

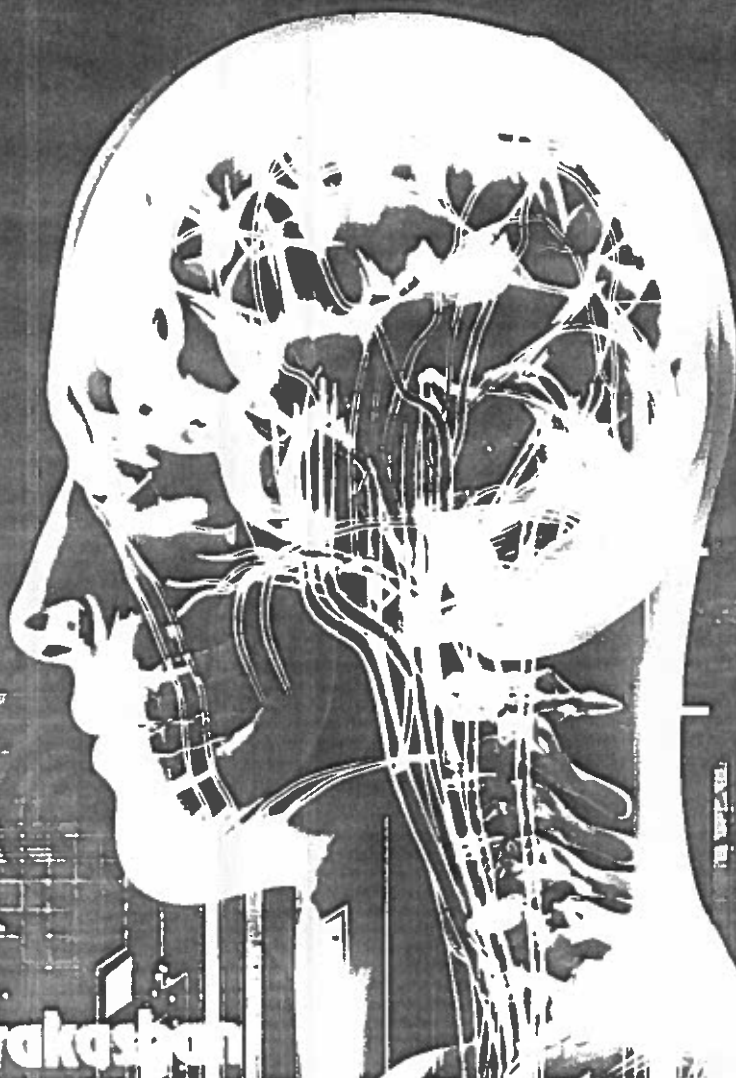
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## 19. The Marginalised Voices in Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things'

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### **Abstract**

Arundhati Roy has intensely pre-occupied with the cast discrimination factor in Indian society, particularly the brutal denial of the basic human position and dignity. She enjoys a prominent place for forcefully raising the issue of marginalisation in her debut novel which has become a phenomenon in the literary world. She shows how the women and unfortunate untouchable are treated as unfriendly and subjugate objects in the social structure. This marginality is predominantly seen in the novel 'The God of Small Things'. The voices of various victimized characters are clearly heard. This paper aims to light on the fact that how marginalised are being forced to stay at the periphery of society. The weaker sections of our society like the Paravans, suffer a good deal in the process of caste stratifications. Roy vividly portrays the acute suffering and deep frustration of these sections in her novel. Kelan, Vellya Paapen and Velutha are the representatives of such section in the novel.

**Keywords:** Marginality, Downtrodden, Protagonist, Humiliation, Equality

### **Introduction**

Arundhati Roy is an excellent artist aware of social obligation. She has emerged as one of the most significant young novelists on the contemporary literary scene. At the same time no other Indian writer has reached so many parts of the world and won such wide enthusiastic applause like her. She is the first Indian woman writer who has won a highly prestigious award for her maiden attempt with the publication of 'The God of Small Things' (1997). It problematizes the role of the political radicalists who have vowed to bring about a Marxist revolution to banish all exploitative systems and establish a society based on equality and respect for man as man

Arundhati Roy has intensely pre-occupied with the cast discrimination factor in Indian society, particularly the brutal denial of the basic human position and dignity. In spite of the long

strides made in the field of the technology and scientific knowledge which caused major changes in society, the conservatism in our social outlook and mind set has remained as rigid as ever. The contemporary society is beautifully portrayed in the novel 'The God of Small Things'. Several issues are discussed by the novelist. The untouchability is certainly a major theme of the novel. It gets prime importance. The novel is a forceful plea for the upliftment of the downtrodden and the have-nots in the society who have suffered through the ages. The plight of the marginalised has been a subject of discussion among the great thinkers, writers and social activists since centuries. The modern writers are more sensitive towards the harsh realities characterising the living conditions of the marginalised section of modern society. Their aim behind exposing the morbid conditions confronting the marginalised is to create awareness about the repercussions of century old insensitivity to the socio-economic problems that blunt an all round growth of society. Among such writers Arundhati Roy enjoys a prominent place for forcefully raising the issue of marginalisation in her debut novel which has become a phenomenon in the literary world. This paper aims to light on the fact that how marginalised are being forced to stay at the periphery of society.

Marginality is generally employed to interpret and analyse socio-cultural, political and economic spheres, where disadvantaged people struggle to gain access to resources and equal participation in social life. This marginality is pre-dominantly seen in the novel 'The God of Small Things'. The voices of various victimized characters are clearly heard. Roy tries to sensitize this society to the cruelty of some of its tradition and degenerated taboos. She shows how the women and unfortunate untouchable are treated as unfriendly and subjugate objects in the social structure. (Kumar)

Caste is one of the main crutches of class rule in the Indian society. As an inhuman social institution which evolved out of the archaic division of the labour from the very beginning, the caste system is integrally linked up with women's oppression on the one hand and landlessness of the broad masses on the other. One of the dominant socio-political concern in Roy's novel is the rigid class structure which is to be seen in India. This caste oriented rigidity sometimes plays havoc with the innumerable innocent lives. The weaker sections of our society like the Paravans, the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes, the dalits suffer a good deal in the process of caste stratifications. Roy vividly portrays the acute suffering and deep frustration of these sections in

her novel. Kelan, Vellya Paapen and Velutha are the representatives of such section in the novel.(Dwivedi)

Velutha is the male protagonist of the novel *The God of Small Things*. He is the representative of the section of the society who continued to suffer at the hands of the privileged and the up trodden for centuries. He is looked down upon and mal treated herein almost at every stage in his life. He is the son of old servant Vellya Paapen. He serves as a carpenter in the pickle factory. He is a skillful carpenter and indispensable at the factory by virtue of his way with machines. The novelist presents Velutha as a God of small things, as a magician who could make intricate toys. Velutha in the words of O. P. Mathur, evokes our admiration and sympathy for his strength and character in which he is superior to most of the characters of the higher classes. He is an educated untouchable. After passing his high school examination from a school meant for untouchables, he put his skill to a good use by making intricate toys. It was in 1967 that the untouchables in Kerala were demanding that they no longer be addressed by their caste names – Parayan, Paravan or Pulayan but by their first names. Vinita Bhatnagar says:

*Velutha is not really a character in Roy's novel. He is more of a dark, symbolic figure who inhabits the fantasies of sexually unfulfilled. His caste status adds to his allure of being forbidden indicating the bettering fortunes of untouchables. If Velutha had not been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer.*

The Ayemenem House represents the upper strata of modern society where untouchables are not allowed entry from the front door. Pappachi settles in the house along with his wife and daughter. His wife Mammachi opens a pickle factory where a large number of workers – touchable and untouchable work in the factory. Roy powerfully portrays the miserable condition of the untouchables. This is how the touchables like Mammachi and Pappachi treat them:

*Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. They were not allowed to touch anything that touchable touched. Mammachi told Estha 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 footprints.*

Mammachi is fully aware of the fact that Velutha is a skilled person. She treats him inhumanly like she treats other Paravans. She facilitated her son Chacko's sexual relationships with low-caste women working in the pickle factory in the name of 'Men's needs'. Subsequently,

as we learn from the novel Mammachi's daughter Ammu and Velutha turn deep lovers of each other, throwing away all scruples of caste, creed and community. The moment Mammachi gets to know that Velutha has committed a serious crime against her family by breaking the law of love, she expels Velutha from service and files an FIR on the false ground that he is responsible for the drowning of Sophie Mol. Mammachi tries her best to ensure that Velutha should be punished severely for violated the social norms under which an untouchable cannot touch anything that the touchable touched.(Surendran)

As a Comrade, Velutha is despised by his own party men including Comrade K. N. M. Pillai. Pillai believes: ' These caste issues are very deep rooted. As an untouchable he is not entitled to love someone of a high caste and yet survive'. Velutha's plight intensifies with Pillai's revelation of his prejudice against the untouchable. Pillai tells the Police Inspector that Velutha does not enjoy the patronage of the communist. The policemen beat him cruelly with their boots and batons, lock his arms across his back, drag him, bleeding and throw him into the lock-up where he eventually dies in midnight.(Roy Amitabh)

Velutha's father Vellya Pappen is an old Paravan. He was a toddy tapper by profession. For giving him succour during his difficult times, Mammachi is held by him in high esteem. His gratitude towards her is as deep and wide as a river in space. Although he is not at all happy with Velutha's spirit of protest against the upper class people, he does not openly oppose his son for being offensive in his attitude. For having committed a crime by giving birth to Velutha, Pappen is treated by Mammachi in a manner an animal is treated. In a fit of rage, she shouts: 'Drunken dog! Drunken Paravan liar!' (Roy Arundhati)

Another minor character who bears the scourge of peripheral existence is Velutha's elder brother Kuttapen. He is an uneducated and handicapped young man perennially experiencing the physical infirmity caused by an attack of paralysis. All the time bed ridden, Kuttapen cannot expect anybody to make arrangement for his treatment. His mother died of tuberculoses which could not be cured due to extreme poverty. Having no hope of a better life, Kuttapen lies alone waiting for the coming of death in the corner of the room in which his mother faced death. It was a terrible experience for him to watch his mother's death.

Another untouchable about whom we find a reference in the novel is Velutha's grandfather Kelan. He along with a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas had embraced Christianity. They had joined the Anglican Church to escape untouchability. But it was a sort of

jump from frying pan into the fire. Though they got a little food and money, they were known as 'Rice Christian'. They had separate Churches with separate services and separate priests. A separate Pariah Bishop was also there. To their disappointment they found that they were not entitled to government benefits like job reservation or bank loans at low interest.

Thus Velutha and his family stand for the periphery of Ayemenem society. Velutha certainly stands out as a very tall figure in the novel. It was his desire to relive as a touchable that triggered the tragedy. But he was never a coward. He dared to speak out even when he knew that his life was in danger. In his profession he was unbeatable. His loyalty to the party was unquestionable and as a trade unionist he was committed to protect the rights of his fellow workers at any cost.

### Conclusion

The novel deals with small things, the consciousness of these things, the minute undercurrents of a situation that surrounds the characters, the situation with numerous hurts and humiliations that are leaped upon those living in the margin. Velutha raises certain questions which our society should answer. A carpenter with a German sensibility continued to be ill-treated for the only reason that he was an untouchable. The party which should stand to protect the interests of the workers fails in its duty. The upper-class of the society we find, are able to do all kinds of damage to those who are in the lower strata of the society. In this sense Velutha is not mere character. He stands as a representative of a group of people who have been traditionally ill-treated and will continue to be treated on. What is expected is a strong social response to ensure that all the people in the society are equal and some are not mere equal as George Orwell put it.

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This is to certify that Mr./Mrs./Miss./Dr. Dr. Pankaj D. More of Head, Department of English, Late Dattatraya Pusadkar Arts College, Nandgaon Peth, Tq. and Dist. Amravati. has Participated and Presented a paper title "The Marginalised Voices in Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things'" at the National Conference on "Contribution of Indian Thinkers and Literary Writers in Social Reforms (NCCSR-2019)" on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2019. Organized by Faculty of Humanities and IQAC Shri Shivaji College of Arts, Commerce and Science, Akola (MS)

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