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CASTE DISCRIMINATION IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S "THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS"

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Abstract

Caste Discrimination is the most complex human rights issue facing India today. In Indian society, primary of younger generation Indians, though largely ignorant about its scope and practice, appears ready and willing to learn about untouchability and work towards its true abolition. Caste systems are also found in Africa, other parts of Asia, the middle East, the Pacific and in Diaspora communities around the world. This paper attempts to explore the elements of caste discrimination and throws light on struggle of women against exploitation in a male dominated conservative society. It also aims at analyzing Arundhati Roy's "*The God of Small Things*" as caste problem and problems faced by the untouchables in an educated society. It explores the role of politics and its effects on the common men. The novel closes the gap between the untouchables and touchables. In "*The God of Small Things*", Roy's character Velutha his black complexion and his low birth suggest his social inferiority and the resultant segregation and subjection that he is subjected to.

Key words: Caste, Untouchable, Society, Ammu and Velutha.

1. Introduction Discrimination in Arundhati Roy's "*The God of Small Things*"

Arundhati Roy is an Indian novelist, activist and a world citizen. She came to limelight when her debut novel "*The God of Small Things*" won her the Booker Prize in 1997. She looks at social problems as closely that touches the writer's sensibility and believes that an authentic writer can't remain detached. Roy herself has said that her fiction is an inextricable mixture of experience and imagination. Arundhati Roy has brought the astringent legitimacy of untouchability before the world through "*The God of Small Things*". In the democratic India, at the end of the 20th century, untouchability still exists. This awarded novel

portrays the cross caste and sub-caste based social sections existing in the Hindu society. She is appalled at the barbarous treatment meted out to the lower section of the society, even in this postcolonial age. In this regard, she says that: "Fifty years after independence, India is still struggling with the legacy of colonialism, still flinching from the cultural insult (and) we are still caught up in the business of "disproving" the white world's definition of us" (Roy, 73-74).

In this novel, "*The God of Small Things*", the laws of India's caste system are conked out by the characters of Ammu and Velutha, an Untouchable or Paravan. Velutha works at the Paradise Pickles and preserves factory owned by Ammu's family. Yet, because he is an Untouchable, the other workers rail against him and he is remunerated less money for his work.

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Velutha's occurrence is disquieting to many who believe he proceeds above his station. His own father comments this problem: "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" (Roy, 73).

Roy's novel like Mulk Raj Anand's untouchable dares to explore the deep rooted evil of untouchability. Ammu and the untouchable Velutha dare to break the laws of the caste system. Velutha, a highly efficient carpenter works in Mammachi's Paradise Pickles and preserves factory. Velutha emphasizes the many boundaries that were prevalent for the untouchables in India. A Paravan by birth, Velutha faces much discrimination both in his personal and public life.

Velutha is black but he is so smart. Caste rises strongly through his life. He lives in poverty. As the main character, Velutha belongs to the lower social class. Life background has significance role and it makes his having lower class level as poor people. He was called Velutha-which means White in Malayalam-because he was so black. His father, VellyaPaapen, was a Paravan. A today tapper (Roy, 1997: 35). The quotation shows Velutha's life background. Velutha is a son of VellyanPaapen whom a Paravan. So, it automatically makes Velutha become a Paravan too. Paravan is the lowest caste in India. It is also called Untouchable. A Paravan contains of poor people because usually Paravan only work as a lower labour. Velyan Paapen works as a maid in Pappachi family, it means that he cannot deserve his son to get a good financial condition. It brings Velutha living under poverty. Social class rises through his poor condition, because the economic condition he has, indicates that Velutha belongs to lower caste people.

Roy does not shy away from giving her reader many instances of the pathetic conditions of untouchables even in a Christian Community that was expected to rise above the differences in birth and caste. In spite of much advancement

intechology and education, the grip hold of caste system has not loosened, even though Velutha is highly skilled, he is not respected and in fact excluded from the society. The irrational belief of caste system overshadowed all his talents and hard work. He is paid lesser than the other workers. He was restricted from doing a number of things in society.

Velutha's affair with a high class lady is unthinkable and highly offensive. They break old age norms and are punished for it by the society who decides "who should be loved and how. Even Velutha's own father is enraged by his son's audacity to commit such a 'sin' and even offers to kill his own son to avoid any scandal. He is wrongly accused of kidnapping the children and punished by the authorities brutally. He is treated in an inhumane manner. When they go to arrest him, "they wake Velutha with their boots. Roy". 308) Even though, the charge is never proved against Velutha he is victimized by the "Touchable" Policemen. After such a barbaric treatment, Velutha dies during the night. The death of Velutha Vanquishes all the Roy's hope in the lives of Ammu and her children. She attack on the untouchable - touchable relationship sheds light on the mindless and irrational rigid laws that oppress and suppress people just on the basis of their birth. We are left wondering if the caste system will ever truly be abolished and how many invisible Velutha's will it take to realize that we are humans first irrespective of our caste and culture.

Velutha does not even have any common rights and is treated terribly by the entire society. Roy tries to raise awareness about this social system that has haunted the Indian society for decades and which continues even to this day. Roy thus moves the story about the Indian caste system, the role of communism in Kerala, and the love laws that govern the characters serve to remind us of many changes that need to be brought about and soon. We see that untouchability is still being practiced in Indian society. The suffering of the characters which is common to highlight the urgent need for change our attitude, behavior and we should treat them



equally, we should give preference in common places. It is important to remember that the little things changes the big things.

2. Work Cited

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