



## **DISCOURSE OF CASTE AND IDENTITY: A STUDY OF ARUNDHAI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS**

**Rashmi Shaju**

Department of Philosophy  
Malwanchal University

**Dr. Tushti Sharma**

Department of Philosophy  
Malwanchal University

### **Abstract**

An integral part of Indian culture is caste. It has been and will be a major factor in shaping India's social and political landscape for quite some time. Caste and its many facets have been the subject of a great deal of writing in recent times. A number of renowned authors took it upon themselves to bring attention to the suffering of those who were thrown out of society due to the caste system. The God of Small Things, by Arundhati Roy, is a notable work of fiction that addresses the tragedy of Dalit existence.

Keywords: Dalit's Life, Arundhati Roy, published, Small.

### **Introduction**

Derived from the Portuguese word "casta," meaning "pure," the English term "caste" has its roots in that language. "Any attempts to define 'caste' based on concepts of cleanliness and impurity should be met with suspicion due to its European etymology." The caste system, sometimes called *caturvarna* (meaning "four colours"), is a long-established method of social stratification in India based on inherited profession. There is little room for advancement in the caste system because of its inherited character. Members of the lower caste endure stigmatization, humiliation, and punishment due to their caste, a factor over which they had zero say.

The Rigveda, often considered the first religious document in Vedic Sanskrit, is one of several holy Hindu writings that makes reference to this horrific social order. "When they divided the Man, into how many parts did they apportion him?" the Rigveda asks, implying that the cosmos and its numerous castes originated from the ritual dissection of Purusa, the cosmic Man. His two arms, thighs, and feet are referred to by what? From his lips sprang the Brahmin, his arms became the Warrior, his thighs formed the People, and the Servants were born from his feet. The myth cited before described a hereditary employment for each level of the caste system. It was the responsibility of the Brahmins, as the priestly caste, to memories the sacred texts, recite rituals, and conduct religious rites. Every segment of society held them in the highest esteem.

Novelist Arundhati Roy is a native Indian who writes in English. She writes screenplays and is active in politics as well. Her 1997 first book, *The God of Small Things*, which won the Booker Prize, was her most publicized achievement. According to Procházka and Stříbrný (2003), note 631. For a long while, this book stood alone as her only novel. Twenty years after that, in June of 2017, her second book, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, was released.

It was unexpected for her to abruptly cease being a writer and transition to political action after the phenomenal success of her first work. She has so far received positive reviews for her return to writer, and the National Book Critics Circle has nominated her for a fiction award with her second book. She is mostly against nuclear weapons and dam developments in her activism work. Additionally, she opposes imperialism, globalization, and corporatization. She may stand up for the defenseless little things, which are just as important as the strong ones. Even in "The God of Small Things," you can see that represented. She

has strong sentiments and views on nationalism, despite the fact that her writing is in English, the language of previous invaders, which has been attacked. fewer food, fewer money, and smaller bombs are all we have. But there is a great deal of other riches that we have or have. Absolutely delightful, immeasurable " According to Roy (2002), on page 25,

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anju Bala (2014) was published in the journal "Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research" with the title of "Giving Voice to Voiceless: A Study of Dalit Literature." This research aimed to shed light on the work of Dalit intellectuals and writers who sought to provide a voice to the oppressed and enslaved Dalits by documenting their long-suppressed histories of cruelty and injustice. This research also depicted the journey of Dalit literature as it evolved from an art form to a powerful tool for expressing pain and anger. The study also showed how Dalit minority went from being a silent, unresponsive group to one that is active and vocal.

Dipenjoy Mukherjee (2015) published an article in "Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature" titled "Untouchable as a Saga of Silent Suffering: an Insight into Anand's Plea to Save Dalits from Ideological Assumptions." Mulk Raj Anand is hailed as the pioneer of Indian writing in English in this article, which highlights his significant contribution to Indian English literature. He describes Anand's writings as depicting social, political, religious, and economic challenges in a way that is rational, communist, rebellious, and reflective. Many of his works revolve with issues of poverty, inequality, betrayal, cruelty, segregation, abuse, and untouchability. The scavenger Bakha is the object of this investigation of the prevalence of untouchability in Indian culture.

Shweta Singh (2014) published an article in 'The Delhi University Journal of the Humanities & the Social Sciences' titled "Representation of Dalit women in Dalit men's and women's autobiographies". The researcher has posed an excellent issue on the portrayal of Dalit women characters in Dalit autobiographies in this study. She makes it very obvious that she thinks Dalit female characters have received less attention than Dalit male characters in media.

Akshay Sivdas (2016) sent a study titled "Varna System: The Forgotten Meaning" to the "International Research Journal of Social Sciences." Since the majority of Indians have a misunderstanding of the Varna system (caste system), Sivdas set out to correct that misconception via this research. This Varna system has been heavily criticized and condemned for being used to persecute lower caste people.

Sneha Jajoria (2017) published an article in the "International Journal of Applied Research" titled "Representation of Dalit female characters in Dalit and Non-Dalit writings: reading Rao's Children of God and Sivakami's The Grip of Change." The purpose of this research was to compare and contrast the ways in which Dalit authors and non-Dalit writers portray Dalit characters in Dalit literary works. There is a striking discrepancy between the writings of a Dalit woman who has experienced the curse firsthand and another non-Dalit woman who has only heard or read about it. This discrepancy was brought to light by the study. It is disheartening for the investigator to find that authors who are not Dalits have portrayed the life of Dalits with a touch of compassion rather than empathy.

## THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS BY ARUNDHATI ROY: A CAST-BASED ANALYSIS

Ammu is really the main character in the book. Ammu has been an outcast ever since she was a little girl. She took the bold step of marrying a Bengali when she was working as an assistant manager at an Assam tea estate, all because her situation in the Ayemenem was so pitiful. She has never before attempted to overcome social barriers by marrying into a different caste or religion. Even though she was a devout Christian, she married a Hindu. Consequently, her parents chose not to respond to her letter.

Even though they disapprove based on caste, she loved Velutha, a Christian. In her satire, Arundhati Roy highlights the fact that the Christian family of Ayemenem home in Syria has all the material possessions one could want, except for the real Christian spirit. Although love is central to Christianity, it is tragically absent from the ambiance of the home. On the contrary, such domesticity is ruled by enmity and envy. Because of her husband's unmanly and horrible behaviour, Ammu left him before she could enjoy her married life for long. As if that weren't bad enough, Ammu snapped at her husband and returned to her parents' home in Ayemenem with their two children in tow. "A divorced daughter had no position anywhere at all" (175) is something that the twins' grandma, Baby Kochamma, an orthodox elderly woman from Ayemenem, says with deep hatred.

Ammu found Velutha attractive due to his abilities and that "sudden smile" of his. Like the Dalits in the story, her family and relatives rejected her. The Ayemenem family saw her and her two children as "outcastes" because of her divorce. She has been a victim of society's capricious rules and has never known love, affection, or comfort from anybody in her family, who have either disregarded her or treated her badly. Unfortunately, even among their own people, they do not get any affection. In the face of such a hopeless and lonely situation, Velutha chooses to be with them. As far as Ammu and her two kids are concerned, Velutha is like an oasis in the middle of nothing. However, the kids were advised from acting disrespectfully towards Velutha.

They are at ease with Velutha, regardless of his caste. Even though they feel trapped and threatened by the world around them, Velutha gives them a little respite. Because they were free from the influence of the concept of untouchability, the children cherish his loving protection and love being in his company. Ammu had become closer to him as a result of the twins' and Velutha's cordial responses. Ammu has been captivated by his healthy and strong physique. Therefore, it was quite normal for love to blossom in Ammu's heart. "Who should be loved, and how and how much" is a forbidden phrase that none of them remembers. (31 1)

I never felt any passionate affection for him, even though I saw him develop from a boy into a man. For the same reason that she regarded him like an untouchable in her very natural manner, she also gazed at him with eyes filled with tradition. But now since she's young and beautiful, she feels an overwhelming attraction to him. There is an organic and unforced connection between the children and the young guy, as well as between the children and the untouchable Velutha. The concept of untouchability goes against the laws of nature as it is a human-made regulation. After seeing that Velutha had manly traits for the first time, she thinks, "She had gifts to give him too." at the end, two lost spirits cross paths at the empty mansion of Kari Saipu across the river. Perhaps Ammu's affection for the children is one of the things that drives him to disobey the love commandments.

The affair comes to light after some time has passed. The fact that Ammu's father, Vellya, has found out about his son's romance with Velutha is the height of irony. Because he is a guy from a subservient generation and a strict adherent to tradition, Vellya Paapen feels embarrassed of his son's dishonourable behaviour and believes that a Dalit man's relationship with a lady from a higher caste is criminal. What Vellya Paapen had witnessed, he informed Mammachi. He begged God to pardon him for creating a monster. He even promised to use his own hands to murder his own kid. To ruin his own creation. The subject is TGST-78. Because "they had made the unthinkable thinkable and impossible really happen" (256), Vellya is moved by their relationship, even if he lacks human decency, self-respect, and concern for human rights. A typical serf in a feudalistic society, his mindset is like such.

When an Untouchable is implicated in any wrongdoing, the Touchables band together to expel him for good. Everyone from the Touchables to the police, the Marxist KNM Pillai, the Ayemenem family, the pickle factory employees, and even the innocent twins come together in this story. Little Kochamma has a haughty attitude towards other people because she thinks she is a very good Christian. Rahel and Estha, her

grandnephew and niece, are half-Hindu hybrids whom she believes no respectable Christian Syrian could marry. This is why she despises them even more. Although she presents herself as a devout Christian, her behaviour is diametrically opposed to the teachings of her faith, and she is therefore the true antagonist of the play.

The epitome of sanctimonious humbug is Kochamma. She acts in a very normal way after learning about the affair, and her behaviours reflect the society's established hierarchy. Her family's reputation is at stake, so she betrays Velutha. As events swirl around him, it becomes clear that he is a guy who has broken the law. Kochamma had planted false allegations against Velutha, an innocent untouchable who had an affair with a Syrian lady from a higher caste named Ammu. She will stop at nothing to exact her vengeance on Velutha, whom she holds responsible for permanently tarnishing her family's image. And Ammu, who "she had defiled generations of breeding and brought the family to its knees," is confined to her chamber. "People would point at them at baptisms, birthday parties, weddings, and funerals for generations to come" (TGST-258).

According to Alex Tickell, "The God of Small Things" allows readers to make connections between seemingly insignificant details and the grand scheme of things. Thus, the web of relationships illustrates the complex interplay between large and small themes throughout the book, beginning with the title, which "declared the creative potential of dissent" and "challenges the tyranny of big things" (Tickell-10).

As a Dalit man, Velutha experiences physical abuse in addition to social exclusion and political marginalization. His only transgression is his desire to transcend long-standing societal norms and practices. It is Arundhati Roy's hope that her work would shed light on the systematic violation of fundamental human rights and the resulting social disillusionment. Velutha is a member in good standing, however he is not granted any privileges despite this. Even though they seemed to be revolutionizing, the Communist Party was unable to keep up with the complicated social and political developments and stopped bringing about revolutions. The communist party has failed miserably in its attempts to reform Kerala's long-established caste structure. The whole time, Comrade Pillai was being hypocritical. He personified every political party run by politicians from higher castes that trick the Dalits into thinking they are looking out for their best interests when in fact they are just trying to enrich themselves. The risk that Pillai poses is shown in his remarks. "People of the world... be courageous, dare to fight, deny difficulties and advance upon... you must demand what is rightfully yours" (120) is completely at odds with his actions. He urges his fellow soldiers to battle, yet he abandons the one who is hurting when the going becomes tough. The author reveals the characters' conflicting intentions and aims via Chacko and Comrade Pillai. She takes aim at the leaders of Kerala's communist party, arguing that they are hypocrites for failing to achieve their goal of a society without social classes.

Even among Marxists, the caste system persists, as Roy points out. He could be perfectly OK on a personal level, says Comrade Pillai, who delivers lengthy speeches advocating for the rights of the untouchables. However, his coworkers are not pleased with him. They are already complaining to me. These caste concerns go deep, you know, from a local perspective. (278 TGST) Even though he claims that "Caste is class," Pillai keeps his distance from Velutha on purpose so that he may keep the support of Chacko's other employees, who despise working with a Paravan. This demonstrates his hypocrisy. It would seem that Chacko is a political ignoramus who prefers to stay in his cosy little corner of the political spectrum. Pillai knows Velutha is innocent, but he still doesn't back him because he's afraid the upper class would punish him. Actually, when Comrade Pillai wishes to run for the Assembly, Velutha becomes his ally. Neither does he divulge the fact that Velutha visited his home the night of Sophie Mol's murder, nor does he assist Velutha when the latter requests the party's protection. He reaps personal benefits from Velutha's suffering.

Every single person in Velutha's life betrays him: his boss, mistress, and even his coworkers. His father betrays him, too. Velutha stands in for the oppressed people who are nothing more than politicians' pawns

and voting bases. Despite the backlash she has received for her incisive observations, Roy remains steadfast in sharing her thoughts on the matter.

The inspector of police, who represents a higher caste, is also opposed to Velutha after seeing his unlawful relationship with Ammu. The fact that he tried to have the children's statements modified in order to safeguard Baby Kochamma's reputation shows that his goal is to protect touchables, even if it means killing an untouchable. It is not uncommon for police to punish untouchables harshly when they are accused. The incident has already been made worse by people's unfounded remarks, but now police have discovered Velutha in the abandoned home where Rahel and Estha spent the night. The tragic situation that Velutha finds herself in has been eloquently described by Arundhati Roy:

A secret was revealed when blood gushed from his cranium. He had a monster's upside-down grin, a bulging face, and a pumpkin-like head that was too big and heavy for its skinny stem. A puddle of pee extended out from him, and the brilliant naked electric bulb reflected it as police boots moved back from the edge of the pool. (319,320) TGST

Velutha finds himself entangled in a web that society, the police, and the so-called guardians of religion have woven for the sake of social status. Even though Velutha is vital to the Kochamma family and works tirelessly to ensure their welfare, he is pitifully abandoned to his terrible destiny when it concerns their honour and reputation. At the police station, false accusations were made against him. It shows that the upper caste people are driven to conduct such horrible things by their widespread biases against the lower caste people. It is not Velutha's gender but caste prejudice that renders him helpless, according to M. Adhikari. His worst transgression is harbouring fantasies about Draupadi when he is a Karna. According to Adhikari, line fourteen

Because of the partiality of the police officers and the lack of assistance from his father and friends in the Marxist party, Velutha was first beaten due to the falsehoods propagated by the higher castes. Loving a lady from a higher caste who loves him back is the Dalit's sin. Because of his Dalit background, Velutha is defenceless and unsupported, which leads to the accusations of rape and murder levelled against him. Cases involving Dalits do not go to prosecution, trial, or judgement. Nevertheless, there are instances when the higher caste is single-handedly rewarded in scenarios where Dalits face social exclusion, horrific murder, or slaughter.

The role that Velutha would play in history was already decided, according to Lakshmi Parasuram. Little did he anticipate that history's biases would hide so many things that were off-limits to him... However, everything changed for him on that fateful day; he found himself suddenly entangled in the web of his past, as if the large had dropped its jaws on the little. (Songs 102–103 of Aramaic

The whole universe turns upside down the moment he has the audacity to touch a lady of a higher caste. What happens next depends on whether Ammu is raped or seduced by someone who isn't Dalit. Ayemenem family members' love and care would have prevented Ammu and her children from considering Velutha. She contrasts Chacko's "man's needs" with her own feminine need. Poor women were the only ones Chacko targeted for his "man's needs" campaign. Because his untouchability is such a stain on his character, Velutha doesn't seem to care much about his humanity. Some individuals who have experienced injustice in the past are the ones responsible for committing this injustice. Although Ammu's mother, Mammachi, puts up with her violent husband, Chacko, sexually exploiting the female workers, she finds it intolerable that her daughter, Ammu, is having an affair with a Paravan. In her zeal to protect the "family honour," Baby Kochamma would stop at nothing to protect the system. Within the privileged households depicted in the book, there is a procedure for identifying and classifying individuals who defy societal norms in their quest for fulfillment—the Paravans.



After Velutha's death, the final hope for justice fades from society, according to Roy's bleak portrayal. The harsh truths of life irritate anybody with even a modicum of good judgement. They say he abducted the twins, and Estha says he did it. As a result, Estha withdraws within herself. An innocent guy was found guilty because her incoherent "yes" was used as evidence. Roy laments the postcolonial world's social realities, expressing her disappointment that the former untouchables still confront an antagonistic culture that denies them the chance to live freely and independently. The god of insignificance, Velutha, will always be stigmatized as an outsider and an outcast, and he will never be able to live in harmony with the "touchable" tribes. Another "untouchable" among the "touchable" is Ammu, who has become even more marginalized after taking Velutha, another "untouchable," as her paramour.

Nightfall finds Velutha dead after such savage torture. His demise "left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water," and he does not appear anywhere. "No reflections in mirrors." (265 TGST) Ammu is abandoned to contemplate her role in his demise; she too meets a lonely and shameful end at the "viable die-able" age of 31. Because they disobeyed the predetermined rules for love, both of them endure excruciating pain. Rahel and Estha, two sets of twins, are entangled in the intricate web of politics and caste, much as Ammu and Velutha are by society's illogical rules. Ammu, Rahel, and Estha were all unjustly punished, but Velutha gives love and company. "Velutha stands as a very tall figure in the novel," Twinkle B. Manavar rightly opines. The catastrophe occurred because he wanted to "relive" as a tangible. According to Manvar-26,

All hope for Ammu and her children is snuffed out with Velutha's death. Roy's criticism of the "untouchable-touchable" dynamic highlights the inflexible rules that discriminate against individuals based on their race, religion, gender, and other personal characteristics. It makes one question how many faceless Veluthas it will take to understand that, at our core, we are all human, regardless of our cultural background or caste, and whether or not the caste system can ever be really eliminated.

God of Small Things is a biting critique of the untouchables' caste issues in a modern, educated society, highlighting the fact that prejudice on the basis of caste, culture, gender, and politics persists in Indian society sixty years after independence. In it, the impact of politicians and politics on regular people is examined. Near the end of the book, a chasm opens up between the exploited and the exploiters, the mighty and the helpless, the untouchables and the touchable.

## CONCLUSION

The authors experience unwelcome discomfort while depicting bare reality. However, avoiding the truth also does not work, and as a result, it lacks the intensity and attraction of a reform movement. An innovative strategy for radical literature is very necessary in light of the terrible reality. Everyone who lives and acts for all of mankind without bias should be very worried about this. Those who oppose free speech find the protest literature offensive, especially in a democratic nation like India. There is a long history that shows that fundamentalists of different organisations have verbally, viciously, and criminally attacked radical thinkers and writers from Buddha and Socrates to Nanak and Kabir to Prem Chand and Baba Nagarjun to Lawrence and Rushdie to Taslima and Murugan. Thankfully, the only book by Ms. Roy to be involved in political controversy was *The God of Small Things*.

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