

The God of Small Things: The Silent Voice of Subaltern**Dr.Shagufta Anjum**

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Abstract: *Great literature should tell us about social realities as class exploitation, injustice and above all the insult and abuse the subaltern. Arundhati Roy tries to unveil the Indian contemporary society through this Booker prize winning novel The God of Small Things. This novel published in 1996 has universal appeal because it voices the hidden and suppressed emotions of subaltern. It is a Panorama of Indian social life. It shows the endless struggle of women and untouchables for carving their identity in this cruel, conservative and elite dominating society. They are vulnerable and deserted too so have to suffer at the hands of law makers.*

Arundhati Roy digs out the inner realities of Indian soil and gives a new depth and dimension to Indo –Anglian Literature. Identity development in subalterns needs to be seen in the context of their life experience. It is necessarily bound to their sense of connection to others. .Being a social activist She raises the existential questions of subalterns and their quest for identity with a silent voice in this modern, democratic and complex world.

The hypothesis of this paper is to echo the silent voice of subaltern for their identity through the main characters as Ammu and Velutha who have feeble voice lost in the cacophony of life.

Key words: *suppressed, subaltern, identity, cacophony,quest.*

Arundhati Roy had been honoured by Booker Prize for her venture *The God of Small Things* in 1997. She added a golden page in the history of Indo Anglian Writings. Universalizing 'Ayemenem' she represented a macrocosm in microcosm like R.K.Narayan's Malgudi .Through this microcosm she appealed at social level that was class exploitation and injustice to untouchable and above all the insult and abuse to the woman.

The God of Small Things was a Saga of subalterns, who were socially and economically marginalized. This novel showed the plight of Indian women and dalits (untouchables) and their endless struggle for carving their own identity in this male dominating, cruel and conservative framework. A subaltern faced many ups and downs with limited choices for pleasure and happiness.

Ammu was the most important female character in the God of small things. She was a bourgeois woman and a divorcee, with two children, Estha (son) and Rahel (daughter). Since her childhood as a little girl she had to face lots of anxieties and fears. She had seen the cruelty of her father Pappachi who usually beat her and her mother Mammachi with a brass vase and they used to hide beside the Mehandi hedge. She was also deprived from education because her father was against the girl's education. He believed that higher education was not useful for girls as it corrupts them so he sent Chacko to England for higher education. Due to his male ego he tyrannized his wife and daughter. "A college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl". (The God of Small Things P.N. 38) Ammu's father believed that marriage means male's domination over woman who was born to serve man that should be the ultimate goal and destiny of women. Roy portrayed Ammu as a girl who had knowledge about the Ayemenem people who had no care about women and their feelings and wishes so when she went to Calcutta at her relative to join wedding reception there she met with her future husband. When he proposed, Ammu she did not think but said yes as her acceptance seeing the redness in his eyes as his love for herself (Ammu). Getting him she thought that she had searched her identity but soon her dream shattered when her husband forced her to go to Mr. Hollick to save his job. Even then, "he launched at her, grabbed her hair, punched her and then passed out from the effort." (The God of Small Things- P.N. 42) Soon she found that she had jumped into fire from the frying pan.

Leaving her husband she returned to her parental house in Ayemenem with Estha (Son) and Rahel (daughter) at her father's house she was not welcomed but commented by her aunt Baby Kochamma who disliked the twins. "She considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. Worse still, they were half Hindu Hybrids home no self - respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry". (The God of Small Things-P.N.45) This society did not accept the manless woman and did not tolerate the fatherless children. A divorced daughter from love marriage had no position in her parent's home. She found her parents indifferent to her and her children. So she felt welled up whenever she saw her children, "like a pair of small bewildered frogs engrossed in each other's company lolloping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic." (The God of Small Things P.-43)

She was not welcomed on her returned to her father's house. Here Roy tried to unveil the Indian society which was only designed by men for their own good life. Baby Kochamma herself felt, "The fate of the wretched Man-less woman" and told Ammu "A married daughter had no position in her parent's home". (The God of Small Things p.45) But on the other hand Chacko was welcomed as inheritor of family's wealth. It was also surprising when Chacko flirted with women he was encouraged by his mother Mammachi but on Ammu's part all this was against the love laws and traditions so she was beaten and closed in a room. Her brother Chacko tried to marginalize her but her violation of the cast; class and religion turned her rebellion and transgressor against this social boundary. Aijaz Ahmad also calls her "A woman of great grit" (Prasad, 2006 P. 39)

Murari Prasad commented on her , “Ammu’s rebellion against maternal and marital conventionality, and finally, her liaison with dark skinned and untouchable Velutha (ironically meaning white) constitute a violation against a determinate social order, sponsoring the immutable ‘love laws’ her rebellion or her ‘quest for self identity”.

Ahamd Aijaz (2006) *Reading Arundhati Roy Politically*; in Murari Prasad (edited) *Arundhati Roy: critical prospective*. New Delhi India pencraft international”.

Against the love laws she chose her partner and was heavily penalized for it. Ammu being a divorced women and single mother had no right of inheritance so Chacko her brother told her “what is yours is mine, what is mine is also mine”.(The God of Small Things –p.57) Apart from this Velutha , who was a protagonist and ‘God’ of small things and weak who was brutally and mercilessly persecuted by the big ,the aristocratic and hypocrite society. Here Roy created a social picture of the post colonial world where the untouchable still face a hostile society that encourages them to search their identity. Velutha, the God of small things was never welcomed in society.

He was trying to change his position in society adapting the mechanism of carpentry but failed .Untouchability was still practiced in India. In this novel it was felt that subaltern want to speak, but they were stopped and beaten to death by police inspector. Veshyas’s (prostitute’s) condition was also miserable they were beaten mercilessly by policemen and were not allowed to have long ,oiled hair due to their position in society .Ammu was also refused to bury in Church for her illicit relationships with Velutha and finally got electronic crematorium. Gayatri Spivak expressed her views in a famous article, ‘*can subaltern speak*’, “The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with “Women” as a pious item. Representation has not withered the way the female intellectual has a circumscribed tasks which she must not disown with a flourish”. (Chakravorty, Gayatri Spivak, “ Can the subaltern speak?” , in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds) *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* Basingstoke: Mc Millan Education, 1988), P.N. 308. The social norms of colonial rules were challenged by a subaltern woman, Ammu who was socially and economically marginalized. Gayatri Spivak told that it was the duty of the elite or the intellectual group of society to represent the subaltern raising their voices. Through insurgency we could change the world. Roy had also remarked in this novel so many times as, ‘things can change in a day and says “revolution is not a dinner party. Revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence in which one class over throws another”.(*The God of Small Things*- P.N. 280.)

Dual character of Indian patriarchal society was reflected by the rejection of love affair between Ammu and Velutha, on the other hand we celebrated the same love affair of Lord Krishna. Like Velutha ,Ammu also challenged the Indian marriage system and social structure. Both the characters became a symbolic personification of subaltern. But what they received at the end death that was considered the final destination for subaltern.

On the basis of caste, elite society exploited the lower people. In ancient time casts were categorized into four Varnas: Brahmins: Priests, Kshatrys : warriors, Vaishyas: traders, Shudras: laborers. Outside the caste system there were untouchables who were considered polluted and not to be touched. The plot of this novel revolved around this theme as the protagonist Velutha who could not enjoy the benefits like other touchable. So caste had become the source of inequality and disparity. Officially they were Christians and therefore castless. "They were not allowed to touch anything that touchable touched. Caste Hindu and Caste Christians" In Mammachi's time, "Pravans, like other untouchables, were not allowed to walk on the public road, 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 thy addressed" (P.N. 74).

Mammachi(mother of Ammu)was one of the most important female characters who was also physically and psychologically abused wife. She was a woman, who underwent torture and trauma and never spoke out. Mammachi acquired a position among the caste class, gender subaltern and patriarchal society. She was tortured by her husband, "every night he beat her with a brass flower vase."(The God of Small Things- P.N. 47.) Her son Chacko took away the pickle factory from her and told her to be a sleeping partner. After pappachi Chacko acquired his father's position in the family because he was the only man in the family. Through the portrayal of Chacko Roy tried to lash out the hypocritical moral code of society which differentiated man and woman.

Amitabh Roy comments: although he (Chacko) was the follower of Marxism even then he followed Manu's tradition as the son's domination over mother in old age. As a post colonial Indian woman she succumbed to the lures of pre-colonial caste rules and 'love laws'.

Arundhati Roy wanted to express the importance of woman in this cruel society. According to her superman is possible with the help of woman. She says that woman is not mere a toy or object who satisfy man's passion and give him pleasure. Thus she gives a witty reply to Nietzsche who believes, "God created women. And boredom did, indeed, cease from that moment – but many other things ceased as well. Woman was God's second mistake." (Advanced English Essays p.No.91 Malhotra brothers, Delhi, 1962).

Roy admired woman like Shakespeare, woman was not an evil but without women man was incomplete as a flower without fragrance. Isaac Pocock holds this:

"Oh say not women's

Love is bought

With vain and empty treasure

Oh say not women's heart is caught

By every idle of pleasure.

When first her gentle bosom knows

Love's flame, it wonders news

Deep in his heart this passion glows;

She loves and loves forever.”(Advance English Essays p.95 Malhotra Brothers, Delhi 1962)

Describing 'Big Man the Laltain , Small Man the Mombatti' in chapter 3 Roy aroused pity for subalterns (downtrodden , dalits and deserted) who were marginalized by elite group of society. The laltain was well protected it could face the blowing fierce wind of storm due to glass support but mombatti did not have any support for protection. Mombatti could lit another lamp but laltain could not .Mombatti referred here the God of small things as Ammu ,Velutha ,Estha and Sophie Mol and laltain means the God of big things as Pappachi ,Baby Kachamma, Chacko , Comrade Pillaian and Inspector Thomas matthew. Ammu and Velutha were indulge in small things for carving or searching their identity .In this search they violate the love laws.”Even later, on the thirteen nights that followed this one, instinctively they stuck to the Small Things. The Big Things ever lurked inside. They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things.”(The God of Small Things P.-338)

Ammu always seemed conscious about her own house, her children's education and over all for herself and her children's future identity. When she talked Estha and told him in future we would have our own school. At this Estha said, “Free bus rides free funeral. Free education.....and in our school we will have classrooms and blackboards.”(The God of Small Things P.325)

Velutha, Ammu's God of small things was an untouchable. Influencing by his mechanizes and artistic expertise .Mammachi also believed that if he was not born in an untouchable family he would become a skillful engineer. Mammachi employed him in his factory but other employees did not like him. He also converted himself into a christen religion to save himself from this cruel and caste ridden society to be a victimization. Whenever he went to Ayemenem House he was never allowed to enter the room. Velutha would come with Vellya Pappan to the back entrance of the Ayemenem House to deliver the coconutsPappachi would not allow Pravans into the house .”(The God of Small Things P.73)

Roy was seemed inspired with Anand's character of *Untouchable* Bhakha and Chinue Achebe's character Okonkwo in *The Things Fall Apart* because the image of Velutha emerged out of the image of Bakha and Okonkwo .All were searching their identity in this colonial and post colonial world .Velutha changed his religion as a rice Christian on the other hand Bakha also imitates as an Englishman with his outfits to save himself with the claws of this cruel

society. Okonkwo and Velutha both have violated the rules of this traditional society in the pursuit of their identity. We have seen the plight of subalterns whenever they raised their voice they were silenced. If they turned as rebellion then they have to taste the fruit of death like Velutha, Ammu and Okonkwo. Even in this Post colonial world where we are enjoying democracy with equal rights they are still prey of discrimination. In reality subalterns were still struggling to carve their identity and they need the help of intellectuals.

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