

4. REINVENTING WOMANHOOD

“The situation of woman is that – she a free and autonomous being like all creatures – nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other.”

(Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*)

“Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time. Women have had less intellectual freedom.”

(Virginia Woolf: *A Room of one's own*)

Every culture is judged by the quality of life available to its woman and children. The subject of women's freedom attains new dimensions when viewed from this perspective. There is an urgent need not only to understand the world but also to change it to the advantage of women. In this respect, feminism is an ideology of women's liberation. It was from this worldwide movement for women's liberation that the term feminism originated. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, feminism is the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of equality of the sexes. The term was first used by Alexander Dumas in 1872 in a pamphlet L' Homme femme' to designate the then emerging movement for women's right. Gradually, it spread through out the world and became a movement to secure complete equality between man and woman in the enjoyment of human rights – moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal, economic and so on. In this way, feminism is an expression of resentment at the unequal status of women in society. It therefore, seeks to discover and change the deep-seated causes of women's oppression, thereby giving importance to the notions of truth, justice, equality and freedom.

It is indeed true that women's emancipation in India started after the contact with the British. During this period, the leaders of the Bengal Renaissance like Raja Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar advocated education for girls, widow's right to remarriage and prohibited child marriages. However, the question of women's freedom

and equality emerged as a political issue only during the freedom movement. During these eventful decades of the freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi provided women the much-needed platform to liberate India and to liberate themselves in the process. The salt satyagraha, with its simplicity and symbolic strength, sparked off a series of non-violent protests. With its sheer simplicity, the revolt reached Indian homes and women in large numbers came out into the open to demand the rights of the Indian people. It was the first major organized effort by the Indian women for attaining freedom and instilled confidence in them about their inner strength.

The fact remains that the political struggle in India was preceded by cultural assertion. There was national pride of having had a glorious past. Also, there was an acceptance of new ideas from the west, which fostered the spirit of liberty and equality. Women's question received much attention. And certainly, India had a more purposeful women's movement than in the west. It was broad-based and was not limited merely to a narrow vision based on sex. Demanding complete Independence in every sphere of life, Subhash Chandra Bose asserted:

Once we have loved freedom for freedom's sake, we could never endure anything that fostered bondage or inequality. We should always be on our guard so that we might apply the basic principles of total freedom to all spheres of our life, be that political, economic or social. Our motto would be to allow every opportunity to the flowering of the inborn potentiality of all human beings, irrespective of sex (qtd. in Grower : 233).

Rammohan Roy also exposed the social inequities and the necessity for justice in the lives of women. Speaking against the general view that women are inferior, Rammohan Roy raised a poignant question: "As to their inferiority in point of understanding, when did you afford them a fair opportunity of exhibiting their natural capacity? How then can you accuse them of want of understanding?" (26)

Needless to say, women's struggle for total liberation depends a lot on the thinking and commitment of the society as a whole. Fortunately, changes in the socio-

economic conditions in the recent past have awakened a new consciousness about women's life and problems. Women are making efforts to assert their own identity and freedom. Most of the women writers have used the medium of literature to illuminate female experience, their search for identity and their quest for the definition of the self. John Stuart Mill has rightly observed:

We may safely assert that the knowledge that men can acquire of women, even as they have been or are, without reference to what they might be, is wretchedly imperfect and superficial and will always be so until women themselves have told all they have to tell (qtd. in Das : 148)

Feminism in Indian literature was contributed by the western feminist movement as well as our freedom struggle, independence, spread of education, concern for economic development, employment opportunities and new awareness of women. In Indian-English fiction, feminism is an extension of existentialism. The novels by women writers focus on the existential struggle by women to establish her identity, assert her individuality and to exist as a separate entity. In their writings, they talk about 'female space', which in the colonial context, also include 'inner space' 'introspection' and Indian identity. The feminine consciousness evident in Indian English fiction by women writers clearly reveals an inner enthusiasm. Certainly, they suggest the beginnings of a fresh awakening.

An analysis of novels by Indian women writers in English reveals an urge to express the agonies and suffering of women. The early women writers, newly educated in English, used the English language as an effective instrument to project their social situation. Bibliographical records show that women novelists in India have been producing fiction as early as the 1870 s. Toru Dutt wrote *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden*, published posthumously in 1878. The other women writings during this period were *The Hindu Wife* (1876) by Raj Laxmi Debi, Krupabai's *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) and *Saguna, A Story Of Native Christian Life* (1895), *Meenakshi's Memoirs* (1937) By H. Kaveribai. The List Also Includes Svarna Kumari Ghosal's *The Fatal Garland* (1915) And Cornelia Sorabji's *Love And Life Behind The Purdah* (1901)

The early women novelists committed to writings in English, had to face many problems. Firstly, there was the difficulty of writing in a newly acquired alien language. Secondly, women's segregation in Indian households limited their exposure. Also, the cultural ideals of Sita, Savitri and Shakuntala imposed on women, exerted an influence on these writers. Under the pressure of their marginalized situation and the lack of any guiding tradition, the early women novelists therefore turned to romanticism, sentimentalism and didacticism. However, women's writing in India attained maturity only when a new group of writers flooded the scene. This second group of women's writings includes – Iqbalunnisa Hussain's *Purdah and Polygamy*, *Life of an Indian Muslim Household* (1945), Zeenath Futehally's *Zohra* (1951) and Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961). All three novels offer authentic presentations of the life of Muslim women. The other novels included in this group are Venu Chitale's *In Transit* (1950) and Santha Rama Rau's *Remember the House* (1956). *In Transit* depicts the period between 1915 and 1934, an age which witnessed significant changes in the political, social and economic spheres. The novel reflects the changing pattern of life in a Maharashtrian joint family. *Remember the House* also deals with the pressures of the joint family. In this way, both the novels portray the social, economic and political pressures during the period.

The second group of women writers, thus offer a convincing picture of the life and society of their times. There is a marked improvement in thematic presentation. The three most outstanding women writers of this group are unquestionably Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala and Anita Desai. While Kamala Markandaya offers us a tragic vision of life, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala brings European sensibility to Indian writing. Anita Desai, through her women protagonists looks at the predicament of women's struggle for self-realisation.

It is the third group of women novelists who have captured the literary scene in India and else where. With their originality, these women novelists have earned their rightful place among the great writers of the world. Gita Hariharan, Jhumpa Lahiri, Nayantara Sahgal and Arundhati Roy, with their excellence both in thought and expression represent the new Indian woman. Expressing her views about the changing

scenario of Indian English fiction by women writers, Anita Desai says:

It is a curious fact that the historical situation was reversed in India and it was the earlier women writers who dealt with the objective world, with politics and the social scene rather than their private and subjective worlds upon which the younger women writers have concentrated their attention (qtd. in Kumar : 73).

In the light of this changing scenario of Indian English fiction, two novels, which deserve special mention, are – Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of the Night* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. What is significant about these two novels by women writers is that they deal primarily with women – women's struggle for self-realisation and self – definition, women's quest for her identity, her rebellion and protest against oppression at every level as well as her pursuit of freedom and equality. Both the novels, which are to be analysed in this chapter, primarily deal with women centred worlds and throw light on the texture of women's lives. In other words, the two novels written by and about women, consciously explore aspects of experience, which are specific to the life of women.

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The Thousand Faces of Night by Githa Hariharan, published in 1992, takes us into a mythical and religious world, which is also, at the same time, urban and unconventional. Interestingly, Hariharan got the 1993 Commonwealth Prize for this very first novel of hers. The novel relates the story of Devi who returns to India after a brief sojourn in America. She thinks about the reasons:

Why did I come? I am not sure. Perhaps it is still too soon for me to understand. But Amma's letters brought with them an unspoken message of loneliness, poignant in its quiet dignity. She has always been a strong, self – willed woman; in my moments of anger I have thought her selfish. But the image of her alone by the sea teased me like a magnet. (16)

In India, Devi lives with Sita, her widowed mother. Very soon, all efforts for Devi's marriage begin. After meeting five or six prospective bridegrooms, she finally decides to marry Mahesh, a Regional Manager in a multi-national company that made detergents and soaps. Two weeks after her marriage, she goes with him to his home on Jacaranda Road, where Mahesh lived with his father and his family retainer, Mayamma. After a few days, Devi realises that for Mahesh, marriage was only a necessary part of life, just as his profession was. As she says:

I can't help admiring his restraint, his detachment which views marriage as a necessity, a milestone like any other. It is a gamble, he says. You measure the odds as best you can and adopt yourself to the consequences. --- All that spewing out of feelings is self-indulgent, he says. It is Un-Indian (49).

Thus, Devi realises that she could not expect any intimate show of love from Mahesh. Disillusioned with her life, Devi finds herself fascinated by Gopal, a man of music. Unlike her husband, Gopal was warm and affectionate. She runs away with Gopal, realises her mistake and leaves him. Her attempt to achieve freedom, however came at a price.

She had torn her respectability, her very name, to shreds. And for what price? A year or two wallowing in the arms of an illusory lover, in a den of riff-raff; then total abject degradation, the slime and filth of an uprooted woman's decay (108).

In the end, Devi decides to stay with her mother Sita and reorganizes her life. As in all Indian English writing, the writer upholds the image of mother as the nurturer.

The novel presents three women characters – Devi, Sita and Mayamma. Through these women characters, the novelist points out that there is very little self-satisfaction, freedom or victory that a woman can aspire for in a male dominated world. Sita, Mayamma and Devi symbolise this disillusionment. The character of Sita in the novel emphasises the limited freedom that a married woman enjoys. In the novel, Sita, who

played the veena, brings it as part of her dowry to her husband's home. She played the veena so beautifully that the whole house would come to a standstill. Everyday, after she had finished her household duties, she would play the veena until the day her father-in-law accused her and said: "Put that veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?"(30) From that day, Sita relinquished her dreams of genius and fame. Sita gave up practicing on the veena as a mute gesture of protest. "She tore the strings off the wooden base, and let the blood dry on her fingers, to remind herself of her chosen path on the first difficult days of abstinence" (103).

The novelist, through the clever use of myth, identifies Sita's protest with that of Gandhari. In the words of Devi:

Gandhari's anger, wrapped tightly round her head in a life-long blindfold, burned in a heart close, very close to mine.... The lesson that was more difficult to digest was human anger: that it could seep into every pore of a womanly body and become the very blood – stream of her life (29).

The interpretation of the myth of Gandhari is used by the novelist successfully in an effort to bring out interesting parallels. Devi's grandmother describes Gandhari as a bride. Dressed in her bridal finery, Gandhari arrives at her husband's place which was twice bigger than her own.

The huge doors opened slowly, and Gandhari's eager eyes lost their shyness as she sought those of her new husband. His sentries, her attendants stood by, pillar-like, but with faces that brimmed over with breathless anticipation. Many years later, when she had learnt the hard lesson that the splendid palace lacked only one luxury – privacy – she would grasp the significance of the twitching lips, the curiosity filled eyes of her witnesses (28).

What Hariharan asserts here is that freedom can be measured not in terms of wealth or luxuries but by the amount of privacy that an individual has. To Gandhari, privacy became a luxury which, inspite of her wealth, she could not afford. Lack of privacy inhibited her freedom. Analyzing this aspect of freedom, Zygmunt Bauman states:

If complete freedom is a mental experiment rather than a practical experience, freedom in a more attenuated form is practiced under the name of privacy. Privacy is the right to refuse the intrusion of other people into specific places, at specific times or during specific activities. While enjoying privacy, the individual may be out of sight, certain of not being watched, and thus able to engage in whatever one may wish to engage in, without fear of reprobation. (51)

During her marriage, Gandhari did not know that her husband was blind. When she saw his white eyes, she was shocked at the injustice done to her. Feelings of anger swelled up in proud Gandhari. Without saying anything, Gandhari tied a cloth tightly over her own eyes. Trying to analyse Gandhari's act of self-denial, the Grandmother says:

"She (Gandhari) embraced her destiny—a blind husband—with a self-sacrifice worthy of her royal blood" (29).

What made Gandhari take this extreme step of self-denial was her feeling of insecurity, her sense of isolation and helplessness. Erich Fromm explains:

Both helplessness and doubt paralyze life, and in order to live man tries to escape from freedom, negative freedom. He is driven into new bondage. --- The escape does not restore his lost security, but only helps him to forget his self as a separate entity. He finds new and fragile security at the expense of sacrificing the integrity of his individual self. He

chooses to loose his self since he cannot bear to be alone.
Thus freedom – as freedom from – leads to new bondage
(207).

This explains why Gandhari chooses to remain blindfolded for the rest of her life. In the story, Sita finds a new path for herself similar to the one adopted by her mythic counterpart. Both of them take significant decisions that change the course of their life. Such mythical parallels are continued through out the novel and form a recurrent pattern. While Sita and Gandhari accept their womanly destiny, Amba, spurned by Bheeshma and her lover Salva, sheds her womanhood in order to take her revenge. Finally, she becomes the cause of Bheeshma's death. The grandmother upholds the spirit of Amba in the following words:

“But a woman like Amba, a truly courageous woman, finds the means to transform her hatred, the fate that overtakes her into a triumph” (36).

What is notable here is that Hariharan prefers to use the myth of *Mahabharata* instead of the *Ramayana* to analyse and interpret the question of women's freedom. The women characters in the novel are not identified with Sita or Savitri, the idealized women in Indian literature. Instead, the novelist prefers to break new paths by interpreting the myth of proud women like Gandhari and Amba – women who took their own decisions and drew strength from their sorrow and uncertainty. This ability to face the harsh realities in the life of Indian women sets Hariharan apart from most other Indian English writers. She points out that women have to bear sadness and misfortunes even if they are born in a good family. Citing the case of Amba who takes revenge upon Bheeshma, Hariharan states:

“A high born prince, or even a goddess, has been the victim of disaster. But a woman like Amba, a truly courageous woman, finds the means to transform her hatred, the fate that overtakes her, into a triumph” (36).

In Hariharan's novel, Gandhari and Amba become the symbols of resurgence of Indian womanhood. Commenting upon the total neglect of *Mahabharata* as a source material for myths, Meenakshi Mukherjee states that women characters in Indian English fiction exemplify the ideal women like Sita, Savitri or Shakuntala. Through these characters, the writers try to express the values of Indian society. To quote Mukherjee:

Not all mythical heroines, however are so popular with fiction writers. Draupadi, for example, has never been a prototype of the characters of fiction. The reason for this is more sociological than literary; in fact not only Draupadi, but also none of the Mahabharata characters has ever become everyday models of reference in Indian life as the characters of the Ramayana have (165).

One of the reasons is also that the urge to freedom in mythical heroines like Draupadi is more pronounced and vocal, which in India, is considered a sacrilege on women's part. This accounts for the conscious avoidance in making Draupadi as a role model in most Indian English fiction. It is from this point of view that *A Thousand Faces of the Night* explores the position of women trapped in typical male power structures. The self-assertive and intelligent women characterized in the novel differ from our traditional conception of women. The sense of tradition is inculcated into the Indian mind from early childhood itself. In the novel, Devi remembers how, in her childhood, she had listened to the stories of womanhood from her illiterate grandmother. She would listen with rapt attention to her grandmother's stories which recounted vividly Damayanti's Swayamwara and "thrilling at the splendours" that awaited her. The heroes and heroines, the beautiful princess, the jewels, the palaces with their mystery, everything would captivate the little girl. The romantic tale of Nala and Damayanti carried her into an imaginative world where "princesses grew up secure in the knowledge of what awaited them: love, a prince who was never short of noble, and a happy ending."

The bedtime stories told by her grandmother thus took Devi to an enchanting world. As she says:

My grandmother's domain, the ritual in which she encased our arrivals and departures, our visits to relatives or the village temple, was more ambiguous. It was also richer, irresistible and through her I fell in love with the god like heroes and heroines whose stories were as real, more real to her than our own (26).

A positive aspect of freedom is revealed in the spontaneous reaction of the child to her grandmother's stories. Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm believes that such moments of spontaneity are at the same time moments of genuine happiness Fromm says:

Small children offer another instance of spontaneity. They have an ability to feel and think, that which is really theirs; this spontaneity shows in what they say and think, in the feelings that are expressed in their faces. If one asks what makes for the attraction small children have for most people, I believe that, aside from sentimental and conventional reasons the answer must be that it is this very quality of spontaneity. It appeals profoundly to everyone who is not so dead himself that he has lost the ability to perceive it (209).

Although the grandmother was an illiterate woman, her stories aptly illustrated the plight of the average Indian woman. The heroines became real women whom Devi could identify with the people she knew. And as she grew older, the concern for women's freedom as projected in the stories became the chief motivating force of her life. She understands the complexity of her position as woman and says:

I had, of course to respond to my grandmother's years of over-rich unadulterated nourishment with a story of my

own. It was impossible to hear her stories year after year, stories of a womanhood I would soon grow into, without insinuating myself on to that fantastic canvas. I lived a secret life of my own. I became a woman warrior, a heroine. I was Devi. I rode a tiger and cut off evil, magical demon's heads (40).

An important aspect of Hariharan's novel is that all the women characters struggle, fight and aspire for freedom. Sita hopes for a change of order that would help her to achieve individual fulfillment. In her existential struggle, she suffers intensely but refuses to be crushed. As a married woman, Sita becomes an ideal daughter-in-law. She spent long hours in the kitchen. As a wife, she became an expert at managing things. She mastered the art of saving money. She helped her husband to get promotions by giving parties.

"Sita was at liberty to take her husband by the hand and lead him from promotion to promotion, till he was within the exclusive circle of fast-rising executives who brought home three thousand a month" (104).

Her own ambitions were not important enough for anyone and so she "cut herself off from the clandestine link with the past, a foolish young girl's dreams of genius and fame." (103) Here, Sita's story helps us to understand how women's ambitions are thwarted by the demands of marriage. In this connection, Simone de Beauvoir expresses the view:

"It is for their common welfare that the situation must be altered prohibiting marriage as a career for woman. Woman leans herself upon man because she is not allowed to rely on herself" (500).

Sita became an ideal wife; she also became a devoted mother to Devi. When Devi went to a college hostel and later to America, Sita goes with her husband to Africa for five years. After the death of her husband, Sita commits herself to a lonely but

independent life and starts life afresh. Isolating herself from all her relatives, Sita finally asserts her freedom to live life as she wished. Zygmunt Bauman, in an essay 'Profits and Costs of Freedom', holds the view that isolation cannot give gainful freedom. He asserts:

Complete freedom can only be imagined as full solitude: total abstention from communication with other people. Such a state is untenable even in theory. First, liberation from social ties would leave the 'free' person alone against the over whelming odds of nature--- second, it is in communication with other people that the affirmation of one's choices is established and actions are given meanings. Persistent separation from human company would therefore involve the twin curses of lack of protection and of growing uncertainty, each one sufficient to turn any imaginable gains of freedom into loss (51).

Hariharan's novel raises several questions such as the role of family relationships in inhibiting freedom of the individual. The relationship of Sita with her daughter Devi is highlighted in the novel. Despite the lack of any outward affection, theirs is a strong relationship, which brings them together during moments of crisis. While in America, Devi realizes that Indian relationships do not allow the freedom to express the affection which one feels. She wondered at the easy relationship, which her friends had with their mothers. However, despite the fact of love not being exhibited, the security and protectiveness that an Indian feels is brought out clearly in the novel. There is a strong element of irony when Hariharan refers to this dual aspect of love. Referring to her relationship with Sita, Devi says:

"We were intensely conscious of each other, we were pulled together by a tender protectiveness that encircled our necks with its fine threads" (13).

After her studies in America, Devi comes back to India to live with Sita, her widowed mother. Very soon she begins to understand the dominating influence of family and traditions upon her life. It is her mother who first makes her experience the

tightening hold of traditions, which limit the freedom of the individual. Slowly, in a very adept manner, she makes Devi agree to marriage.

It must be admitted that intervention of other people in limiting women's freedom is unavoidable. She has to do what the society expects her to do. At every stage in her life, she is reminded of her obligations. Through out her life from childhood, she is not taught the necessity of taking charge of her own existence. Brought up on the love, assistance and supervision of others, women like Devi feel like a caged bird. Through the character of Devi, Hariharan points out the various stages of a woman's life, which restrict her physical and mental freedom. The novelist depicts the process of sexual menstruation of girls, which combined with traditional customs, restrict their freedom. Referring to women's isolation on account of puberty, Hariharan says that women have to "sit alone at the courtyard at the back three days of the month." (115) Mayamma recounts her shocking and humiliating transformation to puberty when she was playing in the temple. While playing, she suddenly saw blood flowing down her leg. Seeing this, the priest got angry. Mayamma tells Devi:

"Go home, he hissed" and before I could turn around to run, his heavy hand marked my cheek with a stinging slap. Hussy that I was, I had stained the purity of the temple with my gushing womanhood" (115).

In this respect, Simone de Beauvoir says:

It is not a question of abolishing in woman the contingencies and miseries of the human condition, but of giving her the means for transcending them. Woman is the victim of no mysterious fatality; the peculiarities that identify her as specifically a woman get their importance from the significance placed upon them. They can be surmounted, in the future, when they are regarded in new perspectives (739).

Whatever freedom a woman can hope to achieve, the fact remains that she can never escape her physiological destiny. She has to perform the important function of

giving birth and becoming a mother. And in India, this becomes the prime reason for her existence. A barren woman has no place in the society. When her attempts to become pregnant do not bear fruit, Devi weeps with a fearful foreboding:

“I feel myself getting blurred in Mahesh’s eyes. The focus gets softer and softer, till everything dissolves into nothingness, everything but my stubborn, unrelenting womb” (93).

It is through the destiny of Mayamma that we fully understand the impediments in the woman’s path to total freedom. For Mayamma, the womb becomes a symbol of her identity as woman. She did weekly fasts for ten years to become a mother. The degrading position of women in Indian society is emphatically brought out through the character of Mayamma. Mayamma’s mother-in-law scolds her in an offending manner:

“Stop thinking of food, daughter-in-law, think of your womb. Think of your empty rotting womb and pray” (114).

The Thousand Faces of the Night, in many ways, upholds the need to be loved but it also thinks of love as inhibiting, as something that curbs the freedom of women. Realizing this, Devi feels “the dread of the familiar love, stifling and all-pervasive.” (7) The novel depicts the influence of romantic myths on the minds of women like Devi. In spite of her education abroad, she still anticipates a compassionate lover sweeping her off her feet. Her feminine expectations are very traditional. She wants her husband to shower his love upon her. However, for Mahesh, marriage was just a necessary milestone of life. Living in a commercial world, he expected that everything he did in life must bring him positive results. He had the absurd notion that showing his feelings was Un-Indian. Disillusioned with her unromantic life, Devi desires to be free. Her self-deception leads her to go away with Gopal, a man of music, who was a most passionate lover. She looks up to Gopal to give value to her life. After some time, she is again disappointed. S. Indira comments:

Realization dawns on Devi that all through her life, she has been running away from her trails, America, the house on

Jacaranda Road, Mahesh and Gopal. She could neither understand her father's helpless need for an ally nor her mother's loneliness behind her façade of grim perseverance. She had had enough of drifting between worlds like a floating island searching for props. She should find her own authentic "self" now and secure a firm holding on the mainland (181).

In the concluding pages of the novel, Devi finally decides to free herself from all the men in her life and stay with her mother Sita. However, the question of freedom still remains poignant and unanswered till the end. As the novel states: "She (Devi) had felt bold and carefree when she left Mahesh's house, a little like a heroine. But she felt like a fugitive now, though she was, for the first time, no longer on the run" (138).

These many facets of freedom are examined through out the novel. There is the extreme case of Parvatiamma, Mahesh's mother, who, although not a character, is sketched in vivid detail. Parvatiamma was a beautiful woman. Her children went to boarding schools and she began to spend more and more time in the puja room. She fasted and performed every puja. And she also sang bhajans in a very pure and sweet voice. Then one morning she left the home never to return again. Devi tries to delineate Parvatiamma's character:

I knew she had been loving, gentle, feminine. A woman whose generosity led her outward, away from herself. A woman like my grandmother...But Parvatiamma had been more ambitious. She had, like a man in a self-absorbed search for a god, stripped herself of the life allotted to her, the life of a householder (64).

Devi feels that inspite of his learning, his gentle nature and his abstract nobility, Baba could not satisfy the needs of his wife. Parvatiamma ran away from home in her quest for freedom and salvation. In an essay titled, "Freedom as the ability to choose and carry out purposes", Herbert Muller contradicts this notion of spiritual freedom. He says:

One may question the more common and attractive idea of “spiritual freedom” or specifically the Christian teaching, “In God’s service is perfect freedom.” This service can promote freedom in the ordinary sense of the word—if it is a free, conscious choice, and service of a God who encourages purposeful activity on earth, including free inquiry into his own purposes. Historically, however, the service of God has not always made for such freedom. Most men have served him out of unthinking habit (81).

The recurrent theme of the novel is the alienation of women and women’s struggle for freedom in a predominantly male world. The increasingly abundant use of words like ‘loneliness’ brings out woman’s isolation from society. However, the women characters are also portrayed as self-willed and strong. For instance, Sita in the novel is often referred to as the ‘anchor rock’; thus signifying her inner strength. The dominant theme that finally emerges is that each woman character in the novel is unable to compromise completely and prefers loneliness. All the three woman characters—Mayamma, Sita and Devi had to struggle for some balance, for some means of survival. Mayamma was married at the age of twelve. She went to live with her husband after some time. He grew a little ‘crooked’ everyday and gambled. He would wake her up every night. From him, she learned of lust and bestial cruelty. Mayamma realises that being born as a woman means to endure a lot of pain. When she lost her first baby, conceived after ten years and screamed in pain, the village doctor admonished her: “A woman must learn to bear some pain. What can I do about the sins of your previous birth?” (Prelude, vii).

After many years, Mayamma’s son was born on the auspicious day of Diwali. Eight years later, her husband took all the money from the house and disappeared. Her trials did not end with this. Even at the age of fourteen, her son threatened to beat her and sold her last pair of gold bangles. Finally one day he died after suffering from fever. Mayamma accepts her fate and begins to live again through Parvatiamma. In spite of all the tortures that life had given her; there was no bitterness in Mayamma.

One of the factors which limits woman's freedom is a total disregard for their individual progress and fulfillment. Compared to Mayamma, Sita had married late at the age of twenty. As a married woman, Sita plays the part of a perfect wife and daughter-in-law. She even decides not to play the veena. It was a big sacrifice and as Devi says, "She had paid the price for it, not a light one for someone who measured her self-worth so completely in terms of her music." (136) Forced to bury her ambition, Sita builds a wall around her.

Sita's daughter Devi, on the other hand, lacked the determination of her mother. Bookish and dreamy, she lived in a world of fantasy. Brimming with traditionally fed feminine expectations, Devi dreamed of a hero who would take charge of her life and guide her gently. Unable to face the realities of life, she ran away from her trials and seeks freedom elsewhere. Finally, she goes to her mother in order to seek solace and strength.

It is ironical that many women like Devi, while seeking freedom, find solace in fantasies and dreams. S. Indira asserts:

Her freedom being thwarted, the gaping emptiness threatening her very existence, Devi seeks refuge in the stories of Baba, her gentle father-in-law and in his sweet wisdom. While her grand mother's stories have initiated her into the numerous subterranean possibilities of womanhood, Baba's stories define for Devi the limits of wifehood. Fed on the stories of virtuous wives who were instrumental in making their husbands walk on the spiritual path, Devi tries to pull out all the stubborn weeds out of her garden (178).

The traditional concept of women's position in India is referred to by Hariharan through Mahesh's father Baba. Baba was a Sanskrit professor and recited his Sanskrit lessons everyday. Like Devi's grandmother, he too told stories. However, there was no

fantasy in his stories. Devi makes a comparison between the stories told by her grandmother and by Baba:

Her stories were a prelude to my womanhood, an initiation into its subterranean possibilities. His define the limits. His stories are for a woman who has already reached the goal that will determine the guise her virtue will wear (51)

Baba also informed Devi about the duties that a woman was required to perform. If she desired to reach heaven, he told her that a woman should serve her husband. In order to justify what he preached, Baba would relate stories of virtuous women. Sometimes it would be about the wife of the saintly composer Purandara Dasa or about Thyagaraja's wife. Speaking highly of women, Baba would instruct Devi about the traditional ideas regarding the place of woman in society.

Fathers, brothers, husbands and brothers-in-law should honour brides, if they desire welfare. Where women are honoured, there the gods delight: Where they are not honoured, there all acts become fruitless (65).

Baba also talks about salvation and how it can be achieved through penance. "By public confession, repentance, penance, repetition of holy mantras and by gifts, the sinner is released from sin" (67).

Baba also maintains the patriarchal view that women's duty is confined to looking after their husband. He says:

The woman has no independent sacrifice to perform, no vow, no fasting: by serving her husband, she is honoured in the heavens. On the death of her husband, the chaste wife, established in continence, reaches heaven, even if childless, like students who have practiced self-control (55).

The inability of Baba to question the old customs, habits and orthodoxies points out to a lack of freedom of choice. From this viewpoint, only a person who questions the established values of society is free. What we understand here is that inspite of being an educated person, Baba clings to the traditional concept of woman. He does not question the old values. In this sense, his temperament is similar to that of his wife Parvatiamma who also has an unchanging belief in her chosen religious faith. We may say that this inability to change or move with the times points out to absence of choice and consequently, of freedom. In the words of P.H.Partridge:

For the devotee of a religious faith, the religious freedom he claims and he believes himself to enjoy may be no more than the freedom to practice unmolested a form of worship he has inherited and never felt the faintest temptation to question; in such a case it is a fiction to speak of a process of choice. The same can be said of the man who is content to follow narrowly, uncritically and unadventurously the established customs and conventions of his society (99).

In retrospect, *The Thousand faces of the Night* presents a detailed observation and analysis of women characters and the limited freedom that they enjoy in a male dominating world. Here, Hariharan is mainly concerned with the domestic and private spheres in which women work under the restrictions of a dominantly patriarchal set-up. In her path breaking work called *A Literature of their own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*, Elaine Showalter throws some light on the woman writer's preference for personalized themes. In her words:

There is clearly a difference between books that happen to have been written by women and a female literature which purposefully and collectively concerns itself with the articulation of woman's experiences and which guides itself by its own impulses to autonomous self-expression. As novelists, women have always been self-conscious but only rarely self-defining. While they have been deeply and

perennially aware of their individual identities' and experiences, women writers have very infrequently considered whether these experiences might transcend the personal and the local, assume a collective form in art and reveal a history (4).

Through the novel, Hariharan succeeds in giving an insider's account of the whole gamut of women's experience, including female bodily functions like menstruation, sexual initiation, barrenness, miscarriage, pregnancy and childbirth Elaine Showalter points out:

The female subculture came first through a shared and increasingly secretive and ritualized physical experience. Puberty, menstruation, sexual initiation, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause – the entire female sexual life cycle – constituted a habit of living that had to be concealed. Although these episodes could not be openly discussed or acknowledged, they were accompanied by elaborate rituals and lore, by external codes of fashion and etiquette and by intense feelings of female solidarity (15).

The novel exposes social inequities and the necessity for justice, in the lives of women. The women characters appear as victims and sexual, maternal and social conflicts achieve a new dimension. The social pressures on women when she is unable to conceive and the humiliating rituals associated with it is described effectively in the novel. There is the case of Mayamma, who recounts how she was made to do severe penance. As the novel states:

She invoked everyday the goddess' thousand names; five hundred times she prostrated herself at the feet of the ever – fertile mother. Every six months she renewed her vows; every six months she invited six Brahmins to a feast and sent them away with the richest gifts she could lay her hands on. A woman without a child, say the sages, goes to hell (81).

Hariharan also takes care to reveal the exploitation of women within the institution of marriage. While Mayamma becomes the victim of bestial lust, Sita thwarts her ambition so that her husband could succeed. Relationships of all kinds are explored in the novel, taking into account the emotional aspect. The novelist also gives an insider's account of women's mundane and unacknowledged work inside the household through Sita's life after marriage. To quote Hariharan:

She became an expert at managing things, and even more important, at moulding the most moist and fragile of clay into the most effective shapes. The first tantalizing shape that hovered over her, a teasing, distant goal, was Economy. She mastered that first --- Then it was Ambition (102).

Women are also required to make a lot of compromises after marriage.

Marriage had meant that Sita would have to learn to eat dry chapattis, which refused to go down the throat like sticky, wet balls of mashed rice. This was the sort of detail which over whelmed Mahadevan (103).

The damage done by woman's self-effacement is well brought out through the story of Sita. Living as a seemingly perfect wife and mother, she subdues her passion for playing the veena. As Baba says:

The housewife should always be joyous, adept at domestic work, neat in their domestic wares, and restrained in expenses. controlled in mind, word and body, she who does not transgress her lord, attains heaven even as her lord does (70).

Hariharan displays feminine sensibility when she reveals Sita's inner turmoil suppressed beneath her strictly perfect life. The novel thus presents a critique of societal expectations and unfair demands imposed upon women.

The strongpoint of the novel is the manner in which Hariharan upholds women's determination and courage to survive against hardship. Mayamma suffers a lot at the hands of her husband and her son. However, by the end of the novel, she acquires self-equanimity by laying to rest the ghost of her past miseries and learning to live firstly through Parvatamma and later, through Devi. The novelist presents different women characters at different stages in their life. These women move through the story in different situations, trying to explore and succeed in giving a new direction to their lives. After the death of her husband, Sita renews her interest in playing the veena.

She forced herself to look ahead. She banned her mind from trading in memories, confessions, judgments, the what – could–have–beens. She reduced it all; she compressed it, with her usual painstaking meticulousness, into a simple, unregimented one-viewed organism. She pruned and re-potted it sensibly, as she did her plants, and she did it in the belief that it would take in the soil, even if it was the soiled ground of a life devoted to being the ideal woman (107).

Mayamma also sheds off her past memories and bitterness and learns to take life in her stride.

Mayamma had been thrown into the waters of her womanhood well before she had learnt to swim. She had learnt about lust, the potential of unhidden bestial cruelty, first hand. She had had no choices really. She had coveted birth, endured life, nursed death. And she had won some small victory – if you could call it by such a grand name – through that ragged belief she carried within her (136).

In the concluding part of the novel, we find Devi going back to her mother in order to start a new life.

To stay and fight, to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning (139).

This ability to break old habits is a sign of growth and consequently, of positive freedom. It would be significant here to consider the views of the noted philosopher John Dewey. Referring to freedom as personal growth, Dewey argues that the key to growth lies in the individual's capacity to make intelligent decisions in the light of his best knowledge. By doing so, the individual learns more about what he can and cannot do, thereby increasing his power to act. To quote Dewey:

As we mature, we usually acquire habits that are settled to the point of routine. But unless and until we get completely fossilized, we can break old habits and form new ones. No argument about causation can affect the fact, verified constantly in experience, that we can and do learn, and that the learning is not limited to acquisition of additional information but extends to remaking old tendencies. As far as a person becomes a different self or character, he develops different desires and choices. Freedom in the practical sense develops when one is aware of this possibility and takes an interest in converting it into reality (205).

Thus, *The Thousand Faces of the Night* consciously concerns itself with the articulation of women's experience and upholds the undying spirit of women. In this sense, it may surely be called a woman's novel.

* * *

The movement for women's liberation raises a few fundamental questions. For instance:

How can a human being in women's situation attain fulfillment? What roads are open to her? Which are blocked?

How can independence be recovered in a state of dependency? What circumstances limit woman's liberty and how can they be overcome (29).

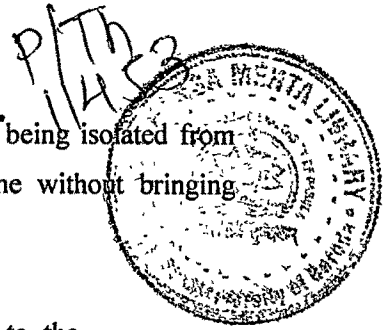
Simone De Beauvoir, in her highly acclaimed work *The Second Sex*, puts forth these questions and proceeds to make a pioneering inquiry into the world of women. It is significant to note that the later books by women on women have tried to answer the questions raised by Beauvoir. The concern with women's liberty finds similar echoes in the Indian English writing of the 90s. Although the writers of the decade clearly reveal a sense of disillusionment, their writing established a dominating position in the western world. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, published in 1997, remains at the forefront of novels, which won international recognition during the decade. With the publication of this very first and only novel of hers till date, Roy, thus came to be recognized as a powerful creative writer. The novel continues to remain one of the best-loved and best-read recent works of literary fiction round the world.

The God of Small Things, in many ways, challenges the patriarchal structure of Indian society and opposes women's subordination to men in the family and society. The novel narrates the story of Ammu as well as the growing up of her son Estha and daughter Rahel. The story is set in the small town of Ayemenem in the Kottayam district of Kerala. After the failure of her marriage, Ammu returns with twins Estha and Rahel to her parent's home in Ayemenem. It is here that the greater part of the novel and much of the action takes place. The kids grow up in the company of their maternal uncle Chacko, their grandmother Mammachi and their grandmother's younger spinster sister, Baby Kochamma. Even at their tender age, the twins knew that they were unwelcome guests in their mother's home. They are conscious of the indefinite future that life holds for them. That is why; they look with heightened attention at each act of their elders.

"It was as though the window through which their father disappeared had been kept open for anyone to walk in and be welcomed"(43).

By showing Ammu's unacceptance in her own family, Roy, in fact tries to draw our attention to the crucial part played by the family, in curbing women's freedom. This

situation mainly arises because of social pressures and the fear of being isolated from society. Once married, a woman could not go back to her home without bringing disgrace to the family. As a result, writes Roy:



She (Baby Kochamma) subscribed whole-heartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parent's home. As for a divorced daughter – according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a divorced daughter from a intercommunity love marriage – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject (45).

Thus, the denegration of women and the subsequent limitation on freedom starts when they are classified and branded in society. In this way, the family as well as the society plays an active part in reproducing the structure of inequality. Baby Kochamma, inspite of being a woman and a part of the family, fails to give Ammu the necessary strength to recover from her miseries. By isolating her, Baby Kochamma reveals her insensitivity to the problems of women and children.

“Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. Worse still, they were half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry” (45).

Her hostile attitude to Ammu and the children, in confirmation with society's values, is one of the reasons why inequalities come into being. It is also the reason why, despite efforts of many kinds, they refuse to disappear.

The God of Small Things, with its individual mode of presentation, raises important questions regarding woman's freedom to determine for herself what she is to do and to become. Significantly, the novel turns its attention to the subtler influences of culture, tradition and the general organization of the society that constrain and limit

women's freedom. The importance of freedom in one's life is clearly exemplified in Roy's dedication which reads:

For Mary Roy who grew me up
Who taught me to say 'excuse me' before interrupting her in public.
Who loved me enough to let me go.

Through her dedication, Arundhati reveals her indebtedness to her mother for giving her the freedom she most needed. The freedom she got from her mother was of immense value to her as a writer and as a woman. A creative writer is normally said to enjoy a great degree of freedom. This is because the writer becomes one with nature in the act of creation. The thoughts and feelings of writers are a spontaneous expression of their selves. The act of creation, therefore, affirms the individuality of the self and at the same time it unites the self with man and nature. The artistic self-expression evident in women's writing is an indicator of this freedom. Herbert Muller has aptly commented:

A civilized man --- is bound to face more obstacles; yet he alone is able to make his desire and his choices really his own. If he is a Shakespeare or a Beethoven, he may become aware of still more obstacles, lay himself wide open to frustration, but in his creativity he may know a god like freedom (78).

The assertion of women's freedom, which is quite evident in Roy's novel, can be attributed to her mother's influence. What is noteworthy is that Mary Roy, despite being a single divorced woman, had the courage to fight for her right to property. Belonging to a Syrian Christian family, Mary Roy was denied of any share in the ancestral property as per the 1916 Travancore-Kochi Christian succession Act. She became the first Christian woman to fight the provisions of the unjust act up to the Supreme Court. It was because of her persistent efforts that the Supreme Court in 1986 gave Christian women an equal share in their father's property. The reference to the unequal rights of women in society regarding their ancestral property is referred to in *The God of Small Things*. In the novel, Chacko tells his sister Ammu that she had no claim to the property. In a surprisingly high voice, he would tell Ammu, "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine." (57)

Although Ammu worked as hard as him in the pickle factory started by their mother, Chacko always referred to it as his factory, his pineapples and his pickles. As the novel states:

“Legally this was the case because Ammu as a daughter had no claim to the property” (57).

In this way, Roy asserts that the family plays a crucial role in the maintenance of the system of inequality.

However, the most elaborate, the most rigid and the most comprehensive system of social inequality which limits freedom of the individual is the structure of caste. No enquiry into inequality can ignore caste, which has been widely regarded as the fundamental institution of Indian society. Roy attempts to explain how social stratification takes place in society. In the novel, Velutha is a *paravan*, an untouchable. The condition of Paravans in Mammachi’s time was very deplorable.

In Mammachi’s time, Paravans, like other untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed (74).

Sadly, the caste system is still manifestly correlated with every form of social stratification, whether based on wealth, occupation, income, education or some other criterion.

Social stratification thus remains a major issue restricting freedom of the individual. When Mammachi hired Velutha as the factory carpenter; it caused a great deal of resentment among the other workers. It was because they felt that *Paravans* were not meant to be carpenters.

To keep the others happy, and since she knew that nobody else would hire him as a carpenter, Mammachi paid Velutha

less than she would a Touchable carpenter but more than she would a Paravan. Mammachi didn't encourage him to enter the house. She thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises (77).

In this way, despite his remarkable flexibility with his hands and his intricate skills, Velutha has to suffer injustice. Thus, the inequalities raised by the caste system resulted in oppression and exploitation of the lower castes by the higher. Through this incident, we observe how society does not allow the people of lower strata to come up in life. This is mainly done, firstly, by depriving them of education and secondly, by denying them job opportunities. Even when jobs are provided, there is disparity in the wages given to them.

Freedom from oppression, therefore, requires the removal of social inequalities. The liberal influence of British administration and western education, the work of the Christian missionaries, the impact of the religious movements in North India such as the Arya samaj, the Brahmo samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission created a socio-religious revolution for equality which started in the nineteenth century and spread over to the twentieth. As part of this movement, many untouchables were converted to Christianity. This was mainly aimed to free them from the caste oppressions of Hindu religion to which they belonged. The conversion of many untouchables to Christianity and its unfortunate consequences in post-independence period is brought out effectively in the novel. Sadly, even after their conversion to Christianity, untouchables faced discrimination at all levels:

They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were given their own separate priests. As a special favour they were given their own separate Pariah Bishop. After Independence, they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservation or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians and therefore casteless (74).

The God of small things also depicts and resolves questions regarding freedom having a bearing on the twin issues of caste and sexuality. The most striking aspect of the novel is the theme of forbidden sexual intimacy between Rahel's mother Ammu and Velutha. Velutha was a Paravan and Ammu was a Syrian Christian. The moment when Velutha for the first time feels attracted to the children's mother had a special significance.

"In that brief moment, Velutha looked up and saw things that he hadn't seen before. Things that had been out of bounds so far, obscured by history's blinkers. Simple things. For instance, he saw that Rahel's mother was a woman"(176).

At that particular moment, the great wall of untouchability was shattered. It was instrumental in changing the direction of Velutha's, Ammu's and even the lives of the two children. The relationship of Ammu and Velutha is based not on love, but on lust. J.M.Vergheese observes:

In *The God of Small Things* the elemental biological urge masquerades as an expression of personal freedom but not as an expression of individual fulfillment. There is the romance of erotic feelings but no real glorification of sex as such (59).

Arundhati Roy takes care to raise the question of human needs in the novel. The concept of needs is a relative one. Human needs vary with time and place, they vary from society to society and within a society they vary from individual to individual. To Mammachi, Ammu's need for sexual gratification is clearly an act of social transgression and hence, disgusting. But for a man, sexual gratification was essential. And so Mammachi had a separate entrance built for Chacko's room so that the women who came to satisfy his 'Needs' could go freely:

She (Mammachi) secretly slipped them money to keep them happy. They took it because they needed it. They had young children and old parents or husbands who spent all their earning in toddy bars. The arrangement suited Mammachi, because in her mind, a few clarified things. Disjuncted sex from love. Needs from feelings (169).

Thus, Mammachi exploited the poverty and misery of the women to satisfy Chacko's sexual needs. In this connection, Amina Amin comments:

Incidentally, Chacko enjoyed the very freedom that is denied to Ammu. The self proclaimed Marxist had the liberty to call the pretty woman who worked in the factory to his room and flirt with them outrageously. Mammachi was fully aware of Chacko's libertine relationships with the women in the factory (23).

The fact is that woman can never hope to acquire an equal measure of freedom as man. At every step in life, at all major turns in life, with all the major relationships in life, a woman is constantly reminded to control and forget her self. The social atmosphere always conditions a woman to try to overcome her individual being for the sake of the other, to overpower those demands of the self the satisfaction of which has to be purchased at the cost of denial of satisfaction to some other self. Ammu, in one of her weak moments, accuses her children of being the impediments in her path. Carelessly, she says:

Because of you! If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be here!
None of this would have happened. I wouldn't be here! I
should have been free. I should have dumped you in an
orphanage as soon as you were born! You're the millstones
around my neck! (253)

Roy adds a touch of humour when she points out to the fantasies and doubts regarding the concept of freedom in the eyes of children.

According to Estha, if they'd been born on the bus, they'd have got free bus rides for the rest of their lives. It wasn't clear where he'd got this information from, or how he knew these things, but for years the twins harboured a faint resentment against their parents for having diddled them out of a lifetime of free bus rides. They also believed that if they

were killed on a zebra crossing, the Government would pay for their funerals (4).

The children felt that since Sophie Mol was not killed on a zebra crossing, her funeral was not paid for by the Government. It is evident in the novel that the distinctions of colour, creed or caste do not affect children. They think and act freely. Rahel and Estha are taught to despise the untouchables and warned not to mix with them. However, their innocence gives them the freedom to go where they receive love and affection. The spontaneous love felt by children is an example of a very special kind of freedom. As has been pointed out by Erich Fromm:

Moments of our spontaneity are at the same time moments of genuine happiness. Whether it be the fresh and spontaneous perception of a landscape, or the dawning of some truth as the result of our thinking or a sensuous pleasure that is not stereotyped, or the welling up of love for another person (209).

Children, in all their innocence, do not realise that the world has many cruel ways of limiting freedom of the individual. The after-effects of Sophie Mol's death are bought together very intimately by Arundhati Roy. When Sophie Mol dies, the twins hide. Baby Kochamma reports to the police that Velutha molested Ammu and has even probably abducted the twins as they were missing. The story now moves to its tragic end. The police begin their search of the innocent Velutha and find him in the abandoned house. The twins have also taken refuge there, unaware of the presence of their friend till the policemen drag him out and batter him into a crumpled broken heap. Baby Kochamma frightens Estha into seconding her story of Velutha's crime. Estha is told that if he did not do as she said, Ammu and the twins would be put inside the jail. Estha succumbs to the pressure in a conflicting state of mind. The horror of the childhood guilt makes him silent. In Roy's words, it was "as though he had simply run out of conversation and had nothing left to say." In the plot that is centered on Estha, Arundhati maintains that if one is afraid, one is likely to perpetuate injustice and subsequently destroy another person's freedom. Estha becomes silent by the horror of an unknown fear. Commenting upon the women's role in the oppression of Ammu and Velutha, Reena Kothari rightly observes:

These women (Mammachi and Baby Kochamma) are powerless in the patriarchal set up but powerful when it comes to oppressing a woman, even their daughter. This is the paradox of the power struggle within patriarchy. The forces of power vie for control over the powerless. These same women become powerful even when they decided that they have to get Velutha to leave Ayemenem before Chacko returns (148).

What we understand is that when truth and justice are not followed, it leads to restriction of freedom at various levels. In fact, the author in a very subtle way, emphasises that the principles of truth and non-violence can be strictly followed only after the elimination of fear within ourselves. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi:

A warrior without fearlessness cannot be conceived of. It may be thought that he would not need to be exactly truthful, but that quality follows real fearlessness. When a man abandons truth, he does so owing to fear in some shape or form (106).

By telling lies to the policeman, Baby Kochamma reveals her fear of disgrace which Ammu had brought upon the family. Truth is a dynamic concept. It means not only the telling of truth but a positive pursuit of all the consequences following a perception of truth. A person devoted to truth cannot stand by and be a witness to injustice and untruth. The person has to fight untruth and fight it not by inflicting pain but by his own willingness to suffer. Baby Kochamma was not willing to suffer the humiliating consequences of truth, and therefore, she lied. By being afraid, she perpetuated injustice and ruined many people. In his essay "Freedom as the ability to choose and carry out purposes", Herbert Muller comments:

"Freedom has been limited by stupidity and ignorance but

more specifically by social constraints, the power of custom and convention. These induce internal constraints which may appear as dutifulness or reverence, but may owe chiefly to inertia, superstition, insecurity, anxiety or dread”(78).

A significant aspect of *The God of small Things* is that it lays emphasis on women’s problems arising from cross-cultural marriages and relationships. The women characters involved in such relationships face cultural challenges both from their own families and the new families into which they are married as well as from society. The first relationship mentioned is that of Chacko, an Indian and Margaret, an English lady, whom he marries without the consent of his parents. He met Margaret during his final year of studies at Oxford. There is a reference in the novel about the attitude of Margaret’s family. “Margaret Kochamma’s father had refused to attend the wedding. He disliked the Indians, he thought of them as sly, dishonest people. He couldn’t believe that his daughter was marrying one”(240).

Few months after the marriage, Margaret began to be disgusted with Chacko’s untidy habits. She was used to a tiny and ordered life. She gives birth to Sophie Mol. Margaret gets a divorce from Chacko and marries Joe. When Joe dies in an accident, Chacko invites Margaret and Sophie Mol to spend Christmas in Ayemenem. Unfortunately, Sophie dies there and Margaret goes back to England alone.

Such cultural problems are also evident in Ammu’s marriage. While staying at her distant aunt’s home in Calcutta, she meets Baba at a wedding reception. He was working as an assistant manager of a tea estate in Assam but his home was in Calcutta. Ammu wrote to her parents informing them of her decision to marry him but there was no reply. Very soon, Ammu realized that Baba was an alcoholic and told lies. After the birth of the two children, the situation became worse. Ammu has to suffer violence at the hands of her husband. As the novelist says, “he lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her and then passed out from the effort”(42). Ammu had to return to her own home where she was unwelcome.

In the case of Rahel, there was nobody to arrange a marriage for her. When she finished school, she won admission into a college of Architecture. It was here that she

met Larry Mc Caslin who was in Delhi collecting material for his doctoral thesis. Very soon, they married. But owing to cultural differences, they could not understand each other. After they were divorced, Rahel worked for a few months at a gas station in America. Finally, she came back to Ayemenem.

Another cross-cultural relationship that finds mention in the novel is that of Baby Kochamma and Father Mulligan, an Irish monk. Baby Kochamma's love for him was so great that she defied her father's wishes and became a Roman Catholic just to be near him. But her dreams could not be fulfilled and she withdrew herself from the convent. Father Mulligan later becomes a Vaishnava and died in Rishikesh. "If anything, she possessed him in death in a way that she never had while he was alive. At least her memory of him was hers. Wholly hers. Savagely, fiercely, hers" (298).

Through the novel, Roy points out that women become the victims of society when they exert their freedom to marry according to their wish. J.M. Verghese observes:

Ms. Roy, with an existentialist's obsession for individual freedom and personal choice, assails all forms of conformity: fossilized Christianity, caste-ridden society and myopic communism. Ammu, Estha, Rahel, Velutha and to an extent the Oxfordian Chacko, revolt against the established oppressive social structures and assert the primordial in man. They suffer because they choose to be different (60).

All the four relationships mentioned in the novel point to the difficulties and miseries that women face when they transgress the laws of the land. After marriage, these women are not able to adjust to their new surroundings. When Rahel grows up, she thinks that all of it happened because they had broken the rules and exerted their freedom. She reflects on the lessons:

Perhaps Ammu, Estha and she were the worst transgressors. But it wasn't just them. It was the others too. They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all

tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how and how much (31).

Ammu's tempestuous encounter with the untouchable carpenter towards the end of the story violates all the love laws laid down by the boundaries of caste and ideas of propriety as to who will love whom and how. Night after night, they return to the same spot, consumed by helplessness and their own bodily desires. They sin and ultimately suffer from the wages of sin, which is death. Madhumalati Adhikari observes:

Consciously or unconsciously a woman writer is geared to look at the problems of enclosure and escape from the woman's point of view and in the process often becomes either prejudicial or preferential for one or the other. Cautious Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* has elaborated upon the theme of freedom and bondage quite impartially and it meets the expectations of the reading public. Many enclosures of marriage, class, caste, politics, economics and emotions are etched and analysed from the angles of man-woman actions and reactions (39).

The novel reveals that failed marriages result in unfreedom of the individuals concerned. Love is an essential component to safeguard freedom of both partners. Even the married woman characters like Mammachi, Margaret, Ammu and Rahel do not enjoy the happy fulfillment of love through their marriages, in the manner they might have wished. After Pappachi retired from Government service in Delhi, Mammachi started her pickle and jam business. Pappachi was a male chauvinist who resented the fact that his wife was successful in her venture. So every night he beat her with a brass flower vase:

He worked hard on his public profile as a sophisticated, generous moral man. But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having

such a wonderful husband and father (180). •

Seeing Mammachi cry during Pappachi's funeral, Ammu told the twins that she was doing it not because of love but because she was used to him. The author writes: "She was used to having him slouching around the pickle factory, and was used to being beaten from time to time. Ammu said all human beings were creatures of habit, and it was amazing the kind of things they could get used to"(50).

What we understand is that Pappachi, inspite of his education, highly resented the attention his wife was getting. He did not help her in her business because he felt it was not a suitable occupation for a high-ranking ex-Government official. In his snobbishness, he wanted to subdue his wife's freedom and therefore loses control over his own emotions. In this context, it would be helpful to examine the suppression of freedom that is evident here. To quote Madhumalati Adhikari:

Despite Pappachi's disapproval, her entry into the man's business world by becoming a small scale entrepreneur is a proof of Pappachi's growing powerlessness. From economically mute, she becomes economically articulate and sweeps away the psychology of dependency to emerge as a self-aware independent personality. Mammachi's marital enclosure is annihilated. She not only escapes from its limiting boundaries but also succeeds in creating a new world for herself(42).

Kant, Germany's outstanding philosopher in the eighteenth century, discusses freedom as acquiring the power to be moral. Kant places the responsibility for becoming virtuous upon man himself. Kant finds that both freedom and virtue require that a man's power and inclinations become subordinate to the rule of reason. Kant explains:

Two things are required for internal freedom: to be master of oneself in a given case, and to have command over oneself, that is to subdue his emotions and to govern his passions.

With these conditions, the character is noble; in the opposite case it is ignoble (189).

By becoming a slave of his negative feelings, Pappachi in fact reveals his lack of freedom. In the process, he even suppresses his wife's freedom and individuality.

The relationship between power and freedom can help us to understand the nature of man-woman relationship inside the family structure. Undoubtedly, the man holds more power mainly because women are dependent upon him. The noted economist Amartya Sen points out that by working outside the family, a woman can gain more power. He elaborates:

Working outside the home and earning an independent income tend to have a clear impact on enhancing the social standing of a woman in the household and the society. Her contribution to the prosperity of the family is then more visible, and she also has more voice, because of being less dependent on others. Further, outside employment often has useful 'educational effects' in terms of exposure to the world outside the household (191).

The equation of power with freedom is equally evident in the English manager Mr. Hollick under whom Ammu's husband worked. Mr. Hollick informed him that he would be sacked but there were options:

Over coffee, Mr. Hollick proposed that Baba go away for a while. For a holiday. To a clinic perhaps, for treatment. For as long as it took him to get better. And for the period of time that he was away, Mr. Hollick suggested that Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be 'looked after' (42).

It is interesting to note that Mr. Hollick gives two options to Baba, both of which would ruin his life. Mr. Hollick's authoritarian behaviour points out to the connection

between freedom and power. In the words of P.H.Partridge:

When men have unequal power, this will often mean that they will also be unequal with respect to the freedom they enjoy – not merely in the sense that the man who is better off has the means to choose more widely and live more abundantly than his poorer brother but in the more relevant sense that the more powerful man can restrict the range of choice and the freedom of the less powerful in order to satisfy his interests more fully (98).

The high point of the novel is the manner in which Roy puts forth children's viewpoints, their fear and suspicions when they experience lack of freedom. Through the character of Rahel and Estha, she shows how children are affected by the harsh realities of the world. Commenting upon the autobiographical tone in the novel, Roy said in an interview to Praveen Swami:

It touches things, which I do not wish to address in my everyday life. It deals with areas I do my best to avoid thinking about. It unleashes terrors, which I have always tried to get away from. All I know is that there are things which form before you form yourself. And these things will never go away(107).

When Ammu returned home with her two children after separating from her husband, the family members were not happy. Even in her mother's home, she had no right to property. Baby Kochamma disliked the twins because she considered them as "doomed fatherless waifs." After her sexual intimacy with Velutha and the consequent disgrace to the family, she was forced by Chacko to leave the house:

"Pack your things and go Chacko would say, stepping over the debris --- Surprised at his own strength. His bigness. His bullying power" (226).

Thus, the story shows how women are ill treated by their own family. After Ammu's death, Rahel, being an orphan was neglected. However, as the author points out, "Neglect seemed to have resulted in an accidental release of the spirit." (17) She studied in Nazareth Convent but she was expelled thrice for her mischievous behaviour. In this way, she drifted from school to school. The fact that she herself had a difficult childhood, helped Arundhati to realistically portray the hostile atmosphere. In an interview given to Alex Wilbur, Arundhati says:

As a child I knew that there was such a struggle to come to terms with what the world is about to do to you. I was an unprotected child in some ways and felt that one was always trying to anticipate the world and therefore, was trying to be wise in some way. You sort of accurately misunderstood things and you make concepts out of things that aren't concepts (46).

Lack of freedom demands a great deal of social adjustment. In the story, Rahel and Estha are placed within the same social framework and situations. However, the distinct manner in which they deal with their problems is brought out clearly in the novel. Rahel and Estha grow up together. Rahel learns from her experiences and goes out into the world to live her own life. She migrates from the little town in Kerala to Delhi and then marries an American Larry Mc Caslin. Rahel develops her own identity. On the other hand, Estha becomes silent after Sophie Mol's death. It was not easy for Rahel to forget her past, but there was always a sort of enforced optimism inside her. She gets a divorce. Rahel develops her own identity that would have been denied to her if she had stayed with her mother. The parallel unfolding of Rahel's growing up and Estha's stunting is mainly intended to show that personal freedom does not depend on external constraints. Victor Gollanz defines what personal freedom is, in the following lines:

Personal freedom is essentially an inner thing; something inside a man, the presence of something in a man's personality, not the absence of constraint from without. This

inwardness, I repeat is the essence of personal freedom and we get nowhere until we recognize the fact (52).

The novelist highlights the society's values with regard to a girl and how they act as impediments in women's freedom. Being an orphan, Rahel had no one to arrange a marriage for her. This was mainly because no person in her mother's family was ready to pay her dowry. The reference to dowry comes more than once in the novel. Ammu's father did not have enough money to give Ammu a suitable dowry. Therefore, no proposal came even after she had finished schooling. Her father did not allow her to go to college because he said that it was an unnecessary expense for a girl. Baby Kochamma could not marry because everybody knew about her affair with Father Mulligan and nobody would marry a disreputed girl.

In this way, *The God of small Things* suggests some fragmentary possibilities for a woman-centred view of Indian family and kinship. Although the post-independence period has witnessed many developments, Roy points out that dowry system is still prevalent. Commenting about the custom of dowry among Christians, Lionel Caplan, in a research work titled "Bridegroom price in Urban India," cites the possible reasons. He says:

Most urban Christians, if asked why they participate in such transaction when these are so widely condemned, reply in several ways. The first is to plead no alternative: that unless they do so, their children will remain unmarried, and such a prospect is as unthinkable for Christians as for the generality of Indians. The second is to plead demographic circumstances ie. there are simply not enough suitable boys to marry. People believe that as long as the choice of the girl is restricted to few suitable men in her own caste, competition for them will entail dowries (362).

The God of Small Things can be taken up as a study of the colonial experience. Different shades of colonial consciousness are projected through the different characters in the novel. To Pappachi, the British rulers were symbols of power and greatness. Until

the day he died, Pappachi wore a well-pressed three-piece suit and his gold pocket watch. He did a six-month diploma course in Vienna that qualified him to become the imperial Entomologist. Pappachi is typical of the middle class colonial Indian who blindly admires everything that is European. He constantly tries to adopt the habit of living of the colonial masters. When Ammu tells him about Mr. Hollick, Pappachi did not believe her. As the novelist humorously points out: "Pappachi would not believe her story-not because he thought well of her husband, but simply because he didn't believe that an Englishman, any Englishman would covet another man's wife"(42).

Chacko goes to Oxford to pursue his studies, mainly because it was prestigious to go abroad. He takes pride in being the member of the rowing team of Balliol. When he returns to India, he brings along with him his oar and displays it in the factory. Mammachi took lessons in violin from Launsky – Tieffenthal. She also liked furniture with foreign designs. Even the children saw English movies and admired English music. As Chacko points out, "They were a family of Anglophiles pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps because their foot prints had been swept away."(52)

This admiration for the English is also evident when Margaret Kochamma comes to Ayemenem. The children were made to practice an English car song for the way back from the airport. The twins are also instructed to speak only in English. If Baby Kochamma caught them speaking in Malayalam, a small fine was immediately deducted from their pocket money. As the novel states:

"She made them write lines-'impositions' she called them-
I will always speak in English, I will always speak in
English. A hundred times each"(36).

There is a reference in the novel about the old colonial bungalow of Kari Saipu with its deep verandah and Doric columns. Although the house had lain empty for years, Chacko told the children that they could not go inside because they had been locked out by their conquerors. He goes on to explain:

And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows and when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves”(53).

Thus, Chacko points out to the strange and ambiguous relationship between the ruler and the ruled and that the once conquered would never really be free.

A sense of disillusionment with the after-effects of political freedom is clearly evident in *The God of Small Things*. The gulf between the rich and the poor has increased and there is exploitation at all levels. Selfishness, inefficiency and corruption remain at the forefront. This tendency is reflected in Comrade Pillai. He encourages the workers of the factory to revolt against Chacko, the owner but he himself strikes a deal with Chacko secretly. He accepts Chacko's order to print the Paradise Pickles labels in his Lucky Press. This tactful behaviour is also evident in his son Lenin who changes his name to Levin when he begins to work for the Dutch and German embassies. This is mainly intended to avoid any fear of his clients knowing his political leanings. When Velutha loses his job, he goes to Chacko for help but Chacko dismisses him and dissociates any party responsibility to help him in his need. Behind the façade of communism, Roy points out that people like Chacko were not helping the poor in reality. Satirizing the present nature of communism in Kerala, Roy says in the novel:

“And there it was again. Another religion turned against itself. Another edifice constructed by the human mind, decimated by human nature”(287).

Political freedom also resulted in disorderliness. Even the police who are sentinels of man's freedom and supposed to maintain law and order are found to be breaking the law. Velutha dies in police custody due to the cruelty and inhuman treatment meted out to him in the police station. And that too, for no crime of his own. The problem of unemployment in the country is also referred to indirectly in the novel.

When the workers of the pickle factory talked for better wages, Mammachi remarked:

“Tell them to read the papers. There’s a famine on. There are no jobs. People are starving to death. They should be grateful they have any work at all”(121).

The title of Chapter three namely Big Man the Laltain, Small man the Mombatti is very suggestive in respect of man’s freedom. In the words of M.K.Naik:

It is obvious that the narrative posits an antinomy between two entities: one is small, vulnerable, with very limited capability and cut out to be a victim of the exploiter; the other is large, armed with seemingly unlimited power, which it uses unhesitatingly; it is the inevitable victor, who crushes its victim. The ‘Small’ is obviously the individual and the ‘Big’ a force far larger than him; it could be either Religion or society or Tradition or Destiny etc. While each of these is capable of crushing the individual, they often combine to make the demolition more complete (67).

Arundhati Roy points out that all the problems in society are due to the feeling of fear, which inhibits freedom. This fact is highlighted in the encounter between the police and Velutha. The Police caught Velutha in the background of the History House and began to beat him mercilessly. The novelist comments upon the psychological reason for their behaviour:

These were only history’s henchmen sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws. Impersonal. Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear-civilization’s fear of nature, men’s fear of women, power’s fear of powerlessness. Man’s subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify (308).

The brutal actions of the policemen can thus be seen as a method to prevent a community outbreak, which the political rulers feared.

The degeneration of the traditional arts like kathakali is also, for the author, a cause for concern. Political freedom and the long years of colonial rule has meant that people find traditional arts demeaning. The young search for jobs, which to the present generation, carries much more dignity. The kathakali artists who mastered and preserved the art of kathakali are derided by their children. There is a search for a different identity and an attempt to free themselves from the traditional hold. They do not want to carry on their father's profession and so they became clerks and bus conductors. The guilt and grief over such a predicament and the nostalgic feelings of loss are portrayed realistically by the novelist through the example of a kathakali artist:

He checks his rage and dances for them. He collects his fee. He gets drunk or smokes a joint. Good kerala grass. It makes him laugh. Then he stops by the Ayemenem temple, he and the others with him, and they dance to ask pardon of the gods (231).

The novelist further points out that ancient cultural arts were commercialized and "six hour classics were slashed to twenty minute cameos"(127). In this way, preservation of ancient arts are only done to cater to the taste of foreign tourists.

The demand for social and economic equality resulting in freedom is brought into sharp focus in the novel through the march by the workers. The march was organized by the Travancore-Cochin Marxist Labour union. Their demands were that paddy workers who were made to work in the fields for eleven and half hours a day be permitted to take a one hour lunch break. They wanted that women's wages be increased from one rupee twenty five paise to four rupees fifty paise a day. They were also demanding that untouchables no longer be addressed by their caste names. In that march, the touchables and the untouchables walked together.

The God of small Things also makes a striking comment on the need to educate children without imposing restrictions which might limit their freedom. However, this

social responsibility of the educational establishment is ignored and most schools adhere to the rigid colonial system of education. In such schools, children are not given the freedom to do anything of their own will. In Estha's Annual Progress Report cards, the teacher complained that he did not participate in group activities. However, they never clarified what exactly they meant by group activities. Rahel was blacklisted in the convent and expelled after repeated complaints from senior girls. In each of the schools, the teacher noted that she was an extremely polite child and had no friends. Roy notes in the novel that "it appeared to be a civil, solitary form of corruption"(17). The need for a much more liberal method in imparting education to children is voiced by Arundhati's mother Mary Roy. Arguing about the freedom, which the children studying in her Corpus Christi school have, Mary Roy proudly talks about the early years:

We had a couple of teachers. We gave these children a lot of freedom, to say what they want and write what they want. We call it freedom. We do not call it composition. It is really difficult to strike a balance between norms imposed by society and the freedom, which I think is the birth right of every child (qtd. in Krishna Kumar : 111).

Coming back to the question of women's freedom, *The God of Small Things* stresses a lot on different aspects of love and highlights the insurmountable gulf between man and woman. Male supremacy along with men's claims to define what is best for women is reflected in the character of Chacko and Pappachi. As a woman novelist, Arundhati Roy advocates the emancipation of women. She stresses upon the need for space in the life of women through the character of Margaret Kochamma. Margaret insists on her need for freedom and leaves Chacko. Rahel reflects on the reasons:

"Margaret told Chacko that she could not live with him anymore. She told him that she needed her own space"(117).

The question of women's identity and its dependence on man is also indicated at one or two places in the novel. After her divorce, Ammu comes back to Ayemenen. She considered reverting to her maiden name. However, Ammu sadly points out that 'Choosing between her husband's name and her father's name didn't give a woman

much of a choice.”(37) Women’s subordination to man is equally evident in the relationship between Comrade Pillai and his wife Kalyani. Kalyani addressed Comrade Pillai as *addeham*, which was a respectful form of ‘he’ in Malayalam. Comrade Pillai, on the other hand, addressed her as ‘edi’, which is a derogatory form of address. Kalyani also, like the average Indian woman, first serves food to her husband and children and then eats herself. In an interesting work titled *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen points out to the reason for male superiority within the family structure. In his words:

Men’s relative dominance connects with a number of factors, including the position of being the breadwinner whose economic power commands respect even within the family. On the other side of the coin, there is considerable evidence that when women can and do earn income outside the household; this tends to enhance the relative position of women even in the distributions within the household (194).

To sum up, *The God of Small Things* has a tremendous impact on our thinking. To quote Madhumalati Adhikari:

Arundhati Roy has very deeply scrutinized the problems and variations of bondage and freedom dominant in society. Some are gender based yet role reversals, situational challenges, traditional social norms; moral codes of conduct are equally responsible for the extreme examples of bondages. The escape routes to freedom are not many and the possible few are to be construed, conceived by the ingenuity and power of the anguished. It is evident from Roy’s treatment that since men and women are placed in various enclosures, the search for freedom is a perennial quest of Man (46).

At the end of the novel, it is Velutha who dominates and becomes a tragic symbol of protest for freedom. He becomes the 'God of Small Things' because he is not bound by caste or religion. He loves the two children without making any distinctions. He makes 'little wonders' in carved wood, he learns new trades and gets himself educated. He is a fighter till the end, fighting with the caste inhibitions and with the society at large. He stands up for the poor people's rights as a member of the Communist Party. Velutha stands apart in the novel with a quiet dignity and demands our respect. Being an Untouchable, Velutha shows a type of pride, which his low caste status could not subdue.

Perhaps it was just a lack of hesitation. An unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel (76).

It is this dignity of Velutha that redeems our faith in man and in the values of freedom. His brutal death ushers in a new wave of realisation regarding freedom. Through his death, he becomes a strong symbol of protest for freedom with all its values intact. As in the words of Thomas Jefferson: "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its nature manure"(231).

It is clearly evident that the two novels by women writers—Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of the Night* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* deal primarily with issues relating to women's position in society. Linked with this predominating view in the novels, there is also the notion that society's traditional values have to be changed somewhat to accommodate women's freedom. Many other issues relating to the general freedom of man in society are also emphasized. In short, both the novels offer a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanism; thereby demanding a progressive increase of freedom in the world.

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