some of their notable works are *A Doll's House* (1879), *A Room of One's Own* (1927), *The Second Sex* (1949), *Sexual Politics* (1970), *Towards a Feminist Poetics* (1979), *Thinking About Women* (1983), *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1983). All these books influenced women with a great deal and provided them new lens. A great French feminist, Simone De Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* deals with the suffering of women. In the introduction she says, "Thus humanity is male and man defines women not in her self but as relative to him... she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject; he is the Absolute- she is the other." [6] She says that it is ill luck of females that they got the

second position in the world and even they are recognized by the names of their husbands. In the society, they are always considered as others. In spite of equality, they didn't get their right place.

Feminism in India: Although feminism arouses in the Western countries, but feminist writers make it successful in all around the world. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the struggle against the Feudal system and British rule, feminist consciousness originated in Asian countries. In India feminist movement was started by male's writers and then joined by the females. The first school for girls begun by Savitribai Phule, a wife of Jyotirao Phule. The first Indian feminist text written by Tarabai Shinde, a first Indian feminist literary critic. Pandit Ramabai, Indian social reformers, who criticised Indian society's traditional values. Kamini Roy became first Indian woman who got the graduate degree in 1886. In the Bengali essay *The Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge*, she wrote, "The male desire to rule is primary, if not the only stumbling block to women's enlightenment... They are extremely suspicious of women's emancipation. Why? The same old fear- 'Lest they become like us'." [7]

Many states were ruled by women in the colonial time such as Kittur by Rani Chennama, Jhansi by Rani Laxmibai, Punjab by Jind Kaur and Bhopal by Quidisa Begum. They are the notable example of women's courage or bravery.

In the post-independence time, there arose social, political, and radical changes in India, joint families got divided into small families. Women got economic freedom because the traditional beliefs came to an end. During this time, the upcoming of new awareness in the women forced them to write about their own suffering, individuality, and identity. Writers like Kamala Markanday, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Shoba De, Anita Nair, Manju Kapoor, Bharti Mukherjee, Githa Hariharan, and Jai Nimbkar gave new direction to Indian literature. They are educated and not following myth, folklores, epics or legends. They started writing those topics which supposed to hide in the Patriarchal society. About these works Rushmi Bajaj gave a statement, "We have here increased social consciousness, a strong awareness of identity as woman, championing of women's cause, problems of alienation and crisis, daring portrayal of sex and emphasis on the study of personal relationships." [8]

Feminist writers play an active role in the world and they keep their ear and eye open up. Whenever their work contrast with the conventional themes they faced difficulty for publication. They go against the subject like harassment, molestation, abasement, humiliation, dishonour etc. As Shani Mooto demonstrated in her short story *Out on Main Street*, "Whoever does he think he is! Calling me dear and touching me like that! Why do these men always think that they have permission to... to hear about so that they can say how sexist and uncivilized our culture is." [9]

Poets as Kamala Das, Monika Verma, Sujatha Modayil, Margaret Chatterjee, Roshan Alkazi, Mamta Kalia, Sunita Jain, Suniti Namjoshi, Guari Deshpande,

Lila Ray, Indira Dhanrajgir, LalitaVenkateswarn, and Vimla Rao are written from the female perspectives by exploring the theme like sexuality, and sensuality. They are different from traditional womanhood and express their feelings without any hesitation, and against the stereotype images or the role of women in the society. SunandaChavan says, "An Indian woman poet in English evolved her full identity as a modern woman only in the post –independence period. .... The variety of new tensions encountered by contemporary women stimulated Indian feminine progress from tradition to modernity." [10]

The above study reveals the contribution of feminist writers in literature. Through the establishment of the new tradition in depicting the real phenomena of society, they gained the specific place in the literary field. Therefore, in the growth of literature, feminism is a remarkable stage.

Feminism in *The God of Small Things*: Through the translation, no doubt Indian literature in English circulated in Western countries throughout Europe, Spanish, French or German languages. Especially the writing of women has been translated in western markets more than men. For instance, the Book Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. It is essential for publicity that woman's face and body are considered as the symbol of popularity for her works. That's why Arundhati Roy's photography makes her a celebrity, "Marketing for *The God of Small Things* has been dominated by glossy photographs of a very photogenic Roy, wispy tendrils of hair framing eyes that stare dreamily out. ...The strategy is a clear one which plays into the Indian beauty myth." [11]

She is one of the well-renowned Indian novelists in English who have tried to illustrate the plight of the female through her fictional characters that seems larger than life. She is a hard core feminist. She extensively influenced to the psychological fact of feminist theory, which is reflected in her works. Her novels details feminist context in numerous events involving the caste discrimination, injustice and exploitation. It is said that Arundhati Roy followed the footsteps of Mahasweta Devi. She took those issues which ignored by other ones. Similarly, Roy depicts the concept as brave and bold manner. She deals with themes of gender oppression, dispossession, and deprivation like Devi. Her novel *The God of Small Things* focus on the irrationalities of social life as a woman. It deals with the social and political issues from the feminist point of view. A woman's struggle against the patriarchal society and the role of women in the modern society is a vital theme of her novel.

*The God of Small Things* explores the feminist concern related to social and political events. In the novel women desire to be liberated from the shackles of patriarchy system. It is a kind of reflection of post – colonial feminist approach. It is said that the novel is a semi – autobiographical. It explains the relationship of man and woman, by studied the various reviews M. K. Naik comments, "This is perhaps the nearest that reviewers seem to come to the vital question of the thematic richness of *The God of Small Things*". [12]The character of Rahel presents the difficulties faced by Roy and Ammu shows the elements of her mother's life. Roy used third person narrative technique in which the story is being told. The

novel begins in Ayemenam, when Rahel comes here for meets her twin brother Estha. Both are the presents as the age of thirty first, same as their mother Ammu had died.

"Not old.

Not young.

But a viable die-able age." (TGST, P.3)

Readers introduced that the Rahel and Estha are twins whose parent's divorced. After divorced Ammu come back to her father's home where a Baby Kochamma is her father's sister and her staunch enemy. Her condition became more miserable when she makes a relation with an untouchable Velutha. The police murdered Velutha because of his affair with an upper class woman and Ammu throw out from the house. Therefore, Ammu's family gets separated as Estha has gone with his Baba as well as Rahel lives with family.

In her novel Arundhati Roy illustrates the male and female characters belong to their own three respective generations. Mammachi's character occupies the generation in which women have always suffered in the male dominated society as muted groups. Father Mulligan and Baby Kochamma are related to the generation that was born during the colonial period in India. Although Baby Kochamma loved him, she could not cross the boundaries of patriarchal norms and played a role as virtuous, virgin woman. The character of Margaret Kochamma and Ammu demonstrates the generation that rejects the patriarchal system, but as a divorced person they have to go through sufferings. The other character is Rahel, representing the woman as an Independent who are not following the traditional rule and wants to free from the bonds of patriarchy and challenge it.

It is taught in the traditional way of thinking that women who get divorced, has no right to live happily. Society makes hell for them on the earth. Thus Rahel's suppression compels her to establish an incestuous relation with her twin brother Estha. It is against the social and moral laws. Estha and Rahel also witnessed Ammu and Velutha's punishment. They filled with the sense of revolt after they get marginalized and stop fearing from any kind of penalty. Their relationship discussed as follows:

Estha's character in the novel described along with the character of Rahel as they face the similar situations. For them life is nothing but a tale that narrated by a fool. In an Indian patriarchal system Roy describes the hybridity as a dominant or primary issue. Ammu's marriage becomes the main cause of distress for twins. But Sophie Mol, whose father also doing inter-caste marriage holds the superior place in the family. Males' decision accepted by the society, but it never allowed to a female to think or take steps for their future. The difference between Ammu and her brother Chacko is obviously seen in the novel. Ammu's condition in her father's house is realized by Baby Kochamma's words, "She subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents' home [...] As for a divorced daughter from a intercommunity love marriage – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject." (TGST, P. 45-46)

In her father's house, she is not a notable daughter. Her presence is like a stranger in the home whom nobody wants to communicate. Ammu's brother Chacko, who also divorced from the love-marriage accepted by the family and he enjoys each and every thing in his life. But family members doesn't in the favour of Ammu's divorced. Her affair with an untouchable Velutha regarding opposed to the man made conventional rules. As a divorced woman she has no right to live her life in a cheerful manner. When Velutha murdered Baby Kochamma says "As ye sow so shall ye reap"(TGST, P. 31). This is an evidence of her hatred for him. Ammu is a victim of patriarchy from the beginning. Usually her father Pappachi beats her. Chacko gets higher education from Britain, but she didn't permit to go for higher study. As Marder says about this role of society: "The son of my house may be granted freedom to develop his mind, he may have a room of his own, but the daughter is expected to be at every one's back and call... bring about adjustments in personal relation".[13]

When Ammu got a chance to live in Calcutta, she accepted it immediately and for a few days remained there deciding not to go back into her own house. Then she married a drunkard man who also beat her regularly. She confronts against her own family, Ranga Rao declared, "In Ammu, the novelist has presented, with compassion, a woman, a feminist locked in a struggle with her family, its 'hidden morality' with society and tragically with herself." [14]

Her husband compels Ammu to go with his manager in the night so that he can get promoted. Ammu denies her husband and divorces him. "Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem. To everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams." (TGST, P. 42) She again returns to Ayemenem but she and her twins received no respect or place in the family. They are like unwelcomed and unwanted guest in the house, "For herself she knew that there would be no more chances. There was only Ayemenem now. A front verandah and a back verandah. A hot river and a pickle factory. And in the background, the constant, high, whinning mewl of local disapproval." (TGST, P. 43)

In the property Ammu has not any sort of share. Her brother Chacko said to her, "what's your is mine and what's mine is also mine." (TGST, P. 47) Despite her hard work in the pickle factory she is not recognized as a family member. Her brother also proclaimed his place, "Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspection or sanitary engineers,...Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter had no claim to the property" (TGST, P. 57).

Ammu's continuous oppression makes her a woman who crossed all the rules. Her act of not giving a surname of her husband or father to the children proves the quest of her own identity. The police officer Thomas Mathew insulted her in front of her children for the relationship with Velutha. After death, the church also refuses to bury her dead body. It compares the body with a cockroach and a sparrow, "A sparrow lay dead on the back seat... She died on the back seat, with her legs in the air. Like a joke." (TGST, P. 296) As a feminist Ammu is the

owner of her body, that is why she denies Mr.Hollick's proposal. At the end of the novel her word "tomorrow" symbolizes her hope for a classless, liberated and better future. The church's rejection reflected its being a blind follower of norms and there is no value of human emotions.

Another female character is Mammachi who is a wife of Imperial Entomologist Pappachi. Vimala Rama Rao, J. Sindhu and Nirmala C. Parkash describes the upsetting climate of the house and they states, "By depicting the shocking relationship between Pappachi and Mammachi, Arundhati derives home the point that children brought up in such a vicious environment crave for escape, an escape which eventually leads them to happiness".[89]Mammachi also supports marginalization of women like Baby Kochamma in the patriarchal society. Mammachi has always faced a brutal treatment. Pappachi has retired from the government service and is seventeen years older than Mammachi.

Mammachi's son Chacko when protects her, his father stops speaking with her. But she didn't get sympathy from the reader as she herself is involved in the patriarchy. In spite of her beatings, she cries at the time of her husband's death. We can call her a lady who has the spirit of the Manusmriti period in which husbands were considered like a God. After the death of Pappachi, her exploitation didn't stop. She is a businesswoman as well who runs the pickle factory, but her hard work remains unrecognized. Roy represents that despite being economically independent women can't be free from patriarchy bond. Mammachi stands silent when she comes to know about the sexual exploitation by Chacko. Even she converts his room as a brothel for him. Through the character of Chacko Roy highlights the paradoxical aspect of her novel. MargeretKochamma Chacko's ex-wife and his daughter Sophie Mol have the superior status in the patriarchal family as they are white skin, whereas Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu and Rahel have the inferior status. Through Ammu's character Roy demonstrates the feminist voice. As a rebellion she rejects the dominance patriarchy authority and protest against bias, discrimination rule.

Arundhati Roy presents a discouraging image of the male' psyche whose only aim is to enslave females. Women characters are subordinate of the powerful patriarchy. Roy also shows that economically independent women can't be liberated one. In the world of *The God of Small Things* women characters are searching their identity. There is a meaningless marriage, which later on becomes the cause of sufferings. Arundshati illustrates the obvious picture of female's oppression through characters. She says that patriarchal society never wants to the establishment of feminist ideology. Consequently, it suppressed all the female voice under its authority. Man made laws imposed on them, they have no option rather followed it. All characters' life is filled with grief and desperation. Through Ammu's life Roy describes the Indian attitude. She has been suffering from the childhood time.

Roy chose the Syrian Christian community to bring forth the women's suppression. Ammu wants to establish her own identity that is why she didn't accept the patriarchal norms. But she gets crushed by conventional society when there is her

confrontation with it. Similarly, Rahel and Estha searched their identity continuously. Rahel returns from the U.S. so that she can search her identity in India. When society tries to control women by brutal means, it always results as a deteriorate demeanour. The same thing happened in the case of Rahel who committed incest with her brother Estha. An untouchable Velutha's cruel murder shows the harsh reality of patriarchy. Other characters Pappachi and Chacko are the symbols of cultural displacement. In this way Roy represents her feminist point of view through the female as well as male characters who tolerate an unbearable pain, agony in the patriarchal system. *The God of Small Things* is a novel that pivots around the relation of an upper class lady Ammu and a lower class man Velutha. It holds the modern theme.

### Conclusion

The novel is written by a woman, about the story of a woman and also read out through the woman's point of view.

Roy depicts the plight of the women in male dominated society, because from the beginning they have been made to face all kinds of biases and discriminations and considered as an object of sex only. Thus Roy presents a males' brutal treatment for females and illustrating that how women lives a life full of humiliation or misery, how their family becomes their enemy. She suggests that family relation should be built on trust and understanding. In a nutshell, Arundhati Roy through her novel has tried to protest against the social injustice to women. She plays a role in which she actively writes about the subjugation of women. She wants to protect them as a guardian in her own country. She speaks through the feminist voice of her characters. We can say that her viewpoint about the gender inequality is very much clear in this work. *The God of Small Things* elaborates the enslavement during the patriarchy in the broadest sense.

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