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## THE MYTH OF *ODIMARICHIL* AND THE CULTURAL RESISTANCE OF PARAYA COMMUNITY IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*.

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### ABSTRACT

The concerned research article entitled as *The Myth of Odimarichil and the Cultural Resistance of Paraya community in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things* focuses on the myth of *Odimarichil* prevailed amongst the Paraya community in Kerala. The myth is powerfully presented in the novel, indirectly, by projecting Velutha as a demi god of Paraya community. The cynosure of the novel, the death of Sophie Mol, is submerged in the ghettos of Myth of *Odimarichil*. One of the main problems that comparative study of literature and cultural studies confront is nothing but the lack of professional academic knowledge in Myth and other cultural aspects. The concerned research article is tries to project that Sophie Mol died because of the occult practices of Velutha, a Paraya in the novel. It may consider as the cultural resistance of those marginalized communities like Parayas in Kerala against the mainstream Syrian Catholic community.

Key Words- Myth- Cultural aspects- *Odimarichil*

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Arundhati Roy's reputed novel *The God of Small Things* revolves round a particular two dominant communities in Kerala; Syrian Catholic and the Paraya tribes. The protagonist in the novel Velutha hails from the Praya community. The novel, in a postcolonial angle, is a shot to the clash of two cultures, the culture of Syrian Catholic and the Paraya community in which the author holds the view that the Parayas are more "cryptic-secret" centered because of their cultural practices and traditions.

In the novel Arundhati Roy indirectly heralds the power and strength of the Paraya community by firmly holding their rich mythical practices. The word Paraya is originated from the word "parai" which means rock, and it is assumed that the parayas are originated from those ancient communities who had spent their life in rocks. The

"Paraya" community is rich with certain cryptic secrets and cultural practices and many a time these practices are essential for the existence of these marginalized dalit community amongst the majority community who controls all material wealth and human physical strength to subjugate communities like these. One of the striking mythical and cultural practices of this community is that they are powerful in destructing (killing) their opponents by using certain practices and customs. In ancient Kerala, this community is side linked in many social and cultural mainstream activities because of the secret and hidden tag of *Odimarichil* in their identity. It is said that *Odimarichil*, turn of destruction, is a kind of occult practice in which the practitioner Paraya man, who always a victim to the majority communities' injustice, metamorphosis into whatever form and structure he likes like dog in

order to destruct his opponent. The area may also include in occultism and black magic. Though the concept is purely mythical, it has certain logical conclusions to believe as it is a cultural practice amongst an ancient community and its artistic form is predominantly exists amongst them as *odiyanthullal*; a kind of dance form prevails amongst the Paraya community.

In Arundhati Roy's hilarious novel *The God of Small Things*, this cultural and mythical identity is existed through the Paraya representatives Velutha and Vellaya Pappan (Velutha's father). The cynosure of the novel is Sophie Mol's death. However, Roy never mentioned the reasons of the death in the novel. Instead, she presented the idea with some cryptic remarks like "the burial killed her". It is assumed that Roy's the god of small things in the novel is Veluthapparayan. If Velutha is capable of creating some small things to Ammu's siblings, Rahel and Estha, which would be has his destructive small things? The question and its answers are buried in Karisaippu's house and other mysteries shrouded in the novel. As a postcolonial novel, the entity of Sophie Mol is always questioned in the novel, for the indigenous entities Rahel and Estha are being always questioned because of the racial superiority of Sophie Mol and the superior position she is usurped from the Ayemanam House where Baby Kochamma and others heralded the alien entity Sophie Mol over Ammu's entity and identity.

Velutha's destructive approach comes here which Roy consciously shrouded behind some cryptic remarks only like Velutha's „polished and varnished nails in red". It is said that the *odiyen*, the Parayan behind *Odimarichil* will receives forms like this and he will always in naked form. Velutha's retaliation against the Ayemanam House, by killing their Sophie Mol, is purely cultural and physical response because of the retaliation the Ayemanam House members meted out against him because of his love with their daughter Ammu. Velutha's form and structure prior to Sophie Mol's death is purely proximate to the form and structure of an *Odiyan*. The police's inhuman attitude towards Velutha is also shown this fact. The novel buried the fact that whether Velutha was arrested for his devilish act, *Odimarichil*, or his love affair with Ammu. The

peripheral reading that Sophie Mol died because of drowning in the Meenachiliyar River is a buried fact to the reader's because she was a "mermaid" according to Roy. Then how can she drown? Or was she drowned because of the hand works of Velutha? The mystery shrouded behind Sophie Mol's death and Velutha's divine qualities are possible to read that Velutha was a representative of cultural stumbling block against the superiors from *outside*. In short, the mythical and cultural canon of the Paraya community *Odimarichil* is a canon to study in the pretext of postcolonial myth and culture of colonized. It may be purely impracticable or superstitious. However, the prevalence of such myths and practices are needed to be studied in par with anthropological biology and psycho-linguistics. This shrouded or buried truth in Arundhati Roy's novel may happened because of her unconscious presence in the place, Ayemanam- a place in Kottayam district of Kerala, which was once a predominant place of the Paraya community. It is the story of many marginalized cultures in India that they perished and vanished in the powerful penetration of other dominant cultures like Christianity. The destruction of the African myth and culture in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* is possible to scrutinize in such an angle.

The vanished myth and cultural canons and forms appear later in the form of art. In the case of Paraya community's *Odimarichil*, their present day *Odiyanthullal*, dance of *Odiyan*, is an artistic form of their culture and myth. One of the striking form and structure in the novel is the presentation of Velutha's (Paraya, untouchable) characterization.

He left no foot-prints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors (265).

This description of Roy about Velutha inherently shows the inherent manly qualities of Velutha. However, Velutha's inherent qualities reflected in the exterior world of the novel remained as a crypto secret.

He stepped onto the path that led through the swamp to the History House. He left no ripples in the water. No footprints on the shore. He held his mundu spread above his head to dry. The wind lifted it like a sail. He was suddenly happy. *Things will*

get worse, he thought to himself. *Then better*. He was walking swiftly now, towards the Heart of Darkness. As lonely as a Wolf..

Naked but for his nail varnish (290).

About Velutha's this structure and form Comrade Pillai also made a comment:

"I noticed something strange ... the fellow had red varnish on his nails..." (288).

In the chapter "A Few Hours Later" Roy illustrated the "structures" around Sophie Mol, in the following manner:

They (Sophie Mol, Estha, and Rahel) seemed to trust the darkness and moved up and down the glistening stone steps as sure footed as young goats. Sophie Mol was more tentative. A little frightened of what lurked in the shadows around her (291).

Roy described the death of Sophie Mol in the following manner: A spongy mermaid who had forgotten how to swim (251).

The structuring structures and forming forms of this sentence hide some code or secret. The spongy mermaid, Sophie Mol, on that particular night forgot how to swim along the Meenachal River. The word, spongy 'semantically represents meanings of "soft" and "an object which has the power to usurp water". The word "mermaid means" a creature with a woman's head and body, and a fish's tail instead of legs". Roy's structuring structures and forming forms shows that Sophie Mol is good at swimming. Then how she is drowned? Arundhati Roy presents Sophie Mol's death in the first chapter itself as: Inside the earth Sophie Mol screamed and shredded satin with her teeth. But you can't hear screams through earth and stone. Sophie Mol died because she couldn't breathe. Her funeral killed her (7).

In short, it is the burial which killed Sophie Mol, not the Kottayam Police's version of drowning in their FIR (First Information Report). This incident, the centrifugal force of Roy's Novel clubs with Velutha's concealment in the History House. Sophie Mol felt, just before her death, a lurked shadow around her which makes her a little frightened (291). Roy presents this structuring structure and forming form around the background of Velutha's presence in the History House.

They (Estha and Rahel) didn't see someone else lying asleep in the shadows. *As lonely as a wolf* (prominence mine). A brown leaf on his black back. That made the monsoons came on time (294).

In short, the nail-varnished wolf-like Velutha" stood behind the background of Sophie Mol's breathless stopping end. Roy as a creative artist and also as a constructive reader of typical Paraya myths and beliefs conjures these elements in Velutha:

He held his mundu spread above his bead to dry. The wind lifted it like a sail. He was suddenly happy. *Things will get worse*, he thought to himself. *Then better*. He was walking swiftly now, towards the Heart of Darkness. As lonely as a wolf.

Naked but for his nail varnish (290).

It reflects that Velutha's "naked body" with "varnished nails" and "lonely wolf – like form" structures along with the "tentative" and "frightened" condition of Sophie Mol. She is frightened, only in this particular scene, because of "the something lurked in the shadows around her". The „lonely wolf“ lurks in the shadows around her. Velutha lurks in the shadows around her. The naked body of Velutha with varnished nails lurks in the shadows around her.

Roy typifies the "creative" and "destructive" power of Velutha beyond the world of opposites in the following manner:

*If he touched her, he couldn't talk to her, if he loved her he couldn't leave, if he spoke he couldn't listen, if he fought he couldn't win* (217).

This description of Velutha is the same as the description of Robert Oppenheimer about electron:

If we ask, for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say 'no'; If we ask whether the electron's position changes with time, we must say "no"; if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say 'no'; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say 'no' (166).

In „Odimarichil“ typical Paraya's mythical- artistic forms, the artist perform the "pain" of the Paravans, as the mythical character Pulimaranja Thondachan felt in his tiger form. In Roy's Novel Velutha realizes

the same „pain“ because of the unity of him with Ammu, the touchable woman. Thondachan, the Paraya intelligent and courageous man, turned as the scapegoat of touchable community's ire and contempt in the myth of Pulimaranja Thondachan, which is filmed in Priyanandanan film *Pulijanmam*. He in his ferocious artistic form, in the form of a tiger, vanished amongst the thick forest because of his wife's failure to transform him into the real form of him by beating him with broomstick (*adimachil*) and pouring his face with rice-water (*chinmathakkuli*). In traditional *Odimarichil*, a dance form prevalent in Paraya community in Kerala, the artist performs this mythical story by bringing the element of „pain“ felt by Pulimaranja Thondachan. Later, Paraya community began to use “the spirit” of Pulimaranja Thondachan in order to destroy the higher class subjugation and segregation towards them. Mythically, an „Odiyan“ is not the real one; he is only the “spirit” of Pulimaranja Thondachan in another body. The myth says that Pulimaranja Thondachan was an intelligent man and good at martial arts. Hence, the “spirit” of Pulimaranja Thondachan will only take his “spirit-metamorphoses” in the body and mind of those people who had already got the same one. Velutha, in Ayemenem, is such a character. His body-mind correlation made him as a Paravan above “force” “matter”, “particles”, “waves”, “motion”, “rest”, “existence” and “nonexistence”. Roy's description of Velutha shows this “reality” of Parayas myth and tradition:

He left no ripples in the water. No foot prints on the shore (290).

The description shows that Velutha had transformed into a “non-existent” form and structure in the „time“ and „space“ bound reality. In *Odimarichil*, the typical Paraya dance form (the dance of destruction) also the artist performs the same „reality“ with grotesque „form“ and „step“ in their dance. Roy presented the death of Sophie Mol in different ways

Sophie Mol died because she couldn't breathe (7).

Her funeral killed her. Even before Sophie Mol's funeral, the Police found Velutha (31).

A spongy mermaid who had forgotten how to swim.

A silver thimble clenched, for luck, in her little fist (251).

Sophie Mol was more tentative. A little frightened of what lurked in the shadows around her (291).

Roy presented the following cynosures in the novel with the support of *odiyen* myth of the paraya community in Kerala.

- Sophie Mol's death
- Velutha in his naked but nail varnish form
- Velutha's Paraya cultural identity
- And Velutha's mental condition at that time (dejected and pained because of Mammachi's inhuman treatment of him)

As a post modern artist, Roy blended and clubbed these four „forms“ (incidents, scenes etc) in a typical way. But this „clubbing“ and „blending“ created an „innerform“ in the wholeness of the text. It is an “unsaid” form in the concerned text. But, the “unsaid” form is conveying its message to the “readers”. Roy's presentation of Sophie Mol's death and Velutha's „enigmatic form“ during that period cast a light on the myth of Parayas and their destructive power. In short, this “unsaid” mythical reality charms all the readers towards the Novel. Sophie Mol died not because of the Zebra- Crossing, but because of the „Crossing“ of Velutha along the Meenachal River during that particular night in a particular, enigmatic” form. The prominent cynosure of the novel, the death of Sophie Mol, is the retaliation of the Paraya community against the mainstream Syrian Catholic Church.

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