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# Depressed and Marginalized Voices in Arundhati Roy and Mulak Raj Anand's Works:- A Critical Review

*Mukesh Kumar*

## ABSTRACT

Dalits are treated as the worst as they are not. They have misinterpreted in the world of the so-called sophisticated society of India by the upper-caste ones. They have been called a slice of sordid reality, which symbolizes the sufferings stigma in which the Dalits are doomed to live as the result of the current ideological assumptions about caste, which have been exceptionally so deeply ingrained in the Indian mind that one has wrestled with oneself to feel free from the change; Change of this thousand years old rotten system. Through this paper, I want to lay down some of my points that have been expressed in Mulk Raj Anand's novels *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* where both of the authors have presented Dalit's sufferings, struggle, and exploitation. *The God of Small Things* demonstrates an ill-condition of a poor male who is tormented by the ill system of the upper caste people for his crime of a love affair with an upper caste girl. In *Untouchable*, Bakha, a young sweeper from the Out-Caste colony of a north Indian cantonment town bears daily torments like a missionary trying to persuade him to embrace Christianity, and he listens to Gandhiji, who advocates social reform and so on. There is a quest in the life of Bakha where thinking of everything he has heard, though he could not understand it all.

**Keywords:** bakha, caste, dalit, munoo, rural india and urban india, untouchable.

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## ABSTRACT

*Dalits are treated as the worst as they are not. They have misinterpreted in the world of the so-called sophisticated society of India by the upper-caste ones. They have been called a slice of sordid reality, which symbolizes the sufferings stigma in which the Dalits are doomed to live as the result of the current ideological assumptions about caste, which have been exceptionally so deeply ingrained in the Indian mind that one has wrestled with oneself to feel free from the change; Change of this thousand years old rotten system. Through this paper, I want to lay down some of my points that have been expressed in Mulk Raj Anand's novels Untouchable, Coolie and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things where both of the authors have presented Dalit's sufferings, struggle, and exploitation. The God of Small Things demonstrates an ill-condition of a poor male who is tormented by the ill system of the upper caste people for his crime of a love affair with an upper caste girl. In Untouchable, Bakha, a young sweeper from the Out-Caste colony of a north Indian cantonment town bears daily torments like a missionary trying to persuade him to embrace Christianity, and he listens to Gandhiji, who advocates social reform and so on. There is a quest in the life of Bakha where thinking of everything he has heard, though he could not understand it all. In fact, Untouchable is a contrast between rural and urban India. Coolie is a pathetic odyssey of Munoo, who suffers a lot during his life in the hands of the upper caste and even by his relatives. Life seems to him very struggled and hard to live in this wretched and bad condition of the so-called highly generated world of people who consider themselves the people of the supreme power or the world of the oppressor.*

*Munoo is an orphaned village boy who sets out in quest of a livelihood, but is treated as an animal in all spheres of society. He has to work as a domestic servant, factory worker and a rickshaw-puller which earns him consumption and untimely death because of suffering and exploitation by the upper caste people. Here is today's so-called modern India, the status of the Dalits is not as good as we dream of living in the age of technology and information.*

**Keywords:** bakha, caste, dalit, munoo, rural india and urban india, untouchable.

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## I. DEPRESSED AND MARGINALIZED VOICES IN ARUNDHATI ROY AND MULAK RAJ ANAND'S WORKS: A CRITICAL REVIEW

'Dalit' is a word which is defined as other, inferior, sufferer, exploited, oppressed, or downtrodden bird of the society. Dalits are treated as the worst as they are not. Mahatma Gandhi named them 'Harijan' (*The People of God*). Most of the Dalits live in rural India, and more than are landless laborers. In many parts of India, the land is still held by the upper castes that use the ideology of the caste system to exploit low-ranking landless laborers economically. Actually, the word caste has been derived from the Portuguese 'casta', which means breed, race, or kind. In India, castes are ranked, named endogamous groups, and membership in a particular caste comes through birth. They have misinterpreted into the world of a so-called sophisticated society of India by the upper caste ones. They have been called a slice of sordid

reality, which symbolizes the sufferings stigma in which the Dalits are doomed to live as the result of the present ideological assumptions about caste which have been exceptionally so deeply ingrained in the Indian mind that one has wrestled with oneself to feel free from the change of this thousand years old rotten system. Through this paper, I want to lay down some of my points that have been expressed in Mulk Raj Anand's novels *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997, where both of the authors have presented Dalit's sufferings, struggle and exploitation.

Here is today's so-called modern India, the status of the Dalits is not as good as we dream here, living in the age of technology and information. Being Untouchable, means that one cannot be touched, or touch others. In *Untouchable* there is a contrast between rural and urban India where Bakha, a young sweeper from the Out-caste colony of a north Indian cantonment town. It highlights the cause of the dumb, and the deserted, the lowly, and the loss of an adverse society. Bakha's occupation of cleaning toilets makes him an outcaste which brings insulted words to people. He was forced to beg food and was not allowed to touch higher-class Hindus. Even he was not allowed to enter in the temples. *Untouchable* illustrates a day of great difficulty for Bakha and accidentally, he touches an upper caste Hindu and earns slaps for having polluted the man. Later on the very same day, when he was cleaning the gutter for a lady, she through the food on him rather offering him in his hands. His sister molested by a priest on that very day. He was blamed for harming or injuring a young boy after a hockey match. As the day goes on, it becomes worse and worst for him. The conditions were not in his favour, he was expelled from home by his father and he becomes frustrated and tormented by the societal issue on caste and occupation.

He thinks that his life is full of miseries and thorns. The action of the caste Hindu; touching of the lowest caste person, Bakha, is considered as a sin and if he (Bakha) touches them by mistake, it becomes the worst day for the upper-caste people,

then they need to sanctify them. At this, the anger of Bakha reveals as he says:

All of them abused, abused, abused why are we always abused? The sanitary inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers, because we touch. They hate dung. I hate it to. That's why, I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That's why they don't touch us, the high caste...I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable, I am an untouchable! (U, 58-59)

Again in an unfortunate situation, he has to control his anger. Still, he reveals it before his father after bearing the insult of his sister, Sohini, who has molested by a Pandit. He is filled with rage a desperate mind, which he delivered at the time of his sister's molestation. He says:

They think we are mere dirt, because we clean their dirt. (U, 89)

So the life of an untouchable like Bakha is full of miseries and anxieties. He is badly abused and tormented by the upper-caste Hindus. Thus we see that he has to struggle a lot during his staying in the hands of the oppressors, and they molest him at every step of his life, which is an oppressed and a chilling exposure of the untouchable in the hands of the upper-caste Hindu who thinks themselves as the emperor over the lowest caste peoples. E.M. Forster rightly says:

The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he can't escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. Unclean himself he pollutes other when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. This he is disgusting as well as disquieting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming...The sweepers were more sensitive looking and more personable than other servants. (U, 8 (Preface))

A writer, on the other hand, is the true voice of these unheard voices of the society. And their voices prompt him to the deplorable, description of the destitute. An outcast has to lead a life meaner than the animals. He feels like a caged bird that flutters its wings for a free flight. So he decided to learn about Christianity and the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. He bears daily torments like a missionary trying to persuade him to embrace Christianity when he listens to Gandhiji, who advocated social reform and so on. Thus, here is a quest in the life of Bakha:

Thinking of everything he had heard, though he could not understand it all. (AHIEL, 164)

On the other hand, *Coolie* is a pathetic odyssey of Munoo, who suffers a lot during his life in the hands of the upper-caste and even by his relatives. Life seems to him a mightily, very struggled and hard to live in this wretched and bad condition of the so-called highly generated world of people who consider themselves the people of the supreme power or the world of oppressors. Munoo is an orphaned village boy who sets out in quest of a livelihood, but is treated as an animal in all spheres of society. He has to work as a domestic servant, factory worker, a rickshaw-puller which earns him consumption and a untimely death because of suffering and exploitation by the upper-caste people.

Munnu is a poor adolescent who travels to the city is unskillfully tortured at every level of society. He attains the lowest jobs available to him, like the other boys who are treated as severely as the enslaved person. His aunt and uncle use him as a money maker. They push him into the dirt, and he is slapped and humiliated. And finally, he is died of tuberculosis. According to Anand, Munnu suffers because of fate but because of society. It is the society that leads him to the tragic end. Unlike Bakha in *Untouchable*, Munnu was the high caste; because of poverty, community did not consider him human. Early in the novel, he realizes the truth, as he says:

Whether there were mere rich or more poor people, there seemed to be only two kinds of people in the world. Caste did not matter. 'I

am a Kshatriya and I am poor. No, caste does not matter. The Babus are like the sahib-dogs, and all servants look alike. There must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor'. (C, 55-56)

At fourteen, he is forced to work at the house of Babu Nathu, a worker in Imperial Bank in Sham Nagar, where the wife of Babu Nathu abuses and curses him without any reason. In fact, he is a burning symbol of millions of unfortunate souls like himself-lost, and bereft, abused and downtrodden. He has to exploit significantly in one or another, by one person or another. Actually, his story is full of the saga of sufferings and exploitations that the world brings in his life where he lives with his other friends. He attains, an untimely-death, due to poverty and hunger. He is mercilessly treated as an enslaved person at each sphere of the societal ground which is a doomed stigma on his life.

*The God of Small Things* presents the ideology of a marginalized, humiliated and segregated person Velutha, who is tortured and exploited by the police of the upper caste group because of his illicit relationship with an upper-caste woman, Ammu, who feels an irresistible attraction for Velutha, the untouchable carpenter of Paravan which is ranked as the lowest in the Indian society. As Arundhati Roy responds on a question in an interview about her attraction towards Velutha:

It is not compassion or pity that attracts Ammu to Velutha. It is not subservience that delivers Velutha to Ammu. It is Ammu's anger at the society she lives in and is shunned by that seeks out and recognizes Velutha's anger. They are united in anger as much as in love...in *The God of Small Things*, Velutha and Ammu's relationship is a battle-cry. There is no way that he could use that relationship to make his way up the caste-ladder, instead she would make her way down-and she did. (Arundhati Roy in an Interview with Out-Caste)

Velutha, *The God of Small Things*, commits a crime by establishing norms of society by having



an affair with a woman of high caste. The relationship between a Syrian Christian woman and a Dalit man disrupts the existing order and notions of society. As Arundhati Roy says in her novel:

They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tempered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. (TGST, 31)

On the other hand, Velutha is a wonderful man endowed with excellent skills as a carpenter is most intelligent in handling the machines, but his qualities are not accepted by the touchable workers in the factory of Mammachi. The social strictures and norms are seriously violated by his 'illegitimate' love for Ammu, a divorced touchable woman and he is punished for this crime. The most of the Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas live in the Malabar region and have converted to Christianity to get rid of untouchability; after this result in effort, they are treated as segregated.

The final chapter of the novel, 'The Cost of Living' brings sad news for Velutha, Ammu, and her children: Rahel and Estha. This chapter illustrates the colossal cost of living that Velutha, Ammu, and her children must pay. They want to live by their own choice, but they are treated because of a man, Velutha, who is untouchable. As the writer says:

They know there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to small things. (TGST, Chapter 21, 338)

Velutha and Ammu are treated as beasts, tortured, and humiliated by the police because they have broken the social and moral code; Velutha, is killed for his raised voice to keep it subjugated, silenced, and effaced from the elite discourse. He is discriminated, hated, humiliated, and segregated by the Syrian Christians. His voice is oppressed by the oppressors due to his lowest status in society.

The Dalits remain the most oppressed section of the social order in India. This caste stratification of the Hindus has rendered the Dalits, Untouchables. The upper-caste people treat them

as other, subhuman beings, and try to avoid any contact with them and if by chance it happens they need to sanctify them. Our constitution has provided the right to equality, education opportunities and social justice but these have proven as mere drama. In reality, their status is as bad as worse-scattered in some states like Madhya Pradesh, Bihar or Rajasthan, they are denied their rights in the so-called society of our Modern India of Information and technology. They must be pressured, humiliated, tortured, and abused because of their lowest status in the Indian social order of castes. In the Indian constitution of 1950, Untouchability is legally abolished.

Today any discrimination due to the caste system is forbidden by law. But the caste system has not disappeared from everyday life. Even today, in villages, the untouchables are still excluded from society, and have to live in separate colonies. In Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Southern Parts of the nation, there are the worst conditions for the people of the God; they are also human-beings; if they are educated and hailed respectfully, they may be uplifted on their lowest corner which is considered as a doomed stricture on their face and personality. We the upper caste class elite people raise our voices for implementing reservation; for what and to what extent we need such reservation by suffocating the throat of the Dalits which need cooperation then do we disturb the everyday life of the people? Who are we? Please stop these atrocities and exploitative activities, which are dangerous and horrible. They must be promoted for attaining higher education as the upper ones get in their life. They must be given equal rights and opportunities as we provide them to the upper one. If we want to see our nation a developed one? Then we have to vanish this blot that is a rock in the development path. There are so many persons like Munnu, Bakha, and Velutha suffer a lot during their work in everyday, and even in their life; their talents are despised and denied due to their lowest status in society. I conclude my research paper in these words:

Change is one thing. Acceptance is another. (TGST)

Note:

I have used some abbreviation(s): U stands for Untouchability, C for Coolie, AHIEL for A History of Indian English Literature and TGST for The God of Small Things.

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