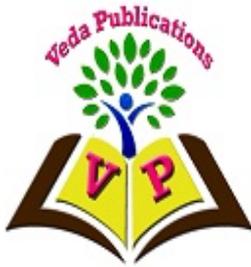




RESEARCH ARTICLE

**REPRESENTATION OF SUBALTERNITY IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS***Jyothy Boudharaj^{1*}, Dr.M.Sridhar²^{1*}(Research Scholar, Department of English, Anurag University, Medchal, Telangana-5000088.)²(Supervisor, Associate Professor, Department of English, Anurag University, Medchal, Telangana-5000088.)E-mail- jyothy.b123@gmail.comDoi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2025.12412>**ABSTRACT****Article history:**

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This study focuses on the marginalisation of women and Untouchables in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). It examines how social hierarchies push certain groups into subordinate positions, exposing them to sustained oppression and suffering. The novel presents the lived experiences of women and caste-oppressed individuals in the Indian context, with particular emphasis on Kerala. In this region, caste-based exclusion has been deeply entrenched and has extended beyond Hindu society to include Christian communities as well. The paper explores the process of subalternisation through key characters such as Mammachi, Ammu, and Rahel, as well as Velutha, whose identity as an Untouchable reflects the continuing impact of India's caste structure.

Keywords: *Caste system, Social hierarchy, Forbidden love, Love Laws, Trauma.*



INTRODUCTION

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy is a significant novel in Indian and world literature. It won the Booker Prize in 1997 and quickly became a classic of postcolonial fiction. Set in Kerala, India, during the late 1960s and 1990s, the story follows the lives of the Ipe family, especially the fraternal twins Estha and Rahel. Their childhood experiences are shaped by complex social hierarchies, familial traumas, and the oppressive "Love Laws" in their society. At its core, the novel explores memory, identity, and the effects of breaking social norms.

Roy mostly wrote politically focused non-fiction, addressing the issues India faced during the rise of global capitalism. Her works include *Power Politics* (2001) and *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002).

MAJOR THEMES

The novel begins with the Ipe family: Ammu, a divorced daughter returned to her parents' house, her twins Estha and Rahel, her brother Chacko, their mother Mammachi, and the baby Kochamma, among others. The family runs Paradise Pickles & Preserves, a small factory that provides the backdrop for interactions with workers like Velutha, a skilled Dalit carpenter whose rapport with the family will ultimately be punished. The setting in 1960s Kerala situates the text amid communist politics, church influence, and persistent colonial cultural hierarchies, especially in attitudes to English, whiteness, and integrity.

The story revolves around three interconnected affences: the forbidden inter-caste affair between Ammu and Velutha; the twins' complicity in Sophie Mol' death as they run away from family conflict; and

the adult world's decision to sacrifice Velutha to preserve class, caste, and reputational order. When Sophie Mol, Chacko's half-English daughter, drowns during an unlawful night-time boat journey, the police and family direct blame onto Velutha, who is violently attacked and dies in custody, while the twins are compelled into giving false allegations.

CASTE, SOCIAL, AND CLASS MARGINALISATION

Roy offers a scorching critique of caste and class hierarchies in postcolonial India, especially through Velutha's status as a Dalit whose very presence inside the "Touchable" house is considered polluting. Academic studies of the novel note how Velutha's political consciousness, Communist affiliation, and traditional skill threaten upper-caste dominance, leading to his criminalization the moment he crosses the boundaries of permissible vicinity. The novel also portrays the subtle mimicry of colonial class structures in the Syrian Christian Ipe family's control with Englishness, whiteness, and connections to Britain, marking how postcolonial high society reproduce older forms of domination.

Marginalisation prolongs caste to include labouring bodies, children, and women whose agency is constrained by economic dependence and social supervision. The figure of Velutha crystallises intersecting oppressions: as Dalit, worker, and lover of a high society woman, he becomes the victim upon whom the community's anxieties about purity, modernity, and sexuality are projected.

GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

Ammu, Baby Kochamma, Rahel, and other women in the novel represent different responses to



benevolent control and limited life choices in mid-20th-century Kerala. Ammu's divorce, economic precarity, and refusal to be gentle mark her as deviant; criticism frequently reads her relationship with Velutha as an act of erotic and political defiance against both patriarchy and caste norms, even as it leads to her social death. Postcolonial feminist critics argue that the novel shows how colonial histories, religious authority, and indigenous patriarchy intersect to regulate female desire and punish women who step outside the "Love Laws."

Baby Kochamma, by contrast, embodies internalised patriarchy: her frustrated youthful romance leads her to invest in respectability, church authority, and manipulation, and she ultimately puts together the betrayal that destroys Velutha and the twins' childhood. The contrast between Ammu's transgressive love and Baby Kochamma's vengeful repression illustrates how women can either challenge or enforce patriarchal structures, complicating simple victim/perpetrator binaries.

UNAUTHORISED LOVE AND "LOVE LAWS"

The novel's most discussed motif is fun authorised love: Ammu and Velutha's inter-caste sexual relationship, the twins' intense bond, and various smaller acts of attachment that violate social norms. observes highlight Roy's concept of "Love Laws" as shorthand for intersecting codes of caste, religion, class, and gender that dictate legitimate affection, revealing how intimacy becomes a site for enforcing broader social hierarchies. Essays on forbidden love in the novel also draw on Foucault's idea of heterotopia, arguing that certain spaces — the riverside, abandoned house, and night-time

encounters — temporarily suspend dominant rules and allow characters to explore suppressed desires.

These transgressive spaces are fragile: once the affair is exposed, the heterotopic sanctuary collapses and official institutions — police, family elders, church figures — swiftly reassert the "normal" order through spectacular violence. The tragic outcome underscores how, in Roy's world, love that challenges structural inequality is possible but perilous, and often survivable only as memory.

MEMORY, TRAUMA, AND NARRATIVE FORM

Scholars emphasize that *The God of Small Things* is as much about remembering as about happening: the adult Rahel's return to Ayemenem activates a series of flashbacks that reconstruct the childhood trauma she shares with Estha. The novel's circular, fragmented structure, repetitions, and shifts in focalization mirror the processes of traumatic memory squash, where events are revisited, repressed, and re-narrated rather than recalled linearly. Studies of trauma in the novel foreground how the twins' psychic distress manifests in silence, estrangement, and an eventual, ambiguous moment of reunion that blurs boundaries between sibling love and shared damage.

This narrative strategy allows Roy to connect private memories to collective histories, such as the rise of Communist politics, the Emergency, and broader debates on caste and gender justice in Kerala. Memory thus functions both as a burden and a form of resistance: remembering wrongs — caste violence, police brutality, familial treason — becomes a way of refusing the official erasure that often follows such events.

**NATURE, ECOFEMINISM, AND ECOLOGICAL SYMBOLISM**

Several critics read the novel through ecofeminist lenses, arguing that Roy parallels the exploitation of women, Dalits, and children with the degradation of the environment around Ayemenem. The river, monsoon, plants, and decaying landscape surrounding the Meenachal function as ecological symbols that register pollution, industrialisation, and moral rot, while also offering spaces of play, desire, and temporary freedom for the twins and Ammu.

Ecofeminist readings highlight how the “small things” of nature — insects, water currents, plant life — respond to and reflect human actions, blurring boundaries between human and non-human worlds. This alignment of feminised bodies and damaged landscapes critiques both patriarchal and capitalist attitudes that treat women and nature as resources to control, consume, or discard.

STYLE, LANGUAGE, AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Critics often remark on Roy’s experimental prose: she plays with English syntax, typography, repetition, and childlike perspective to create a distinctive narrative voice. The language frequently shifts between lyrical description and biting irony, juxtaposing the innocence of children’s mishearings and wordplay with the brutality of casteist and patriarchal violence they witness. Studies argue that this stylistic hybridity functions as a postcolonial strategy, disrupting standard English and signalling resistance to colonial literary norms while inscribing local rhythms and sensibilities.

The shifting focalization — sometimes from the twins’ viewpoint, sometimes from an omniscient

narrator — complicates questions of authority and reliability. This polyphonic approach allows marginalised voices and perspectives, including those of children, women, and Dalits, to surface in ways that challenge the singular, “official” accounts advanced by family, church, and state institutions.

CRITICAL RECEPTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Upon publication, *The God of Small Things* was widely praised for its originality, emotional intensity, and political sharpness, while also provoking controversy in India for its sexual content and caste critique. It won the 1997 Booker Prize and has since become a canonical text in courses on postcolonial literature, feminist theory, and South Asian studies, inspiring a substantial body of scholarship on caste, gender, ecofeminism, and narrative form.

More recent studies situate the novel within broader conversations about Dalit representation, female-Dalit alliances, and the ethics of upper-caste authors depicting marginalised subjects. Others connect Roy’s fiction to her later non-fiction and activism, arguing that the novel’s attention to “small things” — everyday violations, intimate resistances, and minoritised lives — anticipates her ongoing engagement with questions of justice, democracy, and environmental struggle in contemporary India.

CONCLUSION

Arundhati Roy, selected for study in “The God of Small Things” has been studied from post post-colonial point of view. This novel has dealt with postcolonial issues. Identity is a fact essential to proving one’s own existence. The characters are continuously in search of their own ideas. Arundhati Roy, in her debut novel *The God of Small Things*, has



highlighted the oppression of the marginalised group, i.e., the 'Untouchable', along with the woman as a subaltern. Here, the untouchable still epitomises the form of marginalisation. Roy has tried to sensitise this Postcolonial society to the cruelty of some of its traditions. She has challenged certain common-age-old, self-satisfied yet dehumanising social taboos; she has shown how patriarchal ideology of an ancient culture decides codes of conduct for both women like Ammu and untouchables like Velutha. It is this ideology and the value system that are responsible for the violence of the 'Touchable' towards the 'Untouchables'. Roy has presented all this through the eyes of Estha and Rahel. *The God of Small Things* is grounded in historical realities. One finds colonial heritage, local realism all altogether in the novel. She has presented a woman's struggle in seeking 'identity' in a male-dominated conservative society. She has successfully tried to highlight her attention on social reform. She has definitely aroused our sense of pity and sympathy for the mombattis, the downtrodden and the less privileged by this 'The God of Small Things'.

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