

Explicating the Treatment of Dalit in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*



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Abstract

This study conducts an in-depth analysis of Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*, focusing on the portrayal and treatment of Dalits. The primary objective is to examine how the novel depicts the concept of Dalit treatment within the framework of the postcolonial era. Various instances throughout the narrative illustrate diverse forms of Dalit treatment, highlighting issues such as caste segregation, identity struggles, and resistance against feudal and patriarchal structures imposed by the economically and socially influential upper castes. The novel reflects on these themes through a series of events that underscore the complexities of self-identification, gender dynamics, economic disparity, and societal norms prevalent in the depicted community. This paper provides a detailed exploration of each type of Dalit treatment portrayed, offering insights into the broader socio-cultural implications within the novel.

Keywords: Treatment of Dalit, Struggles, Untouchables, Caste Segregation, Reflection, Self Identification, Feudal, Patriarchal forces community

Introduction

The god of small Things is perhaps the most popular fictional work of Arundhati Roy. This work is so meaningful and touching the contemporary social phenomenon is such a realistic way that it was honored with booker Prize in the same year when it was published i.e. in 1997. The greatest feature of this single book is that it is touching multiple themes. There is several sorts of divisions and classifications in society but the chief grounds of social divisions are money and caste. The present work by Arundhati Roy is covering both the aspects. As the novel is consisting the theme of Marxism on one hand, we see that there is the sense of superiority and inferiority on the basis

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of caste on other hand. A chief cause of tragic environment in this novel is caused by the so called casteism and torturing of Dalits and lower class people by upper caste people.

When we go through this novel, we notice that there is nothing artificial or imaginative but everything is happening just with a changed name. The concept of unthouchability is very high in India and no one is ready to abolish the system and practice of dalithood and untouchability from society. There is a class division among the people as touchables and untouchables and the touchable class of people think themselves as superior in comparison to those who are really untouchables or from any lower society. The lower class people are though as a dark see over humanity and the upper caste people are not agree to digest them. In our contemporary era, we see, the concept of dalithood is the most discussed social and literary theme around which the whole of the literary world is moving.

The plot or the story of the novel *The God of Small Things* have been set in Kerala. From the very beginning to the end, we see that the main plot of this work is rotating around the two families or the two sections of society – the upper caste and the lower caste, the touchable and the untouchables, the rich and the poor, the employer and the employee. Thus, there has always been an environment of conflict in it. In her novel *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy is aiming to show the hateful behaviour of the upper-class people toward those who are belonging from lower class untouchable community. Thus, the title *The God of Small Things* refers to the untouchables and dalits.

It is an irony of civilization that people who work hardest to produce riches, suffer the most and fare the worst. They are looked down upon and treated shabbily by the powerful. We know them as 'working classes, a term used all over the world. They are included in the 'small things' Arundhati Roy speaks for. But Indian tradition has left as a legacy of the Aryan past a section which is placed worse than ordinary members of the working class. That is known generally as 'untouchable' or 'pariah'. As it sounds better, Mahatma Gandhi named them as 'Harijans' (children of God) while the census authorities during the British rule referred to them as 'exterior classes'. Nowadays they are popularly known as the 'depressed' or Dalits.

The concept of dalithood is inseparable from the theme of untouchability, harijans, pariah and depressed and all these words are often used as a synonym. Arundhati Roy presents the dark and gloomy phase of the dalits in her novels. The God of small Things' the masterpiece and highly elaborate work of Arundhati Roy gives a new name to this depressed category as 'small things' the very title of Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* is consisting the direct representation of Dalits in it. 'Small Things' is directly speaking about untouchables. In the plot of the novel 'The God of Small Things', there is the provision of untouchable class. When the elite family and the children go to visit the History House, we see there none but only untouchables. They live there a solitary life because they were not allowed to join the company of the elites and the upper caste elites. Generally Dalits i.e. small things are presented with extremely poor financial status without any fixed source of income and leading the life without proper education in the environment of illiteracy. Arundhati Roy picturises the dalits in extremely rough and starving

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condition and that is why they frame a group and fight against the aristocrats and the rich while they know well that there can't be any sort of similarity of them with the elites.

The Dalit community has deep and inseparable impact of Marxism and dalits make a community and fight together with the upper caste people. It is known as communalism. The presentation of Arundhati Roy about dalits is not liked by many critics and they oppose her by saying that Arundhati is presenting the dalits not of present day but from classical era. There was a large scale opposition of *The God of Small Things* because dalits and communalists thought that Arundhati Roy was doing nothing but picturing their image in a negative form because the novelist has presented the untouchables and dalits as the most insincere class of the society. In this novel, Velutha is not an individual but a type character and he represents the whole community of dalits and factory workers. It has been narrated in the novel that he cheated to those who had employed him. This idea and style of Arundhati Roy was widely opposed by working class labourers and even some political parties also came openly against this idea of Arundhati Roy. In more clear words, it can be said that the novelist is opposing the idea of Marxism and bitterly speaks against the naxalism. Arundhati Roy has tried her best to reveal the original picture of society in which how dalits live and what they think and how they behave with the upper class people. As a true social critic, she has tried her best to present the pros and cons of dalithood and its interconnection with upper class elites.

Arundhati Roy doesn't favour any one side blindly but she frankly speaks about the general traits of both of the groups. She presents through the plot of the novel that the upper caste and rich class people have ever a sense of superiority in their mind and they never think the untouchables and working class people equal to them. The surprising thing is that they never think or esteem dalits as human because and don't give value to them more than animals. In response to such sort of behaviours, we see that dalits are also growing very violent and they are adopting violence as a tool to abolish the gap between the rich and the poor as well as played by both the dalits and upper caste people is extremely satirical. A sense of pre-existing sense of prejudice in the mind of dalits and a high sense of pride in the mind of upper caste people always create a gap between the upper caste and the lower caste dalits. The rich class of people try their best to develop a sense of sympathy in their mind for the dalits when they are really in need but dalits think that the upper caste people are insulting them through the curtain of sympathy and help. On the other hand the upper class gentlemen hold the complete sympathy with dalits but they never think to give the equal place with them.

The novelist's presentation of the dalits is constantly blended with irony. People well-placed in society attempt to be kind and sympathetic to them but their deep-rooted prejudices and the fear of losing their supremacy undermine their professed liberal or revolutionary aims. A gentleman wants to educate the untouchables but dares not place them in the same school with the touchables. A leader talks about social revolution but dreads an untouchable who holds the party card. An employer recognizes the merits of his employee but attaches more importance to his caste.

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The God of Small Things is a very rich character gallery in which the novelist is presenting three major categories of dalits through three major dalit characters. Before going further, I would like to make clear that the dalit characters narrated in this novel are not individual but type characters. There are three major dalit characters in the novel. The God of Small Things – Vellya Paapen kuttapen and velutha vellya paapen is the father character and he has two sons who are Kuttapen and Velutha. This untouchable dalit community is belonging from a typical caste known as Paravan. These three dalit characters are depicting the three major sorts of dalit community through them on the basis of their specific behaviour. This trio of character creation is displaying the high rational observation of Arundhati Roy.

The first out of three major dalit communities is the docile community. The dalit from this community are very humble and docile, submissive and loyal and they never think about getting up against the authority of the upper caste elites.

The second out of three major dalit communities is the discontented paralytic and this core of character is represented through the character of kuttapen. Such characters think about rising against or opposing against the elites but they are compelled under the hands of situations and their individual problems and that's why. They are never able to stand against in spite of their discontentment.

The third category may be welcomed as the chief and the leading community among the dalits. This category of character has been represented through character of velutha. This category is known as the rebel category. The dalit characters of this category are never ready to accept any sort of exploitation of violence with the dalit people and actively raise some sort of movement or some secret plan with a view to enlarge the rank and status.

We come across three characters in The God of Small Things which belong to the category of the downtrodden. They are Vellya paapen and his two son's Kuttapen and Velutha. They belong to an untouchable caste called Paravan. They are toddy trappers according to the tradition. Arundhati Roy gives a lot of information about the untouchables of Kerala in this connection. She also gives a generally perfect picture of the dalits with their varying responses to the caste oppression through the device of trio. Vellya Paapen, Kuttapen and Velutha constitute the trio which depicts the three types of dalits in Indian society, namely, the docile conformist, the discontented paralytic and the rebel who moves for equality and stakes his life.

When we go a little back before the plot of this novel, we find that India was divided in several particles merely on the name of caste and religion. There was no sense of unity among them and the British found it very easy to rule over India as the largest population, the lower caste dalits were very happy with the British people because there was no sense of discrimination in the mind of British people on the ground of caste.

In this way, Arundhati Roy is indirectly trying to show and prove that the British people were able to develop in India because they found the Indians divided. Dalithood is a curse not for personal but from the national point of view. The unity and integrity of a nation might be damaged if the nation is having the drawback of dalithood and casteism because there keep the people

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away from coming together on the same stage. Arundhati Roy's idea of dalithood is very dangerous from every point of view. She tries her best to prove dalithood as a curse over the humanity. Being the same human, no one gives value and respect to the people belonging from the lower dalit community. The most surprising thing is that the dalits have also made a categorization among themselves as upper dalits and the lower dalits. There is a sense of superiority in the mind of upper dalits and they always insult the people from lower dalit community. In this way, we see that Arundhati Roy is working through her fictions as an active socialist who is trying her best to make the people aware as how they should live forgetting the discriminative walls of dalithood and casteism-

As noticeable above, the discrimination against Dalits is not religious-specific. Although the caste-system comes from the Hindu religion, it had permeated into society itself. Roy mentions that when the British came, many untouchables joined the Anglican Church to escape the oppression that they were facing. They become known a 'Rice Christians' because the Dalits were given money and food as added incentive to the Christian Church.

A great critic, scholar and literary gem named Mary weidner has tried her best to sum up and explain Arundhati Roy's ideas of untouchability, dalithood and its utility in present scenario. She is presenting an ideal model as what the people should care while treating or behaving with Dalits. Arundhati Roy's idea of small things i.e. dalits is sympathetic as she revels the savage and very painful death of Velutha. The only drawback of Velutha was that he fell in love with a lady of non-dalit origin and it was the root cause of all his sufferings. The torturing of Velutha is not harmful and paining only for him individually but it is the cause of all the tragic scenes in the novel.

In conclusion, Arundhati Roy stands out among contemporary writers for her distinctive approach. She keenly listens to the voices of the marginalized, such as Velutha and Ammu, portraying everyday injustices with a focus on ordinary despair. Her works engage deeply with asymmetrical globalization, presenting rural areas as focal points of intensified global influence. Moreover, Roy provides a platform for diverse subaltern voices within the broader human community. Her writing is imbued with a passionate commitment to empower the marginalized, evident across her extensive body of work, reflecting her unwavering courage and conviction.

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