

**MARGINALISATION AND EXPLOITATION IN ARUNDHATHI ROY'S
NOVEL OF THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS**

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Women's experience—marginalisation, exploitation and subjugation are undeniably the common concerns of Indian Women writers and Arundhathi Roy, the post Colonial writer is one such spokes person for the displaced people in the contemporary Indian situation, where divergent politics of power attempt to subjugate and marginalise them in one way or the other. Her novel can be viewed as a trial blazer on various fronts; its extremely original approach, the language that vacillates to and fro and fuses all the tenses of time with glimpses of James Joyce and Salman Rushdie and yet achieving a totally innovative and experimental narrative, speaks volumes of her genius. Arundhathi Roy successfully created “submerged meanings” in the novel as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have postulated¹, through intelligently camouflaged politics of caste, sex and power.

The subjugation and marginalisation of both Ammu a women and Velutha a Paravan have similar ramifications resulting from their sexual transgression. Both have a lower status in the Society which is predominantly patriarchal. Ammu on account of being a women and a divorcee and Velutha on account of being a paravan, an untouchable ,in a caste ridden Society. The hegemony of gender, caste, and class are excruciatingly explicit throughout the novel. The structure of the Society presented in ‘The God of Small Things’ is Patriarchal in which man is in control of economical, political, physical, psychological and social aspects.

Kate Millet states “ When a system of power is thoroughly in command it has scarcely a need to speak itself aloud”.²Arundhathi Roy through her novel questions this system of power and attempts to bring awareness through her powerful projections of Ammu and Velutha, explicating the plight and struggle of Women against the controlling dominance of patriarchy. The setting of the novel is in a small place in Kerala called Ayemenem. It deals with the heart rending story of Ammu who was always a victim in a male dominated Society. The story reveals how she was always dominated into subservience right from her childhood. This unalloyed , indiscriminate domination resonates with the text of manusmriti which states that women should be always under the control of men at every stage of their lives.

Ammu's childhood was always shadowed by her tyrant wife beating father, who also exhibited constant hounding cruelty towards her. She makes a wrong choice in marriage only to flee from her abusive father.”He proposed to Ammu five days after they first met, Ammu didn't pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all would be better than returning to Ayemenem.”³

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She just “drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied Chair in an airport lounge”⁴. She marries a Bengali, a man from a different caste and that too without the consent of her Parents. Unending stream of bad luck appears to relentlessly peruse her, haunting and tormenting her in the form of her alcoholic egotistical husband who is always inclined to send his wife to his boss to ensure his promotion. She is constantly subjected to “Drunken violence followed by post-drunken badgering”⁵. Unable to withstand the daily shredding of her soul and forced with no option, Ammu divorces her husband and returns to Ayemenen with her twins.

Ammu is treated as an unwelcome guest, both by her mother and brother Chacko who is also a divorcee. The patriarchal hegemony is clearly evidenced in their attitude. The mother, mammachi exhibits discrimination towards her and resents her dependency and divorced status, while she patronizes and indulges Chacko her son who is also a dependent and a divorcee. Ammu is treated as a non entity and every inmate of the house is hostile to her presence. “Women often realise that if they are displaced, they are more vulnerable and therefore they understand the issue in a more visceral and deeper sense than the men do”⁶. The feminist in Arundhati Roy assaults the issue of gender bias by referring to Mammachi’s bigoted stance towards Ammu. “A daughter estranged from her husband is made to feel unwanted in her parent’s home whereas an estranged son not only received warm welcome, he remains the rightful inheritor of the family fortune”⁷. Chacko blatantly tells his divorced sister “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is mine”⁸ This kind of ill treatment and lack of empathy lead to disempowerment of women.

Ammu, oppressed, frustrated and fighting the constraints of the repressed sexuality, seeks to satisfy her natural physical craving through Velutha, a paravan, who, like her is a subaltern, skirting the edges of the Society, doubly disadvantaged through his caste and his physical disability. Like Ammu, he is repressed and rejected by the Society which constantly destroys any trace of individuality. The patriarchal caste breeding Society plays the role of a vengeful, formidable nemesis in the life’s of Ammu and Velutha, seeking retribution while the same society looks upon Chako’s sexual exploits with tolerance and indulgence.

Velutha, a paravan, like all other untouchables is not allowed to walk on public roads, not permitted to cover his upper body and not tolerated to carry umbrella. The glaring caste discrimination is reflected in the Society as “Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their foot prints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s foot print”⁸. Ammu who has been separated seven years back from her husband, finds it intolerable to live without a male association and is attracted to Velutha, his muscular body and his easy bonding with her twins.

Pramod Nayar opines that Sight plays an important role in Ammu’s love affair with Velutha. The near scopophilic gaze helps each to realize the physically, sexually hidden desires of the other.⁹ The illicit relationship between Velutha and Ammu drag them into cataclysm inviting fatality in terms of caste hostilities. Velutha, a non-entity without a voice, lacks the plurality and diversity of a high caste male, since the Society emasculates him on the grounds of his caste. As a Paravan he is the scum of the Society who is not allowed to enter the houses of the upper caste.

The Society operates on rigid moral standards and is up in arms against the untouchable who transgress the sexual codes of the Society thus inviting the cascading effects of

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destruction. Often such acts of love lead to indiscriminate violence. Intolerance and social discrimination forms integral part of the novel. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha is crushed savagely by so the called guardians of Social justice. Sexual freedom is severely condemned and condoned in a women. When the liaison between them is discovered , the Society, the police and the family react with primitive barbarism.

They falsely charge Velutha with theft and beat him to death. The same Police and family hound Ammu relentlessly culminating in her death. The patriarchal Society thus commits two cold blooded murders, one, they wilfully kill and the other they drive her to her death. But, these crimes are not viewed as crimes but are laudable actions of the Patriarchal Society to safeguard morals.

We see that Ammu and Velutha are the two sides of the same coin, parallel to one another, for both are subaltern and their struggles and their voices get drowned in the loud booming din of Patriarchy.

Arundhati Roy questions these convoluted, twisted moral values that govern the Society that is predominantly male ,displaying male aggression. “The God of small Things” is not linear but a spiral narrative structured to expose the glaring defects of the Patriarchal Society with many layered issues.

Through the caste system, political affiliations and gender bias Roy directs the reader to the “Small Things”. These can be the dreams, aspirations, promises and other emotions that people do not want to acknowledge, for these ‘little things’ seem to have no place in the Patriarchal Society. These small voices scream through Roy’s novel, struggling to escape the clutches of the vice like grip of caste, Gender, Feudalism and Patriarchal marginalisation. These, Gods of small things are forced to internalize their sorrow as the Society stifles them killing their body and soul, be it a women or a Paravan.

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