



INEQUALITY AND MARGINALITY IN ARUNDHATHI ROY'S FICTION *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

BANI PRASAD MALI

M.Phil Scholar
Berhampur University



BANI PRASAD MALI

ABSTRACT

Arundhathi Roy is a revolutionary writer and an Ambedkarite in the real sense, *The God of Small Things* is the first and last fiction by her so far, Roy became successful to highlight the real riddles of the Hindu society that is caste system, and as we know that untouchable and women inequality is the by product of Hindu caste system. This paper will explore the functionalities of region specific caste systems and untouchable in India. As it analyses the complex nuances of marginality in terms of caste, untouchability and women inequality, as we know that the main theme of the novel is, how the untouchable along with the woman as a subaltern are facing an assortment of trouble by the higher caste people. Velutha is an untouchable, a dalit. Velutha is an extremely gifted Carpenter and mechanic but facing many problems in the society due to his low caste. In this research paper a try has been made by me to find our inequality and marginality in the Hindu society.

Key Words: Arundhathi Roy, Caste, Marginality, Untouchable, Hindu society.

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INTRODUCTION

Arundhathi Roy is a novelist and social activist from India. Roy's writing is immensely rich in imagination and verbal virtuosity. A student of architecture, Roy managed to create ripples in the field of literature with her very first novel which won the prestigious Booker Prize. A born novelist, Roy is also a screenplay writer. With her original and compelling voice, Roy gives her readers deep insight into the psychological and social realm of her characters. As a social activist, she has courageously fought for a better society and continues to strive to make the world a better place in which no caste, caste system and caste based inequality will exist. She reflects the spirit of her times and it is her revolutionary attitude that sets her apart.

Roy's commitment to reveal the deep-rooted social cruelty in the Indian Hindu Society and religion, made her to create Velutha an untouchable. She wanted to show the youth's unique sensitiveness as against the people of the so called upper caste. Roy with her remarkable skill portrays Velutha's helpless, frustration, anxiety and anguish to the degree that he has become embodiment of his own creation or in other words the creator and the creator co-mingle at one point. Through the character Velutha in *The God of Small Things*, Roy highlights the condition of inhumanity faced by them in the society. *The God of Small Things* unravels as a psychological drama and reveals the social stigma a, political drama, and

gender prejudice that are all hidden underneath. Political affiliations, family honour, and caste system.

Besides discrimination based on their gender, the characters in Roy's *The God of Small Things* also face much discrimination because of their caste and culture. Since times immemorial, the unjust treatment meted out to the low caste and the untouchables in India is pitiable. Roy's novel like Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* dares to explore the deep rooted evil of untouchability. Ammu and the untouchable Velutha dare to break the laws of the caste system. Velutha, a highly efficient carpenter works in Mammachi's Paradise Pickles and Preserves Factory. Velutha emphasizes the many boundaries that were prevalent for the untouchables in India. A Paravan by birth, Velutha faces much discrimination both in his personal and public life. Roy writes:

He was called Velutha—which means White in Malayalam—

because he was so black... Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians.

Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint. (Roy 1997, 73)

We are also told that:

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. (Roy 1997, 73)

Roy does not shy away from giving her readers many instances of the pathetic conditions of untouchables even in a Christian community that was expected to rise above the differences in birth and caste. In spite of much advancement in technology and education,

the grip holds of caste system has not loosened. Even though Velutha is highly skilled, he is not respected and in fact excluded from the society. The irrational belief of caste system overshadowed all his talents and hard work. He is paid lesser than other workers in spite of being better than them. In fact Mammachi

...thought he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch the thing that Touchables touched. She said that it was a big step for a Paravan (Roy 1997, 77)

Restricted from doing a number of things in society, Velutha's affair with a high class lady is unthinkable and highly offensive. They break age old norms and are punished for it by the society who decides "who should be loved and how. And how much." (Roy 1997, 33) Even Velutha's own father is enraged by his son's audacity to commit such a "sin" and even offers to kill his own son to avoid any scandal. He is wrongly accused of kidnapping the children and punished by the authorities brutally. He is treated in an inhumane manner. When they go to arrest him, "they wake Velutha with their boots." (Roy 1997, 308)

Even though the charge is never proved against Velutha he is victimized by the "touchable" policemen. Roy gives us a ghastly description yet highly possible description of the torment. She writes:

His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheek bones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered; one had pierced his left lung which was what made him bleed from his mouth. The blood on his breathes bright red, fresh and fresh and frothy. His lower intestine was ruptured and haemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine was damaged in two places; the concussion had paralyzed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control over his bladder and return.

Both his knee caps were shattered (Roy 1997, 310).

After such barbaric treatment, Velutha dies during the night. He is invisible and his death “left no foot prints in sand, no ripples in water. No image in mirrors” (Roy 1997, 265). His body is discarded in a pauper’s pit and Ammu is left behind to feel remorse and later she too dies a lonely death at the “viable die-able” age of 31. Both of them suffer terribly for transgressing the love laws that were written for them. It is not only Ammu and Velutha who suffer due to the society’s senseless laws but even the twins Rahel and Estha are caught in the complex web of caste and politics. Even though Velutha offers companionship and love, something that was denied to Ammu, Rahel, and Estha, he is punished brutally.

CONCLUSION

This novel has dealt with postcolonial issue in India. Identity is a fact essential to prove one’s own existence. The characters are continuously in search of their own ideas. Roy in her debut novel *The God of Small Things* has highlighted the oppression of the marginalized group i.e., the ‘Untouchable’ along with the woman as a subaltern. Here the untouchable still epitomizes the works of marginalization. Roy has successfully tried to sensitize this Postcolonial society to the cruelty of some of its traditions. She has challenged certain common-age-old, self-satisfied yet dehumanizing social taboos, she has shown how patriarchal ideology of an ancient culture decides codes of conduct for both, women like Ammu and untouchable like Velutha. It is this ideology and the value system that is responsible for the violence of the ‘Touchable’ towards the ‘Untouchables’. Roy has presented all this through the eyes of Estha and Rahel. *The God of Small Things* is grounded in historical realities. One finds colonial heritage local realism all together in the novel. She has presented a women’s struggle in seeking ‘identity’ in a male dominated conservative society. She has successfully tried to highlight her attention on social reform. She has definitely raised our sense of pity and sympathy for the downtrodden and the less privileged the untouchables in *The God of Small Things*.

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