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OPPRESSIONS OF WOMEN IN ARUNDHATHI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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Abstract

In Indian sub-continent, growing protests against environmental destruction and struggles for survival and existence have highlighted the interconnections of feminist perspectives along with nature. Women have always been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions. They have been tutored that their greatness lies in their sufferings and therefore, happiness of others is always prioritized to their own. This paper seeks to outline postcolonial ecofeminism in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. I also argue that women's relationship to the environment is ambivalent, thus disputing the dualism of nature/culture and yet straddling the grey area between these two binaries.

Key words: Environment, Dualism, Ambivalent and Ecofeminism.

1. Introduction

The growth of feminism in India has led to the questioning of the prominent old patriarchal domination. The women of today refuse to be puppets in the hands of men. Hence, the image of women has undergone a drastic change. The Indian female writers have made a transition from the traditional portrayals of enduring self-sacrificing women to depiction of their inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. The conflicting interest of man and woman in the society as a result of self-asserting women, who are engrossed in fervent search for their identity, is the hall-mark of modern portrayal of female characters. Arundhati Roy has her own opinion on society and has successfully made a mark for herself in the literary arena by her novel *The God of Small Things*. The novel reveals her feminist stance and her protagonist represents feminine sensibility.

Women participated in the environmental movements, specifically preservation and conservation much earlier than this. Beginning in the late 19th century, Women worked in efforts to protect wildlife, food, air and water. The environment finds an adequate expression in *The God of Small Things*. In the novel, the female characters refuse to let themselves be caged in the rules and laws set by an extremely conservative society. Ammu, the protagonist of the novel, belongs to a reputed Syrian Christian family from Kerala and she marries a Bengali Brahmin in open defiance of her family. One day, her husband loses his job but his English boss says that he would work something out if he lets him sleep with his wife Ammu. He presents this indecent proposal to Ammu and beats her when she refuses. So, she divorces him and returns to his parents home. Ammu's returning back to her parents' home deprives her of any social position or prestige, of any right. She is treated as an unwelcome guest in her very own house where she was born and brought up.

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Mammachi secretly pawns her jewellery to send money to Chacko whereas Ammu is denied education. Gender preference is also seen in the matter of property. Ammu, being a woman, has no claims on the pickle factory. Chacko believes that women are not fit to own property though the factory earns more profits under the guidance of Mammachi. Chacko says "What's yours is mine and what is mine is also mine" (P57).

Baby Kochamma, though converts to the Roman Catholic faith but does not dare to challenge the traditional ideas of love and marriage prevalent in post-colonial India. She does not run away to fulfil her dreams. She does not overtly believe in the rights of women as well as subalterns and makes a distinction between her self-interest and those of other women. In stark contradiction to her personal subversion and transgression of patriarchy and oppressive structures, Baby Kochammapartners with the exploitive actions against Ammu.

Sometimes, the people who are subjugated quite often plot against the oppression of people who are weaker than they are. For instance, Mammachi, who herself is the victim of patriarchal domination, exhibits great snobbery when it comes to the class question. During weddings, she often comments that the social status of the wedding party's ancestors were nothing compared to her own. Similarly, when Chacko gets married to Margaret, she is quite scornful of her as she is the daughter of a mere shopowner. She shows some sympathy towards Velutha because of her Christian background, the caste system being founded on Hinduism and because of the usefulness of his skills around the house. But, she cannot forgive Ammu's affair with Velutha.

Chacko exercises his feudal rights on female labourers in the factory by demanding their bodies at night. Mammachi tacitly acknowledges his feudal rights by permitting him to use the room that has a separate entrance. He is allowed to indulge in loveless promiscuity. But, when he finds out about Ammu's genuine love affair with

Velutha, he feels that he has the authority and right to punish Ammu for the sake of family honor. He threatens to break every bone in Ammu's body if she steps out from the room where the family confined her after the discovery of the affair.

The novel also presents the high cultural standards of the west in comparison to their Indian counterparts. When Margaret, Chacko's divorced wife, comes to visit Chacko with their daughter so as to recover from the grief caused by the loss of her English husband whom she married after she had left Chacko, Ammu's children are trained to behave well in front of their half-English cousin-Sophie. Surprisingly, Sophie does not turn out to be as well-behaved and cultured as everybody has dreamt of her first question to the Indian cousins is "Does yours [your mother] hit you?" immediately followed by "Mine does," and "Mine even Slaps," to which Estha answers, "Ours doesn't." Thus, Sophie is quite modest and is excited about the prospect of playing with her cousins. However, the free nature of Ammu forces her to rebellion. She is fully aware of the conservative mindset of the members of her family and the society of which she is an integral part. Still she enters "the forbidden territory" to love and being loved by an untouchable - Velutha. At this act, she becomes unpardonable and makes herself susceptible to the deliberate humiliation to which she is subjected by the police Inspector as well as her own family. The river was no more than a swollen drain now. A thin ribbon of thick water that the novel lays bare how the environment is subjected to decay and destruction and points out the reasons that lie behind it too. Once Ayemenem was rich in vegetation, Esther and Rahel dreamt of the river Meenachal in their childhood because: It was warm, the water. Grey green, like ripped silk with fish in it, with the sky and trees in it. And at night, the broken yellow moon in it.

After twenty three years, Rahel returned and the river "greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed. Though it was a month of June and raining lapped wearily at the mud



banks on either side, sequined with the occasional silver slant of a dead fish. It was choked with a succulent weed, whose furred brown roots waved like thin tentacles under water. Bronze winged lily trotters walked across it. Splay footed, caution". The river was no more than "a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea" now. Estha too found that the river "smelled of shit, and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils.

Thus, Arundhati Roy's female characters Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu and Rahel, question the indigenous norms associated with patriarchy, class, caste and feudal-capitalist economic structures. Surprisingly, these women do not support global inequality veiled as globalization. Ammu refuses to be a prostitute to the white boss of her husband. Mammachi feels threatened by whatever happens on the television. Baby Kochamma does not accept every change in the identity of Father Mulligan. She accepts Roman Catholicism for his sake but does not switch back to Hinduism, when Father Mulligan, becomes a Hindu Sadhu. Rahel looks forward to the entrance of her twin brother Estha and tries to heal him of his dumbness and fractured existence and accomplishes their childish but incestuous love and act of complete denial of the restrictive permissive sexuality of the West that binds sexuality with business, transaction and money. Thus, Rahel challenges the global inequalities and domination camouflaged as globalization. So, we should give a voice to resonate all over the world.

2. References

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