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[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)  
[criterionejournal@gmail.com](mailto:criterionejournal@gmail.com)

## Voicing the De-Voiced: A Review of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

**Avishek Chaudhury**

Assistant Teacher in English,  
Midnapore Collegiate School ,  
Midnapore, Paschim  
Medinipur, West Bengal.

In the recent post-modern Indian English fiction there are radical changes in the writers' outlook on socio-cultural matters. Radical changes have been seen in almost all the areas of literature challenging the basic foundations and beliefs and bringing under merciless scrutiny the age-old customs. New themes like struggle of the socially oppressed, experiences of the marginalized and diasporic existence come under focus. There appears a strong urge to expose those areas that had lain in the dark for long. The disturbance is very much perceptible in the works of Manju Kapoor, Sashi Deshpande, Geetha Hariharan, Anita Desai, Amitava Ghosh, Upamanya Chatterjee, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee and a host of other writers.

What is significant about this era is the outcome of a host of women novelists. The woman in this modern world is not only a mother/wife /daughter – but amidst all she is a human being struggling to keep her own identity. Women have always been placed on the periphery in our male-dominated society. The bourgeois people always try to dominate and suppress the poor people. And in this society women are double marginalized- first by bourgeois class and then by men in general. Most of the critical discourse concerning women writers has focused on this point. And with this they put forward on oppositional mode of writing – a strategy to voice the devoiced.

Arundhati Roy in her Booker prize winner debut novel, *The God of Small Things* reflects all these concerns, a disturbing awareness and anxiety for those who have been marginalized by the age-old oppressive systems of society. In my paper I have tried to analyze how Roy has voiced the so called De-Voiced people.

In the recent post-modern Indian English fiction there are radical changes in the writers' outlook on socio-cultural matters. Radical changes have been seen in almost all the areas of literature challenging the basic foundations and beliefs and bringing under merciless scrutiny the age-old customs. New themes like struggle of the socially oppressed, experiences of the marginalized and diasporic existence come under focus. There appears a strong urge to expose those areas that had lain in the dark for long. The disturbance is very much perceptible in the works of Manju Kapoor, Sashi Deshpande, Geetha Hariharan, Anita Desai, Amitava Ghosh, Upamanya Chatterjee, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee and a host of other writers.

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Arundhati Roy in her Booker prize winner debut novel, *The God of Small Things* reflects all these concerns, a disturbing awareness and anxiety for those who have been marginalized by the age-old oppressive systems of society. Roy actually represents a magnificent flowering of that line of women's writing that discards all pretensions and hypocrisy about social decency or gender-related false assumptions and invents a narrative which is affective – candid frank, devoid of any romantic sentimentalization and often brutal in laying bare the seamy side of our socio-political systems.

The story of *The God of Small Things* seems to be very simple and one can say that there is nothing new in it. In Indian context, the love affair between an upper-caste divorcee mother of two children and an untouchable Paravan can be expected. However complications arise when Velutha's father tells Mammachi and Baby Kochamma of his son's affair with Ammu. Interestingly the same Mammachi who earlier went to the extent of building a separate entrance for objects of Chacko's 'needs' to enter the house and who secretly gave them money for:

in her mind, a fee *clarified* things. Disjuncted sex from love.  
Needs from Feelings.(Page-169)

now cannot tolerate this:

She thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy *coolie*. She imagined it in vivid detail : a Paravan's coarse black hand on her daughter's breast. His mouth on hers. His black hips jerking between her parted legs. The sound of their breathing. His particular Paravan smell. *Like animals*, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. *Like a dog with a bitch on heat*.  
(Page : 257-258)

Even the so-called mass leader comrade Pillai dejects Velutha:

Comrade, you should know that Party was not constituted to support workers' indiscipline in their private life...  
*It is not in the Party's interests to take up such matters.*  
*Individuals' interest is subordinate to the organization's interest.*  
*Violating Party Discipline means violating Party Unity.*

(Page-287)

Thus quite inevitably Velutha has been charged of abduction and murder. The police, all touchables, brutally beat Velutha up in the lock up without giving him a chance to defend himself. Thus, though the novel tells the story of one family but it at once captures the sense of desolation, despair, emptiness and failure – characteristics of any ex-colonial society, passing its days in the colonial hangover condition.

In Velutha's character we can perceive how Europe/west/ mainstream has always stereotyped the 'Other' and has always thrust upon it labels of inferiority, perverse desires and intellect-lessness. In the novel Roy makes us aware about the terrible, painful condition of the Paravans – the Untouchables in a casteist society. They have been treated just like animals. One can say even below that because people even love their pets – but these Paravans, they are nowhere. That is why when Velutha, after centuries of subjugation, is trying to raise his voice he has been reduced to nothingness – a fit treatment to a biologically inferior person. So:

If they hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least

biologically he was a fellow creature – had been served long ago. They were not arresting a man, they were exorcizing fear.

(Page-309)

Roy in one place of her novel writes that Velutha's brother, Kuttappen is safe because he is uneducated. He never questions, only follows the rules and regulations led down by the society. Velutha, on the other hand, like Bakha, the protagonist of Mulk Raj Anand's image breaking novel *Untouchable* (1935), questions against the deformities of the prevalent social structure. Velutha, the God of Small Things, becomes a symbol – a voice of all the people – neglected, rejected, exploited – eagerly waiting to be freed from the ideologies that try to enclose them into their rigid frame works.

Ammu, on the other hand, defies the androcentric notion of the male oriented society and emerges as a rebel, voicing her suppressed voice. The capitalist society always treated women figures as commodity. They have no right over their body. Before marriage they are under parental guidance and after marriage, under husband's care. That is why, we see Ammu is denied of her college education whereas Chacko goes to Oxford. Even Ammu has no right in her father's property. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma – all accepted the female role model imposed on them by the society – docile, submissive, ungrudging, stoic resignation. So, there is no threat from them. But when Ammu challenges the norms assigned to a woman and attempts to reclaim her body – society is all set to make the wrong things right once again because:

Superior seed can fall on an inferior field but an inferior seed cannot fall on a superior field.<sup>1</sup>

She has been termed as *veshyas*:

the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from *Veshyas* or their illegitimate children... (page-8)

The novel becomes unique once again from its linguistic perspective. Literature has always been regarded as providing an index of cultural superiority. Roy here uses this mode to counter attack the so-called champions of the society. She adopts the English language but appropriates it into Indian context. Roy does the same thing what R.K. Narayan says :

the time has come for us to consider seriously the question of a Bharat brand of English. So far English has had a comparatively confined existence in our country chiefly in the halls of learning, justice, or administration. Now the time is ripe for it to come to the dusty street, market place, and under the banyan tree.<sup>2</sup>

She breaks and subverts the accepted norms and makes it anew. 'Her stylistic innovations include use of words, phrases, and even sentences from the vernacular language, use of italics and upper case letters, subject-less sentences, faulty spellings, topicalization, deviation from normal word order, single word sentences, change of word classes, clustering of word classes, and a variety of other techniques.'<sup>3</sup>

She invented a new way of writing thus providing a voice to the so-called silenced people.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* shows history in live performance and thus it wonderfully illumines that space on Indian literary scene where the pre-modern world meets the post-modern world. The novel, *The God of Small Things*, reminds us of the writings of Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing etc. They have also experimented with their narrative strategies to voice the devoiced selves. The novel with

its phenomenal success truly adds a new dimension to the corpus of Indian writing in English.

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