

## DEMYTHOLOGIZING WOMEN SUBJUGATION: RETHINKING ARUNDHATHIROY'S GOD OF SMALL THINGS AND SARA SULEHRI'S MEATLESS DAYS THROUGH DERRIDEAN'S THEORY OF PHALLOGOCENTRISM

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### Abstract

Gender equivalence is yet a far-fetched conception for multitudes in an otherwise transforming world. In realms segregated on multiple divisions, women have customarily been placed on the lower pedestal, while the placement moves further downward when it comes to the dilemma of South Asian women, who at best are treated as auxiliaries and not partners to their male counterparts. The recent study aims to critically analyze Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* and Sara Sulehri's *Meatless Days* through the lens of Derridean philosophy of Phallogocentrism. The mentioned works have been analyzed qualitatively through an analytical approach. Sara Sulehri and Arundhati Roy, as South Asian writers, highlight the subjugation of women in the South Asian patriarchal society where women are treated as mere commodities. The regional predicament specifies the marginalization of women, where they are pushed to margins and treated as "others". The authors have captured the existential explorations of depicted women who are endeavoring to claim their identity in a society of binary divisions. The theoretical framework of current investigation has been formulated with the Derridean theory of Phallogocentrism as it ensembles the concept of man's domination with regard to female subjects. It was discovered in the course of this study that both of the writers, Sara Sulehri and Arundhati Roy, protested against the patriarchal attitudes in their society by challenging the philosophy of Phallogocentrism and raised their voice to record their dissension towards such practices. In a quest aimed at deconstructing the myth of Phallogocentrism, the research brings up the alienated and vanquished female voices from South Asia.

**Keywords:** Phallogocentrism, binary divisions, and identity.

## 1. WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN MEATLESS DAYS AND THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

This paper aims to analyze Sara Sulehri's *Meatless Days* and Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* In the backdrop of Derridean theory (2005) of phallogocentrism. Sara Sulehri and Arundhati Roy both elucidate the subjugated women characters in society and highlight the man's character in the phallus. Sara Sulehri's *Meatless Days* (1991) and Roy's *The God of Small Things* (2002) narrate the story of female characters genderised in the patriarchal society. Sara Sulehri and Roy both belong to the South Asian society thus raise voice against the phallogocentric attitude of the patriarchal society where women are looked only through the gaze of the phallus and treated as 'others'.

Phallogocentrism stems out of Derridean theory of deconstruction as according to Derrida the Phallus is always privileged in the production of meaning. Derrida amalgamates the concept of phallogocentrism and logocentrism thus comes up with the concept of phallogocentrism. The Derridean philosophy of Phallogocentrism argues that the modern culture is dominated by phallogocentrism and logocentrism. Logocentrism according to Derrida refers to the theory of determinateness; on the other hand, phallogocentrism is the way logocentrism itself gets genderised by the phallic and central patriarchal agenda. The Phallus is the main center around which all things revolve and man are closer to phallus because they can identify themselves in relation to the other things revolving around the central phallus. The words have to mean through their differences or binary opposites and according to Derrida in such binaries, one word is always valued over other. In this kind of binaries, the masculine and men are always valued in the language while the female is considered on the other side of the binary. The man is treated in language as the self and female as object thus treated as a marginalized other. The term Phallogocentrism emphasizes the linguistic tendency which perceives the whole world from the masculine point of view and overlooks other perspectives which differ from the masculine. Phallogocentrism somehow undermine the monopoly of masculine perspective and favors multiplicity of opinions, which limit the perspective of gender and race. Phallogocentrism is a part of Derridean philosophy of deconstruction which undermines traditions and comes out of the fact that the imbalance between the female presence and male presence is flagrant (Derrida & McDonald, 1982), as Derrida says in his *Choreographies*:

Perhaps the woman doesn't have a history, not on account of an 'eternal feminine' but because one can, all by oneself, all by herself, resist, step aside (to dance, precisely) from a certain history in which one inscribes in general the revolution, or at least its 'concept,' history as continuous progress, despite the revolutionary split, history here directed by the woman moving toward reappropriation of her own essence, of her own difference, toward her 'truth.' Your 'maverick feminist' said she was ready to break, and first of all out of boredom and a taste for the dance, with the most authorized, dogmatic, and serious consensus since it claims to speak in the name of the revolution and of history. Perhaps she was also thinking of another history altogether, with paradoxical laws, non-dialectizable discontinuities, absolutely heterogeneous islands, irreducible singularities, unheard-of, incalculable sexual differences, women who went 'further' centuries ago, apart and dancing in a lone step, others who today invent sexual idioms apart from the great feminist forum, with a reserve that doesn't necessarily prevent them from signing up and taking militant action on occasion (68).

Derrida postulates that women seldom appear in tradition and appear only through the gaze of man .In his work *Politics of Friendship* Derrida presents a model of friendship in a circulated way from Aristotle to Montaigne, Nietzsche, Cicero and Kant to the postmodern era. (Derrida, 2005)

He argues that a friend is always taken as a man never a lady and it always concerns among a couple of men. The other kind of friendships like men with women are not legitimated well by the system in authority and women always remain silent marginal and eclipsed. Derrida discusses an Aristotelian model of friendship in which the best friendship is the one in which friends resemble each other thus find one another as brothers(2005).The motto of French 'equality liberty and fraternity also revolves around brotherhood and marginalizes women from the main stage of life.According to Derrida all philosophies of friendship roam either androcentric or androcentered revolve around the phallogocentric brotherhood.Derrida questions Carl Schmitt's point of view in regard to the political concept friend and enemy in his same book *Politics of Friendship*(2005). According to Schmitt (2008), the political space starts when one recognizes the enemy. So the war in this way is somehow necessary to get an organized political sphere. Derrida undermines Schmitt's idea and says:

Let's come back to Schmitt and give ourselves plenty of room. What a macroscopic view can put into perspective, from very far away and high up is a certain desert. Not a woman to be

seen. A populated desert, certainly, a complete desert in the middle of the desert, and some will even say a desert pitch-dark with people : yes, but with men, men, men, for centuries of warfare and with suits, hats, uniforms, frocks, and with warriors, colonels, generals, guerillas, strategists, and with politicians, professors, theoreticians of the political, theologians. You'd search in vain for a woman's face, a feminine silhouette, and the slightest allusion to sexual difference.(10)

Schmitt (2008) talks about a world of war which is all populated by men and doesn't have any space for women. Schmitt's war discourse completely ignores the visible and invisible presence of women in war. Derrida deconstructs the traditions which decenter women from history and tradition as insignificant creatures thus undermines the phallogocentrism.

*The God of Small Things* and *Meatless Days* struggle against the male domination both socially and linguistically. The authors strive to develop a female subjectivity and criticize Phallogocentrism. Both these novels display women trying to retain their identity in the dominating patriarchal society. Both the author belongs to the South Asian society and tries to raise their voice against the masculinity and phallus. They are South Asian novelists who write in English about the female struggle within the world for their identity and survival. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is set in the backdrop of the colonial Indian subcontinent. The very title of the novel, small things highlight the overlooked and ignored things and creatures (women) which in fact deserve more importance than the big things (man). The title of the novel is symbolic according to Derridean philosophy of Phallogocentrism as it highlights the fact that the hidden and silent should be given agency and voice. The novel is surrounded by stories of broken marriages, death, hatred, violence, sexual / child abuse, sex, and revenge. *The God of small things* throws light on the status of women in India. It exhibits the difficulties women face and their constant struggle against the sexual abuse, exploitation, and torture in the male dominating society. The women in *The God of Small Things* are all in the continuous struggle in the power structure of the patriarchal society. The women characters suffer different kinds of problems in the novel but still resist maintaining their identity in the male dominating society. Ammu, Rahel and Estha's mother, suffers because of her father and who prefers her brother Chacko over her and sent to Oxford for his higher education while she is deprived of education as Arundhati Roy says:

Ammu finished her schooling the same year that her father retired from his job in Delhi and moved to Ayemenem. Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework. Since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals came Ammu's way. Two years went by. Her eighteenth birthday came and went. Unnoticed, or at least unremarked upon by her parents. Ammu grew desperate. All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother.. (19).

Through Ammu's character, Roy shows the domination of the Phallus over the female subject. Derridean philosophy is very much present in Ammu's character as she is presented a typical female character who suffers subjugation and marginalized and gendered because of being women. Roy decenters the binary of women/man and raises the voice of subjugated women thus deconstructs phallogocentrism. Ammu's suffering doesn't end here, she suffers more with Babu her husband who tortures her badly and urges her to sleep with his boss Mr. Hollick for the gain of little profit. Mr. Hollick wants Babu to resign for being not disciplined in work but could be forgiven in only one case if Babu's beautiful attractive wife is sent to his bungalow. Babu instead of getting aggressive became very happy and asked Ammu to sleep with Mr. Hollick, as he narrates the whole story to Ammu and in response "Ammu watched her husband's mouth move as it formed words. She said nothing. He grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence. Suddenly he lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her and then passed out from the effort"(20). Ammu's suffering prolonged when she gets involved in an affair with Velutha the untouchable and her mother Mammachi also turns against her for this crime of a divorcee love with an untouchable.

Mammachi's character also suffers in the novel and is drawn in contrast to the masculine characters. Mammachi suffers badly in the male dominating society as Pappachi used to beat her badly for no specific reason as Arundhati Roy narrates:

He had always been a jealous man, so he greatly resented the attention his wife was suddenly getting...Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place. One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi's violin and threw it in the river.(23)

Pappachi is a jealous husband who couldn't see his wife excelling and getting popular and used to beat her. The domination and authority are shown in an ironical way by Roy as she highlights the linguistic word man given a social authority over the linguistic word women. Mammchi as a female is marginalized doubly both by her husband and son, as her educated son who returns back home after getting divorced, claims Mammachi's pickle factory and refers to it as "my factory, my pineapples, my pickles" (57).

Baby Kochamma is another character representative of women misery in the stream of phallogocentrism as she suffers because of being a single unmarried female as Arundhati Roy narrates Baby Kochamma is in love with the father in church and suffers depression because of that as Roy narrates "She subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for a divorced daughter according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all" (20) Rahel another character is also silenced by society but given voice by Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*. She doesn't possess any place in the society and doesn't live and behave as a normal child. She witnesses the injustice done to her mother and turns as a rebellious soul and answer the old man about her marital status "We are divorced" (130). In her seminal work *The second Sex* Simon de Beauvoir (2011) says "One is not born 'but rather becomes women"(445). In the same vein, she comments in another place "woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality" (20). Roy's characters are representative of the same world which is dominated by the phallus and Roy decenters the phallogocentrism by raising the voice of the marginalized women characters in contrasts to the dominating male characters.

*Meatless Days* is written in the milieu of geographical dislocation and throws light on the suppression of women through false religious discourse in Pakistani society. Sara Sulehri highlights the patriarchal society which circumscribes torture and exploits women. Sara Sulehri describes the biological role of female subjects in a patriarchal society in her *Meatless Days* as on the very first page of the memoir she states:

My reference is a place where the concept of a woman was not really part of an available vocabulary: we were too busy for that, just living, and conducting precise negotiations with what it meant to be a sister or a child or a wife or a mother or a servant. ( 1)

*Meatless Days* is Sara Sulehri's dissatisfaction with the society which denies women's rights and doesn't give significance and agency to women. She reverses the situation by giving a central role to the female characters in her memoir as compared to the male characters. Four chapters out of nine inside the book are named after the female and the rest five narrate tales and anecdotes that again very close to female lives and affairs. The female characters in Sara Sulehri's memoir are drawn as frustrated characters having no means of catharsis against the patriarchal Pakistani society. The female characters are suffocated as Sara's mother is mostly shown lost, submitting to her husband and saying what an excellent thing for each and everything he does. Sulehri's grandmother finds consolation in food and makes it a way to communicate to her husband and son. Iffat, Sara Sulehri's sister, on the other hand, keeps on biting her lips which symbolize her inability to synchronize in the male dominating society. The female characters in the *Meatless Days* are dominated by the man of the household, as Mr. Sulehri is shown the overriding authority in the memoir over all the female characters of the home. According to Sulehri the word women categorizing word as it deprives women of their rights, existence, and individuality. *Meatless Days* highlights the women recognition in their social and biological self not in their free and individual self.

Sara Sulehri's mother Mair Jones is one of the marginalized and displaced lady in the memoir. Mair Jones a Welsh lady married to Mr. Z.A Sulehri suffers identity crisis and subjugation in the post-colonial Pakistan. She was treated as 'other' in the Pakistani society as being a part of colonized race as Sulehri says:

The touching good faith of her Pakistani passport could hardly change the fact that even as my mother thought she was arriving, she actually had returned. There were centuries 'worth of mistrust of English women in their eyes when they looked at her who chose to come after the English should have been gone: what did she mean by saying. I wish to be part of you?' Perhaps, they feared, she mocked. ( 163)

Mair was not only othered in the society but at home as well. She was dominated by her husband and submits to him. Her identity is defined in the whole memoir as a mother and a wife only, not as an individual. She was not taken as a life partner by Mr. Sulehri but only an object as Sulehri comments "Papa's powerful discourse would surround her night and day – when I see her in his room, she is always looking down, gravely listening" (157). Mair Jones character affirms the fact that women were taken merely as sexual machine and servants for giving birth and nurturing the offspring. Nayar (2008) in his *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* argues:

Women's literature from South Asia, Africa, South America, and African Americans in the USA see themselves as situated at the intersection of three repressive discourses and structures: racism, imperialism, and sexism...Sexism, at the hands of an oppressive patriarchy even in native societies, reduced them to machines of reproduction and labour.( 120)

Mair Jones name was changed and given an Islamic name after she got married to Mr. Sulehri but rarely she is addressed with her name in the Memoir .She is mostly called by the names which were assigned to her as a responsibility and duty, not a free individual self. Sulehri herself calls her 'Mamma' throughout. She suffers an existential crisis as she was othered both in society and the family. She was unable to communicate well with her grandchildren as they were all brought up in Pakistan and had full exposure to Urdu. Sara Comments in this regard:

She learned to live apart, then -apart even from herself -growing into that curiously powerful disinterest in owing, in belonging, which years later would make her so clearly tell her children, -Child, I will not grip.' She let commitment and belonging become my father's domain, learning instead the way of walking with tact on other people's land. (164)

Mair Jones gets alienated in the Pakistani patriarchal society because of being women thus a subject to the male dominated society.

Sara's sister Iffat is another victim of the patriarchal society. Though she was a very straightforward and rebellious woman and tried to raise her voice against the patriarchy as she runs away from Kinnaird and marries a man of her own choice and informs her father through a phone call about her marriage straight away. Iffat though tries to protest against the patriarchy still, pays a heavy price for being biologically a woman .She ultimately has to submit to the patriarchs of the society. She submitted to her husband and tried to cope with an unmatched system of an alien world as Sulehri comments:

What energies my sister devoted to Pakistan! First, she learned how to speak Punjabi and then graduated to the Jehlum dialect, spoken in the region from which Javed's family came. She taught herself the names and stations of hundred-odd relations, intuiting how each of them would wish to be addressed. She learned more than I will ever know about the history of the army and then she turned to polo's ins and outs.(141)

Sara Sulehri shows that man governs each and everything and could possess everything while women on the other hand only possess the physical part of the body. And this only possession of female is also a possession of man in each and every regards as Iffat tells Sara "it doesn't matter Sara ... Men live in homes, and women live in bodies"(143).*Meatless Days* highlights the women as silent subjects in the society dominated by the misuse of religious discourse, used and abused as subjects by the phallus.

*The God of Small Things* and *Meatless Days* deconstruct and undermine the phallogocentrism of the society and raise voice against the subjugation of women as a biological subject. Both the novels are set in South Asian societies and more or less discuss the same very characteristics of female displacement, existential crisis, and alienation. The Derridean Concept of Phallus and logocentrism is depicted in both of the narrations by giving multiple points of view to the characters. Both the writers decenter the place of Phallus and bring in multiple voices of the marginalized female characters. *The God of Small things* and *Meatless Days* undermine the patriarchal binaries which give the central place to man while othering women as the less important and meaningless part of the binary. Sara Sulehri and Arundhati Roy highlight the discursive practices which genderise women as weak entities and stereotype them. This is done by these two authors in order to decenter the place of Phallus and gives voice to marginalized females of the society.

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