

## **Victims of Social Discrimination in ‘The God of Small Things’**

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History is the reason of all sufferings, agony and havoc in The God of Small Things. Velutha and Ammu are the victims of age-long disgusting customs and discrimination in the social history of India. Indian Society has seen disgraceful tradition and evils of caste-system and gender-discrimination from the distant past to the recent times. Velutha and Ammu fall prey to the cruel evils and rigid practices in Indian Society.

Velutha is perhaps the most unfortunate sufferer who becomes victim of the age-long caste-system in India. Velutha belongs to *Paravan* (Sweepers) caste who were untouchable and given inhumane and disgusting treatment in the history of Indian Society.

In one place in The God of Small Things, Mammachi tells Estha and Rahel that:-

“In her girlhood, *Paravans* were expected to crawl backwards with broom, sweeping away their foot print so that Brahmins or Syrian Christian would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s foot prints.”<sup>1</sup>

Which shows how disdainful and humiliating treatment was given to the lower-caste by the people in upper-caste in India. In the same place, Roy further observes the hellish condition of the untouchables:-

“In Mammachi’s time, Paravans, like other untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public road, not allowed to cover their upper bodies not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands on their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed.”<sup>2</sup>

It must be brought to notice that the caste-system in India has a history of several centuries. It has its roots in the concept of ‘Chaturvarnya’. The four classes – *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaiashyas*, and *Shudras*. The Brahmins were basically followers of learning; the Kahstrijyas were the warrior-class, the Vaishyas were the merchant-class and Shudras look

after the different types of lower works as farm labourers; to sweep the roads in the town and to peel of the skin of the dead animals to make foot-wear and other articles of leather.

The Varna system then gave way to the caste-system which then became rigid and oppressive system. It led to the unjust concept of social hierarchy and social superiority. So called higher-caste enjoyed all the social privileges and the lower-castes had to suffer injustice and deprivation. This led to the highly unjust system untouchability. People belonging to certain castes were considered to be 'untouchables'. They were given much disgusting humiliating treatment. They were not allowed to fetch water from public wells and tanks and they were not allowed to enter into the temples.

The following lines in 'Ramcharitmans' by great epic poet Tulsidas in 16<sup>th</sup> century describes the social system of the contemporary time in much effective way.

“ æüÖê»Ö □Ö¼ÖÖÑ,ü ÆÖæ!ü -ÖÅÖã -ÖÖ,üß I  
ÃÖ□ú»Ö YÖÖ»ü-ÖÖ □êú †×-Ö□úÖ,üß II 3”

Which means-*Dhol* (Drum), *Ganwar* (Stupid), *Sudra* (Lower Castes, untouchables), *Pasu* (Animal), *Nari* (Women), all are controlled only by beating.

From the above lines we can imagine what rigidity was there about the caste system and mal-chauvinism prevalent in society.

When Mammachi come to know about the illicit relation of Ammu with Velutha ; she is locked in a room

Roy reflects in following way:-

“She (Mammachi) imagined in vivid detail: a Paravan's coarse black hand on her daughter's breast. His mouth on hers. His black hips jerking between parted legs. The sound of their breathing. His particular Paravan smell. Like animal. Mammachi thought and nearly vomited.... She had defiled generations to come, forever now; people would point at them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties. They would nudge and whisper”<sup>4</sup>

The result is the tragic and humiliating death of Velutha in Police Custody.

But in reality, Velutha was a much superior person. He was an expert mechanic and craftsman. At the age of sixteen, he finished his high school and became an accomplished carpenter. He developed a 'German design sensibility.' Apart from the skill of carpentry, Valutha had a special knowledge of repairing machines like radios, clocks and water pumps. It was he who looked the plumbing and all the electrical gadgets in the 'Big Ayemenem House'. Mammachi often said:

“If only he hadn't been a Paravan he might have become an engineer.”<sup>5</sup>

Velutha was a very loving and kind person to Ammu and her children. In spite of all the goodness in him, he meets to disgusting, humiliating and tragic death; he becomes a prey to the cruel caste-system in India.

Even today, though the constitution of free India has legally banned casteism, still some Velutha in some corners of India is being humiliated and forced to drink urine and eat excrement of cruel, inhumane people in higher castes.

The same case is with Ammu also. She is the victim of age-long male chauvinism in Indian history. In childhood, she experienced the cruelty of her father, Pappachi who use to beat her and her mother Mammachi with a brass-vase. Roy observes Pappachi's cruelty:

“not content with having beaten his wife and daughter, he tore down curtains, kicked furniture and smashed a table lamp”<sup>6</sup>

While her brother was made to pursue his higher studies, her father didn't allow her to do so because according to him, “a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl”<sup>7</sup>

The male-chauvinism is an age-long history in India. There was a belief in Indian culture that a woman's husband is her God, and hence she must meekly submit to his will in all matters. The Indian history has seen the practice of ‘Sati’ i.e. a widowed women was denied the right to alive after her husband therefore, she was expected to burn herself in her husband's funeral pyre. The widows were tonsured heads; not allowed to use cosmetics and attend ceremonies. The dowry system has also taken many live of Indian women. Many women are being burnt alive as they do not meet to the demands of their in-laws. The female-foeticide in recent times in India is the worst crime and disgust to the country and its civilization.

She was molested by her husband also. He was an addicted drunkard who even went to the extent of asking his wife to satisfy the sexual desire of Mr. Hollick, his boss, so that his job could be saved. When Ammu refused to oblige me, he “lunged at her, grabbed her hair, and punched her”<sup>8</sup>

Chacko her brother would also impose male-chauvinism on Ammu. Chacko said her; “What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine.”<sup>9</sup>

Even Baby Kochamma would also torture her. Once she commented on Ammu which also shows the condition and fate of a divorced woman in Indian Society.

“... A married daughter had no position in her parent's home. As for a divorced daughter, she had no position at all”<sup>10</sup>

So, the tragic result, Ammu died:

“thirty one. Not old. Not young. But a viable die-able age”<sup>11</sup>

Both Velutha and Ammu fell prey to the age-long history of disgusting caste systems and cruel male-chauvinism. In other words, history is the real criminal for the sufferings and tragic death of Velutha and Ammu in *The God of Small Things*.

In such a turmoil, chaos and agony of discriminations in the world, we remember the following lines by Matthew Arnold which seems perhaps a solution to restore love, faith and harmony in society.

“Ah, Love, Let us be true  
To one another! For the world, which seems  
To lie before us, like a land of Dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a dark ling pain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggles and flight  
Were ignorant armies clash by night.”<sup>12</sup>

**References:-**

- 1) Roy, Arundhati, *The God of Small Things*. Penguin, India 2002, P. 73-74
- 2) *Ibid* P. 74
- 3) Tulsidas, *Ramcharitmanas, Sunderkand, Dhoha 58, Charan 3*, Gitapress, Gorakhpur, India
- 4) Roy, Arundhati, *The God of Small Things*. Penguin, India 2002,
- 5) *Ibid* P. 75
- 6) *Ibid* P. 181
- 7) *Ibid* P. 38
- 8) *Ibid* P. 42
- 9) *Ibid* P. 57
- 10) *Ibid* P. 45
- 11) *Ibid* P. 03
- 12) Arnold, Matthew, *Dover Beach*, Orient Longman.