

Portrayal of Underprivileged in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

The present paper focuses the downtrodden and underprivileged depicted in the novels of *The God of Small Things* and *The White Tiger*. *The God of Small Things* is Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize renowned novel deals with the ravages of caste system in South Indian state, Kerala. Roy focuses on both the sad predicament of untouchables and also the struggle of an Indian woman trying to have accomplishment in life in a patriarchal society. Velutha, the major character, has an affair with a woman of high caste that disobeys the established norms of society. He has got the tragic death by the "Touchable Boots" of the state police, an event that makes a mockery of the idea of God. The novel *The White Tiger* by Arvind Adiga describes the harsh realities of India. It also explores the controversial issues of Indian poverty and corruption vividly in a setting of 1990s economically booming modern India. Adiga has shown how poverty has usurped the whole society where the poor people are deprived of the basic rights of free citizens, like education and health.

Keywords: Indian writing in English, Deprived, Underprivileged, Oppressed, *The God of Small Things*, *The White Tiger*, Indian Society, Suppression, Untouchable etc.

‘The most paying and interesting subject of study in this world is what happens to human beings’ (Mukherjee, Introduction xi)

The genre novel depicts varied themes and subject matter which comprises of human emotions, feelings, psycho societal traits such as human agonies, protests, relations, fighting, greed, exploitation, victories, sentiments, spiritual quests, quest for identity and so many other aspect of human nature. Indian writing in English especially Indian Novel writing, from its beginning has represented contemporary and historical themes and issues that comprises of nationalism, patriotism, partition, struggle for independence, Hindu traditions and rituals, social practices, superstitions, marginalization of lower and working class, issues of feminism in Indian context,

poverty, Casteism and many other relevant issues. Among them, the theme of ‘underprivileged’ is also one of the major themes. Venkat Reddy rightly observes;

The Indian novel, we may say, has emerged not simply as a pure literary exercise, but as an artistic response to the socio-political situation existing in the country. For, the factors that shaped and moulded the growth of the Indian novel, since the mid-nineteenth century, arose as such from the political and social problems of a colonized country as from indigenous narrative tradition of ancient culture. (Reddy, Introduction 1)

The first novel that portrays the under privileged in an Indian context is Sharat Chandra Chatterjee's *Shesprasha*, *Charitraheen* and *Pather Panchali* by Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay explore the issues of downtrodden, deprived and

helpless etc. 'Sharat Chandra identified himself with the down and outs, and boldly portrayed the tears and sweat of the lower middle and have-nots classes' (Iyengar 318). The prominent writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya have brought the issues of untouchables, poverty, and the underprivileged and middle class families in Indian writing in English. *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand is probably the first Indian novel in English that narrates the realism of underprivileged through dalit protagonist. The fate and condition of the deprived and exploited class is also portrayed in his other novels like *Coolie*, *The Road* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*. R.K. Narayan portrayed the lives of middle class and picture of Indian society minutely through his novels like *Bachelor of Arts*, *The Dark Room*, *The English Teacher*, *The Guide*, *Mr. Sampath*, *The Financial Expert*, *Waiting for Mahatma*, and so on.

Bhabani Bhattacharya took up the issue of the underprivileged and down-trodden in his novels *So Many Hungers* and *He Who Rides a Tiger*. The social realism and the exploration of the lower class in Indian society in the post-colonial world is accurately portrayed by Kamala Markandaya in her works *A Handful of Rice* and *Nectar in a Sieve* etc. the issues of women and women empowerment, various traits of feminism were questioned, and discussed in several female novelists in 1960s and 70s; among them, the prominent writers are Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Jai Nimbar, Shoba De, Rama Mehta, Meena Alexander, Kamala Das and many other women writers. *A Fine Balance* (1996) by

Rohinton Mistry portrays the torment and exploitation in the hands of rich and politically powerful. The lives of the helpless, the forgotten, the underprivileged became more miserable as they got trapped in the vicious circle. Anita Desai's *The Village by the Sea: An Indian Family Story* (1982), represents the poor and their real condition. The social life of peasants is described in Vasudeva Reddy in *Vultures* (1984). The hopeless condition of the underprivileged and their rustic life is accurately depicted in *Cyclones* (1987) by Manoj Das. *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy which was awarded by Booker Prize narrates the conditions of an underprivileged Velutha and how brutally he was treated. The character Ammu in the novel is also alienated in the name of pseudo culture. The novel represents dalit protagonist who is helpless, suffering, discriminated and finally murdered.

The God of Small Things

A Booker Prize winner novel, published in 1997, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, dealt with the theme of untouchability and class distinction in the society. The untouchability, the social evil that prevailed prolonged over the ages is discussed in the detail and its aftermaths are accurately portrayed in the narrative. According to the myth of Purusha who is divine ancestor can give an explanation for the emergence of *Varnas* that is caste system. The Brahman's originated from Purusha's mouth, his arms are represented by Kshatriyas, his thighs by the Vaishyas, and the Shudra's are building his feet. The untouchables belong to the Shudras, and even below it. As Mammachi is referring to the past, there is a part in which is said that the untouchables were not allowed to walk

on public roads. Moreover, they had to cover their mouths while they were speaking. They actually were not given permission to exist. The nonexistence of the untouchables is several times referred in the novel, for example, when Velutha does not leave footprints or ripples in the water. From this, it is almost clear that either he is inhuman or supernatural. Being a member of Paravan, or Untouchable, caste Velutha works in the Kochamma family pickle factory and is employed by Mammachi to do additional chores around the Ayemenem home because of his exceptional skills. Many references are found in the novel that Roy presents Velutha as “God of Small Things” He is cast out by all of society’s conventions, an “Untouchable” who cannot even contact members of the “Touchable” caste. When Mammachi welcomes him into the family home is even a huge contravention, and angers some of the other workers at the pickle factory. When Velutha and Ammu develop an attraction, and later engage in an affair, he senses his impending doom.

Velutha builds close relationship with Rahel and Esthappen, the twins, who love him for letting them “be themselves” and for being a father figure to them. For a moment, Velutha allows himself to fantasize that they’re his kids as well. Velutha becomes the target of Baby Kochamma’s anger since he is a Communist and she was forced to repeat a Communist slogan as she was passing by a rally. When his affair with Ammu is revealed, Velutha goes to Comrade Pillai’s home to seek protection, but even the Communist Party spurns him. Velutha is truly “homeless” and a person who can only relish in the “Small Things” of life, like he does with Ammu on the banks of the river.

The White Tiger

Aravind Adiga is a writer and journalist raised in India and Australia. He studied English literature at Columbia College and Oxford University. Before pursuing his career as a fiction writer, Adiga worked as both a correspondent for Time Magazine and a financial journalist for the Financial Times. His experience working as a business journalist caused him to mistrust business magazines and get-rich-quick literature, informing the tone with which he describes India’s economic boom in *The White Tiger*. He currently lives in Mumbai, India.

The Booker Prize (2008) winner novel “*The White Tiger*,” written by Arvind Adiga explores the downtrodden and portrayed deeply exploited, powerless individuals trapped in a cycle of poverty and servitude, primarily through the character of Balram Halwai, who represents the vast majority of poor Indians forced to navigate a corrupt system where their needs are consistently disregarded by the wealthy elite; his narrative highlights the desperation, resilience, and sometimes ruthless tactics they must employ to survive and potentially escape their social standing. Balram believes that the disorganization and chaos following the end of the caste system has contributed to even more extreme inequality. The action of *The White Tiger* takes place in economically flourishing modern India. It tells the story of those left behind in the midst of India’s rapid economic rise.

Balram is a smart child but is forced to leave school in order to help pay for his cousin's dowry and begins to work in a teashop with his brother in Dhanbad. The novel shows how downtrodden people are

treated in their masters' house. The treatment Balram gets from Pinky Sharma's father rightly pointed out that Balram is underprivileged.

The novel frequently uses the image of a rooster coop to symbolize the way the poor are kept confined and exploited, constantly aware of their own vulnerability. As Krishna Singh says:

Balram is the strong voice of underclass in which marginal farmers, landless labourers, jobless youths, poor, auto and taxi drivers, servants, prostitutes, beggars and unprivileged figure. The underclass is the result of our polity, bureaucratic set-up, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, caste and culture conflict, superstitions, social taboos, dowry practice, economic disparity, Zamindari system, corrupt education system, poor health services, police and judicial working. These forces collectively operate to perpetuate the underclass. This underclass constitutes Dark India. (89-112)

Through this novel Adiga comments upon the social disparities in India in which the fate of the downtrodden is shaped and controlled by their superiors. People who live in so called the dark India are destined to serve their masters as Balram cleared that the people in Laxmangarh worship Hanuman because, "He is shining example of how to serve your master with absolute fidelity, love and devotion" (Adiga 19). Silence, oppression and pain are the fundamental parts of these downtrodden classes who always try to fight for their survival but their voicelessness became obstacle for their survival from day to day life. The novel mocks the upper class,

religion and traditional values. Though Balram Halwai is a loyal servant to his master, the chain of suppression by his master makes him a criminal and his vengeance makes him take revenge against his master Ashok. These make a transformation in his psyche from a faithful servant to a murderer. Then he escapes to Bangalore changing his identity to Ashok Sharma. When Balram Halwai is in his village, he is an innocent village boy. But the city life fully corrupted him. His quest for freedom makes him kill his master, Ashok, by breaking the 'Rooster Coop' fence. At the same time, Balram's obsession and his ultimate goal to become rich urges him to kill his own master Ashok and steal the red bag which has full of currency.

The Zamindari and Talookdari systems, although formally abolished through constitutional amendments, continue to exist in rural India under different guises. The novelist vividly portrays the ways in which village landlords oppress and exploit the impoverished and innocent villagers, often with the complicity of various authorities, including politicians, government officials, police, and religious leaders. Even in the era of globalization, these vulnerable villagers fall victim to the cunning tactics of these unscrupulous individuals. In Laxmangarh, four types of oppressive landlords collectively exploit the local populace, exacerbating their suffering and transforming the idyllic 'Indian Village Paradise' into a living hell. In the narrative, these landlords are referred to as 'Animals,' a term that reflects their inhumane cruelty. They are characterized as the Wild Boar, the Stork, the Buffalo, and the Raven. The Stork, a corpulent man, controls a river that

flows outside the village, imposing various fees on fishermen and boatmen who navigate its waters. The Wild Boar possesses all the agricultural land surrounding the village, demanding that laborers show him deference by touching the ground beneath his feet, while offering them minimal wages. The Raven owns the barren lands nearby and charges shepherds for grazing their flocks. Lastly, the Buffalo, the most avaricious of the group, takes one-third of the daily earnings from all the rickshaw pullers in the area.

Conclusion

Both the writers have witnessed the harsh and sorrowing demonstration of the bottom dogs crying under the burden of dearth, hunger, mistreatment and discrimination. The novels give major contribution to depict downtrodden and underprivileged people in modern India. The major focus of the paper to show exploitation of poor, downtrodden people from the superior or upper class are enviable in human society and it results to commit crime.

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