Caste and Gender in Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things

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ABSTRACT:

In this study, I focus primarily on gender and caste issues and their effects on the agonized inner mind of the repressed female and child characters in the novel The God of Small Things (1997) by Arundhati Roy. In this novel, Indian woman novelist Arundhati Roy focused primarily on the existential psychological predicaments and travails in the lives of the subjugated Indian women who were imperiled by the psychological and physical abuse in a male-dominated society ruled by rigid social and religious conventions and constraints. In other words, Roy sought to appraise the aberrant psychology of men and women in the conventional Indian social climate. She focused on the traumatic experiences of her women characters under the impact of social class and gender discrimination. She employed Freud's psychoanalytic theory to reveal the disturbed psyche of her women characters. The methodology of this study concerns two major directions: close-text analysis and cultural studies. It deals with sociological and psychological problems, which analyze and expose the symbolism of man’s behavior particularized in a patriarchal society.

KEYWORDS: Caste System, Gender Discrimination, Male Chauvinism, Transgression of Love Laws and incest.

1. Introduction

The status of woman in society has been an ongoing and critical concern in Anglo-America literature. Not only in India but all over the world, woman have remained on the periphery. The cause for this can be traced back the pre-historic age when society rated the physical ability of people over intelligent characteristics. Due to her specific capacities and physical states, be it menstrual cycle or parturition, the woman was definitely not privileged enough. However, in patriarchal society, equality of the sexes and the status of women was largely ignored. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru once stated that "you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women” (Ramphal1985: 25). For centuries, the women of India had been treated as inferior to men. Violence against women had been fairly common, an egregious example being so-called 'dowry-burnings'. The dowry was an ancient custom in India in which the bride's parental wealth was transferred to the groom or his family at the time of marriage. This sometimes resulted in acts of violence against women, especially when the groom was not satisfied with his dowry.

Another prominent gender issue was that patriarchal religions confirmed the male-dominated family structure. The husband was held responsible for his wife’s behavior and was allowed to beat her when she was perceived to have committed a seriously wrong or moral sin. Neeru Tandon and Nidhi Kapoor, in their essay "Domestic Violence in Alice Walker’s The Third Life of Grange Copeland", point out that "The man expects a wife to look like a woman, behave like a woman, think like a man and work like a dog" (Tandon & Kapoor 2008:176). Men believed and gave themselves the justification that partner beating was a natural phenomenon. They continuously beat their partners as ways to improve them. In turn, women accepted beating as a part of their life. However, gender discrimination was the primary aspect operating through a repressive paternal ethos, in which the father’s domination of the family’s private resources effectively gave him the right to abuse his women.

Arundhati Roy was one of the Indian women novelists who mainly focused on psychological issues in the lives of women characters who were exposed to emotional suffering in a patriarchal society. She used their skill to persuasively project the disturbed minds of victimized Indian women. In her novel, the depiction of women characters strongly reflected her feminist perspective, outlook, and approach. She penetrated deeply into the psyche of persecuted women characters through the integrity of their feminine viewpoint and exposed their dilemmas, which were the result of emotional and psychological imbalances commonly experienced by Indian women.

2. Roy’s style in God of Small Things

Works of Indian writing in English were not a simulation of English literary form but extremely prototypical and deeply Indian in both theme and spirit. The works of Indian novelists such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Mulk Raj, Salman Rushdie, and Raja Rao imbued English literature with a unique pattern and spirit in the same way the Americans and Australians developed their respective literature in their own countries. Today the English language is a heritage gaining ground all over the world. Arundhati Roy, an entirely homegrown Indian, had been given space by England to use a number of Indian words in the dictionary. She coined more than a hundred words of Indian origin. This demonstrated that Indian literary works were making important contributions in the realm of world fiction.

Arundhati Roy (1961- ) is one of the greatest Indo-British writers and has won the Book Prize for literary achievement. Many celebrated critics have described Roy’s The God of Small Things (1997) as the greatest remarkable work in Indo-Anglian fiction. The novel presented a tremendous conformity between sensation and structure, style and matter. Many great writers such as Anita Desai, Kamala Das and Raja Rao wrote Indian fiction in English but the contribution of Roy to English fiction was a priceless distinction. She was opposed to traditional renderings of things and her mocking depiction of modern society; the emotional depth of the detached characters, her modern and unique style containing new elements such as ungrammatical construction and myriad beautiful symbols, images, bizarre phrases, sprinklings of Italics, unwanted capitalization and unconventional rhythm had an enormous impact on the literary tastes of readers. The readers enjoyed the way that Roy twisted the language to conform to the feeling. Roy believed "there is a little difference between studying
architecture and building buildings”(Prasad 2005:257). The reason she brought architecture into her book was that she had been an architecture student. Thus, rather than writing her novel from the beginning to the end, she followed the methodology of architecture. For instance, like constructing a building, Roy expertly drew the entire image of the building in her brain and then cemented the walls before giving the building a final touch. Similarly, all important events and their chronological emblems were concisely yielded at the beginning of the novel. At the end of the novel, readers were provided with the complete vision of the story. She observed in one of her interviews: “I would start somewhere and I’d colour in a bit and then I would deeply stretch back and then stretch forward. It was like designing an intricate balanced structure”(Roy 1997:46). Due to the complexity of the structure, readers demand a second reading and have to push their minds back and forth in a frantic motion to fully understand the story. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* was a novel of a classical nature that constructed a conformity between the past and present with a view to the future. It was fascinating in both content and form, matter and style. It introduced a modern idea into the world of conventional thought. Her style of writing, including the poetic structure, architecture method, similes, symbols, images, new words, and phrases undoubtedly enriched the English tongue and will endure forever on the sheets of literary history. In technique and style, it satisfied readers through the realm of architectural design. However, some of the images in the novel, such as those of Shakespearean tragedy also played back and forth and pointed to the book as a whole. Most importantly, she purposely distorted language and coined several new words such as ‘Mombatti’ which suggested the ‘God of Small Things’ and ‘Laltain’ which suggested ‘God of Big Things’. These terms essentially conveyed the sweetness and the scent of Indianess. The stylistic feature of the novel is rich with several powerful symbols, and images that employ other poetic devices such as irony, personification, pun, and so on. But the chief characteristic of Roy was her plentiful and beautiful use of metaphors and similes that charmed readers. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy employed two powerful metaphors, the Laltain, The Big Man, and the Mombatti, Small Man, which suggested two forces, the ruler and the ruled. These were recurrent images similar to those of Shakespeare’s major imagery in Macbeth. The novel depicted a confrontation between “The God of Small Things” (Velutha, Ammu, Estha, Rahel, Sophie Mol) who are unduly oppressed by the Laltain and the “The God of Big Things”(Baby Kochamma, Mammachi Chacko, Pappachi, Mr. Pillai and detective Thomas Mathew) who seemed to be ruling over the Mombatties. By using the suggestive term ‘Laltain’, Roy refers to the authority of high-class society. Amar Nut Prasad, in his 2003 essay “Arundhati Roy: A Novelist of the Dalit and Deserted”, noted that Both Laltain, and Mombatti give us light and burns another lamp. The Laltain is wellfed and well-protected. It can bravely face blowing wind. But on the other hand, Mombatti has no glass, not protection, no support. It can easily be blown out by the surge of wind. But the advantage of Mombatti is that it can very soon light another lamp; Laltain, on the other hand, is somewhat stubborn to burn other’s light (Prasad2003: 167). The author successfully tried, through this beautiful connotation, to arouse readers’ sympathy towards the marginalized and defenseless Mombatties. Roy described the Mombatties of her world as the God of Loss. Prasad pointed out that “The God of Small Things, are bound to suffer insult, hurdles, and obstacles, tyranny and injustice”(Prasad2003:181). At the end of the novel, Ammu and Velutha, as two Mombatties, had to indulge in the small things and abandon the big things. Prof. O. P. Mathur, in his 2005 essay “Arundhati’s Paradoxical Celebration of Smallness” noted that in the novel, “Velutha also seems to be the God, for he is a carpenter, a creator of small things. He was also concerned only with small things in his love for Ammu”(Mathur 2005: 122). Roy observed “even later, on the thirteen nights that followed this one instinctively they stuck to the small things. The big things ever lurked inside. Hey know there was nowhere for them to go they had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the Small Things”(Roy1997: 336). The novel’s title, *The God of Small Things*, can be interpreted in a number of ways. At the most limited level, it perhaps referred to Velutha and the small things about which he was passionate. The small things might refer to the world of smaller creatures such as insects, ant-bites, caterpillars, and small fishes for whom man considered himself as God. On a much broader level, it was the whole world which contained nothing but ‘small things’ for God, their creator, protector and punisher.

3. The Social Evils of the Caste System

The God of Small Things related the story of a family tree headed by an old Christian couple Pappachi and Mammachi who owned a factory named Paradise Pickles and Preserves. Most of the events took place in 1969 at Ayemenem and the socio-cultural life of Kerala represented the lives of individuals who were victims of social ostracism and diverse social institutions such as patriarchy, wrongful marriage, caste-bound Indian social system, male-female relationships, male chauvinism, taboos, brutal discrimination, and double standards of morality based on misconceived prejudice under religious and political rules. Chhote Lal Khatri, in her 2003 essay, "Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things: Narrative Discourse and Linguistic Experiment", stated that "Ayemenem may be regarded as a sample to project Kerala’s natural beauty and the ugliness of the life of the people and failure of the system-social and governmental-to provide a healthy life to its people”(Khatri 2003:290). Life in Ayemenem was inevitably caught up in theopus-like authorities of religious, social and political evils. These brutalizing forces of hegemonywrongfully suppressed the characters, especially females such as Ammu, Mammachi, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma. These female characters, in Ayemenem, underwent pangs of agony and lived a life of meaninglessness. They therefore lacked a sense of completion and suffered from bereavement.

The God of Small Things was a robust repudiation of the social evils of the caste system that had been practiced in south India with more cruelty and coarseness than elsewhere in India. Indian society was divided into two ethnic groups: touchables and untouchables. The touchables were educated and wealthy families. In the novel, this included the Pappachi family who had different lifestyles, attitudes, educations, and opportunities in society. By contrast, the untouchables were uneducated, poor people and the lowest caste in India. The untouchable people in the novel included Velutha who was a Paravan, the lowest caste in India. The untouchables could not reach a high position and were not permitted to work in public places. Roy pointed out that:

As young boy, Velutha would come with Vellya Pappen to the black 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 Christian...in Mammachi’s time Paravan, like other untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrella. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed” (Roy 1997: 73-4).
In *The God of Small Things*, Roy portrayed the intense clash between social classes; there was also conflict between untouchables and Syrian Christians. Thus, the untouchables faced the agony of dual persecution from Hindus and Christians. The untouchables were intervening between the Hindu majority and the Christianity minority. In the Christian fold, the converted poor were regarded as second grade citizens by the Christians who continued to impose the practice of untouchability upon them. Roy exposed the hypocrisy of this socio-religious evil, which played an essential part in the conversion of the untouchables into Christianity. However, they were underprivileged of reservation advantages and their equality of status was denied:

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 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 (Roy 1997: 74).

As stated previously, conversion to another religion was not a solution to the problem of untouchability. Those who converted their religion without any external force found themselves with different facilities such as separate church services and separate priests. To their disappointment, the untouchables found they were not permitted to any state. This is because they were formally Christians and then outcasts. “It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprint at all”(Roy 1997:74).

Velutha’s legacy was that he was an out caste grandson of Chella who was converted to Christianity to escape the scourge of untouchability. The inheritance Velutha was given by his father and grandfather was one of shame by the caste Christians and Hindus. Velutha converted to Christianity to protect himself from the oppression of a touchable community. However, this bore no fruit in this callous society. Unlike his ancestors, as an outcaste person at later stage Velutha had the courage to touch things and enter Mammachi’s house, in a contest where Paravans were not allowed to enter and touch anything that touchables touched.

Velutha’s remarkable facility with his hands was first noticed by Mammachi. He was talented with abundance of skills. He built the sliding folding door for Mammachi who paid “Velutha less than she would a touchable carpenter”(Roy 1997:47). Roy presented a horrible depiction of a husband-wife relationship in an orthodox family where the male behaved as the oppressive boss of the house. Pappachi was a westernized Indian, who considered himself superior to others and nurtured illogical complaints against his wife Mammachi. Mammachi fell prey to the capricious tendency of her male partner. She was an unhappy character; a silent sufferer and her conjugal life was violent; she was treated as a doll in the hands of Pappachi. She endured the patriarchal domination passively and submissively. Even at an old age, Pappachi regularly tyrannized his wife Mamachi and imposed his male superiority by beating her violently with an iron flower vase “Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beating weren’t new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place. One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mamachi’s violin and throw it in the river”(Roy 1997:47-8). He clearly wanted to fling insults and abuse to exhibit his patriarchal domination over a compliant, obedient, magnanimous, and enduring wife. The attitude of Pappachi towards Mammachi was born of jealousy and frustration after the teacher reported that Mammachi was exceptionally talented in playing the violin. He did not want to see his wife flourishing in her art, abruptly discontinued her lessons, and beat her every night. Their relationship was dominated by hatred, jealousy, and violence. What Arundhati Roy wanted to expose, like other novelists such as Anita Desai, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, was that beating was a normal practice in a male-dominated conservative framework, their struggle and effort in searching for a sense of identity in the society. In India, the social construction of women was replete with many flips and flops, ifs and buts. Keeping in front of the life of three generations, Roy investigated the dilemma of the female characters, Mammachi, Ammu, Margret, and Rahel, who symbolized their generations in an Ayemenem family. She brought to the fore the predicament in the lives of these women who fought to relate to their husbands in a meaningful way. Although Ammu, Rahel and Margret did not compromise with their male counterparts and simply parted ways, they forsook the opportunity to create an independent identity in their conjugal married life. An abandoned woman such as Ammu, the protagonist, strongly desired satisfaction, pleasure and a life free from restraints. The narrator conveyed a detailed image of Ammu’s growth from childhood to teenage years, to her experience of marriage, her role as a compassionate and loving mother and her transformation into a revolutionary wife who confronted the caste-bound Indian social system and male chauvinism.
patriarchal society. The female characters Roy portrayed were all the more real and gave a true depiction of the harsh realities. She delved deeply into the mental world of her female characters. Her understanding of Mammmachi’s weeping over the death of Pappachi illustrated the subtext brought to her interpretation of female mentality: At Pappachi’s funeral, Mammmachi cried and her contact lenses slid around in her eyes. Ammu told the twins that Mammmachi was crying more because she was used to him than because she loved him. She was used to having him slouching around the pickle factory, and was used to being beaten from time to time. Ammu said that human beings were creatures of habit, and it was amazing the kind of things they could get used to (Roy 1997:50).

The God of Small Things was the story of Ammu, an orthodox young woman living in Ayemenem, a small village in Kerala. Ammu was habitually victimized and oppressed by a malevolent stance of male discrimination. She was deprived of higher education because of the conventional attitude of her father Pappachi who “prefers to keep his daughter confined within the four walls of the house in a non-descript place like Ayemenem” (Gaur 2004:197). Pappachi’s declaration that “a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with him” (Roy 1997: 38) reflected his belief. This illustrated that Pappachi was schizophrenic, a peculiar character in his attitude, and believed that college studies corrupted a lady. By contrast, Pappachi sent his son Chacko, a hypocritical male character of the novel, to Oxford for higher education because he was male. Prasad noted that “What a great irony! A great gap! A great step-motherly treatment! Chacko who is a male person of the Ayemenem house was sent to Britain to study” (Prasad 2003:165-6). This was proof of the malevolent attitude of male chauvinism.

In a patriarchal society, the only work Ammu had to do was domestic works and anticipate the arrival an unknown partner. She was deprived of college education, had to wait at home, and gradually became domesticated. She was neglected by her parents “her eighteenth birthday came and went. Unnoticed or at least unremarked upon by her parents. Ammu grew desperate, all day dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother” (Roy 1997: 38-9). She became the victim of the antipathetic attitude of her parents. Because Pappachi did not have an appropriate dowry, the hope of an arranged marriage grew dim for Ammu. Her family took no interest in selecting a suitable life bridegroom for her which meant that Ammu blindly married a gentle Hindu BEngali, an assistant manager working in a tea land in Assam. Roy observed that “Ammu didn’t pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem. She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision. They didn’t reply” (Roy 1997: 39). Without the knowledge and consent of her parents, Ammu and a Bangali young man solemnized the marriage because she did not want to return to the vile atmosphere of her Ayemenem house. She married him without love because in rural India a love marriage was not acceptable; it was regarded as a shame on family and ancestry. Ammu was regarded as a scapegoat who left a ruler in the form of her wretched father Pappachi behind and took another in the shape of her apathetic spouse. Her dilemma exposed the adversity of other Indian women who were regularly victimized and traumatized in search of a protector. As Simon de Beauvoir remarked “There is a unanimous agreement that getting a husband-or in some cases a protector-is for her (woman) the most important of undertakings...she will free herself from the parental home, from her mother’s hold, she will open up her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master” (Beauvoir 1961:352).

Her marriage, which Ammu believed was a way of liberating herself, unfortunately turned out to be a source of greater humiliation in her life. Dr. K. K. Gaur, in his 2004 essay “The symbolism of the Heart of Darkness in The God of Small Things”, pointed out that Ammu’s marriage “is like falling from the frying pan into the fire” (Gaur 2004:197). Therefore, shortly after her marriage, she discovered that her husband was a full-blown alcoholic. He thrashed and mistreated her just like Pappachi had done to Mammmachi and even to herself at a tender age. She realized “marriage wrong man” (Roy 1997: 38). The tragic end occurred when the English boss of her husband Hollick made an indecent deal with Ammu’s husband to have a sexual relationship with Ammu otherwise he would face dismissal. Ammu refused to gratify the boss of her husband. As a result, “Ammu’s so natural declination draws his fury and she is thrashed black and blue” (Gaur 2004:198). Finding herself vulnerable to evil male behavior, Ammu, along with her twins, left her husband forever and returned to Ayemenem as an unwelcome intruder. She found her family apathetic and cool to her and her twins.

Gender discrimination was one of the main issues in the novel. Roy depicted this issue through the experiences of the two characters and how the criminal justice system indiscriminately applied laws based on their gender and status and in society. As far as their matrimonial status was concerned, Ammu and her brother Chacko found themselves in a similar situation. However, Ammu and Chacko were treated differently by her family and the community. In this respect, Khatri points out that “Chacko and Ammu are the recipients of the same punishment by fate, society governs them with different law” (Khatri 2003:295). For instance, when Chacko divorced, his position was not affected in society and he was not only welcomed by his mother Mammmachi, he also remained the legitimate successor of the family’s fortune and wealth. Roy observed that “Mammmachi joyfully welcomed him back into her life. She had fed him, she sewed for him, she saw to it that there were fresh flowers in his room every day. Chacko needed his mother’s adoration” (Roy 1997: 248). He notably fulfilled his sexual needs with different low caste women. In this regards, S. Alphonsa Mary and V. Peruvalluthi, in their 2016 essay, “Oppression of women in Arundhati Roy`s The God of Small Things”, pointed out that “Chacko exercises his feudal rights on female labourers in the factory by demanding their bodies at night”(Mary and Peruvalluthi 2016:258). By contrast, when Ammu became estranged from her husband she was abused and tyrannized in her parental house. Her divorced life was deemed illicit, untraditional, and sinful by her family who felt that it brought shame upon them. Ammu’s condition worsened rather than improved as she returned to Pappachi’s house where Chacko governed the family’s business simply because he happened to be a male. In this sense, S. Alphonsa Mary and V. Peruvalluthi pointed out that “Ammu’s returning back to her parents’ home deprives her of any social position or prestige, of any right. She is treated as an unwelcome guest in her very own house where she was born and brought up”(Mary and Peruvalluthi 2015:257). Ammu was ill-treated by her family because she was a divorcee and married outside her community. She had to place herself at the mercy of her brother and help him in the Paradise Pickles factory. Furthermore, her partnership in the factory demonstrated the position of integrated woman in India. “Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my pickle factory, my pineapple, my pickles”(Roy 1997: 57).

In this patriarchal society, Roy exposed discrimination between men and women at every level. Again, Roy revealed that “discriminatory laws: legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property” (Roy 1997: 57).

Roy’s comment that Chacko “told Rahel and Estha that Ammu
had no Locusts Stand I” (Roy 1997: 57) was descriptive of his bigoted trends despite his Oxfordian background. Developing a sense of hatred towards Ammu was seen through the behavior of Chacko who cynically told her: “what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine” (Roy 1997: 57). In the matter of possessions, gender discrimination was clearly apparent. Like a ignorant man, Chacko believed himself the master of all the property and did not want to share this with Ammu, his only sister. By contrast, as a woman Ammu had no rights in any property including the family factory-paradise Pickles and Preserves. Gaur commented on Chacko’s behavior thus: “His double standards of spurious morality get manifested in the way he banishes his sister from the house for her sexual relationship with Velutha whereas in his own case his “feudal libido” comes into free play?” (Gaur 2004:199). Chacko was a lecherous character who indulged in unrestricted sexual relations with untouchable women working in the Paradise Pickles factory. Roy mocked the hypocrisy of the society, depicted the impact of the social class and discriminatory laws on females, and showed how the male behaves as an autocratic boss in a conventional family.

5. The Attitude of Family and Society towards a Divorced Woman

Roy brought the fate of divorced women to the fore. In Mammachi’s eyes, her son’s divorced wife, Margret was no more than a whore. Ammu was also condemned to suffer Mammachi’s indifference and was targeted by Baby Kochamma. She became virtually untouchable in her home, her parental home and society. The attitude of Baby Kochamma towards divorced Ammu was typically Indian: “She subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a divorced daughter according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all” (Roy 1997: 45-6). This illustrates how women in this novel were against women. Due to her disappointing experiences in the past, Baby Kochamma developed a sense of hatred for Ammu and did not feel sympathy towards her as a way to obtain her lost happiness. Baby Kochamma’s attitude encompassed a worldwide apathy for divorced women. In a patriarchal society, a divorced woman was viewed as an outcaste person who had no position in the family and should be alienated from society.

Because their father had separated Ammu, the twins underwent varied pressures, bans, condemnations, and parental bereavement. In a way the twins were growing up in world of cold aloofness because nobody in their mother’s family expressed serious concerns for them. Ammu and her twins were the object of carelessness, prejudice, asperity of family as well as of society. She endured all this but demonstrated herself to be a loving mother who expressed this love to her twins. In the Ayemenem House, Rahel and Estha became prey to pessimistic rigidity and offensive treatment. Baby Kochamma, the central villain of the novel, reminded the twins of their uncertain position, of their sinfulness and ostracization. The reason for her severity, harshness, and hypocritical stance was her own suppressed emotion, specifically her disappointment at being in love with an Irish monk, Father Mulligan, who studied Hindu scriptures to be able to condemn them brilliantly. Fueled by a strong desire to be with father Mulligan, she converted to a Roman Catholic. However, her desire and love for Father Mulligan was futile and did not result in a positive outcome, which caused restlessness in her psyche. She wrote puzzling letters to her father: “my dearest Papa, I am well and happy in the service of our lady. But Kohinoor appears to be unhappy and none-stick. My dearest Papa, today Kohinoor vomited after lunch and is running a temperature; my dearest Papa, conven food does not seem to suit though I like it well enough” (Roy 1997:25). Her father did not respond. Baby Kochamma’s letter definitely expressed a feeling of disappointment that was growing in her psyche. The root of this disappointment began to develop and the end result was her complete disregard of Ammu and her twins. As mentioned earlier, Ammu’s father Pappachi did not respond Ammu after she married without his knowledge. Both Ammu and Kochamma became the victims of their father’s ignorance. The cruelty of Ammu’s parents and her divorce did not affect or change her kind personality. Unlike Ammu, Kocha Mammachi’s disappointment made her entirely different from the other members of the family and she became the victim of jealousy. Her long-suppressed desires completely changed her personality and she became cold and indifferent to the twins and their mother, Ammu.

Due to the ignorance of her parents and community towards her and her twins, Ammu spontaneously moved towards Velutha, an untouchable from the lowest class and different religion, who loved her and her children. Ashwinin Kumar Vishnu, in his 2004 essay “The God of Small Things: A Note on Roy’s Sociological Imagination”, noted that “It is only Velutha who provides them love, care and company they need so badly” (Vishnu 2004: 210).

6. Transgression of Love Laws and Its Results

Society had continuously been ruled by religious conventions. The Indian society, specifically the Hindu orthodox religion, had imposed certain laws “for social conduct and Love laws whom to love and how much to love and they have to be followed as one follows the rules of making jam and jelly” (Khatri 2003:294). Love laws meant that inter-religious love or inter-caste relationships were not permitted and banned. In other words, a love between two different classes and castes was declared as a crime. M.B. Caijan, in her 2004 essay “Dalit in The God of Small Things”, pointed out that “according to the ban the untouchables are not allowed to love or marry upper caste women, while the other Varana’s allowed to defile the untouchable women” (Caijan 2004:215). The Hindu social code of untouchability was not only practiced by the Hindu religion community, it was also accepted and practiced by other religious minorities.

It is remarkable to note the way in which human beings strive to fulfill their physical and psychological needs at any cost. Velutha, Ammu and her twin were suffering from psychological imbalances and disturbances. Philip L. Harriman, in his 1958 book “Modern Psychology” noted that four important desires that arose in mind. These demands of organisms are: “the wish for the security; the wish for new experience; the wish for response; the wish for recognition” (Harriman1958:102). It was the desire for safety that incited Ammu and her twins to reject social standards. The desire for new experiences prompted the twins to engage in an incestuous relationship. This was the result of a genetic predisposition and their feelings of loneliness. It was also the desire for a new experience that encouraged Velutha and Ammu to indulge in the illicit affair that eventually led to their destruction. The deprivation of basic human needs impelled the novel’s characters to disobey society’s traditional standards.

The real disaster began in Velutha’s life when he had sexual relations with Ammu, a lady of the upper caste family and this lasted for several days. When their sexual relationship was discovered and the impossible had become possible, they were made to pay the price. They had forgotten the ban and consequently were condemned for life. Velutha was almost instantly put to death while Ammu had to accept a gradual death. Gaur pointed out that “She is asked to leave Ayemenem by Chacko and gets separated from her loving children to die.
unwept, unhonoured, unsung, and unremembered. She is more sinned against than sinning" (Gaur 2004:199). Ammu had separated from her twins and finally lost her life. Velutha was considered a “God of Small Things” by the writer.

Velutha and Ammu transgressed the love laws and defied ‘The God of Big Things’ that led to their destruction. Baby Kochamma still said “it was a small price to pay, wasn’t it? Two lives. Two children’s childhoods. And a history lesson for future offenders” (Khatri 2003:296). Roy revealed the gender bias in society for inflicting a social injustice on exploited and oppressed people such as Ammu. Chacko continued to enjoy the supremacy of family, was respected by people around him and remained “the rightful inheritor of the family fortune” (Khatri 2003:286). Roy drew the readers’ attention to how a woman was deprived of having a life of freedom and significance comparable to that of a male.

Moreover, Roy depicted hatred as one of the universal emotions that people from the upper class carried towards people of the lowest class. She portrayed through the character of Mammachi who carried an uncompromising socially fueled hatred towards Ammu –Velutha’s relationship. Like Baby Kochamma, she was also a hypocrite and did not like to see the forbidden relationship between the two. She began to endure a sense of embarrassment and disdain. By contrast, she was entirely aware of Chacko’s illegal relations with the female workers in the Pickle Factory and stated, “he cannot help having a man’s Needs’ (Roy1997:168). Indeed, she arranged for some perverted women to meet her son. The above quotation clearly demonstrates her hypocritical attitude of rebelliousness regarding Ammu’s ‘Women’s Needs’ but tolerance regarding her son’s ‘Men’s Needs’. Roy brought to the fore the strict social structures that banned illicit intercaste relations between a high-class lady, and an outcaste as she interpreted the ideology of an entire race through one deep plunge into Mammachi’s understanding who pictured the sexual activity of Ammu in scornful terms: 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 jerking between her parted legs.

The sound of breathing. His particular Paravan smell. Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. Like a dog with bitch on heat” (Roy1997: 257-8).

This image, embellished with a description of the relationship between Emma and Velutha, indicated the hatred and rage Mammachi carried in her heart for the community Velutha belonged to. The attitude of Mammachi towards Paravans was full of hatred and she called Paravans ” Drunken dog! Drunken breast with his baton like one who points out towards good pieces of tomatoes in a heap with some object” (Gaur 2004:200). Through the character of the Inspector, Roy criticized the police administration where corruption was widespread and lurked in cubbyhole and corner. Thomas Mathew was devoid of virtues such as courtesy, efficiency, intelligence, loyalty, obedience, and politeness. He used some rude words that were not polite when spoken towards a woman. He called Ammu’s children illegitimate and described her as an untouchable Vaishya (whore) whose breasts can be touched. This incident showed that in Hindu dominated Indian society, the Christian minority also hated untouchables by trying to flatter and please the Hindu majority.

The antagonism of the Hindu majority and the Christian minority towards untouchables cannot be overturned until Indian society welcomes and permits untouchables as members of the human species. This antagonism might be removed by giving political rights to untouchables. In Kerala, the communist party was the most powerful political party and its symbolic slogan was “human Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” (Gajan 2004:217). The communists accepted and believed in these symbols, but they changed their policy in the case of the untouchables who were not given any special rights or political protection. The illegitimate love affair between Velutha and Ammu stood against the stance and principles of socialism and Marxism. Velutha was a member of the party and when his love affair was discovered by Ammu’s Christian family, he rushed directly to Mr. Pillai, a leader of the Marxist party, for some help concerning the accusation of rape and kidnapping. But Velutha’s request was shrewdly rejected by Mr. Pillai as the "party was not constituted to support workers’ indiscipline in their private life" (Roy 1997:287). Mr. Pillai declined to save Velutha on this basis but the truth was he hated untouchables. He was an embodiment of jealousy, superficiality, and hypocrisy. He stated to Inspector Thomas Mathew that the culprit, Velutha had no political involvement in the Marxist Party. His statement allowed Inspector Thomas Mathew to feel a sense of joy and victory in brutally torturing Velutha. Vishnu pointed out that “Inspector Thomas Mathew
and Pillai willfully shakes hands with each other to favor the false FIR lodged against him by schemy Baby Kochamma, merely for the reason that all of them are touchable and Velutha is untouchable" (Vishnu 2004:205). Roy depicted the unpleasant truth of integration between law and politics, the agents of which were detective Thomas and Mathew Mr. Pillai, to create a convenient means with which to construct a false accusation against Velutha.

They were not friends, Comrade Pillai and inspector Thomas Mathew...but they understand each other perfectly. They were both men whom childhood had abandoned without a trace...they looked out at the world and never wondered how it worked, they knew. They worked it. They were mechanics who serviced different parts of same machine (Roy 1997: 262).

As mentioned earlier, Baby Kochamma’s stubborn nature was the result of psychological frustration in her early life when her ardent desire to be with Father Mulligan was suppressed. This frustration and disappointment fractured her mind with psychological disorders as a result of which she developed an aggressive puritanical and racist attitude so that her enduring wishes might be compensated. The result of this frustration was her neglect of the twins and her revenge on Ammu and Velutha because she did not want to see a happy couple together. It was she who exposed the reality of Ammu’s illicit relations with Velutha. It was she who deceitfully persuaded the twins to betray Velutha by testifying against him. Under duress, Rahel and Estha were coerced by spiteful Baby Kochamma to confirm Velutha’s responsibility for Sophie Mol’s death in the police station: "the inspector asked his question. Estha’s mouth said yes. Childhood tiptoed out. Silence slide like a bolt." (Roy 1997:319-20).

Roy made Velutha a tragic hero who suffered the miseries of subjugation and segregation and eventually met his end. His tragic death aroused a sense of catharsis and sympathy in the readers. He never believed in a frontal attack against the age-old norms of tradition. He was a silent sufferer, took little notice of social conventions and his innocence was firmly caught in the trap of a caste mentality, the norms of society, and the corrupt police administration. He was called ‘the God of Loss’ by the author because he suffered and attained tragic grandeur. Moreover, although Velutha had been a loyal worker of the party throughout his life, Mr. Pillai did not want to help him at this critical juncture and denied that Velutha was a fellow of the communist party. Gaijan pointed out that “the communists were not out of the based social clutch: the Marxist worked from within the communal divides, never challenge them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy” (Gaijan 2004:217). It indicated that "the castle of Communism in Kerala is based on falsehood and pseudo-Marxism”(Katri 2003: 298). Roy exposed the hypocrisy of Mr. Pillai by contrasting what he professed with what he practiced. Mr. Pillai was supposed to fight against castesim, but he purposely refused to save Velutha. Outwardly, Mr. Pillai had a real attachment to the universal principles of Marxism: “Replace God with Marx, Satan with bourgeois’s, Heaven with a classless society, the Church with the party”(Roy 1997: 66). However, inwardly he did not want to see anyone joyful. He indulged in double-dealings. Chhote Lal Katti, in his 2003 essay ‘Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things: Narrative discourse and Linguistic Experientia’, pointed out that “It is absurd to think of running a government and waging a revolution, a class-war simultaneously” (Katri 2003: 298).

Mr. Pillai was also seen warning Chacko to ousted Velutha in Paradise Pickles factory “But see, Comrade, any benefits that you give him, naturally others are resenting it. They see it as a partiality. After all, whatever job he does, carpenter or electrician or whatever it is, for them he is just a Paravan. It is a conditioning they have from birth...better for him you send him off”(Roy 1997: 279). To conclude, Velutha was a socially rejected, politically spurned, and physically oppressed character who truly loved Ammu and her twins; a character who was not properly rewarded in his work as a skilled mechanic; a character who thoroughly dedicated his life for the sake of the communist party and was not helped and supported by its leader. Mr. Pillai; a character who also had to endure the bane of untouchability and its long held tradition of social morality.

When her relationship with Velutha was discovered and the dawning of Sophie Mol was wrongly associated with their intercourse sexual relationship, Ammu was ruthlessly told by Chacko to leave the Ayemenem house. Roy raised the question of class discrimination which eventually punished Ammu by first exiling her and lastly, obliging to reconcile herself to a life that is “castigated vehemently and finally disowned and disinherited by the family” (Roy 1997: 161). Additionally, she was prevented from seeing her daughter Rahel, sent Estha back to his father, and died in isolation in a “grim, dingy room of Baharat Lodge in Alleppey” (Roy 1997: 161). The author observes: “she died alone. With a noisy ceiling fan for company and no Estha to lie at the back of her, she was thirty-one. Not old one, no young, but a viable, dicable age” (Roy 1997: 161).

The main character of the novel was Ammu who was tragically disgraced, offended, and abused by Pappachi, illtreated and exploited by her spouse, severely offended by Inspector Thomas Mathew, and abandoned by her brother Chacko. The fault that eventually led to her death was that she broke the love laws which laid down "who should be loved. And how. And how much?" (Roy 1997:328). It is important to emphasize that male characters such as Pappachi, Chacko, and Inspector Thomas were not the only ones responsible for Ammu’s tragic dilemma; female characters such Baby Kochamma and Mammachi who played the roles of the villains in the novel were the real miscreants in engendering the sorrows in life of Ammu.

The ruthless antagonism of the society continued to terrorize Ammu even after her death. She was deprived of the self-respect of a funeral as "the church authority refuse bury a fallen women and Chacko gets her cremated in electronic cremation just like ship without a rudder" (Prasad 2003:176-7). The twins’ split from their parents left an unforgettable mark on their psyche. They were neglected and treated by the family as strangers. Prasad pointed out that “The first traumatic experience which the sensitive mind of Estha encounters is the misbehavior of the ‘Orange drunk lemon drink’ man in the Abhilash Talkies who forces or rather say, lulls the boy to masturbate him” (Prasad 2003:174). This nightmarish experience affected the twins’ psychology and created a permanent scar in the mind of Estha and consequently haunted him all through his life. The second source of suffering felt by Rahel and Estha...
was the emotional extortion they were subjected to by Baby Kochamma and Inspector Thomas Mathew to betray Velutha and left them in a pitiable state. At his father’s residence in Calcutta, Estha led a miserable life and felt a sense of isolation. Estha’s reserve and his isolation were the result of the cruelty and persecution of Baby Kochamma, Chacko, Mammachi, and Inspector Thomas Mathew. Like her brother, Rahel experienced the same oppression and inequality, exploitation and offense. However, the main difference between the two was that Rahel was more aggressive and energetic than Estha. Her strange activities caused her to be drifted from school to school which ultimately brought a penalty, calamity at her removal from school. All these anomalies in Rahel’s character were rooted in her past nightmarish experiences. It was this trauma that engraved a lasting imprint in the psyche of Rahel who subsequently developed an incestuous relationship with her brother in History House due to their feelings of isolation, barrenness, and unfulfillment which together created a state in which they had nothing to do. Their relationship was also an instance of oppressed sexuality and hereditary willingness. But Roy did not favour it. She explained that what the twin shared that night “only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous.”(Roy 1997: 328).

However, Rahel married an American man who took her to Boston, but her marriage ended in divorce like her mother’s had because she was incapable of being completely dependent on her spouse. She worked as “a night clerk, in a bullet proof cabin at a gas station outside Washington, where drunkards often vomited into the money tray, and pimps propositioned her with more lucrative job offers”(Roy 1997:20). In such a thoroughly immoral environment, she successfully took risks by working and adjusted herself to such a job by diminishing her self-respect. After the divorce, Rahel left her job in America as soon as she learned about Estha’s return and came back to Ayemenem House like her mother. The first thing Rahel noticed was that many of her kin had gone or passed away (Pappachi, Ammu, Sophie Mol, Velutha, Mammachi, Margret Kochamma, Chacko): “the house itself looked many empty. The doors and windows were locked. The front verandah bare. Unfurnished. But the sky-blue Plymouth with chrome tailfins was still parked outside. And inside. Baby Kochamma was still alive.”(Roy 1997:2). She bravely confronted Comrade Philia by saying in a direct way: “we are divorced. Rahel hoped to shock him into silence. Die-voiced? His voice rose to such a high register that it cracked on the question mark. He even pronounced the word as though it were a form of death”.(Roy 1997:130). This indicated that she felt neither shame nor cared about the constraints imposed by society. The twins were thirty-one years old. The readers are told that Ammu was also thirty-one years old when she died. However, the narrator conveyed the information while the remaining part of the plot in The God of Small Things was conveyed through Rahel’s memory.. Roy ‘employs a third person omniscient narrator to give voice to twins’ perception for the social, political and religious life of Kerala seen through the eyes of the twins”(Khatri2003:301). Roy’s novel was a circular narrative. It can be read, understood and enjoyed from the beginning, the middle, or from the end. The beginning of the novel is not the beginning and the end is not the end.

8. Conclusion

This study described the persecution and humiliation of Indian women and untouchables under the effect of caste, gender, age-old patriarchal domination, and class oppression. Women in India have been the object of continual oppression and degradation by a patriarchal society. However, in the present scenario, Indo-English writers have shown their boldness and value in the field of literature both quantitatively and qualitatively and are continuing to display it today without any barriers. They are being awarded national and international awards. The novels of Arundhati Roy have left a memorable impression on the readers of Indian fiction in English. It also focused on how one of the greatest feminist novelists, Arundhati Roy, analyzed the aberrant mentality of women and men in Indian society.

She was author of the post-independence era who highlighted the causes of Indian women. Her main concern was the offensive and abominable supremacy of men over women. Arundhati Roy fought discrimination and persecution inflicted on unsophisticated housewives. She focused largely on the catastrophe of unsuccessful life and widowhood. The protagonist of novel, Ammu, was seen by her husband as sex object and her life was filled with the drudgery of domesticity, and as such was basically worthless and unfulfilled. In The God of Small Things, Ammu failed to assert her independence and identity inside her parental house, in her marital life, and even after her divorce due to her revolt against antiquated traditions of dogma and moderation. She was deprived of higher education due to the conventional attitude of her father, Pappachi, who believed that education corrupts a woman. She paid a heavy price for her illicit relationship with an untouchable, Velutha. She was deprived of family possessions and thrown out of her parental house. This study also focuses on the dilemma facing their children, who became victims of the ignorance of their parents. Rahel and Estha were the objects of carelessness, prejudice, of the family as well as of society. Thus, they were victims of ill-treatment by their father and their disturbed mental state was the result of traumatic childhood experiences that deeply affected their psyche.

The most obvious finding to emerge from this article is that the persecution and humiliation resulted from the long-silent voices of Indian women and untouchables. Roy depicts the sociopolitical truth of India, where untouchables continue to become victims of the cruelty of the Hindus and Christianity. The God of Small Things is a story about an illicit sexual relationship and cruelty, cruelty against the untouchables. In the rural Indian, this kind of brutality against the untouchables is taking place. The murder of Velutha in Ayemenem presents a microscopic view of the orthodoxy’s cruelty against the untouchables. Roy intends to say that the circumstances of untouchables will not change until the Indian society changes its attitude towards them and accepts them culturally and socially as fellow human beings. Otherwise, more Veluthas will die.

Through this study, the researcher concludes that the rebellion against the caste-bound Indian social system in The God of Small Things, brought destruction to the lives of two characters. Ammu and Velutha could not survive due to the lack of support from their family and society. They became victims of a wrongful marriage, parenthood, a caste-bound Indian social system, male chauvinism, taboos, and brutal discrimination.

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