



Literatures of the Marginalised:
Dreams, Voices and Challenges of the Subaltern

A Collection of Critical Essays

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**The Role of Forbidden Love in Arundhati Roy's
*The God of Small Things***

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The God of Small Things (1996) is a debut novel of Indian writer Arundhati Roy. It is a semi-autobiographical novel, recording her childhood experiences in Ayemenem, a village in Kerala, which is also the place where she grew. After her book won acclaim, she was asked in interview why she chose Ayemenem for the setting, to which she replied "It was the only place in the world where religious coincide; there's Christianity, Hinduism, Marxism and Islam and they all live together and sub each other down....when you see all the competing beliefs against the same background you realize how they all wear each other down. To me, I could not think of a better location for a book about human beings". Her book succeeds in looking through caste, poverty and politics to show humanity as its fundamental level. For that she won English's esteemed Booker Prize for Fiction in 1997. In India the book was criticized for its descriptions of unrestrained sexuality. In January 2006 she was awarded the Sahitya Akademi award for her collection of essays on contemporary issues.

The book touches on many issues that are still prevalent in India almost 15 years after it was written. The story gradually

builds up to reveal the characters for who they truly are and all of the love and hate with them. *The God of Small Things* is a highly stylized novel that tells the story of a much fractured family from the southernmost tip of India. Through flashbacks and flash forwards, it gradually unfolds the secrets of the characters' unhappiness and misery in life. First-time novelist Arundhati Roy twists and reshapes language to create an arresting, startling sort of precision. The average reader of mainstream fiction may have a tough time working through Roy's prose, but those with a more literary bent to their usual fiction inclinations should find the initial struggle through the dense prose a worthy price for this lushly tragic tale. What does *The God of Small Things* stand for? When asked the question in an interview by Binayak, Roy replied:

To me the god of small things is the inversion of god. God's a big thing and God's in control. The god of small whether it's way the children see things or whether it's the insect life in the book, or the fish or the stars- there is not accepting of what we think of as adult boundaries. This small activity that goes on is the under life of the book. All sorts of boundaries are transgressed upon. At the end of the first chapter-I say little events and ordinary things are just smashed and reconstituted imbued with new meaning to become the bleached bones of the story. It's a story that examines things very closely but also from very, very distant points, almost from geological time and you look at it and see a pattern there. A pattern.... Of how in these small events and in these small lives the world intrudes. And because of this, because of people being unprotected....the world and the social machine intrude

in to the smallest, deepest core of their being and change their life (58).

This novel cannot separate from real life of the writer. Many view of this novel take from writer's life. For example setting of the novel, parents' divorce, one of the twin take architecture as her study same like the writer, and many violence in this novel same like what happened in writer's life. In the opinion of Roy Pascal: "Childhood is only the preface of matured man's life-story. It foreshadows the later development..... The accounts of childhood are shaped through the author's consciousness of what the child ultimately became." Forbidden love happened to Ammu and Velutha and also Rahel adult and Estha Adult. Ammu is Rahel and Estha's mother. She married Baba is Ammu's ex-husband and father of them. He is an alcoholic who tells lot of lies for apparently no reason. Ammu divorced him when he started to be violent towards her and her children. She has an affair with Velutha, a paravan. She is a strict mother, and her children worry about losing her love. This novel explores love and how love can't be ignored when confronted social boundaries. The novel examines how conventional society seeks to destroy true love as this novel is constantly connected to loss, death and sadness. By analyzing and discussing the theme of forbidden love, Ammu and Velutha's love that is forbidden because of the 'Love Laws' in relation to the caste system which results in Velutha's death. It is evident that forbidden love negatively impacts and influences other characters, such as Estha and Rahel, which results in Estha and Rahel's incestuous encounter.

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy tells the story of the communist state of Kerala and the forbidden love between two castes, which changes the lives of everyone. In the novel an 'Untouchable', Velutha is a carpenter and works at paradise pickles and preserves for much less than he deserves because of his status as an Untouchable in the caste system. Velutha falls into forbidden love with a divorced woman, Ammu who is associated with an upper caste Syrian Christian Ipe family. Marriage was only way that Ammu could have escaped this life, but she lost the chance when marrying the wrong man, as he was an Alcoholic and this resulted in them getting a divorce. Ammu breaks the law that state 'who should be loved, and how and how much', as their affair threatens the 'caste system' in India, which is a hierarchal structure and social practice in India in which your position in society is determined and cannot be changed. Arhundati Roy portrays the theme of forbidden love within the caste systems and shows how they are treated and how women in general are marginalized. Velutha is regarded as a 'nobody' because he is a paravan. This choice of loving someone who should not be loved, results in devastation and damage for the family, including the twins Estha and Rahel.

As a result of Ammu and Velutha breaking the 'Love Laws' this results in Ammu being disowned by her family, who strictly obeys the caste system, because she 'defied generations of breeding and brought the family into its knees', suggesting that Ammu encounters oppression and cruelty from the society in which she belongs, as she could be expelled from her caste for carrying out such an undignified act. The types of love in Roy's novel, whether they are described as erotic, family

incestuous, biological, or hopeless, are important to the novel's meaning. Roy focuses her authorial commentary on forbidden and taboo types of love, including Ammu's love for Velutha's and Rahel's love for Estha. Both relationships are rigidly forbidden by what Roy calls the incestuous relationship. So nobody has a happy love-life- all yearn for the forbidden, and suffer for it. The novel takes tragic theme but it is not a tragic book. It's too playful for that and the language is rich and powerful, never sordid and gloomy. It's as Roy says: bad things will happen; the god of small things will have his way, but life goes on- and people do as they will in surviving it. "They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tempered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much".

This forbidden love that Ammu and Velutha have reminds me a lot of Shakespeare's play, Romeo and Juliet. Just like Romeo and Juliet, Ammu and Velutha never exist in reality because society will not allow these two completely different people of different class and colour is together. Additionally, the play focuses on romantic love, specifically the intense passion that springs up at first sight between Romeo and Juliet, which can be compared to the intense passion that Ammu and Velutha share towards the ending of the book. Both of these relationships have a fateful and unhappy end, as Velutha is murdered and Romeo and Juliet kill themselves. "Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story" (32).

This emphasis on the small things in life rather than the big things helps emphasize the stylistic device Roy uses in her writing of innocence and childlikeness. This helps bring to life Rahel's point of view and how most children unaware of the bigger matters in life. What I personally loved about the book, something it shares in common with much of what I have been reading recently is that it luxuriates in itself as a story. Roy even goes so far as to her role as revealing and creating a narrative. She has certainly written a masterpiece of epic proportions, which deserves the praise which has been heaped upon it. Beneath the layers of this multi-dimensional and transcending novel, lies a story of life, love, appreciation for what one has. As the story hurtles forwards and backwards in time towards its tragic denouement, Roy never loses sight of her intentions with the novel. Whilst highlighting the struggle of Indian society in what is probably a more organic way than in her later essays, she also touches on universal themes of love, loss and class in new and exciting ways. Her command of language is exquisite, as is the richness of both narrative and prose. Acute and outstanding, Roy has created a narrative so rich and breathtaking; the readers want to read it again and again.

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