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A Conflict of Genders : A Critical Review of *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract:

The reflection of the Indian society is rampant in literature, particularly in the writings of Indian writers. . Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things also describes the social fabrics of India in her first literary work. She describes the powerful and the powerless in her novel. Women were at the bottom in social structure and hence most vulnerable to exploitation. She ranges a variety of women in her novel. She presents women in conflict with men, sometimes with keen relatives like father and husband. They are facing problems with themselves too. They take decisions which perish their lives just because they can not cope up with their husbands. Rahel and Margaret are her female characters who take divorce from their respective husbands because of their conflicts with them.

The intention of the paper is to discuss the female characters and their conflict with the other characters in the novel. To examine the effects of this conflict on their married as well as social life is one more purpose of the paper. They leave their parents to live freely as per their desire. They don't manage to live according to the situation with suffocation.

Indian society is patriarchal society and its reflection was expected in literature too. In its infancy Indian English Literature was being flourished in the hands of male writers. Post-Independence era marks special contribution of women writers in this sphere. Women writers came forward to present their self. They became more conscious about their rights in this period. On Indian literary platform writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal etc. emerged and they portrayed both the roles of women- modern and traditional. "Women writers in post-colonial India have created a literature of their own, so to say, placing in the women in the context of the changing social scenario, specially concentrating upon the psyche of such women." (Myles p.124) Published in 1997 'The God of Small Things' is Arundhati Roy's first novel. It is a blending of male and female conflicts. She portrays both images in her novel realistically. The women characters in her novel are meek and submissive while the male are dominant. The docile women in the novel are always in conflict with the male domination. The novel portrays female characters like Ammu, Rahel, Margaret and Baby Kochamma. Decisions taken by them bring them in conflict with male and their decisions prove devastating finally. They suffer due to number of reasons such as their education, attitude, and conflict with others. The principal aim of the paper is to examine the conflicts of gender. The female characters are in conflict with other sexes due to their decisions which affect their relations either with relatives or with the externals. Male dominance, no doubt is significant which sometimes they challenge, at least Ammu and Rahel leave their husband when they find situations out of control. The female characters who are in conflict with the other males in the novel, hence are to be examined herein this paper.



There are two types of conflict-

internal and external. The internal conflict is that where a person fights with within due to certain tension to take decision. And an external conflict is a struggle with external factors to establish something. The conflict with genders herein this paper is internal.

Ammu has been portrayed as a victim of patriarchal society by the novelist. She depicts the typical ill-tempered father and husband, Pappachi. He is exploitative and exploits the rights of his daughter and wife. They both are powerless before this powerful pillar of the house. He should apply his power to offer safety to his daughter and wife but instead of that he imposes his own unfair bondage on them. Ammu's father beats her mother black and blue. He throws them out of his house too. The inequality in the treatment given by the father to both of his children is explicitly described by Roy. She does not take higher education because her father firmly believes that higher education spoils a female self. But to surprise of the readers he offers higher education to his son. Her brother has been sent for higher education. Pappachi's thinking about a female child is clearly expressed when he says, "*a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl.*" (Roy, p.38) Even he thinks that spending money on higher education for a girl is unnecessary expense. It affects badly her future life. It shows a viewpoint of male towards female. It is clearly a case of gender disparity.

Education is more important for human beings irrespective of its gender. But she is not allowed higher education. The impact of this is instrumental in her decisions. She marries with an assistant manager of a tea estate who latter on turns out to be a full-blown alcoholic, characterless person who asks her to fulfill the desire of his boss. She can not bear her husband anymore and comes back to her father's. Her departure from her husband's is a tragic once because she has to come back at the same place where she does not want to live. The novelist writes, "*Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem. To everything she had fled only a few years ago.*" (42, Roy) She comes back to her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother. Thus, Ammu is described as a woman who has to struggle with everyone who comes in her life. She is especially in conflict with males, her father, her husband and her husband's boss. N.D.R. Chandra describes her life-story as, "*Ammu's life makes up a story of misery, desperate search of livelihood and despondency tinged with fruitless day-dreaming.*" (Chandra, p.152). She suffers because of her father's decision of not letting her pursue higher education on one hand and her husband on the other hand. She is indirectly in conflict with males.

Ammu attends the funeral ceremony of Sophie Mol along with her family members. She marries with a Bengali Hindu without taking permission from her parents. It imposes ban on her going close to her family members. As per Christian tradition she has been accused of having illicit relationship with Velutha, a low caste man. After funeral when she comes to police station along with her twins, she has been badly treated by the police on duty, Thomas Mathew. He insults her by calling her veshya. He says, "*The police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam police did not take statements from veshyas or their illegitimate children.*" (Roy, P.8)

Rahel, the daughter of Ammu, is a female character in the novel next to Ammu. She is one of the twins. Her temperament does not allow her to get education at one place silently without mischievousness. She has been rusticated from three schools. She coincidentally gets admission in one of the mediocre colleges of Delhi. She spends eight years for the degree of five years. It shows that she must be fighting with her internal conflict. She has been bold enough to face



problems. During her college days she falls in love with a boy, Larry Mc Caslin and marries him. When he embraces her for love, he is offended by her eyes that seem to have belonged to someone else and watching someone. He is unable to decipher the language of her eyes. She goes America with her husband to live her married life but there gets frustrated very soon. She finds that her marriage is meaningless. She did not get her desires fulfilled in the land of hollowness. This void of feeling turns her mind and she takes divorce from her husband. N.D.R. Chandra rightly describes her, "*She is a symbol of true Indian immigrant woman whose body is western while her spirit is Indian. Within her home she cherishes Indian tradition beyond her she is like other westerners.*" (Chandra, p.157) Though she is not in conflict with her husband, she drives herself away from her husband.

She reunites with her brother, Estha. As G.D. Barche describes her, "*She gets conceived in tensions, grows in tensions, and drinks up the cup of joy in tension and terror.*"(Barche, p. 114) She is involved more in her brother for all purposes. She has been caught by such strange instinct that she leaves her husband to return to her brother.

Margaret is another female character from *The God of Small Things*. She is a waitress at a cafeteria in Oxford. She is more modern and claims her liberty. She leaves her father, a bakery owner and mother, a milliner's assistant. She was planning to earn money for her teacher training by serving in the in cafe. She happens to meet Chacko in a hotel while serving him. He is a beautiful handsome young man. His order of coffee is received by Margaret. He tells her a humorous story of two men a optimist and a pessimist. They both came under the influence of each other's traits, he by her beauty and she by his personality. The relationship turn out as fruitful; they unite together to lead their happy marriage life. She takes this decision independently without informing at her home. Her decision taking without consulting anybody from her house makes it clear that she must be in conflict with her father and mother like Ammu.

The happy married life of both comes to end soon. The problems raise their heads gradually in their happy married life. He does not like to take interest in their domestic life. It made her uneasy. He is, as Roy describes, "*a self-proclaimed Marxist. He would call pretty women who worked in the factory to his room, and on the pretext of lecturing them on labor rights and trade union law, flirt with them outrageously.*"(Roy, p.65) His careless and hectic nature disappoints Margaret. At the very moment she meets her brother's old school friend, Joe. She finds him fittest for her because whatever, she was expecting in her husband, was there in Joe. She slowly attracted towards him. She comes to know that she is pregnant at that time. She takes support of Joe like,

"A house that leaned
slowly through our growing
years on a bent coconut
tree in the yard". (Ramanujan, lines 8-11)

As the house in the poem, Obituary takes support of the banyan tree in the yard, she takes support of Joe to stand firmly in the life. She is a practical and self-reliant modern woman who finds her own way herself. She takes decisions but does not blame others when the decision turns out wrong. She dares to leave her parents. She earns and learns herself. She completes her training of teacher. Unfortunately she loses Joe and Sophie, her daughter in an accident in England and India respectively. To evaluate her character one can find her in conflict with her own likes and dislikes. She falls in love with the humorous nature of Chacko and marries with



him; he turns out misfit and she develops relationship with Joe. Her internal conflict does not allow her to stay with Chacko.

Conclusion:

“In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy tells many tales of injustice and oppressions being faced by women within their house and beyond it in the androcentric and patriarchal society of India.” (Chandra p.152) She enters the world and psyche of female and shows that women can not enjoy the liberty as men in Ayemenem society. Ammu's family is strong believer of male dominance in the house. All, the three Ammu, Rahel, and Margaret have conflicts with gender. Both of them take divorce; they don't consider their parents important while taking decisions of wedding. The male dominance in the house seems a burden for them.

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