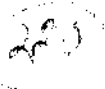


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ARUNDHATI ROY'S TREATMENT OF INDIAN REALITY IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*



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PREFACE

“The truth of art signifies its power to imaginatively inscribe hitherto unknown dimensions of reality” (Surendra Narayan Jha, qtd in *Indian Women Novelists in English*.2001:145)” Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* unfolds a unique dimension of reality in general, and Indian reality in particular with ‘extraordinary linguistic inventiveness’(The Booker citation). Imbued with poetry, her narrative style dismisses the monopoly of ‘established reality’ to define what is real- in a way, Roy has attempted to de-define reality, like a few other promising Indians writing in English today. Centering around an engaging tale of a cross-caste doomed love between a Paravan boy (untouchable) and a Syrian Christian girl, the novel develops a number of themes to present Indian reality from different perspectives. Apart from the dominant language discourse, two other discourses prove to be central to the novel-1) socio-cultural discourse and 2) political discourse. This paper shows how the above-mentioned discourses have been infused into the fabric of the novel to offer a successful rendering of Indian reality. The chapter ‘The Plight of the Untouchables’ demonstrates how a rigid caste-structure plays havoc with innumerable innocent lives. The transgressors, who dare break the laws of love (the laws that lay down who should be loved and how and how much), are treated cruelly. The next chapter ‘Woman’s Place in a Patriarchal society’ manifests how women are relegated to the status of mere ‘females’ as opposed to ‘males’ (Beauvoir, qtd in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2001:2014). Inhuman treatment of women is inbuilt into the standards of behavior in a patriarchal society. ‘Game of Socialist Politics: an Indictment of Marxism’ is a chapter revealing the actual

characters of some self-proclaimed Marxists who frequently change their and achieve their own agenda by fair means or foul. Through realistic portrayal of Chacko, supposedly a communist, and Comrade Pillai, a shrewd advantage-seeker who operates under the veneer of Marxism, Roy exposes the ugly face of Marxist politics which often does not have anything to do with the upliftment of the downtrodden.

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no other single work of fiction with the exception of *Midnight's Children* has made such a momentous impact of Indian English literature in recent decades as has Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* has. She is one of the few Indian English writers actively interested in contemporary socio-political issues as is amply evidenced in a number of articles, interviews and books she has written on various topics in recent years. The impact of her novel is all the more significant considering that the author has so far produced only one novel; it won her Britain's premier book prize, the Booker Mc Connell in 1997. This was the first Booker Awarded to a non-expatriate Indian author; it is the first time an Indian woman author has been able to have an impact with just one novel won this prize. (*The God of Small Things: A Critical Study*, 2004:1)

Arundhati Roy shows her mastery in the seasoned manipulation of reality with a heavily experimental style. She manages to capture fragments of reality and put them together in her work. *The God of Small Things* does not merely transcribe reality, but makes it come alive. Roy's certain technical innovations of modernism and the linguistic deviations are but the definite design to fathom the deeper meaning behind the superficial framework. Surendra Narayan Jha notes "Roy renders her varied experience of Indian reality through subjective mental lenses by aptly employing experimental narrative techniques"(Jha, qtd in *Indian Women Novelists in English*.2001:146). She views the socio-political situations of South India with ironic detachment but highlights almost each and every incident happening around her with a fidelity to reality which the ordinary eye is prone to miss. The very essence of *The God of Small Things* is in a line such as the following: " Little events, ordinary things,

smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story.”(p.32)

The present study analyzes the treatment of Indian reality as portrayed by Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*. The study has selected some elements of South Indian reality as portrayed in the novel and throws light on them to show how they rule people's life and allow the privileged ones to subjugate the downtroddens.

One of the chief socio-political concerns in *The God of Small Things* is the rigid caste-structure of contemporary South- India, which partially constitutes the social discourse of the novel. The 'big' wears down the 'small' with no qualms and the downtroddens cannot escape their doom and fight back throughout her novel. Roy employs a specially crafted language to delineate the constant suffering of untouchables and have-nots. Merely because of his ignoble birth, Velutha, a poor Paravan (untouchable), is denied access to facilities enjoyed by the touchable workers of a pickle factory and is ostracized by the rest of society. He is helplessly entrapped in the snare engineered by some advantage-seekers of a cruel world and is mercilessly beaten and dragged to the police station by the 'touchable' Policemen where he eventually breathes his last.

The history of severe exploitation of the untouchables dates back at least to the arrival of the British in Malabar. To escape the scourge of untouchability, a number of poor Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas (among whom Kelan, Velutha's grandfather, was one) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church. They came to be identified as Rice- Christians because they were offered some food and money by the British. But there too they were "targeted as" objects of pity. They came to realize

their predicament when they 'were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests'(P.75). Their condition worsened after independence as they were not entitled to "any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates.."(p74) because officially they were Christians and, therefore belong to a casteless community. It dawned on the converts that they had jumped from the frying pan only to burn in fire. (*The God of Small Things: A Critical Study*)

Coming from a Paravan background, Velutha, without doing any wrong or even witnessing anything that had taken place at the time of his grandfather, is treated as an outcast and sent to the untouchable's school. He proves his artistry as a carpenter in Mammachi's factory and is admitted by Mammachi as a skilled carpenter there. But to appease other "touchable" workers, Mammachi pays him less, though she admits that Velutha has the skills of an engineer, and can mend radios, clocks and water-pumps.

Subsequently, as we learn from the course of events of the novel, Ammu and Velutha have an affair defying all barriers created by caste, creed and community. Ammu, a transgressor with no "Locust Stand I", a derelict, embraces, in effect, another transgressor who leaves "no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors".(p.145) Jointly they violate the 'Love Laws'. Her family backs Ammu to save face, whereas Vellaya Papan, Velutha's father, offers to kill his son as Vellaya Papan is servile and 'an Old World Paravan'. Consequently, Velutha's 'footprints' are totally erased by caste-conscious society and he is lost in the dark alleys of history.

The sheer vulnerability of women is another concern of the social discourse of the novel; it constitutes a great part of the textual reality of the novel. Roy's portrayal of the plight of women in a

South Indian setting shocks us into recognition of the fact that the social mechanisms that have evolved over centuries do not allow women to emerge as separate entities that can make a difference. Chandra Talpade Mohanty declares “the assumption of women as an already constituted coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally”(Mohanty, qtd in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. 1994:58) The subjugation of women starts within the family and continues from one generation to another. Women are not allowed to assert their presence; they are cornered, pitied and looked down upon by their male counterparts. The only female who dares to rebel is Ammu but she is labeled as a “transgressor” and has to die an ignoble death as she breaks the “Love Laws and enters into forbidden territory”(p339).

The novelist portrays the plights of women in three stages; they are: 1) Ammu’s suffocating pre-marital stay in Ayemenem, her return with two children to an unwelcoming family and finally her brief affair with Velutha, which eventually cuts her life short. 2) Mammachi’s extremely disturbed conjugal tie with Pappachi, which results from Chako’s attempt to stop Pappachi’s regular beating of Mammachi. 3) Baby Kochamma’s unrequited love for Father Mulligan and her eventual spinsterhood. To take up the case of Ammu first, her pre-marital stay at her father’s house introduces us to the cool-headed cruelty of Pappachi. His behavior with his daughter highlights how intensely his brutish violence had affected Ammu’s psyche. Daughter of a Syrian-Christian family, she is compelled to taste male-chauvinist brutality and hypocrisy through no one but her own father(p.180-182). Ammu is forced to quit her studies the year her father retires. He believes that a college education is ‘an unnecessary expense for a girl’. Both Pappachi and Mammachi are quite indifferent about Ammu’s marriage. Due to increasing negligence and the ‘cold, calculating cruelty of her parents’, Ammu feels

like a captive lady who has no freedom and has to succumb to the wishes of her parents. It is not surprising then that Ammu accepted the proposal of a man whom she had known only for a short time simply because 'she thought anything, anyone at all would be better than returning to Ayemenem'(p.39). But she is shocked to discover that her dipsomaniac husband is ready to hand over his wife to his boss to safeguard his job. Ammu then has no alternative but to divorce him and return 'to her parents in Ayemenem . To everything that she had left few years ago. Except that she had two young children. And no more dreams.'(p.43). Back home, her reception is a cold one. Her father does not believe that "an Englishman, any Englishman would covet another man's wife"(p.42), while, her mother, Mammachi, thinks 'what her grandchildren suffer from was far worse than Inbreeding. She meant having parents who were divorced'(p.61). Ammu quickly learns about society's 'ugly face of sympathy'. At this stage she realizes that she is 'already damned'; she becomes 'an unmixable mix combining the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber'(p.44). She loses her dignity and is virtually an 'untouchable' in her family as well as society (*The God of Small Things: A Critical Study*, 2004:57)

Her doomed affair with Velutha starts at this phase of her life. Ammu wants to articulate Velutha's fiery spirit of protest and feels greatly attracted to this rebel ' like a plant in a dark room towards a wedge of light'(p.125). Being representatives of oppressed and the marginalized people, both try to seek solace in each other's warmth. Knowing fully well that they have no future in a society deliberately hostile to individuals who violate its "Love Laws" and enter into forbidden territory, they stick to small things, to minute but uncountably valuable pleasure. Subsequently, Velutha becomes an easy victim of ' the boundless, infinitely inventive art of human hatred'(p.266) and is forced to embrace death.

In Pappachi's habit of regularly beating up his wife, Roy gives us another glimpse at the way women are treated in South Indian Society. Despite his long official stay in Delhi and a brief stint abroad, he remains all along an orthodox, jealous husband. There are numerous references in the novel enumerating his maniac capabilities; he is a compulsive wife-beater, and thrashes his wife mercilessly either with a brass vase (p.50) or his "his ivory-handled riding crop"(p.181). Mammachi hardly protests and adapts herself 'properly into the conventional scheme of things"(p122). Pappachi's physical abuse of his wife is finally stopped by Chako's superior physical might. One day "he twisted his father's hand' and said,'I never want this to happen again"(p.48). This incident hurts Pappachi's pride so deeply that he never speaks to her till his death. He has nothing to do with her pickle making. To him, her job is too menial to suit the dignity and status of a respectable 'high-ranking government official'(p.47). What disturbs him most is the sudden attention that Mammachi enjoys because of her flourishing business: "He has always been a jealous man, so he greatly resented the attention his wife was getting"(p.47)

The third and last example of the way women are treated in Roy's novel is Baby Kochamma's compulsive attraction towards Father Mulligan. When Father Mulligan returns to Madras, Baby displays her obstinacy by defying her father. She becomes a Roman Catholic and goes to Madras as a trainee and enters a convent hoping that she would spend as much time with Father Mulligan as she could. But because of the "superior" nuns and business of Father Mulligan, she is convinced that she will hardly succeed in her mission. The subsequent frustration turns her into an eccentric. Day by day, Baby Kochamma grows more and more bad-tempered and resentful and peevish. Roy describes Baby Kochamma's anger and hatred in the following words: 'Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she

saw her quarrelling with a fate...The fate of the wretched Manless woman. The sad, Father Mullignan-less Baby Kochamma'(p.45)

In addition to the socio-cultural context, *The God Of Small Things* also has a political context which gives rise to a great deal of controversy. Roy's indictment of pseudo socialist politics and of people like Namboodirapad has led one critic to conclude "Roy denounces socialism with the intention of gaining the favor of the western readers in her mind."(K K John qtd in *Contemporary Indian Writings in English*.2001:62). But an insightful reading of the text will not agree with the comment made by K K John as Roy denounces the flawed practice of communism, not communism itself. If she had an intention to appease the western readers, she would directly attack communism itself. Moreover she criticizes capitalism as we find an ironic overtone in her description of the huge capitalist project taking possession of The History House.

The novel does throw light on the political activities of communists in Kerala. The Naxalites(the rebels) fight to ensure payment of minimum wages to laborers as specified by the Trade Unions. The Naxalites also fight the sexual exploitation of poor and helpless women by their employers and the practice of men from elite families who marry servant girls and make them pregnant and then abandon them. The novel satirizes the politicians, who do politics to serve their own interest and throws light on such politicians doing politics to serve their own interest in the garb of serving people through their political activities. One such character is Comrade K.N.M. Pillai, the self-proclaimed Marxist leader of the workers. Quite contrary to his Maoist slogans –'Annihilation of the class enemy' or 'Class is caste', he shows little concern about Velutha and never openly protests against their common class enemy, Chacko. It is his hypocritical approach that makes him denounce

'Chacko-the management' while he willingly allures 'Chacko-the client' to come to his printing press printing press(p.275). He is only apparently imbued with revolutionary ideas of social change, for 'change is one thing. Acceptance is another')p.275). It is he who helps Baby Kochamma by convincing the inspector at the Kottayam Police Station about Velutha's arrogance. He does this because Velutha's removal would get him the electoral votes of the workers of the pickle factory and, thereby, ensure him a seat in the Legislative Assembly.(*The God of Small Things:A Critical Study*, 2001:57)

Thus, it is evident from the above that Arundhati Roy , in rendering Indian reality, carefully includes some issues and masterfully portrays them in her novel. The present study shows how successful the author has been in unfolding the vices and cruelty of a South Indian society based on rigid class, caste and sex distinctions.

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CHAPTER 1: The Plight of the Untouchables

Minute portrayal of the inhumane cruelty of cast-ridden South Indian society forms a major part of Roy's treatment of Indian reality. The question of untouchability centres around Velutha He is the God of Small Things, in fact the 'inversion of God' as the author herself says. Jaqueline Karp Gendre observes, "Untouchables simply have no existence and a woman who has an affair with one would be expelled from her caste. But even if you know no more about Kerala, then the tourist attraction of its Ayurvedic medicine, the universal implications of Roy's story are blatantly clear." (Gendre, qtd in *The God of Small things: a critical study*, 2004:61)

Roy portrays powerfully the miserable condition of Paravans (untouchables) like Velutha in *The God of Small Things*. This is how touchables like Pappachi and Mammachi treat them :

"Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her Girlhood, when 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 Paravan's footprint." p.210)

After independence, the condition of the untouchables was supposed to improve but it did not as they were not entitled to "any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates..." As for Velutha, Mammachi takes pity on him and asks his father to send him to the Untouchables' School and later employs him as a skilled carpenter in her factory, Paradise Pickles and Preserves. She is also convinced that Velutha has the skills of an engineer who can mend radios, clocks and water-pumps. "He was like a little magician. He could make intricate toys-tiny windmills, rattles,

minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds, he could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts" (p.74). Moreover, he was exceptionally talented in many other ways. "Velutha has a way with machines. Mammachi (with impenetrable Touchable logic) often said "if only he hadn't been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer". He mended radios, clocks, water pumps. He looked after the plumbing and all the electrical gadgets in the house" (p.75). He was indispensable at Ayemenem House.

Velutha is looked down upon and maltreated at every stage of his life. As a small boy, when he accompanies his father on his visit to the Ayemenem house to deliver the coconuts plucked from the trees of the factory compound, they have to enter through a back entrance. As a young man, he is treated suspiciously by Comrade K.N.M Pillai as he is a card-holder of the Communist Party; later, as a mature man, he is falsely implicated in the case of attempted rape of Ammukutty (who actually loves him) and is beaten badly and dragged to the police station by the "Touchable" Policemen where he eventually breathes his last. By nature, Velutha is bold, fearless and adventurous. In contrast, his father is humble and servile, as he is "an Old World Paravan" (p.76). His heart is often filled with terror because "He had seen the Crawling Backwards Days." In a fine passage, the author thus describes it: "Vellya Paapen feared for his younger son." He couldn't say what it was that frightened him. It was not something that he had said. Or done. It was not what he did, but the way he did it" (p.76). Vellaya Paapen's fears belong to the harsh tragic realities he had seen and experienced. He couldn't imagine transgressing the limits set by the caste system. He does not conceal the secret bonds of love between his son and Ammu, who night after night row across the river Meenachal in a little boat and meet at the deserted house, returning only at dawn. Bringing the matter to his benefactor Mammachi's notice, he tells her all what he has seen. He asks God's forgiveness for having spawned a monster. He offers to

kill his son with his own bare hands (p.78). Rajpal said, "Velutha's subjugation is multiple. He is born a Paravan, son of a Paravan, 'a community in Kerala', subjected to extreme ignominy through ages" (Rajpal, qtd in *The God of Small Things: Rama brothers*:2004:23). To escape humiliations, Velutha's forefathers had embraced Christianity. But the Christians themselves had adopted, as a matter of natural form, the strict and unavoidable caste-system; thus the Paravans had only received the status of "untouchable Christians" with separate church and priest" (*The God of Small Things: A Critical Study*, 2004:24)

Velutha is a sincere Trade Union Worker and that is how he comes to repose such abundant trust in Comrade Pillai and his Marxist party. KV Sundaran notes, "Velutha participated in the march organized by the Travancore-Cochin Marxist Labour Union as part of secretariat march to be organized by the their colleague in Trivandram"(Sundaram,qtd in *The God of Small Things: Rama brothers*.2004:72). Among the demands of the union were an hour's lunch break for paddy workers, increase in women worker's wages from Rs.1.25 to 3 and for men Rs. 2.50 to 4.50 a day. He also demanded that the untouchables be not addressed by their names, such as "Achoo *paravan*, or Kelan *paravan*, or kuttan *paravan*, or Kuttan *pulliyan*, but just as Achoo, Kelan or Kuttan"(p.69)

"The marchers that day were party workers, students, and the labourers themselves. Touchables and Untouchables. On their shoulder they carried a keg of ancient anger, lit with a recent fuse. There was an edge to this anger that was Naxalite, and new."

This created panic among the beer-sipping barons. After a Marxist government had taken over, Velutha had great hopes from this government. He had also high expectations from Comrade Pillai by

whose side he had remained standing loyally all along as a party worker and as a trade Unionist: Comrade Pillai blatantly refuses to give him any support in Velutha's greatest crisis:

"He is in a strange situation where fuss is made of him by the touchables, rich and poor alike and hated by the touchable unskilled workers in the factory: his helplessness of the situation is also exploited by the 'kind employed' who shrewdly manipulate him as a diluted paravan."(p.226)

So, Velutha is despised by his own party men, including Comrade Pillai who believes that "these caste issues are very deep-rooted"(p.278). As an untouchable he is not entitled to love someone of a high caste and yet survive. Subsequently, and as we learn from the novel, Ammu and Velutha turn lovers secretly, throwing away all scruples of caste, creed and community. Ammu, a great dreamer, even in daytime, dreams of "a cheerful man with one arm" (p.215) who leaves "no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors" (p.216). Arundhati Roy successfully evokes the image of such "footprints" in her novel, and the image grows insistently as the novel progresses. Velutha, a representative of such men, but because he is fiery and haughty in temper he does not sweep off his footprints with a broom, though his grandfather and father would have gladly done so. Consequently, the situation around him grows hostile and he is finally eliminated and his 'footprints' are totally erased. As a Comrade, he is despised by his own party men, including comrade K.N.M. Pillai who believes that "these caste issues are very deep-rooted" (p.278), and that as an Untouchable, Velutha is not entitled to love someone of a high caste and survive.

In Roy's portrayal, Baby Kochamma is "a typical sadist" She seems to derive immense pleasure in seeing helpless Paravan being pushed to the wall and rendered totally defenseless. The

incident in which Vellaya Paapan comes to inform her about the adulterous affair between Ammu and Velutha acquires high dramatic intensity

"Vellaya Paapen kept talking. Weeping, Retching, walking past the kitchen, heard the commotion. She found Mammachi spitting into the rain, THOO! THOO! THOO! And Vellaya Paapen lying in the slush, wet, weeping, groveling. Offering to kill his son. To tear him limb from limb. Mammachi was shouting, 'Drunken dog! Drunken Paravan liar'".

Baby Kochamma reports To the police that an untouchable had forced himself upon her niece Ammu. The dialogue between her and the Police Inspector Thomas Mathew is quite illustrative in this respect, he chides her for first spoiling "these people by carrying them about on your head like trophies, then when they misbehave, you come running to us for help"(p.261)

Baby Kochamma supplies all information to the inspector to build a case large and concrete enough to capture the hapless Paravan, adds a sufficiently heavy dose of sentiment. He was, she says "educated by her family, in the untouchable's school, started by her father....He was trained to be a carpenter by her family, the house he lived in was given to his grandfather by her family"(p.261). And thus Velutha is shunned by his family. Inspector Mathew is a 'prudent man'. He sends for Comrade Pillai, They discuss the case...the are not friends; Comrade Pillai and Inspector Thomas Mathew, and they did not trust each other. But they understood each other perfectly....they looked out at the world and never wondered how it worked, because they knew. They worked it. They were mechanics who serviced different parts of the same machine"(p.262).

How a politician joins hands with the state police in a deceitful game of exploitation is illustrated here excellently: Comrade Pillai tells Inspector Thomas Mathew that he is acquainted with Velutha, but omits to mention that Velutha is a member of the Communist Party or that Velutha had knocked at his door the previous night, which made Comrade Pillai the last person to have seen Velutha before he disappeared. Nor, though he knew it to be untrue, did Comrade Pillai refute the allegation of attempted rape in Baby Kochamma's FIR".

Though Baby Kochamma herself had been humiliated by the Police Inspector, she has no qualms about joining her humiliator in pinning down Velutha. It is the valuable piece of information she provides that finally helps the police decide about swooping on the untouchable. In a world of double standards, where principals and ideals are used as masks to cover the worst kind of social injustices, and where cruelty and barbaric behavior are used as tools to perpetuate age-old exploitative system. As N.V. Raveendran remarks, "She is full of contempt for the envious old wretches; she dislikes the fraudulent politicians. But she is full of sympathy for the exploited classes-exploited by the rich and cheated by the trade unionists. She is like many of those who are full of feeling for the sufferers but know not the way out"(Raveendra, qtd in *Papers on Indian Writings in English.2002:218*). Roy's sympathy for the exploited and her grudge against the exploiters are obvious in her portrayal of Ammu, Velutha, Chacko and Comrade Pillai consecutively. Velutha has been portrayed as an honest craftman lagging behind just due to his ignoble birth. He is in love with Ammu who also has to face ostracism day in and day out. On the other hand, Chacko and Comrade Pillai are portrayed as shrewd advantage seekers who have no sympathy for the common people they supposedly work for.

In conclusion, we can say that Roy's delineation of the plight of the untouchables reveals the vicious circle of South Indian society; the society allows the advantaged ones to remain so by ruthlessly exploiting the downtrodden. The downtroddens' voice was silenced if any attempt of protest or bringing any change is detected. This is how a class-ridden society operates on different levels.

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CHAPTER 2: WOMEN'S PLACE IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

"..... family is a dominant ideology, through which a particular set of household and gender relationships are universalized and naturalized... and through which unequal power relations are observed and legitimized"
(Patricia Oberoi, qtd in *The God of Small Things: A Critical Study*, 2004: 85)

Traditional joint families are neatly structured; in there some women assume the dominant role with greater authority over others. The complex structure is deeply embedded and has given rise to countless stories of personal tragedies of unequally placed women. Their unequal position creates great misery, sufferings and hardships in their lives forcing them to accept the oppressive system in a spirit of religious submissiveness and personal renunciation. There is a terrifyingly sordid side to this issue and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a powerful protest against it. The novel portrays the doomed fate of women of contemporary South India whose sufferings start with their discriminatory upbringing and continue throughout their lives. The suppression of women starts in their own house and is a consequence of a family and social mechanism that has evolved over centuries in traditional Indian society.

There is a typical philosophy behind this traditional Indian family system which exhibits the rigid power structure. Ms. Renuka Roy, a Gandhian nationalist leader has a very apt observation about the traditional family structure in India, she notes,

"...It was an authoritarian system demanding obedience from members of the family. I wonder, however, how many of the young people today realize that joint family with rare exceptions was paramount... Women find that they are often torn between their need for self-expression and their attachment to the old values". (qtd in *The God of Small Things: A Critical Study*, 2004:79)

In the novel, every woman suffers in her own way. Right at the centre is the doleful tale of Ammu, mother of Rahel and Estha, whose sufferings start in her own house and slowly contribute to her ignoble death “in a grimy room...” The other two victims of oppression, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, fit into the oppressive family system that blatantly victimizes Ammu. They become her active oppressors, seeking to corner her and then drive her to her miserable death. Rahel, the youngest sufferer among all the female characters, experiences ostracism at home and school which disrupts her normal upbringing; she becomes adrift and cannot find any moorings anywhere. In fact, *The God of Small Things* can be called the story of the sufferings of Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Ammu, and Rahel. They all suffer in different ways. In a country like India where the patriarchal system is very strong, women suffer mentally, physically and sexually (Rajpal, qtd in *The God of Small Things: A Critical Study*, 2004:137)

Ammu is portrayed as a sad and much wronged character who has been deprived of love and affection since her childhood. Her sufferings continue throughout her life as she does not find anything to fall back on except death which brings all her agony to an end. As a child, she is much exposed to family violence in the form of Pappachi who exploded every now and then due to his extreme frustration in his professional career. Ammu has been a mute witness to the senseless manner in which Pappachi wreaked his wrath upon objects of the house and the only person he could lay his hands on is Mammachi. Pappachi is portrayed as a sadist who delighted in inflicting mental agonies on his wife.

“In the evenings, when he knew visitors were expected, he would sit on the verandah and sew buttons that weren't missing onto his shirts, to create the impression that Mammachi neglected him.”

Ammu has seen the brutality of masculine power from the early years of her life. She was a little girl when Mammachi received those beatings. Ammu could not even save herself from the heinous cruelty of her own father. Pappachi beat the little girl with an iron-topped riding crop and to add insult to injury cut with scissors her best gumboots into shreds cold-bloodedly before her eyes and scattered them all around.

Ammu is a victim of Pappachi's male chauvinistic indifference towards the education of women. We see an example of this indifference when she becomes eighteen and decides to leave her home against the wishes of her entire household. It is heavily ironical to note that Ammu is deprived of higher education by someone who is a "reputed scientist".

"Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was a little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework."

Ammu presents a most pathetic picture of a woman who seeks happiness and love in a world that turns its back on her. She is utterly lonely. Having abandoned her husband for his debauched tendencies, and having returned to her family, she loses all normal status as a family member and is thrown into a dark corner. Her only hope rests on her two children Rahel and Estha who bring comfort in her life. She has been married to an assistant manager in a tea estate but soon discovers that her husband would tell lies for no reason, and is a dipsomaniac "with all of an alcoholic's deviousness and tragic charm"(p.40). Mr. Hollick, his boss, who has an eye for beautiful women, shamelessly tells him that he has found his wife "...extremely attractive". He suggests that "Ammu be sent to his bungalow

to be 'looked after'"(p.42). Ammu's husband(Baba) is dissatisfied with her for not consenting ,since her refusal will block his promotional avenues. He beats her, "Drunken violence followed by post-drunken badgering" (p.42). And then, "when his bouts of violence began to include the children, and the war with Pakistan began, Ammu leaves her husband, and returns, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem. To everything she had fled from only a few years ago".(p 42)Roy says about Ammu:

"She had no plans.

No plans

No Locust Stand I"

(p.32)

Ammu falls prey to the vicious trap set by Mammachi and Baby Kochamma because of her relationship with Velutha. They express little sympathy for Ammu's lonely life, her tragic marital circumstances and her anxiety about her children. On the other hand, their sheer animosity towards the Untouchables finds double force in the Ammu- Velutha liason and breaks out into expressions of moral outrage even though Chako's sexual indulgences with low-caste women is overlooked as 'Men's Needs'. Ammu's affair with Velutha becomes an unpardonable offence against the family's reputation and status. "She was aware of his libertine relationships with the women in the factory, but had ceased to be hurt by them. When Baby Kochamma brought up the subject, Mammachi became tense and tight-lipped "He can't help having a Man's Needs, she said promptly, Baby Kochamma accepted this explanation, and the enigmatic, secretly thrilling notion of Men's Needs gained implicit sanction in the Ayemenem House".(p.240)

This is typical of the double standard of morality practiced in a traditional Indian family . While men enjoy greater laxity and freedom, the family's 'dignity' and 'honor' rest on woman's blemishless moral conduct. Men are privileged, women the cross-bearers!

Ammu defies the "laws" that control a woman's right to love and who she is allowed to love when she has an affair with Velutha, an untouchable. Ammu's constant bombardment from female relatives about how her "life is over" and "washed up" provoke the need for acceptance and nurture, which she finds in "untouchable" Velutha. Most importantly, this man does not belong to the patriarchal society that smothers womanhood. Ng Shing Yi', A Singapore writer, wrote in the Quarterly Literary Review, "Peripheral Beings and Loss in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things" states "[The God of Small Things is] a novel that carries shades of incipient socialism and feminism, the postcolonial condition is reinforced by the added drawback of being an untouchable or a woman, as Velutha, Ammu, ...are: their marginality is so acute that leitmotifs of absence and loss accompany them in the novel" Again, Velutha provides pure untainted love due to the fact that he does not belong to the biased institution that destroyed Ammu's and other women's lives. The two lovers are fugitives excluded from a sexist and prejudicial world, finding love in each other's arms; he allows Ammu to express her womanhood, sharing her very feminine; he, therefore, becomes dangerous to chauvinistic males.

Another victim of Patriarchal society is Rahel's maternal grandmother Mammachi whose all potentials were destroyed by her husband's brutishness and monstrosity. She had pioneered pickle making into something commercially viable in Ayemenem but did not get any moral support from her husband. Having failed in earning fame of a scientist for a not-yet-discovered moth with dense dorsal tufts, Pappachi silently retires from everything; retirement brings a pernicious change in him namely

“his black moods and sudden bursts of temper”(p.49).He wreaked his frustration and venom on his family, especially Mammachi. Turning out to be a scapegoat, she becomes the immediate target of her husband’s fury and distempered outbursts.

Mammachi has an exceptional talent for music, especially the violin; when she is in Vienna with her husband, she took lessons from the famous music teacher Launsky Tieffenthal. It was a mistake on the part of the Austrian teacher to tell Pappachi that his wife is talented, for the remark released all the animal fury of jealousy in him. As the author writes,

“The beatings weren’t new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place. One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi’s violin and threw it in the river”.

That is the ultimate revenge and expression of jealousy, for he believes that by breaking her musical instrument he will be crushing the spirit in her, blotting out all her woman’s aspirations and snuffing out the flame of her independent thinking. To make things worse, he also breaks her sitar. It is the symbolic expression of the masculine animus at women’s desire to assert their freedom and individuality which leads men to devise diverse means of suppression. Within the family in conjugal relationship these tendencies assume another dimension. What is painful is the male attempt to break the spirit of women’s sense of independence and progress. Mammachi suffers in the manner described above; her spirit is sought to be broken and killed simply because she was a woman and trying to build a space of her own.

Mammachi becomes stone-hearted at the torture she has to undergo, but it brings a slow and gradual change in her personality. Unaware of the change, she abandons all her personal convictions

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and freedom, slipping into the mould of a traditional family set-up. Without protesting against the chauvinism, she starts exercising her authority over her daughter and grandchildren with no qualms. She became an example of a traditional wife and mother. Mammachi, blinded with chauvinism, adores her son, Chacko, and chastises her daughter Ammu. The male son can do no wrong. If Chacko does anything wrong, it is the fault of the women in his life, for example the British seductress "Margaret Kochamma". Contrarily, Ammu's faults are her own without anyone else to blame or to give her forgiveness.

A perfect example of Mammachi's perpetuating the cycle of not only self hate for her womanhood, but also projecting hate on other woman is her indifference to Chacko's sexual escapades with low caste women. Mammachi understands her son's "men's needs"; in order to feel more at ease about the arrangement, she pays the women who satisfy Chacko's "needs". The monetary compensation allows Mammachi to view the women as whores. Although, her son engages in the same "indecent" behavior with the women, the women are to be blamed but not her son. However, the mother, Mammachi, not only disapproves of her daughter's, Ammu's, relationship with Velutha, an untouchable, but also condemns them both. Susan Stanford Friedman's excellent essay "*Feminism, State Fictions and Violence: Gender, Geopolitics, and Transnationalism*" more than adequately explains the hypocrisy of Mammachi's of her son and daughter. She waits' "the brother and sister live out different gender destinies: the son Chacko is sent to England for his education, given the factory to run upon his return and allowed a secret passage in and out of the house for his hidden sex life with lower-caste women; on the other hand, the daughter Ammu is kept at home, sees marriage as her only escape, returns home after a disgraceful divorce from her dissolute Hindu husband, and is walled up in a form of modern sati, and expelled from the family to die alone after her affair with an untouchable is

discovered (qtd in *Academic Search Premier and Masterfile Premier*.2001: 19). Sadly, Mammachi implements the rules that governs her own restricted existence. She hinders Ammu and Rahel, yet praises Chacko. She despises herself, but refuses to acknowledge that her hateful insecurities dictate her emotions and expressions towards her female relatives. She is hardly aware that she had already abandoned all her personal convictions and freedom, slipping into the mould of traditional family set-up.

The contempt of women against each other reaches full scale in Roy's character Aunt Baby Kochamma. Her unfortunate past controls her miserable future. Male chauvinistic society molds Baby's psyche to a cruel perfection; she is ready and willing to kill the slightest sense of woman self-empowerment. The embittered, jealous, and ignorant spinster is the worst enemy of all women fighting for civil rights or at least the womanly right to live as a women's without control or suppression. Baby Kochamma shrewdly dehumanizes Rahel and Ammu, secretly envies Mammachi, and feels inferior to free white women like Margaret Kochamma. Dr. Ambreen Hai, an Assistant Professor of English at Smith College, writes convincingly on the matter regarding Baby Kochamma's betrayal of other women. She observes that some readers might question Roy's own ideas on feminist equality due to the perverse negative nature of Baby Kochamma. The answer to such musings is simple, Baby Kochamma is not an unordinary result of her male focused institution. In "Teaching Recent South Asian Women Writers: Issues of Gender in Literature and Theory" she states:

"The most evil figure in *The God of Small Things* is an older woman, the spinster aunt. Roy is very good at showing the ways in which women of all classes and all generations are positioned by socio-cultural systems. Even this aunt, Baby Kochamma, is very much embittered as a consequence of her own history, and we are

shown precisely how she has grown to be the way she is; not that it excuses her horrible actions, but Roy gives you a very complex picture of the dynamics that interplay between cultural constraints and individual choice.”

(Haidt in *Academic Search Premier and Masterfile Premier*.200:23)

More specifically, Baby Kochamma thinks negatively about herself. On page 44 we read that “Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarreling with a fate that she Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman”. Unhappy Baby begrudges Ammu and her children, Ammu and her love affair, Ammu and her divorce, essentially all of the womanly things that Ammu should be entitled to that Baby never attempted to obtain due to her environment. The “resentment” festers in the barren woman. She is not barren in the sense of not having given birth, but barren with discontentment and never experiencing true love. Ultimately, Baby Kochamma, the woman woman-hater, seals her niece’s fate by destroying Ammu’s lover and beginning Ammu’s own rapid descent into self destruction and death. Thus, we see that in this novel Arundhati Roy highlights the deliberately constructed agencies of cruelty that work against women’s interest. In this vicious circle, everyone is involved, but the family members play the major role. In traditional Indian society, such forces flourish and find encouragement in maintaining their hold over the weak.

In conclusion, it becomes evident that women's place in a male-chauvinistic society is never equal to that of men. Women's sufferings start with their family and continues throughout. Mammachi, Ammu, Rahel and Baby Kochamma suffer differently due to the cruel treatment of the society they live in. Social structures are so formed as to sanctify women’s victimization. Arundhati Roy’s depiction of the miserable lives of women in this novel critiques in unmistakable terms the perpetuation of these exploitative forces.

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Chapter: 3 Game of Socialist Politics: An indictment of Marxism

On a larger scale, *The God of Small Things* is about politics, which through its various agencies exercises decisive influences over the lives of the people of Ayemenem. Arundhati Roy presents politics as a very complex force, operated at different levels, beginning with the Ayemenem House, and manipulated by different people for different ends. Reena Kothari says, "She introduces the power structure in society and shows how the more powerful victimizes the less powerful; as there is a gender oppression, oppression of the lower caste, subjugation of children, police extremities, and the hypocrite leader Mr. KNM Pillai who too doesn't leave any opportunity to oppress anyone for personal gain." (Kothari, qtd in *The God of Small Things: A Critical Study*.2004:123)

The whole game of socialist politics as portrayed in the novel centres around Comrade Pillai and Chacko. Through her masterful portrayal of these two characters, the author unfolds the true nature of the Marxist politicians of contemporary Kerala. She shows how they play with people's fate and engage in mud-slinging on the name of doing politics for people. These armchair Marxists always look for an opportunity to serve their own interest under the mask of marxism. Chacko, in Roy's pen, represents the sheer hypocrisy of the elites. He pretends to feel for the downtrodden by allowing him all the 'comforts' of a factory owner. During his undergraduate days in Delhi, he develops a taste for communism, which he carries wherever he goes. Still, he has a 'Marxist mind and feudal libido'(168). His colonial obsession takes him to Oxford and then to the English girl, Margaret, whom he marries. Chacko's feudal libido had been active long before his marriage. For Margaret Kochamma is not 'just the first woman that he had slept with'(p.245). She satisfied Chacko's inherited anglophilia for a brief period. The Oxford educated Rhodes Scholar Chacko is in fact discarded by his English wife for a

'better man'. The Adult Chacko becomes the savior of Mammachi and the owner of the pickle factory established by her. But he soon joins a team of exploiters. So he registers the ventures into a 'partnership' and his mother is informed that 'she is a sleeping partner'(57). He treats Rahel and Estha as 'have nots' and thinks that they should be grateful for the small mercies.

Next to Chacko, Comrade Pilla, the self-proclaimed Marxist leader of the workers, occupies an important position in the novel. The author's disgust with Party politics is barely concealed in her portrait of Comrade Pillai, the local political heavy weight, Chacko's deceptive stances and the freedom with which the police is allowed to unleash its barbarism. In a tone reminiscent of Jonathan Swift for its pointed jibes, Arundhati Roy introduces to us Comrade K.N.M.Pillai and creates a cruel caricature. Pillai is indeed right from the beginning an epitome of all the unpleasant, deceptive aspects of a degenerate political tradition which is nothing more than a means of self-promotion, maintaining one's hold over the citadel of local power, by playing one against the other. The façade so assiduously created by the practitioners of local politics and the ill-concealed brute forces of real evil are easily seen in men like Pillai. Quiet in contradict to his maoist slogans-'Annihilation of the Class Enemy', 'Caste is class'(287,281), he shows the least concern with Velutha against their common class enemy, Chacko. It is his hypocritical approach that makes him denounce 'Chacko-the management', while he willingly allures 'chacko-the-client' at his printing press (p.275) His are rather new revolutionary ideas of social change: 'change is one thing. Acceptance is another'(p.279). It is he who helps Baby Kochamma with respect to the forged FIR lodged by her at the Kottayam Police Station to intentionally feed his political impulse, for Velutha's removal would certainly ascertain for him the electoral votes of the workers of the pickle factory and, thereby, ensure him a seat in the Legislative Assembly. The cruelest irony is that he belongs to a party that supposedly represents worker's interest

and exists on the strength of its pledge to protect them from all kinds of socio-economic exploitation. The leadership of politicians like Pillai survives on the slogan-raising and noisy marches challenging such a society as it is based on all forms of inequality. Such leaders exist on perpetual cycle of social crisis, or history dumps them into time's dustbin. As the author writes, "only then when it was too late and Paradise Pickles slumped softly to the floor without so much as a murmur or even the pretense of resistance- did Comrade Pillai realize that what was really needed was the processes of war more than the outcome of victory. War could have been the stallion that he rode, part of it, if not all, the way to the Legislative Assembly, whereas Victory left him no better off than when he started off."(p.281)

The sneer and sarcasm in these words are clearly audible to the readers. Pillai is the triumph of Roy's subtle and complex art of characterization whom he builds up in fragments that automatically drift into their right places. From the simple portrayal of the lecherous, oil-smearing pot bellied man to the family man whose devotion to Marxist ideology stretches to the extent of christening his son Lenin, he pushes his devilish brains into plotting to trap poor Velutha and finally joining hands with the state police in smashing him. Velutha represents the class of the downtrodden untouchable used by politicians and the police as mere pawns in a political game of chess.

Pillai's dubious games are difficult to understand, even for Chacko. In Chapter 14, we read "Nobody ever learned the precise nature of the role that Comrade Pillai played in the events that followed. Even Chacko—who knew that the fervent, high-pitched speeches about Rights of Untouchables('caste is class comrades') delivered by Comrade Pillai during the Marxist party siege of Paradise Pickles were pharisaic-never learned the whole story".(p.249)

When Velutha arrives at the house of Pillai there is tension in the air. Pillai has already decided his course of action. There is cold-blooded attitude at the way he prefers to take turn eating his favorite dishes. The scene brings out in sharp contrasts the essential cruelty of the man.

“Comrade Pillai has finished his curd unhurriedly. He waggled his fingers over his plate. Kalyani brought water in a little stainless steel container and poured it out for him. The leftover morsels of food in his plate,(a dry chilli, and stiff angular brushes of sucked and spat-out drumsticks)rose and floated. She brought him a hand-towel. He wiped his hands, belched his appreciation, and went to the door”.(p.303)

The whole procedure is reminiscent of Mr. Bounderby in Dickens' *Hard Times* when the poor worker's leader Stephen arrives at his door for help and in a similar fashion is toyed and played with, bringing out deep-seated sadistic tendencies. Once again the manner in which the worker's leader disowns Velutha brings out the tragic essence of the untouchables' plight who have been pinned down to their age-old position of the lowest of the lowly. Comrade Pillai this time takes recourse to party principles to remind Velutha that party has no intention i meddling in his personal affair, “But Comrade, you should know that Party was not constituted to support worker's indiscipline in their private life”. Velutha did not need a long lecture on the subject to understand that he has been abandoned by the party in which he has placed all the trust and hopes and which he had looked up to for the final succour. In what can only be called the splendid dramatization Arundhati Roy brings forth succinctly the inherent contradictions of Pillai's position:

“Velutha watched Comrade Pillai's body fade from the door. His disembodied, piping voice stayed on and sent out slogans. Pennants fluttering in an empty doorway. It is not in the Party's interest to take up such matters, Individual's interest is subordinate to the organization's interest. Violating party discipline means violating

party unity..... And there it is again. Another religion turned against itself. Another edifice constructed by the human mind, decimated by human nature”(p.287).

By highlighting ‘human mind’ grappling with ‘human nature’, Ms.Roy seems to focus on the essential frailty, and its inability to get over its weaknesses. Velutha stands betrayed by society, by his Party in the manner in which Graham Greene’s Whisky Priest (in *The Power and the Glory*) stands betrayed by his religion.. Greene’s hero, harrowed and hunted down by the State Police, and his own religion, finally attains martyrdom; Velutha’s position is similar. In chapter ‘The History House’, we are shown how Kari Saipu’s house had been converted into a posh hotel that has been bought by the hotel chain and “transplanted in the Heart of Darkness”(p.126). Kerala’s communist leader EMS Namboodirapad is reduced to a show-piece : “So, there it was then, History and Literature enlisted by commerce. Kurtz and Kurl Marx joining palms to greet rich guests as they stepped off the boat”. In her devastating portrayal of the leader, Arundhati Roy writes,

“Comrade Namboodirapad’s house functioned as the hotel’s dining room, where semi-suntanned tourists in bathing suits sipped tender coconut water (served in the shell) and old communists, who now worked as fawning bearers in colourful ethnic clothes, stooped slightly behind their trays of drinks” (p.126)

Prasenjit Maiti observes,

“The passage above exemplifies the kind of narrative we can anticipate while intercepting the deep text of chapters 14 and 18. Roy’s portrayal of Kerala’s communist *Weltanschauung* would apparently convince us of the different networks of patron-client relationships and the civil society’s humdrum and proletarian ideological moorings. Half-baked children of revolution that never did happen due to time lag(!) or otherwise in the unlikely work of an imperfectly mobilized politicization we may even venture to add”. (Maiti, quoted in *The God of Small Things*.2004:65)

rather they are getting worse day by day.

In conclusion, we can say that Arundhati Roy is not critical about the broad notion of Marxism, rather she denounces the extremely opposite practice of the theory. Her portrayal of the corrupt communists reiterates that communism never actually flourished in South India; a group of exploiters, on the name of communism, plays havoc with the lives of innumerable people.

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CONCLUSION

By focusing on different dimensions of Indian reality, this dissertation reveals how class, caste and sex forms the basis of discrimination and oppression in Roy's *The God Of Small Things*. Employing experimental techniques, the author exposes the vices and cruelty of a cast-ridden, class-bound, and male-dominated society. Urbashi Barat says, "the novel is moored in space and time and conveys the contemporary social situation with immediacy and poignancy" (qtd in *The God of Small Things: A Critical Study*, 2004:55)

The chapter "The Plight of the untouchables" analyzed the deep-rooted notion of untouchability and how it operates in society to make a clear and cruel division between "touchables" and "untouchables". The untouchables are not treated as human beings and suppressed with no qualms. They are ruthlessly exploited by the armchair marxist politicians and the people of upper echelon. Their condition worsens day by day as new ways of exploitation are designed by the exploiters.

Velutha is tortured and killed for his "insolence" because he dared break the "love laws" and became labeled as "transgressors", whereas Ammu, who is also a transgressor, was backed by her family to save the so-called 'honor' of her family. In *Velutha*, Arundhati Roy presents before us a youth of new ideas and strength who is prematurely snuffed out just because of his untouchability. He is abandoned by everyone including his own father. The party he relies on as something to fall back on at the time of crisis also betrays with him like anything.

The author's handling of corruption and violence against women was discussed in the chapter "Women's place in patriarchal society". The characters of Ammu, Mammachi, and Baby Kochamma represent victimization of women in different forms that started at home and continued subsequently. It is an acceptable fact in South Indian society that a girl needs to know how to be a 'girl' so that she adapts herself to discriminatory behavior of society. By discussing the miserable condition and sufferings of the female characters, this chapter reveals how the exploitation starts and continues. The study also shows, with relevant examples, how the subjugation of women is perpetuated across generations.

The fourth chapter dealt with Roy's bitter attack on the sham lives lived by the politicians and shows how the advantage-seeking politicians always play with the fates of the common people. Two young lovers have to embrace death due to the joint conspiracy of Comrade Pillai and Baby Kochamma. Comrade Pillai maintained a very diplomatic relationship with Chacko as Chacko was his client of the printing business and was the owner of the pickle factory. He never allowed himself to view Chacko as a person against whom he should have united the workers of his factory. Moreover, the shrewd politician wanted to remove Velutha as Velutha was turning out to be a potential threat to Pillai's political career.

The present work makes abundantly clear that Roy's treatment of Indian reality includes the pressing issues of South India with ironic detachment and commendable insight. Ranging from caste problems to the issues of women in the novel, it confirms the mastery of Arundhati Roy as a seasoned artist who is acutely conscious of the socio-political oppression preventing the progress of the society she hailed from.

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