

# Empathetic Outlook on the Distressed and Devastated Lives of the Women

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## Abstract

Feminism is the most debated topic and is consistently explored in the writings of both men and women. Though there are a large number of theories to support feminists, are they really supporting them or in the name of support, trying to manipulate and dictate their existence? Even after ages, female subordination remains unchanged. When it comes to men, be it a father, a husband or a son, they take it for granted that a woman is provided with whatever she needs. She need not struggle like men. They assume that the material resources are abundantly supplied to keep her contented. Is it exactly what a human being needs? It can be a man or a woman; emotions dominate physical desires. Perhaps one needs individuality and distinctiveness. While the first wave of feminism left the voices of women unrestrained, the second wave of feminism voiced the voices of the unvoiced women. There are diverse ways to view and perceive the problems related to women. On one hand, general hermeneutics deals with interpretation, more precisely with the meaning of texts and the ways in which they are understood, while on the other hand feminist hermeneutics is an approach aiming to address the patriarchal biases and oppressive structures that have shaped their understanding from the past. How does hermeneutics allegorically or accurately analyse the suppressed lives of women? The present article is going to focus on the eminent feminists such as Arundhati Roy, Rajam Krishnan and Manju Kapur's views interpreting the subtle realities behind the hidden grief of the victims through the writer's lens.

**KEYWORDS:** Patriarchal domination, suppression, compassion, cultural factors and so on.

## INTRODUCTION:

Feminist Hermeneutics was not a much-recognised subject in the past and Feminism was also remote. The year 1963 is central in the history, where Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* schematically and significantly reopened the question of female and male. From then men and women began to question their prominence, pronounce judgement and were filled with remorse. They began to embrace a visionary outlook. As a small seed can develop into a big banyan tree, feminism was just a sapling in the beginning, but with vigorous strength it developed its branches and grew into an independent tree. Be it a developed, developing or underdeveloped world, nothing is miles away from the patriarchal domination, may be as many writers opine history of theology is marked by patriarchal bias. In times gone by, the words 'gender' and 'sex' advocated male domination and female subordination. 'Patriarchy' described the male dominance over women whether it was inside or outside their home. Though patriarchy directly doesn't curb the power of women or turn them as victims, women were subjugated for ages. On the other hand, dogmatically, the belief is the rule of male over female constitutes sin.

It is not essential that all feminists should hold the same opinion on feminism or dogmatism. Some strive for reformation; some seek transformation and some anathematize dogmatic religious beliefs. It might be that the feminists want to redeem the past and revivify the present. The role of a feminist hermeneutic is to even out the interpretative imbalance because they cannot simply discard the universal truths by taking into consideration one particular social structure or experience of oppression. They have to reckon with the human experience in general and obviously it draws attention to women's palpable experience of suppression which can be considered as a valid observance. Obviously, a feminist hermeneutic tries hard to be open-ended, because these help them intensely identify and interpret the meaning of the text. The underlying meaning of the interpretation should certainly enhance the life of the new woman.

### FEMININE WORLD IN A FEMINIST'S THOUGHT-PIECE

'She has effectively and efficiently shown the dilemma of women in Indian society.' When the question is 'who is she?' every reader has a handful of names to quote 'she'. Most of the post-modern feminist writers have focused and wonderfully dealt with the ordeals that their companions had to face. One among those writers is Arundhati Roy and the 'she' referred to in the above lines is the feminist who focused on their identity, economic and social liberty. Analogous to the writers of her age, she portrays her female characters as not mere role-players but as autonomous and liberated characters. Undoubtedly the novel *The God of Small Things* (1996) a semi-autobiographical work represents how an individual is influenced and shaped by his brought up, especially childhood experiences. Roy undeniably discloses the gender inequalities, social constraints and pressure from a patriarchal society.

Though *The God of Small Things* is her debut novel, it is a striking tale of women who are victims of mistreatment, hostility, exile and violence. The novel is gripping with the moving tales of women belonging to different generations. It's not an exaggeration, when one says everyone's, life is a soul stirring story, but every woman's life is a touching and tender tale filled with trauma. The Greek word 'trauma', traumatizes every individual. B N Thompson in his *Psychology of Trauma* states, "Trauma means an emotional or psychological consequence of a stressful or even life-threatening event." (Thompson and Simon 17). A good number of women experience both. The central character in Roy's novel, Ammu, craving for eternal peace and love enters an inter-communal marriage, which turns out to be a disaster. Though her father Pappachi was a scientist, his life experiment was a fiasco as he couldn't give a blissful life to his family. Ammu remains as a divorced mother, unable to soothe her life or her twins' lives. Is it not pity that twins who are born together, were brought up separately? It also affected their personal, emotional and social life.

Neither Mammachi, Ammu nor Rahel had successful marriages. May be the generation gap made Ammu and Rahel to take a stand on their life. But regrettably, both lives were affected by social stigma for opposing the societal constraints. As Roy clearly portrays how an unhealthy patriarchy can ruin generations, the lives of Ammu, Rahel and Estha stand as the best examples. Though educated in a sophisticated country, Chacko remains the same under the spell of his father. His daughter Sophie Mol is the victim of a broken family who tragically dies in an accident drowning her mother into the sea of sorrow. When we take into consideration the lives of the women of different generations, a dismal picture emerges. Baby Kochamma's unreciprocated love turns her into a resentful old woman, Mammachi an entrepreneur and unyielding woman remains a toy in the hands of her husband, Ammu, a strong and independent woman is ostracized for divorcing her husband and having a relation with a man

from an untouchable caste, Margaret, a self-reliant woman was desolate with two deaths and Rahel, emotionally downtrodden, denied of parental love. The novel written in 1997 delineates the pathetic condition of women controlled and dictated by the domineering patriarchal society.

When it comes to religious beliefs, Roy is transparent in showing the supreme reality of the Indians. How stubbornly insular Indians are with respect to caste as it is an integral part of the Hindu society. It is quite amusing that the word 'caste' was first used by the Portuguese travellers, which was called as 'jati' by Indian. But we retained caste and made it a dominant word. Roy has discussed how people from lower castes converted to Christianity for the sake of respect and dignity which was completely denied in their religion. But it was very unfortunate as Roy says, "When the British came to Malabar, several Paravans ... converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican church to escape the scourge of untouchability. It did not take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire they were made to have separate churches with separate priests." (Roy 74).

### **TOO DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT DAUGHTERS:**

The second writer whose work is also autobiographical and presents a clear conflict between modern daughters and traditional mothers. Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) written during the turbulent days of the country fighting against the British to attain freedom. Whether it is the country's independence or a woman's independence a lot of sacrifice is needed. Sometimes it may cost many lives. Everyone is clear with how many sacrificed their lives for making India free from the colonial rule. But none can accept a woman fighting at the cost of other lives. The opening statement of the novel makes every reader dismayed when Ida the daughter of the central character says, 'The one thing I had wanted was not to be like my mother' (Kapur 1). Again, we have a glimpse of three generations in the novel. Kasturi, who belongs to a hidebound age, her daughter Virmati, who rebels and stands for her individuality and Ida, a childless divorcee, an epitome of a modern woman. Kasturi wanted her daughter Virmati to lead a safe and secured life like her. Virmati fell in love with a married man and marred the reputation of her family with her marriage.

Manju Kapur's breaks the traditional setups of the well-reputed societies who care more for values and repute than anything else in the world. Virmati's marriage had consumed the lives of her father and grandfather. Shakuntala and Virmati emerge as new women breaking the norms of their customs. For Shakuntala it was just a child's play, whereas for Virmati it was definitely an uphill battle. She yearned for affection, but it remained a mirage, as her mother was continuously engaged in giving birth to her siblings and never thought of what Virmati yearned for. The journey of a daughter to unfold the unknown reality of her mother after her death reveals the vulnerable position of women amidst a huge family. Neither accepted by her own family nor her in-law's family. Virmati was ostracized.

Men are men alike, the professor who was the strength and support of Virmati, showed his true colours when it was the time for him to marry Virmati. The courage she shows is really commendable. She questions,

'I break my engagement because of you, blacken my family's name, am locked up inside my house, get sent to Lahore because no one knows what to do with me. Here I am in the position. Of being your secret wife, full of shame, wondering what people will say if they find me out, not being able to live in peace, study in peace ... and why?'" (Kapur 149)

Ganga, his wife who was uneducated, though docile was also a victim of the male domination. She cries not able to understand what was her mistake that her husband to choose another wife. Her mother-in-law

also asks her to accept destiny. People accept the mistakes of men, but cannot when it comes to women. When Virmati's father died, she went to the funeral, they didn't talk to her, but on the other hand, they accepted Harish. Why? Be it in North India or South India, people have great regard for their sons-in-law; the fault is only with their own blood. Disgusting and ridiculous.

### SWIRLS AND WHIRLS IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

'To me literature should deeply assess the contemporary issues, trends and their situations in the society: analyse and interpret them to the present-day context and suggest creative and practical solutions.' Smt Rajam Krishnan, a reflective and relatable writer of Tamil Nadu has rightly mentioned the above lines in an introduction to one of her novels, because they truly mirror her writings. Born in an orthodox brahmin family, she depicts the pathetic lives of the suppressed race through her short stories and novels. From a fisherfolk to a life of Badaga Hill Tribes of Nilgris, every character, every emotion, every situation and every tale has been penned down from the school of hard knocks. Her women characters either cast off the shackles, fly the coop or take the ball into their court. Though born in 1920s, her ideas were avant-garde, her comments were sagacious, her observation was astute and her writings were commonsensical.

She has voluminous writings to her credit. A translated novel of hers *Lamps in the Whirlpool* attracted me a lot, of course, may be the same with every woman, because the story connects to the modern women also. Despite the buzzing and booming of the terms globalization and modernization, the patriarchal domination is inevitable. Girija, a bird in the cage was trapped under the societal norms and family customs. She was just treated as a robo who functions under the control of her husband and mother-in-law. Though educated she never fought for her rights. When her niece Ratna says, "Tell Girija, you are imprisoned in the four dark walls of this tiny kitchen where your education and skills are wasted. Girija, are you happy with this life?" (Narayan and Seetharam<sup>12</sup>), she realises that she was not less to a slave. Happiness, miles away from her life. She moves to Haridwar, discovers herself and returns home but unfortunately, she was not permitted to enter the house.

Certainly, women do not have a right to be what they are. They have no chance to create space for themselves, express their feelings, fulfil their desires and live according to their wishes. Though she is helped by her friends, what happens to her daughters, who need their mother? Will they be trapped in the family customs? Home is the place where everyone feels comfortable and contented, but for many women, the same house is a cage. The exploitation of women by men or women makes everyone to question; are customs and traditions for emancipating or ruining a woman's life?

### CONCLUSION:

To whatever country or state, women may belong, they need to be respected and treated with dignity. Our puranas have given a high position for women. Let us not forget that. The argus eyed writers Roy, Kapur and Krishnan left no stone unturned to understand and ease the atrocities against women. As Francis Schussler Fiorenza (1991:97) observes: "Although feminist theory and hermeneutical theory coincide in their criticism of theological appeals to experience as unmediated, feminist theology also offers a critique of hermeneutical theory that is equally important for theology." For the same David Tracy asserts the actuality of sexism as "A new, explicitly feminist hermeneutics of suspicion has been forged by feminist thought to spot and answer not only the error, but the systemic, unconscious distortions likely to be present in all our traditions and theologies." (1991:124).

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