

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this chapter, the writer will provide some theories and approaches which are appropriate to the analysis of the novel. The main analysis will involve theory of ideology by Althusser as a basic tool in explaining the way caste ideology works within a society and how the characters in the novel carry out this ideology into their private and social life. The writer also needs to complete this chapter with a socio-cultural approach since the analysis is much related to the understanding toward the socio-cultural aspect of the setting, especially on caste system and its Touchable-Untouchable division.

#### **A. Louis Althusser's Theory of Ideology**

Much current Marxist thinking on literature has been influenced by the work of the French Marxist theoretician Louis Althusser (1918-1990). He suggested the idea of a 'dominant' or 'ruling' ideology which is useful in providing a framework for understanding how ideology works in society. He derives the idea of ideology as a structure from the Marxist idea that ideology is a part of the superstructure, but links the structure of ideology to the idea of the unconscious, from Freud and Lacan.

One basic key term in Althusser's idea is ideology which he defines as a system of representation (images, myths, ideas or concept according to the case) endowed with an existence and a historical role at the heart of a given society.

Values within this system are usually implicit, often unrecognized, but suffuse all the artefacts and all the culture of a given time (Barry 164). In understanding the idea of 'ideology' by Althusser, we have to distinct it with the term 'ideologies'. When we talk about ideologies, we will refer to numerous ideologies of different social groups. We can talk about ideologies of masculinity and feminity, of blackness or whiteness, of middle and working classes, and so on. However, we want to consider the idea of a 'dominant' or 'ruling' ideology, as suggested by Althusser (O'Shaughnessy 213):

Althusser, following on from Marx, suggested that each society has a dominant ideology (Marx, in earlier version of this idea, talked of the 'ruling ideas' of a culture). This ideology—comprising a set of shared feelings, values, beliefs, and so on—is shared by the majority of people in a society. It is thus dominant in....numerical terms....in the sense that it tends to support the interests of the dominant, ruling groups. (213)

Althusser's wider concept of ideology takes us a stage further in the argument about how societies adhere to values and ideas supporting the dominant groups and how ideology is not worked out consciously or conspiratorially.

....Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with consciousness...they are perceived/ accepted/ suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them. Men 'live' their ideologies...not as a form of counciousness,

but as an object of their 'world'—as their 'world' itself. The ruling ideology is then the ideology of the ruling class. (214)

As Michael O'Shaughnessy has suggested, Althusser's concept of ideology thus goes beyond pure ideas and consciousness to the way in which people believe in ideology. Althusser sees ideology as "an unconscious force that people live rather than see....ruling ideas or ideology are so deeply embedded in our society that they are shared by almost everyone and seem totally normal" (214).

Althusser further explains how ideology was transmitted socially, how it was that people took and accepted the values of the dominant groups even if these views might not be in everyone's interests. According to Althusser, there are two set of mechanisms that achieved this: Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). The first set of mechanisms, or RSAs, are "mechanisms that are called into play to force people to conform to the dominant ideology" (215). They are used deliberately, to control, punish, and coerce people who try to challenge the system. They are predominantly the institutions of the law, the law courts, the police, the prison system, and the army, all of which are used to deal with people who trouble and disrupt society. RSAs "do not work ideologically....they work directly through force and when necessary, through punishment" (215). While the second set of mechanisms, or ISAs, are the institutions through which we are socialized into accepting the dominant ideology. ISAs do not force people; they work more subtle, like hypnosis. They convince people or win their consent to the dominant ideology (215). This socialization

process is carry out by some key institutions such as political parties, schools, the media, churches, the family, and art which foster an ideology--a set of ideas and attitudes--which is sympathetic to the aims of the state and the political status quo (Barry 164). It is important to notice that these institutions may not always agree and may at times develop a conflict between them (O'Shaughnessy 216).

The socialization process of ideology usually brings us to become subjects, regardless our positions within any particular ideological formation, with the notion of interpellation. Interpellation is Althusser's term for the way the individual is encouraged to see herself or himself as an entity free and independent of social forces. Thus, each of us feels that we are freely choosing what is in fact being imposed upon us. Interpellation accounts for "the operation of control structures not maintained by physical force, and hence for the perpetuation of a social set-up which concentrates wealth and power in the hands of the few" (Barry 165).

Another concept of Althusser is the notion of overdeterminism, a word borrowed from Freud, which designates an effect which arises from variety causes, that is, from several causes acting together rather than from a single (in this case, economic) factor. A related term is the notion of relative autonomy, which is also a way of attacking simplistic views of a superstructure entirely determined by the nature of the economic base (163).

In general, unlike traditional Marxism, Althusserian ideas are intended to enable a much more subtle view of how society works in many different and complex ways. He shows how ideological power has ultimately greater

significance than material power. Hence, the attraction of Althusser to recent Marxist critics is that he offers ways of by-passing the crude base/superstructure model without giving up the Marxist perspective altogether. Althusser's views represent what we might call revisionist Marxism, which is to say that they “rethink and repackage the basic concepts in a form which is more subtle and more flexible” (165).

In applying this theory, the writer starts with the idea that caste, as any other cultures in the world, is basically an ideology. As an ideology, caste is recognized through its apparatuses or practices in the society. So, ideology is not only about ideas for it has a material existence. The existence of ideology along with its practices depends on the notion of people who believe in it and act on this belief. Thus, to analyze a caste-oriented society as portrayed in The God of Small Things, it should be elaborated by recognizing the apparatuses of caste which appear in the novel through different characters or key institutions.

## **B. Socio-cultural Approach**

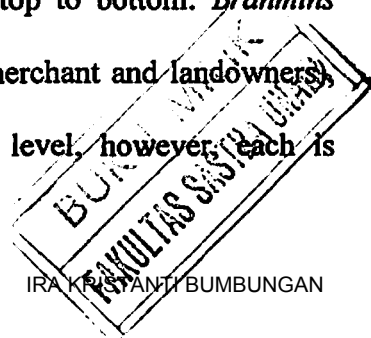
Since the discussion involves the setting of Indian culture and tradition, it is necessary to use socio-cultural approach in the following discussion. This approach provides of a brief understanding of Indian caste system along with its Touchable-Untouchable division and also related social condition of Kerala. It will be given only to a certain point which is adequate to make a better understanding toward the novel itself and to support the analysis.

### **B.1. Indian Caste System: The Varnas and the Untouchable**

The hierarchical order of traditional Indian society was embodied in the institution of caste which has held a commanding position in it for two thousand years. For its absolute durability caste is incomparable among institutions of its kind. Although the ideological principles have been repeatedly attacked by the contemporary Indian, the groups which constituted its basic morphological units have held their ground fairly well (Beteille, 57-58).

According to Andre Beteille, caste has not only been a long-lasting feature of Indian society, its influence has reached into every segment of its composite structure. Originally it was a distinctively Hindu institution but it provided an organizational model for all religions that made their home in India (58). Beteille points out how a person in this kind of society is more regarded as a member of a particular caste rather than as an individual: "An individual without a caste would be an anachronism, and the divisions of caste were both exclusive and exhaustive....kept alive by a variety of rules....with the backing of the community as a whole" (59).

According to Gail Omvedt, caste is a system in which a person's membership in the society is mediated through his/her birth in a particular group which is assigned a particular status within a broad social hierarchy of such group (Alavi 136). The Indian system of castes (or *varna*, a Sanskrit word that means "color") is composed of four major categories from top to bottom: *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors and rulers), *Vaishyas* (merchant and landowners), *Shudras* (peasant serfs/ day laborers). On the local level, however, each is



composed of hundreds of subcaste (or *jati*) groups (Macionis 237). All four orders of society are necessary to each other, but their different roles involve different levels of pollution (or differences in moral quality), so that there is a clear moral hierarchy (Alavi 129).

In a caste system, birth determines the fundamental shape of people's lives in four crucial respects: 1) Traditional caste groups are linked to occupation, so that generations of a family perform the same type of work; 2) People marry others of the same ranking or caste. Sociologists call this pattern *endogamous* marriage (endo stems from Greek, meaning "within"); 3) Caste guides everyday life so that people remain in the company or "their own kind". Hindus in India enforce this segregation with the belief that a ritually "pure" person of a higher caste will be "polluted" by contact with someone of lower standing; 4) Caste system rest on powerful cultural beliefs. Indian culture is built on Hindu traditions that mandate accepting one's life work, whatever it may be, as a moral duty (Macionis 238).

Beneath the four-*varna* hierarchy, there is a fifth group known as the *Untouchable*, which emerged as the lowest members of Hindu society. The primordial being does not claim them.

Untouchable are outcasts—people considered too impure, too polluted, to rank as worthy beings. Prejudice defines their lives, particularly in the rural areas, where nearly three-quarters of India's people live. Untouchable are shunned, insulted, banned from temples and higher caste homes, made to eat and drink from

separate utensils in public places, live in a segregated area, and, in extreme but not uncommon cases, are raped, burned, lunched, and gunned down. (National Geographic 9)

Involvement of Untouchable with “unclean jobs” has often been viewed as the primary reason for the practice of untouchability. Dealing with dead cattle, scavenging, and other works associated with blood, death, and dirt that were considered polluting in the Hindu culture were left to be done by the Untouchable. As stated by Jodhka, though not all Untouchable would have ever been employed in the “callings” of their group, every group was identified with a specific “polluting occupation” (1816).

The ancient belief system that created the Untouchables overpowers modern law. While India’s 1950 constitution forbids caste discrimination and specifically abolishes Untouchability, Hinduism, the major religion of India’s population, governs daily life with its hierarchies and rigid social codes. Under its strictures, an Untouchable parent gives birth to an Untouchable child, condemned as unclean from the first breath (National Geographic 9).

Apart of some progress in education and living standards for a number of Untouchable, the stigma of the Untouchable condition still persists, especially due to the hatred of some upper caste members: “In recent years the reported cases of case-based violence against Untouchable have risen...25 to 30 percent....Yet, the official numbers fail to represent the true extent of the violence, since only a small fraction of the crimes are reported, and fewer are investigated by the police” (27).



In The God of Small Things, caste order was not specifically divided into four *varnas*, since the community was not based on pure Hindu religious rules. However, the Syrian Christians in this novel are likely to associate themselves with the upper caste, and obscurely higher than the Hindu majority. Even Roy as the author of the novel calls them as 'Caste Christian' which is somewhat identical to the structure of 'Caste Hindu'. The members of four *varnas* and—in this case—including the Syrian Christian community in the novel are labeled as the 'Touchables'.

## **B.2. The Case of Kerala**

A complete appreciation of The God of Small Things is dependent upon an awareness of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. The Syrian Christian faith practiced by Ammu and her family was begun in 52 AD when St. Thomas brought Christianity to Kerala. About sixty percent of the Keralan population is currently Hindu, with Christians and Muslims making up most of the remaining forty percent. One of the most apparent indications of the Hindu influence in Kerala is the prevalence and importance of the caste system in Keralan society. Though caste was originally present only in Hinduism, it was adopted and internalized by other religions as they began to appear in Kerala; caste has now become more of a social phenomenon than a religious convention in Kerala (Coffey). Caste in the Syrian Christian society is so extremely important that it is evident in the extreme power that holds over the actions of most of the characters in this novel.

The Marxist sentiments portrayed in The God of Small Things are in some ways representative of the actual political climate of Kerala. Most of the action in the novel takes place over two weeks in 1969, in the middle of the rising panic among the landlords (including Ammu's family) at how communism and the spreading Naxalite rebellion were unsettling the ancient caste system. As a part of a radical land-reform movement led by militants known as Naxalites, Untouchables have fought violence with violence, using guns to attack high-caste landlords (National Geographic 27). As portrayed in the novel, Touchables characters have already put negative sentiment toward Velutha's political activities in the Communist party, especially on the rumour that he has been a Naxalite. Communism and Marxism greatly influenced the political life of Kerala, ever since it became the first Indian state to elect a communist government in 1957. In 1970 Kerala became the first state in India to abolish landlordism. Kerala is presently a democratic state, and is still under Marxist control (Coffey).

Based on this theory and approach, in the next chapter the writer will further discuss about the perpetuation of caste as a dominant ideology in Indian society as reflected in The God of Small Things. The outline of this analysis will adopt the idea of ISAs and RSAs by Althusser and will be supported by the socio-cultural approach related to the Touchable-Untouchable division and the social condition of Kerala.

# **CHAPTER III**

## **ANALYSIS**