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ISSUES OF SOCIAL OUTCASTES AND EXCLUSION IN INDIAN SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

Exploring Marginality, Caste Dynamics, and Societal Fractures through Literary Lens

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Abstract: This study has been undertaken to investigate the issues of social outcastes and exclusion in Indian society. India is a hierarchical society. Whether in north India or south India, Hindu or Muslim, urban or village, virtually all things, people, and social groups are ranked according to various essential qualities. Although India is a political democracy, notions of complete equality are rarely witnessed in daily life. Societal hierarchy is evident in caste groups, amongst individuals, and in family and kinship groups. Castes are primarily associated with Hinduism, but caste-like groups also exist among Muslims, Indian, Christians, and other religious communities. Whether it's the most densely populated and less developed state like Bihar or the synonym of literacy champion Kerala; caste system has crept in every nook and corner of society. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a bitter, poignant portrayal of caste mechanics in so called education paradise of India. Be it the Syrian Christian community or self-acclaimed communists Hindu Brahmins- all seem to bury deep in this Casteopolis or what I prefer to call Castetopia.

Key words - Caste, Exclusion, Social Outcast, Untouchables, Casteopolis

I. INTRODUCTION

Being one of the oldest civilizations has its own price to pay. A society deeply rooted in Caste, Religion and Color might advance technologically or financially but whenever someone tries to peep under its notional shining outer cover a blurred or rather charred version of its fragmented society at large is often witnessed. It all seems to have started in Vedic age where Varna originally referred to colour, with the Aryans typically being depicted as fair-skinned while the indigenous inhabitants were described as darker in complexion. While this colour distinction may have played a role in the emergence of social hierarchies, its significance has been overstated by certain Western authors who emphasize racial differences. The primary factor contributing to the establishment of social divisions was the Aryans' conquest of the indigenous population. Those conquered, known as dasas and dasyus, were relegated to servitude and considered sudras. Tribal chiefs and priests, who garnered a larger portion of spoils, saw their influence grow at the expense of the common people, leading to social disparities within the tribe. Over time, tribal society became divided into three main groups: warriors, priests, and the general populace. The fourth division, sudras, emerged towards the end of the Rig Vedic period, as evidenced by its first mention in the tenth Book of the Rig Veda, the latest addition to the text. Arundhati Roy's novel "The God of Small Things" intricately entwines the lives of

twins Rahel and Estha within a family drama unfolding in Kerala, a southern state of India. Through a narrative that shifts between past and present, the story unveils the family's secrets and traumas. Roy's prose, rich and evocative, delves into themes such as love, caste, politics, and societal norms. Through vivid imagery and poetic language, Roy skilfully depicts the complexities of human connections and the impact of social oppression on individuals. "The God of Small Things" serves as a poignant exploration of identity, memory, and the quest for freedom in a world rife with inequality and injustice.

II. OUTLINE AND MAJOR CHARACTERS OF NOVEL

"The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy is a captivating novel set in Kerala, a state in southern India, during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Its narrative delves deep into the lives of its characters, revealing the intricacies of love, caste, societal norms, and the struggles faced by individuals trying to navigate through them. At the heart of the story are Rahel and Estha, fraternal twins whose lives are profoundly impacted by the events unfolding around them. Raised in a society rigidly structured by caste and social hierarchy, the twins grapple with the constraints placed upon them and the traumas of their childhood. Their mother, Ammu, is a central figure who rebels against societal expectations, but finds herself ensnared by them nonetheless.

Velutha, an untouchable carpenter, forms a forbidden relationship with Ammu, which challenges the deeply ingrained prejudices of their society. Their love affair sets off a chain of tragic events that reverberate throughout the lives of all involved. Chacko, Ammu's brother, is haunted by his failed marriage to an Englishwoman and struggles with his own sense of identity in the midst of societal pressures. Sophie Mol, Chacko's daughter, represents the intrusion of Western influence into the lives of the Indian characters, highlighting the clash between tradition and modernity.

The novel also introduces us to Mammachi and Pappachi, the twins' grandparents, who embody the oppressive traditions of the older generation, and Baby Kochamma, their aunt, whose bitterness and resentment further complicate the family dynamics. Each character in the novel is intricately woven into the fabric of Kerala society, grappling with their own desires and the expectations placed upon them by their families and communities.

Roy's narrative is not told in a linear fashion; instead, it moves back and forth in time, revealing the events that shaped the characters' lives and the consequences of their actions. This non-linear structure adds layers of complexity to the story, inviting readers to piece together the puzzle of the characters' lives and relationships. Through her richly evocative prose, Roy paints a vivid portrait of Kerala, its lush landscapes, and its vibrant culture. But beneath the surface beauty lies a society rife with inequality and prejudice, where love and desire are often at odds with societal norms. "The God of Small Things" is a poignant exploration of the human condition, a story that resonates with readers long after they have turned the final page. It challenges us to confront the complexities of our own lives and the forces that shape our identities, while reminding us of the enduring power of love and the resilience of the human spirit.

III. SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND OUTCASTES

The word outcaste means as per Cambridge Dictionary website "a person who has no place in their society or in a particular group, because the society or group refuses to accept them:" showing its Synonym : pariah which strangely but factually correct is a caste or community in southernmost India especially Kerala against the backdrop of which this novel "The God of Small Things" is set. The Paravan, Pulaya, Paravar or Pariah all these are various different yet similar terms used for the community set at the lowest strata of societal structure. Social exclusion and ostracism are societal phenomena that marginalize individuals or groups, denying them access to resources, opportunities, and participation in mainstream activities. This exclusion can stem from various factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, or disability. It often leads to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and psychological distress.

In "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy, social exclusion and ostracism play significant roles in shaping the lives of various characters. The novel portrays the rigid caste system in India, which inherently leads to social exclusion and ostracism based on one's caste identity. Characters like Velutha, an Untouchable, face extreme discrimination and are relegated to the margins of society solely due to their caste.

Similarly, Ammu, the mother of the twins Rahel and Estha, experiences ostracism from her family and society due to her defiance of societal norms and her romantic involvement with Velutha, a member of the lower caste. Their relationship defies the strict social hierarchy and is met with severe repercussions, leading to further exclusion and isolation.

Furthermore, the twins themselves experience ostracism within their family due to their unconventional behaviour and the tragic events surrounding their childhood. Their unconventional upbringing and the stigma attached to their family name contribute to their sense of social exclusion, leaving them feeling isolated and misunderstood.

Overall, "The God of Small Things" vividly illustrates how social exclusion and ostracism based on caste, gender, and societal norms deeply affect the lives of its characters, highlighting the complexities and injustices inherent in the social fabric of India.

IV. VELUTHA: THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS OR THE GOD OF LOSS

VELUTHA, THE PARAVAN IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S "THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS," IS AN UNTOUCHABLE, BELONGING TO THE LOWEST CASTE IN INDIA'S RIGID SOCIAL HIERARCHY, HE ENCOUNTERS DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION. DESPITE THESE CHALLENGES, VELUTHA DEMONSTRATES REMARKABLE SKILL AS A CARPENTER AND EXHIBITS COMPASSION IN HIS INTERACTIONS.

“Velutha wasn't supposed to be a carpenter. He was called Velutha - which means White in Malayalam because he was so black. His father, Vellya Paapen, was a Paravan. A toddy tapper. He had a glass eye. He had been shaping a block of granite with a hammer when a chip flew into his left eye and sliced right through it.

As a young boy, Velutha would come with Vellya Paapen to the back entrance of the Ayemenem House to deliver the coconuts they had plucked from the trees in the compound. Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. Mammachi told Estha and 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 footprint. 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 from those whom they addressed.”(Roy, 73)

His character embodies resilience and rebellion against the oppressive caste system. Velutha forms a profound connection with Ammu, the mother of the novel's protagonists, Rahel and Estha. Their clandestine romance defies societal norms and conventions, challenging the boundaries imposed by caste. Velutha's portrayal in the novel symbolizes the on-going struggle against social injustice and oppression. His tragic fate serves as a poignant reminder of the harsh realities endured by those labelled as "Untouchable" and underscores the profound impact of caste-based discrimination on individual lives. In essence, Velutha's character in "The God of Small Things" is richly textured, representing both the resilience and vulnerability of those marginalized by caste-based prejudice in Indian society.

Some modern thinkers have often been of the view that British period in India was more liberal in terms of Religion and Castes but the irony is that with the spread of Christianity the segmentation in society further widened instead of narrowing down. The already caste ridden society further divided under the umbrella of religion of Christianity.

“When the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas (among them Velutha's grandfather, Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. As added incentive they were given a little food and money. They were known as the Rice-Christians. It didn't take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Pariah bishop. After Independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because 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.” (Roy, 74)

Parents are often proud of the confidence in their kids yet from the point of view of a Dalit that too one who is extremely poor and downtrodden like Vellya Paapen this streak of confidence in their kids is not only undesired but also dangerous for their own growth and survival. Being Dalit means being submissive and in a desperate state of hopelessness forever without having desire to raise their lives.

“Vellya Paapen feared for his younger son. He couldn't say what it was that frightened him. It was nothing that he had said. Or done. It was not what he said, but the way he said it. Not what he did, but the way he did it. Perhaps it was just a lack of hesitation. An unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel. While these were qualities that were perfectly acceptable, perhaps even desirable in Touchables, Vellya Paapen thought that in a Paravan they could (and would, and indeed, should) be construed as insolence.” (Roy, 76)

Karl Marx might have died preaching and calling for the unity of the masses especially labour class yet the bitter truth is that the working class in India is severely fragmented in terms of their religions, castes, gender and even their political ideologies. They can't stand a worker amongst themselves being praised or getting more importance if that happens to a person from an outcast of untouchable community.

“Mammachi rehired Velutha as the factory carpenter and put him in charge of general maintenance. It caused a great deal of resentment among the other Touchable factory workers because, according to them, Paravans were not meant to be carpenters. And certainly, prodigal Paravans were not meant to be rehired. To keep the others happy, and since she knew that nobody else would hire him as a carpenter, Mammachi paid Velutha less than she would a Touchable carpenter but more than she would a Paravan. Mammachi didn't encourage him to enter the house (except when she needed something mended or installed). She thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that Touchables touched. She said that it was a big step for a Paravan.” (Roy, 77)

Syrian Christian community in spite of being far more advanced in education and social status seems to have plagued with the notion of upper class- lower class division. An orthodox Syrian Christian would never agree to be placed on the same pedestal as an untouchable like Velutha or his kind. The low paid maid Kochu Maria in the Ameynem house is extremely conscious of not being associated to a lower caste under any circumstance.

“She kept damp cash in her bodice which she tied tightly around her chest to flatten her unchristian breasts. Her kunukku earrings were thick and gold. Her earlobes had been distended into weighted loops that swung around her neck, her earrings sitting in them like gleeful children in a merry-go-(not all the way)round. Her right lobe had split open once and was sewn together again by Dr Verghese Verghese. Kochu Maria couldn't stop wearing her kunukku because if she did, how would people know that despite her lowly cook's job (seventy-five rupees a month she was a Syrian Christian, Mar Thomite? Not a Pelaya, or a Pulaya, or a Paravan. But a Touchable, upper-caste Christian (into whom Christianity had seeped like tea from a teabag), Split lobes stitched back were a better option by far.” (Roy, 170)

The severity of insult thrust upon the lives of socially backward communities is far more than we have read or discussed in academics discourses. Although constitution of India has several provisions for this menace yet ground reality is far away from Utopia. The Constitution of India contains several provisions aimed at combating untouchability, considering it a deeply entrenched social evil practiced against certain communities in India. Here are some key provisions:

Article 17: Abolition of Untouchability: This article explicitly abolishes the practice of untouchability in any form. It declares that the practice is forbidden and punishable by law.

Article 15(2): This article prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Discrimination based on caste, which often manifested in the practice of untouchability, is covered under this provision.

Article 15(4): This clause allows the state to make special provisions for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes of citizens, which includes those who were historically oppressed due to the caste system.

Article 17(1): This clause provides for the punishment of offenses related to untouchability, making it a punishable offense under the law.

Article 46: This article directs the state to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and to protect them from social injustice and exploitation.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989: Though not a constitutional provision, this act was enacted to prevent atrocities against members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, including untouchability-related offenses.

These constitutional provisions and legal enactments aim to eradicate untouchability and uplift the marginalized sections of society who have historically been subjected to discrimination based on their caste. However, despite these provisions, the complete eradication of untouchability remains an ongoing challenge in Indian society, and efforts towards social reform and awareness continue. In this novel, the treatment done to Velutha or his father by the hands of so-called upper class society is utterly inhumane and beyond any value that has been prescribed by Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar while drafting the glorious and lengthy constitution of India. The example from the text itself is a testimony to this insult:

“Suddenly the blind old woman in her rickrack dressing gown and her thin grey hair plaited into a rat's tail stepped forward and pushed Vellya Paapen with all her strength. He stumbled backwards, down the kitchen steps and lay sprawled in the wet mud. He was taken completely by surprise. Part of the taboo of being an Untouchable was expecting not to be touched. At least not in these circumstances. Of being locked into a physically impregnable cocoon.

Baby Kochamma, walking past the kitchen, heard the commotion. She found Mammachi spitting into the rain, THOO!

THOO! THOO! and Vellya Paapen lying in the slush, wet, weep-ing, groveling. Offering to kill his son. To tear him limb from limb. liar!' Mammachi was shouting, 'Drunken dog! Drunken Paravan’ (Roy, 256)

A plethora of folklore and tales full of love have been passed from generation to generation orally as well as in written literature in hundreds of languages in India. Be it of the eternal holy, divine, and pious relationship between Lord Ram and Goddess Seeta; Lord Krishna and Radha or even humanly figures as Laila-Majnoo, Heer-Ranjha or many others less known. But a society full of diversity is yet to learn to accept a love relationship between two persons from different religions, castes, creed, or even gender roles as per their own willingness. The central figure Velutha born an outcast and untouchable is a victim of society's narrow-mindedness and falls prey to it for loving a girl Ammu from upper caste society. When this girl is already divorced and has already been through hell in her marital and personal life breaking her hopes and aspirations; she is not allowed to love a person just because he is a Paravan. The mere thought of them being together infuriates the family as shown in the following paragraph:

“Mammachi's rage at the old one-eyed Paravan standing in the rain, drunk, dribbling, and covered in mud was re-directed into a cold contempt for her daughter and what she had done.

She thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie. She imagined it in vivid detail: a Paravan's coarse black hand on her daughter's breast.

His mouth on hers. His black hips jerked between her parted legs. The sound of their breathing. His particular Paravan smell. Like animals Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. Like a dog with a bitch on heat. Her tolerance of 'Men's Needs' as far as her son was concerned, became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter. She had defiled generations of breeding The Little Blessed One, blessed personally by the Patriarch of Antioch, an Imperial Entomologist, a Rhodes Scholar from Oxford) and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, forever now, people would point at them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties. They'd nudge and whisper. It was all finished now.” (Roy, 257)

V. AMMU, RAHEL, AND ESTHA AS OUTCASTES

Velutha being an untouchable was subjected to such disgrace and oppression is easy to understand in such a society whose roots is in the Varna system but born upper-class Ammu and her twins Rahel and Estha are shown as always in a no man's land between upper-class and untouchables just because of their platonic relation with Velutha. Ammu born in Syrian Christian family becomes an outcaste in the eyes of her family and society when she marries an orthodox Brahmin man whom she met in Guwahati and immediately decided to marry being in a desperate state. Her decision is awful as he turns out to be an abusive alcoholic so she has to eventually leave him after the twins are born. Ammu is then disgraced because of her divorce, and she causes this so-called "scandal" by having an affair with the untouchable Velutha. In the deeply hierarchical and caste-conscious society depicted in the novel, their love is forbidden and seen as a transgression of social norms. Their affair leads to dire consequences for both of them, with Ammu being ostracized even more because of it... Ammu's relationship choices and rebellious nature lead to her being estranged from her family, particularly her mother Mammachi, and her brother Chacko. They disapprove of her decisions and lifestyle, which creates a rift between them. Throughout the novel, Ammu's struggles with societal norms, family expectations, and her desires paint a poignant picture of a woman who finds herself pushed to the fringes of society, largely due to circumstances beyond her control and her refusal to conform to societal expectations.

Rahel on the other hand may not be as outwardly portrayed as an outcast as her mother Ammu, she too grapples with feelings of alienation and marginalization in her own way. She, like her twin brother Estha, is of mixed heritage, with an Indian mother, Ammu, and an English father. This mixed heritage contributes to a sense of not fully belonging to either community. They are sometimes viewed with suspicion or curiosity because of their mixed parentage. She carries the burden of childhood trauma, particularly stemming from the events surrounding Sophie Mol's death. This trauma further isolates her from others as she struggles to cope with the past. Additionally, she and Estha become estranged from each other after the traumatic events, further deepening her sense of isolation. Rahel shares her mother's forbidden relationship with Velutha. Although she is a child during the events of the novel, her connection to Velutha deepens the sense of outsidership, as their relationship challenges societal norms and leads to tragic consequences for both Rahel and her family. She carries a sense of guilt and self-blame for the events that transpire, particularly regarding Sophie Mol's death and the consequences that follow. This guilt contributes to her feeling disconnected from others and unable to fully integrate back into her family or society. Throughout the novel, her loss of innocence is palpable as she navigates the complexities of family dynamics, societal expectations, and personal relationships. This loss of innocence further contributes to her sense of being an outsider, as she grapples with adult emotions and experiences from a young age. While Rahel may not be as explicitly labeled an outcast as her mother Ammu, she nonetheless experiences feelings of alienation and marginalization due to her mixed heritage, traumatic experiences, and the consequences of her family's actions. These factors contribute to her sense of being an outsider within her own family and society.

Estha is Rahel's twin brother in "The God of Small Things". Like Rahel, Estha also experiences various forms of isolation and marginalization. He carries the burden of childhood trauma, particularly stemming from the events surrounding Sophie Mol's death. This trauma manifests in his selective mutism, rendering him largely silent throughout much of the novel. His inability to communicate effectively with others isolates him further, as he struggles to express himself and connect with those around him. Similar to Rahel, He experiences a profound loss of innocence due to the traumatic events that unfold within his family. This loss of innocence shapes his worldview and further distances him from the carefree nature of childhood, leaving him feeling disconnected from others his age. He faces social rejection due to his mutism and withdrawn demeanour. He is often misunderstood by those around him, and his silence is sometimes interpreted as aloofness or indifference. This social rejection exacerbates his feelings of isolation and contributes to his sense of being an outsider. Estha becomes estranged from his family following the traumatic events of the past. His bond with Rahel is strained, and he struggles to reconnect with her and other family members. This estrangement further deepens his sense of isolation and contributes to his withdrawal from familial and social interactions. He experiences profound emotional turmoil as he grapples with the trauma of his past and the complexities of his family dynamics. His inability to articulate his feelings exacerbates his sense of isolation, leaving him feeling trapped within his own internal struggles. Through Estha's character, Roy explores themes of isolation, alienation, and the consequences of childhood trauma within the context of a complex and deeply layered narrative.

VI. CONCLUSION

To conclude, "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy delves deeply into themes of social out casting and exclusion, particularly within the context of Indian society. Set in Kerala, India, against the backdrop of caste hierarchies, gender norms, and colonial legacies, the novel masterfully portrays the marginalized existence of characters who defy societal expectations. At the heart of the narrative are Ammu and her twins, Rahel and Estha, who grapple with various forms of societal exclusion. Ammu, a divorced woman, faces ostracism for her defiance of traditional gender roles and her forbidden love affair with Velutha, a lower-caste man. Her status as an outcast is further compounded by her economic struggles and estrangement from her family. Rahel and Estha, despite their privileged upbringing, experience profound isolation due to childhood trauma and societal rejection. Estha's selective silence renders him silent and withdrawn, while Rahel navigates the complexities of her mixed heritage and the consequences of forbidden love. Both siblings are cast adrift in a sea of societal norms and familial expectations, struggling to find their place in a world that refuses to accept them for who they are. Through richly drawn characters and lyrical prose, Roy exposes the insidious nature of social exclusion and its devastating impact on individuals and communities. The novel lays bare the arbitrary divisions that govern society, challenging readers to confront their complicity in perpetuating systems of oppression and marginalization. "The God of Small Things" is a powerful testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. It serves as a stark reminder of the need for empathy, compassion, and solidarity in the fight against social injustice. Roy's searing portrayal of social outcasts and their struggles for acceptance resonates long after the final page, urging readers to confront the uncomfortable truths that lie at the heart of society's most enduring inequalities.

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