

Reflections on Velutha's character sketch in Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things"**Dr. Sushama Mishra****Asst. Prof. of English****Govt. Pt. Shyamacharan Shukla Colle Dharsiwa****Dist.Raipur****Email: mishrasushma2301@gmail.com****(Received:25February2019/Revised:10 March2019/Accepted:20 March 2019/Published:25 March2019)****Abstract**

There are several images and actions in the novel linking Velutha to the figure of Jesus Christ: through his occupation as a carpenter, his betrayal by one of his group, Comrade Pillai, and the little miracles he achieves. Religion however is denounced throughout the novel as the basis for human savagery and intolerance. So, the reader will discover that the links or comparisons made between Velutha and Jesus are always to Velutha's advantage, perhaps as a means of rehabilitating an individual quasi devoid of the defects that his detractors possess, and yet punished, murdered and registered in official history-police records as a child kidnapper and a high-caste female's rapist.

Keywords Intolerance, Betrayal, Human Savagery

The God of Small Things is a story about childhood experiences of twins whose lives are destroyed by the "Love Laws" prevalent in 1960s Kerala, India. Written by Arundhati Roy and published in 1997 vividly and poetically narrates the story of Velutha and Ammu.

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In the elaboration of this character, Roy's defence of the Dalits is at its best, most devoted and compassionate to a difficult cause. Velutha is presented as a "God of Small Things" (330). He is the one who creates little marvels out of wood for Ammu as a child and who equally offers her

small pleasures as an adult.

Even later, on the thirteen nights that followed this one, instinctively they stuck to the Small Things [...] They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things. (338)

Velutha is described as belonging and ruling over the world of nature, which is separated from the social world on the other side of the river. As he rose from the dark river and walked up the stone steps, she saw that the world they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars. (333-34)

Velutha can tread on water "He trod water, standing in the middle of the dark river" (333), like Jesus, "And a jewelled Jesus watching. He walked on water. Perhaps." (211) However, Jesus, unlike Velutha and the twins, does not have imagination and creativity, the narrator seems to imply, because he himself is merely a creation, a God of a man-made narrative, at least that is what one might understand from the way religion or at least its use are presented as destructive elements in the protagonists' lives.

And there it was again. Another religion turned against itself. Another edifice constructed by the human mind, decimated by human nature. (287)

The exceptional quality of Velutha's and the twins' imagination is made clear through the comparison of the children's creative abilities with those of Jesus when they row their boat on land (211) and the dust raised by their activity seems to be an offering made to Jesus (213). This is because Jesus is clearly represented as a mere creation of the mind who is even adapted to the specific local religious norms, a "jewelled Jesus" (211). The author reveals how the religious icon is used by the high castes to suit their needs and is then discarded once they have achieved their goals. Indeed, the calendar which represents Jesus "with lipstick and rouge, and a lurid, jewelled heart... Jesus in a mini" (208-9) is something discarded from the Ayemenem house.

Baby Kochamma's bogus religiosity is revealed in her treatment of this materialist representation of Jesus, her use of religion to approach the Irish Father and also in her return for Velutha's deeds, when she leads him to his violent death. Velutha who had "fixed [the garden cherub's] bladder for her" (75), ironically lies dying "in a pool of urine spreading from him" (320), because police violence "resulted in a loss of control over his bladder" (310). There lies the difference between the God of Small Things and Baby Kochamma's Upper Caste God. Through a small detail, the colour red which is on Velutha's "blood-red nails" (307) when he is killed (310-11) and the heart of Jesus who has "lipstick and rouge," yet another link is made and

Velutha becomes the symbol of the innocent sacrificed, in his case, to the precepts of Brahmin Christianity, and in Jesus' case for the sake of the redemption of Man.

The reason for this sacrifice is invalid on the religious level for its use is economic and political: this myth and other deep reasons have already been encountered elsewhere: African slaves in southern USA in the past were an economic necessity, the Germans' pretext was being worried about the Jews' "growing presence and power" in their "Aryan" society.

Thus Velutha is linked to Jesus and placed on a higher level giving a very high meaning, almost of sacrifice to happiness- Jesus being the saintly person that he is, and Velutha being almost devoid of defects, and of a far nobler soul than all the high-caste Brahmin characters.

The narrator makes fun of the symbols of the morality of this particular Christianity and its patriarchal order that crushes women. Thus the image of Jesus that Baby Kochamma had in her home, wears a mini and has a lurid heart, "a benign, mouse- haired calendar-Jesus with lipstick and rouge, and a lurid, jew- elled heart [...] frilled out like a skirt. Jesus in a mini." (208-9)

One must not forget that Velutha is compared to a God, "God of Small Things" (330), and that when he is murdered his toenails are painted red bringing him closer to the figure of Jesus, son of God. Velutha is an untouchable or "Harijan," "children of God" as Gandhi called them, a name rejected by the community for the name 'Dalit, the Oppressed' thus showing their situation to be a socio-political one, and not a religious one. So, just as Jesus died for man's redemption after being punished for preaching a new religion, Velutha died for preaching and practising equality. Through Rahel's reminiscences, one learns she believed in the right of all layers of society to happiness, but he is to be sacrificed for the maintenance of the social order.

Both Velutha and Jesus as a deity are 'exploited' by people like Mammachi who forgets Velutha's untouchability when she needs something repaired, or like Baby Kochamma who uses religion for her own dark ends, as when she tries to recite the Hail Mary while preparing to go further into criminality to cover her first lies that led to Velutha's bloody death (315). The owner of this gaudy Jesus (208-9) is Baby Kochamma whose use of religion applies double standards to members of the lower and higher castes. Baby Kochamma herself, who is the keeper of religion as it is practised in Ayemenem, as well as the guardian of tradition is represented in a similar manner to the image of Jesus that she chooses, and this description is given again through Rahel's perception, which underlines the loud, garish taste in both descriptions.

Rahel noticed she was wearing make-up. A sly touch of rouge [.. I her lipstick mouth had shifted

slightly off her real mouth. [J She was wearing a lot of jewellery. (21-22, my italics)

The guardian of traditions, Baby Kochamma, clings on to ancient beliefs, and the rusted state of her mind is symbolised in the twilight that she lives in with Kochu Maria, through her refusal to use powerful bulbs, "And because the house was locked and dark, and because she only believed in 40-watt bulbs." (21) This petrification of time is metaphorically revealed in the unchanged state of her calendar, "Twelve layers of petticoats for the twelve months of the year. None had been torn out." (209) This calendar which Baby Kochamma gives away to the Paravan home (209) also symbolises the status quo of the social hierarchy that Baby Kochamma wants to keep. A status quo in which the members of her caste will continue to generously bestow on the untouchables their unwanted trivia as gifts, and for which the untouchables are to remain thankful forever. This blind gratitude that is sought by the selfish members of the upper castes can be found in the example of Vellya Paapen's "mortgaged eye" (78). an example given by the author to denounce the shameless exploitation of the untouchable as cheap labour even when they are gifted like Velutha (74-77). In this, the calendar is equivalent to the untouchables' school that Baby's father created for the Untouchables (13) and to the untouchable church that the ruling classes had created for the Untouchables, a church which renders explicit the means by which Hindu tradition is preserved through the adaptation of Christianity to the Hindu caste system.

When the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans,... converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. [...] They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Pariah Bishop. (74) When the policemen cross over to the other side and beat Velutha up with the intention of giving him a good lesson, they murder the imagination and the creativity that he represents. Apart from the little presents that he makes for Ammu and later for her children, Velutha is indeed the only person who is capable of respecting the world of fantasy of the three children.

It is only now, these years later, that Rahel with adult hindsight, recognised the sweetness of that gesture. A grown man entertaining three racoons, treating them like real ladies. Instinctively colliding in the conspiracy of their fiction, taking care not to decimate it with adult carelessness. Or affection. (190)

Velutha's death occurs only after he is dragged back to the other side by the policemen, and this

signifies that he is taken back to the world existing on other side of the river, back to the area where his social and spatial limits are neatly defined. He is dragged away from the a-historical zone where he had crossed into forbidden territory and symbolically entered a space re-served for the upper caste by loving Ammu. The a-historical zone of the lovers' meetings which could have produced another hybrid child, is penetrated by the policemen who change the course of history even before Velutha strays too far as Comrade Pillai takes care to send him to his death. His feet walked him to the river. As though they were the leash and he were the dog. History walking the dog. (288)

This image of Velutha being a prisoner of his feet is not surprising as we know that not only Velutha's steps leave no trace, but that when he is sent to a "blind date with history" (282), he is traced and hounded by the policemen. However, they need to drag Velutha back into their own world in order to annihilate him and particularly to make up the proofs of his guilt so that none other would try to transgress the limits that religion and so- ciety have imposed. Official history can trace Paravans after all, but it does not allow them to leave their imprint.

Works –cited

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