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The God of Small Things – A Conspectus of Reforming the Social Bias in Society

Abstract

India as a nation is successfully stepping forward towards developed country under the various campaigns like Make in India, Skill India, Startup India and Digital India led by Hon. Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi. Thus it has become the necessity of the time that we make some effort in terms of surviving from various clashes, internally and externally. Since long India has been suffering from many issues at domestic level as well as at global level like terrorism (domestic and global), internal class, caste and gender clashes: social evils like dowry, child marriage, corruption, communal riots, marginalization of women and untouchability. Not only this, India has already faced a lot in form of conflict between class enmity and class exploitations, spotlight of the oppression and injustice against underprivileged caste, adolescent maltreatment, political chauvinism, caste system, breaking of love marriages and above all, the trials and tribulations, the weak have been tortured in police custody and in a caste-ridden social structure.

As Ranga Rao, in his famous article: "The Book of the Year" rightly observes, "Roy's book is the only one I can think of among Indian novels in English, which can be comprehensively described as a protest novel. Literature conveys the awareness of existence and society. For the wellbeing of society, literature plays an imperative role. Literature shows the mirror of issues countenanced by society and makes revolutionize. It is all about atrocities against minorities, small things, children and fourth, woman and untouchable" (17). In the light of this quote, the present study tries to focus on the need of reformation which India badly needed as it is aiming for being a role model society for the whole world where untouchability (racism at a global level) and inequality has no significance. This paper also

observes the ill-treatment done to Velutha and the need of improvement and restoration of Indian society.

KEYWORDS: Marginalized, Digital, Untouchable, Reformation, Restoration

Introduction

As Literature is being inspired from the society immensely thus it portrays chiefly a way of living life and states radical cognizance of the society. Not only this, with the reformation of the society from various social evils literature also provided a powerful platform to those writers who really want to contribute to the welfare of the society. As being highly motivated and inspired from society Literature demonstrates the medium of problems facing society and makes efforts to improve the situation. In postcolonial India Indian English novelist wrote with no fear and with great confidence reflects the social aspects in their writings. Few of them are mulk raj anad, amitavghosh, dina Mehta, salman rushdie, and Arundhati Roy. The ray of Independence came with a hope that now India as an independent nation will progress towards to its golden era. But again the people of India have still divided into small groups where few are Hindu, few Muslims, few Sikhs and various people from others religion but no one an Indian. This shows that India as a nation is still possessed a division of class, caste, religion, regional and gender. Democracy has brought a new light for repressed classes, but the irony of this is that it is not clear visible effectively as still violence and bigotry against them is in practice, the vast majority is suffering silently.

Role of Literature in reformation

An endless flow of stories of prejudice towards Dalits floods our consciousness every day — appearing on TV, social media, online portals and pages of the print media. While media news can make us alert of the degree of these atrocities, the impunity of their perpetrators, and the reaction of the victims, it takes novel to knock us where we slightest anticipate, to shift us to rage or, more potently, to make us question our own lives, choices, politics, and prejudices. While the literature on marginalized, by authors who may or may not belong to the social group, are widely accessible in the Indian languages too. The options and instances are widely available not only in English language but also in certain regional languages or translations from existing writing or original work, particularly if someone is fascinated in non-academic books.

A number of contributions have been done into this field with some of the remarkable work of writing. All most authors from all corners of the India have tried their best to reform the citizen of the country from various meaningless social norms and customs. Their main aim is to reform the society and create a kind of atmosphere where all can live peacefully without any bias and prejudice. The novels mostly in form of fictions or writing that have a tendency to move the mass in that direction, that helps us look at, and understand, Dalit lives better. Few works which really stand as thorough and convincing to this reformation like...Untouchable, Mulk Raj Anand

In a preface to Anand's widely renowned novel, which was a hotchpotch of actuality and narrative, E.M. Forster asserted that the book "could only have been written by an Indian and by an Indian who observed from the outside". Even though Anand wasn't a Dalit, he looked at the inhuman practice of manual scavenging with scathing eyes. As a young boy, he played with children of sweepers, which gave him access to their lives, enough "to understand a tragedy which he did not share", as Forster put it. The story accounts the life of Bakha, a man of dignity and a good-looking young man born into an "untouchable" social group, over the course of a day. Thrilled by the vision of the arrival of M.K. Gandhi, the optimism of the Harijans, to his town, he goes to listen to the Mahatma so that he might find a way out of his miseries. But at the end of it all, he comes back puzzled and pessimistic, but with ashes of wish blazing deep within him.

In *Unclaimed Terrain* by Ajay Navaria a modern Hindi writer is a collection of stories (in Laura Brueck's translation), principally set in urban situations. It's a tale of the optimistic people who left their ancestral village and came into the society having a dream in their eyes to make their life better. These are such characters that run in and out of our lives every day without being noticed by anyone and who does all hardships and still not being successful in fulfilling their dreams dies an unknown death. Looking deep into these ordinary stories, Navaria exposes the sinister tie of caste and individuality — the muscle of wealth to act as a communal leveler, if only for an illustration, before shame rears its hideous head, even in the most unanticipated of settings.

Samskara, U.R. Ananthamurthy, a remarkable classic from the iconic Kannada writers of our times, this is a book of enormous ironical latent, later on, turned into a movie, revealing the pretense that is the caste system and its in-built rituals of double standards and discrimination. A shameful story of a close-knit Brahmin village where an untouchable dies

and a catastrophe brews about the removal of his dead body and the performance of the cremation. In *Father May Be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But...*, Gogu Shyamala incorporates the lives of the people of the Madiga community, one of the most underprivileged among the Dalits. The prose with vicious realism and images of the daily village practices, like the hammering of drums or the right to wear slippers in the presence of the superior castes, are touched with pity and a bleak sense of wit. Last but not the least, *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability*, Art: Durgabai Vyam, Subash Vyam, Text: Sridhya Natarajan, S. Anand, a must read book by the leader of the most radical movement, is an account of the life of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and his experience of Dalit Movement. This volume is a must-read for our turbulent times.

An Epitome of Reformation

In 'The God of Small Things' Arundhati Roy in her original and creative style depicted the social problems like class animosity and its exploitation, injustice and inequity against woman, political absolutism, child abuse, bigotry of power, caste system, pain of love marriage, agony of untouchables and atrocities against all small things. Roy in her booker prize winner novel delineates political, social and cultural issues. This novel also attains love, sadness, hope, endless enjoyment. This is one the most artistic piece of ingenious writing that disentangles social environment and human state. The central character Ammu is subjected to pity and misery just because she loved Velutha, a low caste carpenter, which is against the conventional norms of upper caste Keralian society. As per the norms, a man from a paravan community belongs to lower caste and so he must remain there with all his impurities. This event itself stands out as the inhumanity of gendered conservative sensibility of the upper caste factional society. The novel presents the most flaming political problem in the character Velutha, as Tagore said in his 'Geetanjali' "whose mind is without fear and the head is held high" and whose understanding is liberated from narrow caste-ridden isolation. The novel exposes the social-political situation that disavows viciousness, malicious indifference of touchable towards untouchables of Kerala.

Casteism

The word caste is derived from the Portuguese *casta*, which stands for breed, race, or kind. In the novel, *The God of Small Things* Casteism is represented through the poor and miserable character of velutha, a paravan, an untouchable, his father and brother. " In Mammachi's time, Paravans, like other untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, 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.” (74). Velutha is the very close to Bakha of Anand in both his revelation and appearance. He too struggles for his survival in society. He has to resist tough to attain a sense of distinctiveness. Unlike Bakha, Velutha is sober and unaggressive. Velutha never opts for a fore attack. He is a man of moderate personality and center behavior. Despite his low caste god has blessed him with art and that art may make his life better but again due to lack of an academic degree, his art and talent have no worth. Along with social exclusion, an educational exclusion came as complementary. Though all are aware of Velutha’s ability but no one tried to give a platform to it. When Mammachi takes a decision to surround the back verandah, it is Velutha who plans and assembles the tough folding doors. As Roy says, “He knows more about the machines in the factory than anyone else. Mammachi often said that if only he had not been a parvan, he might have become an engineer.”

In spite of all these enormous qualities in Velutha, he does not get proper esteem and friendly handling in society. Vallya pappen, the father of Velutha, is robustly against any type of schooling or advance awareness in a Parvan. He thinks that in a Parvan they could (would and indeed should?) be constructed as audacity. He always neglects and ignores the craft man ship and unusual skills of Velutha. Further, Vallya rapidly descends into harassing and wrangling and as a result, there is the feeling of nastiness amid father and son. In course of time, Velutha embarks to evade going home. He spends time at a job, goes for fishing at the river bank and alone cooks it in an open fire. He also spends the night outside. All of a sudden, he disappears for at least five months. He doesn’t say anybody about his exile. When he returns to Ayemenam, mammachi again rehires him as the factory carpenter and the general maintenance of the whole factory is in given charge to him. But this act of help causes a great rouse in the factory workers. Why? Because the upper caste workers of the factory are also feral with castes in that they think that Parvans are not meant to be carpenters. So, in order to keep the workers happy, Mammachi pays Velutha less compare to the touchable worker. Thus this novel displays a very fine portrait of the Dalit and forsaken. The novelist appears to throw satire on the upper caste wealthy people of society who abuse and maltreat the untouchable without any meaning just only to show their dominance.

This community of paravans, pelayas and pulayas are considered to be the lowest of the low caste in a typical orthodox society of Kerala. This shows how the other upper caste ill-treated these groups: Pappachi never allows paravans to come into his house as well as they even not

allowed to touch that which has been touched by the upper caste person. Nevertheless “paravans were expected to crawl backward with a broom, sweeping away their footprint so that Brahmins and Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a paravan’s footprint.”(Roy 73-74). Velutha was an accomplished carpenter and do things which skilled engineers can make. Though mammachi have noticed velutha’s skill he was paid less than a touchable carpenter. As “paravans were not meant to be carpenters”. (77) He considered inferior to the touchable. Due to the defined verna system Dalits, the untouchables have been abused and weigh down often. Velutha being an untouchable undergo through painful bigotry of upper cast people throughout the novel.

Caste prevention in church

In novel, roy has designated an unperceived social problem, converted Christian. To escape form torment of untouchability velutha’s grandfather, kelan along with number of paravans, pelayas and pulaylas converted to Christian, accepted Christianity. When the British came to Malabar all such downtrodden castes have being motivated to change their original caste just to free themselves and their future generation from this endless and inevitable harassment. They took a new incarnation and adopt a new God of Christianity and join the Anglican Church. They have been provided by money, food, separate church, separate priests, separate services and separate pariah bishop. Yet another way to make them feel that they are coming from the lowest status and though they have changed their caste but still they belong the same lowest status after adopting the new religion. If they have the status of Christians then what is the use and meaning of giving them everything separately? Funny but the reality is here also the people having the original background of Christianity don’t want to accept them as one their own. Here it is may be right to say that Christens are more interested in expanding their social group at any cost than to give a respectable status to Dalit. “It is an irrefutable fact that Christian missionaries have been using all kinds of fraudulent means to convert the hapless Dalits to Christianity, the purpose of which is to change the demography of India and bring it under foreign (read western) rule once again. Despite the tall claims of missionaries, Christianity has not redeemed some 20 million Dalit Christians from social discrimination and untouchability. In fact, it has only added to their misery. Dalits were persuaded to accept faith in Jesus Christ in order to regain their purported ‘lost humanity’ and to be considered as ‘God’s children’. In reality, as Christians, the Dalits continue to live miserable lives in society and in the church”. Dalits transformed to Christianity with a vision to flee away from the nuisance of caste-based bias which they had tolerated for decades, but it’s proved to be

futile steps for them as they aimed to find equality but with the passage of time as the upper caste converts to Christianity denied to seem Dalit converts without caste chauvinism. This is obvious in the case of Dalit Christians in Karnataka who faces discrimination from 'upper-caste Christians', and in one example hundreds of Dalit Christians had to conceal in fields from rampaging mobs of upper-caste Christians, Hindustan Times reported. In Tamil Nadu's Trichy, Dalit Christians cannot bury their dead with those of upper caste converts. Still in the novel very soon the converted Christians came to know the catastrophes that they are going to be counted neither upper caste nor a lower caste. A state of 'Trishanku' has been created for them as they found themselves at nowhere on the ground as well as not in heaven with new government policy. They came to realize that "they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire", (Roy 74) as rice Christians were not permitted for "government benefits like job reservations, bank loans at low-interest rates, as 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." (74) Nevertheless, except other higher and superior class from the society, Christians tried to uplift the conditions of the untouchables in many ways. Punnyan Kunju the father-in-law of Mammachi had established a school, especially for the untouchable children. Here again, Velutha came out as the best example of this as he is educated and skilled untouchable carpenter who is though outcaste by the conventional society laws.

Social Exclusion

As we seen in the beginning of the study that Roy has portrayed the social denial of lower caste people by the upper dominant caste where Velutha and other people who belong to his caste have to undergo and follow lot many types of brutal norms set by the old fashioned society proves their social exclusion. There are lot many other illustrations of social exclusion in *The God of Small Things*. Despite the reality that Velutha is a greatly gifted person with proven skills of carpentry, yet what he receives in life is the social exclusion. He fails to comprehend why his father Vellya Paapen yelled on him for his affection towards Ammu, a high-grade woman; and is against this social discrimination. Consequently, his courage in carrying on this constrained love-affair proves a deadly hazard for him. Velutha who is untouchable paravan by birth but by the grace of almighty he has been a gifted young man with the skill of furniture making, unfortunately, develops affection for a Syrian Christian divorcee and mother of two children, called Ammu which has become the reason of social exclusion for him and indeed a fatal one. So his courage takes him towards the fatal misery of

his life at the end. In Kerala, the Syrian Christian community practices untouchability more enthusiastically than the Hindu upper castes themselves. Velutha, a Christian by birth but a paravan Dalit all the same, receives the callous treatment possible from his coreligionists for breaking the unwritten laws, including the love laws, governing the Dalit lives. Religious alteration has not socially uplifted the Dalits, nor enhanced their material situation. They have continued to be Dalits whatever religion they follow. The example of K.N.M. Pillai who works as a global activist and always ready to raise questions of working class and their needs/rights but in a case of low castes in Kerala it “never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community” (Roy 66). The financial conversation extends to the professions conventionally reserved for the Dalits as well. They are anticipated to be content with their unhygienic and shameful occupations and never intend to privileged professions. If they do, they can be certain to receive the condemnation and dissuasion of the upper caste social group and self-appointed guardians of communal standards. As already said, Velutha is a talented carpenter and extremely trained mechanic working at the pickle factory owned by Ammu’s family. His deeds coerce his employers to put him in charge of the general maintenance. The upper caste colleagues dislike this for “ancient reasons” (Roy 121). At one stage in a discussion with Ammu’s brother, Chacko, Comrade Pillai puts it down point blank: “That Paravan is going to cause trouble for you,” he said. “Take it from me ... get him a job somewhere else. Send him off.” ... “He may be very well okay as a person. But other workers are not happy with him. Already they are coming to me with 9 complaints ... You see, Comrade, from the local standpoint, these caste issues are very deep-rooted.” (Roy 278) Velutha, like other Dalits in these novels, pays with his life, among other things, for crossing the economic boundaries demarcated ages ago.

Caste-Based Discrimination

In *The God of Small Things*, society is formed by the predominant caste system. Characters are categorized into diverse caste groups, which may distinguish against each other. In downward position, the Indian caste classification composed of Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants, landowners), Shudras (servants) and Untouchables (cobblers, street sweepers, latrine cleaners). It is the birth which decides the caste of the person as it is based on age old caste norms. Rahel, Estha, Ammu, Chacko, Baby Kochamma and Inspector Thomas Mathew belong to the educated “upper” and “middle” class (most likely Vaishyas), and hence would be bilingual or effortless in regional language Malayalam and foreign English. Kochu Maria who is the Ipe family’s lower class servant

(belongs to the Sudra caste) and Velutha who is an Untouchable servant would be monolingual in Malayalam and possibly know some English. There is obvious societal discrimination toward lower class characters in this book. During this phase of time, most likely the 19th century, Untouchables were not permitted to touch person from higher castes or even prohibited to enter their houses. Society observes them as contaminated humans, and hence they were given tedious jobs such as picking fruits of trees and sweeping roads. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy drops light on the malice of the tyrannical caste structure, which disadvantages the lower class regardless of how brilliant they are. Lower caste members are hated by society and are regularly victimized for hostility. Upper-class individuals suppose that conversation with lower class will lower their status and decorum in society. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, coming from an upper-class family, keep away from mixing with lower class individuals like Velutha. Although he is a gifted carpenter who is very bright, Velutha has fewer opportunities and is discriminated against simply because he is an Untouchable.

Police torturing on Dalits

India has always been witnessed the injustice done to Dalits sometimes by upper caste, dominant politicians, antisocial people, law and order, and police. If turn over pages of recent news paper we can find a lot of incidents where we can find these low strata people being victimized and humiliated by the police in the name of law and order. Although they are supposed to stand for 'Politeness, Obedience, Loyalty, Intelligence, Courtesy, Efficiency' (304). The accused, who have killed, beaten, raped and humiliated Dalits, have might become free due unavailability of proofs or having been in jail with all the comforts and luxury provided illegally by the police as they may have good relationships or on the power of money. The brutal torture of police and atrocities have beautifully exposed by the author in this novel. The incident which we can say the most unfortunate misery happens in the life of Velutha when his affair with Ammu comes to light. He is falsely charged with kidnapping the children and murdering their cousin and is done to death by the police. The love affair he has with an upper caste woman is a mere pretext; his real mistake is to want to rise above the station his caste permitted. His success activates ancient prejudices and poses a challenge to the upper caste social forces that involuntarily form themselves into a punishing force and finally eliminate him. Not only civilians but also government servants with whom we can expect the justice and unbiased favor, the police, also indulged in the illegal and brutal beating of Velutha and finally in his death. It was not a natural death but full proof legal

conspicuous murder conspired by the police officer Thomas Mathew and other upper caste people. Here evidently the untouchable lover is killed by touchable police and the beloved dies of the shock. Just because he is a parvana, an outcaste, he is being accused of that crime which actually he has not been committed. He is untruly caught up in a case of attempted rape of Ammukutty (who actually loves him from the core of her heart) and is physically tortured roughly and dragged to the police station by the Touchable Policemen where he eventually breathes his last. The high caste Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are angry at this love relation between a lower caste and upper caste. Baby Kochamma makes a totally false story and narrates it to the Inspector. And the police emerge as an authoritative power to fetch a conclusion to the story. The political party too emerges as a commanding power. They all together smack the blow at Velutha. One more aspect which also came on the surface where a gossip had claimed that the 'Management' had implicated the Paravan in a fake police case because he was a dynamic member of the Communist Party and had indulged in 'Lawful Union activities.' Thus with an excuse of fake complaint Inspector Thomas Mathew and his touchable men barge into Velutha's house, beat him viciously with their boots and batons, lock his arms across his back, drag him bleeding and mutilated to the police station, and throw him into the lock-up, where he eventually dies in midnight. In this way, Arundhati has spectacularly captured the event of 'Police Torture' in her novel.

Conclusion

With this, we can conclude that more or less Dalit community has always been remaining at target sometimes in form of humiliation, sometimes in the form of torture or violence. Yes, we cannot deny the urge and plea of such people who are indeed in need of a reformation. This community is in search of the platform through which they can display their misery, irony, and gloom. Literature has always provided a voice to those who are a force to remain silent sometimes in the name of so-called social norms and sometimes in the name of orthodox tradition. Here, *The God of Small Things* by Roy has truly played a role of a reforming platform where the various class of the society has come to know about the injustice done to lower caste community. As India trying to strengthen its root in the 21st century global world, it has become very significant for it to identify such social evils which are deeply pervaded in Indian society and try to vanish it permanently. A novel like *The God of Small Things* has done a great job in identifying these social tribulations and also got a global appreciation and received an acclamation in form of Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 1997. This novel has in true sense portrayed the real life of Dalit, here a paravan, with the

help of the various characters. It is visible that Roy has done a lot of hard work in characterizing her characters who speaks for themselves especially in the case of Velutha. Roy has advocated a revolutionary approach against the mal-treatment of untouchables, the vulnerable and downtrodden. The author has wonderfully raised a question against the suffering of such group: why it is that the vulnerable and defenseless in a conservative set up are subject to abuse and insult, humiliation and derogatory remarks. Though this ‘Mombatties’ have no glass, no protection, no support to face the surge of the fast wind, yet in comparison with ‘Laltain’, they are not rigid and stubborn but ever ready to burn another lamp. The Mombatties of Roy’s world, which she calls them the God of Loss’, the god of small things are bound to suffer much insults and abuse, hurdles and obstacles sometimes with cause and without any cause. The ‘Laltain’, on another hand, is well fed and protected.

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