

Gender Biasness as the Social Realism in The God Of Small Things

Pallavi Srivastava
Research scholar,
Department of English,
Bundelkhand College, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh
India

Abstract

The God of Small Things has been received very well by literary quarters as a bundle of pertinent themes. The most prominent themes are realism, feminism and subaltern. This paper examines the social realism present in the form of gender biasness throughout the novel. The female protagonist Ammu suffers a lot because of society and fellow women in the house. The psychology of orthodox women is compared with a woman of radical thoughts. The paper focuses on the theme of realism present in the novel. Roy has depicted the real condition of single woman in society brilliantly.

Keywords- Realism, Society and Gender bias.

The Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy's The God of Small is considered a master piece not only for a genuine language but also because of Roy's realism in coat of an interesting fiction. The book reveals the universal theme of injustice against powerless subaltern (women, children, and the scheduled castes) by the powerful people of the society. In this novel Roy examines the psychic depth of every character. She examines the bonds which connect human beings. Roy has attempted to make the story as interesting as was possible. It involves love, hatred, innocence, loyalty, and betrayal: which brings guilt, politics, violence, erotic scenes and ... death. The novel has a different kind of language which makes it more touching and appealing.

The story deals with two themes at a high level viz. communism and gender discrimination. Although love, incest, guilt, shame, ego are also recurrent themes throughout her life for being a female. Though from beginning till end she is found fighting bravely but

at the end she surrenders miserably. Hated by all men and women she loses her mental balance and dies a pathetic and lonely death. Ammu's character can be seen in perspective of gender bias. As Bimaljit Saini asserts,

“Seen from a feminist perspective, the novel is about the violence inflicted on women by the paternal tyranny enveloping the unfortunate children. It exposes the double standards of morality in society regarding men and women, the passive, docile role of a wife in a man –woman relationship, and the malicious role of a woman in perpetuating the humiliation of another woman by male.”(172)

While going through Ammu's character deeply, it should be noticed that she is a fighter throughout her life. She never gives up the fighting spirit whether it is her childhood or in her married life and even after her divorce.

“As a child, she had learned very quickly to disregard the Father Bear beats Mother Bear stories she was given to read. In her version, Father Bear beats Mother Bear stories with brass vases, Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation.”(Roy,180)

This is what she witnessed from the childhood. Being a girl she was never loved by her loved by her parents or worst she was supposed to tolerate everything just like her mother. In fact she suffered a lot with her mother only that she never let the slave mentality of her mother crush her fighter soul. How desperate she was to get, what she wanted can be seen in her love for gum boots episode.

Ammu and her mother used to hide outside the house to save themselves from the beatings of Pappachi. He used to thrash them every evening after returning from his office. Mammachi never had the courage to oppose all this instead she felt safe outside but this was not the case with Ammu,

“...little Ammu crept back in the house through ventilator to rescue her new gumboots that she loved more than anything else... when he caught, he didn't say a word. He flogged her with his ivory-handled riding crop(the one that he had held across his lap in his studio photograph). Ammu didn't cry.” (Roy, 180-181)

Though she could not save her lovely boots but she realizes that it's the destiny of the ladies in the house.

“She develops a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops, in someone small who has been bullied all their lives by someone big.” (181-182)

Ammu commits a blunder in her life and leads her life to chaos by marrying a man more or less stranger to her. She does this out of sheer disgust of living in Ayemenem. It so happens that her father retires from his job, the year she finishes her schooling. Her bad luck prevails when Pappachi refuses to pay further for her education and she has to return to Ayemenem with her parents to lead a hellish life.

“There was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework. Since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals came Ammu’s way. Two years went by.” (38)

Once again she gets desperate and she plans to escape Ayemenem when fortunately Pappachi agreed to let her spend the vacations with some distant aunt in Calcutta, where she met her future husband and he proposed her just after five days of their meeting. Ammu who wanted to escape from the clutches of her parents marries him. It’s after few days of her marriage she has jumped out of frying pan straight into the fire. After her marriage she comes to know that her husband was not only alcoholic but a liar also. He drinks whole day long and does not go for his work. After begetting twins her condition only deteriorates. A time comes when her husband wants to barter her for his job. Ammu doesn’t show any mercy and hit him with heaviest book she could find in the house. Now being betrayed by her husband in the most indecent way she divorces him and returns to her father’s house where she is not welcome.

“To everything that she fled from only a year ago. Except that she had two young children. And no more dreams.” (82)

Her coming back to Ayemenem makes her psychologically weaker. In few days she understands that for her and her children there is no place in the house. They have no locus standi. She learnt to recognize the reality of fake sympathy shown towards her. Tortured both from her parental side and husband’s side she is frustrated now, she fights with herself only. Her psychological condition can be seen here.

“On the days that the radio played Ammu’s songs, everyone was a little wary of her. They sensed somehow that she lived in the prenumbral shadows between two worlds, just beyond the could therefore be dangerous.” (45)

Ammu’s mental imbalance is because of her failure in marriage. She feels forlorn. A woman’s walking out of her wedlock as her own decision brings her social stigma. Womem

are praised as victims but not as a decision maker. Even then Ammu does so and faces the consequences later. Simone de Beauvoir writes that,

“Marriage is not only an honourable career and one less tiring than many others: it alone permits a woman to keep her social dignity intact and at the same time to find sexual fulfillment as loved one and mother....”(62)

Ammu moves out of her marriage although she is not educated enough that she could raise her children at her own but there is nothing in the world which can suppress her soul; except her own self and people.

Ammu’s character falls in sharp contradiction of Baby Kochamma and Mammachi.

“Baby Kochamma resented Ammu because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman. The sad Father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma.” (Roy, 45)

Baby Kochamma managed to persuade herself over the years that her unconsummated love for Father Mulligan had been entirely due to her restraint and her determination to do the right thing.

Here it can be seen how gender bias is properly fed by women only. The representatives being Baby Kochamma and Mammachi. Mammachi has double standards when it comes to feelings and needs. It is visible that Chacko and Ammu both are divorcees but for her Chako Deserved to have care.

“She has aware of his liberatine relationships with the women in the factory but had ceased to be hurt by them. When Baby Kochamma brought up the subject Mammachi become tense and tight lipped ‘He can’t help having a man’s needs’, she said primly.” (68)

She is always there to take care of him although he never likes her doing so. Here we can easily observe that she is never concerned about Ammu’s feelings and needs. Ammu’s contribution in factory but has no right on it as she is daughter of the house not son. She is well aware of the fact on her own. Mammachi is ready not only to overlook but also make arrangements for Chako’s ‘needs’ but when it comes to Ammu’s relationship with a male factory worker she is least tolerant. She is also scared of society when it comes to her daughter’s affair. Nityanandam observes:

“In spite of all the brouhaha about human rights, the demand for equal status for women, the modernist and post- modernist ways of thought, there continues to be a deep- rooted pattern of discrimination against women both within the family and by society in general. It is so deeply rooted in the system that it is rarely questioned and generally accepted by everybody.”(Nityanandam, 87)

Mammachi herself never dared to fight back with her husband rather she accepted beatings from her husband. She never voiced against the violence but she loved it when Chako saves her from his Father. The mute acceptance of a woman’s fate is something expected from every woman if she wants social approval. Both Kochamma and Mammachi glorify themselves because they are socially accepted for what they tolerated. Ammu’s refusal to accept the physical and emotional violence made her a woman of low reputation and degraded her to a ‘whore’. In the last days of her life she is always scared that police will hack off her hair and will stamp her as prostitute. Her moral character is condemned even after her death and Church refuses to bury her on several accounts.

We can see Ammu’s life has been made miserable by the ladies of the house mainly Baby Kochamma. Ammu’s condition is representative of all women. As Bimaljit Saini observes-

“The disparity between man and woman is a result of the complex operation of economic, political, social and other factors. In spite of the significant change in women’s position in society in the post-independence era she is still not totally emancipated.” (172)

It can be seen here that Ammu would have lived her life properly only if she had adjusted according to the rules of society. Her life becomes hell because she refused to be oppressed. She gets killed under the cruel law and rules of society which offers women a secondary position in comparison to men. Roy has shown how social parameters differ in judging the behavior of a man from a woman. The social inequality has been shown at its ugliest. A divorcee man can avail all the opportunities present to live his life to fullest but a divorcee woman is forced to accept that she has lost all the opportunities to live with dignity. Roy has painted the reality of gender biasness with subtlety.

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