

## SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

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# **The Neoliberal Postcolonial State and Prolegomenon to Literature of Insurgency: A Study of Arundhati Roy's Novels**

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### **Abstract**

Arundhati Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things* that won the Booker prize in 1997, deals with the issues of caste, gender, class, state atrocities and many other issues which were expanded later on in Roy's non-fictional works. Arundhati Roy raises voice against various forms of injustice and discrimination which attempt to relegate human beings into nothingness and their subjectivities. Roy sheds light on the power dynamics prevalent in society and demonstrates how the more powerful victimize and marginalize the less powerful. Issues such as gender oppression, caste atrocities, untouchability, state brutalities and intellectual hypocrisy are projected minutely in the fiction.

**Keywords:** prolegomenon, postcolonialism, marginalisation, gender oppression.

Arundhati Roy's first novel, *The God of Small Things* that won the Booker prize in 1997, deals with the issues of caste, gender, class, state atrocities and many other issues which were expanded later on in Roy's non-fictional works. Arundhati Roy raises her voice against various forms of injustice and discrimination which attempt to relegate human beings to nothingness. Roy sheds light on the power dynamics prevalent in society and demonstrates how the more powerful victimize and marginalize the less powerful. Issues such as gender oppression, caste atrocities, untouchability, state brutalities and intellectual hypocrisy are projected minutely in the fiction. The setting of the fiction is a village named Ayamenem of Kerala, a microcosm of India reflecting the caste atrocities and power structures through socio-political division. In Roy's portrayal of Kerala there are multiple forms of oppression, subjugation and discrimination based on caste, class, gender and religion. These various layers are often entangled and function as an intricate repressive structure that is hard to dissect. For example, caste is interlinked with religion as a result of which there are separate churches for Touchables and Untouchables. Roy's narrator in the novel explains why Marxism became strong in Kerala: "the real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. A reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community" (64). Thus, according to the narrator's interpretation, Kerala's communist party made no attempt to confront the practice of caste, despite their high-sounding statements that "Caste is Class, comrades" (266). The practice of caste indicates a "stratification system in which distances are rigidly maintained through endogamy, pollution and legitimacy of rituals" (Kothari 8). The notions of "power and vulnerability, privilege and oppression, honour and degradation, plenty and want, reward and deprivation, security and anxiety", innate in the concept of caste, make it a structure of difference and conflict (qtd. in Chakravarti 12). There are incidents of violation of the rules of the caste system and the resultant penalty to those, who do not submit to the system of hierarchy. Consequently the "lowest castes have an inherent

interest not simply in rising in the system but in overthrowing it” (Rege 73). Even after India got independence a long time back, caste is still a major aspect determining the socio-political structure of the country. *The God of Small Things* foregrounds the subaltern and marginalized position of a human being due to his/her belonging to the fringes of society. Arundhati Roy is pre-occupied with the caste-discrimination prevalent in society, mainly the atrocious denial of the fundamental human rights and dignity. Ammu is the female central character, a subaltern pitted against the forces of the family and social structure. Velutha is the male protagonist subalternized by social and political forces. Roy’s novel unfolds the tragic story of Ammu, a Syrian Christian and her love relationship with Velutha. Apart from the universe of “motherhood” and “divorcehood”, Ammu, had a different universe of her own, a “better and happier place” (44). The “unmixable mix” of her character “led her to love by night the man her children loved by day” (44, 332). By entering in the relationship with Velutha who is a Paravan, Ammu transgressed the “Love Laws” that “lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much.”(33) The tormenting situation of Ammu is presented against the tragedy of Velutha, who was killed by authority for trying to resist it. In all of her writings Arundhati shows great sympathy for those characters who dare to cross “into forbidden territory” (31). Roy is very well aware of the caste-ridden society around her and in this novel she offers a detailed investigation of the ideology and the practice of the system of caste. Velutha, the male protagonist of the novel, belongs to Paravan, a low untouchable caste in Kerala. Perhaps, Arundhati intentionally makes Kerala the setting of her fiction, because caste system is most rigidly followed here. In *Gendering Caste*, Uma Chakravarti mentions that “in Kerala, traditionally, the lower castes were even required to observe a minimum distance from the brahmanas so that the latter would not be defiled...” (10) In *The God of Small Things* Roy presented this situation with graphic details:

Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians...Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint. In Mammachi's time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (73-4)

Wearing the kunukku was very important for Kochu Maria simply because it was a means for her to assert her upper caste status. Thus the narrator remarks:

Kochu Maria couldn't stop wearing her kunukku because if she did, how would people know that despite her lowly cook's job... she was a Syrian Christian.... Not a Pelay, or a Pulaya or a Paravan. But a Touchable, upper-caste Christian . . . (170)

The huge disparity existing between the people belonging to high caste and those to the lower caste are also noticeable in their dwelling places. In *Constructing Dalit Identity* Social scientist C. Joe Arun writes: "Most of the houses of the Paraiyars are huts, which have roofs of dried palmyra leaves. The huts have neither doors nor windows." (34) The picture of Velutha's hut is a reflection of Arun's description of the Paraiyar's house:

.... a low hut with walls of orange laterite plastered with mud and a thatched roof nestled close to the ground...Three untidy banana trees grew in the little front yard that had been fenced off with panels of woven palm leaves. (205)

In the context of the condition of the Paraiyars Arun remarks that "abject poverty, dependence on the ... higher castes and the enormous amount of debt seemed to have been the general

characteristics of their life ...” (55). Roy’s description of Vellya Paapen’s reliance on and approach to Mammachi’s family is an accurate depiction of Arun’s insight. An extract from the novel echoes Arun’s insight on the life of an untouchable:

When he had his accident with the stone chip, Mammachi organized and paid for his glass eye. He hadn’t worked off his debt yet, and though he knew he wasn’t expected to, that he wouldn’t ever be able to -he felt that his eye was not his own. His gratitude widened his smile and bent his back. (76)

Talking about the enormous economic disparity between the upper and lower castes, Uma Chakravarti states in *Gendering Caste* that this “dominance is based on wealth, that is, control over land, which also gives the dominant caste access to political power” (13). The opulence of Mammachi’s house is balanced against the poverty of Velutha’s residence:

There were other things from the Ayemenem House that had either been given to them or salvaged from the rubbish bin. Rich things in a poor house. A clock that didn’t work, a flowered tin waste-paper basket. Pappachi’s old riding boots (brown, with green mold) with the cobbler’s trees still in them. Biscuit tins with sumptuous pictures of English castles and ladies with hustles and ringlets. (209)

It is the upper caste section of the society that determines the life of people and punishes those, who defy this “systematically arranged” framework (Thapar 38). Arundhati honestly mirrors the disparity between the castes in terms of access to knowledge and social status.

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, Paravans were not meant to be carpenters. And certainly, prodigal Paravans were not meant to be rehired. (Roy 77)

Furthermore, regardless of having the competence, the Untouchables are deprived of many opportunities to maintain the age-old social fabric. Even though Velutha is extremely skilled, he is denied due respect. He is salaried less than the workers belonging to a higher caste. Even Mammachi, who considers herself an altruist, persuades “Vellya Pappen to send him [Velutha] to the untouchables’ school that her father-in-law Punnyan Kunju had founded” Mammachi with her “impenetrable Touchable logic” says that if only Velutha “hadn’t been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer” (Roy 75). Instead of appreciating Velutha’s service, she felt that she was doing a favour to him by permitting him to touch things that the upper caste people touch:

To keep the others happy, and since she knew that nobody else would hire him as a carpenter, Mammachi paid Velutha less than she would a Touchable carpenter but more than she would a Paravan. Mammachi didn’t encourage him to enter the house (except when she needed something mended or installed). She thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that Touchables touched. She said that it was a big step for a Paravan. (77)

The height of caste discrimination becomes clearly evident when Baby Kochamma says: *How could she stand the smell? Haven’t you noticed? They have a particular smell, these Paravans* (Roy 257). There is always caste hegemony prevalent in the society and it makes the members of the lower caste maintain the status quo by accepting their low position. C. Joe Arun has stated in *Constructing Dalit Identity* that “the older Paraiyars ... do not want to put up a fight with the higher castes of the village. They want to hold on to their life as slaves of the Higher castes” (38). In *The God of Small Things*, Velutha’s father is seen as very grateful to Mamachhi and her family.

Velutha's father, Vellya Paapen, however, was an Old-World Paravan. He had seen the Crawling Backwards Days and his gratitude to Mammachi and her family for all that they had done for him was as wide and deep as a river in spate. (76)

However, there are always people like Velutha who transgresses the boundaries and forge identity by asserting subjectivity. He represents "the second type ... of the younger generation, who are assertive and articulate, decently dressed and educated" (Arun 39). He had "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.

While these were qualities that were perfectly acceptable, perhaps even desirable in Touchables, Vellya Paapen thought that in a Paravan they could (and would, and indeed, *should*) be construed as insolence." (76)

In Velutha, Baby Kochamma noticed "some signs, some rudeness, some ingratitude..." (81). She feared that "that man will be our Nemesis" (184). The words proved to be prophetic articulation. Velutha broke the barriers when he "made the unthinkable thinkable", by entering into a love relationship with the Touchable Ammu (256). Velutha didn't realize that he was part of a society which enforces restrictions on inter-caste marriages and considers "endogamy as an inexorable rule of social life" (Kumar 124). Talking about the brutal criminalization in a caste-ridden patriarchal society, Uma Chakravarti presents a harsh reality in *Gendering Caste*: "...when the lower caste man dares to fall in love or enter into a relationship, or elope with and marry a higher caste woman, he is... subject to the collective power of the upper castes who will stop at nothing to punish the transgression. The last few years have witnessed a spate of brutal killings of such couples. Since a woman's sexuality is still under patriarchal and caste

control... these killings have the explicit consent of the community, especially that to which the woman belongs” (qtd. in Chakravarti 157).

As Velutha violated society’s norms he faced its consequence. Velutha was “smashed and broken” (Roy 309). Arundhati thus highlights the position of the people who are marginalized in this society. Different mechanism of society criminalizes and punishes the transgressor. Often the state takes active participation in hunting down and punishing the so-called criminal. Velutha is also captured by the police, the “Servants of the State”. Arundhati uses the phrases “Dark of Heart” and “Deadly purposed” for these state forces. (304) Velutha is alleged of a fabricated charge of attempted molestation. Baby Kochamma told the inspector that, “A few days ago he had tried to, to... to force himself on her niece, she said. A divorcee with two children” (259). She intentionally “misrepresented the relationship between Ammu and Velutha... to salvage the family reputation in Inspector Thomas Matthew’s eyes” (259). Roy satirically describes the “Touchable Policemen” who had “Responsibility for the Touchable future on their thin but able shoulders” (307, 309). These state apparatuses are meant to maintain the domination of the rich and the upper castes. Arundhati offers an ironical account of the role of the policemen in punishing Velutha (309). She narrates;

Unlike the custom of rampaging religious mobs or conquering armies running riot, that morning in the Heart of Darkness the posse of Touchable Policemen acted with economy, not frenzy. Efficiency, not anarchy. Responsibility, not hysteria. They didn’t tear out his hair or burn him alive. They didn’t hack off his genitals and stuff them in his mouth. They didn’t rape him. Or behead him. After all they were not battling an epidemic. They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak. (309)

Nicholas B. Dirks in *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* says that the ghost of caste prejudice haunts the postcolonial India (17). Arundhati exposes the hypocrisy



of society regarding casteism. The so-called communist Comrade Pillai in the novel gives high-sounding lectures on the “Rights of Untouchables (‘Caste is Class, comrades’), but his practices are different from what he preaches(281). There is no entry for a lower caste Paravan in his house. Despite having Communist faith he failed to be free from the caste prejudices. Thus he says, “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” (279). His hypocrisy gets further exposed when he, who at first describes Velutha as a member of the communist party, departs from his initial stance during his meeting with Inspector Thomas Matthew (227). Instead of helping Velutha, he assured the inspector that Velutha had no “patronage or protection of the Communist Party” (262-3).

Women are the worst sufferers in a caste-ridden society. This novel foregrounds the position women in Indian society which is biased in terms of both gender and caste. Ammu in *The God of Small Things* transgressed the social boundaries and faced the bitter consequences. The position of a woman like Ammu is a precarious one in this male chauvinistic society.

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. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage—Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject.

(45-6)

Endogamy, i.e. marriage within one’s own caste or sub-castes, is considered very vital in this society for the perpetuation of the caste system. Hypergamy or *anuloma*, i.e., the marriage between “female members of lower *varna* and males of higher *varna* and hypogamy

or *pritiloma*, i.e., the marriage between female members of higher *varna* and males of lower *varna*” happen sometimes (Kumar 124). But *pritiloma* was looked with scorn and such a marriage caused humiliation and loss of family status of the women. Ammu’s unforgivable offence is that her love affair with Velutha, far from falling in the category of *pritiloma*, becomes an example of adultery between two people belonging to two different castes. As a penalty for this offence, Ammu had to pack her bags and leave the house. Through her disgraceful act she not only brought about the ruin of her family but also dishonored society formulated restrictions. In comparison to the position of the female in our society, the upper caste man “wields the maximum amount of power” and is the “most privileged segment of our society” (Chakravarti 160). Chacko represents the oppressive male who exploits women. Chacko lives happily after his divorce but, Ammu, after divorce, goes through various forms of suffering. Ammu’s parents give more attention to Chacko for being a man than her. She was denied education; Chacko went to Oxford for higher education. Furthermore, being a single mother her children, her position is very precarious in society. Without any alternative Ammu stays in her parents’ house which is male dominated. Ammu’s inter-caste relationship is disdained but Chacko’s relationship with a woman of low caste is accepted. Uma Chakravarti in *Gendering Caste* points out the hypocrisy of caste-ridden patriarchal Indian society:

Both in cities and in rural areas social transgressions are also perceived as tempered by caste... hierarchies such that when an upper caste... man desires a lower caste woman, and rapes or seduces her, the act is... accepted or even naturalized. (156)

However, Roy attempts to create a space for the women characters to tell their stories. Interestingly there are more female characters than male characters. Ammu, Mammachi, baby Kochamma, Sophie Mol, Rahel –these women are sharply depicted and they occupy the

limelight by keep the plot in motion. The plot revolves around the pathetic story of Ammu who suffers mutely but with a sense of dissatisfaction

*The God of Small Things* perfectly gives vent to the anguish and trauma, struggle and resistance of the untouchable dalit people who are victimized by the society and the state simultaneously.

Apart from the issues such as the caste atrocities inflicted on the lower caste and emphasizing the failure of communism in Kerala, *The God of Small Things* foregrounds the marginalized condition of women as a major theme. Since childhood she witnessed the cruel and dominating attitude of her father towards her mother. In Calcutta, she fell in love with her future husband. After their marriage, she realized that she had made a wrong selection. Her husband was ready to offer her to his boss Mr. Hollick to protect his job. Ammu left her husband with her twins Rahel and Estha. Having been subject to gender discrimination in the family since her childhood, Ammu understands the enormous influence that various social institutions exert over the emotional, cultural and psychological growth of women. This awareness leads Ammu to silent resilience in all spheres of her world. With the objective of experiencing freedom and equality she offers a space for Velutha who is positioned much below her social status. She realizes that in India women and untouchables are in the same marginalized positions. When the inspector Thomas Mathew addresses Ammu, his lecherous staring reveals his authority: “He stared at Ammu’s breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all. They needed to know and that the Kottayam police didn’t take statement from *veshyas* or their illegitimate children...” (8). His superior position as a man and a part of the state apparatuses is in sharp contrast to the subordinate position of a transgressing woman in a gender biased society. His authority is again evident when “he tapped her breasts with his baton. ...As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket.”(8) The victimized positions of Ammu and Velutha bring them together. Velutha’s space of freedom denied by the caste-ridden Indian

society is facilitated by Ammu whose attempts in bringing Velutha to the universe of love are seen as dismantling of the social hierarchies. Destabilization of the repressive gender regimes by a woman faces the fury of every social institution. To understand the attempts of Ammu to form a universe of freedom one needs to see from the perspectives of the critical notions like 'Fourth World Feminism' as it gives attention to the inclusion of suppressed women and untouchables of India to formulate the world of freedom.

### **The Subaltern Saga Continues: The Ministry of Utmost Happiness**

After the publication of *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy started writing nonfictions on various burning issues which are generally overlooked in the public domain. One of her targets, in the 1998 essay, "The End of Imagination," was the nuclear tests carried out that year. To Roy, the nuclear program was a hypocritical stance of the Indian state. On the one hand the government was trying to display its power to the world outside; on the other it has been denying a huge population of their basic necessities of life. She then focused on the construction of a series of dams in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. This project of dam building was presented as a part of development project of the government but in reality huge number people suffered, became homeless and displaced. In some essays she talked about the 2002 Gujarat massacre, state coercion and atrocities perpetrated to the tribal people, the military occupation of Kashmir, and most importantly evil impact of capitalism on the poor and the marginalized. Arundhati Roy's second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* published in 2017 is a further extension of these thematic concerns. The novel covers the last two decades of Indian history viewed from the perspective of the outcastes and otherized segments of society. In this novel Roy engages with the precarious position of the marginalized people, struggle for freedom in Kashmir, Indian military occupation, tribal insurgency especially in the central India, people's

resistance movements across the country, caste atrocities in a capitalist society, environmental concerns.

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is filled with the so-called misfits and outsiders. Roy in this novel presents various Others forming new territories, transgressing boundaries, and testing out new roles. The Tilo–Musa romance in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* can be compared with the Ammu–Velutha romance in *The God of Small Things*. These romances, set against the backdrop of the socio-economic, political unrest in post-Independence India, do not just serve as Roy’s rebuttal to violence and injustice but also formulate a form of political rescue. Like her non-fictional writings Roy’s fiction engages with India’s relentless, oppressive othering of individual belonging to the periphery. The issue of othering is very frequent in Roy’s writings but the way she once again explores it in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is nonetheless original. Consisting of twelve chapters the novel has two main narratives- one focusing on the story of Anjum, a transgender. And the second one revolving around the relationship of Tilotamma and Musa. There are many versions of ‘others’ fictionalized in this novel. Anjum, a transgender, Musa, a Kashmiri militant, Saddam Hussian, an untouchable Dalit, and Tribal people of South India and nature- they are all otherized by various forces.

The first section of the novel is focused on the enigmatic character called Anjum. The predicament in the life of a transgender is presented through the her character. Anjum being a transgender is subject to mockery, humiliation and sexual assault. When Anjum’s mother Jahanara noticed the ‘unformed but undoubtedly girl-part’ of Anjum she got terrified. Each and every moment Anjum is made to feel outsider in this society in which everything is either masculine or feminine. Anjum functioning as the representative of the *hijra* community’s struggle to survive in society. When Anjum takes the decision that she will become a woman, she joins the *hijra* community called “the Khwabgah,” or “the House of Dreams,” where a group of transgender people stay together. Nevertheless, the Khwabgah or the House of Dreams

is not free from hierarchical tensions. There is a conflict of power between the old and the new generations. Later, Anjum decides to leave “the House of Dreams” to stay in the graveyard where she builds the Jannat Guest House, or Paradise.

She lived in the graveyard like a tree. At dawn she saw the crows off and welcomed the bats home. At dusk she did the opposite. Between shifts she conferred with the ghosts of vultures that loomed in her high branches. She felt gentle grip of their talons like an ache in an amputated limb. She gathered they weren't altogether unhappy at having excused themselves and exited from the story. (3)

The Jannat Guest House turns out to be a place where Anjum welcomes other Hijras who leaves the oppressive authority of the age-old Hijra Gharanas. Anjum crosses the boundaries formed by the society by living outside the heteronormative society and the hierarchical system. Through Anjum, the novel introduces the readers with many different characters and just when the novel seems to be involved intensely with Anjum's desire to be mother one realizes that the fictional world of this book does not have one single story but many. The readers are introduced to other characters such as Biplab, Naga, Musa and Tilo. The novel starts revolving around these four college friends. After thirty years Biplab becomes an officer of the Indian Intelligence Bureau. Naga takes the career of a journalist with leftist leanings. Musa forges the life of a militant fighting for Kashmir's freedom. The narrative sheds light on the journey of Tilo who has been described by the narrator as: “...a girl who didn't seem to have a past, a family, a community, a people, or even home” (155). Tilo is the unlawful child of an untouchable father and a high caste Christian mother of Syrian origin. Having been denied the basic needs of life like home, family, proper upbringing, she rises against the established norms of the society. Through the character of Tilo, Roy explores many complex issues of postcolonial India, especially the freedom struggle of the Kashmiris and the Indian military

occupation there. Tilo records her experiences of state atrocities in Kashmir, and comes in contact with people of different caste, class, religion or gender. In this novel the character of Musa who turned into a militant after his wife and daughters, Miss Jabeen, are killed by the Indian military forces is the representative of many Kashmiri youths who become militants for the (azaadi) freedom of Kashmir from the clutches Indian state. Roy says:

Their problem is not confusion, not really. It's more like a terrible clarity that exists outside the language of modern geopolitics. All the protagonists on all sides of the conflict, especially us, exploited this fault line mercilessly. It made for a perfect war- a war that can never be won or lost, a war without end. (Roy 181)

Another character Naga emerges out to be a mouthpiece for the Leftists. According to Naga: "The falsehood of our 330 million mute idols, the selfish deities we call Ram and Krishna are not going to save us from hunger, disease and poverty. Our foolish faith in monkeys and elephant-headed apparitions is not going to feed our starving masses..." (164).

Roy depicted the atrocities that Indian Army inflicted upon the people of Kashmir. The major portion of the fiction is presented in the backdrop of Kashmir. Roy has addressed the problem of the Kashmiri people not only in this novel but also in many of her essays for the last two decades. She wrote:

Death was everywhere. Death was everything. Career. Desire. Dream. Poetry. Love. Youth itself. Dying became just another way of living. Graveyards sprang up in parks and meadows, by streams and rivers, in fields and forest glades...near the Line of Control, the speed and regularity with which the bodies turned up,...Some were delivered in sacks, some in small polythene bags, just pieces of flash, some hair and teeth. (314)

The nation has been witnessing the pathetic plight of Kashmiri people for a long time. The people of this country who talk of progress do not bother about the Kashmir's actual situation.

With the concluding words of the book Roy offers us some hopes: She wrote:

By the time they got back, the lights were all out and everybody was asleep. Everybody, that is, except for Guih Kyom the dung beetle. He was wide awake and on duty, lying on his back with his legs in the air to save the world in case the heavens fell. But even he knew that things would turn out all right in the end. They would, because they had to.

Because Miss Jebeen, Miss Udaya Jebeen, was come. (438)

Dalits in this country are also the "Others" who are subject to various forms of exploitation, inequality, and injustice. In this novel, Saddam Hussain is a representative of the Dalit community of India. Born as Dayachand, Saddam belongs to the untouchable Chamar caste, a low caste in India. Saddam witnessed his father being detained by police on the false charge of slaughtering a cow and later being lynched by a mob of caste Hindus. Traumatized by that violence by the Hindu extremists he turns from Dayachand to Saddam Hussein. Saddam narrates that incident to Anjum:

I have never heard a sound like that.... it was a strange high sound, it wasn't human.... Everybody watched. Nobody stopped them.... How they splashed through puddles of his father's blood as it were rainwater.... I was part of the mob that killed my father. (Roy 89)

Later on, working as a toilet cleaner in a hospital he comes to learn that all those working as toilet cleaners are Dalits, Untouchables. The hospital where Saddam worked reflects the social exclusion the Untouchables are subject to in their day to day existence. Saddam narrates to Anjum:



The Hindu doctors who were required to conduct post mortems thought of themselves as upper caste and would not touch dead bodies of untouchables for fear of being polluted. The men who actually handled the cadavers and performed the post mortems were employed as cleaners and belonged to a cast of sleepers and leather workers who used to be called Chamars. The doctors like most Hindus looked down on them and considered them to be Untouchable. (72-73)

The narrator then gives a historical context to the caste system of India; “evil demons were really darkskinned Dravidians – indigenous – rulers and Hindu gods who vanquished them (and turned them into Untouchables and the oppressed castes who would spend their lives in the service of the new rulers) were the Aryan invaders” (86-87). Talking about the persistence of this practice of caste the narrator quotes Gandhi’s view that “Caste system was India’s salvation. Each caste must do the work it has been born to do, but all works must be respected.” (103) Saddam tells how it is unsafe to be a Muslim in this country. While working as a security guard in Delhi Saddam used Hindu identity: “Saddam told Sangeeta madam that his name was Daya Chand (because every idiot knew that in the prevailing climate a security guard with a Muslim name would have been considered a contradiction in terms).” (75) After leaving his job Saddam Hussain comes to stay in Anjum’s Jannat Guest House, the abode of the marginalized and fallen ones.

In this novel, Roy also focuses on the current communist movements, displacement and dispossession of the tribal people in the name of the development project, and rise of Maoist insurgency. For ages the Adivasi people have been encountering displacement, marginalization and institutionalized terrorism. State autocracy and the resultant Maoist resistance movement in the forests of Central India have been reflected through the characterization of Revathy. In a letter to her unlawful daughter, Revathy reveals the silenced stories about her life as a Maoist

insurgent. Her account of physical torture and sexual assault by the policemen clearly shows the pathetic condition of the tribals. Having no alternatives but the tribal people lift their arms and engage in an unequal war with the state. Roy narrates the long fight of the Maoists against Indian state authorities for their basic rights and protection of their indigenous lands and resources.

Roy talks about the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat in essays like “*Democracy: Who Is She When She Is at Home.*” In this novel she revisits that carnage, a planned pogrom carried out against the Muslim population, in which 2000 Muslims were massacred on the streets of Gujarat and one hundred and fifty thousand were rendered homeless. Arundhati has always been very vocal against the demonization of Muslim community across the world. In the book *The Shape of the Beast* she remarks, “The demonization of Muslims has also been given legitimacy by the world’s superpower, by the emperor himself. (118) In this novel the narrator talks about the killing of Muslim young men in fake encounters or arresting the Muslim people on the basis of mere suspicion:

The Urdu papers carried stories of young Muslim boys being killed in what the Police called ‘encounters’, or being caught red-handed in the act of planning terrorist strikes and arrested. A new law was passed which allowed suspects to be detained without trials for months. In no time at all the prisons were full of young Muslim men. (42)

*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* explores the multiple layers of violence, injustice and discriminatory practices rooted in Indian social fabric. India as a postcolonial state has failed to offer equal space to its citizens:

You will never stop falling. And as you fall you will hold on to other falling people. The sooner you understand that the better. This place where we live,

where we have made our home, is the place of falling people. Here there is no haqeeqat.... We aren't real. We don't really exist. (84)

Arundhati Roy skillfully enables the readers to have varied glimpses of living in this country. From the transgenders to the Dalits, from the excluded to the silenced, from the battle for *azaadi* in Kashmir to the Maoist insurgency, from domestic violence to genocide, Arundhati brings all together. She succeeds in narrating such a shattered story by slowly becoming everybody and most importantly everything.

Arundhati Roy's writings encompass a wide range of thematic concerns which connect the fictional characters in her books with the current state of affairs in India as well as in other parts of the world. Roy gave her Booker Prize money to the Narmada Bachao Andolan, a movement protesting against the building of dams built across Narmada river that flows through three states. Not only did she assist the NBA movement economically, she also emerged as an prominent voice against the state and addressed the fight of marginalized people through her writings. During her two decades' rupture from fiction, Roy was involved in voicing against India's nuclear missile testing and writing about the Maoists. The left in India called her India's moral compass. She participated in many political debates. Several threats were given to Roy but that didn't stop her from raising her voice against the injustice. In 2004, while receiving the Sydney Peace Prize, Roy made a famous statement, 'There's really no such thing as the "voiceless". There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.' *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is a Roy's attempt to lend voice to the silenced or the unheard. The novel contains plethora of marginalized experiences. We hear from the religious minority and the transgender, the missing and the murdered. It is about the Gujarat genocide, the Sikh riot and the mob lynching of innocent people. The book has thematic continuities with her first novel *The God of Small Things*. One can imagine Tilo as the child of Ammu and Velutha.

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