

Yayın Geliş Tarihi: 21.03.2019  
Yayına Kabul Tarihi: 09.10.2019  
Online Yayın Tarihi: 05.06.2020  
http://dx.doi.org/10.16953/deusosbil.542921

Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi  
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi  
Cilt: 22, Sayı: 2, Yıl: 2020, Sayfa: 421-434  
ISSN: 1302-3284 E-ISSN: 1308-0911

*Araştırma Makalesi*

## **SUBALTERNITY IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS***

Şule OKUROĞLU ÖZÜN\*  
Ayşe İREN\*\*

### **Abstract**

*Subaltern Studies, particularly in the field of social and cultural anthropology, has provided critical contexts that restore suppressed histories while criticizing Eurocentrism, imperialist biases, Enlightenment rationality, and the idea of nationalism. After the publication of Edward Said's Orientalism, the terms subaltern and Subaltern Studies have become profoundly entangled with postmodern and postcolonial cultural studies, underlining the need for a conscious and deconstructivist approach for reading the history in order to get at the different ways in which European forms of knowledge represented the "subaltern". Arundhati Roy's famous novel *The God of Small Things*, while touching on many post-colonial issues ranging from linguistic imperialism to hybridity, is a striking display of the plight of subalterns. The subaltern in the novel can be grouped into three as "the inhabitants of Ayemenem", "the untouchables" and "the women". The novel scrutinises first colonial discourse and Western style of thinking about and studying the subaltern, and then how the colonizer and the colonized evolved within an unequal power relationship. Accordingly, this paper focuses on the ways in which hegemonic discourses constitute class, marginality and the objectification of the subaltern.*

**Keywords:** *Post-colonialism, Subaltern, Touchable, Untouchable, The God of Small Things.*

## **ARUNDHATI ROY'UN KÜÇÜK ŞEYLERİN TANRISI ROMANINDA MADUNİYET**

### **Öz**

*Maduniyet Çalışmaları, özellikle sosyal ve kültürel antropoloji alanında, Avrupa-merkezçiliğini, emperyalist önyargıları, Aydınlanma Rasyonalizmini ve milliyetçiliği eleştirirken, bastırılmış tarihleri yeniden canlandıran eleştirel bağlamlar sunmuştur.*

*Bu makale için önerilen kaynak gösterimi (APA 6. Sürüm):*

Okuroğlu Özün, Ş. & İren, A. (2020). Subalternity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 22 (2), 421-434.

\* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Ana Bilim Dalı, ORCID: 0000-0001-5471-8075, [suleozun@sdu.edu.tr](mailto:suleozun@sdu.edu.tr), [suleokuroglu@gmail.com](mailto:suleokuroglu@gmail.com)

\*\* Öğr. Gör., Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi, Rektörlük, ORCID: 0000-0002-8143-047X, [ayseiren@sdu.edu.tr](mailto:ayseiren@sdu.edu.tr)

*Edward Said'in Oryantalizm adlı çalışmasının yayınlanmasından sonra, önceleri Avrupalı bilim türleri tarafından temsil edilen "madun" kavramını farklı şekillerde yorumlamak için tarihin bilinçli ve yapısökümcü bir yaklaşımla okunmasına duyulan ihtiyacın altı çizilmiş, böylece madun ve Maduniyet Çalışmaları kavramları, postmodern ve sömürge-sonrası kültür araştırmaları ile derinlemesine iç içe geçmiştir. Arundhati Roy'un ünlü romanı Küçük Şeylerin Tanrısı, dilsel emperyalizmden melezliğe uzanan birçok sömürge-sonrası konuya değinirken, madunların içinde buldukları zor durumu da çarpıcı bir şekilde sunmaktadır. Romandaki madunlar "Ayemenem kasabasının sakinleri", "dokunulmazlar" ve "kadınlar" olarak üç ayrı grupta ele alınabilir. Roman ilk olarak sömürgeci söylemin ve maduniyetin Batı düşüncesindeki yerini ve nasıl ele alındığını, sonrasında ise sömürgeci ve sömürülenin eşit olmayan güç ilişkisinde nasıl evrildiğini inceler. Bu nedenle, bu makale hegemonik söylemlerin cinsellik, marjinalite ve madunun nesneleştirilme şeklini ele almaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sömürgecilik-sonrası, Madun, Dokunulabilirler, Dokunulmazlar, Küçük Şeylerin Tanrısı.

## INTRODUCTION

The term "subaltern" is first used by Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* to "describe 'groups or classes' which were socially inferior and had no ideological power" (Tickell 2007, p. 82). Due to Benito Mussolini's fascist regime and its state censorship, Gramsci has a preference to use 'subaltern' instead of words like 'proletariat' to demystify a group or person subject to hegemonic power (Novetzke-Patton 2008, p. 380). Gramsci's term later is used by a group of Marxist Indian and English scholars, mostly historians, who formed an academic discussion group, "Subaltern Studies". This group launched a new scholarly journal in 1982, "Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society", to (re)read South Asian history and discuss power relations in a colonial and postcolonial context. However, postcolonial theorists of diverse disciplinary backgrounds have contributed to the later edited volumes, thus, contributors to Subaltern Studies "have participated in contemporary critiques of history and nationalism, and of orientalism and Eurocentrism in the construction of social science knowledge" (Chakrabarty 2003, p. 191). As a result, the meaning of subaltern is expanded to "a name for the general attribute of subordination ... whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office in any other way" (Tickell 2007, p. 82). From different countries and outside the bonds of South Asian history or Indian historiography, the study of subaltern "as a category of investigation" has become a popular subject in East Asian Studies, African Studies, Latin America Subaltern Studies, and Education Studies (Novetzke-Patton 2008, p. 380).

The search of subaltern studies for hidden pasts calls up textual criticism, fragmentary testimonies, and lost moments "to restore the integrity of indigenous histories that appear naturally in non-linear, oral, symbolic, vernacular, and dramatic forms" (Ludden 2002, p. 20). Gayatri Spivak, a postcolonial theorist and

translator, in her well-known essay “Can the subaltern speak?” discusses the term by questioning the hierarchically formed gender and colonial binaries in order to argue whether the subaltern has “agency” or not (Tickell 2007, p. 82-83). The questions raised by Spivak have inspired many articles searching for an answer since the day the article was published. However, it seems that there is no possibility for the subaltern to speak or to be heard since they have no agency at all, and they still use the hegemonic discourse subjugating them to define the relations of domination and subordination.

Although the term “subalternity” in readings of Postcolonialism generally refers to “the colonized”, regarding the subordination of the colonized, its meaning is not limited to this power relation. For instance, it is quite interesting that the British military used the term “subordinate” to define a junior officer. When Gramsci’s idea of cultural and ideological dimensions of hegemony and subordination is taken into consideration, subalternity can also be observed in the relationship between male and female, and in the social subjugation of the subaltern by the upper classes in hierarchically shaped cultures like the caste system in India.

Subaltern Studies focuses on historical analyses to uncover how subaltern groups are regarded as the subjects of history in Eurocentric metanarratives. Thus, subaltern focus, which is to look for “a history in which the subaltern was the maker of his own destiny” brings into focus “the question of the relationship between texts and power” (Chakrabarty 2003, p. 198). Arundhati Roy’s novel, *The God of Small Things*, is a worthy example to examine the colonial discourse and Western style of thinking about and studying the subaltern, and how the colonizer and the colonized evolved within an unequal power relationship. In *The God of Small Things*, three groups of subaltern can be defined: Firstly, all of the inhabitants of Ayemenem—whether touchable or untouchable—are the subaltern since they are all victims of colonization. Though they have been liberated from the colonialism in the sense of land occupation, they are still culturally and linguistically colonized. Secondly, the Untouchables—Pelaya, Pulaya, Paravan—who are at the bottom of the caste system in India are subalterns. Though theoretically and legally, the caste system was abolished, in practice, it still dominates the social life ideologically. Lastly, the women, whether upper class or lower class, are one of the subaltern groups since they are the other of the phallogocentric Other. Thus, this paper focuses on the ways in which hegemonic systems in the novel constitute hierarchical relations of domination and subordination as well as the objectification of the subaltern.

## THE INHABITANTS OF AYEMENEM AS SUBALTERN

The novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy is about a family living in the town of Ayemenem<sup>1</sup>, Kerala, India between 1969 and 1993. While the novel tells a forbidden love story between a Syrian Christian divorcee Ammu and an untouchable carpenter Velutha, and the reuniting of Ammu's twin children, Rahel and Estha after twenty-four years, it also draws a postcolonial picture of India. Over and above poverty, the novel highlights social, political, and economic ills of the post-independence era, such as the religious and caste conflict resulting from the political economy of colonialism. In the novel, in their struggle against British imperialism, the regenerative force, the agency that South Asian people need, is a new kind of unifying nationalism (like Gandhi's and Nehru's nationalism) since "the conflict of interest and ideology between the colonizers and the "Indian people" was the most important conflict of British India" and "all other conflicts of "class or caste were secondary to this principal contradiction and were to be treated as such in histories of nationalism" (Chakrabarty 2003, p. 193). In one of her interviews, Arundhati Roy states, "Fifty years after independence, India is still struggling with the legacy of colonialism; still flinching from the cultural insult [and...] we're still caught up in the business of disproving the white world's definition of us" (Tickell 2007, p.5). The colonial legacy she mentions is felt from the beginning to the end of the novel, especially in the plight of subalterns.

As a result of the spatial extension of powerful nations like Britain, the land colonized falls under the control of the centre believed to be the legitimate source of power and authority. Colonization refers not only to physical domination but also to the production of specific forms of knowledge and discourse to justify this colonization process. San Juan defines this as the "White Man's Burden of civilizing barbarian natives into free, English-speaking, forever adolescent consumers" (San Juan 1998, p.57). The violence of colonialism is more than fixing the colonized people in the inferior "other". Without exploring the colonial exercise of the disciplinary power "as a discourse, one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment era" (Said 1978, p.3). In Fanon's words, "colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (Fanon 1963, p. 210). Accordingly, otherization in colonial discourse, while subordinating the other, creates "an inferiority complex" in the soul of the colonized by destroying "local cultural originality" (Fanon 2008,

---

<sup>1</sup> Ayemenem, the setting of *The God of Small Things*, is a town in the state of Kerala in India and this town is also where Arundhati Roy was born in 1961. Roy herself is a hybrid character as the daughter of a Syrian Christian mother and a Hindi father who got divorced when Arundhati and her brother were young. Roy herself grew up in a multi-faith and cultural society where Hinduism, Islam and Christianity were all established religions shaping different cultural practices.

p. 9). Thus, many postcolonial writers, scholars and critics support the idea that even though the former colonies are now formally independent countries and the official colonial structure does not exist, colonial influences still persist in many different ways. Roy in the novel criticizes the British colonization of India for their intervening with local Indian customs and traditions during the colonial period. After Independence, the people of Ayemenem, -whether touchable or untouchable- are still under the influence of colonization even if they are not colonized subjects anymore. However, these people are neither pure Indians nor British and their hybridity between cultures and languages creates a sense of ambivalence. After centuries of colonial domination, the people of Ayemenem are foreigners who cannot fit right in their original culture, religion and language; furthermore, these characters are also not regarded as pure British. Chacko—whose Oxford education and English ex-wife clashes with his ideas—gives an account of themselves as the colonized. Chacko cries “We’re Prisoners of War,” Chacko said. “Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows will never be sad enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives never important enough. To matter” (Roy 1998, p. 26).

From the beginning, the effects of British colonialism in the novel are very noticeable since particularly the influence of the cultural colonialism continues to shape the cultural space. As G. Rajeev underlines, the novel refers to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, reflecting the atrocities of colonization in its severe form many times and Roy, herself, states in an interview in 1997 that “in Ayemenem, in the heart of darkness, I talk not about the White Man, but about the Darkness, about what the Darkness is about” (Rajeev 2011, p. 1). *The Heart of Darkness* is first mentioned when Chacko explains Estha and Rahel that “history was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. Ancestors whispering inside”. The image that evokes in the twins’ mind is of Kari Saibu’s house (The History House) - which belongs to “The Englishman”, “Ayemenem’s own Kurtz” who had “gone native”. Who spoke Malayam and wore mundus” (Roy 1998, p. 25). As the History (House) is captured by the “English” sahib, the history of Ayemenem is colonized by the white men, and it will never be re-accessed and re-created fully. Chacko’s following words reinforce this similarity when he says, “We can’t go in (...) because we’ve been locked out. And when we have been locked out. And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves” (Rajeev 2011, p. 25-26).

The sentences Chacko utters about the plight of the colonized inhabitants of Ayemenem mirror the ideas of Frantz Fanon’s in his famous work *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon, in his ground breaking work portraying the psychology of the people who are colonized both linguistically and culturally, defines the colonial

inferiority complex and colonized subjects' emulation to their oppressors which leads to their alienation from their own cultures as follows:

A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves Every colonized people- in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality- finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle (Fanon 2008a, p. 9).

When Chacko's explanations and Fanon's psychological analyses are compared, it is apparent that the touchables in the novel, who regard themselves superior to untouchables, are more deeply affected by colonization compared to the untouchables. The touchables in the novel, because of their inferiority complex, mimic the White Man in many ways. That is why, as the quotation below points out, Ammu and Chacko refer to Pappachi and themselves as Anglophiles:

Ammu said that Pappachi was an incurable British-CCP, which was short for chhi-chhi poach and in Hindu it means shit-wiper. Chacko said that the right word for people like Pappachi was Anglophile...Chacko told the twins that, though he hated to admit it, they were all Anglophiles. They were a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps-because their footprints had been swept away (Roy 1998, p. 25).

The prevailing Anglophilia can be observed in the manners of the Ayemenem House members. The father of Pappachi, Ammu, and Chacko always wears English-styled clothes. Chacko goes to "Oxford" to study, and he marries an "English woman". All the members of the family support the use of English as the medium of communication instead of their vernacular language, Malayalam. When the twins, Rahel and Estha, speak Malayalam they are punished by Baby Kochamma and made to write "*I will always speak in English*" a hundred times each. The Anglophilia pervading the Ayemenem house atmosphere reaches its peak when Chacko's ex-wife Margaret Kochamma comes with Sophie Mol to the Ayemenem house; furthermore, this visit makes the twins aware of their depreciation. As stated in the novel "She has her mother's color," Kochu Maria said. "Sundarikutty. She is a little angel. " Little angels were beach-colored and wore bell-bottoms. Little demons were mud brown in Airport-Fairy frocks with forehead bumps that might turn into horns. With Fountains in Love-in-Tokyo. And backwards-reading habits. And if you cared to look, you could see Satan in their eyes (Roy 1998, p. 85). At this point, the novel makes a striking comparison between black Indian twins and their half-English cousin, Sophie Mol. While Mol is "loved from the Beginning" the twins are not. As it can be observed in the portrayal of the characters from different classes of the caste system, lower class people are not only humiliated and subjugated by the colonizer but also by the

colonized members of the higher caste. It is witnessed in the novel that power regimes, while positioning individuals within social, political and cultural systems, also shape fields of experience.

### **THE UNTOUCHABLES AS SUBALTERN GROUP**

A subject is “[b]ound to seek recognition of its own existence in categories, terms, and names that are not of its own making, the subject seeks the sign of its own existence outside itself, in a discourse that is at once dominant and indifferent” (Butler 1997, p. 20). As observed in the novel, in a Foucauldian sense also, the subject is both the producer and the product of discourse and power; thus, those in power that generate the texts and other indexes of knowledge while shaping the society also determine and allocate certain roles to individuals. In *The God of Small Things*, the hierarchical observation of the caste system reflects the idea that power in the form of institutional mechanisms produce and maintain the privileged norms. In an interview, Arundhati Roy regards *The God of Small Things* as a novel about “caste”, and she emphasizes that “the subject of caste in India has been hailed as the central organizing principle in society in spite of the fact that the Indian state has passed several acts ensuring that the practice of caste discrimination is eliminated” (Gqola 2004, p. 107).

The caste system is basically a class system which is determined by birth and which divides Hindus into four main categories: the Brahmins (ecclesiastical people), the Kshatriyas (ruling elites, administrators and warriors), the Vaishyas (artists, traders, and farmers), and Shudras (laboring classes). Basically, this system can be categorized into four castes above “the red-line” which distinguishes them from the “outcastes”, also labelled as “untouchables”. There is a huge difference in terms of status and prestige among the castes above the red line. However, the attitude towards “untouchables”, who are only assigned as “sanitation workers; from earwax removers to lavatory cleaners” is humiliating (Margalit 1997, p. 150). From that point of view, the untouchables constitute a very disadvantaged group of subalterns since they are twice subjugated both by the touchables and the colonizer. The operation of the caste system is very similar to the operation of the colonial subjugation in the way that both of them take their predicament from the notion that one group of people is superior to the others, and also the ones holding the power have the right to exert control over the others while defining the limits of possibilities and manipulating what eventually becomes known as “truth”. Although both of these systems are claimed to have disappeared ages ago, they continue to dominate the people in many ways and manners. “In Kerala, untouchability is practised more meticulously than elsewhere in India and it is not restricted to Hindus only but Christians, the established Syrian Christian, practise the rules and customs also” (Nimni 2016, p. 21). The novel vividly portrays how the untouchables were treated in India by others: “When the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans and Pulayyas (among them Velutha’s grandfather,

Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. As added incentive they were given a little food and money. They were known as the Rice Christians. It didn't take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire". They "were made to have separate churches, and separate priests... After independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservations, or bank loan at low interest rates because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore casteless" (Roy 1998, p. 35-36). As the words from the novel underline, caste is often adapted within the Christian churches so that there are different churches for Touchables and Untouchables respectively, reproducing the caste system within the religious realm. The novel sketches the strict boundary between the castes: Touchables—the upper-class people, and the Untouchables—the lower-class people: — Pelaya, Pulaya, and Paravan and humiliating attitude towards the touchable as follows:

His father, Vellya Paapen, was a Paravan. ....As a young boy, Velutha would come with Vellya Paapen to the back entrance of Ayemenem House to deliver the coconuts they had plucked from the trees in the compound, 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. In Mammachi's time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed (Roy 1998, p. 34).

Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are both from a proud minority group, Syrian Christians, who regard themselves to be "descendants of the one hundred Brahmins whom St. Thomas the Apostle converted to Christianity when he traveled east after the Resurrection" (Roy 1998, p. 64). In the social hierarchy, these Syrians are 'upper-caste Syrian Christians', and they separate themselves from the poorer 'Rice-Christians' who (like Velutha's grandfather) joined the Anglican Church and were exhilarated by a little food and money.

Roy also presents two different kinds of attitudes of the untouchables towards the rigid caste system through the characters of Velutha and his father, Vellya, who are representatives of untouchables in the novel. As an 'Old World Paravan' (Roy 1998, p. 76), Vellya knows that if one wants to challenge the rigid social order he has to face the awful consequences of this encounter; thus, Vellya, who is loyal to his oppressor, conforms to those predetermined roles, traditions, customs, and rules without questioning them. Vellya accepts the hegemonic relation between Touchables and Untouchables readily, and he shows respect for

the system: “Velutha’s father, Vellya Paapen, however, was an Old-World Paravan. He had seen the Crawling Backwards Days and his gratitude to Mammachi and her family for all that they had done for him was as wide and deep as a river in space. When he had his accident with the stone chip, Mammachi organized and paid for his glass eye. He hadn’t worked off his debt yet”, and “though he knew he wasn’t expected to, that he wouldn’t ever be able to, he felt that his eye was not his own. His gratitude widened his smile and bent his back” (Roy 1998: 34).

Though both Vellya and Velutha are representatives of Paravan (one group of the outcastes in India), Velutha is against the caste system and differs from all of the untouchables with his talents and freedom of ideas. Velutha is encouraged to go to school though not together with Touchables but to a special school for Untouchables only. Contrary to what is expected from a Paravan, Velutha offers his suggestions without being asked, demonstrating he lacks the inferiority complex the other colonized has. He stands against all the categories that are hierarchically shaped, and instead of silently obeying the old established caste system, he rebels against it. Velutha is a member of a Marxist group called Naxalites. In the novel, the plight of Velutha as an Untouchable having an affair with a Touchable woman changes the lives of many people in an unrecoverable way. This leads to the murder of Velutha by touchable police officers, the disinheritance of Ammu, the separation of Estha and Rahel both from their mother and each other for long years. Velutha, is “the God of Small Things” and “the God of Loss” who knows their relationship does not have a viable future that is why “they stuck to the small things” (Roy 1998, p. 157). Being subaltern, Velutha tries to “speak”, but he is exterminated and silenced since he is regarded as a threat to the social order as well as all established systems. In the novel Roy writes, “If they (police officers) hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature -had been severed long ago” (Roy 1998, p. 144). It is obvious that the inhumanly brutal attitude of the touchable police officers towards untouchable Velutha mirrors how the caste system segregates people of the same nation and causes violence in the society.

Though Untouchables differ from each other in their understanding of their own plight and reaction against oppression as in the case of Velutha and Vellya, the touchables have always been consistent in their perception of untouchables and their attitudes towards them. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and the other members of upper class, still believe that the untouchables are inferior to them, they only exist to serve them, and also the relationship between a Touchable and an Untouchable is unacceptable. For instance, Mammachi is submissive towards people whom she considers to be superior to her, like her husband; nevertheless, she displays oppressive tendencies towards people she regards as inferiors, like Ammu and her children. Hierarchically formed categories shape the manners of the members of society, and these manners are firmly rooted in the caste system of

Indian culture. The Untouchables are exploited by their own people (the touchables) and the colonizers equally. While their own people make them serve and do the works they do not want to do, the colonizers make them lose their identities by changing their language and religion.

In the novel it is highlighted that when the British came to Malabar, they converted a number of untouchables into Christianity. In that way, they could not benefit from the welfares of the government since they are officially Christians, therefore casteless. Roy powerfully depicts how it is to be casteless in the following words: “It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all” (Roy 1998, p. 35-36). These footprints are their culture, religion, history and language constituting their identities and without them these people cannot exist. The untouchables have been oppressed not only by the colonizer (the English) but also the colonized (the touchables). Stripped of all of the elements forming their identities (their religion, their language and cultural history) these people become only signifiers without signifieds.

#### **THE WOMEN AS SUBALTERN GROUP**

Hegemonic structures, like colonial domination and caste system, are often intertwined and serve as a complex oppressive system that is sometimes difficult to dissect. Patriarchy has a massive effect on creating the subaltern in terms of gender. The women have always been subordinate and inferior to men. The plight of women as subaltern can be explained by “double colonization” - a term coined by Holst Petersen and Rutherford in *A Double Colonization: Colonial ad Post-Colonial Women’s Writing* in mid 1980s (Petersen and Rutherford 1986, p. 5). According to them, the women are doubly colonized by two forms of oppression, patriarchy and imperialism due to their race as well as their gender (Ashcroft and Griffiths et al. 1995, p. 66). Spivak underlines that women have an ambiguous “minimal predicament” in a “phallogocentric tradition” and adds how colonialism and patriarchy join their forces to destroy the women as double subalterns:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effected. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is “evidence”. It is rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow...(Spivak 1995, p. 28)

In *The God of Small Things*, the plight of women as doubly colonized is clearly presented in male characters’ attitudes towards the female characters. Though Pappachi draws an image of a perfect man as an intellectual and philanthropist, he indeed is one of the practitioners of oppression against women.

To illustrate, although Pappachi is an educated man who is also a high official in British Empire, he deprives her daughter of her right to pursue higher education regarding this as 'an unnecessary expense' (Roy 1998, p.38). He beats both his wife, Mammachi, and her daughter, Ammu. He is very jealous of his wife's success when she runs the Paradise and Pickles Factory in a perfect way. Mammachi's success in work is rewarded by continuous beatings of Pappachi. She is also punished by him since she is excellent at playing the violin and one day she can be a concert violinist. As a child "she learned very quickly to disregard the Father Bear Mother Bear stories she was given to read. In her version Father Bear beat Mother Bear with brass vases. Mother Bear suffered from those beatings with mute resignation." In her "growing years, Ammu has watched her father weave his hideous web. He was charming and urbane with visitors, and stopped on them if they happened to be white. He donated money to orphanages and leprosy clinics. He worked hard on his public profile as a sophisticated, generous, moral man. But alone with his wife he turned into monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father" (Roy 1998, p. 86).

Pappachi is not the only character who otherizes women. The other characters of the novel also humiliate and subjugate the women in different ways. Although both Chacko and Ammu are divorcees, only Ammu is seen as a second-class citizen by her family. This double standard can be grasped in the attitudes towards Chacko's countless affairs with women and Ammu's affair with a man. Though a liaison between a higher-class man and a lower-class woman is ignored, the one between a higher-class woman and a lower-class man is reacted severely. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma respond differently when both Chacko and Ammu engaged in sexual intercourse with people from a lower caste. Chacko's liaisons with female workers at Paradise Pickles and Factory are consented by Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, while Ammu's relationship with Velutha causes a great chaos (Gqola 2004, p. 109- 110). When Mammachi and Baby Kochamma learn about the relationship between Ammu and Velutha, they never approve their relationship. They even tell a lie that Ammu has been raped by Velutha which leads to his being beaten to death by the police. On the other hand, Chacko's liaisons with these women is seen as a necessity by these women and even a separate door is built to facilitate his affairs with them and let these women come and go without being seen:

Mammachi was aware of 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 primly. Surprisingly, Baby Kochamma accepted this explanation, and the enigmatic, secretly thrilling notion of Men's Needs gained implicit sanction in Ayemenem House. Neither Mammachi nor Baby Kochamma saw any contradiction between Chacko's

Marxist mind and feudal libido. They only worried about the Naxalites, who had been known to force men from Good Families to marry servant girls whom they had made pregnant (Roy 1998, p. 80).

Qqola underlines that the same empathy is not shown for Ammu's relationship with a lower-class man, Velutha, in spite of their mutual love. In this case, she does not offer any justifications as she does in case of Chacko (Gqola 2004, p.110). Once she learns about her daughter's affair with a Paravan, Mammachi feels:

Cold contempt for her daughter and what she had done. She thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who has nothing but a filthy coolie. She imagined it in vivid detail: a Paravan's coarse black hand on her daughter's breasts. His mouth on hers. His black hips jerking between her parted legs. The sound of their breathing. His particular Paravan smell. Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. Like a dog with a bitch on heat. Her tolerance of "Man's Needs," as far as her son was concerned, became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter. She had defiled generations of breeding....and brought the family to its knees (Roy 1998, p. 122).

However, this is neither the first nor the last of Ammu's subjugation by the patriarchy. She also suffers from her alcoholic ex-husband who tries to trade her with his boss in return for his job. Furthermore, since she is a woman, the other of man, she is also oppressed by the guards of the state, the police, when she goes to the police station to save Velutha: As clearly stated in the novel "When Ammu went to him (Inspector Thomas Mathew) with the twins to tell him that a mistake had been made and he tapped her breasts with his baton, it was not a policeman's spontaneous brutishness on his part. He knew exactly what he was doing. It was a premeditated gesture, calculated to humiliate and terrorize her. An attempt to instill order into a world gone wrong" (Roy 1998, p. 123).

According to inspector, both Ammu and Velutha are transgressors of the order of the society "Where the Love Laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much" (Roy 1998, p. 84). The inspector even calls her by a name in Indian which means prostitute, and her children are called illegitimate. Even if she belongs to an upper class, she cannot escape from being a subaltern like her mother, grandmother and great grandmother. In the novel, the plight of the women as subaltern and their being silenced twice consolidate the truth that subalternity is related to gender as much as it is related to race and class. As an answer to Spivak's question it can be claimed that patriarchally shaped symbolic order provides no space for women to have their own voice; thus, this subaltern group cannot speak.

## CONCLUSION

The post-independence period of South Asian writing in English presents a consistent picture of colonial and post-colonial encounters with a new variety of challenges, conflicts, negotiations and problems. During the post-independence era, like all the countries that have had “the misfortune of being colonized”, South Asian countries had to “experience the traumatic searing of the self” (Iyer 2003, p. 70). In the novel, *The God of Small Things*, the residue of colonial history and imperial power continues to shape both the psyches and the spatio-temporal practices of the characters. Although originally the term “subalternity” in readings of Postcolonialism generally refers to “the colonized”, regarding the subordination of the colonized, its meaning is not only limited to this power relation in the novel. The hegemonic systems operating in the novel constitute feudal relations of domination and subordination, sexuality, and the objectification of the subaltern. Thus, these feudal relations form three groups of subalterns in the novel; people of Ayemenem, the subaltern of English colonizers; the Untouchables – Pelaya, Pulaya, Paravan- the subaltern of the Touchables and English colonizers; and the women, the subaltern of men and English colonizers at the same time. The British colonization of India the British for intervening with local Indian customs and traditions during the colonial period. The people of Ayemenem in the novel, after having been colonized physically, culturally, linguistically, and psychologically by the English for many years, lose their cultural identities and their connection with their roots. However, they are never accepted as a part of the mainstream of the “white” British life, either. This leads to a fragmented sense of self in the characters since they do not fit comfortably into either Indian culture or British culture. The plight of the untouchables is worse in the way that they are colonized not only by the English colonizers but also by their own people who are from the higher level of the caste system. The women are the victims of double colonization and otherization since they are first women, then they are Indian. There are three major othered groups in the novel but they are all subalterns of a higher totalizing system. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy displays how the ghost of colonization still haunts the minds and souls of the ex-colonial subjects though the British rule collapsed many years ago.

## REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G and Tiffin H. (Eds.) (1995). *The Post-colonial studies reader*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2003). Subaltern studies and postcolonial historiography. G. Delanty and E. F. Isin (eds.), In *Handbook of historical sociology* (pp. 191-204). London: Sage Publications.

- Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin white masks*. Northampton: Pluto Press.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Gqola, P. D. (2004). History was wrong-footed, caught off guard: Gendered caste, class and manipulation in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 26 (2): 107-120. doi.org/10.1080/13698010500268072.
- Iyer, N. S. (2003). *Musings on Indian writing in English: Fiction*. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons.
- Ludden, D. (2002). Introduction. D. Ludden (Ed.), In *Reading subaltern studies: Critical history, contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia* (pp. 1-43). London: Anthem Press.
- Margalit, A. (1997). Decent equality and freedom: A Postscript. *Social Research* (64:1): 147-160.
- Nimni, I. J. (2016, February). *The God of Small Things: Speaking subaltern*. *OISR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHHS)*, 21 (2): 21-26. DOI: 10.9790/0837-21272126.
- Novetzke, C. L. & Patton, L. (2008). Subaltern. S. Mittal & G. Thursby (Eds.), In *Studying Hinduism: Key concepts and methods*. London: Routledge. 378-400.
- Petersen, K. H. & Rutherford, A. (1986). *A double colonization: Colonial and post-colonial women's writing*. Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press.
- Rajeev, S. (2011). Arundhati Rai's *The God of Small Things*- A Post-colonial reading. *IRWLE* 7 (2): 1-7.
- Roy, A. (1998). *The God of Small Things*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.
- San Juan, E. (1998). *From exile to diaspora: Versions of the Filipino experience in the United States*. Colorado: Westview Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (1995). Can the subaltern speak?. B. Ashcroft , G. Griffins and Tiffen H. (Eds.), In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge. 24-29.
- Tickell, A. (2007). *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: Routledge Guides to Literature*. London: Routledge.