

## SOCIAL OSTRACISM IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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### ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy, the Booker prize winner for her debut novel, 'The God of Small Things' is one of the contemporary Indo-Asian writers, whose own consciousness speaks and inspired many to take up this aspect of writing, focusing on the different discourses of marginality such as the position of women, caste segregation and untouchability. The novel, *The God of Small Things* is a tragic ordeal of a woman as a subaltern victim of existing injustice, caste discrimination and various heart-rending problems, ultimately stripping them of their individual identity and marginalizing them into nothingness. This paper attempts to study the novel, reflecting the victims of social ostracism. Ammu's silence not being heard is a mark of women's repression in a masculine culture. And, Velutha when he dares to break his 'silence' and liberate himself from the shackles of hierarchically superior caste meets his end forever.

**KEYWORDS:** Untouchables, Caste, Paravan, Society, Silence, God

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### INTRODUCTION

The novel frames contention for the marginalized and untouchables of Kerala. Roy presents the pathetic condition of untouchables and the struggle of a woman against her continuous exploitation, mental torture and how she tries to have fulfillment in life in a patriarchal society. The novel surfaces the social political situation that disavows cruelty and brutality towards untouchables by the upper caste. The society treats & brutally kills the unfortunate untouchable Velutha, who belongs to Paravan Caste in *the God of small things* for having an affair with Ammu a woman of high Caste.

Roy has explored untouchability in *The God of small things* at two levels. In Kerala, Paravans, are considered socially untouchables and never allowed to have their basic human rights, and secondly the position of womenfolk, who are marginalized, forsaken and tortured by everyone in the society. History of India has seen the evils of caste system and gender discrimination from the distant past to the recent times. Velutha, belongs to Paravan caste, which was untouchables and is subjected to trials, brutality and inhuman treatment by the upper caste.

The continuous suffocation and sometimes to escape from the grim realities of life, but escapism is not a solution for Ammu and Velutha. A permanent solution overflows with in and the two make a survival strategy for a new beginning for a conjugal life. Roy employs, how they ultimately pay for their happiness and meet a tragic end because of social circumstance created by the so-called upper caste powerful people.

Castes are ranked, named and membership in a particular caste comes through birth. According to the Hindu sacred texts of the Rigveda, there are four main castes. **Brahmins** were the priests; **Kshatriyas**, were warriors and rulers; **Vaisyas** were landowners and merchants; **Sudras** were artisans and servants.

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Untouchability is like plague, that has spread and eating our society from ancient time and has been handed down from generation to generation. Caste system became a tool in the hands of the Upper Caste people to exploit and marginalize the lower castes. Lower Castes are still considered untouchables and live an isolated life, and not even offered the basic human rights by the society.

The Namboodiries had varying ideas regarding the degrees of virtual pollution, while interacting with people of different caste. In return, most castes practiced the principle of untouchables in their relationship between other regional castes. Untouchability in Kerala is not restricted to Hindus, and George Mathews says that, technically the Christians are outside the caste hierarchy but in practice, a system of inclusion and exclusion was developed among Christians, the established Syrian Christians also practiced the rules of untouchability. In the colonial period, many lower castes were converted to Christians by the European Missionaries, but the new converts were not allowed to join the Syrian Christian community and they continued to be considered as untouchables even by the Syrian Christians. The unjust and malice treatment meted out to characters in *The God of Small Things* has been shown through Velutha and Ammu, the female protagonist of *The God of Small Things*, traces her life back to her childhood, through the disorderly, chaotic sequence of events and movements that made up her life, and purges herself of her burdens she was carrying within herself. She marries to escape from the situation, but unfortunately her husband is an alcoholic and treats her in a harsh cruel manner. The female protagonist is subjugated by patriarchal power and has lost her identity and her freedom is curtailed. Her quench for mental satisfaction is fulfilled by Velutha, a low caste Paravan. The protagonist of the novel belongs to a class, where silence has been imposed on women and the untouchables. Silence not being heard is a mark of women's repression in a powerful upper class culture. It is indeed a mark of victimization. Roy has employed the language of the interior to delineate the inner turmoil of the characters. It is only through self-analysis and self understanding, through vigilance and courage, the being to change their lives, but ultimately are victims of social ostracism.

The untouchables of Kerala presented by Arundhati Roy in her novel were victims of social Ostracism. Roy presents a sensitive portrayal of sufferings, agony of a marginalized woman in patriarchal society and the sufferings of the most unfortunate sufferer Velutha, a Paravan treading the labyrinthine paths. Roy with a rear gift for sharp psychological insights into the subtleties of the human mind and situation, supported with evocative, unassuming and pretentious style. Roy subtly delineates the sea saw moments of joy and sorrow, the fragments of feelings perceived and suppressed, heartrending story about the victims of age long incessant exploitation and torture by the upper caste touchables.

The novelist reveals, the caste system of the society marginalized human being into a 'hollow' identity. They are grappled between the powerful upper caste and patriarchy of terror of suppression, are inescapably subjected to continuous mental and physical torture. Roy present her characters in search for 'self' to discover their identity, means discovering achievement of freedom to think and decide for oneself. Velutha raises his voice against the rules of society even though and excellent carpenter and intelligent men, "If only had not being a paravan, he might have become an engineer". Roy, 75 is killed by the upper caste, as he pays for having a relationship with Ammu a Syrian widow, a high caste. Velutha was

very caring, humble and loving person. In spite of all the benevolence and kindness, he becomes a victim and meets a tragic end in the police custody.

The novelist, carefully analyses the situations and circumstances in which, a man and a women in love grappled between the powerful currents of untouchability and who are never allowed the basic human rights. Roy presents emotion, madness, hope and exuberance in the novel, is an aesthetic skill of creative writing that presents social and human predicament. The two human beings, Velutha and Ammu are inescapably subjected to continuous physical torture and sexual assaults in the society, their identity and personality are totally crushed, and the very instinct of self assertion gets capitulated.

In the novel, religious difference appeared in the disagreements between Father Mulligan (who belongs to the Roman Catholic Church) and reverend IPe (who belongs to the Mar Thoma Church), as well as Baby Kochamma's conversion to Catholicism and her consequent lack of suitors. The Socio-Political changes brought about by colonial rule led to upper caste Hindus shunning the Syrian Christians. Between 1888 and 1892 every one of the main Syrian Christian denominations founded so-called Evangelical societies that sorted out low caste converts and built schools and chapels and publicized mass baptism (Bayly 314-320). *The God of small things* thus refers to the school for "untouchables" built by the great grandfather of the twins, Estha and Rahel. However, as Roy points out, even though a number of Paravans and members of other low castes converted to Christianity, they were made to have separate churches and thus continued to be treated as "Untouchables". After independence, they were denied government benefits created for "Untouchables" because, officially on paper, they were Christians, and therefore casteless (Roy 71). Roy writes, how her human deprived class is suffocating and struggle for liberation from "untouchability" and imposed silence, some of the lines in "*The God of Small Things*" highlights the social, political conspiracies against the untouchables. They are not allowed to touch anything. The novel portrays the labyrinthine paths of the untouchables, who had "to crawl backwards with broom sweeping away their footprint, so that Brahmins of Syrian Christian would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into Paravan's foot print Roy, 73 -74 The victims of social ostracism in *The God of Small Things* is revealed by Roy in her character portrayal of Ammu, she struggles on personal levels for her rights as daughter, an individual's quest to fulfill her desire, as a child seen in patriarchal power used by father beating his wife and kicked them out of the house. Deprived of higher education, Ammu accepted the marriage proposal as had no choice. Unfortunately, her husband turned out to be a drunkard and forces her to satisfy the boss Mr. Hollick. He "lunged at her grabbed her hair and punched her" (p-42), and this unjust action of her husband forces her to leave him and marriage turns into divorce. After divorce, Ammu returns to her parental home in Ayemenem in Kerala. She seeks some support emotionally, but soon learns her own home turns out to be a hell. She suffers all kinds of mental torture and learns, a divorcee has no rights to aspire for happiness. Ammu, the central character of the Novel has only a marginal existence in the family. "A married daughter has no position in her parent's home. As for a divorcee daughter, she had no position at all." Roy 45 Ammu meets Velutha, a low caste untouchable and Ammu's quench for emotional support ends here. When Ammu's relationship with Velutha is discovered, she is locked in her room and Velutha is banished. Ammu's children Rahel and Estha decided to ran away and Sophie Mol, their cousin also accompanies them. During the night, while trying to reach across the river their boat capsizes and Sophie drowns and died. When Baby Kochamma sees Sophie's body, she goes to the police station and knits a false story and accuses Velutha of being responsible for Sophie's death, and Baby Kochamma takes her revenge against Velutha for his relationship with Ammu. The twins Rahel and Estha were forced to give false statement about Velutha by Baby Kochamma and finally Velutha dies in the hands of police.

The age long unjust and cruel treatment meted out to the low caste untouchables in India, has been a matter of serious concern. Since time immemorial, the untouchables Paravans have been suffering severe humiliations at the hands of upper caste. *The God of Small Things* deals with the conflict between power and powerless, position of womenfolk and identity on the basis of social and gender roles. Roy presents the pathetic plight of the untouchables.

Paravans, like other untouchables were not allowed to walk on public road, were not allowed cover their upper bodies, and not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hand on their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those, whom they addressed, Roy 74.

India is a very complex society with various cultural and religious beliefs. Roy evaluates the complex society evident in the interactions between untouchables and touchables in Ayemenem in Kerala. Vellya Paapen (Velutha's father) is an example of untouchable, so grateful to the touchable high caste out of inferiority complex that, he is willing to kill his son, when he discovers that his son has broken the rule of class segregation and has relation with an upper caste widow Ammu. The whole incident in Roy's *The God of Small Things* takes place in the state of Kerala, and centers around a low caste carpenter Velutha, and a Syrian Christian divorcee Ammu. The novel highlights the position of womenfolk in society, the rights of the women and the untouchables versus age old restrictions, imposed by the traditionalist Indian society. Throughout the novel, Roy presents and encounters between the power and powerless, and ultimately the powerful emerge as a winner.

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