



CLASS EXPLOITATION IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS AND ARVIND ADIGA'S THE WHITE TIGER

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ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy, who recently showed her anguish towards the increasing religious intolerance in Indian society, is a winner of The Booker Prize and the stalwart in the field of Indian English literature. She boldly exposes the caste and gender marginalization in her debut novel The God of Small Things. She deals in this novel with the chauvinism in Indian patrimonial set up. She stands against the conventional notion that women are weaker and inferior to men. She also exposes the ghastly evil of casteism and hierarchy. The struggle between the mainstream culture and sub-culture is visible in her novel. Whereas Arvind Adiga, The Booker Prize winning novelist for his debut novel The White Tiger is a significant voice in the field of Indian writing in English. He exposes the corrupt political system in India where the common people are suffered and humiliated. The present paper studies Roy's The God of Small Things and Adiga's The White Tiger and investigate that how Dalits ,poor and downtrodden and women in India are humiliated, exploited due to castiesm and male chauvinism. The paper primarily focuses upon the element of class exploitation in the respective novels.

Key Words: *classism, poverty, unemployment, exploitation, power politics, etc.*

Roy's The God of Small Things is one of the most celebrated novels in the field of Indian writing in English which discusses the issue of casteism, male patriarchy and class exploitation. Velutha , the untouchable in the novel represents the whole Dalit community. His relationship with Ammu , a high caste ,Syrian Christian woman is considered illegal and immoral. Actually he brings a new hope in Ammu's life after her divorce from her husband Baba comes back with her children Estha and Rahel to her ancestral home Ayemenam. Being a divorcee, she is ill treated by her sister-in -law Baby Kochamma and brother Chacko.In such a complicated situation she once meets Velutha and gets attracted towards him. He plays with Ammu's twin children Estha and Rahel, makes fishing rods for them, mends their boat and readily agrees to colour his own toe nails for them. Ammu, a lonely lady, a divorcee and



mother of two children, humiliated and oppressed by her parents and ill-tempered husband, finds a new hope in Velutha. Velutha, being an untouchable is exploited and humiliated at the hands of high-caste people. Neglected and unwanted individuals, both they begin to love each other and enjoy a short happy life. But their relationship is bound to be broken and this happens eventually. Velutha's father is terror stricken to see "what his Untouchable son had touched. More than touched."(78) The past of the untouchables is very well reflected in the novel. It is told that Velutha's grandfather had embarrassed Christianity along with the number of Pullayas and Pellayas in order to escape from the scourge of untouchability. It is disgusting that after their conversion to Christianity, they have been treated as untouchables or Dalits. About the word 'Dalit' R.G.Jadhav writes: "Dalit is a Sanskrit word and means downtrodden, or oppressed or exploited or condemned to peripheral leavings."(39) After conversion into Christianity also their condition is the same as an outcaste. They were called as Rice Christians. Officially on paper they were Christians and therefore casteless.

Oppression and humiliation for ages make Vellya Pappen too timid to stand against the high castes. So he rushes to the Ayemenam house and informs Mammachi about the love affair of Ammu and Velutha. Mammachi gets an opportunity to punish Ammu. She wonders how her daughter could stand the particular smell a paravan has. The relationship between a high-caste lady and a paravan, an untouchable is considered as disgrace. Baby Kochamma adds fuel into the fire. She wants to take revenge upon Velutha for calling her 'Modalali Mariakutti' at the March. She goes to the police station and misinterprets the facts. Meanwhile Sophie Mol, Ammu's niece dies accidentally at Meenachal River. Baby Kochamma files a false case against Velutha that he has tried to rape her niece Ammu and is responsible for Sophie Mol's death too. So the police arrest him and beat him unto death.

The love affair between Ammu and Velutha is being crushed down by the orthodox forces on the account of power politics of caste. When she goes to the police station with her twins, the police Inspector Thomas Mathew also humiliates her. On the contrary he calls her as 'Veshya' and tries to molest her. This is indicative of Ammu's humiliation not only at home but also in society. Eventually she finds odd jobs like receptionist. The continuous humiliation makes her mentally sick and she dies at last at a very young age of thirty-one. In the novelist's words: "Not old, not young, but a viable dia-ble age." (161). K. N. M. Pillai, a communist party leader is essentially a political man, a professional omeletteer. He too does not stand by Velutha when time comes. He represents those who merely make a show of being reformers. Actually he too follows all the orthodoxy. As a trade union leader he dominates the factory workers. He is jealous of Velutha, the untouchable who the only card is holding member of the party. When Velutha is in need of Pillai at police station, he denies to identify Velutha. Pillai in the novel appears as a cunning politician, and expert in changing even the most unfavorable circumstances to his advantage. Besides, the dilemma of factory workers is also strongly highlighted in the novel. The other issues Roy deals with are the undue importance given to the promotion of tourism industries and its devastating effects



upon rivers and environment, the miserable condition of the Kathakali dancers which indicates the cultural degradation of Kerala due to the globalization. As Roy writes: “Ancient stories were collapsed and amputated. Six-hour classics were slashed to a twenty-minute cameos.” (127)

Velutha, an untouchable, a Paravan is portrayed as a victim of castism. The tragic condition of the untouchables is very well reflected in the novel through him, his father and brother. In Mammachi’s time the Paravans like other untouchables were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies and carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke. As Mammachi tells to the twins: “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 Parvan’s footprint.” (73-74) This throws light upon the social barriers and attitude of high-castes towards dalits, and untouchables. Brahmins in India wanted to dominate the whole population of India, they frightened and terrified the lower caste people and women in the name of God and his Manusmriti. Accordingly they humiliated and oppressed the untouchables or Dalits and women, and pushed them to marginal existence. It is due to such a tragic condition of them, Velutha’s grandfather, Kelan along with a number of Paravans, Pelayas and pulaylas had embarrassed Christianity to avoid the scourge of marginality. But in vain! After conversion, they were known as the Rice-Christians. Their condition has been very pathetic after independence. For, officially on paper they are Christians and therefore casteless, and so no government benefits like job reservations were entitled to them. This shows how even after conversion, the Dalits, the untouchables have been exploited and oppressed due to the fourfold division of the Verna system. Velutha, being an untouchable is suffered throughout the novel. He comes with his father Vellya Pappen to the Ayemenam house to deliver the coconut plucked from the trees. No high castes would allow them into their house. They were not treated properly at Ayemenam. They would have to low their backs before the high castes. All this created in them a slave mentality. This shows, that there was no place for the untouchable in high-caste society. But for her selfish purpose, Mammachi successfully used Velutha. She recognized his talent for carpentry. She often said that if he had not be a Paravan he might have become an engineer. In spite of his superior skills in carpentry, Veutha is paid less than the touchable carpenters. He is not entertained and accepted as a fellow worker by the touchable workers. It throws light upon the shabby nature of Mammachi and the touchable workers. Thus, Velutha is marginalized figure in the novel and has been considered inferior than other touchable workers not for his any weakness but only because of his inferior caste. Thus Roy succinctly exposes the vulnerable condition of the Dalits on the account of class in *The God of Small Things* through Velutha and the Dalit community.

Whereas Adiga’s *The White Tiger* too brilliantly exposes the issue of class exploitation in the contemporary society where the protagonist like Balram lives a helpless and vulnerable life. Iqra Shagufta asserts in the article “Class Stratification in Aravind Adiga’s *The White*

Tiger” “The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga is also a brutally realistic exposition of this class struggle between two opposite strata of society between which gap is impassably wide and it is still widening.”(01)The White Tiger is all about marginal consciousness in which Balram, the protagonist, narrates his life story to Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of China, in seven nights from his desk, which is a revolt of a deprived against the mainstream of society and social values, made by the power centre. The protagonist, Balram, son of Vikram Halwai, Rickshaw Puller, born in dark corner of India, in Laxmangarh, in the district of Gaya. His native was under the domination of Land Lords. He was born under the domination and miserable condition of his family. The place where he born is a mystic place in India where the mother Ganga emancipates lives of people but at the same place people forgets to name their children. Here we come across the real name of the protagonist that is ‘Munna’ by which his parents call him, means boy. “Munna? That”s not real name. He was right: it just means boy.” (Adiga, 2008: 13)

The life story of the protagonist Balram reveals the ugly reality in the life of the under privileged class where the honest and intelligent people like Balram become the victims of the socio –political ills like poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. Though Balram was honest and intelligent in his activities, his family doesn’t permit him to complete his education due to poverty. In India the fate of uneducated and deprived people is sarcastically depicted through the life journey of Balram who joins the tea shop with his brother, Kishan and used to sleep on the road with him in the night. He undertakes job like coal crusher and table sweeper, but never been satisfied with his earnings. As Prashant Jadhav asserts in the article “Arvind Adiga’s The White Tiger : A Search for Identity.” “The prime concern of their life was food, shelter and identity.” (38)Balram faced so many calamities in his life therefore decide not to die like his father in the government hospital waiting for the doctor. He decides to learn driving to earn more money for his and family’s betterment. Now even in the present it is not easy for a low born to get job in India easily. Being born in low caste, Balram expelled from various land lords and employers. His big chance comes when a rich Landlord hires him as a chauffeur for his son, daughter-in-law and their two Pomeranian dogs. Balram gets a chance to be free from the shackle of tradition, caste and cultural inferiority. Mr. Ashok who is also the offspring of the same soil where Balram was born and raised, but both becomes two opposite poles of the same society. Mr. Ashok, rich, educated and important person of in the society and opposite to him, Balram, poor, least educated and less-important.

Balram’s master Ashok lived in a new apartment called Buckingham Towers A Block, which was one of the best in Delhi. Ashok spent a lot of time visiting malls, along with Pinky Madam, his wife and Mongoose. Balram’s job was also to carry all the shopping bags as they came out of the malls. The mean and stingy behavior of the rich is shown through the lost coin episode where Mongoose insults Balram for not having retrieved a rupee coin he lost while getting out of the car. He was so bothered about a rupee coin after bribing someone with a million rupees:



‘Get down on your knees. Look for it on the floor of the car. ‘I got down on my knees. I sniffed in between the mats like a dog, all in search of that one rupee. ‘What do you mean, it’s not there? Don’t think you can steal from us just because you’re in the city. I want that rupee.’ ‘We’ve just paid half a million rupees in a bribe, Mukesh, and now we’re screwing this man over for a single rupee. Let’s go up and have a scotch. Finally, I took a rupee coin out of my shirt pocket, dropped it on the floor of the car, picked it up, and gave it to the Mongoose (139).

Balram is not allowed to switch on the AC or play music when he is alone. Both his master Ashok and his wife Pinky taunt Balram due to his lack of proper pronunciation in English. It patched up their quarrels. When he mispronounced “Maal” for “mall” they laughed upon. The pizza episode also reveals the lower status of Balram in the eyes of upper class society. On Pinky Madam’s birthday, Balram was made to dress up like a maharaja with a red turban and dark cooling glasses and serve them food. The lady ridiculed Balram and asked to repeat PiZZa as Balram always pronounced it piJJA. The deprived people never been treated as human being since ages in India. Only because of their low birth, Balram also treated as animal since his childhood to his grand success as entrepreneur in Bangalore. Mostly such treatment is given him by Mr. Mukesh and Stork, the land lords. The rich expects their pets to be treated as humans, they expects their dogs to be pampered, walked, petted, and even washed, but they never treat their servants as human beings. Repressed are always deviant in front of their masters and their pets. Balram describes how he takes dogs for walk, “Then I took them around the compound on chain, while the king of Nepal (Watchman) sat in a corner and shouted. ,, Don’t pull the chain so hard! They are worth more than you are!” (78) Balram escapes from Darkness and drive his master to Delhi, where he sees that in the developed cities also there are slum areas where Slum dogs like Balram lives. There are some people from Darkness too, who came Delhi to survive with the light but they are still away from the equal rights for which Balram is struggling. One day, a child dies in the accident by Pinky Madam but they force Balram to take this accident on his part just to save Pinky getting trapped in the case.

Balram observes the politicians, who received bribe from Mr. Ashok to exempt from the taxes of Coal Mines, which is obviously the wealth of nation. Whenever he finds Ashok making corruption and not paying taxes, he becomes furious and it leads him to think about the story in The Murder Weekly titled ‘Rape, Murder and Money”. Balram come to conclusion: “The history of the World is the history of ten-thousand- year war of brains between the rich and the poor. Each side is eternally trying to hoodwink the other side....” (Adiga 254) Balram is not ready to die as servant, driver or with an identity as a low born member of Halwai community. He haunts for the identity, he finds a way to be out of cage to become The White Tiger. The corrupt minded Protagonist decides something furious and life changing that we guess from his narration. On the other hand the political changes make Mr. Ashok restless because The Great Socialists become ruling party, which demands seven

hundred thousand rupees from him to veil the tax case. Already, city and its life styles have been corrupted Balram and made him selfish and evil who decides to steal money from his master. He prepares lot for the same and considers it's an opportunity. He describes. "I was looking for the key for years, but the door was always open." (Adiga 267) Not only he wants to steal money but he put a bottle of whisky, Johnnie Walker Black with the purpose to kill Mr. Ashok and escape from the cage to reestablish his own identity. Finally on the D day, he does the same and escapes with money. Finally after the murder he settled in Bangalore and became successful entrepreneur with the money stolen from power centre. The novel is an absolute portrayal of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless. The powerful people like Mr. Ashok exploits the poor and downtrodden like Balram. They treat the poor people worse than animals without any of their fault. The only fault of them is that they are poor .The novel shows how poverty and unemployment in India has turned the common man Balram into a cruel villain who does not hesitate to kill his master Mr. Ashok.

Thus, both Roy's The God of Small Things and Adiga's The White Tiger do a brave attempt to expose the social evil of class exploitation. Today in the world of power politics their respective work is relevant as well as appealing to bring forth social change.

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