

## A Searing Comment on Caste Discrimination in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

**Dr. Y. Kusuma Kumari**

Assistant Professor, Department of English  
GITAM Deemed to be University  
Visakhapatnam

[kusumsurendrat.bw@gmail.com](mailto:kusumsurendrat.bw@gmail.com)

---

---

### Abstract

Arundhati Roy established herself as a post-colonial writer with the publication of her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*. She, like other post-colonial writers, tries to throw light on the cultural colonialism that prevails even after the colonial period. The minds of the Indian people are colonized in a most dangerous way and the decolonization of minds is one of the aims of the post-colonial writers. One of the worst results of post-colonialism is its influence on the upper classes in the colonial countries. The upper class people, in the earlier colonial countries, place themselves in the position of the colonizer and develop a 'big brotherly' attitude towards the lower classes and the weaker sections of the society. Women, untouchables and Dalits belong to the category of the 'other' and they are cut off from the mainstream of life. Roy becomes the post-colonial voice of the oppressed to speak out the various atrocities encountered by women and the Dalits.

**Keywords:** Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, Dalits, *Paravan*, hypocritical, Marginalization, Untouchability, Discrimination

Arundhati Roy established herself as a post-colonial writer with the publication of her debut novel *The God of Small Things*. She, like other post-colonial writers, tries to throw light on the cultural colonialism that prevails even after the colonial period. The minds of the Indian people are colonized in a most dangerous way and the decolonization of minds is one of the aims of the post-colonial writers. One of the worst results of post-colonialism is its influence on the upper classes in the colonial countries. The upper class people, in the earlier colonial countries, place themselves in the position of the colonizer and develop a 'big brotherly' attitude towards the lower classes and the weaker sections of the society. Women, Untouchables and Dalits belong to the category of the 'other' and they are cut off from the mainstream of life. Roy becomes the post-colonial voice of the oppressed to speak out the various atrocities encountered by women and the Dalits.

Arundhati calls a spade a spade in her inimitable characteristic way and she does not indulge in preaching, but merely holds, the mirror up to nature and reality in order to evoke powerfully, the image of the suffering class. The novel can be interpreted at several levels. It may be said that the novel is a satire on politics attacking specially the communist establishment in Kerala. It may be treated as a family saga narrating the story of four generations of a Syrian Christian family. It may also be treated as a novel having religious overtones. One may also call it a protest novel which is subversive and taboo breaking. It may also be treated as a love story with a tragic end. In terms of stylistic experimentation, it is the bold novel of the nineties.

Roy's fresh perspectives on an age old tradition, created waves as rebellion against the social injustice meted out both to the downtrodden and to the women. It is a feminist novel in the pity and terror it evokes for the condition of women in a particular cultural milieu, a political novel in its criticism of the hypocrisy of the communist party, an autobiographical novel in the way the facts of the author's life have been distilled into a verbal artifact and so on, a novel of Dalit consciousness as it deals with the ravages of caste system in south Indian state, Kerala portraying the miserable plight of the untouchables.

To quote Ranga Rao in his famous article:

*The God of Small Things* unravels as a psychological drama and reveals the social taboos, political situation, and gender discrimination that are all hidden underneath. Political affiliations, family honor, and caste system wreck havoc in the lives of the twins, their mother Ammu and others involved. It is also a story of broken marriages, love laws, disturbed childhood, and loss of innocence and how the immature decisions of adults ruin many lives for no fault of theirs. (Rao-13)

Set in 1969 and 1993 in a little village called Ayemenem, the narrative shifts back and forth around the death of the twins' cousin Sophie Mol. Estha and Rahel live with their divorced mother Ammu Ipe who escapes her ill-tempered husband and seeks refuge in her parents' house. Her brother Chacko, their blind grandmother Mammachi and the bitter aunt Baby Kochamma all contribute significantly to the many events that unfold throughout the novel. Told from the perspective of the two children, the novel centres around the drowning of their nine year old half-English cousin Sophie Mol, Ammu's love affair with a lower caste man named Velutha and its aftermath. Intertwined in the narrative is the satirical commentary on the social customs, politics, familial relationships, and gender discrimination in the Christian Syrian household. It also explores the many paradoxes that govern the lives of the people irrespective of their age or position.

The backdrop of the novel is set in the southern part of India, a town named Ayemenem in the Kerala state. In Kerala Syrian Christians make-up one third of the population, which is a

higher percentage of Christians compared to other states in India. They constitute the middle and high hierarchy of the Kerala society. Roy's relatives on her mother's side are of this ethnic group. Though Kerala is a progressive state, it is notorious for its exceptionally rigid caste system in which each caste occupies a fairly definite position. Roy ridiculed general Syrian Christians' hypocrisy and obviously showed more sympathy to those downtrodden untouchables. When Ammu returned with her two kids as a divorced woman, "Ammu finds herself amidst her family—all Syrian Christians lived like Brahmins with caste-phobia" (Dwivedi-56) Roy graphically presents the miserable and pathetic condition of untouchables when Mammachi was a girl.

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... they had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed (TGST-73,74).

But at the time when Mammachi became older, still the condition was the same with slight changes. Roy says, "untouchables are not allowed to touch anything that touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians." (73-74) There are two families in the novel, the Syrian Christian family which represents the upper caste mentality and the other family which belongs to *Paravan*, an untouchable community; a family that portrays Dalit life in our caste ridden society.

Velutha's grandfather Kelan was also one of the sufferers of castelessness. Along with a number of other untouchables, he embraces Christianity to escape the curse of untouchability. But, they, later on, found that they had done a blunder. Though they were given separate churches and separate priests and as a special favour they were even given their own separate pariah Bishop, but after 1947, they found they were not entitled to any government's benefits like job reservation nor bank loans at low interest. It is because they were Christians and so casteless. They were made to believe that once they become Christians, the caste-stigma would be rubbed off. Initially the Dalit Christians received a little money and food as an added incentive. But they were trapped under the new circumstances as they were not given the equal status. The direct entry of the untouchables into Christianity caused divisions among them and they lost all their benefits of being underprivileged. Roy says,

They were generally known as the Rice-Christians. It didn't take them to realize that they had jumped from the prying pan into the fire....It is a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all (TGST-74).

The idea of untouchability is explored at two levels in the novel. Firstly, Paravans or socially untouchables who never possessed basic human rights and secondly, metaphoric untouchables in high castes where discrimination expresses itself in marginalizing women in their personal and public life.

Ammu in her own family was treated as a Dalit; her character reveals the condition of woman with a kind of modern thinking and rebellious thoughts in Syrian Christian family. One of the themes, which rings the note of *The God of Small Things*, is the truthful portrayal of the plight of the women in society and their marathon struggle for seeking the sense of identity in a male dominated conservative framework. The novel can be a fertile ground for feminist critics as it amply demonstrates that women did not merit much freedom in the family code of the Ayemenem house. The narrator portrays a vivid picture of the woman's childhood to adolescence, to the experience of marriage to a sympathetic and affectionate mother to a wife who challenges the age long hypocritical moral stand of a patriarchal family. As a little girl, Ammu had to face a lot of anxieties, fret and fever of life. She had seen the cruelty of her father, Pappachi who used to beat her and her mother, Mammachi with a brass-vase.

Once it so happened that Ammu's father tore a part of the shoes she had brought for herself. She was also deprived of higher education because, according to Pappachi, college education is not at all useful for a girl. This shows that Pappachi is a man of schizophrenia. He behaves like a decent man in public but demonstrates his male ego and bourgeois mentality when he tyrannizes his wife and child: "Not content with having beaten his wife and daughter, he tore down curtains, kicked furniture and smashed a table lamp". (TGST-181)

In this context, the observation of Betty Friedan is worth noting. In a male dominated society how a woman is identified in Indian families, Friedan says "The problem is always being the children's mommy or the minister's wife and never being myself." (Friedan Betty-73) The treatment meted out to a woman in a patriarchal society can be seen in the way Ammu got married. Ammu paid a visit to one of her relatives in Calcutta where at someone's wedding reception she met a man who was on vacation from his job whom she married later. He was an assistant manager of a tea estate in Assam. Ammu was in a hurry to marry him because she knew that in Ayemenem, people were quite dead against her wishes. The author observes:

"Ammu didn't pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem. She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision. They did not reply". (TGST-39)

How pity the condition of the teenage girl. It is the protection of the parents that guards teenagers, especially girls but here she was not interested to go to them. Many families are

broken because of the narrow mindedness and lack of love and affection for children. “Marriage is honorable in all” says the Bible. Much importance is given to the institution called marriage in one’s life but here Ammu’s marriage is like a nightmarish incident. When she wrote to her parents, they did not care to reply. Though it is being said that Ammu suffered a lot from the patriarchal dominances she suffered from both the parents. About the mentality of the members of the Ayemenem house Dwivedi commented: “The whole family of these Syrian Christians is totally conservative—almost blind to the new awakenings.” (Dwivedi-57)

Soon after the marriage, Ammu discovered that she had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. Her husband was an alcoholic. He even went to the extent of asking her wife to satisfy the sexual desire of Mr. Hollick, his boss, so that his job could be secured. This extreme humiliation had become the last straw and she abandoned her despicable husband. In a scuffle she hit her husband with a heavy book and left the place for good with the twins Estha and Rahel.

There has been no love lost between Ammu and her parents. She received only a step motherly treatment from them. Chacko, the brother of Ammu, left for Britain for his studies; Ammu on the other hand, was not allowed to study further. Even today, in spite of a fundamental improvement in women’s stature, it is seen in the villages of India that the conservative and superstitious minds of a large number of people are against the higher education of girls.

Chacko failed in almost every other respect including his marriage with Margaret, an English woman who deserted him, yet he is in charge of the Ayemenem house and so he asserts his position whenever he can. He cynically tells his sister: “what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine”. Why? Because ‘Ammu as a daughter had no claim to the property and she had no locus standi’ (TGST-57).

When Chacko flirts with low woman, he is encouraged by Mammachi in the name of “Man’s needs” (268) whereas the same behaviour of Ammu is termed as illicit, untraditional and sinful and she was locked in a room and punished. Her woman’s needs are ignored, when she tried to satisfy her needs, she was humiliated to an extent of her life being lost. Mammachi secretly gives money to the poor women who satisfy her son’s needs. “She secretly slipped them money to keep them happy. They took it because they needed it. They had young children and old parents or husbands who spent all their earnings in toddy bars.” (TGST-169) It is evident from these words that the condition of poor and Dalit women in our country is deplorable. It is how they are exploited by the rich upper caste people.

Roy does not shy away from giving her readers many instances of the pathetic conditions of untouchables even in a Christian community that was expected to rise above the differences in birth and caste. In spite of much advancement in technology and education, the grip hold of caste system has not loosened. Even though Velutha, the male protagonist of the novel is highly

skilled, he is not respected and, in fact, excluded from the society. The irrational belief of caste system has sadly ignored all his talents and hard work.

Untouchability surfaces in the novel as the major theme, especially in relation to upper caste Christian woman. The whole story of the novel with its kaleidoscopic incidents revolves around the main theme. Roy, as a strong supporter of the uplift of the untouchables, reminds the reader in this novel the position of the outcaste people and the cruel treatment meted out to them by the Touchables in our country even after many years of independence. Velutha (meaning white), an Untouchable is the real protagonist of the novel; Roy described him in the novel as the god of small things. Velutha's family consists of five members, his father Vellya Paapen, his mother, his brother Kuttapen, and his grandfather Kelan. The condition of Velutha's father was pitiable. He had thoroughly imbibed the spirit of the serfs of the old feudal society. He was a typical specimen of traditional untouchable class whose members always keep their heads bowed in humility in front of the members of higher caste. Vellya, like Lakha in *Untouchable*, a submissive older generation member whose body and soul strongly believe that the practice of untouchability by upper castes is right, justified, religious and natural. Therefore, he was a specimen of the untouchable class by being submissive, subdued, and calm. He never thought beyond the limits imposed on him by the existing social hierarchy. It was, in fact, the oppressive religious ideology from which Vellya was unable to get rid of. Vellya Paapen is an old world Dalit. He had seen the crawling backward days, the days when they were not allowed to cover their upper bodies or carry umbrellas, and when they had to cover their mouths whenever they spoke so that they would not pollute the air around those who they addressed. Vellya Paapen had profound gratitude to Mammachi and her family because they had given him so much—his land, his son's education; items in their hut, and Velutha's job, and, above all, his glass eye when he lost his own. He is an embodiment of centuries of submissive serfhood, and he never thought badly of the way he is treated.

The most important Dalit character in *The God of Small Things* is Velutha, an untouchable. Though he is a Paravan, a community ill-treated by upper caste people, and a community always looked down upon by caste Christians, he is multi-talented. He is an expert mechanic and artisan who can repair all the machines including radios, clocks, water pumps, etc. right within a short span of time.

It was Velutha who maintained the new canning machine and the automatic pineapple slicer, who oiled the water pump and the small diesel generator. Velutha who built the aluminum sheet-lined, easy to clean cutting surfaces, and the ground-level furnaces for boiling fruit ... (TGST-76)

Perhaps, this is why Mammachi employs him in her factory as a carpenter. Velutha is also seen taking part in political activity fighting for the cause of Marxism. He converted himself into the Christian religion to be free from the victimization of a casteist society. But the

conversion and his technical expertise, apart from many other good things, never bring any fruitful result in this cruel and caste-ridden society.

Obviously, a person with such extraordinary capabilities would be intelligent enough to realize his position in the caste-ridden society and Velutha is vaguely conscious of his latent talents and he harbours a wish for betterment, even it remains dormant most of the times. Velutha himself is a man of innocence and simplicity, *The God of Small Things, the God of Loss*. “he knows more about the machines in the factory than anyone else. Mammachi often said that “if only he had not been a paravan, he might have become an engineer.” (75) The words of Mammachi reveal that in India, which is a caste based society, caste is a serious impediment in the way of the development even of the skilled and talented outcastes. Unfortunately, Velutha’s caste had eclipsed all his talents. The furniture he made with his untouchable fingers, always decorated the grand houses of Touchables. He was a quick learner and seen as a multi-talented and highly skilled worker.

Although Dalits are skilled and talented, education is denied to them. By chance if some of them are educated they are humiliated and ill-treated by offering menial jobs or lower positions. They had to perform their ancestral jobs. The birth based social status was a very important factor for the livelihood of an individual. Through Velutha, a Dalit should know about the importance of education. Velutha’s father, Vellya paapen, was a Paravan, a toddy tapper, but Velutha is a carpenter which as a Dalit, is something that he is not supposed to be. Though untouchables were educated, they could not rise to the position they really deserved. Mammachi has given him a chance as a carpenter in *Paradise Pickles and Preserves* where he was rejected by touchable factory workers. It shows that Mammachi recognized his skill and dutiful nature but still she has the barrier of caste to allow him to enter her house because of his untouchable status. She had to satisfy the anger of upper caste employees by paying him lower wages than actually what he deserves because the touchable workers of the factory are so wild with casteism and think that “*Paravans* are not meant to be carpenters.” (TGST-77) So, in order to keep the workers happy, Mammachi pays Velutha a little less than the touchable workers.

In contrast to Velutha, Chacko can get away with his debauchery or his ‘man’s needs’ as his mother puts it because he is a ‘touchable’. The society presented in the novel is patriarchal. On one hand there is a group of characters, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and Kochu Maria the cook, who perpetuate the division of caste, race, and gender. On the other hand, Ammu and the twins, Rahel and Estha, consciously or unconsciously resist these hierarchies. Ammu, the biggest victim of the system, is an archetypal image of a daughter marginalized in a patriarchal society. “Perhaps Ammu, Estha and Rahel were the worst transgressors. They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with laws that lay down who should be loved and how much. A person is given a position based on his caste rather than his talent. In spite of all admirable virtues Velutha possess, he does not get proper respect and respectable treatment in society.

Vellya Paapen, the father of Velutha, is vehemently opposed to any type of education or advanced knowledge. He always grudges the craftsmanship and natural skills of Velutha. Further, Vellya quickly degenerates into nagging and bickering and consequently there is a sense of unpleasantness between father and son. Velutha, is quite opposite to his father in a number of qualities and in the novel he appears to be a foil to him. His freedom loving nature was not a desirable quality in an untouchable. It is, therefore, his father remained worried all the time about: “The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing rebel” (76).

He (Vellya) thinks that such behaviour in a paravan ‘should be construed as insolence’ driven by this unnamed fear, he cautions Velutha and nags him continually. It is more the fear of the transgression of the caste lines than the love for moral uprightness that compels him to tell Mammachi about the illicit affair between Velutha and Ammu. (TGST-76)

Tragedy begins in Velutha’s life when he has come into contact with Ammu. As Amarnath Prasad says:

The tragedy begins to take its toll in the life of Velutha when he comes in contact with Ammu or rather say, when Ammu’s ‘troubled eyes and dimpled cheeks’ turn Velutha a transgressor as well as a victim into the secret heart of touchable woman and a miserable victim of its punishment in the police custody” (Amarnath-116)

The actual protagonist of the novel is Ammu. Since her childhood itself, Ammu had been a rebel. When her condition in the Ayemenem was pitiable she ventured to marry a Bengali, working as an Assistant Manager in a tea estate in Assam. It was her first attempt to break the social barrier by getting an inter caste and inter religious marriage. She married a Hindu which was against her own religion of Christianity. And, therefore, her parents did not reply to her letter. Now she loved a Christian—Velutha yet they disapprove of it on grounds of caste. Arundhati Roy satirizes this Syrian Christian family of Ayemenem house and points out that they possess everything except the spirit of true Christianity. Love is the basic principle of Christianity, but this sublime element of love is sadly lacking in the atmosphere of that house. Instead, hatred and jealousy reign supreme in that domesticity. Ammu could not enjoy her married life for long as she left her husband because of his unmanly, heinous character. This was, indeed, the last straw on Ammu’s back; in a fit of fury, she hit her husband and came back with her two children to her parents’ house at Ayemenem. Baby Kochamma, an orthodox old lady of Ayemenem, house, grandmother of the twins hatefully says: “A divorced daughter had no position anywhere at all” (175).



Ammu was attracted towards Velutha because of his skills and ‘sudden smile’. She is also like a Dalit in the novel and was denied by all members of her family and relatives. As she was a divorcee, she, along with her two children in the Ayemenem house was treated like ‘outcastes’. A victim of whimsical society, her life has been barren of love, affection and consolation since her own kith and kin have completely ignored or ill-treated her. They are sadly devoid of loving treatment by their own people. Against such a helpless, desolate condition Velutha makes his presence in their company. Velutha seems to be an oasis in the desert of Ammu and her two children’s life. But the children were warned and cautioned about their behavior and attitude towards Velutha.

With Velutha they feel comfortable, without worrying about his caste. Velutha provides them a few moments of comfort and ease in the world which otherwise seems to be suffocating and hostile. They enjoy his presence as their minds were not polluted with the notion of untouchability; His affectionate and loving protection is a precious possession of the children. The friendly reactions of the twins and Velutha had brought Ammu nearer to him. His healthy and muscular body has exercised an irresistible fascination on Ammu. Thus, the sprouting of love in Ammu’s bosom was very natural. Both of them have forgotten the ban “who should be loved, and how and how much.” (31) She saw him growing from a boy to a man but never felt any passion of love for him. It is because she also looked at him with tradition-ridden eyes and treated him an untouchable in a very natural way. But now, she is at the heyday of her youth, she has been instinctively drawn towards him. The simple untouchable Velutha’s natural love for the children and the children’s innocent attachment to this young man is quite natural and spontaneous. The element of untouchability is man-made and as such, is against the law of nature. For the first time, she notices man-like qualities of Velutha and thinks that “She had gifts to give him too” ultimately two abandoned souls meet in a deserted house of Kari Saipu on the other side of the river. His love on the children may be one of the reasons that provoke Ammu to break the love laws.

Eventually, the secret love affair is discovered. It is at the height of irony that the illicit love affair between Ammu and Velutha has been discovered by none other than Vellya, his father. As Vellya Paapen is a man of submissive generation, a staunch follower of the tradition, he thinks that the relation between a Dalit man and an upper caste woman is a crime and he was ashamed of his son’s shameful conduct. “Vellya Pappen told Mammachi what he had seen. He asked God’s forgiveness for having spawned a monster. He offered to kill his son with his own bare hands. To destroy what he had created.” (TGST-78) Vellya is devoid of human dignity, self-respect and consciousness of human rights; their relation stirs him as “they had made the unthinkable thinkable and impossible really happen” (256). He has a typical mind set of a serf in a feudalistic society.

Whenever an Untouchable is accused of any crime, the Touchables become united to remove him forever. In this novel one sees the unity of the Touchables, the policemen, Marxist

KNM Pillai and the members of Ayemenem house, workers of the pickle factory, even the innocent twins. Baby Kochamma considers herself to be a devout Christian and looks down upon others. She does not even like her grandnephew and niece Rahel and Estha, because they are half-Hindu hybrids who, she thinks that no self-respecting Syrian Christian could marry. She is the real villain of the piece, although she thinks she is a pious woman, her actions greatly differ from what the church or Christianity preaches. Kochamma is the best example of the sanctimonious humbug. Her reactions, after having known the love affair, are quite natural and truly represent the established hierarchical order of the society. She betrays Velutha to save her family reputation. In the whirlwinds of circumstances, he is proved to be a man who has committed a crime. As a helpless untouchable, Velutha, who is guilty of an adulterous affair with a high caste Syrian woman Ammu, has falsely been charged with fabricated accusations by Kochamma. She is hell bent on taking revenge on Velutha, who she believes, has damaged forever, the reputation of her family. Ammu on the other hand is locked in her room because “she had defiled generations of breeding and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, forever now, people would point at them at weddings and funerals at baptism and birthday parties” (TGST-258).

Alex Tickell remarks,

The God of Small Things is a book where you can connect the very smallest things to the very biggest. Therefore, the chain of connections delineates the multi-layered pattern of big and small in the novel, originating from the very title which challenges the tyranny of big things and enunciates creative potential of dissent” (Tickell-10).

Velutha is a Dalit who is socially discarded, politically neglected and physically tortured. His mistake is only that he wants to rise above the established social tradition and convention. Arundhati Roy wants to project the idea as to how the basic human rights are being trampled upon and an atmosphere of disillusionment is created in the society. Although Velutha is a card-holding member, he is denied all his rights. The Communist Party, seemingly revolutionary, no longer made any revolutions and were unable to deal with the complex social and political changes. The communist party is unable to bring any significant change in the deep-rooted caste system of Kerala. Comrade Pillai was a hypocrite to the hilt. He was the symbol of all political parties led by upper caste leaders who deceive Dalits by pretending that they are working for the welfare and uplift of the Dalits. Pillai’s speech betrays how dangerous he is. There is an unbridgeable gulf between what he says and what he does: “people of the world... be courageous, dare to fight, deny difficulties and advance upon ... you must demand what is rightfully yours” (120). He asks his comrades to fight but when time comes, he doesn’t support the comrade who is struggling. Through the characters of Chacko and Comrade Pillai, the author exposes the ambivalence in their motives and goals. She critiques the dual face of communism in

Kerala and attacks the role of leaders who are supposed to strive towards a classless society but they fail to.

Roy highlights that the caste system is deeply rooted even among the Marxists. Comrade Pillai who gives long speeches about the rights of the untouchable remarks: “He may be very well okay as a person. But other workers are not happy with him. Already they are coming to me with complaints. You see comrade, from local standpoint, these caste issues are very deep-rooted.” (TGST-278) Pillai’s double standards are also seen when despite his slogans of ‘Caste is class’, he deliberately distances himself from Velutha in order to maintain the support of Chacko’s other workers who dislike working with a Paravan. Chacko himself appears to be an armchair Communist with no real understanding of the politics that surround him. Even though Pillai is aware that Velutha is innocent, he does not support him because he does not want to incur the wrath of the higher class. In fact, Velutha becomes Comrade Pillai’s accessory when he wants to contest in the Assembly. He never helps Velutha when he seeks the protection of the party nor does he reveal of Velutha’s visit to his house on the night of Sophie Mol’s death. He uses Velutha’s misfortune for his private gains.

Velutha is betrayed by everyone, including his master, mistress, leader and even his colleagues. Even his own father betrays him. Velutha is representative of the downtrodden masses who are merely puppets and vote banks of the politicians. Roy’s searing insight, though controversial, does not deter from revealing her mind about the things as she sees them.

The police inspector, a representative of higher caste is also against Velutha after seeing the illicit relation between Ammu and him. His attempt to get the statement of the children changed to save the reputation of Baby Kochamma clearly reveals that his purpose is not to trace the truth rather it is to protect touchables at the cost of an untouchable’s life. The harsh treatment of police is quite common if an untouchable is accused. Policemen found Velutha at the deserted house where Rahel and Estha passed their night, ignorant of his presence; but the event has been further aggravated by the false comments of people. Arundhati Roy has presented a heart rendering description of the pitiable plight of Velutha:

Blood spilled from his skull like a secret. His face was swollen, and his head looked like a pumpkin, too large and heavy for the slender stem it grew from a pumpkin with a monstrous upside down smile. Police boots stepped back from the rim of a pool of urine spreading from him, the bright bare electric bulb reflected it. (TGST-319,320)

For the sake of social prestige, Velutha is somehow trapped in the net prepared by the society, police and the so called custodians of religion. Though Velutha is indispensable to Kochamma’s family and does a lot of work for their well being, when it comes to their family

pride and prestige, he is pitifully left to his own tragic fate. Wrong statements were fabricated in police station against him. It reveals the fact that the rampant prejudices against the members of the low caste compel the higher caste people to adopt such heinous methods. In the words of M. Adhikari, “In Velutha’s case, it is caste discrimination that makes him powerless and not his gender. His greatest crime is that while being a Karna, he has dreamt of Draupadi.” (Adhikari-141)

The reason why Velutha got beaten, in the first place, is because of the lies of the upper castes; he lacks support from his father or his friends in the Marxist party, and partial views of the policemen. The wrong that the Dalit has done is to love an upper caste woman who too loves him. Velutha is a Dalit; he is helpless and does not have any support and therefore, he is accused of rape and murder. No prosecution, no trial, no judgment in the cases where Dalits are accused. But in some cases where Dalits are ostracized, murdered brutally, massacred yet the judgment favours the upper caste only.

Lakshmi Parasuram observes:

Velutha’s place in history was predetermined. He was not expected to see many things that were out of bounds for him obscured by history’s blinkers... But one day changed the whole course of his life; he was caught in the noose of his history with a suddenness, which the big brought upon the small. (Parasuram 102-103)

When he dares touch a woman from higher caste, whole of the world gets topsy turvy. If Ammu is raped or seduced by a non-Dalit, the story would be different. Actually, if Ammu along with her children gets love and affection from the members of Ayemenem house, she would not have thought of Velutha. Her woman needs on the contrary to the ‘Man’s needs’ of Chacko is pointed out. The victims of ‘Man’s needs’ of Chacko were lower caste women only. Velutha’s untouchability is such a blot for him that his human qualities appear to be insignificant in comparison to his caste identity. This injustice is perpetrated by a group of characters who are themselves the victims of injustice. Mammachi, Ammu’s mother, who endured her husband’s abusive attitude, ignores Chacko’s sexual exploitation of the female workers, but she cannot tolerate her daughter’s love affair with a *Paravan*. Baby Kochamma, the defender of the system, would go to any limit to save the so-called family honour. The novel shows the process of creating and labeling *Paravans* within the high class families—the people who go beyond the unwritten laws of society in pursuit of happiness.

Roy presents a pessimistic picture of society that bristles with the rude realities that vex anyone with an iota of right thinking; with the death of Velutha, the last ray of justice extinguishes. He is accused of kidnapping the twins, and Estha falsely confirms it. Estha

becomes a silent creature. Her incomprehensible ‘Yes’ served to prove an innocent man guilty. Roy expresses her disillusionment with the social conditions of the postcolonial world in which the untouchables of the past still face a hostile society that does not let them live as free and independent individuals. Velutha, the god of small things, the outcaste, can never co-exist peacefully with the “touchable” communities, for as long as, the stigma of untouchability is attached to him and countless others like him. Ammu, another ‘untouchable’ within the ‘touchable’ cannot pursue happiness as things stand; she has been made an untouchable by accepting an untouchable, Velutha as her paramour. After such barbaric treatment, Velutha dies during the night. He is invisible and his death “left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water. No images in mirrors.” (TGST-265) His body is discarded in a pit and Ammu is left behind to feel remorse and later she too dies a lonely ignominious death at the ‘viable die-able’ age of 31. Both of them suffer terribly for transgressing the love laws that were written for them. It is not only Ammu and Velutha who suffer due to the society’s irrational laws but even the twins Rahel and Estha are caught in the complex web of caste and politics. Even though Velutha offers companionship and love, something that was denied to Ammu, Rahel, and Estha, he is punished brutally. Twinkle B. Manavar aptly opines, “Velutha stands as a very tall figure in the novel. It was his desire to ‘relive’ as a touchable which resulted in the tragedy.” (Manvar-26)

The death of Velutha extinguishes all the rays of hope in the lives of Ammu and her children. Roy’s attack on the untouchable-touchable relationships sheds light on the mindless and irrational rigid laws that oppress and suppress people just on the basis of their birth. Readers are left wondering if the caste system will ever truly be abolished and how many nameless Veluthas will it take to realize that we are humans first, irrespective of our caste and culture.

Even after sixty years of Independence, the Indian society is not free from discrimination on the basis of caste, culture, gender and politics. *God of Small Things* is a searing commentary on the caste problems faced by the untouchables in an enlightened society. It explores the role of politics and politicians and its effect on the common men. The novel closes with the gap between the untouchables and the touchable, those who are exploited and those who exploit them, the powerful and the powerless.

---

---

### Works Cited

1. Adhikari, Madhumalati. *Power Politics in The God of Small Things*. Arundhati Roy: the Novelist Extraordinary, Prestige Books, New Delhi, Dhawan, R.K. (ed.) 1999. p.46.
2. Betty, Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique* New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 2001 p.73.
3. Dwivedi, A.N. *Arundhati Roy’s Fictional World*, A Collection of Critical Essays, Ed. by A.N. Dwivedi.

4. Manavar, Twinkle B. *Velutha: The Downtrodden in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*. *The Critical Studies of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things* (1999): 124-29.
  5. Parasuram, Laxmi. *Arundhati Roy: the Novelist Extraordinary*, Prestige Books, New Delhi, Dhawan, R.K. (ed.) 1999. P.102-103.
  6. Prasad, Amar Nath. *Arundhati Ro's The God of Small Things: A Critical Appraisal*, Sarup & Sons, New Delhi, 2013. P.116. ISBN: 81-7625-522-X.
  7. Ranga, Rao. *The Booker of the Year*, *The Hindu*, Sunday, November16, 1997. P.13.
  8. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*, Harper Perennial, London, 1997.
  9. Tickell, Alex. *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*, Routledge, London & New York. p.10
-