

## AYEMEM, DALIT & MEM SAB IN “GOD OF SMALL THING”

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The aim of presenting this paper is to pictures the role of atmosphere, dwelling place, social structure (as a result) to strengthen the evil forces to highlight and weaken life of so called inferior the people called Dalit – Daridranarayan, Underdogs, Sudras, Untouchables, Outcasts, Exploited People, Marginals, Scheduled casts & Tribes, the landless, the poor peasants, and all those exploited politically, economically and socially. It is usually seen that the high casts – the so called Brahmins- always bed the low cast – women but never wed them, because they consider it their prestige point. But in this paper we will see that how so ever highcaste a woman ‘the mem sab’ may be but if she dares to show her love to the Dalit, she is maltreated and outcast even by her family members.

Arundhati Roy is the Champion of the down trodden of the post sixties India like Mulk Raj Anand in thirties to focuss on “comprehensive historical humanism” which makes man “the master of the destiny uncontrolled by God” The God of small Thing is spun on the wheels of social satisfaction we pose to bear for several centuries. In spite of the usual slogans : Equality Liberty and Justice for all, India is under the pressure of social inequality, religion intolerance and racial discrimination. As a result Indians are pressed under the burden of the ‘Chaturvarna Pyramid.’ Arundhati represents the whole scenario in Ayemenem, a village in Kerala. Before entering into the details, we should not forget the role of Ayemenem as an evil character just like Hardy’s nature “Red in Tooth & Claw” the imagery presented in the opening lines of the book are beautifully suggestive :

“May in Ayemenem is hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jack fruits burst. Dissolute blue bottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear window panes and die, fatly baffled in the sun.”

The whole process of the events has been brought lively and symbolically by these opening lines. It is not flash back technique, rather it is flash forward technique so as to bring forth each event in nutshell.

Black crow indicates towards Valutha- untouchable, black in appearance. Bright mangoes suggests Ammu – ‘Mem Sab’ of Valutha – the lady of the upper caste – though a divorced woman, discarded by her parents, mal-treated by her husband, mother of two children, still bright and blooming young lady. The word ‘dust’ is trifling, useless, insignificant object. The whole phrase indicates and suggests the patriarchal suppression, burden, domination and the brutal

heartless, feelingless remorseless, kindles cruel society which never permits the two lovers like Valutha and Ammu to enjoy and live peacefully after bearing the pangs of her married deserted life. 'Dissolute blue bottle' is suggestive of not only the Dalit-Valutha-but much more deserted fatigued, helpless characters like Rahul, Estha and Ammu. These unfortunate characters have been targeted by cruel society & family members.

Arundhati Roy artistically & skillfully presents the pictorial view of big Ayemenem house; the so called big house can be called or imagined as the dwelling place of cruelty, injustice, hypocrisy, hatred and so on, Roy observes :

“The old house on the hill wore its sleep, gabled roof pulled over its ears like a low hat. The walls, streaked with moss, had grown soft, and bulged a little with dampness that seeped up from the ground. The wild overgrown garden was full of the whisper and scurry of small lives. The house itself looked empty. The doors and windows were locked. The front verandha bare. Unfurnished. But the skyblue Plymouth with chrome tailfins was still parked outside and inside. Baby Kochamma was still alive” (P.2)

The rich symbolism of the above quoted passage reminds us of the 'Cave symbolism of EM Forster's 'A Passage to India' The history house situated on the bank of Meenanchal river stands for evil and villainous character that breaks the various good relationships and depicts the tragedy coming out from the illicit relation between Ammu-The Mem Sab'-and Valutha – 'The Black Crow' :

“Arundhati Roy conceives history as an awful burden. History is immutable and it cannot be defiled. History has its own cruel ways of dealing with those who don't fit into this pattern and who don't conduct themselves according to its ruthless requirements. It is a tragic fate of the twins' life that at tender age they learned how history negotiates its terms and collects its due from who breaks its laws.”<sup>14</sup>

The dark shadow of the house mercilessly envelopes Ammu & Valutha & dislocates their budding & infant-like relationship – personal in character. It also reminds us of Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights full of symbolical interpretation of stormy weather, atmospheric tumult, “the range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way of craving alms of the sun”<sup>16</sup>

The life in this "History House" is devoid of all humanism. This place is infected by male chauvinism, age old discriminatory double standards of morality, politically and socially polluted, suffocated environment which never welcomes feelings of human heart, realization, cooperation, larg-heartedness and obligation. Ammu – leads the most tragic life since her childhood. She leads a life full of suffering even in her parent's home which is silent observer of the budding girl into woman hood. Ammu- a victim of hasty marriage (to a Bengali Boy) solemnized without the knowledge of Ammu's parents because she is unwilling to face and enter the awful sickening & thorny atmosphere of Ayemenem house. But the unfortunate creature never knows that while avoiding, the pricking thorn she would fall on the cactus a bushy plant just like Shelly who bleeds profusely by falling on the 'thorns of life' Her husband maltreated her by beating her physically and injuring her mentally & psychologically. Finally she leaves her

husband with two small kids. Despite her efforts to avoid Ayemenem house, she has to enter the atmosphere of ‘Heart of Darkness- ‘the history house’ devoid of all human feeling & care.

The fate of divorced women too is brought to the fore. Divorced woman is just like whore in Mammachi’s eye. Baby Kochamma’s view about deserted Ammu is typically Indian in nature :

“She subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents home. As for a divorced daughter according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And for a divorced daughter from a love- marriage, well words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from a inter community love – marriage Baby Kochamma choose to remain quivering silent on the subject. (45-6)

By this time Ammu’s sudden sexual temptation towards Valutha a Dalit – a Paravan who brings small gifts of wooden boxes & boats and windmills on small gifts for her children who never enjoyed the love & care of their drunkend father. Valutha’s muscular well built body is the centre of attraction to Ammu’s suppressed feeling of womanhood. And her sexual desire is kindled. The journey of sexual relationship continued till thirteen days during incessant rain & cyclonic disturbances. But it filled the emptiness in the life of Ammu who became the ‘Mem Sab’ of the Dalit. Ammu has a dream of one-armed lover-perhaps Valutha-the helpless, a man of degraded social status of the untouchable, daribranarayan. Ammu’s dream symbolically interprests :

“That afternoon Ammu traveled upwards through a dream in which a cheerful man with one arm held her close by light of an oil lamp. He had no other arm with which to fight the shadows that flicked around him on the floor. Shadows that only he could see.” (P.215)

The cruel & ruthless, sapless law of unkind society is represented symbolically by the word ‘shadows’ the dark-patch which never allows the transparent vision across the barriers of age old tradition and the so called moral standards so as to permit an untouchable to make love to the lady of high standards. Baby Kochamma’s hatred can be sensed on account of Ammu’s breaking the old age traditional law’s of family & love though she had broken those laws in her young age.

The Orthodox society had imposed its own standard of laws “whom to love” who should be loved and how. And how much” (17) Plenty evidences are available in the Ancient Literature of India which puts a ban for untouchables to love or marry high class woman. Matsya Puran – one of the oldest Purans ban the inter-caste relationship :

“If a low caste mam wants to marry a high caste girl and does so, would be punished with death. Similarly a high caste women marrying a low caste man, should be punished with death ” (CXXVI 13111) (Matsya Puran)

In case of Valutha & Ammu both had ignored the imposed law as the lust in them fired on both the sides. Ammu became his’ Mem Sab’

Baby Kochamma was fascinated towards father Mullingun – a hand some trish Mank in her youth but her ambition could not be fulfilled due to an untouchable affair. This anguished & suppressed desire bloomed into contempt towards Valutha – who became the victim of her

canspiracy. Baby Kochamma in order to destroy Valutha fired F.I.R. against an innocent untouchable regarding Sophie's death.

Valutha – the Dalit, Sudra, the outcaste the down-trodden, the most enfeebled, marginal exploited by the high-caste since centuries dared to make high caste woman his 'Mem Sab' Valutha is a good and gentle character, a good craftsman & an active member of the Marxist Party in Kerala. He becomes victim of politics, callous society & administration. He & Ammu had to bear so many rejections & problems in the society of double standards. The important metaphors- Laltain & Mombatti are suggestive of two forces – the god of big things and the god of small things by Arundhati Roy in this authentic novel. The Big Man-the Laltain Sahib & the small Mam – the Mombatti Mombatti has no support though it can enlighten any other lamp fastly. It is symbol of weak, helpless, down trodden and have not the Dalit and the deserted.

Valutha, the untouchable is wrongly accused of abducting the twins and drawing Sophie Mol. The Kerala Police takes him under custody. He was so mercilessly beaten by the police that " blood spilled from his skull like a secret" (P. 320)

Not only Valutha, the untouchable but Ammu & her twins are also very brutally and in an unabashed manner behaved by Thomas Mathew. He calls her 'Veshya' & her children as illegitimate ones. At police station Mathew taps at her nipples with his baton like some lifeless object. Thus both become the victim of rigid caste system in Ayemenem & naked brutality of the police system and undergo the torture and inhuman treatment. Valutha's sexual relationship with Ammu cost him his life. Ammu has also to pay a very heavy cost for such type of relationship. The mother of the twins is expelled from Ayemenem by Chacko and thus she is separated from her dear durlings to die 'unwept, unhonoured, unsung and unremembered' :

Thus lies the end of the two lovers – Valutha – the Dalit & Ammu – his mem sab in Ayemenem.

**References :**

- 1- All numbers in brackets refer to the pagination of Arundhati's the God of Small Things. Indiaink New Delhi. 1997 edition.
- 2- The Matsya Puran.