



The Legacy of Female Rights in *The God of Small Things* and *Cracking India*

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Abstract

Aim: *The present paper is an attempt to examine the rights and status of women with all the conflicts and contradictions in the novels. The God of Small Things and Cracking India by Arundhati Roy and Bapsi Sidhwa respectively. Roy stormed into the limelight with her debut novel The God of Small Things. Through this novel, Roy shows her real concern for women's liberty and position as well as the structure of transformation. Like Roy, Bapsi Sidhwa also encounters women's lives with outward silence and inward alertness in her novels. Through the novel Cracking India Sidhwa seeks to contribute to the process of change that has already started all over the world, involving are defining of women's*

autonomy and situation. The paper will also focus on the assertiveness and equality of the female characters from a feminist perspective in the novels.

Methodology and Approach: *The study is based on primary sources i.e., select novels *The God of Small Things* and *Cracking India* by Arundhati Roy and Bapsi Sidhwa respectively. A descriptive qualitative approach and feminist point of view have been used as a method to analyze the characters, situations, and themes of the select novels. Some secondary sources like critical books on Arundhati Roy and Bapsi Sidhwa, articles in scholarly journals, interviews, and internet sources, etc. are also used for reaching a significant outcome.*

Outcome: *Arundhati Roy's novel presents the inner self and conversion of women in a male-dominated society. Roy is one of the most outstanding and extraordinary novelists in modern Indian English Literature who has put India on the map of the English-speaking world. Likewise, the picture of women in Sidhwa's novels quivers our mentality to ponder over the true picture. She tries to present a world that is free from dominance and hierarchy and abounds with justice and equality. *Cracking India* is a vigorous statement of a gynocentric view of reality in which the feminine psyche and experiences are analyzed with a unique sense of freshness and dynamism.*

Conclusion and Suggestion: *The concluding idea of the paper is that the liberation of women is the main theme of feminist theory. The main purpose of the paper is to give voice to the silenced or marginalized group. The novel *The God of Small Things* reflects the projection of women's plight and exploitation in a patriarchal society and explores how men establish their masculine power and fulfill their desire by assaulting women. Similarly, the novel *Cracking India* highlights feminist concerns about women's issues, particularly their experience of victimization and suppression within patriarchal societies.*

Keywords: Transformation, Dominance and Hierarchy, Assertiveness and Equality.

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Feminism is a cultural, political, and intellectual movement that recognizes the fact of oppression of women and seeks ways to emancipate them. It also challenges traditional and accepted male ideas about the nature of women and focuses on gender politics, power relations, discrimination, oppression, and patriarchy. Arundhati Roy can be truly called a female novelist because of her Booker Winning Novel *The God of Small Things*. Like other feminist novels, this novel transmits a deeper meaning about the values and attitudes of a patriarchal society concerning female characters. Roy's novel presents the cultural and social implications of women's lives through its dialogues, characters, and various events and images. In this novel, Roy emerges as a strong feminist writer who explains the crisis and compromise of her women characters. Like Roy, Bapsi Sidhwa also remains a potent voice among modern feminist writers. She is one of the noteworthy English authors of Pakistani origin. She has also portrayed the true and real representation of women in her writings. The main purpose of her writings is to give voice to the silenced or marginalized group. Her famous novel *Cracking India* (1988) was published under the same name in the United Kingdom in 1988 and in India in 1992 and as 'Cracking India' in North America

in 1991, and by this Sidhwa established herself as a respected and important literary figure. In *Cracking India* Sidhwa represents the series of female characters who have survived in the messy time of 1947. She tries to present a world that is free from dominance and hierarchy and abounds with justice and equality.

The God of Small Things has been acclaimed as an outstanding novel in the whole range of Indian English fiction. Because of this novel, Roy has got international recognition and represents the individualistic and realistic approach to her characters. Because of her style and treatment of women characters, Roy occupies a distinguished place among the novelists of the literary scene in Indian literature in English. As a modernist and feminist, Roy's fiction is related to social issues and she focused on the liberty of women in her literary works; particularly in her famous work. *The God of Small Things*. It is shown in the novel that in all situations women have been the target of exploitation whether it can be for the sake of family, honor, community, and country also. The novel tells the story of a Syrian Christian family in the southern province of Kerala, India.

The analysis of *The God of Small Things* questions the validity of our tradition-bound society. It reveals the caste system and female domination in India through the love affair of Ammu with Velutha- an untouchable. The novel foregrounds the traditional Indian society in which it is considered an illicit relation as Ammu defies the caste system. It also highlights their characteristics and experiences within patriarchal societies. *The God of Small Things* deals with traditional South-Indian life and depicts the various customs and superstitions. There is an extreme progressiveness co-existing with extreme backwardness in this novel. Arundhati Roy seems to fling irony on the upper-caste rich people of society who insult and persecute the untouchable just only to show their superiority. The novel also deploys the consciousness of the child, whether male

or female. And the child's view of looking at the adult world has been one of the most appealing features of the book.

Arundhati Roy has great sympathy for the downtrodden as well as women so she has presented a living picture of their sufferings and the injustices done against them. She projects class conflicts in terms of caste, contrasting touchables and untouchables. She also exposes the domination of patriarchal ideology over the underdogs which also cultivates the pervasive snobbery and violence of the touchable towards the untouchables. Arundhati Roy has also written about her life experiences in her novel *The God of Small Things*. This novel contains a good deal of autobiographical matter from the lives of Arundhati Roy and other members of her family as well as her grandparents. Through her family background, she depicts the position of the untouchables and their extreme humiliation. She presents her mother Mary Roy in the character of Ammu, her brother George Issac as Chacko, and her brothers as Estha. Through the characters and incidents of the novel, Arundhati Roy portrays the plight and sufferings of women as well as the untouchables.

The God of Small Things represents all those people who are victimized by the forces of history, dead convention, false pride, and respectability. It also reveals an outgoing conflict between the 'God of Big Things' and the 'God of Small things'. By transforming the experience into a work of art, she universalizes it and creates an appeal even for the disgusting matter. Arundhati Roy avoids big things, vows, passions, yearnings, and lamentations because she confines herself only to all sorts of small things. She focalizes on a whole world of small things, tiny insects, tiny creatures, small children, small happenings, and small lives. She also makes use of sympathetic irony which attracts the readers towards the unprivileged characters – the twins, Velutha and Ammu. Roy exposes the ugliness

of society by bringing two children to react to it, and the children's pain serves as a powerful language of rejection of the prevailing system.

Roy uses the title "Big Man The Laltain, Small Man The Mombatti" in one of the chapters of her novel. Here the 'Laltain' refers to the rich who are well-fed and well-protected, and the 'Mombatti' points to the poor and the downtrodden who are great sufferers. Pappachi, Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Chacko, Comrade Pillai, and Inspector Thomas Matthew represent the higher section of society while Ammu, Velutha, Rahel, and Estha are associated with the lower and the depressed class. Among them, Velutha is central in the novel and is a very strong young man of a new age. He alone is an active factor in the scheme of the novel. The story of his life is no less tragic and he had been called the god of small things or the god of loss by the writer.

Velutha is a victim of social ostracism and suffers because he is untouchable. He has to struggle hard to achieve identity in society. Roy wants to show that even a 'Dalit' or an untouchable can also become an engineer, a doctor, or a professor if he is properly guided. Velutha is a master carpenter and a talented craftsman and he had exceptional talents for many other things, "Velutha had a way with machines. Mammachi (with impenetrable Touchable logic) often said that if only he hadn't been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer. He mended radios, clocks, and water pumps. He looked after the plumbing and all the electrical gadgets in the house" (*The God of Small Things* 75). The writer appears to be suggesting that untouchability is not only a social dispensation but a mindset also.

Ammu, the daughter of a Syrian Christian family, represents the status and predicament of women in this male-dominant stagnant society. In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu is not an untouchable yet she is humiliated by her father, betrayed by her husband, ill-treated by Baby Kochamma, rendered destitute by

her brother, and insulted and crushed by the police. She is regarded as a weaker sex and hence inferior to men in all aspects. Ammu becomes a victim of her husband's drunken rages because he was an alcoholic who reduces her to the level of a toy and urges her to satisfy the lust of his boss Mr. Hollick so that his job might be secure. At this extremity of humiliation, Ammu hits her husband with a heavy book in a mad frenzy, leaves the place, and returns to her parent's home with her two kids- Estha and Rahel. Here Ammu gets stepmotherly treatment and her children are subjected to all types of indignities and sufferings.

Arundhati Roy also reveals her familiarity with privileged or humble surroundings and different cultures in her writings. In the novel, *The God of Small Things* Roy presents the question of identity and the use of Malayalam and English languages through the twins. In the opinion of Chacko (the uncle of the twins), the colonized people belong nowhere and they don't have a good quality of life as they are 'prisoners of war'. Ammu and her children were constantly reminded that they don't have any position in the Ayemenem house. According to Baby Kochamma, her aunt, Ammu's twins are living in that place "where they had no right to be" (*The God of Small Things* 45). In Ayemenem, being a male Chacko holds the reins of control while Ammu has no status in her father's house after her divorce and her children also don't have any material or legal rights. Even her mother Mammachi also turns her face to Ammu and her twins, Rahel and Estha. While Sophie Mol, Chacko's daughter has a higher position even though her parents are divorced.

In the novel, the dominant characters rule over the helpless characters. The children, who are known as small things, get much pain in the novel due to the rules and regulations of the patriarchal society. They make Velutha their best friend and also a part of their world. Although Velutha is untouchable, they called them as their God – The God of small things. The obvious inequality between the

sexes, noted by the alert girl-narrator, the central consciousness of the novel, Rahel, ill-fated Ammu's daughter and one of the two-egg unidentical twins, clearly makes gender a basic concern of the novel. In Ayemenem house, Ammu's twins become prey to the morbid stiffness and malice of Baby Kochamma, who constantly reminds them of their insecure position and sinfulness. This also shows the patriarchal control over children and women. Some untouchable characters like Velutha, Kuttappan, and Vellaya Paapen also show the patriarchal domination over lower caste class people.

The portrayal of Velutha in the novel shows how the untouchables are believed to be worse than animals. After knowing about Ammu's love relationship with Velutha, not only outside people violated her womanhood but her own family also. Chacko, Ammu's brother, had threatened the authority of a patriarch in his own house: "Get out of my house before I break every bone of your body" (*The God of Small Things* 255). Both Ammu and Velutha present the intolerable plight of the deprived class. The novelist seems to arouse the sympathy of the readers for the person like Ammu and Velutha who bear all sorts of tyranny and torture and in the end pay the penalty of their lives. In the end, Ammu's disgusting funeral is a direct comment on the system that carries out 'doubleness' of not only 'Big and Small' but 'the public and the personal' also.

On the contrary, Sophie Mol, the half-English daughter of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma, gets a special satin-lined brass-handled coffin and church burial with a gathering and prayers. The arrival of Sophie Mol seemed to ignite the so-far contained and suppressed conflicts. The preferential treatment shown towards Chacko's widowed ex-wife and their daughter is openly displayed in front of all and sundry, throwing Ammu and her twins into complete isolation. Dead Sophie Mol is more important than alive Estha and Rahel. The two twins present the cruelty of the society and its visible noose which seems to sullenly

tighten around their necks on every page, as does the smell of dung and foreboding. They are utterly neglected and had traumatic experiences throughout their lives. Because of this, they have withdrawn themselves from society and they develop a philosophic attitude of indifference toward the world around them.

In the same way, Bapsi Sidhwa projects realistically women's plight and exploitation for the sake of family and community in a patriarchal society. The novel *Cracking India* foregrounds women's consciousness as they are affected by political battles. It also highlights their characteristics and experiences. The female characters of the novel pulsate with a will and life of their own. Sidhwa has recreated a universe where women appear as biological beings and represent a way of life. The women characters of the novel expose the patriarchal biases present in contemporary social perceptions. The central consciousness of the fictional world of the novel is represented by an eight-year-old lame girl Lenny. She is the most significant female character in this novel who narrates the incidents as she witnessed them. Through the child narrator Lenny, she brings out her autobiography and the trauma of partition. Lenny looks at characters belonging to different communities through the prism of her Parsi sensitivity.

Bapsi Sidhwa's main concern is to show the life of Lahore through Lenny's eyes. At the beginning of the novel, the narrative of developing nationhood and the personal tale of Lenny's maturation unfold side by side. There is an interesting turn in Lenny's life with the character of Ayah Shanta, who is her Hindu caretaker. Ayah is not a very pious lady but her personality is attractive and charismatic. She has relations with many men and she also controls the actions and emotions of her male admirers. The protagonist Lenny has her mother, father, her Godmother with her but only Ayah is there to look after her. Lenny is dependent on her Ayah for her care and companionship, so she is often surrounded by adults. The people around Ayah discuss almost everything in

society and thus present the debate on culture, politics, and religion. As a precocious child, Lenny witnesses them very consciously with a certain objectivity.

In *Cracking India*, it is the woman who performs and controls and promotes the action through her active involvement and concern, and in this process, she acquires the attributes of heroism and glory. Here, it is Lenny's mother and Lenny's aunt who play the sterling humanitarian and heroic role of fighting for the lives and property of Hindus. Sidhwa projects through Lenny's mother that women should have a purpose in life besides domesticity which should be developed by them to the best of their abilities. Besides, Lenny's Godmother Rodabai is endowed with a profound understanding of human existence and her personality sparkles with razor-sharp wit, a good sense of humor, and inexorable strength. She is the towering figure of the novel who realizes her individuality and existence. It is tangible in this novel that Sidhwa turns the female protagonists into the moral center, while most of the male characters either remain passive or indulge in violence.

The world of Sidhwa's female child Lenny is quite constricted due to her lameness. Her lameness is allied to her femaleness to deprive her of a proper education. Her schooling is stopped as suggested by Col. Bharucha, her doctor because she was suffering from polio. He concludes, "She'll marry, have children, lead a carefree, happy life. No need to strain her with studies and exams"(Cracking India15) Lenny concludes that the suggestion made by Col. Bharucha sealed her fate. It reveals the limitations associated with a girl's life. But in no way does Lenny's lameness become a source of self-pity; she remains assertive and even aggressive at times. By observing the life of many women she understands the limitations associated with women's lives in a patriarchal society. Lenny visits a village in rural Punjab with Ayah where she comes to know about

the rural, urban Hindu, and Muslim as well as how the girls are taught to behave and live. These were some happenings that take place in the novel. But all of a sudden, one can find that violence takes place and it sweeps over Lenny's little world. It transforms the atmosphere as well as the relationships. People were asked to change their religion if they were Hindu. For instance, Hari, the gardener, is converted to Islam for protection and turned his name from Hari to Himmat Ali; Moti, the sweeper, opts for Christianity. Besides, Ayah's name is changed from Shanta to Mumtaz after becoming the mistress of Ice Candy Man.

Ice Candy Man plays a negative role in this novel. Even after his marriage to Ayah, he kept her at a kotha and pushes her into the business of prostitution. Lenny recognizes the biological exploitation of women as she grows. As a child, she cherishes her mother's love and father's protection but the terrible episode of Ice Candy Man and Ayah destroys all her thoughts about love. She was shocked to perceive the condition of Ayah who was made a commodity by Ice Candy Man and sold every day to a new customer. Each one of the suitors makes frivolous advances to Ayah but none treats her as an individual in her own right. She remains a symbol of sex rather than an individual to be regarded and respected. Due to this reason, Ayah moves from speech to silence. But by focusing on Ayah as a specific individual, and grounding the violence inflicted upon her in the actions of her friends and admirers, Sidhwa invites us to consider the personal and political dimensions of sexual violence as entwined and inseparable.

Sidhwa affirms that women should utilize their potential beyond domestic life to have their individuality. *Cracking India* has strong women characters who are not only conscious of their desires but also eagerly assertive about their independent handling of situations. The novel consistently resists positioning "woman" as a metonymy for 'nation'. The Parsi world in the novel is more about women than men. Characters like Lenny's father, old Husband, and even Manek

Mody are relatively insignificant when compared to his Godmother and Mother. But it is the men, and especially the Ice Candy Man, who perpetrate the sufferings of women. In short, Sidhwa presents a collage of the lives and experiences of men and women caught in the web of history. Finally, one can find that Ice Candy Man has been arrested, Ayah has been released and went to Amritsar, and Ice Candy Man, as the news comes, disappears towards the Wagha border. Through this novel Sidhwa seeks to contribute to the process of change that has already started all over the world, involving a redefining of women's rights and position.

Therefore, the novel *The God of Small Things* has won universal acclaim for its remarkable inventive quality and creative use of language. An analysis of the novel deals with the confrontation of the problems related to both females and underdogs. By focusing on male domination and the deep-rooted caste system, the novel has a deeply moving tale characterized by excellence in artistry and social insight. Roy gives a graphic picture of the terrible situations of Southern society, mainly related to the lower classes which lack security and are subject to the perils of economic and political upheavals. In the novel, there is always an oppressor as well as an oppressed which could also be viewed in terms of the patriarchal and matriarchal structure of the society. In the same way, Bapsi Sidhwa presents the female segment of society and suggests we reconsider women's rights and status in the novel *Cracking India*. The final message of the novel is clear and explicit as it ends on a positive note. By this Sidhwa wishes to create a world that rests on the principles of righteousness and impartiality. Sidhwa also offers a vision of life in which feminine values are made to rule and perform heroic duties so that they could bring order to this chaotic world. It shows the excellence of Sidhwa who writes all the incidents with such a fine feminine sensitivity that no one can lag her behind in the field of Feminist studies. So

Cracking India is a successful attempt to bring the female characters to the center and thus becomes a feminist text in the true sense of the term.

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