

UNTOUCHABILITY IN THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS BY ARUNDHATI

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ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy came into the realm of literature in the year 1997 with her debut novel 'The God of small things' which begged the coveted Booker Prize for literature. It is also the first time an Indo-English woman writer won such prestigious Booker Prize for literature. Through this novel, she describes the conflict between Syrian Christians and untouchables. This novel also shows that untouchables are not suffering from Hindus but also from other religious communities in this free and democratic India. Thus, untouchability is sandwiched between the Hindu majority and other religious minority.

INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy is an Indian novelist, activist and a world citizen. She is a novelist from Kerala who shot into fame when her debut novel "The God of Small Things" Won her the Booker Prize in 1997. It is also the first time an Indo-English woman author won the prestigious Booker Prize for writing as, "To top it this happened in 1997, India's 50th anniversary of independence from Britain" and this fact proves her greatness as a novelist. While congratulating the young novelist, the famous poet Kamla Das said that Roy's successful venture in fiction was a „freak“.

MATERIAL

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Arundhati Roy has brought the bitter truth 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 depicts the cross caste and sub-caste based social divisions we find in the Hindu society. In this novel, Arundhati has described the intense cross caste conflict; this conflict is not taking place between Touchable Hindus and untouchables, it's between Syrian Christians and untouchables. It shows that untouchables are not only suffering torturing and harassment from Hindus but also from other religious communities in this democratic India.

She seems to regard social problems as closely touching the writer's sensibility and believes that a genuine writer doesn't remain aloof Roy herself has said that her fiction is an inextricable mixture of experience and imagination. Her presentation of the Dalits is controversial as she is often accused of drawing a gloomy picture of the Dalits which is related to their past rather than present in Kerala. Her presentation of the Dalits is constantly blended with irony. People well-placed in society attempt to be kind and sympathetic to them but their deep-rooted prejudices and the fear losing their supremacy undermine their professed liberal or revolutionary aims. A gentleman wants to educate the untouchables but dares not place them in the same school with the Touchable. A leader talks about social revolution but dread an untouchable who holds the party-card. An employer recognizes the merits of her employees but attaches more importance to his caste.

We came across three characters in: „The God of Small Things“ who is untouchable. They are Vellya Pappen and his two sons, Kuttapen and Valutha. They belong to an untouchable caste Paravan. They depict the three types of the dalits in Indian Society namely, the docile conformist, discontented paralytic and the rebel who moves for equality and stakes his life.

“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 foot prints. In Mammachi's time, Paravans, like other untouchables, were not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas.”¹

But conditions have changed since then now-they are becoming members of the communist party and trade unions. They have become aware of the stigma that is attached to their casts demand now “That untouchables no longer be addressed by their caste names.”² Roy doesn't fail to inform us what Christianity has done to the dalits in Kerala. Syrian Christians of Kerala are converts from higher casts “by and large the wealthy, estate-owning feudal lords”³ “who had always voted for the Congress Party”.⁴ Christianity did not prove a boon to the untouchables. Velutha's grandfather, Kelan converted to Christianity in hope to escape the scourge of untouchability. Many, like him, were also given some food and money and came to be known a “Rice-Christians”.⁵ They realized soon that “they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire.”⁶

Throughout, this novel, she describes untouchability as a social-stigma.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we can affirm that in “The Good of Small Things” Roy presents a confrontation between the Big man and the small man. As compared with the Laltain and Mombatti. This novel shows maladjustment between the God of Big things in terms of Pappachi, Kochamma, Chacto and Comrad Pillai and The God of small things in the terms of Ammu, Veplutha and Estha. Both „Laltain and Mombati“ give us light but the former is well fed and well protected and can bravely face the blowing winds. But “Mombati“ has no glass, no protection and no support and it can easily be blown out by a surge of wind. Untouchables severely suffer the brunt of casteism, nepotism, social injustice and callous police administration.

REFERENCES

1. Roy, Arundhati, The God of Small Things, London, 1997-73
2. Ibid, P-73-74.
3. Ibid, P-13
4. Ibid, P-77
5. Ibid, P-77, 278
6. Ibid, P-73