

Gender, Class, and Caste: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and the Politics of Marginalization

Shirsh Ahirwar

BA Hons English

School of the Liberal Education

Galgotias University

Gautam Buddh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, India

shirshsinghaharwar@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is on the interconnected systems of caste, class, and gender in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The novel deals with the effect of the social hierarchy on human interactions, emotional identities, and political realities in post-colonial India. Roy shows the cruelty of caste discrimination, patriarchy, and economic distress in the horrific stories of Ammu, Velutha, Rahel, and Estha. Through the lens of fractured chronology, child views, symbolic imagery and linguistic innovation, this study explores Roy's narrative experimentation to demonstrate how literary form can be a political critique. The book also explores the role of institutions such as family, church, police and communist politics in maintaining systems of exclusion and oppression. Roy's work, which is about the lives of minorities and ignored emotional truths, counters the dominant discourses that justify injustice. The thesis argues that the novel is a literary achievement as well as a critique of social injustice, and it suggests the relevance of caste, class and gender politics in contemporary Indian culture. *The God of Small Things* is an ingenious exploration of caste, class, and gender inequality in post-colonial India. The author, Arundhati Roy, utilizes the tragedy of Ammu, Velutha, Rahel and Estha to highlight the brutality that is built into ordinary social processes. The novel implies that emotional misery and political inequity are connected. Roy's image of caste hierarchy

reminds us how deeply discrimination is embedded in contemporary society. Velutha's killing is a brutal portrayal of the brutal price paid by those who dare to break social limits. At the same time, Ammu's tragedy is a testimony to the harsh restrictions on women's independence in a patriarchal culture. The political critique of the work is enhanced by its narrative inventiveness. Using fractured chronology, symbolic imagery, and child viewpoints, Roy is able to express suffering and alienation in extremely complex ways. The story does not offer easy answers but forces us to confront the continued presence of injustice and silence. In the end Roy's fixation on "small things" becomes an ethical and political statement. Through her focus on lost feelings, buried histories, and sidelined lives, she refuses dominant narratives that erase grief. Therefore, the work is a literary success and a strong condemnation of social injustice. *The God of Small Things* remains a powerful exploration of caste, class and gender oppression in postcolonial India. Through the catastrophe that Ammu, Velutha, Rahel and Estha experience, Arundhati Roy illustrates the violence that is embedded in the normal structures of society. Roy's story reveals that emotional suffering is related to political inequity. The caste system in India is depicted in Roy's writing as a deep-seated discrimination in today's society. Velutha's devastation is a painful price paid by those who dare to violate social norms. At the same time, Ammu's tragedy also exposes the harsh limitations on female agency under patriarchal organizations. *The God of Small Things* is a powerful exploration of caste, class and gender inequality in postcolonial India. Through the tragic stories of Ammu, Velutha, Rahel and Estha, Arundhati Roy shows the inherent violence in common societal institutions. The novel stresses that there is no way of disconnecting emotional misery from political inequity. Roy's depiction of caste hierarchy shows us the extent of discrimination in modern society. Velutha's killing is a brutal portrayal of the brutal price paid by those who dare to break social limits. At the same time, Ammu's tragedy is a testimony to the harsh restrictions on women's independence in a patriarchal culture. The political critique of the work is enhanced by its

narrative inventiveness. Using fractured chronology, symbolic imagery, and child viewpoints, Roy is able to express suffering and alienation in extremely complex ways. The story does not offer easy answers but forces us to confront the continued presence of injustice and silence. In the end, Roy's obsession with "small things" is a statement about ethics and politics. She brings to the fore neglected emotions, forgotten histories, and marginalized lives, challenging prevailing narratives that dismiss grief. The work is therefore a literary classic and a strong condemnation of social injustice.

Keywords: Caste Hierarchy, Postcolonial Feminism, Gender Oppression, Marginalization, Velutha, Ammu, Patriarchy

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is one of the most prominent postcolonial novels in current Indian literature. The novel, released in 1997, investigates the social realities in Kerala through the lives of the Ipe family and the tragic love between Ammu and Velutha. Roy does not merely narrate a family story; she offers a political and emotional critique of the Indian culture where caste, class, and gender intersect to determine the destiny of individuals. The story depicts the violence that underlies social acceptability and the operation of authority in the domestic, political, and cultural spheres. The story revolves around inherited hierarchies that form the social order. They cannot find their identity in self alone. Their identity is defined by their caste position, their economic power and the patriarchal expectations. Velutha's identification as a Paravan, Ammu's identity as a divorced woman and Rahel's psychological alienation show the various ways in which marginalization can affect different people. Roy's story reveals that tyranny cannot be limited to a category. Caste prejudice, on the other hand, is rooted in class exploitation and gender inequality that leads to entrenched systems of exclusion. The disrupted narrative of the novel parallels the fragmentation suffered by the excluded. Roy revisits tragic events, undergoing a constant process of reconstruction from multiple angles, and thereby reveals the way memory and history are shaped by power. It is a

composition of poetic language and symbolic imagery that condemns the social institutions that punish love, individuality, and resistance. The emotional power of the novel is in its focus on the lives of common people who are destroyed by authoritarian structures. This study discusses the intermingling of caste, class and gender in *The God of Small Things*. It argues that Roy's writing exposes the persistence of social inequality in postcolonial India and demonstrates how personal relationships become sites of political conflict. The paper highlights how Roy, in her thorough textual analysis, attacks patriarchy, caste violence, economic instability, and institutional injustice and, at the same time, recovers the humanity of the underprivileged. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is considered one of the most powerful postcolonial novels in current Indian literature. This novel, published in 1997, addresses the social realities of Kerala through the lives of the Ipe family and via the tragic link between Ammu and Velutha. Not only does Roy narrate the narrative of a family, but she also builds a political and emotional criticism of the Indian society in which caste, class, and gender combine to determine the destiny of individuals. The story depicts the violence that underlies social acceptability and the operation of authority in the domestic, political, and cultural spheres. The story is structured around inherited hierarchies that constitute the social order. They are not free to define themselves; their identities are determined by caste position, economic power and patriarchal expectations. Velutha's status as a Paravan, Ammu's status as a divorced woman, and Rahel's psychological seclusion all demonstrate how marginalization works differently for different people. Roy's tale implies that oppression cannot be considered as a single, monolithic issue. The novel of 1997 explores the socio-economic realities of Kerala through the lives of the Ipe family and the tragic link between Ammu and Velutha. Roy not only narrates the family saga but also develops a political and emotional critique of Indian culture in which caste, class, and gender work in tandem to determine the destiny of the individuals. The story depicts the violence that underlies social acceptability and the operation

of authority in the domestic, political, and cultural spheres. The story is structured by inherited hierarchies that make up the social order. They cannot define themselves in isolation. Their identities are determined by their caste standing, economic power and patriarchal expectations. Velutha's identification as a Paravan, Ammu's identity as a divorced woman and Rahel's psychological alienation are the various ways in which marginalization can affect different people. Roy's story demonstrates that tyranny cannot be limited to one category. Caste prejudice, however, is entrenched in class exploitation and gender inequality, leading to entrenched systems of exclusion. The fragmented narrative structure of the novel is parallel to the fragmentation experienced by the excluded. Roy revisits tragic events, undergoing a constant process of reconstruction from multiple angles, and thereby reveals the way memory and history are shaped by power. It is a composition of poetic language and symbolic imagery that condemns the social institutions that punish love, individuality, and resistance. The emotional intensity of the novel stems from its attention to ordinary lives destroyed by authoritarian structures. This article discusses the interaction of caste, class, and gender in *The God of Small Things*. Argues that Roy's work depicts the persistence of social inequality in postcolonial India and demonstrates how intimate relationships become sites of political confrontation. Through a detailed textual analysis, the dissertation examines how Roy confronts patriarchy, caste violence, economic instability, and institutional injustice while at the same time recovering the humanity of the disadvantaged.

The God of Small Things: The conceptual basis for social relations is the caste system. Even in modern India, where caste discrimination is explicitly prohibited, Roy demonstrates caste still determines social interaction, marriage, labor, and mobility. The most glaring illustration of caste discrimination is the life of Velutha. He's smart and creative and a good mechanic. But he's still stuck in the identity society has given him. He is not equal due to his

abilities. He is worth what his caste makes him valuable in the perspective of dominating groups. Roy often demonstrates the working of caste not merely in governmental institutions but also in private emotions and family bonds. The Ipe family relies on Velutha for work, but they do not consider him their social equal. His touch, his presence, and his desire are dangerous because they threaten the integrity of upper-caste identity. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha is uncomfortable in that it breaks the caste lines that society would rather keep at any costs. The brutality of the police against Velutha is an example of institutional backing for caste injustice. His caste identity already marks him as guilty, and therefore the police do not bother to investigate the veracity of the allegations against him. Roy's presentation of the state's brutality is an extension of social prejudice. The death of Velutha then is more than the death of a person, it is the systematic destruction of lower caste opposition and aspiration. Roy also shows the development of caste ideology in the psychological mind. Characters internalize societal conventions and enact them in everyday life. Baby Kochamma hates Velutha because she is afraid of social disorder. Even sympathetic characters are complicit in perpetuating caste discrimination for fear of losing social respectability. In these portrayals Roy indicates that caste injustice is perpetuated via communal involvement and silence. In *The God of Small Things* the caste system forms the theoretical basis of social relations. Roy demonstrates that even in modern India, where caste discrimination is technically outlawed, caste continues to control social contact, marriage, work, and mobility. The strongest example of caste discrimination is Velutha's life. He's smart and creative and a good mechanic. But he's still stuck in the identity society has given him. He is not equal due to his abilities. He is worth what his caste makes him valuable in the perspective of dominating groups. Roy often demonstrates the working of caste not merely in governmental institutions but also in private emotions and family bonds. The Ipe family depends on Velutha's labor but does not consider him socially equal. His touch, presence, and needs are considered grave

dangers to the integrity of upper-caste identity. The caste system is the philosophical base of social relations in *The God of Small Things*. This is why the connection between Ammu and Velutha becomes intolerable. Roy argues that although officially rejected in modern India, caste continues to affect social contact, marriage, labor, and travel. The most glaring instance of caste discrimination is the life of Velutha. He's smart and creative and a good mechanic. But he's still stuck in the identity society has given him. He is not equal due to his abilities. He is worth what his caste makes him valuable in the perspective of dominating groups. Roy often demonstrates the working of caste not merely in governmental institutions but also in private emotions and family bonds. The Ipe family relies on Velutha for work, but they do not consider him their social equal. His touch, his presence, and his desire are dangerous because they threaten the integrity of upper-caste identity. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha is uncomfortable in that it breaks the caste lines that society would rather keep at any costs. The brutality of the police against Velutha is an example of institutional backing for caste injustice. His caste identity already marks him as guilty, and therefore the police do not bother to investigate the veracity of the allegations against him. Roy's picture of the state's brutality is an extension of social prejudice. Velutha's death is thus not only the assassination of an individual; it is the systematic annihilation of lower-caste opposition and aspiration. Roy also shows the development of caste ideology in the psychological mind. Characters internalize societal conventions and enact them in everyday life. Baby Kochamma's hatred of Velutha exposes her fear of social disorder. The preservation of caste disparity is thus the responsibility of the most sympathetic of people who are afraid of losing social acceptability. Roy contends that these images represent the persistence of caste oppression with the help of the complicity and silence of the community.

Roy's assessment of Indian society is rife with gender inequity. In the story, the female characters are devoid of agency and evaluated according to patriarchal standards. The life of Ammu is a metaphor for the fragility of women trying to carve out an independent existence in the face of oppressive social structures. Her failing marriage leaves her economically dependent on her family, and her divorce makes her a social outcast. Through deft strokes, Roy shows the surveillance and regulation of female sexuality. It is not the absence of emotional honesty that is the problem with Ammu's relationship with Velutha but the threat it poses to the authority of patriarchy. Women are expected to be submissive, sexually restrained, and dependent on the goodwill of men. By not meeting these expectations, Ammu is shamed and destroyed. Her family finds her wishes unethical and damaging, dehumanizing her into a societal scandal. Mammachi's situation is another instance of patriarchal tyranny. For years she endures Pappachi's abuse but society considers her anguish part of married life. Roy uncovers the obscured realm of domestic violence inside patriarchal civilization. Mammachi's artistic talent and emotional life are secondary to her role as wife and mother. Baby Kochamma is an example of the transfer of patriarchal ideologies. She participates in the maintenance of oppressive structures instead of fighting them. Her resentment and manipulation are an example of how patriarchy may lead to women police each other. Thus, Roy does not wish to represent women as only the victims of innocence. Instead, she shows how complicated female identity is amid systems of oppression. Rahel's solitude as an adult reflects the long-term psychological effects of patriarchal violence. Her fragmented identity and emotional isolation suggest the generational transmission of trauma. Roy's image of women is ultimately a revelation of the emotional and social cost of denying female autonomy and freedom. Gender inequality is one of the most crucial themes in Roy's critique of Indian culture. The story disallows female characters to exercise autonomy and assesses them on patriarchal ideals. Ammu's life is a metaphor for the precariousness of women who seek to achieve their freedom

within the confines of rigid social structures. Her failing marriage leaves her economically dependent on her family, and her divorce makes her a social outcast. Through deft strokes, Roy shows the surveillance and regulation of female sexuality. It is not the absence of emotional honesty that is the problem with Ammu's relationship with Velutha but the threat it poses to the authority of patriarchy. Women are expected to be submissive, sexually restrained, and dependent on the goodwill of men. Ammu's defiance of these expectations is a source of shame and ruin for her. Her family decries her wants as unethical and dangerous and converts her to a social scandal. Mammachi's experience is an illustration of another form of patriarchal tyranny. She spends gender inequality is central to Roy's critique of Indian society. The women characters in the story are disempowered, and their judgment is based on the patriarchal standards. Ammu's life is an example of the precariousness of women's lives who seek independence against the backdrop of restricted societal systems. Her divorce makes her a social outcast, and her broken marriage renders her fiscally dependent on the family. Through deft strokes, Roy shows the surveillance and regulation of female sexuality. It is not the absence of emotional honesty that is the problem with Ammu's relationship with Velutha but the threat it poses to the authority of patriarchy. Women are expected to be submissive, sexually restrained, and dependent on the goodwill of men. By not meeting these expectations, Ammu is shamed and destroyed. Her family finds her wishes unethical and damaging, dehumanizing her into a societal scandal. Mammachi's situation is another instance of patriarchal tyranny. For years she endures Pappachi's abuse but society considers her anguish part of married life. Roy uncovers the obscured realm of domestic violence inside patriarchal civilization. Mammachi's artistic talent and emotional life are secondary to her role as wife and mother. Baby Kochamma is an example of the transfer of patriarchal ideologies. She participates in the maintenance of oppressive structures instead of fighting them. Her resentment and manipulation are an example of how patriarchy may lead to women police each other. Thus,

Roy does not wish to represent women as only the victims of innocence. Instead, she exposes the complex nature of female identity in systems of oppression. Rahel's loneliness as an adult underscores the lasting psychological impact of patriarchal violence. Her broken identity and inner loneliness reveal the misery that crosses generations. Ultimately, Roy's portrayal of women highlights the emotional and social price of the denial of female liberty and independence.

The story has a lot to do with class distinctions, both in terms of relationships and power. The Ipe family is economically degraded too, yet socially pampered by caste rank. Roy's depiction of postcolonial Kerala is a country in economic transition, where older aristocratic families are trying to hold on to their power. Chacko's pickle plant becomes a metaphor for the precariousness of class identity. Chacko is a learned Marxist thinker; however, he is also a man of inherited privilege and patriarchal entitlement. He claims the family property but refuses Ammu equal rights. Roy pulls back the curtain on the rich men who cloak their own social privileges in the rhetoric of progressivism. Velutha's economic vulnerability deepens his caste injustice. He has no ownership stake in the factory, no voice in its management. Roy explains the complementarity of caste and class. The denial of social mobility to lower-caste people guarantees the economy of inequality. The narrative also interrogates the colonial legacies that create class consciousness. The characters admire English culture and take Western education as a prestigious issue. There is tremendous excitement about the arrival of Sophie Mol from England, she is a sign of worldwide prestige. Roy observes that postcolonial identity is still afflicted by colonialism through cultural ambition and economic stratification. The novel demonstrates that economic uncertainty influences emotional exchanges. Disputes in a family are often about property, inheritance and social status. The novel is concerned with the power relations of class difference and interaction. The Ipe family is socially placed by

caste position and economically falling. Roy shows postcolonial Kerala as a country in economic upheaval, and the older aristocratic families are striving to retain authority. Chacko's pickle business is a symbol of the fragility of class identity. Chacko is an accomplished Marxist thinker; however, he is also a man of inherited privilege and patriarchal entitlement. He asserts his right to the family property but denies Ammu equal share. Roy criticizes the hypocrisy of the rich men who speak progressive but do not look at their own social advantages. Velutha's caste injustice is compounded by his economic vulnerability. His work is a part of the machinery of the factory yet he is excluded from Class distinctions are significant variables in the setting of relationships and power dynamics across the tale. The Ipe family is socially privileged in terms of caste position but economically declining. Roy portrays postcolonial Kerala as an economically transiting society, where older aristocratic families are struggling to maintain dominance. Chacko's pickle business reveals the fragility of class identity. Chacko is a good Marxist thinker but also a man of inherited privilege and patriarchal entitlement. He claims the family property but denies Ammu equal rights. Roy exposes the lies of rich men who use the rhetoric of progressivism to camouflage their own social privileges. Velutha's economic vulnerability deepens his caste injustice. He has no ownership stake in the factory, no voice in its management. Roy explains the complementarity of caste and class. The denial of social mobility to lower-caste people guarantees the economy of inequality. The narrative also interrogates the colonial legacies that create class consciousness. The characters admire English culture and take Western education as a prestigious issue. There is tremendous excitement about the arrival of Sophie Mol from England, she is a sign of worldwide prestige. Roy observes that postcolonial identity is still afflicted by colonialism through cultural ambition and economic stratification. The economic uncertainty impacts the emotional interactions in the narrative. Family quarrels are usually over property, inheritance, and social

position. Roy reveals that inequality between classes is not only material but also psychological in shaping desires and fears and interpersonal relationships.

The way Roy constructs his story is important to the political meaning of the work. The broken timeline reflects the broken experiences of the traumatized and abused characters in the society. Roy does not narrate in chronological sequence but reconstructs the past through recollection, repetition, and emotional association. Roy exposed social hypocrisy in a stunning clarity of children's viewpoints. They watch the ways of grown-ups without completely knowing the politics of it all. Their innocence is a reflection of the stupidity and severity of social standards that adults think normal. Youngsters express emotional complexity via imaginative interpretations and language play, while resisting limiting structures. Roy's literary style is a fusion of lyrical imagery with political insight. In the story rivers, insects, rain, and household objects all become symbols. The environment reflects emotional emotions and social tensions. The image of the river, for example, is repeated throughout the novel and signifies both freedom and hazard. It's associated with forbidden love, death, and remembering. The repetition of sentences and situations conveys the sense of inevitability. Readers know from the beginning that catastrophe has happened but Roy unpacks slowly why. This pattern shows the way social institutions imprison people into preordained destinies. So the fractured narrative echoes the difficulty of escaping historical and societal violence. Roy's experimental manner also departs from typical realist storytelling. She breaks chronology for subjective memory, letting voices and emotional truths, often excluded by traditional narratives, surface. Roy's narrative structure is central to the political relevance of the work. and traumatized by society. Roy reconstructs the past through memory, repetition and emotional association rather than in sequence. Roy made clear the social hypocrisy through child points The children's play with language, their creative interpretation, adds emotional

depth and critique of authoritarian structures. Roy's writing style is a blend of poetic imagery with political analysis. Rivers, insects, rain, and household items are symbols. The narrative structure of *SyRoy* is important for the political content of the work. The non-linear timeline reflects the fragmented experience of traumatized and socially violent characters. Roy does not narrate events in chronological order but reconstructs the past through memory, reiteration and emotional link. Roy revealed social hypocrisy with stunning clarity through child perspectives. They watch the ways of grown-ups without completely knowing the politics of it all. Their innocence is a reflection of the stupidity and severity of social standards that adults think normal. Children use inventive readings and linguistic games to communicate emotional nuance and critique constraining structures. Roy's literary style is a fusion of lyrical imagery with political insight. In the story rivers, insects, rain, and household objects all become symbols. The environment reflects emotional emotions and social tensions. The image of the river, for example, is repeated throughout the novel and signifies both freedom and hazard. It's associated with forbidden love, death, and remembering. The repeated sentences and situations gives a feeling of inevitability. Readers know from the beginning that catastrophe has happened, but Roy slowly unpacks why. This pattern shows how social structures condemn people to predetermined destiny. The shattered story, therefore, represents the impossibility of escape from historical and societal harm. Roy's experimental style also undercuts conventional realism narratives. She breaks chronological chronology and emphasizes subjective memory, opening the way to the voices of the marginalized and emotional realities that conventional storytelling is inclined to ignore.

The political situation of Kerala is a significant setting for the narrative. Roy presents communist politics as a paradox of hope and constraint. But in practice, communist leaders do not handle the caste order, while they may speak of equality and fairness. Velutha's political

involvement does not insulate him from assault, as institutional power ultimately serves the interests of dominant social groups. Comrade Pillai is a case in point of the opportunism of political leadership. He is vocal in his support of labourers and lower caste people but leaves Velutha when his own reputation is threatened. Roy takes on the gap between rhetoric and real social change in revolutions. Political institutions do not do away with hierarchy; they reinforce it. The police force is the most violent manifestation of institutional power. Velutha's torture reveals the state's ruthless defense of upper-caste acceptability. Roy portrays law enforcement as not being impartial but rather as being greatly influenced by caste prejudice and patriarchal attitudes. Religion also is a contribution to social control in the novel. Social hierarchy dominates in religious societies. Hence, Christian identification does not eliminate caste discrimination. Roy critiques the lack of adequate protection for marginalized individuals by institutions of all kinds: political, legal, and religious. The story is against the backdrop of the political environment of Kerala. Roy's portrayal of communist politics is at once uplifting and confining. But in practice communist leaders do not challenge the caste hierarchy as much as they may preach about equality and fairness. Velutha's political engagement does not insulate him from assault since institutional authority finally supports dominant social interests. Comrade Pillai is an example of the opportunism among political leadership. He publicly supports the workers and the lower castes but abandons Velutha when his personal reputation is in jeopardy. Roy is critical of the gap between revolutionary rhetoric and real social transformation. But in practice communist leaders do not question the caste hierarchy even as they talk of equality and justice. Velutha's political involvement does not insulate him from assault, as institutional power ultimately serves the interests of dominant social groups. Comrade Pillai is a case in point of the opportunism of political leadership. He is outspoken in his support of the laborers and lower-caste people, but he abandons Velutha when his own reputation is at stake. Roy takes on the gap between rhetoric and real social change in

revolutions. Political institutions do not do away with hierarchy; they reinforce it. The police force is the most violent manifestation of institutional power. Velutha's torture reveals the state's ruthless defense of upper-caste acceptability. Roy shows how law enforcement is not impartial but is greatly influenced by caste prejudice and patriarchal values. Religion also has a role in social control in the plot. Caste bias does not disappear with Christian identity and social stratification exists within religious communities. In particular, Roy critiques the failure of political, legal, and religious institutions to protect the disadvantaged.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Copyright: © 2026 by Shirsh Ahirwar retain the copyright of their original work while granting publication rights to the journal.

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, allowing others to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon it, even for commercial purposes, with proper attribution. Author(s) are also permitted to post their work in institutional repositories, social media, or other platforms.

Works Cited

Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*. Random House, 1997. New York:

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Nivedita Menon. *Recovering Subversion: Feminist Politics for a New Law, Permanent Black*,
2004.

Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Empire Writes Back*. Routledge, 2002.

Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 1990.