

## RESEARCH ON THE GENESIS OF SUBALTERN LITERATURE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S WORK

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### ABSTRACT

*Subalternation is a fundamental postcolonial concept and refers to the social process of making someone a subaltern. The country's top class allegedly exploits the impoverished of a country in the name of patriotism. The class of native masters maintains their authority and advantages. This research aims to examine how well-known writer and activist Arundhati Roy has portrayed members of lower castes, untouchables, tribals, and women, among many other oppressed areas of society, in a selection of her works.*

**Keywords:** Arundhati Roy, Postcolonial Subalternation, untouchables, tribals, women as subaltern

### INTRODUCTION

With its diverse population and official languages, India offers a wealth of practices, values, and development initiatives from various sectors to promote. One cannot help but twirl in one's thoughts and gaze. The land is also home to various monsters that drive the nation and its inhabitants to ruin and death.

The God of Little Things, by Arundhati Roy, won the Booker Prize in 1997. Her collection of nonfiction works is extensive. Scholars still need to find common ground between fiction and nonfiction. However, Arundhati Roy knows that the same ideas flow through her fiction and nonfiction. The creative art of storytelling shines through like moonlight in fictional works, while the anguish of extrication is palpable in recounting nonfictional stories. In her experience, there are two types of people in the world: those who are at ease with authority and those who are predisposed to view authority with suspicion. Based on this comprehension, she does an analysis of her topic in both fiction and nonfiction.

The oppressed subaltern is often portrayed as an intangible projection, but the evolving literary canon has given us voices that are both powerful and aggressive, which may now be used to challenge those whose sole motivation is to keep their hold on power and privilege. Literature written by and for the subaltern in different eras addresses different concerns and topics. In "Chandra's Death," Ranajit Guha [1] interacts with the story's voice, especially in how narrative voice builds subalternity, expanding on his earlier work in Subaltern Vol. I, in which he theorizes the various legends and myths of society. The subaltern narratives, criticized by the Subaltern literary figures like Premchand, Mahasweta Devi, and the Dalit authors [2], seem to have been absorbed by the discursive force of feudal class, nationalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. The topic of "Can Subaltern Speak?" remains prevalent in mainstream Indian literature as contemporary writers in India continue to

reframe subaltern themes including women, Dalits, and other marginalized groups. Recently published works that use the Subaltern approach to literature include Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* and Anjali Deshpande's *Mahabhiyog*. Both books include powerful tales of caste prejudice and the suffering of the Bhopal Gas Disaster victims. These works of subaltern literature provide an invaluable legacy, an inexhaustible wellspring of inspiration, and a crucial framework within which to craft accounts of the lives of the masses.

Arundhati Roy clarifies the connection between her fiction and non-fiction in a talk with David Barsamian titled *The colonization of knowledge*. "I have been doing this job since I was twenty-one," she proudly proclaims. It only appears like a change to the people on the outside, to those who met me for the first time after reading *The God of Little Things*. on page 36 of *The Shape of the Beast*. Before her work came out, she had authored three articles. *The Great Indian Rape Trick* (in two parts) and *The Naughty Woman of Shady Lane* discuss the exploitation of Phoolen Devi in the film *Bandit Queen* and whether or not anybody has the right to re-stage the rape of a live woman without her permission. Then she goes on to say:

In my opinion, there is not much of a gap between *The God of Little Things* and my nonfiction, in my opinion... For the first time, *The God of Little Things* draws parallels between seemingly insignificant details and the grand scheme. Whether it is the imprint of a baby spider on the surface of a pond, the glow of the moon over a river, or the intrusion of politics and history into your home, bedroom, and bed, as well as your closest interpersonal relationships (with your parents, children, siblings, and others), everything is connected. (*The Shape of the Beast*, p. 36) [4]

She underlines the need to take her fiction and nonfiction together as a whole rather than see them as two distinct entities. Her book comprises the theoretical creation of her philosophy. At the same time, her political essays, speeches, and interviews represent the application of that philosophy for the elevation of the weak class in the world, undaunted by the threats and bribes of the strong. The book *The God of Little Things* explores the human condition and the social fabric. It examines social stratification along lines of wealth, status, and religion. As a book, it is deliberately subversive, with the goal of giving a voice to the voiceless and disadvantaged. According to Arundhati Roy, *Ayemenem* is a reflection of the world at large, complete with all of the social ills found in every community.

"Fiction and non-fiction are merely different narrative strategies," Arundhati Roy writes in her political piece *Come September*. I don't know why, but when I sit down to write, stories disappear. The hurting, damaged world I see when I open my eyes each morning is a significant inspiration for my nonfiction writing. (*An Everyman's Guide to the British Empire*, p.13) [5]

The happenings of *Ayemenem* are stifled by the presence of two gods: the God of the Great and Powerful and the God of the Tiny and Insignificant. The enormous patriarchal God may be in charge, but the God of the Little Things is what keeps everything running smoothly. In the book, these characters are referred to as "things" because of their size. In this universe, the little inhabitants are not accorded the same dignity or respect as the rest of the population.

Things include anything or anybody we do not hold in high regard. As a result, the commoners of Ayemenem are seen as insignificant by the elites.

However, even these little humans are endowed with divine mastery. This God of the Little Things erects no artificial divisions between people and lays down no rigid norms. God is responsible for fostering the growth of humanity's spirituality and romantic bonds. On the other side, the Large people's God is the one who puts barriers up and dead traditions in the ground, stifling individual freedom and collective progress. That is why Arundhati Roy sides with the God of the Little Things when the two Gods go to war in Ayemenem.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to "Feminist Study of Arundhati Roy's Postmodern Indian Fiction: The God of Little Things" by A. Hariharasudan and S. Robert Gnanamony (2017), members of the higher caste (such as Syrian Christians) continue to dominate the lower caste in order to demonstrate their superiority. They think the book *The God of Little Things* is about ending caste system discrimination in Kerala, southern India. They demonstrated via their writing that Roy's depiction of the downtrodden of the working class and the struggles women confront in a patriarchal culture are parallel and comparable in severity. According to Bharat (2016), terrorism is a "global phenomenon," not a problem exclusive to any one nation (p. 82). [6] She believes terrorism affects the whole world and is not confined to any particular nation (p. 85). While we agree with much of Bharat's analysis in her paper on TMUH, we disagree with her characterization of terrorist violence as "a worldwide phenomenon," which, in our view, serves to obscure the fundamental problem of discrimination and state-sanctioned violence against Kashmiri Muslims in Indian-occupied Kashmir. Even though terrorism in Kashmir is a relatively new phenomenon, the "subalternation" of Kashmir's Muslim population dates back to the time of partition. [7] Considering that she waited over two decades to write her second novel, it is hardly surprising that the book was met with such enthusiastic acclaim. Messud (2017) [9] thinks that Roy's latest book is more significant in scope, and the concerns at play are multifaceted, as the novel teems with details related to these difficulties, while Silva (2017) [8] argues that the tale of TMUH awakens in us empathy for humanity. According to Walter (2017) [10], TMUH is "A brilliant mosaic." It brings together the unheard voices of many different groups in India. The novel seems disjointed at first glance, but that is on purpose; the author wants to experience everything firsthand before recounting the tale of it. Muslims, transgender people, Sikhs, Dalits, Kashmiris, Tribal Adivasis, and victims of the Bhopal gas catastrophe all had their voices silenced. Hopley (2017) [11] adds that the trans community, low-caste individuals, and religious minorities are all represented in TMUH's canon. Transgender characters like Anjum, Saddam Hussain; Musa, a liberation warrior; and Revathy, a lady from the tribal Adivasis, are included in these works. Nonetheless, TMUH is described as "Roy's intriguing tangle" by Sehgal (2017) [12]. The novel's depiction of the world is harsh but not complicated. Bringing together the personal and the political, it was "well worth the 20-year wait," as described by Begley (2017) [13]. Identity struggles on all sides are reflected in work, from the internal struggles of transgender characters to the external struggles of Muslims and Dalits against Hindutva nationalists and of Kashmiris and tribal Adivasis against the Indian State forces. The work is "structurally a political one," according to Khair (2017) [14], who approaches it from a different perspective. He argues that the novel's characters are less important than its political

goals since political novels have clear political stands. The work is a manifestation of Arundhati Roy's struggle for the rights of India's underprivileged populations. She has often backed radical causes, including the Maoist and Kashmiri independence movements. That is why the book's plot backs up her political stance. Acocella (2017) [15] applauds Roy for writing a "scarring tale of India's contemporary history" in light of the bloody events of modern India. She refers to the violence committed in recent decades in India by Hindutva nationalists and Indian State forces against religious minorities, lower castes, Kashmiris, and Tribal Adivasis with the term "Scarring novel." Kakutani (2017) [16] agrees, arguing that the novel is essentially discursive. It is an ambitious effort to tackle a wide range of topics in one book. In India, public unrest has been a harbinger of anarchy over the last half-century. There have been several protests and struggles for equality among traditionally oppressed groups.

An analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* by O. P. Dwivedi (2010), titled "The subaltern and the text: Reading Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*," argues that the novel addresses the plight of the subaltern classes (including untouchables and women) in a society where they continue to be denied fundamental rights and privileges long after colonialism has ended. He discusses the psychological and physical abuses suffered by the novel's subaltern characters. Even though we live in the supposedly postmodern era, he claims that the connection between Velutha and Ammu in the book would only be recognized in the Vedic time even though we live in the supposedly postmodern era. That is why, according to him, the book should be everyone's priority. Dwivedi continues by arguing that the story is consistent with Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" since the subaltern characters are unable to communicate with one another because they are forbidden from doing so. He ends by arguing that Arundhati Roy poses a controversial topic regarding the plight of the subalterns and that the author encourages the subalterns to free themselves from society's constraints to establish their own identities. [17]

The word "Dalit" is a Hindu term used to refer to the "depressed classes" and formally the "Scheduled Caste," according to the article "World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples India: Dalits" (2008). It has become a source of pride and dignity for the previously unreachable. The untouchables are a subset of the lowest castes of Hindus and are stigmatized for "contaminating" Indian society. The Dalit has the potential to re-create historical moments. Even though laws were enacted in India to prevent untouchability, it is still widely practiced today. [18]

Morris et al. (2017). [19] discuss how hard it is for authors from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to find the time and quiet to focus on their work. Because of this, most accounts of living on the streets have been published as electronic books by writers, and only a tiny percentage have found homes in traditional publishing houses. In her autobiography, Lisa Gray-Garcia (2006, 181) [20] writes, "Like all low-income and homeless folks, I did not even have the privilege of an organized life, knowing what I would be doing from one moment to the next." She adds, "I did not have the paper, I did not have a computer, and further, I did not have the paper, I did not have the computer." "It is hard to find the courage to keep speaking out when you have no money, no resources, and you are living in a condemned building," Cash Carraway says (2020: 226).

Nonetheless, written documentation is still essential for preserving the past. The Latin American Subaltern Studies Group (1993) attempted to remedy this situation by studying and promoting non-written forms of historical memory. A group of oral historians in the United States and the United Kingdom set out to collect testimonies from homeless individuals; I study this endeavor in further detail elsewhere. Similarly to the anti-colonial testimonials that include co-authorship between speakers and writers (Beverly, 1993), [21] homelessness memoirs frequently have their origins in oral forms. Ron, as mentioned above, Casanova and Tina S. collaborated on their respective autobiographies with interviewers who documented their life tales. Although oral history and testimonio interventions do not entirely address the issue of orality's inherent connection to subalternity, they can increase the likelihood that subaltern expressions will be heard and preserve a communal record of otherwise marginalized voices.

### READING SOCIAL HISTORY THROUGH LITERATURE

Throughout India's history, subalterns have been targeted by colonialism, classism, casteism, and gender inequality. While their social standing in post-independence India has improved, they remain marginalized and have few options. This research looks at how the struggle of India's lower-class citizens has been portrayed in popular media from the 1930s to the present. It also looks at the imagined subaltern's position in pre-independent India. It contrasts it to the subaltern's actual position in India now, more than seven decades after the country gained independence from the British Raj. Also, both Jawaharlal Nehru's *Toward Freedom: An Autobiography* (1936) and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2001) are analyzed to reveal how subalterns overcome oppression and establish their own identities via acts of resistance (2017). Several studies have been conducted on these texts, emphasizing how they show the prejudice that subalterns in India endure. However, studies have yet to be conducted on how they depict the nature and status of subalterns. This research looks at the marginalized people of India, including colonial Indians, Hijras, Dalits, women, Muslims, and untouchables, and their struggle for freedom against the background of Nehru's promises. This research aims to compare and contrast the status of India's subaltern populations before and after independence. Nehru and Roy have made significant efforts to include the voices of the underrepresented in their writings. By educating the marginalized about their status and encouraging them to band together to combat injustice, Nehru and Roy wanted to break down the barrier between the mainstream and the periphery. The authors draw on Antonio Gramsci's, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's, Ranjit Guha's, Partha Chatterjee's, Miguel Tamen's, and Michael Garnett's theoretical contributions to examine the subaltern's position in post-independent India in comparison to that of pre-independence India, as well as the role of consciousness in resisting injustice. Subalterns in modern, politically empowered India have used their agency to some degree to become their person.

Roy's *The Ministry* depicts the plight of the Indian subaltern, who fall prey to casteism, sexism, and capitalism. The essay shows the random bits and pieces of Indian culture. There is an emphasis on the Hijras, lower castes, destitute, and women who do not fit into the current social order in India. To put it another way, they need help settling into new places. They are not afraid to break the rules, experiment with other ways of living, and assume different social positions. Roy discusses "binarism" and the struggle between society's core and the fringes. She depicts the tension between the Hindus and the Muslims,

the men and the women, the higher and lower classes, the cemetery, and the city at large. The characters of Anjum, an intersex person; Revathy, a moist comrade; Dayachand, an untouchable; Tilotamma, a nomadic half-Dalit lady of Syrian descent. And Musa Yeswi, a compelled Kashmiri liberation warrior, takes center stage in her work. She tells the untold stories of why secular democracy in India has failed. She gives a national narrative told from the viewpoint of the underrepresented. Roy works to break down barriers between the subaltern and the privileged.

### **SUBALTERN CONSCIOUSNESS: INTERSECTION OF HISTORY AND LITERATURE IN INDIA**

The word "subaltern" refers to those on the margins of society. They need more options available to them. In any case, they are the ones whose rights are restricted since they have no autonomy. At the center, they are forgotten and disregarded. Even though they are on the lowest rung of society, they can rebel. In 1890, Antonio Gramsci used the term "subaltern" to describe members of society who had been marginalized by the 1870s Italian state's historic transition.

Furthermore, he used the phrase to designate the lowly-ranked and poorly compensated members of the armed forces. Scholars from South Asia were the ones to start the discussion of Subaltern Studies after Gramsci. Since 1982, they have published a series of books under the umbrella term "Subaltern Studies," intending to educate historians about the history and culture of India's underprivileged groups under and after colonial rule. The definition of "subaltern" varies somewhat from Gramsci to Spivak, as may be seen by following the term back via their writings. Gramsci defines the subaltern in terms of the people's socioeconomic standing. As indicators of the subaltern, Guha zeroes in on class and caste. According to Chatterjee, social standing is less of a factor in how individuals are treated than their caste. Spivak defines the subaltern in terms of gender.

Gramsci, Guha, Chatterjee, and Spivak's views on subaltern consciousness demonstrate that one's economic standing and control over other resources are essential factors in determining one's subalternity. Caste, religion, and gender are not the only factors determining a person's subaltern status. They are considered subaltern or elite, depending on their social financial standing. Subaltern is a relative word, and it has many tiers. Class distinctions, including those between the subaltern and the privileged, are context- and historically specific. Caste and gender may be valuable indicators of subaltern identity, but they are not sufficient. Instead, a person's socioeconomic and political standing establish his social class. Since India's independence, the status of the country's lower castes has not altered much. Even though subalterns in India have made some progress in recent years from a position of complete impotence to one in which they can dismantle prejudice, they remain at the society's periphery, with few, if any, options available to them. Although having fought off colonialism, India's subaltern population now finds itself at the mercy of modern-day discrimination, including capitalism, casteism, and sexism. There has been a noticeable shift in the character of India's subaltern population but little progress in their social status. In postcolonial India, women, the poor, those of lower castes, and transgender individuals still do not enjoy complete freedom. Thus, in modern-day India, they are the new social outcasts.

## THE SUBALTERN AND CRITICAL DEBATE

A "subaltern" is subjugated in more than one way. They are on the margins of society because of their class, caste, gender, religion, and culture. Those in lower economic and political classes, as well as members of non-elite cultural groups, are also considered to be subalterns. They are under-read, under-taught, and outside the canon. Subalterns are members of oppressed communities subject to the ruling elite's values and norms. Subalterns are often aware of their position within a given social hierarchy. The term "subaltern consciousness" refers to a group's recognition of its marginal status in mainstream society and its subsequent attempts to bridge that gap. The Italian Marxist Gramsci coined the term "subaltern" in 1890. In 1935, the piece was published as part of Gramsci's most well-known book, *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci used the word "subaltern" to describe the members of Italian society who were overlooked throughout the country's revolutionary upheaval in the 1870s. As a result, subalterns are characterized by diversity and do not constitute a legitimate social category. Gramsci's perspective on the subaltern is, in a genuine sense, a must for any theorist who seeks to comprehend the concept of the subaltern. His perspective diverges somewhat from the purely economic and mechanical framework traditionally characterized by Marxist research. According to Gramsci, "the subaltern classes relate to any "low-rank individual or group in a specific society" (66). Those at the bottom of society are disadvantaged when a powerful elite dominates at any cost. The elite's hegemonic rule undermines the common people's ability to have a voice in shaping their history and culture. No credit is given to them as citizens who contribute to the country. Gramsci used the word "proletariat" to describe the exploited and subjugated workforce and rural populace under National Fascist Party members Benito Mussolini and his agents. Following Gramsci, the discussion on Subaltern Studies was sparked by academics from South Asia, such as Guha, Spivak, Dipesh Chakravorty, and Chatterjee. Since 1982, they have been publishing books in Subaltern Studies to satisfy the curiosity of historians interested in the lives of India's underprivileged populations during and after colonial rule. With Spivak's ascent to prominence as a postcolonial feminist critic, the word "subaltern" became increasingly contentious. In her seminal article "Can the Subaltern Speak? Spivak emphasizes subaltern concerns amid contemporary historical shifts. She discussed the division of labor and the suppression of revolutionary voices in today's globalized economy as examples of the capitalist political system. She demolished Gramsci's theory of the subaltern group as an independent self. The history of the subalterns, Gramsci claims (67), [22] was just as complicated as that of the ruling elite. Subaltern history needs to be completed. So, they are constantly impacted by the actions of powerful organizations. Even if they rise against elite groups, subaltern groups will only be fully independent if they have a history and identity. Those on the margins cannot access the tools necessary to influence their media portrayal. The cultural and social resources available to them are limited. In Gramsci's view, permanent triumph is the only option for the subalterns who want to end their subjugation. The underdog needs time and perseverance to achieve a lasting win against the elite. Gramsci emphasizes the "role of the intellectual in the cultural and political development of the subalterns" (78 [23]). Because of their lack of access to hegemony, subaltern people need the guidance of intellectuals. In interacting with the elite, intellectuals must be able to galvanize the subaltern to create revolutionary leaders fighting for subjugation's overthrow.

The idealism movement that was Indian nationalism was revolutionary in its day. "Indian nationalism was essentially an idealism endeavor in which the indigenous elite led the life from subjection to independence," according to the elite's history (2). It shows how the histories of the privileged tend to overlook the contributions of the lower classes. The postcolonial nationalist endeavor is similarly directed by elitism due to the national narrative's inability to represent the masses. As proof of "the inability of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the country," the relationship between the elite and the subaltern class was provided. Large swaths of people's lives and minds would never be assimilated into their reign (76). The imperialist historiography demonstrates that colonialism invests in people's consent even though it inflicts significant harm on them. Generally speaking, colonial history grants dominance to colonialism. Guha points out that Colonialism "included domination without hegemony" (106). Therefore, colonization continued along the lines of force and not widespread approval. The colonized subjugated group fought back. However, colonial history ignores their struggle and dismisses their political awareness.

### THE SUBALTERN AND INDIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

This chapter focuses on the subaltern's experience of the 1930s welfare state movement. Moreover, it clarifies Nehru's [24] vision for the situation of the oppressed in *Toward Liberation* (1936). Furthermore, this part illustrates the pre-independence or colonial era situation and fight of the Indian people. Nehru penned his autobiography while incarcerated from June 1934 to February 1935. Before his role as India's first Prime Minister, he released it in 1936. In the first edition's prologue, Nehru explains why he wrote his autobiography and what he hopes to achieve. Nehru claims that he wrote his autobiography to make productive use of his time and reflect on India's history. To begin the task of "self-questioning" in his "personal account," Nehru wrote his autobiography. When asked why he set out to document his mental development, he responds, "my purpose was...primarily for my benefit" (5). He does not think of anybody in particular when he writes, although he does say, "if I thought of an audience, it was one of my countrymen and countrywomen" (7). His family left Kashmir for Delhi in 1716, and he begins his memoirs with that story. During the uprising of 1857, he tells how he and his family eventually settled in Agra.

Mohan K. Gandhi initiated three pivotal movements in the Indian Independence Struggle. These included the 1919–1922 non-cooperation period, the 1930–1931 civil disobedience campaign, and the 1930–1931 Salt Satyagraha. Gandhi also led the Quit India campaign, which occurred between 1940 and 1942. Gandhi went to school for law in London before being involved in these movements. Twenty of those years were spent in South Africa, where he endured racist insults and developed his Satyagraha strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience. After returning to India from South Africa, he quickly joined Nehru's government. Nehru began a "positive effort" to reduce tensions between Hindus and Muslims behind the scenes of the Indian National Congress (INC) political organization. Along with other INC members, Gandhi took action against the British commission that had no Indians on it, thereby solidifying India's destiny.

### CONCLUSION

The primary focus of Indian postcolonial writing was on analyzing the lasting effects of the British colonizer's strategic alterations to Indian society. Just as colonialism did not



cease with the demise of colonial control, it persists even now. This literary subgenre both glorifies the individuality of formerly colonized nations and criticizes the colonial authority's influence.

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