



The Clutches of Patriarchal Society on Women: a Study on Arundhati Roy's the God of Small things and Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe

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ABSTRACT: India being an orthodox and conventional society, women have always been unrecognized due to male-controlled traditions. They have been instructed that their enormity depends on the sufferings and happiness of others. Their perceptions of their ambitions and hopes are within the context of social and moral obligations. In this paper, a study is made on the women in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*. It focuses on the life and conflicts of the women who starve for their identity. The paper has tried to discover the elements of Feminism in Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* which throws light on some important things of life associated with the constant struggle of women against their continuous mistreatment, suffering and struggle which they undergo because of the male dominated conservative society. In *Ladies Coupe*, Nair explores the liberty of the woman to fulfil herself of her various traditional roles as a daughter, wife, mother and so on. This article deals with the theme of self-discovery plays a major role in her works.

KEY WORDS: Feminism, Patriarchal Society, suffering, freedom, struggle, family

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I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a social movement that has fully grown to a larger extent in the present society opposing the traditional patriarchal ideology. Its rationale is to bring alterations concerning women. Feminism also points that women should enjoy the same social, lawful, educational, spiritual and religious rights that a man enjoys in the social order. Indian women writers in English raise the question of a woman's liberation in a patriarchal Indian society. Arundhati Roy and Anita Nair are two noteworthy present-day Indian female novelists who write in English. Both the novelists present the position of women in household and social sectors. Roy's *The God of Small Things* and the novel of Anita Nair *Ladies Coupe* have been selected for a brief study in this paper.

In the novel *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy deals with the position of women in the men dominated society of South India. Roy depicts through Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu and Rahel the typical feminist perceptions through three different generations. All three of them were born and brought up under various circumstances. Mammachi is in the oldest generation, then Ammu the next generation, and Rahel the third generation. They live according to the predominant customs of Hinduism. Mammachi, the wife of the Imperial Entomologist Pappachi, effectively turns her kitchen capacities into a business. Her pickle business is a grand success and soon becomes an established cottage industry. Pappachi, who is envious of his wife's victory, becomes more violent and he bangs her cruelly. Pappachi is also worried about the age difference that existed between himself and his wife. "Pappachi, for his part, was having trouble coping with the ignominy of retirement. He was seventeen years older than Mammachi and realized with a shock that he was an old man when his wife was still in her prime" (47). Mammachi lives under the control of men. She got married in puberty with a man seventeen-years older to her who has nearly controlled her in all the steps of her life. When Pappachi knew that his wife Mammachi is excellent at violin, he suspends her classes unexpectedly. Pappachi's irritation turns him to beat his wife brutally. Pappachi, often beat Mammachi with a brass flower vase. Pappachi often disrespected Mammachi as she was never allowed to sit in his Plymouth, until after his death.

Anita Nair in her novel '*Ladies Coupe*', portrays the life of the character, Akhilandeshwari from her suppression of expectations of the family to her liberty as she commences a literal journey away from home to Kanyakumari. Akhilandeshwari means the paramour of all world, is the eldest child in the middleclass Brahmin family. The name, but it is a contradiction as being a girl, her life is controlled at every stage. As a

daughter, Akhila is presented to be a bride, she has to perform the role of a wife, a mother, carrying on domestic burdens. But Akhila's life takes a different turn when her father dies, and she has to take up a job in his office. She becomes a bread-winner for the family consisting her mother, a sister and two brothers. When her younger brother asks her at the time of their father's death, 'what are we going to do?' She harshly replies "Cremate him and thenand then, we'll find some way to keep ourselves afloat and alive." (57). Akhila's self-hood is thus threatened being born a woman. Akhila's self-discovery starts with her journey by train. Akhila is concerned about everybody telling her that a woman cannot live alone. Akhila does not have experience of living alone, by herself, or managing every day running of a household, because she has been an office-going girl since her late teens. Her mind is, therefore, full of uncertainties about existing alone, running a household, how to manage.

Chacko, her fortunate and Oxford educated son also dominated Mammachi's life in *The God of small things*. After his divorce from Margaret, she takes over Mammachi's pickle factory and referring to the factory as "..... my factory, my pineapples, my pickles" (57) without regarding Mammachi who had started and established the factory before Chacko returned home. Mammachi did nothing but takes it obediently. In the novel, Ammu is convicted for marrying outside the community while her very own brother Chacko is pardoned for the same. Ammu's parents give more affection to her brother for being a man than her as a woman. Her position in society is worse so she had no other choice but to live in her parent's house under the control of men. Ammu's second husband is not well employed and one day he sold Ammu to his manager. This forced her to leave and divorce him which makes her situation much worse in the society. According to the society, a divorced woman is considered equal to an un-virtuous woman. Ammu, is the woman who attempts to fight against the patriarchy system in Indian society. She was unable to withstand the behaviour of her husbands and feels that divorce is better than keeping her marriage.

Janaki tells her story to Akhila in Nair's *Ladies Coupe*. This is the education of selfhood by the story of typical housewife looked after by her husband, then her son. She describes the way she is brought up, and the way she was taught about the woman's destiny is to get married and to be a good wife, mother etc. Janaki's story proves to be a common life of all women in the society. Janaki's story, thus, tells Akhila how the patriarchal control is unavoidable in the life of a woman. Janaki, feels annoyed with her husband when he tries to enforce his choice of shoes on his grown-up son. But at the late stage, feels tired of living such life of dependence. Akhila had already noticed in her own family how her father was praised by her mother, while even the children in the family had inferior treatment. Sheela, another character in the compartment, is also an example of the patriarchal control. She used to delight everybody by her wit as a child, even her father enjoyed it. But when she grew up, her father started scolding her for the same activities. Sheela embellished her dead grandmother's face because she knew her wishes. The elders were angry with her. Sheela also tells her experience of annoying touch of her friend's father when she goes to her house. She studies to be ready to protect herself. From Sheela's experience, Akhila understands how to protect the self and develop a sense of selfhood.

Rahel, Ammu's daughter in *The God of Small Things* is the woman who has no place in either her family or society. Living in her grandparent's house, she does not live like a normal child. She lives as an example to the biases done to on her mother's. Rahel's close opinion of her mother began when she was an abandoned child at the mercy of her mother's irregular horrible displeasure resulting from frustration. Ammu tries to discipline Rahel and occasionally she gets hurt when her mother utters indifferent remarks. From the beginning she observes her mother with an upward look when everybody else looks down on her. Rahel also comes back home as a divorced woman as her mother once did. Rahel is the symbol of the postmodern era, a postmodern woman. Through the character of Rahel, the novelist tries to disrupt the shackles of the old customs. A sense of resentment and separation also fills the diverse senses of individuality among the different generation of women.

The character of Margaret Shanthi in *Ladies Coupe* reveals about the relation between her husband Ebenzer Paulraj, who controls her life and frustrates her in her career, and wish to have a child for his own selfish ends. She finds her nature being crumpled and her individuality being compressed by her husband. Margaret reacts by developing a silent war against him. She creates a plan to make him reliant on her. *Marikolanthu*, is a story of working girl, who is sexually oppressed by the male members of the upper-class society. She is deprived of education being a girl from a poor family. Only her brothers could go to school in the town. Her mother says there is a risk to send a girl by a bus to town for school. She accompanies her mother to Chettiar house, where she becomes a baby-sitter for no pay. *Marikolanthu* has to struggle very hard and decides to end living for others, making sacrifices for other. She comes out as a strong woman bearing her own responsibility. In her decision to accept Muthu and bring him up, she disobeys the predictable morality and the bondage of family. When she tells Akhila, "I am the woman you think you have wondered about. For within me is a woman I have discovered." (P. 270). This self-discovery of *Marikolanthu* gives her strength and courage, to face life on her own terms.

II. CONCLUSION

In *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy portrays Ammu's character, as a woman who gets freedom back by fighting against the centuries-old custom that society has forced upon her kin. Roy establishes how a woman with high desire and sturdy will who creates a hazard to the tyrannical order of society is quickly trademarked as hazardous. Rahel neither worries nor accepts the laws established in the male dominated society. She voices the passions of the author about a woman and her position in the society. Rahel is the depiction of the postmodern woman. According to the feminist critic Veena Nobel Dass, "A search for identifying and quest for a definition of self-have become the prime factor of women in the literature under the sway of feminism" (Dass, 11). In the novel, *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair has examined the question whether woman can achieve her self-living. The stories told by Janaki, Margaret Paulraj and Marikolanthu informs that these women protagonists learn to make adjustment. Janaki is brought up to be a good wife and does not have an identity of her own. She is happy in her traditional life. Margaret, finds a way to train her husband and succeeds. Though these women have asserted their self-livelihood, they have had their married life except Marikolanthu. From all the stories of these women, Akhila hopes to find answer to her question whether a woman can live alone.

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