



## Literature

*Elixir Literature* 61 (2013) 17174-17176

**Elixir**  
ISSN: 2229-712X

# “Those Who Have Once Been Silenced” in Roy’s *The God of Small Things*

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 3 June 2013;

Received in revised form:

1 August 2013;

Accepted: 12 August 2013;

#### Keywords

Literature,  
Employe,  
Productions,  
Malfunction.

### ABSTRACT

Literature has always been employed as a source for voicing trepidations and reconnoitering social productions, issues, malfunctioning and identities. It has allowed writers to give vent to their shared experiences while crafting novel and imaginative worlds which can be deduced by observers in numerous ways. Language, the main ingredient of literature, is acknowledged as a social stimulus and also a stimulus of social progress that has trailed its way for unknown ages, which is above all capricious and subjective dictums and existed unbridled by fiat or decree. The capacity and possibility of infinite influence, which language can hold, is marked in the narrative of the text itself. Within the novel of Roy “The God of Small Things” power and force of language is used in order to express multiple social identities and social mal-behaviors. Language, as a device for understanding and structuring social rationalities and social transgressions, plays a dynamic role in the creation and establishment of the untouchables’ place in Indian society in Roy’s novel. This will be illustrated by looking at how language offers voice to those who have once been silenced in a given social mosaic. In order to provide a base for a better comprehension of the role of language within the novel under consideration, Lecerle’s ideas about the force of language are very helpful.

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### Introduction

Literature has always been employed as a source for voicing trepidations and reconnoitering social productions, issues, malfunctioning and identities. It has allowed writers to give vent to their shared experiences while crafting novel and imaginative worlds which can be deduced by observers in numerous ways. Language, the main ingredient of literature, is acknowledged as a social stimulus and also a stimulus of social progress that has trailed its way for unknown ages, which is above all capricious and subjective dictums and existed unbridled by fiat or decree. The capacity and possibility of infinite influence, which language can hold, is marked in the narrative of the text itself. Within the novel of Roy “The God of Small Things” power and force of language is used in order to express multiple social identities and social mal-behaviors. Language, as a device for understanding and structuring social rationalities and social transgressions, plays a dynamic role in the creation and establishment of the untouchables’ place in Indian society in Roy’s novel. This will be illustrated by looking at how language offers voice to those who have once been silenced in a given social mosaic. In order to provide a base for a better comprehension of the role of language within the novel under consideration, Lecerle’s ideas about the force of language are very helpful. Jean- Jacques Lecerle and Denise Riley argue about the power of language in *The Force of Language* as ‘Simply the utterance is not the linguistic incarnation of an abstract proposition, not a carrier of information but of affect’ (69-70). He also gives vent to his ideas in following words as: ‘So language has strong material effect: the sequence of words is also a string of sounds, capable of breaking crystal and of inflicting pain’ (2005: 89). While drawing upon the ideas of Lecerle and Riley, my contention here is to explore the

domination of odd syntactical and verbal combinations, rogue capital letters, and unpredicted elaborations, which are found in a ubiquitous fashion in Roy’s novel, and their subsequent relation to phenomenon of untouchability and social marginalization in post-colonial Kerala. Although creative attempts, but with no provocation of structural deviations, were made by earlier Indian English writers like Anita Desai with the purpose to encompass, enlarge and extend the English language in order to accommodate the native Indian experience but certain other literary figures like Salman Rushdie have deliberately departed from standard English towards its indianization/nativization. Arundhati Roy is the only female novelist who ventured to curvature the pulses and edifice of the English language to the shades and nuances of Indian indigenous expressions and experience; the social inequality, brutal caste system, and imposed love laws, etc. Arundhati puts across her discontent with the communal settings of India where phenomenon of untouchability and social marginalization prevails to date not letting these individuals live as free men. Velutha, the God of Loss, the outcast is not alleged to survive with the touchables for as long as he and incalculable others existing in Indian society are attached to the stigma of untouchability. Ammu, another untouchable within the supposed touchable community is found unable to claim her part of bliss as her quest of delight is thought to fragment the social norms where the social structure is not disposed to put up with any kind of alteration in its conventional order. Roy is found dealing with deprecation of societal class segmentation in the context of Kerala, an Indian state, presenting despondent predicament of dalits and fight of a woman attempting to pursue her share of happiness in a patriarchal society. Velutha, the God of Small Things, contravenes the time-honored social rules by entering

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into a love relation with a touchable woman who belonged to a higher caste and is doomed to his awful fatality. The notion of untouchability is dealt with at two forums in the given novel. At first place are found socially untouchables commonly called Paravan, who are deprived of basic human rights while at second place, we encounter emblematic and metaphoric untouchables, like ammu, Rahel and Estha, existing in high castes. For a better understanding of the phenomenon of discrimination towards the dalit character, Velutha, in novel and overall scenario of pitiable plight of Indian dalits, it is important to be conversant with caste structure in Indian social order. In India, castes are classified, titled, and endogamous groups of individuals, and affiliation to a certain caste is directly related to birth of an individual. Four pivotal social groups are found in Hindu holy Rig Veda and each of those social groups was supposed to execute a specific purpose in society. Brahmin caste was considered as celebrant while Kshatriyas were, by default, taken as combatants and monarchs. Vaisyas were property and land owners and traders; and Sudras were artificers and servants (Heitzman & Warden 1995: 267). No one can switch from one caste to another one. According to Micheal D. Coogan (2003), individuals born into a given social order in India are believed to be outgrowth of their past destiny and their social standing is generally assumed to be predestined and irrevocable. (159-160).

The code of Manu describes that an intermarriage between a higher caste female and a lower caste male results in a 'Candala', illustrated as 'the lowest of men', who is/are found sharing feature of the existing 'Untouchables' (Moffit 1979: 34). The given term 'scheduled castes' in India is being used for untouchables since 1935. They are also known as 'The children of God', Harijan, a name given to them by Mahatma Gandhi. Lately the groups under discussion are better known as dalits, which means oppressed or subjugated ones. The novel by Roy inquires into fates of socially outcaste, rebellious to the supposed margins attributed to them by time and society, who are inadvertently doomed to annihilation. Encompassing the slaughter of dream and life, novel is replete with evocative language encumbered with imagery, wordplay, humor and rhymes beautifully employed by Roy. This distinct and idiosyncratic language inventiveness and ingenuity by Roy is also found corresponding to above discussed phenomena of marginalized caste system, patriarchal society and setting in of communist movements; elements usually found in Dalit literature, in India. However, apart from the persuasive and distinctive language of the novel, it is the act of Roy's linguistic transgression and her departure from linguistic norms that corresponds to the phenomenon of infringement of those who are destined to be meagre and socially oppressed, a denunciation of Love Laws set down by given society (Roy 1997: 33) in her novel.

She epitomises patriarchal customs of the given social structure through obnoxious, frenzied and autocrat men who subdue not only dreams but also existence of females living in their circle. Ammu's cravings and her intrinsic nature contravene the destiny laid down for her by the social system. Her disposition makes us come across an appraisal of patriarchal mores entrenched in supposedly cultured folks of Kerala. Ammu, being offspring of a disgusting, petulant father and an anguished, long tormented mother, is the untouchable from a touchable family and a mere marginal existence in the family structure. She has no means of realising choice and freedom because she was kept deprived of schooling, 'an unnecessary

expense for a girl', according to her father (38). Velutha, the untouchable, is also 'The God of loss' and 'The God of Small Things' leaving his no trail or shadow anywhere (Roy 1997: 265). Roy fairly raises the issue of untouchability, enlightenment of Indian society and its acceptance in view of pre-existing social norms, as she thinks that change and approval of change are two different things. The God of Small Things presents a group of touchables, Ammu's parents, her aunt Baby Kochama, who propagate social hierarchy in terms of social order and sexual category while characters of Ammu, her two children and Velutha intentionally, at the same time unconsciously, fight back these imposed orders and social hierarchies. Every one of them is found meddling with social rules which set down the permissibility for a living being to be loved or to be loathed in a given social order (31) and at the same point Roy takes form of a linguistic transgressor by meddling with linguistic norms by using unnecessary capitals as found in following examples: 'She deemed them Capable of Anything. Anything at all.' and again 'For a Breath of Fresh Air. To Pay for the Milk. To Let Out a Trapped Wasp.' (28- 29). The loss of social boundaries by both, Ammu and velutha, in the novel corresponds to loss of linguistic boundaries by Roy. We find a sort of linguistic transgression by Roy in the form of employment of capital letters while discussing issues of Comarade Pillai, a hypocrite Marxist in novel, 'He dismissed the whole business as the Inevitable Consequence of Necessary Politics' (14), in the form of construction of a sentence comprising the incident where Rahel was punished for misbehaving on the arrival of Sophi Mol and she is found asking an innocent question to her twin brother Rahel, 'Where d'you think people are sent to Jolly Well Behave' (150), and ultimately the death of Velutha 'Which left the police saddled with the Death in Custody of a technically innocent man' (314). As a common phenomenon, excessive use of capital letters is considered distracting and such a text is found uncomfortable to read because capital letters form a busy text sending pointless signals. But in *The God of Small Things* capital letters develop as Roy's considerable agents helping her through in her politics of transmission of her message to her potential reader by featuring emphasis technique. Arundhati Roy's linguistic inventiveness and ingenuity keep reader oscillating and mapping between two universes: Universe of linguistic form and linguistic meaning and the other Universe of intended and implicit meaning. Her distinct and novel linguistic constructions, either for sarcastic prominence or courtesy, help reader understand nature of a fact that she might find rather difficult to describe amply in a brief given space and chooses to employ readers' own faculties of depiction, portrayal and comprehension. Roy makes her deliberate departure from conventional linguistic rules by using very short, most of the time single-word, sentences, usually interrupting normal syntax, thus making no sense to reader if taken out of their particular context but at the same time, while taken in their particular context, this distinct syntactic formation creates a punch and makes an emphatic point involving emphasis, association, elucidation, and focus while entertaining disruption in Roy's prose. This idiosyncratic syntactic formation accelerates prompt incoherence in the novel, subsequently serving as an appropriate resource for inducing corporal and emotional facets of the narrative. The occurrence of such syntactic structures can be observed when twins are rebuked by their mother as, 'Is. That. Clear?', the description of Estha's love for his sister, Rahel, 'She

was lovely to him. Her hair. Her cheeks. Her small, clever-looking hands. His sister.' (299), in the description of outer world of 'Trains. Traffic. Music. The stock Market' (15), and the 'Sealed. Healed. Untapped.' (306) scars slashing across the bark of rubber trees. The unfamiliar linguistic structures such as, 'Porketmunny?' (102) instead of pocket money, 'Lemonorange?' (103), 'His lemontoolemon, too cold' (105), '(legs thiswayandthat)' (107), spontaneous remark of Comarade Pillai, 'Die-vorced?', and 'Mo-stfortunate' (130), become expressive of relative social violation particularly practiced by drink vendor in movie hall. On the other hand, Roy shows how the supremacy of Love Laws (who should be loved and how much) makes panoptic operations work in a social system that intercedes attitude of individuals according to their inherent caste in a society where travelers are never allowed ashore even if they have sailed unanchored on troubled seas, where sorrows are never gloomy enough, joys never joyful enough, and where dreams are never big enough (Roy 1997: 53). The Love Laws serve as surveillance to acquire and retain supremacy, control and social order, however, sensual craving attests to be the innate human feature that even socially imposed caste system cannot efficaciously regulate. Sexual desire exhibited by Ammu, Velutha and Chachu elucidates the use of panoptic operations in *The God of Small Things*. According to social norms, Ammu's and Velutha's desire for corporeal pleasure is supposed to be exterminated, while Chacko's sexual carving simply needs to be managed by his mother who allows and secretly pays to many women to visit her son regularly. Every part of Velutha's life: his childhood, his relationship with Ammu, his interest in Marxist ideas, is designed by his social status imposed on him by society. The most obvious example in this context is his association with Ammu since their childhood. During childhood, he made miniature timber playthings and put them in Ammu's outspread hand as he was supposed not to touch even her hand. Ultimately, Ammu transgressed the social boundaries by stopping extending her hand out and letting Velutha touch her hands. Velutha offered her and her kids what is denied to them by society and Ayemenem house. Consequently, she is cast out to die alone at 'a very viable diable age' (161). Even though she had realized that she was in love with Velutha, however, she presages her kids to keep away from him as it could create a trouble but she could not make herself understand the same thing, when she realized just how Velutha had turned into a man from a boy, 'She wondered at how his body had changed – so quietly, from a flat-muscled boy's body into a man's body. Contoured and hard.' (80-81). Velutha did nothing erroneous by adoring Ammu, though his low social status brought him ultimate demolition. His life and death both were designed by his social standing and untouchability. The description of the establishment of relationship between two lovers, asserted as "claim of History's friends" (214) by Roy, takes reader into the instant where both lovers recognize their affinity to each other that was "Obscured by history's blinkers' (176). It is the tragic trauma that they were seen by Velutha's slavery addicted father and his very addiction and terror made him disclose the secrete love of the socially prohibited lovers. Resultantly, both lovers ended up disbursing price for unlawful love, that had transgressed 'History's Plans' (199). The unlawful love of two lovers might have 'made the unthinkable thinkable and the impossible really happen' (31) during times where Roy made this story a story of hope that apparently turns to be a story of loss of dreams, hopes and lives (242). The unapologetic

depiction of lovers' lovemaking is another landmark of revolt of the 'The Small God' (19), an exposition of resistance of weak and downgraded in a social hierarchy through a corporeal performance (242) and this phenomenon is corresponded by the novelty of Roy's linguistic inventiveness of small and big Gods. On the other hand, the lovers' belief in fragility and 'Sticking to Smallness' (339) is novelist's technique by which she succeeds in retaining battle of marginalized against 'Structure. Order. Complete monopoly of Human history, masquerading as God's purpose' (321, 309) even in termination of her novel.

Overall, novel is found replete with inaudible distraction of lives ailing in seclusion and haunting isolation. The disposition of persistent melancholy, linguistic inventiveness and novelty in the novel add to despondency and gloom. The river, the colour of obscuring sepia, presents the existence of an apocalyptic emblem of the lurking peril of annihilation and submergence of the self. A sense of looming fate outshines lovers' lovemaking at the finale of the novel as the abandoned house regresses behind them, 'a steamer hooted again, a little closer now, melancholy, hollow' as they are literally and metaphorically shown sunk into a the grey-river bed (304) by Roy. Arundhati Roy seems employing the Indian Gothic aesthetic in her language and imagery for the purpose of reconnoitering and critiquing Indian disquiets about marginalization and regretful doom of untouchables. The Kerala that Roy paints with the help of imagery found in her language, remains an enigma, a place of Untouchables and the embryonic middle-class, a ghostly place of monsoon and the persons with grey leaves on their backs that make monsoon come in time (336) and at the same time, underlines the social prejudices enacted upon non-conforming entities in the context of a society perforated with colonial reminiscences and class obsessions where even delicate love can lead you to death. Thus by using language 'not as a carrier of information but affect' (Lecerle & Riley 2005: 69-70) for fabricating social authenticities and fashioning and shaping it to her own purpose, Roy generates a voice within a society which leaves little room for the expression of oppressed and socially marginalized ones. Her injurious speech echoes relentlessly (Lecerle & Riley 2005: 65) either through the strange imagery painted by her or through the smashed linguistic boundaries – the smashed linguistic boundaries that make Velutha and Ammu, socially assumed and un-assumed untouchables respectively, shatter all social bonds imposed on them by wretched time and space thus making Velutha God of Loss leaving no image in mirrors but he left a deep footprint and a painful shriek, for society and its mal-functioning norms and order, to be echoed through all times to come.

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