

The God of Small Things: A Saga of Protest and Oppression

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While we stop to think, we often miss our opportunity.

...Publilius Syrus.

Arundhati Roy, a product of unhappy marriage of a Keralite woman and a Bengali man, proves to be a revolutionary throughout. Launched into the literary canon by her first creation *The God of Small Things*, Ms. Roy has a number of works to her credit. She is originally a social activist-turned writer. She has produced the essays concerning universal threats, politics and society which include *New nukes: India, Pakistan and Global Nuclear Development*, *War is Peace*, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, *The End of Imagination* and *The Greater Common Good*. The Booker Prize winner, Ms. Roy keeps herself concerned with several causes regarding dalits, environment protection due to Narmada Dam. *The God of Small Things* rotates round the oppressed characters. The novel reflects the sage of oppression on one hand and on the other; it depicts deep sense of protest.

Ms. Roy's *The God of Small Things* presents the conventional Indian society with a few of its revolutionary inhabitants. The novel is related with those, men as well as women, who have to pay heavily for their birth either as an untouchable or as a woman. The status of a woman and that of an untouchable are alike. Both lead a suppressed and neglected life. Their existence in the society is a marginalized one. Ammu, a woman of Touchable society, resembles Velutha who is an untouchable of the same locality. These characters symbolize conservatism and regression, belief and assumption, revolt and repose. Ammu, the heroine of the novel, is an example of the wrong done against her by men as well as social rules. She cannot avoid her reverse journey towards death. Velutha represents the injustice done on his person on the basis of his being an untouchable. The surprising thing is that the Police department and the non-governments organization also join this oppression.

Ammu has been a silent witness to Pappachi's violence over her mother Mammachi. The reason for the use of violence has been his frustration and failure in profession. As a small girl, Ammu had seen Mammachi receiving her husband's beatings. Ammu has been aware that her father's use of violence over her mother has been a result of his jealousy as Mammachi has been seventeen years younger than him. Moreover, she has been a talented woman in many activities. Whether talented or silenced, a woman, in a conventional society, is deemed to suffer either at the hands of the society or at the hands of her husband. Senselessly, Pappachi uses to beat his wife. Ms. Roy observes:

Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. (p. 47)

Though Ammu remains a silent observer, she develops a determination within herself. As she grows eighteen years of age, she decides to leave the household against the wish of the members of the family. Pappachi's injustice has not been limited to Mammachi but it exceeds beyond and Ammu is deprived of the higher education. Pappachi thinks:

Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl. (p. 38)

Against her wish, Ammu remains at home to help her mother and wait for the proper time of her marriage. With the decision of her father, she grows desperate and yearns for freedom. Her restless condition has been described as:

All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother. (p. 39)

The act of Ammu's desperation has resulted into her visit to Calcutta on some pretext where she marries an Assistant Manager of Tea Estate. This act of Ammu is an act of protest against the conventional domesticity. Modern woman wants to liberate herself from the conventional burden which is put over her by the male-dominated society. The women who silently accept the male-domination and oppression are equally responsible for their condition. Every woman is hopeful about marriage. She sees in her husband a protector, a friend, a lover and what not. Ammu's marriage is an account of her further torture and suffering, that too, at the hands of her husband who is an alcoholic. He desires to push Ammu into the arms of his boss to get promotion.⁰⁹ Instead of following the desire of her husband, Ammu protests and decides to break the marriage. She '*left her husband and returned unwelcomed to her parents.*' (p. 42)

Ammu knows that a divorcee-woman has no respect and place in the traditional Indian family but she hasn't experienced it yet. At her parents, she leads a neglected existence full of insult and humiliation. She tries to keep herself busy in meaningless acts at home. It is not only the last of her sufferings to take divorce but fate has reserved many miserable things for her. She meets Velutha, parvan, an untouchable though a gifted worker. She feels drifted towards him. Neglected and discarded by the orthodox society, both try to find consolation for each other's sufferings. Velutha, a socially oppressed and Ammu, a divorcee and a revolutionary, both are subject to the injustice of the society. They display a sense of protest against the set rules and principles of the society. It is very unfortunate that nobody understands them. On the charge of illicit relationship, she is expelled from the house and she has to leave it. She goes on searching for jobs at different places but in the male-dominated and socially stagnant social culture, she doesn't get any. Finally, she feels tired, exhausted, sick and defeated. She is found dead in a grimy room of Bharat Lodge. Even the religious institution, like a church, observes reservation in her burial. She is cremated in an electric crematorium, like a pariah. The novelist writes:

Nobody expects beggars, derelicts and the police-custody dead were cremated there. People who died with nobody to lie at the back of them and to them. (p. 162)

Velutha, despite many good qualities fails to establish an equal and respectable position in the society. It is just due to the reason that he has been an untouchable. As a professional, Pappachi identifies Velutha's good many qualities. He observes at one of the occasions that Velutha would have been a good engineer had he not been a parvan. On this ground, Mammachi rehires Velutha in the family carpenter factory where Velutha has to receive criticism from other Touchable workers. Ms. Roy Writes:

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 Parvanas

were not meant to be carpenters. And certainly, prodigal Parvanas were not meant to be rehired.

Velutha is well aware of his forefathers' background that how a broom used to be tied round their neck so as to sweep the street. As a result of which Brahmins and Christians wouldn't defile themselves by stepping into Parvanas foot-prints.

He wants to live in the present and not in the past and wants all the class-restrictions must be removed. It has been is intense desire that he should be treated equally. His joining the Communist Party principles also prove to be illusory when he seeks assistance from the party leader Comrade Pillai while Velutha has been charged of having illicit relationship with Ammu. Instead of helping him, comrade Pillai delivers an extended lecture on party rules and principles. Even the police department arrests him due to this charge. He is beaten in a most brutal manner, breaking his skull, knee caps, and ribs and reducing him to pulp. He doesn't get a chance to defend himself. It is the Touchable conservative society which decides his fate whether he will survive or not.

After meeting with Ammu, he feels drawn to her. Both of them try to identify their suffering with each other. They share each other's hurt and humiliation. They knew their end and try to get affiliated with each other though momentarily. Velutha is presented as transgressor of Love Laws, and untouchable cannot touch a touchable woman. He spends a few moments of intense love with Ammu on the banks of Meenachal river. Ammu dies away when expelled from the house and Velutha is killed by the police on the plea that he is responsible for the death of Sophie Mol because he has given instructions to her regarding the boat-repair and also taking of the boat upstream.

Any protest against convention is for the progress of the society as well as for self-development. Ammu presents a sense of protest to continue higher education. Her character resembles Ms. Arundhati Roy's who has also protested against the set rules of the family and left the house at an early age. Protest doesn't bear any barriers in its way, however difficult may be the path. The very deaths of Ammu and Velutha are suggestive of the fact that the voice of suppression and injustice is powerful than that of protest and justice. In a true sense, Ms. Roy has projected a saga of protest and oppression in *The God of Small Things*.

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