



# Aesthetics of Feminism

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## ABSTRACT

Feminist post-colonial literary text can avoid being seduced into eurocentric values only if it locates the female experience in the specific, socio-cultural context in which it is produced and received. The positionality of the female post colonial writer and the authenticity of her awareness of female subalternity may produce a counter hegemonic discourse that can seek to dismantle the metropolitan canons governing the categories of imperialist culture.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak fears that the discourse of the world's privileged societies dictates the configuration of the rest and the place of radical feminism within that discourse. So she is not happy with the intervention of Western feminism and attempts to correct gender blindness of the counter hegemonic modes of cultural analysis. She critiques the Western feminists' self interested intervention on behalf of the subaltern women and describes the international feminism as a discourse of and about the developed West, the engagement of which with the others disguises an often patronizing mission of intervention on behalf of its disadvantaged sisters.

KEYWORDS – patriarchal , anticolonial , seriocomical , anti-imperialist , anticolonial.

## INTRODUCTION

The God of Small Things. Roy attempts to fashion her artistic strategy with the help of the intense awareness of her role as a feminist operating in a post-colonial situation. The essentialist formulation of feminist sensibility that is crystallized out of socio- economic factors peculiar to her society does not regress into narrow nationalist orthodoxy. All the same it contests the European theoretical propositions and calls for new feminist paradigms.

The God of Small Things is basically a saga novel that depicts the life, destiny and fluctuating fortunes of three generations of a Syrian X'ian family in Ayemenam, a sleepy village in central Travancore. The problems of patriarchal domination and female subalternity and the clash between the two are rooted in the specific geocultural reality of Ayemenam. Of the male characters, Pappachi and Chacko represent phallocratic hegemony. They are created out of the peculiar post-colonial situation that prevailed in Kerala, in the fifties and sixties. Pappachi, as the son of Rev. Ipe, the one blessed directly by the Patriarch of Antioch, is a typical member of an upper middle class Christian family. He has the middle class ambitions which in those days are affiliated to getting anglicised. The novelist comments sarcastically on the carefully maintained imperialist

postures of the family. "They were a family of Anglophiles pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away". Pappachi seems to be one of those post-Independence Indian urban elites who has not understood the difference between being English and being Anglicised. Homi K. Bhabha in the essay "of Mimicry and Man" (1984) included in his *Location of Culture* emphasizes that the difference between the two terms sustains the distinction between the colonizing and colonized subjects on which colonial control depends. Pappachi had been an imperial Entomologist at the Pusa Institute. After Independence his designation was changed from Imperial Entomologist to Joint Director, Entomology. In him, Patriarchal authoritarianism coincides with misogynistic misdemeanours manifest in his violence towards his wife Mammachi, and daughter, Ammu. After retirement he moves to Ayemenem. but tries to create an exotic and outlandish little England there. He buys the skyblue Plymouth from an English man and becomes a familiar sight in Ayemenem, coasting importantly down the narrow road in his wide car; looking outwardly elegant but sweating freely inside his woollen suits. Roy exposes his European predilections: "Until the day he died, even in the stifling Ayemenam heat every single day, Pappachi wore a well-pressed three piece suit and his gold pocket watch. On his dressing table, next to his cologne and silver hair brush he kept a picture of himself as a young man, with his hair slicked down, taken in a photographer's studio in Vienna where he had done the six month diploma course that had qualified him to apply for the post of Imperial Entomologist". Roy's irreverent and seriocomic comments on an Anglicized tyrannizing and wife-beating man can be read as a discourse where the anticolonial and anti-patriarchal impulses intersect. He is suspicious of the emerging woman finding a voice and a vocation for herself. He can't relish the idea of sending a girl for higher education. Nor can he appreciate his wife's efficient management of the affairs of the family's "paradise Pickles Factory". Ammu uses scathing and even blasphemous language to deflate the vanity and Eurocentric pretensions of an authoritarian father whose extremely desensitized ways and interventions had traumatized her childhood. She calls him an incurable 'CCP' which was short for chhi-chhipoach which means shit-wiper. Ammu's conflict with patriarchy often assumes anti-imperialist dimensions. She never loses a chance to condemn the hypocritical and Oxford educated Chacko's claims to sophistication and higher civilization. She can only sympathize with her mother who considers him prime-ministerial stuff. Roy puts him in a ridiculously absurd situation by making him love and marry an English waitress who walks out of that marriage soon after. He is often caricatured as moronic and emasculated, full of infatuation for things British. His love for communism is part of his ideological pretensions the absurdity of which is exposed when he is outwitted a number of times by the cold calculating ever-manipulating politician Com. KNM Pillai.

Chacko's authoritarian and metropolitan proclivities are latent in his attempt to appropriate the family property. The degenerate social system in Kerala that denied property rights to Christian women and prevented them from enjoying equal rights with men has undone Ammu. There is double standard even for morality. Mammachi herself takes care of Chacko's erotic needs by conveniently arranging girls for him. But Ammu's transgressions are considered irreversible violation of moral codes.

Ammu challenges the defiled social order and what it represents first, by marrying a man of her choice and then breaking that marriage and getting entangled in a forbidden love. Velutha epitomizes the negation of all that she detests in Chacko and perhaps Pappachi. The subaltern speaks through him and resists the inequitable process of minoritization. By positioning him in a social context full of revolutionary potential Roy seems to equate desubalternization with a kind of cultural syncretism. Ammu seeks to unsettle the formidable structures of an irrelevant socio-cultural order by interrogating the traditional grammar of love. Through their iconoclastic ways Ammu and Velutha construct on aesthetics of destruction. They tend to demolish all

orthodoxies and ideologies which have outlived their relevance. Ammu is an unmixable mix and combines in her "the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber". She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness "Velutha housed a living breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against".

Roy's protest against male chauvinism and her deprivileging of a societal coherence triggered by the careful exclusion of certain kinds of experience is carried on symbolically by Ammu and Rahel. Both of them like Velutha because he represents the beauty of the marginal, and the subaltern. He is nature and instinct and is symbolic of unsullied precolonial culture surviving the Western cultural incursions. Humanism and creativity coexist in his revolutionary sensibility validating the reformulation of an ideology that is fast breaking up with the erosion of its human centrality.

Roy has evinced a well-defined feminist sensibility in the selection and organization of her fictional materials. She has chosen to reconstruct the countryside and its life that she knew so well in order to produce a counter discourse, and has given a local habitation and a name to her feminist concerns. Driven by an intense urge to discover her own identities she undertakes an imaginative recreation of her social and cultural traditions. She takes recourse to the device of carnivalistic debasing to oppose the official culture. Her tendency to profane the sacred is in keeping with her strategies to expose the limitations of religious and cultural orthodoxies. Baby Kochamma's amorous inclinations towards the Irish monk who was not so sure about his saintly defence and the blasphemous treatment of her sexual repressions are calculated to bring about the defrocking of false religio- cultural structures based on sustained sublimation of erotic instincts. Roy attempts to demolish the artificial and desensitized world with the help of the primeval energy released from the coy timidity of a noble savage. She upholds the values of folk art and culture to reinforce her battle against the evils of urbanization and technocratization. Scenes from "Duryodhanavadham" and "Karnasapadham" seek to provide a regional identity to Roy's cultural assertions, though they basically remain as objective correlatives to the atrocities perpetrated on Velutha and the ineffable agony of a mother's intense love for her children. Roy's environmental concerns endorse her affinity towards a simple and uncorrupted life.

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