

Marginalization of Outcaste Untouchables in Fiction: A Study of Selected Works

Shouket Ahmad Tilwani*

Department of English, College of Science and Humanities, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, 11942, Saudi Arabia

Hadiya Shafi

Department of English, Govt Degree College, Sogam, Kupwara, 193223, University of Kashmir, Hazratbal, India

Abstract—Outcaste untouchables in India have been subjected to centuries of oppression and discrimination by upper-caste Hindus. ‘Although the government of India passed legislation known as “The Scheduled Castes.... The Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989” (2014), they are considered ritually polluting and are denied fundamental rights to education, freedom of movement, and access to justice’ (Mayell, 2003). The paper aims to discuss the marginalized untouchable communities, euphemistically called Dalits, in Indian Anglophone fiction from the Dalit discourse perspective. Literary works such as *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *Untouchable* (1935), and *The God of Small Things* (1997), have depicted the dehumanizing treatment Untouchables are exposed to within the caste system. This study is qualitative research. Through a keen study of these selected works, research papers, and theories related to the untouchables and caste system such as Ambedkarism and Subaltern studies, it is highlighted that Dalits are often forced to live in squalor, work in difficult situations for menial jobs, and are vulnerable to violence and abuse. The findings highlight the ongoing marginalization of Dalits, who endure disproportionate poverty, hazardous labor, and systemic violence. Despite India's modernization, Dalits face discrimination across various demographic factors, underscoring the urgent need for social justice and equity measures.

Index Terms—caste-system, untouchability, discrimination, violence and abuse, literature

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Hindu social system, a person who is considered to be the lowest in the hierarchy is called ‘untouchable/*shudra*’ and is euphemistically called “*Dalit*” in literary nomenclature. An untouchable is an individual rejected by and excluded from the prevalent social groups or society, having no place in the social system established by his ‘superiors’ or upper-caste Hindus because caste has been the dominant principle of social organization since ancient times (Sana, 1993). In Indian English literature, the concept of untouchability is one of the themes dealt by several prominent writers, including Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Amitav Ghosh. Anand’s Bakha in *Untouchables* (1935), Roy’s Valutha in *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Ghosh’s Kalua in *Sea of Poppies* (2008) are notable representatives of the untouchables in English literature. However, before discussing these characters and analyzing their predicaments, it seems imperative to look at the historical and religious background of the untouchables in Hindu society.

This Hindu caste system is a hierarchical social structure based on individuals' roles and functions within society. It categorizes people into distinct groups, known as castes, which traditionally determine one's occupation, social status, and interactions within the community. This system has been a prominent feature of Indian society for centuries, although its influence and practice have evolved over time (Sharma, 2012). More than 3000 occupations are related to sub-castes known as ‘*jaatis*’. All four *varnas*- social strata, have their typical professions and occupations considered hereditary and passed on to the next generation of the same *Varna*. However, some regional variations were found in this regard. In contemporary India, the link between a sub-caste and its profession is not as strict and rigid as it once was. However, the 1992 famine in Andhra Pradesh, mainly affected the weavers, illustrates the limitation of the mobility of professions among the ‘*jaatis*’, clearly showing how the sub-castes are tied to their occupations even during economic hardships.

Chatur-varna, i.e. four colours, is an age-old caste system dividing society into four sections. It is believed in Hinduism that the caste system is the result of divine creation. Around 10 to 12 centuries BC, *Rig Veda*, the seminal text of modern Hinduism, linked this caste system with the myth of the primeval cosmic being *Purusa*. Humanity’s creation and division into four categories is like the dismemberment of *Purusa* through a sacrificial act. The priest class, i.e., Brahmins, was created from the head of *Purusa*, the nobles, i.e., Kshatriyas, were from his arms, the populace, i.e., Vaishyas, from his thighs, and the servants, i.e., *Shudras*, from the feet of *Purusa* (Shiva, 2016).

Evidently, this division of *varna* fixed diversified roles and duties for these groups. Temples and religious activities were entrusted to the priest class, Brahmins, who had the authority to study and recite the holy texts. Military duties and warfare were allotted to Kshatriyas. Trade and agriculture were entrusted to Vaishyas, and the *Shudras*, the lowest class,

* Corresponding Author. Email: s.tilwani@psau.edu.sa

labelled and described as untouchables were given menial labor. The untouchables are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. They depend entirely on the higher classes socially as well as economically. Such downgrading and spiritually polluting duties as rubbish collecting, sweeping, and disposing of the deceased and leatherwork are entrusted to the untouchables (Imran et al., 2020; Joyia & Gull, 2017).

The link between the caste system, the four categories is a cycle of reincarnation and *Karma*-purity, of past lives is crucial to understanding untouchability (Atiyat & Khassawneh, 2022; Imran & Ismail, 2022). It is believed that the members of the *Shudra* caste committed sins in their past lives and are consequently punished to serve the three upper castes whose members are believed to have 'performed good deeds in their past lives and are now eligible for performing religious rites, a privilege forbidden to the *Shudras*. 'Moksha' is the process of gradual spiritual purification (Imran et al., 2023), believed to be necessary for the rebirth in the caste Hindu circles from the *Shudra* life of untouchables. In other words, if the untouchables want to reach *Nirvana*, they must perform their duties with 'religious fervor' without raising any questions. Achieving *Nirvana*, the ultimate goal for a human being in Hinduism entails liberation from the cycle of reincarnation, which is believed to consist of 8.4 million births (Jadhav, 2005). This state of salvation can only be attained by devoutly fulfilling one's caste-based duties, emphasizing the significance of adherence to societal roles and responsibilities in pursuing spiritual enlightenment. The process of '*Moksha*' and social division can be hampered by external and internal impurities of man (Ghafoor & Farooq, 2020). The upper castes can clean the impurities, physical and spiritual through bathing and certain religious rituals, whereas the *Shudras* can cleanse only through death and rebirth, besides serving the other three groups.

The prevalence of caste ethics and power fluctuated in time, but often it has been advocated that the Dalits be freed from the bondage of caste ethics (Bhatnagar, 1999). Mr. Mahatma Gandhi, during the Indian independence movement, also realized that just freedom from British colonialism was not enough for the people of India. They also needed to be freed from the clutches of this derogatory caste system. Accordingly, Gandhi traveled throughout the country and made great efforts to make people realize the importance of avoiding inhuman deeds in the name of the caste system and to spread the concepts of brotherhood and love among the people. After meeting Gandhi in 1932 at Sabarmati Ashram about the issue of the caste system, which he was dealing with at that time in his under-process novel, it is reported that Anand revised a number of sections of his novel as, according to George (1994), Gandhi had advised him not to write about anything of which he does not have a firsthand knowledge based on his own experience.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is a thoughtful reflection of the complexities of human experiences, historical events, cultural and societal nuances, and insights into diverse human experiences. In this context, the literary works *Untouchable*, *The God of Small Things*, and *Sea of Poppies* provide various human experiences and social issues. Considering the diversity of these selected works, many scholars have critically analyzed these novels' narrative intricacies and thematics in depth. According to Cilano (2009), *The God of Small Things* focuses on the silenced and ignored histories and thus gives a futuristic perspective instead of the past one. The novel depicts two kinds of haunting, literal as well as metaphorical. The literal one is portrayed through an Englishman, Kari Saipu. At the same time, the metaphorical haunting is shown through Rahel and Estha's guilt not only for the death of Velutha but also for the subsequent breakdown of their family. Symbolically, these kinds of hauntings show the effect of the past on the present.

Punter (2003), on the other hand, delves deep to signify the importance of ghosts in *The God of Small Things*. According to him, in the postcolonial context, these ghosts symbolically portray the inevitability of the re-emergence of the past, indicating the effects of the colonial trauma. He opines that Chacko's portrayal of history positions India as a specter excluded from the process of history. Further, Punter (2003) talks about the toys hidden in the History House as quiet witnesses of the brutal beating of Velutha, and thus, representatives of how it becomes impossible to recount history completely. Talking about the liminality in *The God of Small Things*, Froula (2009) says that Ammu and her children are positioned in such a way on cultural divides, thus challenging the social norms about gender, caste, and religion. Crossing the boundaries of caste laws, they indulge in relationships that are unconventional and defiant to the established social customs and norms. In response, the social system, governed by "Love Laws" and represented in the novel by such characters as Mathews, Chacko, and Baby Kochamma, punishes them for this transgression, threatening the existing social hierarchical structure. Thus, Ammu and her children symbolically seem to be the dirt that must be cleaned to avoid polluting and corrupting the social system.

According to Jani (2009), *The God of Small Things*, while depicting the intricate power dynamics, puts oppression based on class at its core to illustrate various forms of oppression intersecting and strengthening one another. However, the narrative strategies used by the novelist to implicitly address the English-speaking non-Dalit elite class instead of the oppressed Dalits do not allow the story of Velutha to be conspicuous. The novel focuses more on the trauma of Ammu and her family, thus making it difficult for the readers to fully grasp the story of Velutha. While talking about trauma and temporal hybridity, Outka (2011) says that, while symbolizing traumatic as well as problematic blending, temporal hybridity works as a tool helping the readers to view the possible changes in the political scenario. Its effects, thus, maybe not only positive but destructive also in portraying the complex relation between the contrasting aspects. Instead of resolving this contradiction, the novelist encourages readers to acknowledge and embrace it. According to Fox (2002), *The God of Small Things* enjoys international fame because of its unique utilization, in its narrative, of that which is

traumatic and abject. The story engages these profound and unsettling aspects of human experience, adding depth and resonance of emotions to create a compelling and impactful experience for the readers, which is beyond mere storytelling and beautiful use of language (Imran & Hart, 2019). Velutha's role is pivotal in this regard, not only being the focus of the traumatic incidents in the novels but also because he is abject and untouchable.

In a critical essay, Saini (2016) discusses the primary purpose of Mulk Raj Anand in writing *Untouchable*, which is to spur compassion for the impoverished in the upper and privileged sections of society. His literary works raise the voice of the marginalized and silenced sections of society, serving as a platform to unmask the suppressed feelings and emotions of those deprived of the right to express themselves because of social norms. The sufferings, deprivation, and hardships endured by the underprivileged and oppressed sections of society are highlighted in his fiction. However, according to Mukherjee (1991), the postcolonial critics, persistent in utilizing such binary frameworks as domination/resistance or colonizer/colonized, overlook a significant array of texts that may not fit into these theoretical paradigms. In this way, perhaps they unknowingly perpetuate a form of cultural imperialism akin to the universalist or all-encompassing critiques but in a different guise.

Similarly, Dhar (2017) evaluates *the Sea of Poppies* and explores the complicated scenario of indentured labor. Ghosh doesn't liken indentured labor to slavery but tries to indicate how the Indian indentured laborers decided to accept indenture as a desperate need for survival in a limited socio-economic environment. Thus, the oversimplified binary of freedom and bondage often associated with chattel slavery is challenged by this portrayal. It is elucidated that accepting indenture wasn't a voluntary pursuit of personal mobility but a result of the severe limitations and diminishing options faced by Indian peasants. To provide a voice to the voiceless, Singh (2012) examines how an upper-caste widow, Deeti's elopement with an untouchable, reflects the exploration, by the novelist, of migration patterns of the time. The story explores the feelings of the old Indian diaspora in search of their ancestral roots, indicating how this nostalgic pursuit might uncover uncomfortable truths they prefer not to confront.

According to Rana (2017), Ghosh's fiction investigates individuals' lives in the context of important historical events. He illustrates through his European as well as non-European characters how their fates are intricately woven and entangled in the impact and turmoil of colonialism, highlighting how it affects, in a significant manner, the lives of not only the individuals but also the communities. Joshi (1986) refers to different political, cultural, and religious movements that advocated the emancipation of the untouchables. Deliege (1992) also has similar views when he calls the untouchables' position ambiguous in India. According to him, the untouchables seem to live a life of connection between the world of human beings and its surrounding wilderness. This life is ambiguous because these untouchables are not ready to accept themselves as impure. Yet, they do not reject the concepts of impurities and spiritual pollution and try to impose the same notions on those groups who are below them (Deliege, 1992).

Singh and Thorat (2014) focus on the economic aspects of caste ethics, and also reveal, after their study on occupational trends among different castes, that such marginalized groups as Dalits and Adivasis are overrepresented in the informal economy for their roles as skilled and semi-skilled laborers. It shows that job discrimination persists in the private sector of the labour market. That is what Thorat and Newman (2010) had shown in their research: caste identities are still linked with specific jobs, particularly in the case of the lowest castes as Dalits.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach is used in this research for critical evaluation and depiction of the untouchables in fiction to explore and comprehend the multifaceted phenomena of their portrayal in novels. Three untouchable characters from the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, and Amitav Ghosh are mainly focused on the purpose. Such qualitative methods as textual analysis, contextual understanding, and content analysis are employed to delve deep into complexities found in the characters, social contexts, and narrative structures of these novels. The qualitative analysis helps the researcher lay bare the stereotypical themes and ideologies underlying the marginalization of the untouchables as depicted in these novels.

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the Dalit discourse perspectives and narratives, a critical lens that illuminates the experiences and challenges faced by the outcast Untouchables in India. The study is grounded in the framework of Dalit discourse, which encompasses various theories and perspectives that illuminate the socio-political realities of Dalit communities in India. Drawing on critical theories such as Ambedkarism and Subaltern Studies, the study examines how literature serves as a medium for articulating Dalit experiences and challenging dominant narratives of caste-based oppression. Ambedkarism is a movement inspired by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's teachings, which advocates for the empowerment of Dalits through education, social mobilization, and constitutional rights. It emphasizes that all individuals are inherently equal, regardless of their caste, and calls for collective action to challenge caste-based discrimination. Ambedkarism is a foundational framework for addressing socio-political inequalities and promoting social justice in contemporary India (Hantal, 2022). Moreover, this relies on Subaltern Studies, a movement that emerged during the 1980s and was guided by renowned scholars such as Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Subaltern Studies represents a shift in historiography, with the aim of highlighting the narratives and experiences of marginalized groups, especially in colonial and postcolonial contexts (Chakrabarty, 2000).

This framework draws upon foundational principles in Dalit studies, emphasizing the historical and contemporary dimensions of caste-based oppression. Through the literary analysis of the works *Sea of Poppies*, *Untouchable*, and *The*

God of Small Things, this study explores how these narratives contribute to the broader discourse on the dehumanizing treatment of Dalits within the caste system in Indian society. Theoretical insights from Dalit discourse provide a lens to analyze the portrayal of marginalized communities in Indian Anglophone fiction, shedding light on issues of discrimination, oppression, violence, and abuse faced by the Dalits. This framework aims to unravel the complex layers of societal structures, cultural norms, and historical injustices perpetuating these communities' marginalization. It offers a comprehensive understanding of their plight in the literary realm and beyond.

This study focuses on Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) to examine the presumptions of the caste system, the caste practices sustaining marginalization and the operational aspects of the marginalization based on caste systems. The scope of this study is delimited to these three literary works to provide a critical and in-depth analysis of the predicament faced by the marginalized Dalits within the communities presented in these selected works. Therefore, this study does not extend its analysis beyond these selected works and objectives, limiting its scope to ensure a comprehensive and focused examination of the following outlined research questions.

1. How do Indian Anglophone fiction portrayals of outcaste untouchables reflect and perpetuate caste hierarchies, influencing societal perceptions?
2. In what ways do outcaste untouchables' experiences in Indian Anglophone fiction intersect with gender, age, race, and religion, shaping their marginalization?
3. How do literary depictions of outcaste untouchables challenge prevailing caste-based narratives and offer alternative perspectives on identity and agency?
4. What socio-political impact do portrayals of outcaste untouchables in Indian Anglophone fiction have on public discourse and policy formation regarding caste discrimination and social justice in contemporary India?

IV. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The story of the novel *Untouchable* (1935) is set in pre-partitioned India. It revolves around an 18-year-old untouchable Bakha who works as a sweeper and is depressed and angry because of the derogatory behavior of the members of the upper caste. The strained and grave relations among the low-caste untouchables, the upper-class Brahmins, the Muslims, and the colonial British Christians are depicted in this novel picturesquely. The novel is an expression of hope, not only for the untouchables but also for India as a country. Similarly, *Sea of Poppies* (2008) is also set in pre-partitioned India.

On the contrary, Arundhati Roy (1997) highlights the condition of Dalits in post-independence India. In her first novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997), she presented the minority perspective of the untouchables before the readers. Ammu, a woman belonging to a respectable upper caste, and Valutha, an untouchable, face a lot of trouble because of the oppressing social system, which deprives them of their dignity as well as justice because of the caste ethics.

The hero of the novel *Untouchable* (1935) is a fictional character based on an untouchable boy who was Anand's childhood friend. Perhaps this friendship inspired Anand to create a lively, untouchable character with dirty and filthy hands and clothes and a sweaty face cleaning the restrooms of the better-class members of society. Though belonging to an untouchable family, the writer has presented the child as belonging to a modern India and unwilling to surrender and be content with his fate as his father had. As a 20th-century child, he eagerly wants to adopt modern ways of looking fashionable like the white Europeans with the help of old breeches and a pair of shoes (Iyengar, 1973).

In this novel, Anand has presented one day from the life of an untouchable sweeper, Bakha. His primary duty was to clean and wash the latrines. So, people like him were considered to be 'filthy and dirty' not only because of the filthy nature of their jobs but also because of their ancestral 'untouchability', which is actually the reason for giving them such kinds of filthy jobs. And if anyone from the upper class contacted them, they had to cleanse them from head to foot by bathing. So, it was the duty of the untouchable to loudly announce his approach so that the others may avoid them, "Posh, keep away, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming, posh, posh, sweeper coming! (1935, p. 42)". It is one of the ways the Untouchables are shamed while performing their daily routine activities. They are not even allowed to visit the temples because only the upper-class members of society can visit the gods.

Untouchable is actually an attempt by the writer to put forward the option of laying this curse off Indian society. Bakha is perhaps the first unique character in English literature created by the writer for the purpose of voicing that change. Bakha is facing difficulties after moving from his native village in the slums to the city, where working as a sweeper, he is perplexed and tormented not only by the humiliating behavior of the Brahmins and other upper-caste people besides the priest of the temple. As a result, Bakha's innocent mind is disturbed and is affected because of the physical and psychological humiliation. According to Forster (1935), the condition of a sweeper is worse than that of an enslaved person. This is because a slave has the 'luxury' of changing masters or duties, and even obtaining freedom, but an untouchable sweeper has no such options. They are forced to continue their work forever without any escape, which leads to their exclusion from not only social but also religious activities.

The story of Bakha starts when his father, Lakha, calls him for going to his duty, which is sweeping the roads and courtyard of the temple and cleaning the restrooms of the upper caste people. He has to go through five rounds of this routine, and after coming back from his duty, he is in a very pathetic, miserable, and contemplative mood. It is because of the derogatory and humiliating behaviour of those for whom he has worked the whole day. He fails to comprehend the concept of 'karma' and how it can make him different from and inferior to the other castes of society. He strangely

experiences that his own religious fellows, the Hindus, hate touching him while the Muslims do not avoid him. He feels that as a sweeper, he can clean their physical filth but not of their minds. Anand writes: “For them, I am a sweeper, sweeper-Untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That’s the world! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!” (1935, p. 143).

He experiences how even the betel-leaves-seller throws cigarettes towards him as a “butcher might throw a bone to an insistent dog sniffing around the corner of his shop” (Anand, 1935, p. 34), a confectioner throws jalebi packet like a cricket ball and a housewife throws chapattis towards him as if he is a dog. He wants to change it and improve his social position despite all this. This sense, of being untouchable, continues tormenting him. When Bakha comes home after getting *chapattis* (pieces of bread) in a humiliating manner, he is scolded by his father for bringing fewer chapattis. Thus, Bakha’s struggle is twofold. He is to fight not only outside his community but within as well.

Anand expresses the extent of humiliation of these untouchables through an experience of Lakha, who wails: “I tried to fall at the feet of every passerby and prayed them to tell the Sarkar, your honor, that my child was suffering. But Sarkar, this is the time of kindness; be compassionate at this time; another time, you may take even my life. Only save my child” (Anand, 1935, p. 73). As an untouchable, Lakha could see the bottles of medicine only from outside the shop and could not go inside. Similarly, the untouchables were not allowed to get water from the well of the village but had to wait for help from some ‘generous’ upper-caste Hindus to pour some water into their ‘filthy’ pot. It was so because “if they were ever to draw the water from it, the Hindus of the three upper castes would consider the water polluted” (Anand, 1935, p. 14).

These untouchables were also not allowed to visit the temples as well, besides other social spaces for general public. Anand gives us a glimpse of this situation when he tells how Bakha and Sohini, his sister, were held responsible for polluting the temple. The crowd of the upper-caste Hindus, which was serenely and sacredly busy in the holy rituals, suddenly started crying, “Polluted! Polluted! Polluted!” (Anand, 1935, p. 68) at seeing the untouchables there, though, Bakha was at a loss and could not comprehend what crime he had committed. The crowd asked Bakha to leave the place at once, saying:

Get off the steps, scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our temple! Now, we will have to pay for the purification ceremony. Get down, get away, dog! ... A temple can be polluted according to the Holy Books by a low-caste man coming within sixty-nine yards of it, and here he was actually on the steps, at the door. We are ruined. We will need to have a sacrificial fire in order to purify ourselves and our shrine. (Anand, 1935, pp. 69 - 70)

Anand has presented the agony of the untouchables not superfluously but deeply feeling their pain and sympathizing with them with an explicit purpose, which he himself expresses thus: “My aim is not negative, merely to shock, but to stimulate consciousness at all levels” (Cowasjee, 1973, pp. 115-116). However, according to Mukherjee (1991), *Untouchable* endeavors to make its upper-class readers believe that the discontent and traumatic situation of the untouchables cannot and will not disturb the prevalent social system by taking some violent turns. The untouchables themselves are willing to remain marginalized and silenced, honoring the social norms of the caste-based social structure.

Valutha in *The God of Small Things* (1997) also belongs to a low caste. His coworkers, who belong to the touchable castes, do not accept his presence at the pickle factory. This prejudice towards Valutha is expressed even by Com. Pillai who is proud of his wife when she does not let a low-caste individual enter their house, and thus gives vent to the prejudice which had its roots very deep in the social fabric of Kerala. As a representative of the Communist Left, Com Pillai’s attitude is more akin to the taboos of the Right-wing society than the principles of the Left-wing Communists. He considers the resentment of the other workers toward Valutha at the factory and watches the police torture and kill Valutha but does nothing to help or protect him (Roy, 1997).

Roy also presents Valutha’s elder brother, Kuttappen, a good and obedient untouchable who is uneducated and so servile that being paralyzed with a damaged spine after falling from a tree; he bears his lot without any protest. Thus, the main trait of Kuttappen’s character is the acceptance of life. But, unlike his, Valutha has self-realization as well as self-respect. He does not show much respect or servitude for the social taboos of untouchability. His character is a voice of revolt, and his love for Ammu is an act of revolt. However, his father is not so. When he comes to know about the amorous venture of Valutha, “he is terror-stricken knowing full well what his untouchable son had touched. More than touched” (Roy, 1997, p. 78).

Torn between his love for Valutha and loyalty as an untouchable, Lakha finds it his duty to tell Mammachi what his son has done. Baby Kochamma is so shocked at this revelation and gives vent to her disgust for the untouchables, asking Mammachi: “How could she stand the smell? Haven’t you noticed? They have a particular smell, these *Paravans*” (Roy, 1997, p. 257). Then Valutha goes through brutal victimization and torture at the hands of the police, who do not take him as a human being but merely as an ‘untouchable’. Roy (1997) writes in this regard: “They were history’s henchmen sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke the laws [...]. They were not arresting a man [...]. They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak [...] they were exercising fear” (Roy, 1997, pp. 308-309).

Valutha is so brutally tortured that most of his limbs are broken and paralyzed. At last, “abandoned by God and History, Marx, by man, by woman and by children” (Roy, 1997, p. 310), he embraces a painful death, the toll of his disobedience to social taboos. Roy concludes: “The God of Loss. The God of Small Things. He left no footprints in the sand, no ripples in water, and no image in mirrors” (1997, p. 265).

The life and then the death of Valutha make it clear that caste is the result of external social behaviors rather than having some inherent essence like 'race'. According to Bhatnagar (1999), it is not a person's concept of his own self, but something thrust upon him by those who are enjoying superior status because of the hierarchical social system. The dilemma of Valutha is that he has the courage to disregard those taboos, being unwilling to accept his untouchability in a servile way as his brother had accepted. Trivedi compares this portrayal with that of Anand's by saying it is "the novel about the novelist's personal sufferings, her own experiences while living with social realities of Kerala. Even Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and *Coolie* depict the problems of the downtrodden and Untouchables in their own ways. But the difference between Anand and Roy is that Anand observes outwardly, while Roy inwardly" (1999, p. 188).

Kalua, a Chamar in *Sea of Poppies* (2008) by Amitav Ghosh, is yet another specimen of a brutalized untouchable presented in Indian English Literature. He is an obedient, tame, and servile character living in the *Basti of Chamars* near Ghazipur. We come face to face with his social status and his servitude at the very beginning of the novel when he is to take the disabled Hukam Singh, a Rajput (Kshatriya) by caste, on his ox-cart. Despite being a strong and sturdy man, Kalua does not help Hukam Singh just because, as an untouchable, he knows that he cannot touch the high-caste individual. Further, he takes care of hiding his face from the Rajput because seeing the face of a Chamar, the caste of the leather workers would be an ill omen for Hukam Singh and might destroy his whole day.

As Chamars, it is their work to collect the carcasses of the cows and oxen. He is a powerful and giant-sized being because he was fed upon the meat of the dead animals. But he was more popular for his colour than his size. He was nicknamed Kalua because of his polished and shining black skin. It was generally believed that though he was physically large, he was mentally slow and humble, so much so that even small children took advantage of his simplicity and used him for their benefit. He was so simple-minded that after the death of his parents, his brothers and relatives fully cheated him and deprived him of his due share. Even when he was cast out of their family residence, he did object.

The social fabric, these untouchables live in, is severely hostile towards them. So far as *Untouchable* (1935) is concerned, it is a kind of protest in which the untouchables are shown as scavengers and sweepers taking away and cleaning the dung of the better-caste human beings with their own hands. These high-class Hindus thought that they would be polluted if those scavengers and sweepers touched them. Vivekananda (1983) states that the Vedanta religion (Hinduism) does not endorse this caste system. He considers it a social custom. That is why great preachers such as Buddha and others have always strived to break this system down through their preaching (Vivekananda, 1983).

In *Untouchable* (1935), the worldview is presented from an untouchable perspective. The depression and mental agony of the untouchables at their status in the prevalent social structure shows how the lower caste people are suppressed in the societal structure, which is imposed in the name of religion. In this way, not only the colonizers' imperial approach and poverty but also the deep-rooted dogmatic religion is also brought into light as the critical factors in snubbing and suppressing the low caste untouchables in a primarily Hindu society. In the 'Preface' of the novel, Forster (1935) pays homage to Anand in the following words:

Untouchable could only have been written by an Indian and an Indian who observed from the outside. No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha because he would not have known enough about his troubles. And no Untouchable could have written the book because he would have been involved in indignation and self-pity. Mr. Anand stands in the ideal position. (1935, p. vii)

In *The God of Small Things* (1997), almost all the characters show their prejudice towards people from the low caste in some way or other. Even the untouchables, except for Valutha, are 'sure' of their lowliness. The double standards of morality, which subjugate an untouchable and a woman and force them into a very precarious situation, are portrayed by Roy in this novel. Through the character of Valutha, Roy has expressed the voice for change. In 1999, she was credited with the Dalit Sahitya Academy Award for raising her voice for the untouchables.

According to Roy, the hold of the Hindu social system could not be destroyed even by the spread of Christianity. Instead, it also played a role in maintaining and, in some ways, strengthening such worst customs as untouchability. If the members of the lower caste were converted to Christianity, they were sometimes deprived of even those privileges which the Hindu untouchables could enjoy. Kochu Maria, a Christian in *The God of Small Things*, wears kunuku because of this class consciousness so that the other people may realize that she belongs to the high-caste Syrian Christians despite doing a lowly job as a cook: "How would people know that despite her lowly cook's job she was a Syrian Christian, Mar Thomite? Not a Pelaya or a Paravan. But a Touchable upper caste Christian" (Roy, 1997, p. 170). The Syrian Christians in Kerala are said to be the descendants of the 32 Brahmin families converted to Christianity in the first century. So, the Brahminic traditions continued among them despite the change of religion. Thus, all the members of such untouchable communities as Pulayas, Pelayas, or Paravans, who changed their religion and converted to Christianity, failed to get rid of the taboos of untouchability. The upper-caste Christians could not allow them to get absorbed into their community. Roy (1997) writes in this connection:

Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendancy, before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before three purple-robed Syrian Bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found floating in the sea, with coiled sea serpents riding on their chests and oysters knotted in their tangled beards. It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag. It really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. (p. 33)

Similarly, in *Sea of Poppies* (2008), when Kalua was cast out of his family residence, three young Thakur sahibs offered him help because they were gamblers interested in wrestling matches. They found Kalua's strength appropriate for that purpose, so they sent him to their dwelling. His strength became an asset for them, and he won many wrestling matches for them.

Once, he was forced for a match in Ramgarh Palace. But somehow, Kalua lost the match. People attributed his defeat to the humiliation that Kalua had to suffer at the hands of a prostitute, Herabai, who, on seeing Kalua, had said that such an animal should not mate with a woman but a horse. While returning from Ramgarh, after losing the match, the three brothers cursed Kalua and then beat him hard, making him the butt of their kicks. Then, as Herabai- a prostitute, advised, they tried to force Kalua to mate a mare. Taking his *langot* (loincloth) off, they pushed him hard towards the mare's tail till his body touched the animal. Forcing his whip into the buttocks of Kalua and laughing, one of them asked him to do the same with the mare.

Then there is the incident at the ship where Kalua is whipped and tortured to the point of death at the hands of Bhyro Singh. And when, at the time, being beaten by him so savagely, Kalua just called him master and asked him what wrong he had committed for which he was so brutally punished. This question further enraged Bhyro Singh, and he beat him still harder. And at last, Kalua was sentenced to death for the murder of Bhyro Singh. And what Neels says to Kalua then is an indictment of the system on which the caste taboos are based. He asks him to wait a little longer to find his freedom in the form of *moksha* at hand.

V. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Dalits are often forced to live in impoverished conditions and are compelled to undertake demeaning and hazardous occupations. They are also subjected to violence and exploitation. Despite the attempts of the Indian political machinery to curb the menace of caste-based oppression, Dalits continue to face discrimination and marginalization, regardless of their gender, age, religion or time. The findings highlight the long-lasting impact of caste-based inequalities on Dalit communities, emphasizing the urgent need for social justice and equity measures. After a thorough analysis of the historical and socio-cultural situation of the untouchables in India as presented in Indian English literature, it is clear that these low-caste characters are forced to lead their lives under abusive deplorable conditions, performing very cheap menial jobs and often made the butts of abuse and violence. Velutha, Bakha, and Kalua all faced such violence and atrocities in one way or the other. The study concludes that, despite historical changes, developments, and progress in India, discrimination and marginalization have continued to persist against the untouchables. This marginalization is not restricted to the untouchables belonging to any one generation, gender, religion, or time. It goes across such boundaries, showing how deep-rooted these inequalities and biases are and how these marginalized communities have, over centuries, failed to come out of this traumatic situation.

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Shouket Ahmad Tilwani is born in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir on 01-03-1981. Till his Masters in English in 2007, he has earned all his degrees (including bachelor's in education with English as a specialization in 2008) from the University of Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir. He has got his Ph.D. in English besides M. Phil. (2010) from Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, India in 2015.

Dr. Shouket Ahmad Tilwani is academically specialized in the areas of post-colonialism, and discourse analysis. His papers are about marginalization and subalternity, published in well-reputed journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science databases. In addition, he is a reviewer of some reputed journals. He is currently working as an Associate Professor, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia.

Hadiya Shafi is born in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir on 01-03-1990. Till her Masters in English in, she has earned all his degrees (including Masters's in Education with English as a specialization from the University of Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir. She is a PhD Aspirant. Her areas of interest include post-colonialism, discourse analysis, marginalization subalternity, intertextuality, etc. She is currently working as a guest lecturer, in the Department of English, Government Degree College, Sogam, Kupwara, University of Kashmir, Hazratbal, India.