



New Women in *The God of Small Things*

SANDRA R S

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

NANJIL CATHOLIC COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE

KALIAKKAVILAI – 629153

Abstract

God of Small Things has witnessed many researches on feminism and the problems of women in Indian society. But hardly notices the emergence of New Women in that novel. Women were always considered as an object to fulfill man's desires. The society as well as the literature never gave women a chance to win the rabbit – tortoise game with men. She was always marginalized from the main part of society and also from the family. Through *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy tries to bring out women who is well aware of her rights as a human being. The story describes the life of women in different generations and how they react to different life situations which they face. This Booker Prize winning novel shows women as a powerful creature in this male dominated society. This novel also depicts the development of attitude of women after generations, through the characters Ammu and Rahel.

Key words: New Women, patriarchy, disability, male chauvinism, suppression

Representation of women in the literature of cultures essentially bound to patriarchal structural ties has been the key concern of feminists throughout the ages. But actually they failed to appreciate the New Women who is coming up from these bounds. Feminists always work for the empowerment of women and the freedom of women from the patriarchal power that surrounds her. But they hardly notice women who are well aware of their rights in society and brakes all the conventional rules supposed for women. The magnum opus of India's renowned Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy in her *The God of Small Things* essentially encompasses this concern. New Women movement revolutionized the very discourse of feminist theories.



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In this novel Roy portrays many women characters in a family, who were suffering due to the patriarchal power around them. Men never allow them to come up in life and also they are not courageous enough to overthrow these systems. When some tried for that they have to face double suffering. The similar problems of women could be removed only by removing the prejudices of men about women. This paper entitled “An Approach to the Voice of New Women through the characters in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*” tried to bring out the characters, who were New Women, who shows a willingness to live a life as they like. Also Roy portrays the typical Indian society that considers women as a slave and marginalizes those who tried to come out from the cliché role of a mother and a housewife.

Arundhati Roy has presented the true picture of patriarchal powers of Ayemenem house through *The God of Small Things*. The female characters of this novel are exploited and suffer at the hands of society and family. Ayemenem house has presented many women such as Ammu, Rahel, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and Margaret Kochamma, each one has their own tale of woes to tell. Ammu is the daughter of Benan John Ipe, the etymologist and represents new ideas against the former one. John Ipe is a male chauvinist who makes a lot of distinction between his son and daughter. He sends his son Chacko to Oxford but claims college education “an unnecessary expense of a girl”. So she has no choice but to move to Ayemenem from Delhi as her father retired. All she can do next is to wait for marriage according to her father. Thus denied higher education, she remained handicapped in future but shows a lot of independence of mind, courage and moral strength as well as ability to judge people correctly to a certain extent. She goes to Calcutta to spend the summer with a distant aunt and marries a Bengali Hindu there. Her marriage is not based on love, even though the choice is hers. She marries because she does not want to return to Ayemenem. Ammu shows her strength of mind not only in marrying the man of her choice, but also in divorcing him when the choice proves wrong. Her husband, to her dismay, is found to be alcoholic. She hit him with a heaviest book from the shelf on his head and legs when he tried to prostitute her. She is far from the traditional idea of an ideal woman who worships her husband like a God and obeys him blindly despite all his blemishes.



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Ammu challenges the androcentric notions of society when she avoids surname after divorce. She feels that choosing between her husband's name and her father's name does not "give a woman much of the choice". The rebel Ammu does not permit her to remain contented with motherhood and divorce hood. Velutha's return after many years makes her take a fatal decision to "love by night the man her children loved by day". An illicit relationship between a divorcee, touchable woman and an untouchable paravan is actually a union of two rebels protesting against hypocritical laws of society not in word but in deed. Ammu is humiliated and cornered by her father, ill-treated and betrayed by her husband, insulted by the police and beaten by her brother. Ammu is a tragic figure who fights for her destiny but has to end abruptly, alone in a hotel room at the age of thirty one. The termination of the very bond of marriage by Ammu brings her to the hatred of society and her family and she suffers throughout her life.

Rahel, Ammu's daughter too deserves our attention. The novel deals with the story of her life only to the age of thirty one and most of that story belongs to her childhood. She is more concerned about living at her own than hoping to build a good career. She met Larry McCaslin in Delhi and marries him. Though the decision is hers, like her mother it is not taken under ideal conditions. She is aware of the fact that she has no locus standi at Ayemenem, that there is nobody to arrange marriage and pay dowry for her. Larry is not a male chauvinist but the marriage proves failure. Larry values her but fails to understand her. Rahel refuses to continue this relationship when she realizes its futility. She does not feel shame or moral weakness for the divorce. It does not leave her depressed. She works as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York. Unlike her mother she has no burden of children to look after. But she has to look after her brother Esthappan. There is no one to listen to her words, except her twin brother. Her loneliness and Estha's emptiness results in a relationship which is not at all acceptable by society "they break the love laws. They lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much.....only that what they shared that night was not happiness but hideous grief".(328)

Being a person who studies the psychic mind of Indian women, Arundhati Roy could excel as a novelist even in her first novel "The God of Small Things" which leads to the winning of



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Booker Prize that makes her the first woman who won this in India. Like Ammu and Rahel the other characters who have to pass through the trial and tribulations of life are Mammachi, the mother of Ammu, Baby Kochamma, the sister of Pappachi and Margaret Kochamma, the wife of Chacko. Arundhati Roy's *New Women* completely becomes self-dependent and self-confident and achieves perfection. In Indian culture it is expected of a woman to remain totally faithful to a man – alive or dead. But Arundhati Roy has forcefully raised the question of “women's needs”. Ammu and Rahel violate the set notions of society and decide to leave their husbands. When analysing the women characters in this novel it is clearly shown that who among them are living still in the traditional way of society can survive long.

Mammachi is a lifelong sufferer, from the hands of her husband. She represents a typical Indian woman and a wife who considers husband as God. Baby Kochamma is also a traditional woman in her ideologies but a modern woman in her appearance. Ammu and her daughter Rahel were just opposite to Mammachi. Both of their life is similar in nature, which shows the courage to break the laws build patriarchal world. Ammu ends the living with her husband when she finds that her dignity as a woman. Ammu ends her living with her husband when she finds that her dignity as a woman, as a mother as well as a wife is questioned by him. Her daughter Rahel is also ends her life with her husband when she was denied with sexual gratification. Both the characters show the qualities of New Women. But they suffered a lot in their life, as the society and family didn't changes. Society still wears the veil of patriarchy, which is not lifted by anyone. The prejudice of society towards women could only be removed by some strong men, not women only could change this prejudice. Through this novel Roy has proved that women are no longer disabled in this modern world and they are capable to stand their own legs.

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