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Arundhati Roy's Portrayal Of Female Masculinity In Her Novel The God Of Small Things: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Masculinity as a term is related to the men and male-power. Based on traditional gender roles, Masculinity shows the ideas of muscular body, handsome face, bold, brave, leadership etc. where Femininity shows the ideas of tenderness, soft mind, obligation, subjugation etc. and are firmly affiliated with the women in society. This study focuses on the masculinity through the leading female characters like, Amma, Rahel, Kochamma, Mammachi etc in the novel, The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy, one of the towering figures in the post-modern Indian writers and feminist critics who brought some changes in the attitude of the women herself as an individual in her own right she firmly realized Indian women's identity is one that is usually connected to and defined by social and cultural norms of a patriarchal family. The first fact discussed here how the female characters practice Masculinity and the second fact is which factors they practice it in. This literary study falls under the umbrella of gender studies, deploys Peter Lehman's concept of Masculinity and theory of female masculinity by Judith Halberstam to bring out the representation of female masculinity in the novel. Based on the analysis, this study shows that they are more masculine characters than feminine in the form of Courage, Heroism and Leadership skill. As a revolutionary writer she searches for a balance between the traditional role of women and new revolutionary female characters, who break the traditional patriarchal system, show their incarnation of "Shakti" in spite of obliging the set rules of society.

Keywords: female masculinity, femininity, identity, leadership, masculinity, revolution, power.

Introduction

The term 'female masculinity' denotes masculine performances by female. It refers to muscular power, physique force, leadership,boastfulness and all these qualities are possessed by males, where feminity is associated with women possessing tenderness, soft mind, obligation,emotion, subjugation etc. Basically they play passive roles and from female perspective, they are nothing but commodity for male in society. Though in India, women have been idealized as the incarnation of 'shakti', the very form of power. As a matriarchal country, people worship women form as 'Devi' from the very dawn of civilization. This concept began to change from the later Vedic period and became prominent with the muslim invention. Literary texts were written from male perspective where women get inferior position. Even female writers are hardly found and if so, their subject matter was merely fanciful imaginative tales. But changes took place in terms of attitude,made law,get equality and in the post modern time the female writers are raising the issues of women empowerment and they're championizing their literary characters. They started putting all the masculine performances in them and eventually distinguish them from males in society. Arundhati Roy,one of the towering figures of postmodern feminist critics brought changes in the attitude of the women herself as an individual in her own right she firmly realized Indian women's identity is one that is usually connected to and defined by social and cultural norms of a patriarchal family. Her identity is defined within the parameters of her social relationship to man and this essential spirit of India lies in its religion, spirituality, culture, traditions and family. The God of Small Things , her debut novel for which she is awarded The Booker Prize in 1997 as the first Indian woman writer to win this prize. The novel occurs various issues of contemporary time along with the position of women and lower caste in the patriarchal society. The novel portrays the truthful picture of the plight of Indian women, their great suffering, cares, anxiety, emotions, and their humble submissions to the male more or less as a 'sexual toy' and 'baby making factory'. But as a revolutionary feminist, Arundhati Roy led women aware of the injustice heaped on them and raise their voice in protest to get equality. As a revolutionary writer she searches for a balance between the traditional role of women and new revolutionary female characters, who break the traditional patriarchal system, longing for freedom in private space. Slowly becoming aware of the injustice women began to raise their voices and led birth of Women's Liberation Movement in early seventies.

The study of masculinity has received much attention from literary perspective in the late 80s and 90s, though not welcomed at its initial stage. Halberstam stated in her book, "Female Masculinity" that 'scholars have shown absolute no interest in masculinity without men' (p-13). However she firmly stated that, "it is crucial that masculinity does not belong to men,has not produced only by men and does not properly... What we call 'masculinity' has also been produced by masculine women, gender deviants and often lesbians."(p-241).

Parvanthi P K, PhD entitled —Female Masculinity in Dystopian Adolescent Fiction – Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games Series (2017), she notes that female masculinity is a phenomenon in which a female do masculine performatives. Such characteristics is ascribed as masculine, such as power, aggressiveness and masculinity are transposed in a female body. She also believes that masculinity is always related with power which is a quality that is basically associated as ideal masculine characteristic.Woman who has female masculinity means that they have man quality or characteristic on their body. Arundhati Roy is one of such writes who portrayed such female masculinity in The God of Small Things through the female charaters like Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Rahel, Ammu etc. All of them challenge the set rules of society,defy the norms, protest against age-old customary and bring revolution in the notion of female charaters.

Theoretical framework

To support the analysis, two theories are presented here are; the concept of masculinity by Peter Lehman, theory of female masculinity by Judith Halberstam.

Peter Lehman's Masculinity concept

Giles and Middleton mentioned that feminity and masculinity are formed based on childhood experiences in society. A woman is not born with female attributes that are prescribed by society but society teaches them how to be a woman,built up through social interaction. To Lehman, masculinity concept is complex and dynamic but has some universal features like power, courage, heroism, leadership.

Female Masculinity

Feminity and masculinity are social perspective and will decide who is man or woman and how to be so. But it is also possible for a woman to possess like a man and vice versa.Female masculinity has played a crucial but unrecognized role in the emergence of contemporary formations of the masculine. Empowering models of female masculinity have been neglected or misunderstood because of a cultural intolerance towards the gender ambiguity that the masculine woman represents. Halberstam states that —both male and female can produces heroic masculinity in their bodies. She argues that in female masculinity appearance is very important, though she adds that it is not only about how one looks. Masculine women experience their masculinity as an internal identity effect. She refutes the notion of reserving masculinity for people with male bodies and denying it to those with female bodies. It means that masculinity does not always belong to men but also to women in their self.

Reflection of typical feminity in the female charaters in The God of Small Things

In The God of Small Things , Roy delicately portrays and criticizes the Indian women's Suppression in a very stark way. Even in present time, the social structure of average Indian women are more or less quite the same. Women are confined into house hold articles and male members control family and society and the Ayemenen house actually represents the Indian patriarchal set up in the traditional sense and modern sense :

"It was a grand old house, the Ayemenen House, but, aloof-looking. As though it had little to do with the people that lived in it. Like an old man with rheumy eyes watching children play, seeing only transience in their shrill elation and their whole hearted commitment to life... The doors had not two but four shutters of paneled teak so that in the old days, ladies could keep the bottom half closed, lean their elbows on the ledge and bargain with visiting vendors without betraying themselves below the waist. Technically, they could buy carpets, or bangles, with their breasts covered and their bottoms bare. " (p - 158)

Mammachi, wife of Pappachi is the first woman that allows for one to get better idea of the issues that a woman faces in a patriarchal society. She has been a silent sufferer from the beginning of her married life. Though she is not frustrated one but like a doll in the hands of Pappachi. The frustrated and unsatisfied married life of Mammachi shows a different tale of woe. Her husband is 17 years older than her, is a respectable patriarchal figure in society. He is a very jealous husband. At first Pappachi allows her to take lesson of violin, but when her teacher states that she is very gifted at playing violin,Pappachi forced her to stop playing violin. He used to beat Mammachi and Ammu regularly. One day he was beating Mammachi with

a flower vase, Chacko, their son strode Pappachi to room and twisted his hands back and warned him not to dare to beat her again. He viewed himself, the way the patriarchy views men that males are superior to women. He always discouraged Mammachi to start pickle factory, considered that pickle making is not a suitable job for him, a high ranking ex-government officer and didn't believe that women, earning for family and women have ability to support or command family and society.

Ammu, the central character, who suffered from her childhood for being a female child. As a female child, Ammu had to endure some night marish experiences. Pappachi beats her due to neglect of being a female child. She was deprived from higher education because according to Pappachi, education for girls is unnecessary, while her brother Chacko was sent to Oxford University for higher education. We can get the glimpse of the middle ages or the 16th century, where women were deprived from education and out house activities, as Virginia Woolf firmly stated through the invented character of Judith Shakespeare in *A Room of One's Own*. It shows the truthful picture of the women especially in the rural society for traditional superstition and money also. Ammu being frustrated of the dowry fact, left home to Kolkata for a liberal life. Later she married a Bengali Hindu man and each loved others. But later, her husband became alcoholic and forced her to smoke. His boss, Mr. Hollicks offers him a proposal to secure his job by sending Ammu to his bungalow for physical enjoyment. Her husband insists her to do that and beats her to go Mr. Hollicks' bungalow. So like Woolf, Roy also highlights money as 'gender issue' not 'class issue'. She being frustrated returned to Ayemenen and told her life to her parents but no one believes or cares of it. Now she and her twins live like aliens there, because despite of equal rights over parents' property, our conservative society still believes that, "as a daughter had no claim to property" (p - 57)." A married woman had no position in the parents' home. As for divorced daughters - according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position any where at all" (p - 45). On the other hand, Chacko also being a divorcee, the only inheritor of the property, welcomed by his family when he returned from foreign. Like Chacko, Ammu also married to other caste and divorced but being a female, she is mal-treated. She was brutally punished by her family when her relation with Velutha, a lower caste has been discovered. She was locked into the room, beaten and abused by Kochamma and Mammachi because firstly, she develops an illegal relation, secondly, the man was from lower caste. But when Chacko began to engage in sexuality with the lower caste women in the factory, it was accepted. This shows how society develops its rules that is male biased, male centric that it saves males from any kind of illegal that is imposed upon women. Society accepts this illegal relation with a woman until she becomes pregnant but that same case is totally prohibited for the women in society :

" Thus Chacko may engage in any form of sexual activity with his female stuff so long as he can be protected from marriage with some one of a lower caste" (p - 110, *The God of Small Things*).

She was badly harassed and abused in the police station when she went there to tell the truth of Velutha and asked for a justice for the death of Velutha by beating savagely by the police. Baby Kochamma went to the police station and accused Velutha of being responsible for Sophie's death. Then a group of police hunt him down, savagely beaten for crossing the castle line and arrested him for murder of Sophie. Later he knows the truth from the twins, got alarmed that Velutha is a Communist and is afraid of that if words get out, would be wrong for him. Ammu was badly abused by Inspector Matthew, whose mustaches bustled like the friendly ' Air India Maharajah' but his eyes were sly and greedy. He greedily looked at the breasts of Ammu and abuses her as 'veshyas'. He came around his desk and approached Ammu with his baton and said ; "If I were you, I'd go home quietly" (p - 9). Then he trapped her breasts with his baton, " gently Tap tap. As through he was

choosing Mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered" (p - 9-10, The God of Small Things).

This not only shows how patriarchy works through administration but also influenced by the political parties. Ammu meets a tragic death at the age of 31 in a grubby hotel room with nobody to help her. Even death can not put an end to her humiliation because church refuses to bury her. So patriarchy now becomes an organization that no body avoids as a social being. This is how the society expresses how should women act in society and what will happen if it's violated. The female charaters passively accepted all these showing their feminity.

Analysis of the female masculinity in the women characters in The God of Small Things

Halberstam believes that feminine does not always related to woman and masculine is not always refer to man. Masculine characteristics can be owned by a woman and not only produced by man. The description of Masculinity and femininity are not based on sex but it created by society and influenced by parent, experiences, family, environment and culture. It is possible for women to have several norms of masculinity such as Courage, Heroism and Leadership skill so she can be called as masculine women. It reflects in the writings of Indian revolutionaries. Arundhati's portrayal of women characters explore such characteristics to empower the concept of female masculinity. The novel traced three generations of women of a family. Ammu is the most discussed woman in whom Roy first penetrates the revolutionary zeal, who dares to challenge the patriarchal norms in society. Naturally Indian women do not marry with her own choice, chosen by her family. But Roy gives a strong message to all Indian women to challenge that bad custom that always makes them in trouble, and gives them courage to marry with her own choice as men used to have. Ammu married a Bengali man when she was in Kolkata in her aunt's house. She left Ayemenen to avoid the dowry system as she always suppressed of being a woman. It was against not only against the conservative society but also against the age old caste system. So she not only married but revolts against the age old conservative system that always was against her. It is obviously a revolutionary step to marry with her own choice and marry out of her caste. In India, marriage is considered as a pious and important aspect of life, full of expectations, wishes, hopes, etc. An Indian woman dreams for this dreamy life and social security through marriage. They can easily enter into this pious life but not easy to come out of this one-way road of marriage. Here Roy's women are really proved to be revolutionary and ultramodern. Rahel, daughter of Ammu and one of the most destitute life leader from childhood but a strong female character, and capable of making her own decisions. She is able to revolt against all the traditional patriarchal laws and breaks them very easily. She was deserted by her father and also forcibly separated from her mother and always neglected by her own family like Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, etc. She saw the dejected death of her mother, makes her hopeless in life about society, but, this neglect has accidentally resulted in a release of the 'spirit'. After finishing her schooling, she admitted herself into a college of architecture in Delhi. This decision is taken not out of interest in architecture, but, to keep herself from Ayemenen, the symbol of patriarchy because she was so disgusted by her family. In her college life, she met a foreign student Larry MacCaslin, a Research Scholar in Architecture from Boston. Later she falls in love with him and married him. It was a very bold decision taken by her because it is unconventional and there was no one to arrange their marriage or pay the 'dowry' for her. Perhaps her husband was a foreigner so he might be unconscious about dowry. But her married life was not smooth and did not last long. Though Larry was not a male chauvinistic person, gave her liberty to celebrate life but their marriage proves prosaic. Rahel diffuses to continue their relationship because their was no understanding between them. For her,

marriage is not a yoke, so she very easily broke it soon and she did not feel shame or mental weakness for this divorce. It is naturally very emotional and shameful moment for a woman to divorce her husband as we see in case of Ammu. She was suppressed a lot when she came back Ayemenen leaving her husband forever. But in that case Rahel is revolutionary figure who did not hesitate to break the relationship as it freely breaks by the males and remarried again. Baby Kochamma fell in love with a handsome young Irish monk, Father Muligan, when she was only 18, against her father's wishes and followed him from seminary to seminary. It is also a very daring attempt that the young Kochamma to love a man outside religion, culture. They were quaking with the unchristian passion. Even Kochamma decided to become a Roman Catholic with a special dispensation from the Vatican. She started working in a convent in Madras after she became a catholic. It is again a daring attempt to change one's religion to another. As she was educated so that she might have realized the hollowness of the patriarchal system. She hopes that now she can engage with Father Muligan because she is now a converted christian. But soon she realized that her love would not be materialized because it was never a love but a fascination. Later being frustrated in life, she was sent America for further studies and returned 2 years later with a diploma in Ornamental Gardening. Ammu, we see decided not to give any surname to her twins because she is considering to revert to her maiden name, though she feels that choosing between her husband's name or her father's name doesn't give them respect. Society always sees the twins as unwanted children as Kochamma thought. So it is also a daring decision made by Ammu that not to give any title to her twins.

Mammachi started a small pickle factory named 'paradise Pickles and Preserves', in her own house. Pappachi objects on her initiation to start the pickle factory. Woolf said in *The Room of One's Own* that males are afraid of the fact that if women become financially strong then they can snatch away their authority over women and society. Here Pappachi, being an ideal patriarchal figure, objects and discourages Mammachi to start pickle factory rather he is afraid of snatching away his authority over others including Mammachi. He discouraged Mammachi that women should not work for money how worse condition of their family has. Later the company becomes bigger and economically strong and Mammachi, Ammu, Rahel and many lower caste women work in that company. Ammu later went to the Bharat Lodge in Allepy for a job interview. Rahel totally dislikes tradition, we see her working in New York when she went Boston with her husband. Larry did not have any problem to see her working and earning money. She works as a waitress in an Indian Restaurant in New York. Nowadays in India, women also have got the right in choosing life partners and even have liberty to sex with others as their own by Supreme Court. Supreme Court says that this age old Adultery Law in IPC section 497 is actually anti-women. Roy here presents sexual liberty in her revolutionary women characters like Ammu. Ammu, a brave character who defies the social rules of marriage and then entangles herself in a 'forbidden relationship' with Velutha, an untouchable. She could realize that what a woman and her children actually want like love, compassion, support etc, Velutha can give all these to them. She saw how Velutha companies little Rachel, Estha and they both love and understand him and he also. Even in her childhood Ammu can recall how Velutha was compassionate of her. Now his physicality attracted, moved her and gradually they both feel each other's feelings and gradually fall in love with him and develops their relation. She used to meet him in a regular interval, especially at night and started sexuality with him. Ammu not only developed a forbidden sexual relation but also with a man who is an untouchable in society. Rahel is the most liberal and ultramodern woman in this novel and was careless about social norms. She feels no burden of social rules and defies all social serious issues. She loves her brother so much that she did not stay New York no longer. She realized that they did not get any support from society and after their mother's death Estha

seems to become a worthless thing in society. She realized the responsibility to her brother. When she met Estha, she was speechless to hear the traumatic experience of his life. They started living together. The most shocking incident that occurred is Rahel started physical relation with her own brother. As an Indian, one cannot imagine of such relationship. In India, this brother and sister relation is considered as a very pious relation. But as a revolutionary feminist, Roy portrays Rahel as a ultramodern woman to whom sex is only a fascinating subject to enjoy the moment and the partner may be any one she chooses. Roy definitely penetrates an ultramodern sensual thinking in our conservative Indian societies through an ultramodern woman, Rahel and makes this serious issue so simple that sex is only a matter of enjoyment. In this case, the 'new woman' concept somehow becomes a bit ruder. It definitely cherishes pro-new woman concept but it is somehow beyond new woman concept Indian culture and sensibility.

Courage, Bravery are seen in Ammu with denial of social customs of marriage, dowry system when she married to Bengali man. Ammu's Bravery and Heroism are again shown with the forbidden relationship with Velutha, an untouchable man. Ammu didn't give any surname to her twins, which is very age-old norm bearing parental identity, which are undoubtedly masculine performances. It's seen in Rahel, when she married to Larry MacCaslin, outside her caste and religion and later divorced him. Rahel's masculinity is again shown with her denial of her marital status, educating herself abroad. Finally, her physical relationship with her own brother, Estha is the example of the highest masculine performance. Mammachi started a pickle factory without consent of Pappachi which became larger and under which many workers were working. Breaking the age-old concept of remaining engaged in household works only by force is obviously masculine leadership performance. Again the masculine traits are shown in the works of Kochamma, with her marriage to a monk outside her religion by her own will and it got heroic tag with her conversion to Christianity by her own will. Power, Force are another aspects of masculinity. It's firmly expressed when Kochamma imposed her power, force and authority on Ammu, who was locked in a room and beaten by Kochamma. She badly abused the twins, being 'fatherless children', with having no parental identity. Power of caste is expressed by Mammachi in dealing with Velutha and his father when they weren't permitted entering Ayemenem. She spat on Velutha's face when disclosed the affair with Ammu. Her masculine authority is expressed when Kochamma told lie to police about the murder of Sophie Mol that Velutha did it. It's accepted only for her socio-masculine status. For reference, Sabarimala issue can be quoted where the Supreme Court of India ruled that all the pilgrims can enter the temple regardless of caste, sex, women are still practicing the forbidden rule of not entering the women in the temple. Even it's recorded that two women were severely punished by the educated elder women of their family in 2018.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, it's found that major cause of female masculinity in the women characters in *The God of Small Things* is to strengthen and empower gender identity. Gender identity is formed by social identity, built on social relation and the way one is looked upon. It can't be separated from family upbringing. Ayemenem, a symbolic male patriarch imposed his rules over others to follow, using his power. The female characters realised that power and started regenerating themselves psychologically i.e. being independent by denying set rules, getting higher education from abroad, giving no surname defying socio-parental identity, marriage out of own will outside religion, converted into other religion, incest and many more. All these were possible only because they possess masculinity in their female bodies. Their Courage, Power, Force, Bravery, Aggression, leadership made them female-masculine figures. Society can be drawn as a bullying figure where

it practices not much education for women, caste system, domination over female, no property rights after marriage of a woman etc. These women used these bullying forces in their own purposes and regenerated as their own masculine forces to achieve their goals.

Judith Halberstam stated that, masculinity does not always belong to men but also to women and it's firmly reflected in the novel through the shine empowering portrayal of women characters. It's having two possible reasons, 1) portrayal of women empowerment, 2) it's nothing but an obvious result, obtained by the women using the power force treatment from family upbringing and social dominating influence over them. They only transfer these forces into female masculinity and regenerated it in their characters. Arundhati Roy penetrated all the major elements of female masculinity in her female characters so deeply.

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