

DOI-10.53571/NJESR.2020.2.2.38-42

Indian Women's Plight in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things**Dr. Sushama Mishra****Asst. Prof. of English****Govt. Pt. Shyamacharan Shukla College Dharsiwa****Raipur****Email: mishrasushma2301@gmail.com****(Received:29January2020/Revised:18 February2020/Accepted:26February2020/Published:29February2020)****Abstract**

The female characters are omnipresent in this novel, creating, building, but in a certain sense their uncomplaining toiling expunges the male characters' attempts at success and gives them a castrating aspect. The text becomes an act of defiance to the age-old patriarchal tradition, which has led to the erasure of generations of un-touchables from the history of India by giving a Paravan all the noble and enterprising qualities severely lacking in the high- caste members who loftily claim to be the sole possessors of positive qualities. This same, perhaps insistent, rehabilitation of women can be seen in the comparison of moral qualities and effective actions of both genders in the whole novel.

Keywords: Rehabilitation Of Women, Patriarchal Tradition

The maternal connotations in the appellations of the female characters are no coincidence as the youngest girls are considered as potential mothers and variations and diminutives of the word 'Amma,' 'mother' are attached as suffixes to girls' first names. The Tamil word, 'Ammavaru,' means the primal mother and this novel, even if it underlines that women are limited to their roles as mothers, also points out the authority that motherhood confers on the woman. The twins are brought up, nurtured by various mother figures. Ammu, their own mother, is almost always designated by the only social function that is left to give her living space, for when her sexual desire is perceived, her person is split into two distinct figures, woman and mother separated, the two being incompatible.

As though she had [...] Even her walk changed from a safe mother-walk to another wilder sort of walk. (44)

Even in the love scenes with Velutha her children are evoked by the female narrator and Velutha himself is perceived as a child by Ammu. Their Mammachi, or grandmother, is a reigning matriarch and from her youth, her name Sosha is transformed into Soshamma, Mother Sosha.' The other powerful female figure is Navomi Ipe, the twins' great-aunt, called Baby Kochamma, Ko-

chamma signifies "Aunty," used for the aunt who is the younger sister of the parent. One could say that Baby Kochamma's title, "Aunty Baby" or the literal translation of "Kochamma" being "Small Mother," is a nebulous one which underlines the distorted nature of the life she has lived and is an irony as she has wasted her life as a woman, being neither wife nor mother but an obese great-aunt with a ludicrous name.

The male characters are blotted out in the female text as is indicated from the fact that Estha has deleted his name from his "Wisdom Exercise Notebooks" and it is only with the appearance of a female figure, Rahel, who unearths his childhood narrative when she returns from America, that his prophetic story-writing is revealed. The link between the erasure of the name from a notebook with the brand name "wisdom" and Estha's loss of mind can also be mentioned as a symbolic erasure of the male when represented in the female text. From Ammu's attempts at erasing the image of their father from the twins' minds by allowing them to look at his photograph only once, one can read her symbolic erasure of his legal right as a father, had he wanted it. This is further underlined in her refusal of using his name even temporarily for her twins while she unwillingly chooses between her husband's and her father's name. This refusal of the mother to adhere to the transmission of family name by the male is continued by the narrator; the text never mentions the name of the father and the world of the novel becomes an entirely feminine one that intentionally rejects men.

The narration is mostly coloured by Rahel's perception and emotions. The factory or the world becomes red coloured or "angry coloured" through her plastic glasses. The similes, metaphors and twists to the narrative thread are all related to Rahel's emotions and vision. Even when Rahel's anger does not permeate the narrative, the similes or metaphors foreshadow the role she is going to play, as in the allusion to her future unearthing of the hidden family secrets through the linking of the violent monsoon rain with her arrival in Ayemenem. The harsh but necessary revival of the bad memories in Estha's anaesthetised mind, which awakens to the outside world, occurs only when his sister comes back to Ayemenem. It also indicates that through Rahel's memories, the true facts of Ammu's story-in the possession of the female characters Baby Kochamma who hides it, and Ammu who is dead-are going to be revealed.

The only actions of the male characters that are mentioned are the destructive or the sterile ones. The male in the female text appears as a parasite. living off the woman's efforts and mistreating her at the same time. Velutha is an exception in his quality as an all-rounder succeeding in every

enterprise he undertakes, almost making one wonder if the author has set her mind to sing the praise of the Dalits, if not the discreet consideration of a possibly existing figure in her past due to the semi-autobiographical nature of the novel. Velutha is the only male character who is totally devoid of malice. Velutha is written in the female text of Rahel's reminiscences as the only positive agent in their little family's lives. From the gifts he carves for Ammu as a talented child, to the short period of intense joy he gives her as a divorced and lonely woman, to his joining of the twins in their imaginary world of children's play with an ease and an intuition that their Oxford-educated uncle, Chacko sorely lacks, Velutha appears as a perfect figure. Even physically, Velutha is portrayed as manly, handsome and noble-minded, while Chacko is feminised as having "slack, womanish legs" (16).

Through Ammu's gaze that is revolted against the "smug [order of her] world" (176) Velutha's caste disappears and only his noble behaviour and the details of his physical beauty are perceived and used in order to equate him with his creative skills through the wood that he works, "She saw the ridges of muscle on Velutha's stomach [...] A swimmer-carpenter's body" (175). This description is contrasted with the scabs of the unmanly legs of her brother who represents the decaying past, the old order. Both Velutha's hopes for a future where "walking backward days are over" and their love are contained in Ammu's understanding of Velutha's body and what it represents.

[Ammu] understood the quality of his beauty. How the wood he fashioned had fashioned him. Had given him his strength, his supple grace. (334)

An equation can be made between the beauty of his body and that of the little marvels that he used to carve and offer Ammu. without his hand touching hers. As Ammu realises and appreciates the transference of the beauty of the little wooden toys to Velutha's physical body, Velutha realises that Ammu also has gifts to offer him. From the moment both realise that history's laws need not necessarily be respected, the physical link is made possible between the two despite the traditions. For fourteen nights the lovers share small things and an intense passion, indeed Velutha does not accept the rules of the past like his father, for he is not a "safe Paravan" and has carried with him from his past only hopes, not a slavish mentality. "His smile was the only piece of baggage that he had carried with him from boyhood to manhood." (175)

In contrast to Velutha's noble and manly attitude, Chacko behaves in a puerile and mean manner; he worries his scabs and displays his repugnant boils when visitors are around in a mean attempt

to spite his mother and Baby Kochamma (248-49), his behaviour totally opposing his feudal pretences and his family's status. Velutha learns at the expense of his life that the communist party does not interfere in its member's private lives, but Rahel is back to reveal that it actually does when it suits its controlling members. Rahel's return to India and her role almost appear to continue what her mother did: rebel against the instilled order that thrives on the disruption of lives of the minorities, women, untouchables. The children's father is described as having unrefined behaviour, blowing spit-bubbles and "shivering" his legs (84). He has an 'effeminate' tendency to rely on his family throughout the novel we see that it is the women who are the pillars of the family-and then on his wife in order to be kept in his job through her prostitution, all this in a society where men are traditionally supposed to be the bread-winners. In the end, the only element the twins have as a reminder of their father is a letter written in a woman's hand, his second wife's convent school handwriting (9). Velutha, on the contrary, possesses the gifts that the men of the family lack.

Both men of the higher castes, Chacko and Ammu's husband, significantly have something negative linked to their legs or feet. Just as the expression 'to have feet of clay' indicates a weakness, this image of having weak legs or probably nervously shaking the legs indicates that 'standing on one's feet' or behaving in a responsible way for one's family is what the two high-caste males lack.

Men's behaviour is spiteful, revealing an inner weakness and inadequacy when compared to their women, leading them to resort to violence and a mean tendency to ruin their companions' or close relatives' reputation. For instance, Pappachi's imaginary darning to make visitors think Mammachi neglects her wifely duties. This also reveals an aspect in the society the author wishes to criticise, which is the burdening of the woman with all the household chores even when she is the breadwinner.

Her husband, in order to intimidate her into prostituting herself to the English Manager, Mr. Hollick, so that the former may keep his job on the tea estate, subjects Ammu to drunken brawls. All the incidents linked to the male characters and (re)membered by Rahel are negative ones, leaving the reader to wonder if all the men of the family or of the higher castes are totally devoid of good feelings, talents or if the narrative is too coloured by Rahel's emotions to be reliable.

The excessively positive portrait of Velutha puts him in danger of being considered as a pure creation of an angry young woman in the feminine text, a text that could be considered as an act

of solidarity between the women and the Dalits as marginal groups. The allusions to the various political and social issues dear to the author glut this novel which, had it not been written in such an original manner, would have read like a pamphlet. The instance of Ammu's not having the same inheritance rights as her brother is more than a mere allusion, for the author's mother, Mary Roy, sued her brother concerning female inheritance and obtained a change in the inheritance laws in favour of the women in Kerala.¹⁰

The text becomes an act of defiance to the age-old patriarchal tradition, which has led to the erasure of generations of untouchables from the history of India by giving a Paravan all the noble and enterprising qualities severely lacking in the high-caste members who loftily claim to be the sole possessors of positive qualities. This same, perhaps insistent, rehabilitation of women can be seen in the comparison of moral qualities and effective actions of both genders in the whole novel.