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Examining The Roles of Gender in The Narratives of Arundhati Roy

¹Apoorva Mishra and ²Dr. Rashmi Saxena

¹Research Scholar, Shri Krishna University, Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh, India

²Professor, Shri Krishna University, Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh, India

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Corresponding Author: Apoorva Mishra

Abstract

The cultural system of gender is intricately related to the fields of sociology, language, and psychology. The current research examines Queer Theory in great detail as an academic field by zeroing in on the intersection of gender studies, psycholinguistics, and cultural studies. Over the course of human history and in every culture across the globe, the exact nature of masculinity and femininity has been defined in various ways. Society completely downplays and ignores a woman's labor and indefatigable effort, and she sees little value in her economic contributions. Color consciousness is also another major fallout of colonial impact. Biological differences between the sexes are less of a factor than the social interactions that people have with one another and their surroundings when determining gender discrepancies.

Keywords: Gender, Arundhati Roy, language, Queer, and masculinity

1. Introduction

People's ideas about gender, societal expectations, interpersonal dynamics, and the many institutionalizations of gender within a particular culture, ethnic group, region, religion, or government all play a role. In a world where biological sex is separate from socially created gender, there is a great deal of diversity in how individuals, groups, and faiths understand what it means to grow up male or female. When studying queer theory and how it has been institutionalized, it is crucial to look at how "gender" and "sexuality" are defined.

What we mean when we talk about "gender" are the benefits and drawbacks that being a man or a woman brings to one's social, political, economic, and cultural life. Over the course of human history and in every culture across the globe, the exact nature of masculinity and femininity has been defined in various ways. Consequently, it impacts the way people see themselves and one another, as well as the distribution of power and influence in their community. Similar to the biological division of labor into male and female, gender refers to the social classification of male and female identities.

Biological differences between the sexes are less of a factor than the social interactions that people have with one another and their surroundings when determining gender discrepancies. Everyone agrees that gender is something that people make up through their interactions with one another. The interplay between gender and performativity is elucidated by Foucault. Foucault released *Herculine Barbin's* memoirs, which was written by a French hermaphrodite in the 18th century. After living much of her life as a woman, Barbin describes in her memoirs the difficulties of being forced to adopt a male identity. The medical and legal establishments want to classify Barbin as a certain "sex," so they force him to identify as a man.

Beyond the purely physical aspect of a sound track, the fact that men tend to have lower voices than women have several cultural and sociological connotations. In general, males tend to use more accurate language than women do. Women, in contrast, tend to talk more about themselves when they speak. Women and men chat about many things: houses, families, children, food, style, and purchases. Men mostly talk about politics, technology, job, sports, and the army. The fundamental societal roles of the sexes are

associated with these differences.

Reproduction as the primary sexual expression and motherhood as the primary identity might be seen as the responsible woman/sexuality. An abortion disrupts a woman's natural function and transforms her into a non-naturalized woman in this situation since parenting has been normalized. Some women also choose not to have children and want to have same-sex interactions. The process of gender becoming less inherent is known as denaturalization. To put it simply, feminism is an effort to dissect and explain the differences between masculinity and femininity, or the feminine sensibility, experience, and expression. By examining the cultural, social, and psychosomatic constructions of masculinity and femininity, feminism sheds light on the contrasts and similarities that define a woman's feminine-identity or feminine psyche. Our sexuality and gender define us individually, as John Singleton notes. Gender studies, which examine how individuals transform from male to female, have only just been brought under the spotlight by feminists after having long been the domain of male-dominated behavioral scientists.

Gender and sex are different concepts. Although gender is a societal construction, sex is an innate biological characteristic. The difference was likely originally made by the British feminist Ann Oakley in her 1972 book *Sex, Gender, and Society*. This difference is discussed extensively by Mary M. Talbot in her book *Language and Gender*. Genes, gonads, and hormones all play a part in sex, according to her, and it's essentially binary because one is either 'male' or 'female' based on biology. Gender, she argues, is "socially constructed" and "learned" via the acquisition of stereotypically male or female.

Literature Review

Narola Dangti (2014) ^[1] was a doctoral candidate who studied Alan Hollinghurst's and Shyam Selvadurai's novels through the lens of *Queer Talk: The Politics of Transgression*. The goal of this research was to analyse aberrant sexual impulses by analyzing queering homosexuality in the works of Alan Hollinghurst and Shyam Selvadurai. The purpose of this research was to provide a cursory examination of several key concepts related to postmodern sexual identities and gender.

Gouri Mohan (2019) ^[2]. This research takes a look at the gay culture in India by analyzing several stories from books, movies, and the internet. A critical analysis of the construction and disruption of sexual identities in modern Indian stories was the aim of the study. It also looked at the problems that the stories' assumptions about gender and sexual diversity brought up.

Sudhir in *Raj Rao's Hostel Room 131* (2010), Therefore, the stories cast doubt on gay, lesbian, and transgender identities, which exhibit characteristics of the mainstream. To be queer is to question and disrupt these normative inclinations. People on the margins of society in homophobic societies are shown in these tales, and their choices, influenced by the politics of visibility, lead them to seek for positions of normative acceptance. For instance, one could argue that the choices made by Astha in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2002) and both of which depict marriage, represent a return to traditional gender norms. An indigenous Indian queer framework should be developed to understand these

normative tendencies, according to the thesis.

M. Priyakumaran's (2021) ^[3]. In this research, we looked at queer oppression through the lenses of identity and literature, as well as politics, culture, and society. Curiously, several literary works have explored the emotional and intellectual vitality of LGBT people, which has given queer identity a novel perspective. Conversely, the dissertation focusses emphasis on the identities of three separate queers: transgender individuals, homosexuals, and lesbians. Using two films and an autobiography, the researcher delves into the identity of each quiescent Namjoshi's autobiography *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth* (2000), Raj Amit Kumar's *Unfreedom* (2015), and Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1998) all revolve with lesbian identity. Considered here are *Aligarh* (2016) by Hansal Mehta, *My Brother...Nikhil* (2011) by Onir, and *The Man Who Would Be Queen*.

Autobiographical Fictions (2011) by Hoshang Dinshaw Merchant, an autobiography. Some films that address transgender identity include *"Tamanna"* (1998) by Mahesh Bhatt, *"Narthaki: Avanul Pirantha Avan"* (2011) by Vijayapadma, and *"TruthaboutMe: A Hijra Life Story"* (2010) by A. Revathi. Examining the many ways in which these books portray other desires and sexual orientations is essential to queer representation studies. The spatial reclamation raises problems about queer freedom by adding various desire secrets into these writings. The researcher also considers the promotion of lesbian, gay, and transgender persons from a variety of perspectives. At long last, it becomes clear that the works focus on queer conflicts rather than idealized, reality-free utopias.

Gender And Sexuality in The Works of Arundhati Roy

Arundhati Roy's works of fiction *Gender*, caste, class, and racial inequality are all brought to light in *The God of Small Things*, which brings attention to the postcolonial problems of patriarchal cultures' repression and marginalization of women and untouchables. The effects of these problems on relationships and interactions between people in colonial and postcolonial India are also shown.

A little village in Kerala, India, called Ayemenem, is where *The God of Small Things* takes place. There is a lot of bouncing about between 1969 and 1993 to fill in the gaps in the novel's events. This article chronicles the fall from grace of the once-prominent Ayemenem-based anglicized Syrian Christian Ipe family. Rahel and Estha, the youngest twins from a broken South Indian family, reunite at the beginning of the book. In the story, the twins' upbringing by their mother Ammu, grandmother Mammachi, grandpa Pappachi, uncle Chacko, and aunt Baby Kochamma is chronicled.

"The problem is more with how the conceptual construction of gender maintains masculine dominance, both as an object of insurgency and in and of itself. Particularly for female subalterns, the lack of history and the inability to communicate within the framework of colonial production casts them into an even darker shade.

Three female characters, one from each of the colonial and postcolonial eras, provide light on the marginalization and subaltern status of Indian women in *God of Small Things*. As representatives of the first generation, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma subtly recognize the dominance of men. They accept the conventional patriarchal rules because they are self-aware and know they are subservient. Mammachi,

whose given name is Soshamma, is Rahel's grandmother, Ammu and Chacko's mom, and the customary house mistress. Right from the start of the book, she is shown as a submissive wife. In order to fit in with the patriarchal culture, she follows all of the rules. She wishes she could join the faceless mass. She disregards her own unique identity in favor of fitting in with the gender norms. Rather than challenging patriarchal subjugation, she believes she and her daughter should conform to it in order to demonstrate their worth to society.

Society completely downplays and ignores a woman's labor and indefatigable effort, and she sees little value in her economic contributions. Pappachi, an esteemed entomologist and the son of a famous reverend, cruelly excludes Mammachi from society. Throughout her life, she endures the abuse of her spouse. Her spouse brutally beats her with a metal vase or a riding crop with an ivory handle. Without raising an objection, she silently endures her husband's thrashing. Even when her spouse abuses their daughter Ammu, she remains silent.

The fact that Mammachi is so gifted musically, particularly on the violin, makes her husband green with envy. When they were younger Mammachi had great promise as a violinist. When Mammachi's instructor, Launsky-Tieffenthal, "made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented and, in his opinion, potentially concert class," the lessons were suddenly halted, as she puts it (Roy 50). A night later, he shatters the violin's bow and tosses it into the river. When she begins a company manufacturing pickles, the same envy is voiced again. "Though Mammachi had conical corners blind, Pappachi would not help her with the pickle-making because he did not consider pickle-making a suitable job for a high-ranking ex-Government official," the writer explains. He hated that everyone was staring at his wife all of a sudden since he was a jealous guy at heart.

Gender Discrimination

Small Things' Deity accurately portrayed the challenges faced by women within a traditional, male-dominated framework, as they sought to establish their place in society. There were a lot of ifs and buts and flip-flops in India's social construction of women. Roy delved into the predicament faced by the female characters representing three generations in an Ayemenem family-Mammachi, Ammu, Margret, and Rahel-while keeping the lives of these generations in mind. She highlighted the plight of the women who struggled to have meaningful relationships with their spouses. Despite not compromising with their male counterparts and instead choosing to separate ways, Ammu, Rahel, and Margret missed out on the chance to forge their own identity while married.

Ammu, our heroine, was an abandoned lady who longed for love, freedom, and fulfillment. The narrator painted a vivid picture of Ammu's life from her formative years as a kid and adolescent to her marriage, her parenting duties, and her eventual metamorphosis into a revolutionary wife who challenged the patriarchal Indian social order and male chauvinism. Roy painted a gruesome picture of a traditional marriage in which the man acts as the domineering head of the household.

An Indian who had been exposed to Western culture,

Pappachi had an inflated sense of self-importance and harbored unreasonable grudges against his wife Mammachi. The irrationality of her male companion was too much for Mammachi to bear. She was a tragic figure—a quiet victim whose violent marriage and treatment by her father, Pappachi, made her a miserable character. She patiently and submissively suffered the dominance of the patriarch. "Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase," Pappachi would say to his elderly wife Mammachi, a method he used to assert his dominance and control over her. There had been prior beatings. The only novel aspect was the regularity with which they occurred.

Post Colonialism and The God of Small Things

Post Colonialism has a few limitations as a theory as it is dragged into the controversy as to whether it really has as its theoretical foundation, structure and totality or the politics of fragments. The polemical contestation between Marxism and post modernism is another confining factor. Post modernists are worried about the post-colonial theory being usurped by the advocates of "totalizing methods". The universality of the theory is another area of concern like the issue of universal feminism. All cultures and societies do not share the same experiences of colonialism. The methods employed in the course of anti-colonial struggles are also varied.

But most post-colonial analyses hold on to the theory of universal exclusive history. Post colonialists also fail to recognize the innumerable forms of colonization. The pretensions made by different sections to claim the contemporary mileages of subalternity is another serious matter of concern. The creative assertiveness of post-colonial writers is in fact a compromise between imperial culture and native practices. Post colonialism unwisely identifies itself with the end of colonialism while conducive atmosphere for further colonization still exists.

The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy's lone novel which is rated as a critique of middle-class Indian society won the Booker prize in 1997. Arundhati Roy the activist writer has remained alive to the attempts of capitalist patriarchy to degrade the environment in course of the so-called development. She experienced the pains of a broken family at a very young age and the sharp experiences appear to have fine-tuned her female sensibilities and she insists that her writing should not be separated from her activism. She has campaigned with Medha Patkar against the Narmada Dam project and has contributed substantially for The Narmada Bachao Andolan. Her stand on imperialism, US policies, Globalization, Indian nuclear policies and Kashmir has created controversies in India.

The Social Evils of The Caste System

An elderly Christian couple named Pappachi and Mammachi had a business called Paradise Pickles & Preserves, and their family tree was told in The God of Small Things. The majority of the events occurred in Ayemenem, and the cultural and social life of Kerala mirrored that of people who had experienced social exclusion as a result of various social institutions, including but not limited to: parenthood, wrongful marriage, the caste-bound Indian social system, male-female relationships, male chauvinism, taboos, harsh discrimination, and double-

standards of morality stemming from unfair religious and political regulations.

"Ayemenem may be regarded as a sample to project Kerala's natural beauty and the ugliness of the people's life and failure of the system-social and governmental-to provide a healthy life to its people," reads Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things: Narrative Discourse and Linguistic Experiment." The octopus-like authority of religious, social, and political ills in Ayemenem ultimately ensnared life there. Ammu, Mammachi, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma were among the characters who were unjustly repressed by these sexist hegemonic forces.

A strong condemnation of the societal ills associated with the caste system, which had been more harshly and coarsely enforced in southern India than in the rest of India, *The God of Small Things*. There were two major divisions in Indian society: the touchable and the untouchables. Educated and well-off households were the ones that could be touched. This included the Pappachi family, who exhibited a wide range of social classes, perspectives, and educational backgrounds throughout the narrative. The untouchables, on the other hand, were members of India's lowest caste who lacked education and wealth. Velutha, a member of India's lowest caste, the Paravan, was one of the untouchable characters in the book.

Post-Colonial Remembrance

The star musician Elvis Presley has influenced the boy so much that he arranges his hair in his manner. Perhaps the alien culture forced on them results in a sort of identity crisis for the children. The children obviously suffer from a sense of loss which is a very important feature of post-colonial literature. K V Surendran in his book *The God of small things A saga of lost dreams* goes to the extent of saying that it is not the characters alone that suffer in the novel.

The novel is a chronicle of lost dreams from the point of view of the characters who are destined to play their respective roles" (K V Surendran 14). Estha and Rahel from whose perspective the narrative blossoms are twins who in appearance are not look alike. But as far as their thought processes go they can perceive each other's minds. They get forcibly separated at the tender age of seven or eight and this loss is the hardest one for them to bear. Their agony gets manifested in the form of indifference in one and silence in the other.

Estha when he is returned to the Ayemenem house has stopped talking altogether. The indifference observed in the eyes of Rahel intimidated even her husband. Surendran argues that loss is very much evident as Estha and Rahel did not even have a surname (Arundhati Roy 27).

Estha and Rahel were forcibly taught by Baby Kochamma and their dislike manifested in the form of perverted reading. They lost the pleasure of education. Almost all characters of the novel suffer losses. The oldest character referred to in the family history of Ayemenem house is Reverent Ipe who could not fulfil his dream of happily marrying out his only daughter Navomi Ipe. His son Pappachi who was a noted entomologist lost the opportunity of the insect located by him being named after him.

Critique of Subalternity

He is compassionate and develops fond liking for Estha and Rahel without any selfish motives. But laws framed by age old history negates his innate goodness and it is relevant that he gets booked in the back veranda of the History house. He ventured into an ominous love relationship knowing fully well what in fact was in store for him. Exploitation of labor and caste discrimination were rampant in central Travancore and even 'Converted Christians' were not spared.

The untouchable Velutha is the Godin "*The God of Small Things*". He represents a change among the downtrodden and the society which is comfortable with the present unjust laws, sacrifices him for no real reason. But then the fact that he dared to challenge the laws framed by the society talks volumes of his capability and proves the fact that subalterns at least try occasionally though in vain to represent their issues with courage.

Velutha's death unwittingly involves some others and they never recover from their sense of betrayal. Along with the treachery meted out to Velutha, a graver crime of making innocent children have a troubled conscience expose a society which has not shed its colonial character even a little bit. The colonized people develop a distorted identity as history, culture, language, customs and beliefs get imposed by the colonizer who get impelled to consider this as the superior normative. We have in the novel a host of characters who develop a we for the westernized natives and the English woman Margaret Kochamma is revered because of her white skin and Kochu Maria becomes eloquent when she visualizes Sophie Mol as her future Kochamma.

The servile attitude shown towards people with a better grasp of the English language underscores the perspective that attributes special value to Westerners and to the upper middle-class culture. We have Chacko who pretends to be a revolutionary quoting verbatim from English stories and children intentionally coaxed into anglicized way of living. Even Mammachi is troubled because of the indifference shown by her grandchildren to imitate perfect western nascent. In Postcolonial Theory as Gandhiji was able to recognize, "The slave's hypnotized gaze upon the master condemned this figure to a derivative existence" (Leela Gandhi 21). Gandhiji approached the problem thus: "that we want the English rule without the English man. You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger..." (Leela Gandhi 30).

Color consciousness is also another major fallout of colonial impact. The glorification of anything western is done in the novel by Baby Kochamma and all compete in trying to impress the English waitress, Margaret Kochamma. In fact, Arundhati Roy is saddened by the fact that this kind of defective perception actually uproots the native and he is finally left without even a language of his own. "We are the prisoners of war. Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed a shore. Our sorrows will never be sad enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives never important enough to matter" (Arundhati Roy 53).

Survival Strategies

Baby Kochamma was placed in charge of Estha and Rahel's

formal schooling, and they protested against her. While being taught Shakespeare by Baby Kochamma and her Australian missionary companion, Miss Mitten, in a forceful manner, they would read everything backwards. When they taught Miss Mitten how to read "Malayalam" backwards and forwards, it was like turning the tables on her. It was an effort by the kid subalterns to fight against the forced use of a language that was not their own. The kids got what they deserved when Miss Mitten filed a formal complaint. They were instructed to write it a hundred times so that they would never again have to read backwards. Miss Mitten was murdered by a milk van in Hobart as it was reversing a few months later, which is pertinent.

Renovations were made to the historical home as tourism flourished. For the enjoyment of the visitors, shortened Kathakali performances were staged. The Kathakali performers did this as a profession and then found solace in performing for the Lord. Such subaltern statements are ignored because they are not overtly protestive. Kochu Maria raised her hands to her nose as a sign of affectionate greeting to Sophie Mol upon her arrival at the Ayemenem residence. Sophie Mol and Margaret were intrigued by this display of devotion. After her angry reaction, Ammu came to terms with the fact that people may have many sexual orientations. fact that people may have many sexual orientations.

Mammachi's effort to manage the Paradise pickles can be seen as a classic example of a woman trying to assert her independence. But Mammachi despised her daughter in law Margaret as she was a shop keeper's daughter. Mammachi had regarded her son as her only love and even went out of the way to make arrangements for satisfying his feudal libido.

Ammu who was subjected to indifferent treatment at home learnt as she grew older to live with this cold, cruelty. "She did exactly nothing to avoid quarrels and confrontations. In fact, it could be argued that she sought them out, perhaps even enjoyed them. This was another subaltern technique tried out by Ammu. Estha's plan to go akkara (across the river) was because he feared that anything could happen to anyone and so it was best to be prepared. To Rahel's question whether they may have to become communists Estha answers apprehensively that they might have to. Dreaming happily about the future is one way of expressing one's sub alterity and unhappiness. Though unreal it takes you away from pain of the present. Estha asks Ammu

"If you are happy in a dream, Ammu does that count?
Does what count?

The happiness-does it count?" (Arundhati Roy 218).

She knew exactly what he meant. Her son with his spoiled puff. The truth is that only what counts.

Sometimes even madness is a technique feigned by the subalterns. Chacko said that the high incidence of insanity among Syrian Christians was the price they paid for inbreeding. Mammachi said it was not. The artists and cultural performers make use of their art forms to get relief from their subalternity through their performances. Subalterns realize the importance of sticking together in the milieu of the aggressors sparing no effort to perpetuate their dominance. "Promise you'll always love each other she'd

say, as she drew her children to her. "Promise", Estha and Rahel would say. Not finding words with which to tell her that for them there was no each, no other"

Conclusion

Social stratification and gender norms are harmful to individuals and society as a whole, say post genderism advocates. Postcolonial concerns about the oppression and marginalization of women and untouchables in patriarchal cultures were brought to light in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. It has looked at how gender, caste, class, and race all play a role in prejudice in Indian culture. Gender inequality was investigated via Ammu's marital and intercommunal relationships. The effects of these problems on relationships and interactions between people in colonial and postcolonial India are also shown. Biological differences between the sexes are less of a factor than the social interactions that people have with one another and their surroundings when determining gender discrepancies.

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