

Gender Discrimination in ‘*The God of Small Things*’

Dr.Nilesh Uttamrao Hume, SNDT College of Arts & SCB College of Com. & Sci. for Women, Mumbai-20,E-Mail: nileshhume83@gmail.com

Article Received: 14/11/2022

Article Accepted: 25/12/2022

Published Online: 28/12/2022

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2023.4.12.153

Abstract:

Gender discrimination, a recurring theme in various literary works worldwide, highlights the inequality and power structures perpetuated by patriarchal societies. Women often face numerous challenges due to these entrenched gender biases, becoming custodians of cultural norms and societal expectations dictated by the dominant patriarchal culture. In "The God of Small Things," Arundhati Roy truthfully portrays the plight of women in society and their arduous struggle to establish their identities in a male-dominated framework. The novel challenges the notion that women are merely objects of pleasure or subservient to men's desires, instead emphasizing their nobility and significance in a man's life. The narrative delves into the detailed experiences of the female characters, from childhood and adolescence to marriage, highlighting their strength and resilience. Characters like Ammu, Mammachi, and Baby Kochamma in the novel are depicted as individuals who were deprived of opportunities for independent growth and fell victim to gender discrimination. The author's portrayal sheds light on the societal constraints and hypocrisies faced by these women within a patriarchal family structure. The novel serves as a powerful commentary on the struggles faced by women, their constrained growth, and the broader societal issues related to gender.

Keywords: Male domination, social taboos, equality, dignity, second sex, etc.

Arundhati Roy's novel "The God of Small Things." The novel, set in Kerala against a backdrop of social, political, cultural, and religious complexities during the post-colonial era, delves into the multifaceted experiences of Indian women throughout history. The narrative portrays the struggles faced by women due to gender discrimination entrenched in society. The social structure and norms have often subjected women to various ups and downs, imposing limitations and fostering a culture of domination by men. Women are frequently marginalized, treated as objects of pleasure, and subjected to discriminatory practices in a patriarchal society. Despite the legal facade of gender equality, social, cultural, and economic disparities persist between men and women. The patriarchal culture, along with societal taboos, restricts women from living freely and impedes their empowerment and equality.

In "The God of Small Things," the narrative revolves around the Ayemenem house, a setting dominated by dead conventions, rigid value systems, and outdated rules. Reverend E.

John Ipe, representing the patriarchal culture, enforces strict family norms, particularly on female members, to safeguard family reputation and uphold sexual morality. His wife becomes an earlier victim of this patriarchal structure. The novel thus intricately portrays the oppressive patriarchal norms and gender biases prevalent in society, examining the impact on women's lives and the challenges they face in breaking free from such constraints.

The life of Ammu, the central character in "The God of Small Things," is a poignant portrayal of the struggles faced by women in Indian society due to deeply ingrained gender biases and societal norms. Ammu's marriage to an assistant manager of a tea estate in Assam quickly turned into a nightmare when she discovered her husband's alcoholism and his demand for her to satisfy his boss's sexual desires to protect his job. This extreme humiliation led to her lashing out in anger, resulting in her departure from her husband with their twins, Estha and Rahel. Her return to Ayemenem brought further anguish as she faced physical and psychological distress, symbolized by her pulled-out cheeks, yet received a cool and indifferent welcome from her parents. As a woman, Ammu faced injustice, exclusion, marginalization, dispossession, and gender discrimination. The novel highlights the denial of basic human rights to women and the persistent issues of gender discrimination in postmodern India. Ammu's rebellious decision to marry against her family's wishes starkly contrasts the hypocrisy within her family, where her brother Chacko's illicit relations were accepted, yet her choice of marriage was denied.

The narrative underscores the politics of discrimination and exclusion prevalent in society, unveiling the biases based on gender, caste, and religious differences deeply rooted in patriarchal norms. Ammu's love marriage marked the beginning of her rebellion against patriarchal culture, challenging societal rules and attempting to carve her female identity by marrying outside her community without her parents' consent. However, her personal decision was perceived as a disgrace by the family, bringing dishonor and grave consequences. Her intercommunity love marriage aimed to embrace cultural pluralism and regional diversity, yet mainstream culture's prejudice against other cultures led to hostility. After her marriage, she sought to break free from her confined life, but societal norms and biases began to suppress her. Indian society, although accepting of widowhood, harshly stigmatized divorced women, leaving Ammu isolated and distressed. The mental torment inflicted by her family and society induced a profound sense of alienation and restlessness in Ammu. Her struggles underscore the societal neglect, torture, and insult faced by women who defy traditional norms, shedding light on the broader issues of gender discrimination, societal rejection, and the isolation experienced by women in patriarchal societies.

Baby Kochamma is another female character who is also a victim of gender discrimination. She was neither prestigious nor assertive in the Ayemenem house. She had also violated the rules of the house restricted by its male members. She fell in love with father Mulligan, an Irish Monk. She tried to seduce him but he did not respond her. She realized the futility of using different tricks on him. She then submitted herself to the standards of the house. Mammachi, Ammachi, Baby Kochamma and Rahel are members representing different generations from the brutal patriarchal culture. Ending the gender discrimination in the society is the responsibility of both men and women. Forgetting the bad memories of the

past, both should try to reduce the sufferings of women due to the bad customs, weaker side and subordinate position. If every man takes an oath that no woman will suffer because of him then the scenario would definitely change. We also can see that women are the root cause of women's suffering. So the woman should be conscious to that level in which she should take care that she would not become the cause of woman's sufferings. In fact, she should stop to remain the worst enemy of the woman

The character of Baby Kochamma in "The God of Small Things" also embodies the repercussions of gender discrimination within the Ayemenem house. She was neither empowered nor held a prestigious position in the household, constrained by the limitations imposed by its male members. Her unrequited love for Father Mulligan, an Irish Monk, led her to attempt to seduce him, but her advances were met with no response. Realizing the futility of her efforts, she eventually succumbed to conforming to the patriarchal standards dictated by the household. The novel's portrayal highlights the different generations represented by Mammachi, Ammu, Baby Kochamma, and Rahel, each grappling with the constraints imposed by the patriarchal culture. The responsibility to end gender discrimination in society lies with both men and women. It necessitates a collective effort to move past the negative past experiences and alleviate the sufferings of women, stemming from oppressive customs, their weaker position, and subordination. If every individual, especially men, consciously commits to ensuring that no woman suffers due to their actions, a positive transformation could be achieved.

The narrative underscores the role of women in perpetuating gender discrimination. Women themselves can sometimes become instrumental in upholding societal norms that oppress other women. Hence, there's a call for women to be mindful and avoid becoming complicit in perpetuating the suffering of their own gender. Instead, they should strive to support and empower each other, rather than acting as adversaries within the female community. This self-awareness and solidarity among women are crucial steps towards combatting gender discrimination.

References:

- Onkar, Adwk Multiculturabos in Indian Fiction in English. Atlantic Publishers, 2010.
- Mundira S CA Rimbook of Literature in English. Bareilly: Prakash, 2003.
- Ashcroft Billet al The Empire writer Back Newyork; Routtedge – 2003 print.
- Gutheinz Emily, Wordsworth interview with Arundhati Roy, via internet, P.3
- Naik, M.K of Gods and Gods and Men A Thematic study of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. The journal of Indian writing in English.
- Bose, Bindra. "in Desire and in Death: Eroticism as politics in arundhati Roy' s The God of Small Things. Ed. Murari Prasad Arunolhati Roy critical perspective, New Delhi: Penacraft International , 2006 print.