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HUMAN RIGHTS: THE CENTRIFUGAL FORCE TO RESIST EXPLOITATIONS IN
ARUNDHATI ROY'S 'THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS'

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ABSTRACT

Over many decades debate on human rights has increasingly occupied prominent place in post colonial literature to grant rights to obsessed community to extend them better life circumstances to experience and enjoy life and remove all kinds of indifference and disparities practiced by several societies. Writers like Mulkraj Anand, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul and Arundhati Roy; they all have placed their sincere efforts to represent the traumatic, pathetic and exploitative practice of the society to illuminate light on the miserable plight of obsessed class people in numerous societies. The present paper evaluates the efforts of the writer in her novel *The God of Small Things* towards the contribution of human rights granted to underprivileged class of the society. It also attempts to explore the spirit of the author to address the problems of factory workers after independence, the liberation of women from exploitation and manipulation by men and even women against social hierarchy pertaining in the contemporary society. They strive and struggle for freedom, rights and resistance and are still placed back in their traditional roles as primarily mothers and wives. The role models set for women started to blur in modern context for the women in contemporary context in the novel through character Ammu.

Key words: Decades–duration of ten years, Contemporary- current, Resistance- protest, Liberation- freedom.

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Since centuries humanity has been consistently trying to become civic to more civic in attaining dignity and respect for each and every individual as a social entity of the society they have living in. Various international, national and regional socio-political bodies and institutions contributed to greater extent towards the defining and redefining universal human rights to ensure respectable position for each and everyone in the society. Over many decades debate on human rights has increasingly occupied prominent place in post colonial literature to grant rights to obsessed community to extend them better life circumstances to experience and enjoy life and remove all kinds of indifference and disparities practiced by several societies. Writers like Mulkraj Anand, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul and Arundhati Roy; they all have placed their sincere efforts to represent the traumatic, pathetic and exploitative practice of the society to

illuminate light on the miserable plight of obsessed class of people in numerous societies. Present paper attempts to reveal how the lives are still excluded from human rights considering their lines of race, gender, class, disability and species membership. Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children' addresses the obstacles to incorporating rights into a formerly colonized nation's legal culture. El Saadawi's 'Woman at Point Zero' takes up controversies over women's freedoms in Islamic society. In 'Disgrace', J. M. Coetzee considers the disappointments of post-apartheid reconciliation in South Africa. And in 'The God of Small Things', Arundhati Roy confronts an array of human rights abuses widespread in contemporary India. Each of these literary case studies further demonstrates the relevance of embodiment to both comprehending and redressing the failures of human rights, even while those narratives refuse simplistic ideals or solutions.

'The God of Small Things' addresses the problems of factory workers taking them in union through the voice of the local communist leader K.N.M. Pillai. When Chacko (a factory owner) reveals his intentions to organize the factory workers into a union to Comrade Pillai, Pillai's answer is: "comrade, you cannot stage the revolution for them. You can only create awareness. Educate them. They must launch their own struggle. They must overcome their fears." Hence, Roy seems to be aware of the problems connected with representing individuals from diverse socio-economic habitats. According to Gaytri Spivak Rao belonging to a middle-class, understands closely to the community and educates woman. As an author she seeks to give voice to the oppressed class. This novel appears as an intervention to act upon political interest to make a pointed discussion on the deprivation of the rights of the people within the society. Acclaimed critic Anita Singh takes up Rao's discourse in the novel as "a discourse protecting and voicing for the rights and liberation of marginalized, dispossessed and subordinate people." In fact writer attempts to concentrate and crystallize the issue of atrocities against all the dispossessed and marginalized people. Her fictional writing resembles her spirit to betray the conventions and practices of the society that deprive people from their rights. Her spirit flaps its wings to liberate not only her spirit but also the spirit of the entire subaltern and subordinate communities from the clutches of oppression and manipulations. She executes her own experience of life to depict the discriminations and suffering those women in Kerala underwent due to their subalternity and subordinate community in the novel. She experiences the bitterness of life experience on very ground level. It is her experience that led her to voice the pain of the manipulated women and find some concrete positive solution for the obsessed class. She has grown up as a woman in a small Indian village as the daughter of a Syrian Christian mother and a Hindu father, and her parents divorced when Roy was young. Ms. Anita Singh, an established critic and writer states; "The book becomes the voice of all those who are relegated to the margins of society"

Feminism is the name given to a political movement initiated in 1960s as a call for liberation of women from certain forms of discrimination based on gender that deprived women from the opportunities and equalities to promote their interests and rights. John Stuart Mill in her book 'The subjection of women' and Mary Willston in her book 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' defend women's oppression and revealed the utter injustice imposed on them. They believed that the liberty of women is utter need for the development of the society. They find that their freedom is key-point for the development of the society. Virginia Woolf in her book 'A Room' underlines acute sense of exclusion and marginalization of women. From feminist perspective Rao responds to the way women is presented in literary space.

Thus after independence, the women who had struggled for freedom alongside with the men, found themselves back in their traditional roles as primarily mothers and wives. The role models set for women started to blur in modern context for the women in contemporary context. The notion of female suffering in the Hindu tradition is dangerously glorified through the use of mythological models like Sita and Savitri. But while glorifying this society forgot their pain and restriction and even their sacrifices they had given and undergone through. Roy addresses the internal agony of women and the over expectations imposed upon them. Susheila Nasta takes this as an act of awareness among women and reveals that: "the post-colonial woman writer is not only involved in making her-self heard, in changing the architecture of male-centered ideologies and languages, or in discovering new forms. However, Spivak acknowledges Roy's intervention in

pertaining hierarchy of male domination and justifies her position as an author who almost is considered to act upon visible political interest of feministic approach scrupulously' with which she feels sympathetic and welcomes as a kind of strategic essentialism. Her novel appears as "a discourse of the marginalized and subordinated community in Kerala" and her fictional creativity "crystallizes the issues of atrocities against . . . all those dispossessed of an identity or a speaking voices". The author strives for liberation of women from the social hierarchy. She challenges patriarchal traditions that oppressed women within the home.

Roy fictionally constructs marginalized female voices to explore and display the position of women in the society through three main female characters – Ammu, Rahel-her daughter and Estha in *The God of Small Things*. They all break the conventional practice and relate and respond to Velutha, the male hero of the novel who is a Paravan, the lowest caste among the Untouchables. Novel enacts as a window that opens in to the life of twins Estha and Rahel. Estha's mother had once left and then returned to her husband Ayemenem, the father of Estha who also returns to her father along with the mother. But story reveals several layers of silence, divorce and their return to Kottayam following subsequent tragedy.

Narrative moves through the tough framed human laws confining the females as the victims of deprivation of their basic rights – being loved one. Ammu falls in love with Velutha, who works as a carpenter in the pickle factory, and their love story is at the center of this novel. The ultimate result is that all three had loved an untouchable man till death. The character Ammu, mother of the twins, is separated and placed in such a position from where she couldn't speak a single word and even take a sigh of her own grief. This scene of a mother's separation melts our heart and reflects her painful separation from her child. This leads to the loss of the very essence of some one's life- the childhood of a child. Velutha is encouraged to go to school though not together with Touchable but to a special school for Untouchables only. But as time goes by, Velutha crosses several lines; apart from learning how to read and write, he becomes a trained carpenter, when traditionally a Paravan should stick to simpler activities like toddy tapping, picking coconuts and so on. He secretly becomes a member of the communist party and participates in a political march (organized by the Marxist labor Union). Eventually he crosses the most forbidden line of all, that of having a relationship with a Touchable, upper-caste woman. He is a character who belongs to untouchable community but works for upper caste family and experiences the helplessness of the twins and their mother who relies on the small God –her husband. Her husband is the person who decides that who should be loved and up to what extent. So in all the ways Velutha is the most oppressed and downtrodden of the main characters in the novel—despite being a man.

Ammu's marginalization is also quite obvious; she is a divorced woman with two children to take care of. They live on 'sufferance' in her parent's house where she is disregarded by her relatives, especially Baby Kochamma who is eager to make Ammu and her twins understand that they "really have no right to be there." As a teenager, Ammu does not conform to the expectations on her that she should wait obediently in her parent's house for a suitable husband. Beside this she escapes from her parents and marries the first man who proposes to her, outside her parent's religion and without their consent, but after a couple of years she decides to divorce him as well. Ammu's brother, Chacko, reminds her children that their mother has no 'locus stand', no legal rights to inherit the factory or the house for instance she is in fact literally kicked out of her parent's house by this very same brother. If Ammu is on the margin, her children are thrown in worse condition than their mother. They are "Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no one in the community shows self-respect this Syrian Christian and no one would even marry with them" in the eyes of Baby Kochamma.

Ammu is treated in an inhumane manner and is disregarded, deceived and despised by her family. She is also sometimes feared and scared of the evil treatment of her family members that make her feel haunted with the sense of insecurity. Every time she feels that they may be proved as an 'unsafe edge' for her in the family. Being a woman she had suffered the great loss mentally and physically as they had already damned her. Now she has had little left to lose. She battles every day the fight of survival inside her. The infinite tenderness of motherhood in her is oppressed and obsessed. Ammu carries opposing forces inside her; as a mother she strives to love and protect her children at all cost but as an individual she is desperate to break

the set convention of the society and free herself from all the social confining- a kind of rebel against the 'smug, ordered world' around her.

Ammu, like Velutha is one who betrays and crosses the man made boundaries of patriarchal hierarchy; she appears a person who has no willingness to place her in to the role models presented to her like common females. Mamma chi and Baby Kochamma are both Syrian Christians, a proud minority group in Kerala who believe themselves to be "descendants of the one hundred Brahmins whom St. Thomas the Apostle converted to Christianity when he traveled east after the Resurrection". In the social hierarchy of Kerala, they are 'upper-caste Syrian Christians', separating them from the lowlier 'Rice-Christians' who (like Velutha's grandfather) joined the British colonialists Anglican Church encouraged by a little food and money.

Ammu carries the feelings of meaningless in her life. She feels that nothing remains worthwhile to be lived. She is overwhelmed with a sense of injustice. She had her bluntness which she carries in her inner self. The most important streak in Ammu's character is her sense of identity crisis. She feels that she belongs nowhere. Her unwelcomed presence in the house and in the family leaves her with a feeling of distance and detachment from the place where she lives. Perhaps this is why she is attracted to Velutha's affinity with the material world around him. Right before their first night-time meeting he comes up from a swim in the river and the narrator lets us know about her impression of him: "As he rose from the dark river and walked up the stone steps, she saw that the world they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water, the mud, the trees, the fish, and the stars. He moved so easily through it." (316) She is longing to belong somewhere and feels safe with Velutha. The narrator ponders: "Ammu smiled to herself in the dark, thinking how much she loved his arms—the shape and strength of them, how safe she felt resting in them when actually it was the most dangerous place she could be" (319). Ammu's yearning for love and intimate kinship with another adult human being is thus much stronger than possible fears about what might happen if her relationship with an Untouchable should be revealed. Double Standards of society is displayed when Ammu's and Velutha's relationship is finally exposed, the different expectations upon men and women become as clear as day.

The ill treatment with Ammu, Velutha and Estha shows how strong the ideology of caste and difference is prevalent and persisting in the society still. Religious beliefs are embedded with the rigid social fragile laws which collectively incorporate the caste system within their religious practices, with all its prejudices and double standards imposed on the obsessed community and people. Velutha represents himself as a person with the potential to transgress the boundaries of class and caste; an Untouchable with smart look, talent and brain who could have made a bright future and career without any fear that regularly keeps people scared in the hierarchy of society. Velutha represents him as one who dis-regards, rejects, denies the established social hierarchy at personal level and poses himself as a threat to upper caste. Ammu and Velutha both break the convention and social hierarchy to fight for the rights as a common being belonging to the untouchable community.

The novel represents conflicts between the big and small things. The conceptual structures of religion, caste, nation and colonialism are big things, difficult to attack and slow to change, whereas people, insects and flowers are small things that may be enjoyed today even if they are gone tomorrow. Big things, joint future for Ammu and Velutha, remain unspoken of. They have their fragile relationship. They find that how things change within a day to them. Similarly, big things, like nations or castism, may be overthrown one day, but when? No one can predict. The novel at least provides a ray of light which offers a counterweight to the fatal outcome of Ammu's and Velutha's love affair. Subaltern Speech is Ammu and Velutha's sad love story, which is obsessed and oppressed by the unethical clutches of the society. According to the newspapers, Velutha dies in custody, charged with kidnapping and murder. Comrade K.N.M. Pillai is interviewed in the same newspaper, claiming that the "management had implicated the Paravan in a false police case because he [Velutha] was an active member of the Communist party" and therefore they wished to eliminate him (286). The truth behind Velutha's death is representation for thousands of victims of violence against Untouchables

who dare to transgress the social boundaries. Ammu and Velutha, dared to admit their love to each other in Roy's own version of Romeo and Juliet.

What the conclusion can be drawn from the instances of the female characters represented in novel is that these female characters of 'The God of Small Things' are trapped in a system of oppression at a great extent but they dare to oppose the social clutches at a substantial degree. They are ventured to give voice to those who are subjected to victimization of social exclusion and marginalization. From a postcolonial feminist perspective Roy has contributed to make the representation of the Third World subaltern woman in diverse manner to represent their grievances and raise their voices to help them overcome from manipulative practices. She draws various portraits of exploited women that, despite their oppressed and marginalized status, are not depicted without agency or responsibility. The women characters clearly reject the intricate system of oppression in the story though Ammu is punished severely by her mother and aunt for her transgression. But Ammu represents people who actually dare to do 'the unthinkable', to transgress the very line that upholds the system of difference that castism inherently maintains. She represents all those who have suffered due to transgressions against the 'Love Laws' and gender-specific expectations imposed upon them, sometimes even by paying with their own lives. The novel itself has given the fictional Ammu and Velutha, as representations of thousands of cross-caste relationships in the real India, a voice that resonates all over the world and persists as a central force of attraction occupied by different creative canvas of different authors and writers across the country.

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