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## NARRATING THE MARGINAL IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

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**Abstract:-** The discourse of marginality has become intrinsic to postcolonial literature. “Marginality is the condition constructed by the posited relation to a privileged centre” (Ashcroft et al 102). The process of breaking the “centre” shows the framework of marginal experience. It resists domination and dismantles the oppressive discourses of power. Marginality based on gender, class oppression, cultural and racial differences has formed the content of mushrooming range of postcolonial narratives.

**Keywords:** God of Small Things, Marginal, postcolonial literature, domination.

### INTRODUCTION:-

The depiction of the have-nots and oppressed groups points up the cultural realities compounded of denial, harassment, moral degradation and hypocrisy in the social and material practices of the postcolonial dispensation. Arundhati Roy's illustration of the subalterns in her novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997), reflects her leading ideology. She hammers the need for the removal of the marginalizing power from the dominant centre. Situated within the discourse of resistance and abrogation, Roy's fiction also indicates the despicable and devastating force of neocolonial pressures complicit with the postcolonial order. She gives details of her concerns about the various maladies of the oppressed communities with vigour and frankness:

Arundhati Roy has put her ears to the ground to listen to the whispering of the truly powerless like Velutha and Ammu, to depict unspectacular day-do-day injustices and engage with the texture of ordinary despair, to engage with asymmetrical globalization and represent the rural as a site of intensified globalization and to give a forum to myriad voices of the subaltern across the human community. Imbued with the passion for mobilizing the marginal, her courage of conviction permeates the entire range of her writings (Prasad 175).

The intersection of different discourses of marginality such as feminism, caste segregation and untouchability is detailed in *The God of Small Things*, which deals with subaltern groups and individuals. Here, a curbed and constricted lady haunted by her own personal aches and pains, her insecure kids, and a low-caste carpenter, against institutional domination and power under various guises are at the centre of the storyline. A sense of selfhood takes its birth from the experiences of oppression, marginalization and denial. The incidents narrated here are set in a simple location of Ayemenem in Kerala. The novel retraces the divergent strands of the historically marginal which knit Kerala's multicultural society. The narrative of Ammu's marginalization and Veluth's silence is based on the absence of power, and that of self-determination. Ammu does not learn the practices that Mammachi and Baby Kochamma learn to survive in the Ayemenem house.

The characters have to compete with the socio-historical realities. Veluth's individuality is restricted by hard social segregation; Ammu's suppression is conditioned by the long-established male chauvinism. Her sexual involvement with Velutha represents her rebellion whereby she wants to free herself from the exploitive social state of affairs. Ammu is not given the same rights which Chacko, her brother, enjoys. Neither was she given higher education nor her say from the parental property. Rather, Chacko asserting his position tells her point blank: “What is yours is mine and what is mine is also mine” (Roy 57). Her choice to wed a Bengali Hindu is an “unchristian act”. Though she goes against the instructions of those who dominate the Ayemenem House, her transgressive search appears predestined in the very outset. Her wedding is filled with conflicts and her spouse takes her a pawn as he asks her to satisfy the lust of his boss, Mr. Hollick. Livid by this unspeakable demand, she divorces her irresponsible husband and comes back with her seven-year-old twins to her parental house to pocket insults after insults. In Ayemenem, she falls into a taboo amorous affair with Velutha, an untouchable. Closeness to a

traditionally untouchable Paravan is an unpardonable crime. It, therefore, forms a transgression, which takes her towards tragedy, leaving her twins, Rahel and Estha, waifs and strays.

Roy's brutal portrayal of the Ayemenem society throws family nastiness and bogus moral embargo into stark relief. Ammu strives to protect her brittle independence. The most disastrous and moving jiffies in novel are those that cope with Ammu and her children, and with Velutha's brutal damage. The novel shows the yearning and craze of the main characters, the emergence, for a brief period, of a sense of selfhood and mutual coalition between them, and the ultimate ruin of this fulfilling liaison in the face of the conventional restrictions. Velutha, who is on the margin of the caste-ridden feudal Ayemenem society, is given agency by the novelist through the meaning of his name ("white") and his physical beauty. The symbolic connection between blackness and dirt, between whiteness and purity is reversed in his representation. Although he does not speak, he does act. Ammu's midnight visit to seek physical union with Velutha is a bold act in a conservative, caste-dominated society. Finally, however, she has to pay for transgressing the existing caste restrictions.

Roy challenges the traditional theory that the lady's body be embedded in a set of regulated social and cultural practices. She empowers her characters by putting them in a romantic alliance or incestuous escapes. Velutha, who does not come out as an assertive subaltern, is, however, seen in a mood of self-consolidation, and he surely turns up something different from his servile father. The social taboos not only ambush Velutha and Ammu but also trap the twins in the plot of keeping mum regarding the murderous assault on Velutha. This incident leaves a deep wound on Estha's head and heart, and his sister feels completely insecure.

The story is anchored in the boundaries made by the "Love Laws" (Roy 33) limiting women's freedom in a sexually skewed social system. These laws do not apply to Chacko's marriage to Margaret Kochamma, nor to his "Libertine relationships with the women in the factory" (Roy 168). Feudal libido is permitted, as Mammachi meticulously says: "he can't help having a Man's Needs" (Roy 168). Thus, hegemonic pressures continue to work against the weak and suppressed. In an interview with Praveen Swami, Roy affirms that the issue of "subdued biology" (Interview 107) is her main concern in *The God of Small Things*. The term "Biology" becomes a metaphor for communion with nature, for the lovers' attraction which gives them the pace to transgress the social boundaries. This apprehension is sensitively portrayed in the eponymous chapter, where we see how Ammu's subdued biology is determined by her insecure situation in a patriarchal household:

Hooded in her own hair, Ammu leaned against herself in the bathroom mirror and tried to weep.  
For herself.  
For the God of Small Things.  
For the sugar-dusted twin midwives of her dream (Roy 224).

Roy presents the irrepressible aspect of Ammu's personality. With her tiny grains of grit she is capable of screwing up her courage, but the heavy weight of traditional institutions is pitted against her. The panic of captivity makes her emotionally feeble. The novelist foregrounds the foundational bias of the Ayemenem community which gives women only a ruthless schedule of "wrinkled youth and pickled futures" (Roy 224). Baby Kochamma's involvement with the dominant culture and Mammachi's surrender to long-established patriarchy peeve the rebellious, Ammu. The flavor of her fatal attraction, her glowing desire to overcome social and sexual oppression, as well as her fragile resistance to the dominant ideologies of the social fraction surrounding her bring out her rebellious nature. She knows the consequences that will come, if once she moves to fashion female autonomy. She is aware of the fact that she is now on the margin of the community following her marital disgrace. Yet, true to her biology, she is mesmerized by the hope of a fulfilling sexual liaison:

In asserting her own "biological" desire for a man who inhabits a space beyond the permissible boundaries of "touchability," it appears that Ammu attempts a subversion of caste/class rules, as well as the male tendency to dominate by being, necessarily, the initiator of the sexual act. Further, Rahel and Estha's incestuous lovemaking as the culmination of a "dizygothic" closeness that transcends –and violates– all biological norms, is proof once again of the subversive powers of desire and sexuality in an arena that is rife with the politics of gender divisions and the rules that govern them (Bose 64).

The phrase "the God of Small Things" encapsulates the signifying transactions in the text as M.K. Naik opines: "It is Velutha who gives the novel its title: 'The God of Small Things'; it is he who is that kind of a god" (66). The puny god of small things is defenceless against and weak to the assaults of the feudal values. Ammu, her children Rahel and Estha, and Velutha are these small things. They all are on the margin of the social order and lack free choice. Thus, the basic thesis of the novel is the frail world of these marginal characters pitted against the repressive weight of custom in the Ayemenem society represented by Pappachi, Chacko, Baby Kochamma, the tools of the State who shake hands with the dominant social groups. Aijaz Ahmad, says: "Velutha is the Untouchable carpenter, the maker of little wonders in carved wood and thus 'the god of small things', whose tempestuous sexual encounter with Ammu, the upper-caste woman, towards the end of the story violates all the Love Laws laid down by caste boundaries and the ideas of propriety as to who will love whom and how" (105).

"Big Man the Laltain, Small Man the Mombatti", the title of third chapter, presses the conflict between the marginal and the dominant in itself. The marginal things are meant to be curbed. This dichotomy is highlighted by the illustration of Ammu's "lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by someone Big" (Roy 181-82). The marginal is meant to be curbed by the dominant which is brutal and authoritative. It can either be religion or society, or tradition as a gamut of prejudices, customs and stereotypes that repress "Biology". As the Laltain (lantern) has its flame covered and sheltered, the dominant beings have the sanction, safety and protection. In contrast,

the small flame of a Mombatti (Candle) is too weak to face wind blowing around it. Velutha cannot raise his head against the dominant powers of his society; he is distorted and butchered. As a Paravan by caste he is untouchable. Although Velutha has extraordinary gifts of manual deftness, empowering skills, humour, creativity and diligence to beat social inequalities, he is damned to live as a Paravan by birth.

Although he is a member of the Communist trade union, Velutha is beaten black and blue by the police because some leaders of his own party belonging to the upper castes plot against him. It shows the shallow roots and pretentious ideological moorings of communism in Kerala. Roy's picture of the Communist world and her sardonic allusions to the Comrades evoked sharp protests by the marginal side:

The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. A reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a cast-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from within the communal divide, never challenging them, never attempting not to. They offered cocktail revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy (Roy 66-67).

By abusing power, Inspector Matthew, a touchable policeman, hurls insult at Ammu, and makes a sexually violent gesture towards her by calling her a "Vesya". Finally, Ammu falls a prey to her family's atrocities and brutalities, and passes away at the age of thirty-one as a destitute in a lodge. Rahel and Estha are left feeling exposed and vulnerable. Their shared childhood through transgressive relief of incest – and erotic remedy is like "private balm for emotional [trauma and] injuries once caused by various brutalities in the public domain" (Ahmad 105).

Thus, the novel attempts to address Ammu's frail confrontation to the blitz of the social discrimination. Arundhati Roy's favourite premises such as women's marginalization, patriarchal authority, feudal survival, displacement and dispossession of the susceptible masses, and the tyrannical fetters of the caste system are woven in the texture of *The God of Small Things*.

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