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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FEMINISTIC READING OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS* IN AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE.

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Abstract

This paper has been developed to analyze the different elements of Feminism by studying the opinions or views of various scholars from their writings. The Indian perspectives of Feminism have been highlighted in this paper by analyzing and comparing the views of the Indian Feminist writers like Shobha De, Anita Desai, Anita Nair, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy and others. Their reviews have been compared with the opinions of Arundhati Roy by evaluating her text "**The God of Small Things**" where she has highlighted the issues faced by the Indian women in the male-dominated society. The themes of subjugation, oppression, struggles, domestic violence, and gender discrimination have been discussed in the initial phase of the novel. But, later, the author has portrayed the three major characters like Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel to prove the theme of Feminism. The women in her stories did not endure the issues and instead protested against the society and its traditional norms to create their own identity. They have shown their self-confidence and inner strength to bring a change in the thoughts of the society.

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Indian Feminism is said to be a set of movement which aims at establishing, defining and defending the equal economic independence, equal opportunities and political and social rights for the Indian women. This is a pursuit of the women rights in the Indian society (Gupta, 2002). Feminism in India seeks for gender equality which is transparent in the writings of different Indian women writers or Feminists. Indian Feminists fought for the cultural or specific issues like equal access to education or health and other rights that are visible in the Indian patriarchal society. The painful and long-suffering of the women, the continuous battle of women rights and the struggle for equal pay and work are the visible signs of gender difference for which the Indian Feminists and women writers started to write for them. Many Indian writers like Kamla Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Geetha Hariharan and Manju Kapur have realized that the concern of women invasion needs to be reduced in India to the contradiction between women and men (Myles, 2006). They have understood and observed that the women have to literate themselves and empower to confess the various cultural and institutional practices to avoid the patriarchal domination. They wanted to develop a woman identified in the dominating society. For instance, Rama Mehta's work "**Inside the Haveli**" (1977), Geetha Hariharan's famous story "**The Thousand Faces of Night**" (1992), and the novels of Anita Desai etc. present the theme from childhood to the womanhood where psychic or physical emancipation of women is noticeable (Wiemann, 2008).

Arundhati Roy is one of those Indian Feminist writers who is a Booker prize winner for her debut novellas that is "**The God of Small Things**" in 1997. She employed the women characters in her novel through which their position

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in the society and home can be analyzed. The focus of the novelist is on the injustice and irrationalities of the social and domestic life of women. The novel does not transcribe the reality, however, makes it alive in front of the readers (Ghosh & Navarro-Tejero, 2009). The novelist has rendered her varied experiences of the Indian reality through the idiosyncratic mental lenses by employing the narrative techniques aptly in this novel. The following paper has presented the sheer vulnerability of the Indian women in the societal discourse. As reviewed from other previous documents and portrayed in this review paper, Roy has revealed the quandary of the Indian women in the settings of South India. This has shocked the readers and helped them to recognize the truth of the society where women are not respected and allowed to emerge as the separate entity (Prasad, 2004). The subjugation of the women begins from the family and continues from generation to generation. They are deprived of equal rights and are cornered, looked down or pitied by the male counterparts. Arundhati Roy has portrayed the predicaments of the women from three different dimensions like:

1. The suffocation of Ammu during the pre-marital stay in Ayemenem followed by her return with the two children to the unwelcoming family and then her brief concern with Velutha that has cut her life shorter.
2. The disturbed conjugal tie of Mammachi with Pappachi that has resulted from the attempt of Chako to stop the regular beating of Pappachi to Mammachi.
3. The unrequited love of baby Kochamma for the father Mullignan along with her eventual spinsterhood.

The novel consists of the stories of broken marriages, death, revenge, violence, sexuality and irrational hatred. Roy has sarcastically presented the harsh irony of the male domination of the women (Roy, 2005). The novel has further portrayed the oppressions of the women along with their struggles to develop their own identity in the patriarchal space. *The God of Small Things* presented the truthful picture of the Indian society as studied from previous researches. The humble submission, anxieties, cares and persecution of the women in the male-dominated society has been described in this novel. The novelist has depicted these issues through the main characters of the novellas that are Ammu, Mammachi, Rahel, Baby Kochamma and Margaret Kochamma. A descriptive analysis has been done in the literature review section of the study.

The main aim of developing this review paper is to understand the Indian perspectives of Feminism through the famous novel of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The researcher has reviewed various established papers and journals to observe and evaluate the subjugation of women in the Indian society as presented in this novel to complete this paper.

The objectives of the study have been formed depending on the study aim as follows:

1. To explore the subjugated representation of women in the novels of Indian female writers.
2. To examine the Indian perspective of feminism in the novels of Indian female writers.

The following section of the review paper has attempted to discover the different themes and elements of Feminism as presented in the fiction of Arundhati Roy that is "*The God of Small Things*." The novel has been presented as the unique work of Arundhati Roy in the text of the feminine writing. The writer has efficiently and beautifully shown the harassment of women in the Indian society (Ghosh, 2006). Roy has chosen this theme to fight for the economic or social freedom and identity of women in the society. The review paper has been classified into three main parts to cover the chosen objectives. The literature review section has also provided the findings and opinions of the different researchers on the concept of feminism from the Indian perspectives. Besides that, the researcher has divulged the subjugation of the Indian women in their respective patriarchal society and the concept of Feminism accordingly.

In this section of the study, the Indian perspectives of Feminism have been explored. The feminist ideologies have begun to influence the field of Indian English Literature many years before. Most of the novels have depicted the psychological sufferings of the oppressed and frustrated housewives and other women of the lower-class society. The novelists have beautifully presented the theme of feminism in their writings. In this context, Dingwaney (2005) commented that the novels revealed that the present aged women have realized that they are no more dependent or helpless financially or physically. They are equal to men. Thormann (2003) explored that the Indian women novelists have described the feminine subjectivity and applied the different themes starting from the childhood to the womanhood. Through the novels, the Indian women writers like Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Anita Nair along with Arundhati Roy have presented the concept of "feminism" in a detailed manner. (Al-Qudaeri & Islam (2011) It is specified that they had revealed the concept of Feminism to put an end to every suffering of the women that they used to tolerate in silence.

The Indian women novelists have provided a new dimension to the field of Indian English Literature. Some of the important writers like Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, and Kamala Markandaya have revealed the issues and problems faced by the Indian women in the male-dominated society as noticed by Shukla (2009). In their writings, the writers have discovered the inner climate, mastery of the inner life and human psyche of the women characters. The novelists have revealed the miserable suppressions of the women under the inconsiderate and insensitive patriarchal conventions. Mishra & Kumar (2006) added that the predicaments and problems related to Indian women found an artistic expression through the writings of the Indian English women writers. The writers did not only portray issues faced by the women in the Indian society but, also exposed the various ideological elements which have shaped her. These consist of the psychological and social factors like the subordinate position of the woman in their families and the restricted sexuality.

The novels written by the novelists have provided new directions in the field of English fictions. Olsson (2011) commented that their writings have emphasized on the inner minds of the Indian women from the perspectives of Feminism. As studied earlier, Nandi (2010) specified that the orthodox women of India used to belong from the conservative family for which they were not allowed to raise voice against the dominated and aggressive male people of their society. Their desires, ambitions, and senses have been expressed in the writings of the female novelists. The novels have further expressed how the educated Indian women suffered psychologically because of the inferiority complex or deep sense of inhibition. They eventually depicted the image of a new woman who waited for liberation and emancipation in the fast-changing world as revealed by Comfort (2009). However, with the beginning of 20th century, changes in the spirit and statue of the women have been noted by the sociologists. For instance, Shashi Deshpande wrote about the struggles of the modern women to find the autonomous self-hood. Her female protagonists have been able to free themselves from the traditional constraints.

On the other hand, Tiwari & Chandra (2010) argued that Shobha De is another well-known author who explored the world of urban women in India. She gave importance to the issues of the women and indicated the arrival of a new Indian women era who can find their way and identity to survive in the society. However, Manju Kapur in her writings has presented the problems of inter-religious marriage system, patriarchy, male-female bonds and the family bonds for which the women had to face issues. She presented how the women have become the victims of gender discrimination, domestic violence, and the other cultural traditions, etc. Thus, Al-Qudaeri & Islam (2011) revealed that the feminism in the Indian writings had not developed rapidly, but, it has evolved steadily and slowly. Campaigns have been raised for rape, violence, and dowry through the books of the women writers of India to support Feminism. '*The God of Small Things*' is one of such novels where the novelist, Arundhati Roy, has portrayed the notion of Feminism through the subjugation of women in the patriarchal society.

Feminism in India is said to be a social movement which has the purpose of bringing equal opportunities and rights among the women of Indian society. The group of women who started the movement is said to be the feminists (Comfort, 2009). To highlight this concept of Feminism and reduce the physical or psychological issues faced by the women, many of the Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Anita Nair, Shobha De or Manju Kapur have created an impact in English Literature. The writers have portrayed the inner world of women as noted by Dingwaney (2005), and have also revealed their frustration and sensibility. They have further highlighted the lives of those women who seek for love, emancipation and suffer from mental disorders or face death due to the patriarchal society or the traditional norms. Ghosh (2006) specified that the Indian women writers have started to change the mask of the Indian literature. They wrote mostly on the women issues. Similarly, as discussed in this present paper, Arundhati Roy also portrayed the lives of women belonging from the Indian patriarchal society in her well-known novel "*The God of Small Things*" who faced issues by surviving under the male-dominated society herself.

Though, the chosen novel revolves around the stories of two twins that are Rahel and Esthappen who are said to be the protagonists, but, at the same time, the novel is said to be an argument regarding the evil and good things of the society in context to the women. According to Ghosh & Navarro-Tejero (2009), Roy has shown some ugly faces of the society and people in this novel and a vivid explanation of the sarcastic and black world concerning the females who abide around us. Besides that, the novel has also portrayed the positions of the women folk in the Indian society and presented the constant struggles of the women against the exploitation, struggles and torture that they tolerate due to the male-dominated society. Gupta (2002) added that the novel had been divided into three main generations of women who were born under different circumstances. The oldest generation started with Mammachi followed by Ammu and Rahel where women used to follow the traditions of Hinduism. They used to be controlled by men and dominated by their husbands. The people suffered from domestic violence. (Mishra & Kumar, 2006). Pappachi often

beat Mammachi who is said to be the first generation, and at the same time, Mammachi was dominated by her educated son that is Chacko.

Similarly, Mishra & Kumar (2006) mentioned that the second generation that is Ammu had been subjugated under the traditional norms followed by the parents. Ammu has been sold by her second husband who made her situation miserable in the society. She was considered as the un-virtuous woman of the society. But, Ammu did not accept the bad attitude and behavior of her husband and rebelled against it which highlights the theme of Feminism in the novel. On the other hand, Myles (2006) commented that Rahel is Ammu's daughter who has no position in the society or family. She has been the witness of all the injustices that are done to her mother. She has been growing up as an unwanted, and unlike her mother, she lives with a free woman who is restricted from the mental torture of the Hindu traditions. Considering these perspectives, Roy wanted to reveal the sufferings and struggles of the Indian women who have always been subjugated in the male-dominated society. They are treated as soulless beings and playthings for the men (Naikar, 2007). However, by portraying the rebels of the women like Ammu, the author has proved the concept of Feminism being developed by the Indian women writers in the field of English Literature to render the issues of women faced in the patriarchal society.

The study of women in Indian English Literature is said to be a significant concern for the female writers as it plays a vital role regarding shaping the consciousness and perceptions of the different segments of the society. Olsson (2011) mentioned that through the writings of the Indian feminists, it had been revealed that the women had been the silent victims of the patriarchal society where they are suppressed and oppressed and sacrifices being under the control of men. Prasad (2004) added that the most of the novels that have been written by these Indian women writers depicted the psychological or mental sufferings of these frustrated women of the society. The famous works of Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Anita Desai, Anita Nair and Arundhati Roy left indelible imprints on the mind of the readers. Roy (2005) observed that the major development of the modern Indian fictions has been around the growth of Feminism along with the feminine sensibility and consciousness. Some of them have discovered the female subjectivity to develop their own identity. The theme ranges from childhood to the womanhood in society.

According to Chandra (2005), the images of women in the Indian fiction have changed in the last few decades. The writers have moved from the concept of traditional portrayal of Indian women to conflicts or struggles that the females do to make their own identity. The last three decades of the Indian English Literature have been the emergence of the prominent Feminism as viewed in the writings of the feminist writers of the time. For instance, Shashi Deshpande in her novel "A Matter of Time" has portrayed various themes of gender discrimination, silence, familial relations and passive sufferings. Shukla (2009) recognized that the writer had weaved the concepts of destiny and fury in this novel. The theme is based on the human relationship between the father and daughter or husband and wife or in between the mother and daughter. Sree (2005) noticed that in all these relations, the women had occupied the main stage for which the story has been narrated in a feminine consciousness.

On the other hand, Manju Kapur through her novel. "A Married Woman" has presented a feminist tone and made the readers aware of the need of self-control power among the women. Thormann (2003) mentioned that she has portrayed that the women need to be strong, rational and self-reliant while keeping faith in their inner strengths of womanhood. Women become trapped in the male-dominated society for which they need to struggle to free themselves from all sorts of bonding and make their own identity. Tickell (2007) supported this and discussed the novel of Arundhati Roy that is "The God of Small Things" where the author has discussed the sufferings of women from three different generations. Arundhati had depicted a feminine sensibility in her writings when she revealed that after being subjugated in the male-dominated society, the women in her novels have raised their voice of protest and did not tolerate the burden imposed by their traditional norms and conditions of the society (Tiwari & Chandra, 2010). Thus, it can be inferred that the images of women have been presented in varied tones in the writings of Indian English writers.

The present review paper has been developed to explore various elements related to Feminism in "*The God of Small Things*" by Arundhati Roy. The work of Arundhati Roy has been analyzed as the feminist writing where the author has portrayed the theme of Feminism from the Indian perspective by depicting the issues faced by the Indian women in a patriarchal society (Wiemann, 2008). The novelist has presented how the women suffered due to gender discrimination, inequality and deprived of the access to work or education compared to men. The story has been portrayed in three generations by revealing the life story of Ammu, Mammachi, and Rahel to discuss the struggles that they faced in the male-dominated society (Al-Qudaeri & Islam, 2011). But, at the same time, the novelist has

highlighted the theme of Feminism by portraying how these women struggled and protested against the issues that they experienced to gain an identity in the society.

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