

Silenced Voices, Unheard Stories: Unpacking the Lives of Women in “The God of Small Things”

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 1

Month: April

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Citation:

Thrishsha, TKS. “Silenced Voices, Unheard Stories: Unpacking the Lives of Women in ‘The God of Small Things.’” *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. S1, 2025, pp. 87–91.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS1-Apr.8948>

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Abstract

This paper presents a feminist critique of Arundhati Roy’s influential novel, The God of Small Things, using the framework of subaltern studies. By exploring the intersections of gender, caste, class, and power, it reveals how Roy’s storytelling challenges dominant narratives and amplifies the voices of marginalized women. The paper examines the novel’s female characters, particularly Ammu, Rahel, and Velutha, to highlight how Roy contests patriarchal norms, exposes the brutality of caste discrimination, and underscores the agency and resistance of subaltern women. By situating Roy’s work within Indian feminist and subaltern studies, this paper illustrates how The God of Small Things offers a powerful critique of established power structures and is a testament to subaltern voices’ enduring strength.

Keywords: Subaltern Studies, Feminist Theory, Postcolonial Literature, Indian Feminism, Caste and Gender Intersectionality.

Introduction

Post-colonial scholars treasure and delight in terms such as peripherality and dislocation within present-day post-colonial works. Arundhati Roy wrote a book called *The God of Small Things* which won the best award for a whole book. A person from the UK, the Commonwealth, the Republic of Ireland, Pakistan, or South Africa wrote the English-language story. The first Indian woman to receive the Man Booker Prize was Roy. The circumstance that Roy’s triumph took place amidst the 50th commemoration of India’s sovereignty adds to its distinctiveness. Roy emerged in Assam, born to a Bengali Hindu father employed as a tea cultivator and a Kerala Syrian Christian mother, Mary Roy, a campaigner for gender equality. Roy grew up and studied at Corpus Christi School in Ayemenem, Kerala. Roy wrote screenplays for the TV serials *Annie Gives It Those Ones*, *Electric Moon*, and *Banyan Tree*. The book ‘*The God of Small Things*,’ is partly based on its writer’s young days at Ayemenem. Roy commenced composing ‘*The Divine in Miniature*’ in 1992 and finished it in 1996.

The novel emphasizes social consciousness and promotes thoughtfulness. The narrative examines subjects like caste conflicts, sex equality, women’s societal roles, and opposition to backward trends. The writer scrutinizes Indian heritage and governance, addressing

ephemeral unions, treachery, early-life traumas, and rebellion via affection. Roy's book uses a special storytelling way that mixes old-fashioned and new ways to show Indian thoughts. She skillfully connects past and present narratives through the use of flashbacks.

As the release date of the novel neared, Roy radiated an impressive assurance in its capacity for widespread recognition and commercial prosperity. After its publication, the book garnered astounding worldwide sales, swiftly turning into a literary marvel translated into around forty dialects. In subsequent months, Roy commenced an audacious tour, showcasing her creations in about 80 global cities, engaging enthusiasts and analysts with her content. Arundhati Roy boldly spoke up against old, unnecessary social rules that she thought were not needed today. Her book acts as a potent dissent against these beliefs, revealing their effect on modern society.

Defining the Subaltern

Subaltern Studies examines the experiences of lower social classes after colonial rule. The study scrutinizes the bond between the aristocracy and the oppressed and strives to restore the chronicles of communities frequently sidelined or omitted in colonial and nationalist records.

Subaltern Scholarship keenly dialogues with the narratives of the laboring masses and peasantry in post-colonial and post-imperial South Asia, especially within India. By leveraging insights from the herein-listed methods, this strategy foregrounds the experiences and endeavors of the general populace on a local front, underscoring their importance in the expanded historical account. The structure gains insights from the foundational efforts of cultural studies experts and historians, such as Thompson, Williams, and Hobsbawm, advocating for history seen through the view of frequently ignored figures.

The expression subaltern, originated by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, denotes persons viewed beneath rank due to economic, racial, or gender aspects. ' A team of South Asian academics contributing to vibrant discussions in postcolonial intellectual spaces. Hence, Alternative Studies signify a wider group of academics and proponents united in their effort to elevate overlooked narratives and viewpoints, thereby creating a richer comprehension of past events and societal structures.

Amplifying Marginalized Voices

The protagonist of this novel is Ammu she is a Siri and Christian devotion her path is categorized by adversity and fortitude. After a tragic marriage ended in divorce, she wanted to live happily with her beloved twins in her family's Ayemenem house. But her life when her parent's house was not as smooth as she thought before. They started to mystery and degrade her for marrying a man of a low caste. But still, she faces humiliating incidents while carrying the weight of societal judgment and societal expectations. Even her children were treated unfairly and were not given enough love which is normally given by the grandparents to the grandchildren. Velutha was the only soul who genuinely showed kindness to them in the midst of their struggles and he was the lighthouse of compassion to them. Velutha was a low caste worker at Paradise Pickles and Preserves so he also didn't get his recognition. Ammu's infatuation develops into a strong friendship across societal boundaries.

In *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, a Dalit man named Velutha speaks for the voice of the underprivileged in a culture that usually ignores them. He is evaluated only by his caste, regardless of his abilities and humanity. Because Ammu is from a higher caste, his love for her represents defiance of the restrictive Love Laws that limit caste-based relationships.

The tragic conclusion of Velutha's tale emphasizes reality and frequently violent outcomes that can result from disobeying long-standing social conventions. The novel depicts how the caste

system dehumanizes people like Velutha in order to critique it. By illustrating his relationship with Ammu, the story exposes the violent mechanisms—discrimination, brutality, and systemic oppression which are often seen in the society.

As she battles oppression from both gender and class, Ammu's struggles also strike a deep impression with subaltern studies themes. Her decision to love Velutha opposes the expectations society has of her as a woman from a respectable family, highlighting the intersectional difficulties marginalized people face. Her rejection of these expectations highlights the greater systemic and cultural problems that contribute to her tragic destiny in addition to reflecting her yearning for independence. The book powerfully shows how casteist and patriarchal structures combine to punish and silence women who goes against social norms.

Furthermore, *The God of Small Things* frequently modifies its language to represent the viewpoints of its subaltern characters, giving readers close-up views of their inner lives and emotional landscapes. This stylistic decision is noteworthy because it subverts the hegemonic narratives that usually dominate literary discourse, giving much-needed room to voices that are usually disregarded and left out of the mainstream. Roy's narrative pushes readers to face the intricacies of caste, gender, and social expectations by elevating the stories of the oppressed through vivid imagery and profound emotional depth. The goal of subaltern studies is to give voice to oppressed and marginalized groups that are frequently silenced by the prevailing power structures that influence society.

A Dalit man named Velutha is a significant representation of the subaltern voice in Arundhati Roy's critically acclaimed book *The God of Small Things*. People around Velutha only see him through the prism of his caste identity, despite his considerable carpentry skills and his innate humanity. His dedication to Ammu, a member of a higher caste, represents a valiant defiance of the repressive Love Laws, which establish social limits and forbid particular caste-based relationships.

The Unceasing Struggles of Women

Ammu, the mother of twins Estha and Rahel, portrays the female suffering in the novel. She was denied higher education due to her gender; she seeks escape through a marriage to an abusive Bengali man. When he offers her to his superior for a promotion, Ammu leaves him and returns to her family with her children, only to be treated as a pariah in her conservative Syrian Christian community. When Ammu returns to her home after facing a tragic end in her marriage life her life takes a tragic turn again even more worser than before. Rahel, Ammu's daughter, portrays the long-term impact of a mother's suffering faced by Ammu. Rahel grows up in a house that sees her and her twin brother as a product of Ammu's embarrassment, making her to feel emotionally alienated and unsupported. Rahel is greatly traumatized after seeing Velutha's violent murder and the destruction of her family in front of her eyes. Throughout her life, she bears the weight of her mother's pain as well as society's cruel reality that turned their life into hell. As an adult, Rahel struggles to create permanent connections, reflecting her thoughts and freedom into her life.

Ammu's mother, Mammachi, represents the sorrow of women throughout history. Even though being physically assaulted by her husband, Pappachi, she feels compelled by social norms to stay faithful to him and obey whatever he says and follow them blindly. Although she supports her son Chacko's attitude and mistakes, she condemns Ammu's behavior, highlighting her part in maintaining the cycle of women's suffering and double standards. She could not support Ammu due to the societal culture and norms that are been followed for years. The suffering of women from low castes is also a significant issue in this novel. Dalit women, such as Velutha's mother, experience caste-based and also gender-based oppression, which manifests as poverty, hard labor, and a denial of fundamental rights, exposing serious social inequalities. These are the few portrayals showcased

by the author to portray the sufferings of women in society. Not only women from low class but also women from higher class also suffers due to the society laid rules and regulations. And they are forced directly and indirectly to follow them blindfolded.

Conclusion

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy tells a deeply human story that brings to life the significant suffering endured by women within a rigid patriarchal and caste-driven society. The author depicts a bleak view of society. With Velutha's death, the final glimmer of hope vanishes. He is wrongfully charged with kidnapping the twins, and Estha, under pressure, confirms this falsehood. Estha transforms into a voiceless being, his incomprehensible "Yes" serving to wrongly condemn an innocent man. The author has seen firsthand the terrible and heartbreaking display of the lowest dogs weeping under the weight of discrimination, maltreatment, hunger, and lack of resources. All her early experiences and observations shaped her sensitive intellect forever and stoked her innate empathy for the underprivileged as well as the muck and froth of society. She spearheads an effort to combat the cruel and dehumanizing distinctions. The narrative revolves around a few institutionalized catchphrases, such as justice, liberty, and equality for all Indian citizens. Man-made obstacles and the four caste system continue to dominate democratic India. The book expresses a deep disapproval of the social injustice that untouchables face. In the earlier days, during the British rule, the paravans accepted Christianity to escape the scourge of untouchability and were allowed separate schools and churches. Roy protests stems from her sense of indignation at the slave-like position of women of untouchables and untouchables in liberated democratic India.

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