

.The Dalits as "Small Things" In *The God of Small Things*

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The God of Small Things, a Booker prize winning book which brought Arundhati Roy into international limelight, established her as a champion of the dalits and the downtrodden. She has very aptly portrayed the ostentation and hypocrisy of big Man and small man's tireless effort to seek an identity in this callous society. The novel shows transgressions of rules in the world of small thing and big thing, which make the life of small thing miserable and more sinned than sinned against. In one of the interviews granted to the press, Arundhati Roy is reported to have said:

"Fiction for me has been a way of trying to make sense of the world as I know it. It is locked very close to me... If I had to put it very simply, it is about trying to make the connections between the very smallest things and the very biggest things and to see how they fit together"(*General Knowledge Today*, p.6)

The God of Small Things "stands for the life of the weak and the helpless, whether they are small creatures like blue bottles, frogs, and ants or human beings such as the victims of Hollick's lust or the women who supply Chacko's 'man's needs' or children like Estha and Rahel... The God of Small Things represents all those people who are victimized by the forces of history, dead convention, false pride and respectability, the tyranny of the state and the politics of opportunism and andro-centric order"(. R.S Sharma,p.43)

'Small Things' are victims of society and the sheer will of the unthinking powerful. There are selfish, cruel people in our society who treat the poor and the powerless no better than "small things". They are unable to raise their voice against the injustice done to them. As they are voiceless, as they cannot resist, they are but "small things", the deserted, the dalits, the marginalized and the defenseless. Small Things so called the dalits can be put into three categories in the novel: women who are placed in a subordinate position by society; children who are unable to defend themselves and suffer a lot to survive; the workers and the dalits who are down trodden, exploited and abused traditionally.

Her commitment to the dalits and the deserted (small things) issues from her worldview and we have to consider her novel in the light of the rest of her literary and social activities. She says in an interview:

"As far as I am concerned, whether the protest is about Nuclear Weapon or Big Dams on the Normada, what one is fighting for is nothing less than a worldview, what all of these works have in common is that they attempted to analyze power and powerlessness"(*Frontline*, , p.132)

The God of Small Thing deals with the confrontation between the God of Big Things (Baby Kochamma, Pappachi, Mammachi, Chacko, Comrade Pillai and inspector Thomas Mathew) and the God of Small Things

(Ammu, Vellay Paapan, Velutha, Rahel and Estha, Sophi Mol etc). The novel crystallized the issues of atrocities against children, women and untouchables -all these dispossessed of an identity or speaking a voice. The novel can be viewed as a discourse of the marginalized and subordinated.

Ammu, the daughter of Pappachi and Mammachi finds living with her parents unbearable because her father is an ill-tempered bally who pretends to be an ideal husband and ideal father before outsiders but makes the life of his family more miserable. He used to beat her and her mother Mammachi. She was also deprived of the higher education because according to her father college education is not useful for a girl

"Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework"(The God of Small Things, p.38.)

Ammu grew desperate and wanted to escape from Ayemenem house. "All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill temperd father and bitter long suffering mother".(The God of Small Things, p.39.) She went to Calcutta where she married an assistant manager of a tea estate but her husband, to her dismay, is found to be alcoholic who went to the extent of pushing her wife into the arms of Mr.Hollick, his boss so that his job could be saved. This extreme humiliation created a sense of hatred in her heart and she left her husband and returned unwelcome to her parents with two children Estha and Rahel.

A divorced woman has no place or respect in the traditional Indian family. She knew it but had not experienced it. Women are the symbols of the family's honour and pride and are supposed to live within the prescribed norms. No such compulsion attaches to men. Ammu's brother, Chacko, is a divorced man. He married a foreigner and there was obviously some initial resentment over his action. But when he comes back he was accepted in the family and was made the master of the family. But Ammu was neglected, ignored and humiliated when she came back at her parental home. Her presence was a source of irritation and annoyance to others. While Chacko was totally indifferent to her plight, Baby Kochamma herself a victim of the man dominated society, despised Ammu and her twins. Her vacuous days, black nights stifled her spirit more bruetly than her husband's beatings did. Her condition in the family became more terrible when she established an illicit relation with Velutha, an untouchable, by violating Love Law that layed down "who should be loved and how and how much"(The God of Small Things, p.31.). Mammachi and Baby Kochamma who have not only tolerated but facilitated Chako's sexual relation with low caste women workers in Pickle Factory in the name of the 'man's needs' demonstrates their sorrow and disgust at the unfortunate fact that Ammu had liaison with Velutha. She thought of her "coupling in the mud with a man whowas nothing but a filthy coolie"(The God of Small Things, p.258.). The drowning of Sophie Moll was wrongly associated with her illicit affair. She was maltreated by her family and asked to leave the house.

Both Ammu and Velutha are the victims of a cruel social system. Ammu's gender and Velutha's caste were looked down as their faults. Velutha is a Paravan untouchable who is brought up by his father in a house that is socially hated, economically neglected and culturally barren. It is to be noted that Paravan is a community in Kerala, subjected to extreme ignominy through ages. To escape the scourge of untouchability Velutha's forefathers had converted to Christianity. But the stigma attaching to their caste was not wiped out and they were not accepted in society on equal terms. The Christians themselves had adopted, as a matter of natural form of adoption, the strict and unavoidable caste system. Thus, the Paravan had only received the status of untouchable Christians with separate church and priest. Christianity has not ameliorated the lot of the converts from the untouchable communities. Despite their conversion they are still treated as untouchables:

"They were known as the Rice- Christians. It didn't take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Pariah Bishop. After Independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore casteless. It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all." (The God of Small Things, p.74.)

Velutha's father, Vellya Paapen, "an old world Paravan" belongs to the time when Paravans were expected to crawl backward with a broom sweeping away foot prints so that Brahmin and Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping in a Paravan's foot prints. He took for granted the social disabilities imposed on the untouchables by tradition. Vellya fears for his younger son because of his rebellious nature. He can not find fault with him what he says or does but he resents (dislikes) "the way he says, the way he does." Vellya Paapen's fears belong to harsh tragic realities he had seen and experienced. He belongs to the hierarchical system and could not imagine transgressing the limits set by the cast system. The second half of the chapter 13 is an intensely moving section of the book throwing up the picture of Vellya Paapen in his most cringing humiliating aspect, pleading and weeping in an act of confession of his guilt. In turn he receives the most inhuman treatment from women:

"Vellya Paapen kept talking weeping, moving his mouth Baby Kochamma walking past the kitchen, heard the commotion. She found Mammachi spitting into the rain, Thoo! Thoo! Thoo! and Vellya Paapen lying in the slush, wet, weeping groveling, offering to kill his son, to tear him limb to from limb. Mammachi was shouting, Drunken dog! Drunken Paravan liar." (The God of Small Things, p.256.)

This pitiable scene of his utter surrender to the upper caste family is the symbolic of the status of the Paravan untouchables.

However, in Velutha Arundhti Roy presents before us a youth of new idea and strength. His character has been powerfully drawn in terms of his robust physique and in born talents for making wooden objects.

Mammachi said, "that if only he had not been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer" (The God of Small Things, p.75.). In factory Velutha's talents as a carpenter could hardly be ignored. He was always in demand. But there was a great deal of resentment among the other touchable factory workers. Why? Because the touchable workers were so mad with casteism that they thought, "Paravans were not meant to be carpenters" here caste discrimination is clearly seen:

To keep the others happy...Mammachi paid Velutha less than she would a touchable carpenter but more than she would a Paravan. Mammachi did not encourage him to Su enter the house (except when she needed something mended or installed). She thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all and allowed to touch things that the touchables touched".(The God of Small Things, p.77.)

His plight is not much different from that of Anand's Bakha, an untouchable who receives tyranny and injustice, insult and humiliation sometimes on trifles and sometimes without any cause. Velutha also suffers untold miseries at the hands of people whose attitudes are guided by age-old casteist prejudices. His only fault is that he is a Paravan and moreover he loves Ammu. When his relation with Ammu is revealed Velutha is considered transgressor of Love Law that does not permit a untouchable man to touch a touchable woman.

She summons Velutha to her house and uses abusive language that surprised all listeners. She screams: "if I find you on my property tomorrow I will have you castrated like a pariah dog that you are! I will have you killed".....Mammachi spat into Velutha's face. Thick spit,it splattered across his skin, his mouth and eyes." (The God of Small Things, p.284.) She is not satisfied with all these. Ammu is tricked into her bedroom and locked while Velutha is implicated in false case of attempted rape, kidnapping of Children and Murder of Sophie Moll.

When he knows all the doors are closed for him, he goes to Comrade Pillai for help whom he sees as the messiah of the poor and the downtrodden but instead of sympathizing with him, he dismisses him with the remark: "But Comrade you should know that party was not constituted to support workers' indiscipline in their private life" (The God of Small Things, p.287.) It surprises us whether the party was constituted to defend caste rules or further the ambitions of Pillai.

At the Kottayam Police station, Pillai does not try to challenge the false accusation against Velutha and hides the fact that he is a card-holding member of the party. Here the Politics joins hand with the casteist state police in a deceit game of pinning down Velutha. The police killed Velutha in the most brutal manner, without sufficient evidence against velutha for having committed any crime'. He hides in the History House where he is nabbed by six police men who beat him severely, breaking his skull, knee ribs and reducing him to pulp. He is not given an opportunity to explain himself. Arundhati Roy at several places uses the expression 'Touchable Police' in order to remind the readers of its role in oppressing the untouchable, its role in sustaining the caste-based division of society where the lower class is denied through force their basic rights to equality.

The novelist's presentation of the dalits is ironical. A gentleman wants to educate the untouchables but dares not place them in the same school with the touchable. A leader talks about social revolution but dreads an

untouchable who holds the party card. An employer recognizes the merits of her employee but attaches more importance to his caste.

The tyranny and brutality Ammu and Velutha underwent also inflicted on Estha and Rahel. They went through a tumultuous childhood tortured initially by Parental strife and bullied by selfish adults. In Ayemenem house they along with their mother were unwanted and treated as outsiders. Baby Kochamma disliked them for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. They were half Hindu hybrid whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry. She made them realize that they "lived on sufferance in the Ayemenem house, their maternal grandmother house, where they really had no right to be". (*The God of Small Things*, p.45.) Chacko called them "mill stones around his neck".

Even the maid servant of the house Kochu Maria left no chance to remind Estha of his position in the house. At one night. Estha stood on his bed with his sheet wrapped around him and crashed into bed without bending his knees like a stabbed corpse. Kochu Maria said that she would complain to Mammachi: "Tell your mother to take you to your father's house, she said, "there you could break as many beds as you like. There are not your beds. This is not your house". (*The God of Small Things*, p.38.)⁸³

The most traumatic of his experiences which the sensitive mind of Estha counteracts is the misbehaviours of the Orange Drink man Lemov who forces the boy to masturbate him. Its effects sank into mind of the child and taunted him throughout his life. It resulted in his obsession with loneliness and his abhorrence of adult company he always remained in fear if his mother came to know of it she would begin to love him less.

Rahel was also given same kind of treatment. She did not get the love and affection from her elders. As a child she had seen the sufferings of her mother, the insults and ignominies inflicted on her Velutha was father like figure to children but ironically, they were deceived in giving a false evidence in a case when Velutha was arrested and brutally tortured to death. Rahel could never wipe out this memory from her mind and this memory ruined her conjugal life. Rahel remembers how they were used as instrument by Baby Kochamma in doing wrong to their

mother. With the death of her mother Rahel had lost the last mornings that she had and she began to drift, from school to school, spent eight years in a college without getting degree and finally" drifted into marriage like passenger drifts towards an unaccepted chair in an expert lounge" (*The God of Small Things*, p.18.)

All these exercised a deep rooted trauma on the minds of Estha and Rahel which later on, destroyed them completely and pushed them into the realm of a taciturnity and loneliness. Just as Velutha's campaign against the caste structure of society ends with his death in the police custody, in the same way Ammu's campaign against patriarchy ends with her banishment from the Ayemenem house and her subsequent death in a lodge in Kottayam. Thus, the dalits presented as "Small Things" in the novel are punished and banished because of "inchaote unacknowledged fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerfulness". (*The God of Small Things*, p.308.).

Works Cited

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