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PROBLEMS OF A MADE – DALIT IN
ARUNDHATI ROY'S 'THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS'

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the problems of a woman who falls in love with a Dalit youth and thereby she is made a Dalit. If we observe and analyze the characterization of Ammu, the woman – protagonist in Arundhati Roy's debut novel *The God of Small Things*, Ammu appears to have represented the fourth world, having been put to inequity both in family and in society. If dalits are deprived of basic amenities, health, education, right to possess property, social security, moreover respectable social identity, Ammu, who was born in a Syrian Christian petty - bourgeois family is also deprived of the same in the caste – stricken class society in India. At several instances, Ammu appears a Dalit. The aim of this paper is to show how a pathetic social reality is reflected in this novel through the character of Ammu. In order to achieve the above purpose, the Dialectical and Historical Materialistic method is employed. This method helps us explore the relationship between literature and the contemporary social relations which are otherwise called production relations. This method was propounded by Karl Marx and Fredric Engels.

Key Words: Made- Dalit, Deprivation of higher education, Pathetic marital life, Place of woman in a traditional family set up, Deprivation of right to property and love etc.

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INTRODUCTION

The world is a cluster of contradictions. If anything exists, that exists in contradictions, and so the 'Fourth World' is not an exception for it. If a born dalit, caters to the needs of oppressors at the cost of the interests of his class, and mints money, that person can no longer be a dalit. Similarly, even if anyone - though born in any upper caste or oppressive class - is neglected and evicted by his or her own class and by the main stream of society, having been deprived of human rights, that person will unhesitatingly be an underdog, and so a dalit.

The social and economic positions of various sections of people are not fixed and stagnant. They always undergo change because everything exists in motion which causes change. That is the reason why, the social positions of the ruling classes and the ruled have been subjected to evolutionary changes. For instance the then ruling class people have become the ruled and vice versa, and so today's fourth world will, perhaps, evolve into a significant social force which could help abolish all kinds of evil discriminations!

If we observe and analyze the characterization of Ammu, the woman – protagonist in Arundhati Roy's debut novel *The God of Small Things*, Ammu appears to have represented the fourth world, having been put to inequity both in family and in society. If dalits are deprived of basic amenities, health, education, right to possess property, social security, moreover identity, Ammu, who was born in a Syrian Christian petty - bourgeois family is also deprived of the same in the caste – stricken class society in India. At several instances, Ammu appears a dalit.

Deprivation of Higher Education :

Ammu is put to bitter discrimination within the family. While her brother is allowed to pursue higher studies, she is forced to stay home, waiting for marriage proposals. Her heart throbs for higher education after schooling but her father deems it an unnecessary expenditure on daughter's education. Consequently she leaves home for Calcutta (now Kolkata) and there she happens to marry an alcoholic.

Pathetic Marital Life:

Woman has been an unequal partner in the traditional Indian social set up. She is made inferior to man in every aspect; to her husband, to her father, to her brother(s) or to her son(s). Beatings and other forms of physical violence are common modes of oppression of women by men ever since the 'mother-right' was replaced by 'father-right' centuries ago. Woman's Putting up with this family violence is hailed as a virtue in epics and in modern Art and Literature too.

Ammu with marriage, jumps from frying pan into fire and she once again becomes a victim of domestic violence. When he tried to prostitute her to his English boss with view to keeping his job, she vociferously protests his attempts and later gives divorce to him and returns to her parents, along with her two children.

"Drunken violence followed by post – drunken badgering. ... When his bouts of violence began to include the children, and the war with Pakistan began, Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem." - (p 42)

Place of Woman in Traditional Indian Family Setup:

In a class - society, the male domination over women continues unhindered. Mutual understanding, love, equality and friendship do not constitute the basis of marriages. Matrimonial life continues to be horrible and hypocrisy is rampant both in family and in social life. Nayanatara Sehgal renowned Indian feminist writer says that the traditional institution of marriage has become a millstone to the neck of woman in India. In the traditional family system, the man is considered the owner of the family. If the man is considered the owner of the family, the other members become either slaves or servants and so woman in the traditional family set up can never become an equal partner to him, as the relationship between them is that of an owner and a slave or servant instead of love and understanding. In this rigid system of social structure, woman is chained in several bonds. She lives as a subordinate to man, the male. This is the reason why, Pappachi refuses to permit her to go for higher education, and her husband tortures and tries prostitute her. It is only due to the deep rooted spurious notion, according to which woman is a second - rate human being!

Ever since she returned to Ayemenem, she becomes unaccompanied. She is neglected by the members of her own family and thrown into a dark corner. Furthermore, she fails to get emotional support when her father does not empathize and sympathize with her. He implicitly finds fault with his daughter, Ammu.

Pappachi would not believe her story – not because he thought well of her husband, but simply because he did not believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man's wife. (p 42)

Deprivation of Right to Property and Love:

When she loves Velutha, a man of many virtues, but a born untouchable in the so – called civilized society, she is imprisoned in the Aymenem house while her beloved is killed. Velutha, the God of small things and the one who understood her, who had given her warmth, sense of her own importance and love, is brutally smashed by one of the wings of state – machinery. She 'longed for him. Ached for him with the whole of her biology.' – (p 330)

After the completion of Sophie Mol's funeral, she is compelled to leave home by Chacko, her own brother. "Pack your things and leave" – (p 302) She too, cannot protest against this injustice. Because, she has no claim over the property, as a woman during 1960s in India was not a legal inheritor of her parents' property.

Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my factory, my pineapples, my pickles. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property. (p 57)

Ammu's deprivation of right to property is resulted from the contradictions between the productive forces and the production relations (also called property relations). which form the basis for social relations.

As soon as, her secret sensual liaison is revealed to others, she becomes an untouchable on the reason that the counter part of a dalit inevitably becomes a dalit. Though this perception is dormant in the caste – stricken society, it swims to surface, when she dies. She leaves home in search of jobs for mere livelihood, in vain. She battles with the patriarchal hegemony in society while trying to settle in any job. She is exhausted and vexed and eventually, found dead alone in 'Bharat Lodge,' which symbolizes the social reality that anybody who crosses the drawn lines or rebels against discriminative social order cannot survive, in the casteist Indian society.

Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat lodge in Alleppey, where she had gone for a job interview as someone's secretary. She died alone. ... Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age. (p 161)

The church - men also refuse to perform her burial as, she is more than touched by an untouchable and so she is also considered an untouchable. Ammu a born a Syrian Christian, lives a second rate human being, wades through the muddy pool of social barriers and injustices, and ultimately dies an untouchable.

CONCLUSION

Chalam, a renowned Telugu feminist - writer and critic says, like man, woman too has body, brain and heart and therefore she needs exercise to her body, knowledge to brain, and experience to heart! Miserably, though Ammu is the daughter of a scientist, she is deprived of the above said. Furthermore, she experiences all social restrictions and discriminations in society. Being a woman, she is deprived of higher education, harassed by husband, neglected as divorcee; and moreover, unlawfully imprisoned in home while her beloved is killed, in a fake – encounter, by the police; expelled from the house by her own sibling, vexed at searching for a job for mere livelihood and at last, found dead after sometime in a lodge. So, she is undoubtedly a dalit, though she was born in a caste - family. Ammu, a lively character falling prey to gender discrimination, is a specimen for the society in which women outside the Fourth World are made dalits. Therefore, Dalits are not only born but are made too! And these made – dalits and other suppressed classes and sections essentially empathize and sympathize with the fourth world and will even join hands with it in the struggle against exploitation and oppression. Marx and Engels declare,

Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. (Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1997.)

Ms. Roy has projected the gender oppression and problems of the woman - protagonist in isolation making no connection with class oppression and class struggle. But in Marxist understanding, the gender inequalities, to which Ammu fell a prey, are a part of class inequity and so gender oppression is a part and parcel of class - oppression. The root cause of gender oppression lies in exploitative production system. The emancipation of women like Ammu, the made – dalits, become possible only by replacing the exploitative production system with a non - exploitative one by class – struggles and so literature should reflect this historical truth as art is not for its own sake but for the sake of people and social justice!

GLOSSARY

Mother right: Woman's right over children and property .

Father right: Father's right over children and property.

Productive forces: Land, Labour, tools etc., which are required in Production.

Production relations: Property relations or material conditions of social life, based on production system.

Production system: Both Productive forces, and Production relations are together called the production system of a country.

Classes: Groups of people in a society that are thought of as being at the same social or economic level.

Class Struggle: Struggle between the two main classes - exploiters and the exploited. In Slavery - masters and slaves. In

Feudalism - feudal lords and peasants. In Capitalism –capitalists and workers.

Syrian Christians: Upper – caste people (next to Brahmins) in Kerala.

Pappachi: 'Grand - father' in Malayalam, the official language of Kerala one of the states in India.

Mol: 'Girl' in Malayalam.

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