Caste, Childhood, and Collective Trauma:

A Micro-history of Ayemenem in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* transcends a mere familial narrative. It provides an intimate examination of a diminutive Indian village named Ayemenem. The novel illustrates significant social issues which encompass the caste system and make stringent regulations for women. These issues overwhelm individuals and inflict profound emotional distress. Roy narrates the story in a disjointed manner; the style is disordered. It reflects the fragmented psyches of the child characters Estha and Rahel. Their lives are devastated. They witness grave injustice. Their misfortune is not coincidental. It is a direct consequence of inequitable societal regulations. The narrative centres on a forbidden love affair. Velutha belongs to the lowest caste, Ammu hails from an affluent background. They violate the stringent "Love Laws," resulting in violence. The violence devastates the twins' childhood, transforming them into traumatised adults. They are ensnared in silence and sorrow. Roy concentrates on 'small things' such as a glance, a touch, or a memory. These exemplify oppression in everyday existence. The narrative takes place in Kerala. Kerala is renowned for its educational advancements and progressive initiatives. Roy underscores a paradox that contemporary society can conceal longstanding animosities, it can conceal caste bias. The novel examines the interplay between caste and gender which conspire to subjugate individuals. The God of Small Things serves as a poignant reminder. Personal afflictions reveal significant societal injustices. It constitutes a call to action.

Keywords: Caste, Childhood, Memory, Society, Trauma

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is more than a family saga. It is a meticulous analysis of a society in turmoil. Roy employs a single village, Ayemenem, to construct a compelling micro-history which exposes extensive systems of caste oppression, unjust gender norms, and post-colonial deterioration. It condenses into deep trauma which is catastrophic in nature. The novel examines the absorption of this trauma. It illustrates the occurrence of trauma during childhood. The narrative centres around a prohibited romance which seeks to transcend the rigid confines of caste. The violent suppression serves as a catalyst, disrupting the childhood of the twins, Estha and Rahel robbing them of their innocence. Their shattered perspective becomes their primary lens. Their personal misfortune is not unique, being the result of a collective history. Tabish Khair observes that Roy "zooms in on the minute, the personal, the bodily, to make sense of the historical, the political, the social" (332).

Ayemenem functions as a character in its own right. Its verdant beauty conceals a profound, hereditary affliction. The social structure of the village is inflexible. It is governed by tradition, gossip, and violence.

Roy employs Ayemenem as a case study. She employs a micro-historical methodology. This method amplifies three interrelated elements. Caste, childhood, and collective trauma are the subjects at hand. The 'small things' in the narrative are never small. A fleeting look, a touch, a child's misinterpretation holds significance. They are locations where significant historical forces are evident. The twins' trauma is personal. It reflects the unhealed scars of a community. This community is founded on a hierarchical structure and exclusionary practices. Their recollections are fragmented. This illustrates a fundamental concept. Luna Rushdi

asserts that Roy "fractures chronology and language to mimic the psychological fragmentation of the traumatised child" (81). Caste violence transcends mere physical or economic dimensions. It is not only psychological but also hereditary in nature. It intrudes upon the most intimate spaces of the self. Roy employs a non-linear narrative structure. This reflects the mechanisms of memory and trauma. The past manifests in the present. This technique demonstrates something important, that history is not a definitive conclusion, it is a living, agonising presence. This paper explores the micro-history of Ayemenem. It delineates how caste determines destiny. It examines how childhood transforms into a crucible.

Collective injustice culminates in individual devastation. The novel ultimately provides profound insight. The most diminutive, intimate injuries constitute an exact record. They document the most egregious and severe injustices globally.

The caste system in India, a longstanding social hierarchy initially associated with labour, solidified into a birth-based framework that determines opportunity and status. Caste-based discrimination endures despite legal prohibitions, manifesting through violence, economic disparity, and social exclusion. *The God of Small Things* illustrates this mechanism. Salman Rushdie emphasises that Roy depicts “a portrait of a society rotten with caste prejudice, galloping capitalism, and the sexual fear that, in India as elsewhere, is the strong arm of fascism” (95). The village represents that portrait in Kerala during the late 20th century. It depicts a forbidden love story. Ammu is a woman belonging to a higher religious caste.

Velutha is a Dalit individual, belonging to the lowest caste. Their relationship contravenes a significant social norm. The novel illustrates two significant points. Caste can diminish an individual's worth. Velutha possesses both proficiency and benevolence. However, society perceives him solely through his caste: "Velutha was a Paravan," an Untouchable... In Mammachi's time, 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.” (71)

Velutha’s inferior caste precipitates his mistreatment and demise. Ammu faces dual discrimination: by rules governing women and from caste restrictions. Their fight together is huge. Their poignant story possesses a greater meaning; it illustrates the huge cost of violating stringent social norms. These rules devastate individual lives. Arundhati Roy employs their tragic narrative to address broader societal issues. It elucidates the interplay between caste bias and the inequitable treatment of women. It illustrates the disparity between the equitable laws established post-independence and the harsh, inequitable reality that numerous individuals continue to endure. Roy's *The God of Small Things* unequivocally conveys the message that caste discrimination endures in contemporary society.

The caste system in India is archaic. It originated in ancient manuscripts. These writings are the Vedas. Society was categorised into four groups. The groups were organised according to occupations. Priests were present. Warriors existed. Traders were present. Labourers were present. Initially, it structured tasks. Over the course of centuries, it became inflexible. The struggle against caste intensified during India's quest for independence. Two exceptional leaders spearheaded this struggle through distinct approaches. Mahatma Gandhi concentrated on transforming the essence of society. He referred to Dalits as 'Harijans' and advocated for moral reform. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a member of the Dalit community. He advocated for legal and political reform. He contributed to the drafting of the Indian Constitution, which prohibited caste discrimination.

The impact of caste is evident in society. Caste influences access to educational institutions

and employment opportunities. Discrimination manifests in overt forms, such as violence. It also occurs in subtle manners, such as social exclusion. While positive laws are in place, genuine equality remains distant. Kerala introduces an intricate dimension to this issue. The state exhibits elevated literacy rates and superior health standards. Women possess greater rights in Kerala. Nonetheless, caste discrimination persists in covert, nuanced forms. This paradox renders Kerala a pivotal location for the examination of caste. Arundhati Roy situates her narrative in the state of Kerala. Amidst its beauty and advancement, she discerns a profound undercurrent of caste animosity. She demonstrates this through Velutha, a skilled and kind Dalit carpenter.

Arundhati Roy employs Velutha's existence to highlight a glaring contradiction. Kerala appears contemporary and well-educated. However, it continues to adhere to traditional caste regulations. This is contradictory. Society identifies as progressive, however, it safeguards an inequitable system. The environment intensifies this conflict. The novel depicts the splendour of Kerala with verdant rivers and fertile fields. This tranquil nature observes human animosity. The juxtaposition renders the violence more startling. Roy explicitly articulates this paradox: “Kerala’s famous, staggering, picturesque beauty… is like a pair of painted paisley paws hiding a diabolical laboratory where old hatreds are cultured and perfected” (78). Love constitutes the most significant danger to the system. The relationship between Velutha and Ammu is clandestine since it breaks caste boundaries. This love constitutes an act of defiance, demonstrating that human connections can transcend artificial divisions. The established order perceiving a threat reacts with hostility and aggression and the lovers are punished for their hope. They envisioned a world devoid of divisions. Their destiny serves as a cautionary tale for others.

Velutha's story transcends the misfortune of a singular individual who is also a symbol. The story reveals a duplicitous society whose exterior is modern yet adheres to antiquated biases internally. The novel poses a question. What constitutes genuine progress? It is neither elevated literacy nor picturesque landscapes. Genuine advancement entails relinquishing deep-set animosities. Velutha is not merely a victim. He is obliterated by a comprehensive system. The system employs violence to safeguard caste dominance. Roy states, “He was the God of Loss. The God of Small Things… He left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors” (309). Velutha's story compels us to delve further. It illustrates the interplay between caste and other facets of identity. This encompasses religion, gender, and socio-economic status. On the other hand Ammu is a divorcee which makes her more vulnerable. Rules governing women, work in tandem with caste, exacerbating oppression. Their relationship transgresses numerous societal taboos. This explains the intensity of the backlash.

Social reforms possess inherent limitations. They are not always able to resolve deeper issues. Kerala has effective policies. It boasts of high development metrics. However, these accomplishments frequently conceal deep inequities. They conceal the realities of the lived lives of marginalised communities. The novel remains relevant as it prompts readers to pose challenging questions. It compels one to recognise disparity. This represents the disparity between Kerala's ideals and its actual circumstances. V. Geetha asserts that Roy “locates caste prejudice not in a backward, rural heartland, but in a society that is literate, politically conscious, and famously ‘modern” (108). Caste in Kerala is characterised by stark contrasts. The state has achieved significant advancement. Nevertheless, it grapples with its feudal heritage. Roy's novel accomplishes two objectives. It exposes these contradictions. It compels readers to confront concealed discrimination. Her narrative is simultaneously personal and

political. It prompts readers to understand social hierarchies. This applies to both Kerala and the nation.

The novel adeptly intertwines caste and gender and showcases deep oppression within Indian society. The narrative exposes personal anguish. It also illustrates the intersection of caste and gender discrimination. This complicates life for marginalised individuals like Ammu the central character. Her struggles illustrate the extent to which patriarchal norms govern women. In her society, a woman's worth is associated with matrimony. Ammu is regarded as an outcast due to her divorce. The disapproval of her family exemplifies prevalent societal attitudes. Women who transcend conventional roles encounter this. Ammu hails from an upper-caste lineage, however, being a woman diminishes her status. This illustrates the manner in which patriarchy subjugates all women. Her role within the family is precarious since her decisions are perpetually scrutinised. This underscores the minimal power possessed by women.

Ammu's association with Velutha constitutes a formidable act of rebellion. Ammu violates two sets of regulations by associating with him. She transcends caste divisions. She also contests societal norms regarding acceptable behaviour for women. This relationship serves as her means of asserting autonomy over her life. It is a rejection of the oppressive laws that dictate whom one should love and the manner of that love. Mrinalini Sebastian writes that Roy illustrates how “patriarchy operates through caste and vice versa” (90). However, this defiance incurs a significant cost. Her love for Velutha results in severe societal ostracism and familial violence. This illustrates the severity with which society penalises those who contest its authority.

The novel frequently illustrates the hypocrisy of the elite classes. The Ayemenem family serves as a quintessential illustration. Chacko, Ammu's brother, exemplifies the advantages afforded to men in a society structured by caste and patriarchy. He belongs to the upper caste. His transgressions are overlooked or absolved. He engages in relationships with women, including those from lower castes. However, society does not exhibit the same indignation that it shows towards Ammu. Her association with Velutha incites indignation. Chacko's sense of freedom and entitlement contrasts sharply with Ammu's absence of freedom. This illustrates the evident double standards regarding caste and gender. The enforcement of rules varies according to one's identity. It marginalises women and Dalits.

Roy highlights this hypocrisy with incisive irony. She states: “They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much” (147). These "laws of love" constitute stringent regulations. They are determined by caste, class, and patriarchy. They serve as instruments of oppression. Their objective is to maintain the status quo. They penalise anyone who dares to confront them. Ammu and Velutha's love transcends the personal realm. It constitutes a political action. It undermines the social order. The retribution is swift and severe proving how society suppresses dissent and consolidates hierarchies.

Velutha's narrative illustrates the intersection of caste and gender oppression. As a Dalit, his existence is characterised by discrimination. The system negates his humanity. He possesses both skill and intelligence, nevertheless, he is relegated to a subordinate status within both the family and society. His association with Ammu contravenes caste regulations but also asserts his own humanity. His identity as a Dalit renders him a target. The family and society direct their ire towards him. The violence he endures exemplifies the brutal enforcement of caste regulations. It illustrates how oppression dehumanises individuals. Amitav Kumar contends

that the novel illustrates how “the secrets of the public sphere, the horrors of history, penetrate the private world and shape its most intimate relationship” (194). The children Estha and Rahel suffer as they witness their mother's anguish and see Velutha's end. They experience the repercussions of discrimination that endures for a long time. Their childhood is destroyed, serving as a potent reminder that systemic inequality engenders trauma and the trauma recurs in cycles.

Roy emphasises the importance of memory. Memory encompasses anguish and resilience. The twins' recollections are fragmented, which shows the mechanisms of trauma. Their psyche grapples with distressing occurrences. Their recollections are disordered recurring in cycles, reflecting systemic violence. Roy's perspective on trauma is psychological. The past encroaches upon the present influencing individual identity. The novel remains pertinent in contemporary society. Themes resonate with contemporary struggles for justice. The narrative mirrors authentic life challenges. It elucidates the persistence of caste discrimination. The violence experienced by Velutha is recognisable. Countless Dalits face it in the present times. They frequently experience a denial of justice. Ammu's solitude is also recognisable. Numerous women encounter stigmatisation. This occurs when they contravene tradition. Roy's novel compels readers to engage in deeper contemplation of the influence of caste on societal structure. She reveals a deep bias in traditional Indian society and her novel serves as a instrument calling for action. It compels us to combat these injustices. Roy intertwines personal narratives with political motifs. The narrative illustrates how caste dehumanises individuals. The novel addresses gender inequality. It illustrates the ramifications of colonialism. It exposes societal hypocrisy. Roy illustrates the transformative power of love and resistance. The significance of personal agency is paramount. The novel advocates for empathy. It necessitates systemic transformation. It advocates for a more equitable society.

The God of Small Things being a literary magnum opus, interlaces societal norms and childhood memories. Its exquisite prose possesses a sinister undertone whose underlying emotion is anguish. Their personal suffering resulting from childhood trauma, reverberates throughout their lives creating an ugly indelible mark. This emblem is present in their identities. Estha and Rahel bear significance; “Though they neither spoke nor touched, they stared. As though they were one soul in two skins” (Roy 139). They harbour familial secrets and illicit affection. Roy encapsulates their suffering. Estha contemplates, “Anything can happen to anyone. It is best to be prepared” (82). This notion torments them. Trauma appears unavoidable. It is a recurring thought. It serves as a reminder. Life is fragile. The novel examines identity. Identity is haunted by childhood trauma. It illustrates how formative experiences shape a person. Julie Mullaney notes that the twins exemplify how “trauma refuses to be laid to rest; it insistently returns to haunt the present” (54). The characters' identities are indelibly marked forever. They are defined by their past. The twins bear childhood traumas. These scars influence their adult lives. Roy reveals their spectral identities. Their traumas remain unvoiced. This creates a tangled web. The web influences their identity. It influences their self-perception.

Childhood trauma manifests as a spectre. It persists into adulthood. This spectre impairs their capacity for connection. It complicates self-understanding. Even in adulthood, their bond endures in an ethereal manner. They are characterised as entities “that childhood had failed to fill… they were strangers who had met in a chance encounter” (Roy 213). Rahel thinks of their mother. She thinks, “Perhaps Ammu put words into their innocent mouths. And haunted them... with other people’s dreams” (245). They were plagued by expectations. The spectres of the past are influenced by familial expectations. They are shaped by social rules. The

Ghosts disturb the twins. The twins endeavour to establish their individual identities.

The rules of society torment them. The caste system exerts an oppressive force. Social expectations are burdensome incorporating additional layers. These layers pertain to the twins' conflict of grappling with self-identity. The anguish of judgement hits deep inducing a sense of entrapment. They are confined by an inflexible social framework. Roy demonstrates that this haunting transcends personal experience and is associated with communal trauma. The twins' identities are interconnected with collective memory. Social norms influence individual identity. Amit S. Rai contends that the novel illustrates how "the violence of the social becomes the violence of the psychic, and vice versa" (110). Historical injustices shape their core. In this story, Roy prompts us to reflect. She desires us to perceive lasting damage. This damage originates from childhood trauma. The novel functions as a reflection.
Signifying initial suffering. Signifying familial pressures. Embodying societal norms. These forces torment individuals. They form identity. This formation is profoundly sorrowful. It is profoundly distressing.

Roy intertwines the personal with the political. Velutha's murder constitutes a public tragedy. Ammu's exclusion is not merely a personal misfortune. These are offences against the public. Society permits them through silence and complicity. The novel reveals this hypocrisy. A society may appear progressive superficially. However, it can perpetuate harsh traditions beneath the surface. The narrative is presented in a non-linear format. This reflects the nature of trauma. The past is perpetually present. Memory is disjointed. Memory endures. The novel advocates for empathy. It prompts us to examine the "minor details." Observation is significant. The significance of touch is paramount. The significance of lost innocence is profound. This is the locus of genuine justice assessment. Genuine transformation requires

more than legislation. It requires the dismantling of prejudice which resides within our hearts and households. The God of Small Things is an essential work necessitating our confrontation with hidden authority.

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