

Post-colonial Feminist Critique of Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

The present study intends to thoroughly examine the Postcolonial feminist perspective in Arundhati Roy's novel The God of Small Things by focusing on the theoretical approaches of Gaytri Spivak, Trinh T.Minha and Ania Loomba. The ambivalent personality of colonized women is tarnished due to subalternity imposed by the patriarchal culture of India. The destructive nature of the Western Imperialism forced the people to endure wild oppression by British colonizers. Post-colonialism paved the way for the double oppression of women. Women became the victim of not only British Imperialists but also native cultural patriarchy. Roy successfully intricates three generations of women i.e Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Ammu, and Rahel into the fabric of the novel to acme the plight of women in the Third World Nations..

Key Words:

Postcolonialism, Feminism, Subaltern, British Imperialism, Colonized. Patriarchal Traditions.

Introduction

Britisher's considered Eastern's as primordially sullen and had the obligation to rule over a consigned inferior race of India. The imperialistic enterprise and violent oppression of the humanitarian mission of the British colonizer have effected severely the social position of women. Loomba (2007) narrates that by 1930, 84.6% of the total covered land surface of the earth became the colony or the ex-colony of colonizers (04). She further opines that postcolonialism is a diverse term that operates differently in different parts of the world along with the factors of economics, history, culture, and society (p.23).

Postcolonialism shares many similarities with the feminism theory. Spivak (1999), a famous literary critic, philosopher and postcolonial speaker questions about the social position of immigrants, women, and the subaltern in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. Spivak (1999) challenges "legacy of colonialism" (p.263) in the Third world Nations. She introduced a new word "subaltern" in the theory of postcolonialism. The word subaltern narrates the condition of people who either belong to lower or working-class or are marginalized by the patriarchal social order. The subaltern individuals are supposedly the silenced unprivileged members of society. Minha (2009) in her work *Woman, Native, Other* introduced the term "double colonization" (p.141). Double Colonization describes not only the social victimization of women in the patriarchal culture but also the Western Imperialism. Women were oppressed because of their gender as well as race.

Arundhati Roy has portrayed the diverse social perspectives in *The God of Small Things*. Roy is a distinctive postcolonial writer trying to give voice to the issues of women in Kerala, one of the states of India. As a humanitarian, Roy is fully aware of the pitiable condition of women in domestic as well as the social sphere. Roy's iconic narratives labeled her as a distinguishable writer of international success. She eloquently voiced against the war in Iraq. Roy's social humanitarian services made her win the Sydney Peace Prize (2004). *The God of Small Things* narrates about gender issues, caste, political turmoil, and double standard love laws. Roy minutely intricate in the fabric of novel that how small events and things leave an unending impression upon an individual's personality.

The God Of Small Things opens with the introduction of legendary Ipe family residing in Ayememnan in the 1990s. As the novel begins reader comes to know that Rahel has returned to the house of grandfather after divorcing the American husband. Rahel's grandfather, Pappachi, worked as an imperial entomologist for the colonizers and later became the director of the institution. The wife of Pappachi (Mammachi) is submissive and does not resist the patriarchal social order. Pappachi and Mammachi have two children named Chacko and Ammu. Mammachi is violently beaten and abused by Pappachi till the time Chacko (son) returns from England and stops his father. Pappachi begins to

ignore his wife when Chacko returns after divorcing her British wife Margret Kochamma. Sofie Mol is the only daughter of Chacko and Margret. Mammachi enjoys liberty and begins the domestic business of pickles. Patriarchal social order allowed Chacko to become Oxford scholar but denied the right of education to Ammu. Ammu tends to find an escape from the depressing domestic atmosphere by visiting her Aunt in Calcutta during summer. She meets with her future husband, Baba, in Calcutta and decides to marry him, irrespective of the unwillingness of her parents. Ammu and Baba had twins named Estha and Rahel. After some of her married life, Ammu realized that Baba is an immoral person and in order to save his job wishes to prostitute her to the boss. Tired of everyday beating, Ammu divorces Baba and returns to the home of his father along with twins, Estha and Rahel. Ammu was not welcomed on her return.

Indian society labels a divorced woman as bad and unwanted. Ammu being a divorced woman was supposed to bring a bad reputation to the Ipe family. On the contrary, Chacko being a divorced man was warmly welcomed by the family. Roy successfully portrays the double-gender standards for the man and woman in Indian society. After the death of Pappachi, Chacko considers himself an authoritative man and takes over the pickle business of his mother and names it as "Paradise Pickle and Preserves". Mammachi knows that Chacko sexually exploits the women laborer at the pickle factory but do not stops her son's immoral acts and name it as "man's need" (p.169). On the contrary, when family detects about love affair of Ammu with Velutha (untouchable) they imprison Ammu in their home and later violently gets Velutha killed by the brutal beating of the policeman. Therefore, it can be said that Indian social and domestic order has different lense to judge the moral actions of man and woman.

Estha and Rahel were later separated when Baby Kochamma convinces Chacko to send Estha to his father, Baba. Rahel is vehemently sent to the boarding school and develops rebellious temperament. Rahel and Estha were only seven years old when they were forcefully separated. Chacko as the dictator of family orders Ammu to leave the home as she has brought a bad reputation to the family. Ammu dies after some years due to poverty. Estha and Rahel get united at the age of 31 and unfortunately due to their childhood traumas "fraternal twins destroy their lives by the Love Laws that judges who should be loved, how and how much" (p. 33). Therefore, it can be said that the discriminating Indian society with Anglophone postcolonial conditions rendered the life of lower caste and woman to pitiable condition. Roy tends to give voice to the woman and people who are marginalized by the traditional Indian society and British Imperialist.

Literature Review

Postcolonial feminism tends to find similarities between feminism and colonialism. Bulbeck (1998) expresses that Postcolonial feminism is a literary critique which includes Postcolonial theory as well as feminism. Postcolonial feminism became a burgeoning literary method for the analysis of key issues of both the theories (p.75). Milles (1998) opines that postcolonial feminist theory studies the impact of colonialism on the socio-economic condition of a nation but fails in addressing the issue of gender (p. 55).

Shiekh et al(2019) view that gender inequality is found not only at homes but also at the workplace in most societies. Gender inequality is pragmatically grounded in the patriarchal order of colonized nations (p.6). Moreover, Butler(1990's) opine that gender issues are socially constructed. The subordinate gender discursively has less respect and power (p.15). Similar to Butler, Sheikh et al (2019) believes that patriarchal men are perfectly aware of the art to dominate women (p.06-07). Ali and Nawaz (2017) express that men are brought up with an ideology of domination. They are tamed to enjoy power and pleasure whereas women are brought up with the social ideology of subordination and silencing (p.04). Therefore, one can say that Milles is right in saying that postcolonial nations lack freedom of expression when it comes to women residing in postcolonial nations. In patriarchal society of India, men were considered as the head of the family. Men had power and authority to make any decision and choice of their own. but the double socio-cultural standards never allowed women to exercise any power. Milles(1998) asserts that postcolonial feminist theory was initiated due to failure of the West to deal with the issues of Third World Women (p. 57). This theory tends to incorporate the hardships and struggles of Third World women in the wider fabric of the feminist movement (p.65).

Spivak(1999) expertise makes her pioneer in the field of cultural theory. She tends to present the condition of subalterns to the world. Subaltern is a word of the postcolonial theory which describes the status of radically lower classes who are not allowed to enjoy the socio-political structure of hegemonic power. Spivak debates that subaltern women are hardly heard in the socio-economic world of patriarchy (p.14). Loomba (2007) opines that Spivak has elaborated at length the domestic and social status of Indian women. The portrayal of Sati woman in Hinduism intends to show that female voice is completely absent (p.185). Loomba(2007) further elaborates that he tradition of *Sati* in Hindu culture and religion was completely banished by the British's in Indian law. British rulers proudly claimed that they saved Hindu woman from brutal cruelty of native Indian man after banishing the immolation of widows (p.131). Loomba expresses that "bodies of women symbolized conquered lands. European colonizers could

barely encode them as the male deflowerers of feminized land” (p.129). Women were portrayed more as an object or commodity and almost no voice was given to the lower class women.

Homi K. Bhabha (2012) expresses that Subaltern woman can rediscover their voice by the reading of colonial discourses (p.15). Nagy Zekmi asserts that women from Third World colonized nations tend to develop the language of their own in autobiographical discourses and are inclined to represent the woman as a subject. Women have been a commodity of desire and disdain. They are considered untrustworthy yet mysterious, uninteresting yet intriguing, not clean but sexually provoking (p.175). This helped a woman to counter colonial as well as patriarchal oppression in social and domestic spheres. *The God Of Small Things* favors giving the voice as well as expression to all the characters residing in the colonized nation. Postcolonial feminism aims to highlight the voices of colonized women who have remained unheard from a long period of time.

Research Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature. Data is collected by the thorough critical reading of *The God of Small Things*. The textual analysis highlights the diverse issue of power, resistance, marginalized oppression and much more. To analyze the novel, the present study will focus on the postcolonial feminist theoretical stances of various literary theorists especially Gaytri Spivak, Annie Loomba and Trinh T.Minha.

Discussion and Analysis

Mullaney Roy (2002) opines that the lives of female protagonists of Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things* are intricately braided. Representation of oppressed Hindu woman can carefully be delineated in the character of Mammahi, Ammu, Rahel, Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria (family cook). Three different generations of women portrayed by Arundhati Roy reacts differently to the oppression imposed by the patriarchal society. Mammachi as well as Baby Kochamma have internalized all the social norms of patriarchy and do not question their perverse position in the domestic scenario. They are silent and mute amidst the conventional and tradition-bound society of Kerala. Ammu belongs to the second generation of woman who begins to question the law of the father. She rebels against the male-dominant structure of Southern India. Her rebellious resistance to conventional traditional norms continued to groom in her daughter, Rahel.

Arundhati Roy narrates her novel from multiple perspectives of people victimized by patriarchy as well as colonialism. *The God of Small Things* is narrated from the lense of fraternal twins i.e Estha and Rahel and also through the experiences of tragic lovers i.e.Velutha and Ammu. The patriarchal regime was often aggressive in treating the women and the untouchables. Mammachi is abused physically as well as psychologically by her husband Pappachi. She suffers tortures of her husband but never speaks of being victimized. Pappachi works in the colonial establishment as an Imperial Entomologist but has obnoxious behavior towards his wife. His image outside the domestic sphere was of a perfect man who was a die-hard supporter of White Britishers. As Roy narrates:

Pappachi worked hard on his communal profile. He was known as a generous, cultured and honorable man. But alone with his wife and children, he turned into a monster, suspicious tyrant, with a smudge of malicious astute. They were humiliated, beaten and then made to writhe the envy of relatives as well as friends for having such a nice partner and father (*TGOST* p.181).

Pappachi's ill-treatment in domestic becomes more vivid to the readers when the music teacher of Mammachi (Launsky Tieffenthal) informs him that his wife is “exceptionally talented” (p.67). Pappachi, out of jealousy, stops the music lesson of Mammachi brusquely.

Looma tries to reason the double-faced attitude of native Indians and opines about the reinforcement of power in the domestic sphere is the aftermath of colonialism. Loomba (2007) expresses:

Patriarchal oppression is intensified due to Colonialism. The reason in often cases is that native Indian men were marginalized and excluded from the public sphere. Such men became tyrannical in the domestic sphere. They seized upon the home. Women became the emblem of their traditional culture as well as nationality. The outside world was Westernized but the home retained its conventional cultural plurality (p.143).

Mammachi had got habitual of beating and has internalized the abusive treatment as her fate. Pappachi was a double faceted person. He was good for the public and abusive for the family females. Similarly, Mammachi had a different standard for the treatment of her son, Chacko, and daughter, Ammu. She venerates Chacko and derides Ammu. Chacko was lucky to study at school and at Oxford but the right to higher education was denied to Ammu because Pappachi considers that “sending a girl to college is a superfluous expanse” (p. 39). Chacko after returning from Oxford stops his father, Pappachi to beat his mother. This action of Chacko had unexpected consequence on the mind of Mammachi. Roy narrates that “from then onwards, Chacko became repository of Mammachi's womanly feeling. Her Man, her love” (p.169). She felt the sense of liberty after Pappachi stops beating her and begins her

own small business of pickle at home. Later when Pappachi dies, readers come across Roy's narrative that "at the funeral of Pappachi she mourns because she loves him and was used to beating" (Roy, p.51).

After the death of Pappachi, Chacko became the patriarchal head of the family and became the owner of the pickle factory. Chacko was just another man of patriarchal society and tends to tyrannically dominate over her mother in the old age. Mullaney asserts that "Chacko is on the margin of the native culture of India and English civilization. He is between the self-proclaimed Marxist of India embodied by *Paradise Pickle and Preservatives* by Mammachi and the new model of Englishness inherited via Pappachi and his own Oxford education" (p. 35). Chacko similar to his father is representative of the patriarchal men who are equally complicit in the oppression of women and the working-class people. Roy narrates the personality of Chacko in *The God of Small Things* as:

Self-proclaimed Marxist who would call good-looking woman waged in the Pickle factory to his chamber with the cause of lecturing them on labor rights & law on trade union, and philander with them despicably....This was much to Mammachi's consternation and mortification. Chacko forced them to sit at the table with him and drink (p.33).

Mammachi turns blind eyes to the affairs of his Chacko and excuses them "in the name of Man's need" (p.169). She does not resist or raise voice for the immoral activities of Chacko because he is a man in the patriarchal world. On the other hand, Mammachi is demonstrated as a rigid intolerable woman when the love affair of Ammu with Velutha (untouchable) comes to family's notice. She objects severely on Velutha's affair with Ammu on the basis of his class and caste. Velutha belongs to the lower working class of India and his caste was labeled as untouchable. Velutha is falsely blamed to rape Ammu and kidnap Estha, Rahel and Sofie Mol (daughter of Chacko). Velutha being the untouchable is beaten to death by the policemen.

Systematic discrimination of Indian men with Indian women in the patriarchal society is eminent in the portrayal of Ammu. She belongs to the second generation of Indian women who try to resist male dominance. Pappachi lacks the money to make a dowry for marrying his daughter, Ammu. She manages to convince his father to spend her summer vacations at aunt's home in Calcutta. There she meets Baba, her husband, and father of fraternal twins. Baba like traditional husbands was alcoholic, immoral and often beats Ammu. He wishes to prostitute Ammu to his boss to save his job. Ammu resists obeying Baba and returns to the home of the father. Indian society hardly bares divorced daughters. Ammu's presence in the home of her father was considered as disgracefully shameful. Roy explicitly narrates the position of women in tradition-bound Indian society in her work:

"a married woman had no status in the parent's home...A divorced woman had no status anywhere at all. A divorced woman from a love marriage, words cannot describe Baby Kochamma's rage. As for a divorced woman from an inter-community love, marriage-Baby Kochamma chose to remain silent on the subject (*TGOST*, p.46)

Ammu's presence with twins was painful for all family members. Chacko had a similar experience of marrying an intercommunity woman Margret out of his love. They had one daughter, Sophie Mol. Chacko divorces Margret and comes to Ayamemnan but no one has an unwelcoming attitude for Chacko. He was not considered disgraceful for the name of Ipe family. Indian society has double standards for both genders. Chacko, after the death of Pappachi, marginalizes her sister. He disdains Ammu from all her rights from the family property. Chacko expresses to Ammu, "What's you is mine and what's mine is also mine" (p.57). Estha and Rahel were continuously made to realize that they were living at the place. They were neither loved or cared. They were also the source of disgrace to the Ipe family. Kochu Maria, the female servant of the Ipe family, harshly says to the twins, "Ask your mother to take to your father's home....This is not your home" (p.83). Ammu's affair with the vigilant and hardworking untouchable, Velutha is a shame for the Ipe family.

Ammu rebels and resist against the patriarchal society. She marries the man of her choice. Indian society prohibits the daughters to wed with their choice. Moreover, she fell in love with Velutha, an untouchable. Falling in love with the people of lower class untouchables was a shameful crime for the daughters of good families. Ammu also goes to the police station when Velutha is imprisoned due to false blame of the Ipe family. Ammu was locked by the family and she dies in exile. Twins were separated at the age of 7. Estha is sent to his father and Rahel is admitted into the boarding school.

Rahel belongs to the third generation of women portrayed by Arundhati Roy. She has a recalcitrant nature from her childhood. She was repeatedly blacklisted by the boarding schools due to her rebellious temperament. Teacher's worrying about her strange behaviors opines, "Rahel does not know how to behave like a girl" (p.17). She resists being silent like any other Indian woman. On the contrary, Estha remains quiet and refuses to take the male privileges at the house of his father, Baba. His behavior, much to the embarrassment of his father was like the servants working in the home (p.11). Rahel and Estha meet at Ayamemnan at the age of 31. Fraternal twins, like their mother, break the love-laws of the society and falls in incest. Roy expresses that Rahel and Estha thought of themselves as Me....they were a rare breed of Siamese twins...with joint identities" (p.03).

Conclusion

This novel satirically highlights how big things of gender, caste, class infatuations small and minor things like family, relationships, and love affect the lives of people in society. Wild imperialism paved the way for the double oppression of Indian women. Roy clearly denounces the ill-treatment of humanity by the hands of whites and the patriarchal social order. Roy tries to liberate woman and makes them express their emotions. For example, Ammu refuses to be prostituted by the British boss of Baba and returns to the home of the father. Ammu and Rahel resist being silenced by patriarchy. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are stereotypical women bound in the cage of traditional society. Ammu and Rahel tend to suggest possible directions to have their own choice of making a rightful decision. Women and untouchables like Velutha were marginalized by the systematic oppression of Indian society. They were supposed to give no expression and have no choice of their own. Arundhati Roy artistically weaves the themes of feminism and post-colonialism in *The God of Small Things*.

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