

## **The Paradigms of Women Antagonists in *The Dark Room* and *The God of Small Things***

**Jyoti Kumari**

Research Scholar, Department of English  
Central University of Himachal Pradesh

### **Abstract**

There is a convention to have a protagonist and an antagonist in every traditional fiction. The protagonist is the heroic and the ideal person of the story around whom the story revolves. The antagonist is the person who is evil and tries to worsen or create hurdles in the protagonist's life. Women most often have been portrayed in minor roles in literary genres. Women were portrayed as protagonist or heroines but not as any major antagonist. But gradually things are changing. The present paper aims to look at the representation of the two of the antagonists in the select novels. One of the novels is written by a male writer and the other one is written by a female writer. Both the writers have chosen women to be the antagonist of their respective novels. The paper will try to analyze how different or similar their treatment with the women antagonist is.

**Keywords:** antagonists, women, patriarchy, point of view, opposition

## **Introduction**

The word antagonist is taken from the Greek “antagonistes” which means opponent or a rival. In literature, an antagonist is the main opponent of the protagonist in any narrative. An antagonist could be a force or an institution which is in complete opposition against the protagonist. The opposition could be personal or impersonal in nature. The impersonal forces like nature, circumstances, addiction or social censures can also play the role of an antagonist.

The women protagonists in the traditional narratives are always ideal traditional women who adhere to the traditional norms and customs of the society. They never question the oppressive patriarchy. They remain silent and devoted towards the duties laid down by the culture and society. The women who play the role of an antagonist are typically shown as people who try to subvert the norms. They question as well as challenge the patriarchy. She acts like an opposition to the traditional society. And a narration written through the perspective of a traditional and restrictive mindset make her a villain for opposing traditional society.

The present paper intends to analyse two novels titled *The Dark Room* and *The God of Small Things*. *The Dark Room* is written by R.K Narayan in the first half of the twentieth century. The novel, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy is published in 1977. The difference between these novels is that one of the novels is written by a male author and the other one is written by a female writer. There is also a difference between the times they have been published. So, the society and the culture which these novels are representing is also different from each other. There is also a difference between the perspective of a male and female writer at some levels.

The character of Shanta Bai in *The Dark Room* is the object of the analysis. *The Dark Room* is a story of a married couple namely Savitri and Ramani. Ramani works in an insurance company and Savitri is a homemaker and performs the duties of a traditional woman. Ramani gets involved with one of his colleagues namely Shanta Bai. This affair leads the protagonist Savitri to leave her home and kids, but later she resumes her duties as she comes back to her home. The character of Navomi Ipe who later on gets known by Baby Kochamma in the novel, *The God of Small Things* is the object of the analysis. The story of this novel revolves around Ammu and her twin children Rahel and Estha. The story is about a non-sanctioned love affair between Ammu and Velutha and how it becomes a tragedy for most of the people in the novel.

### **Discussion**

The similarities which could be seen between these characters is their family background. Both of them do not conform to the institute of marriage. Shanta has left her husband as he was a drunkard. She got her education and a job as well. She does not have any family of her own. Baby Kochamma also does not have her own family. But her reasons are different as she never married. But the lack of family somehow makes both of the characters least concerned about the family of others as they intentionally or unintentionally try to harm them.

The treatment which these characters have received in the mechanism of narration from the writers is different. In *The Dark Room*, Shanta bai has not got space in the narration. As she has no direct encounter with the readers. She is at a distance and presented as a third person about whom readers get to know from other characters or the omniscient narrator. Shanta Bai's character does not speak like other major character speak for themselves in the

novel. She cannot defend herself or explain her inner thoughts which could have added another dimension to her character. Due to the lack of space in narration, she becomes a fixed and stereotypical character. She acts as an antagonist primarily and not as a person.

On the other hand, the character of Baby Kochamma gets a fair share of space in the narration. Her motivations and reasons are stated in the narrative. The perspective changes through different narrative voices. It gives the readers an access to the minds of the characters through free indirect style (Benoit).

The novel, *The God of Small Things* subverts the idea of a traditional woman antagonist. As the antagonist is the opposite of a traditional good woman. As Sunaina Singh says, "In India a woman's life is governed by tradition and family customs. A good woman is one who is a good daughter, wife and mother. To be good means to be of a sacrificing, self-abnegating, meek and quiet nature." However, the protagonist of Narayan's novel namely Savitri is all of these things which make her an ideal woman. And Shanta Bai opposing to these traits become an antagonist in the novel.

But in the novel, *The God of Small Things* none of the women are conforming to these ideals be it the protagonist or the antagonist as the novel is written at a different time by different people. The protagonist, Ammu marries a Hindu man against her parents' wish and later gets a divorce also. She gets into an affair with an outcaste man named Velutha. She doesn't conform to any of the societal norms. Although the antagonist, Baby Kochamma is still adhering to the moral code of the society. But she hasn't been a good Daughter, wife or a mother. She never sacrificed her happiness for others. Baby views her life as a moral righteousness as she led a barren and loveless life but despite that never went against the rules laid down by society and traditions. She opposes Ammu, the protagonist of the story because

she has not followed the moral and ethical codes of the society. She wants Ammu to be alone and to suffer like she has in her life.

The antagonist namely, Baby Kochamma fell in love with an Irish monk, Father Mulligan. It didn't work out between them, but she kept on loving him without any expectations. She never crossed the boundaries of moral and ethical codes laid down by the society instead led a life alone in her parental home. On the other hand, the antagonist in *The Dark Room* Shanta has a broken marriage, she is also not connected to her parents in any sense. She is opposite to Baby because she tries to overstep the ethical and moral regulations. She gets involved in an extra marital affair with a married man in her company.

The women characters Mammachi and Baby have internalized the patriarchal norms. It makes them perpetuate oppression against Ammu. They preserve this patriarchy by denying agency to women. Baby's alliance with the patriarchal order against Ammu is motivated by a sense of jealousy which she feels for her niece as she has dared to go against her fate which Baby could not (Lehiri). It could be established that the woman antagonist in this novel acts as a tool of patriarchy which a male antagonist often play in the narratives. The protagonist here is anti-patriarchy and it makes the antagonist oppose her. On the other hand, in the novel *The Dark Room* the protagonist has at some levels internalized the patriarchal customs. Savitri does everything according to the norms and never questions anything. Although she also takes a step against these norms when she leaves her home but it does not add to anything as she comes back to her family and her husband also does not repent over his actions. The antagonist, Shanta Bai is the one who opposes the patriarchy although she does not oppose Savitri directly. This also suggests that the nature of protagonists have also changed with time along with antagonists.

The character of Baby Kochamma is portrayed as a villain, where through her actions she navigates the plot of the novel. Her role is quite significant in shaping the future of other characters in the novel. She is evil and sadist which most of the villains are. She is a sadist character as she can not stand the happiness of any person around her. She uses to make the twin children feel outsiders as they didn't have the father and were living in their mother's parental home. She even loathed the comfort which twins found in each other. It was she only who provoked Mammachi against Ammu and locked her into her room. She hatched the plan to get Velutha arrested for the murder of Sophie Mol. She advised Chacko, Ammu's brother to send Estha back to his father. She separated the twins and made Ammu walk out of the home. On the other hand, the character of Shanta Bai in *The Dark Room* is not an important character who influences the lives of other characters. Although at some levels she alters the relationship between Ramani and Savitri which affects their family. But here also, she is not the only person who is responsible for that. Ramani himself lied to his wife without any provocation of Shanta Bai. Shanta Bai is not a total villain in nature as she is not evil. But its also because her personality has not been represented in the novel.

### **Conclusion**

The women antagonists are seen as people who do not stick to traditional norms of the society. Shanta bai is against the social norms laid down by patriarchal order. But Baby is portrayed as a tool of patriarchy itself. And Shanta, being an antagonist is anti-patriarchy. Shanta bai is not depicted as a moral or ethical woman as she gets involved in an illicit affair with Ramani. But Baby is ethically very righteous as she does not get involved in any affair. Baby is a strong character of the novel whereas Shanta is not. Baby is a villain because she is evil but Shanta is a villain only because she is anti-patriarchy. The similar thing between both

of the antagonists is that they do not adhere to the institution of marriage. The novel written by R.K Narayan does not give Shanta's point of view to the readers. But the other novel by a female writer gives a window to look and understand the personality of Baby. It could be concluded through the analysis of these novels that there are some similar and distinct points or biases through which male and female writers have portrayed women as antagonists.

### **Works Cited**

Benoit, Madhu. "Circular Time: A Study of Narrative Techniques in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." University Stendhal, Grenoble 3, 18. Jul. 2008.

Kutluk, Asli. "The Position of Women in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*." Middle East Technical University, Cankaya, Ankara, Turkey.

Lehiri, Sharmita. "Alternate Visions of a Feminine Space in *Clear Light of the Day* and *The God of Small Things*." *South Asia Review*, 2007.

Narayan, R.K. *The Dark Room*. Indian Thought Publications, 2103.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Penguin Random House India, 2017.