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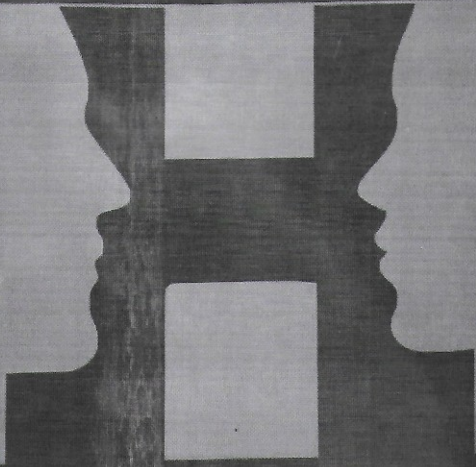


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RE-ENVISIONING GENDER THROUGH THE DOUBLE/TWIN MYTH
IN THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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Arundhati Roy, best known for her innovative use of myth in her text *The God of Small Things* examines feminist concerns of social and political issues related to gender roles. Roy, with only a single novel to her credit, has dared to both question and reject the version of reality presented to her by a patriarchal society. Her preoccupation with concepts of gender and sexuality and her attempt at remodelling such ideological creation of false universals makes her to speak of things for which no language previously existed. She tries to decolonize language and the basic habits of thought people are used to. Her postmodern text shares a close affinity in its representation of gender as a potent factor in the generation of hierarchy of power structures. Through her self-consciously subversive use of myth in this novel, she expresses her anguish at the marginalization of women on the basis of pre-given notions of gender norms in a patriarchally conditioned system. In challenging these false universals she is much more radical and adventurous in her writing. Having imbibed the Western cultural tradition dominated by patriarchy, Christian in its flavour, Roy seeks to deconstruct that very ideology that perpetrates gender inequalities. As a radical feminist she believes that gender dichotomies of masculinity/femininity are male defined, and are oppressive social constructs that prevent women from realizing their true selves. Hence, by placing these two concepts under searching scrutiny in her text, she subverts, undermines as well as deconstructs the accepted modes of thought and experience that serve to perpetuate the domination of men and the subordination of women. The portrayal of the twins in Roy's work is deliberate as she recreates through the power of the 'word/text the whole episode of the creation myth, in particular that of Eve, in her own terms.

The double/twin myth in literature:

Literature has for long adopted the myth of the double/twin as an important device for developing literary plots and themes. The idea of the double/twin

originates from the classical pagan mythology, the Christian and Hindu traditions where gods and later human beings were associated with encompassing dual elements of male/female, body/soul, spirit/flesh, good/evil elements within them. In Western literature the myth of the double is closely associated with the idea of subjectivity. Since the time of Shakespeare to the end of sixteenth century, the double myth was used to emphasise the unity of the self. The question of subjectivity led to the binary formulation of subject-object relationship. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, due to the advancement in knowledge of the inner workings of the mind, literatures of this period represented the heterogeneous nature of the self. However by the beginning of the twentieth century psychoanalysis had contributed to multiple heterogeneity, leading to the absence or erasure of the self. Literature has mostly produced identical doubles/twins to reiterate the idea of unified self either as good or bad in the case of the split personality of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, or Shakespeare's twins like Viola and Sebastian for the sake of comic confusion. In other words literary texts in the past stopped with the recognition of the double as an end in itself, whereas recently it has become a new point of departure where man "no longer suffers from the chronic effects of a split personality, but remains open to all possibilities of human existence by living fully according to mind and instinct and his dual male and female nature" (Bravo 373).

Roy has been found to rework the double/twin myth to deconstruct the cultural concepts of the masculine and feminine that enables her to foreground the distinction between biological sex and culturally constructed gender, to raise questions about gender attributes and the marginal position assigned to the female subject in the dominant male culture. Roy employs a very subtle method to degender the patriarchal myth of the double. Instead of searching for an identity, her characters in their reconciliation with their double/twin arrive at the prelinguistic state of chaos which "embraces all opposing forms in a state of undifferentiated dissolution" (PNE 100).