



Postcolonial Legacy of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things.

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Abstract: This paper examines Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* through a postcolonial lens, focusing on the themes of cultural hybridity, mimicry, and marginality. This novel set in postcolonial India that disturbs binary notions of colonialism by exploring the relationships between the colonizers and the colonized particularly in the context of the caste system and gender roles. Roy's work challenges the oriental discourse of Europeans and highlights the struggles of marginalized groups which includes the Untouchables and upper-class women. This analysis examines the ways in which Roy's novel revokes the privileged center exploring the intersections of feminism, caste segregation, and untouchability. Ultimately, this paper reveals how *The God of Small Things* analyses the social and religious constitutions of gender and castes which reveal the power dynamics that punish violation and silence marginalized voices.

Keywords: Feminism, untouchability, mimicry, marginality, relationship, gender equality, cultural hybridity.

Introduction

Postcolonial refers to the period after colonial rule and the study of how colonialism and imperialism have shaped cultures, societies, and identities. In academic terms, postcolonial theory analyzes the lasting effects of colonization such as power imbalances, cultural domination, and resistance and explores how formerly colonized peoples reclaim and reinterpret their histories and identities.

In Arundhati Roy's novels postcolonial themes appear prominently through her exploration of how the legacies of colonialism continue to shape modern India socially, politically, and culturally. In *The God of Small Things* (1997) Colonial legacy and class hierarchy: The novel shows how colonial era class and caste divisions persist in post-independence India. The preference for Western culture, and class distinctions reflect the lingering effects of British rule. Language and identity: Characters use of English and Malayalam illustrates how colonial languages influence personal and cultural identities. Resistance and hybridity: Roy portrays characters navigating between Indian traditions and Western influences, revealing a hybrid postcolonial identity. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) Postcolonial politics: Roy critiques how the Indian state, after independence, continues forms of oppression mirroring colonial structures against marginalized communities (Kashmiris, Dalits, Hijras). Nationhood and fragmentation: The novel questions the idea of a unified postcolonial nation, highlighting how internal inequalities and violence undermine the ideals of independence. Voice of the marginalized: By centering marginalized voices, Roy reclaims narrative space from dominant often Western or elite perspectives. Overall, Roy's work is postcolonial because it examines the persistence of colonial power structures, the struggle for identity in a hybrid society, and the resistance against oppression both colonial and postcolonial.

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Indian traditions and Western influences, revealing a hybrid postcolonial identity. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), Roy critiques how the Indian state, after independence, continues forms of oppression mirroring colonial structures against marginalised communities (Kashmiris, Dalits, Hijras). *Nationhood and fragmentation*: The novel questions the idea of a unified postcolonial nation, highlighting how internal inequalities and violence undermine the ideals of independence. *Voice of the marginalised*: By centring marginalised voices, Roy reclaims narrative space from dominant, often Western or elite perspectives. Overall, Roy's work is postcolonial because it examines the persistence of colonial power structures, the struggle for identity in a hybrid society, and resistance to both colonial and postcolonial oppression.

Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* evaluates how colonialism and its discourse undermine the metaphor of "heart of darkness." Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* presents European colonial discourse that portrays the colonised as primitive, barbaric, and irrational, in contrast to the colonisers. Who represent light, knowledge, and civilisation. Conrad's novella supports this binary and represents Africa as a land of darkness. At the same time, the European colonisers are the source of light. However, Roy challenges this notion by introducing the character of Kari Saipu, an Englishman who has "gone native." Kari Saipu represents the colonial idea of degeneration, where the coloniser adopts native customs and becomes morally and physically corrupted. Roy ridicules this idea by portraying Kari Saipu as "Ayemenem's". They highlight the exploitation of colonial powers. Roy represents the coloniser's land as the true heart of darkness rather than the colonised land. This revolt challenges the colonial discourse and its binary oppositions. In order to reveal the complexities and degree of colonialism. Roy's novel exposes the power dynamics of colonialism, where the colonisers exploit and oppress the colonised. The "civilising mission" is actually a mask for domination and control. Through her critique of Conrad's novella and the colonial discourse, Roy's novel offers a postcolonial perspective that challenges the dominant narratives of colonialism and highlights the voices and experiences of the marginalised. Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* mocks the colonial notion that the colonised land is a "land of darkness." The character Kari Saipu, an Englishman who has "gone native," exemplifies this idea. Roy ridicules the colonial concept of "going native," where the coloniser supposedly degenerates morally and physically by adopting native customs. Kari Saipu, who wears native clothes and speaks Malayalam, is dubbed "Ayemenem's own Kurtz" and the "heart of darkness." Roy reverses the metaphor of "heart of darkness," using it to represent the coloniser's land in the colony, rather than the colonised land.

Furthermore, Roy subverts the colonial idea of the "other" through Estha and Rahel. The native characters refer to the History House (Kari Saipu's residence) as the "house on the other side of the river." This reversal challenges the European colonial discourse, which viewed native people as the "other" to the colonisers. By using these literary devices, Roy critiques colonialism and its discourse, highlighting the power dynamics of exploitation and oppression. Her novel offers a postcolonial perspective. This challenges dominant narratives and enhances the voices of the marginalised. Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* became part of the culture of the native people. Roy uses the character of Kari Saipu, an Englishman who has "gone native," to highlight the exploitation of colonial powers. By using the character Kari Saipu as the "heart of darkness," Roy reverses the metaphor colonisers used to describe the colonised land. Instead, appeal to the coloniser's own land in the colony. The History House owned by Kari Saipu serve as a symbol of India's colonial history and its struggle for independence. Roy uses the house to represent how colonial history was written by the British without a true understanding or input from Indians. Chacko's statement, "To understand history...we have to go inside and listen to what they're saying," highlights the need to look beyond narratives and truly engage with the past.

However, Chacko also notes that Indians have been "locked out" of their own history, forced to observe from the outside and to see only "shadows" and hear only "whispers." This serves as a powerful commentary. The way colonial powers controlled the historiography denied Indians agency and voice. Through these elements, Roy critiques the dominant narratives of colonialism and highlights the need for a more layered understanding of



history, one that admits the perspectives and experiences of the marginalised. Chacko's remark about smelling the smells of history is a powerful metaphor that implies the caste system in Indian society. The sense of smell is often associated with memory and emotion, and by invoking it, Roy highlights the need to tackle the uncomfortable truths of India's past, including the oppression of Dalits and Untouchables. Baby Kochamma's comment about the supposed smell of Paravans (a caste considered Untouchable) confirms this theme, exposing deep-seated prejudices and sustaining the caste system. The History House, symbolising India's colonial and caste-ridden history, becomes the site of Velutha's tragic murder. It highlights the dark legacy of oppression and violence against marginalised communities. Roy's vivid description of the murder scene contrasts the efficient and responsible actions of the Touchable Policemen with the brutal atrocities that might have been expected to underscore the systemic nature of this violence. By choosing the History House as the site of this tragedy, Roy underscores the idea that India's History is marked by the oppression of Dalits and Untouchables. The house becomes a powerful symbol of the darkness at the heart of Indian society. Roy argues that the colonial legacy of the White man is more significant than. In her interview with Frontline magazine, Roy clarifies that the darkness she refers to is not just colonialism but the deeper, more subtle darkness of the caste system and untouchability. This elaboration reinforces the idea that Roy's novel is not just a critique of colonialism but also a powerful accusation of the social and cultural structures that perpetuate oppression and violence in India.

Ranjit Guha's essay provides a detailed understanding of the terms "elite" and "subaltern" in the context of colonial India. Guha argues that the elite consists not only of European colonisers but also includes ruling aboriginal groups who have access to power and privilege through their association with the colonial government, education, wealth, or social status. These elites can shape their own interests and wield influence in political and economic spheres. In contrast, Guha defines the subordinate as the polar opposite of the elite, encompassing all members of society who lack political and economic agency, identity, and the ability to articulate their own interests. The subaltern represents a negative space, characterised by disempowerment, opposition, and marginalisation. This category is not defined by specific class, caste, or race but rather by their rejection from power and privilege. Guha's framework highlights the complex dynamics of power and oppression in colonial India, where both external colonisers and internal elites collaborated to maintain their dominance over the subaltern masses. This understanding of the subaltern as a negative space emphasises the need to acknowledge and amplify the voices and experiences of marginalised groups. They are historically silenced and kept out of controlling narratives. In the context of Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*, Guha's concepts of the elite and the subaltern can be applied to the characters and their social positions. The characters of Baby Kochamma, Chacko, and Kari Saipu represent the elite, with their access to power, privilege, and social status. In contrast, characters like Velutha, Ammu, and the twins Rahel and Estha occupy inferior positions, facing marginalisation, oppression and disempowerment. The incident highlights the oppressive nature of the caste system, where individuals like Velutha and his father Vellya Paapen are regarded as "untouchable" and are not allowed to enter the homes of "touchable" (caste Hindus and Christians) due to the fear of "pollution". This fear is rooted in the belief that physical contact with someone from a lower caste can pollute the higher-caste individuals and their surroundings. However, the narrative also exposes the dishonesty of this system. Despite the "touchable" avoiding physical contact with Velutha and Vellya Paapen, they have no doubt about consuming food (coconuts) that has been handled and plucked by the "untouchables". This contradiction underscores the absurdity of the concepts of pollution and untouchability.

The repeated use of the term "touchable" in the narrative serves to emphasise the artificial nature of this prominence. By using this term to describe both people and objects, Roy highlights the arbitrary boundaries created by the caste system. The irony lies in the fact that the "touchables" are willing to benefit from the labour of the "untouchables" (by consuming the coconuts) while maintaining an aspect of separation and superiority. Through this incident, Roy critiques the caste system's attempts to maintain a false sense of purity and highlights the inherent contradictions and falsity that support it. By inverting the notion of purity and pollution, Roy



challenges the dominant discourse and encourages readers to question the validity of the caste system's oppressive structures. Mammachi's story about paravans being expected to crawl backwards with a broom to sweep away their footprints illustrates the exercise of leadership control by the dominant class. The use of the word "expected" suggests that this behaviour was not imposed on the paravans but rather a social norm they were expected to follow. This is a classic example of Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Where the ruling class asserts its authority through voluntary means, convincing the population that their interests align with those of the dominant class. In this case, the hegemonic elites (upper caste individuals) exert control over the lower castes (paravans) by creating a social expectation that strengthens their supremacy. The paravans are socialised to believe their duty is to avoid "defiling" the upper castes, and thus they internalise their subordinate status. This internalisation is a key aspect of hegemony, as it allows the dominant class to maintain power without resorting to compulsion. Gramsci's concept of hegemony highlights how power is exercised through cultural and ideological means rather than just through force or pressure. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy illustrates how the dominant class maintains its power by creating and reinforcing social norms, expectations, and beliefs that maintain their dominance. The novel critiques this hegemonic structure, revealing the ways in which it sustains oppression and marginalisation. By exploring the dynamics of hegemony, Roy's novel provides a vision into the complex power structures that shape Indian society, particularly in relation to caste and social hierarchy. The narrative encourages readers to question the dominant discourse and challenge the internalised beliefs and expectations that perpetuate oppression. Mammachi's description of paravans crawling backwards with brooms, sweeping away their footprints, symbolises the erasure of their existence from history. This act of removal is a result of the hegemonic class's control over the narrative, leading the paravans to believe their existence is a pollution that needs to be eliminated. The paravans are forced to internalise their own inferiority and marginalisation, leading to a loss of identity and agency. The novel highlights the various ways the dominant class exercises control over the lives of paravans, including their movement, dress, and speech. The idea of pollution is used as a tool of abuse, making the paravans believe that they are naturally impure and must take steps to avoid "polluting" the upper castes. This is a classic example of Gramsci's notion of hegemony, where the dominant class asserts its power through non-coercive means, shaping the beliefs and values of the subordinate class. The character of Vellya Paapen represents the effects of this hegemonic control. His feelings of responsibility to Mammachi's family and his subsequent complaint as a result of the internalised oppression he has faced. The fact that he is termed an "Old World Paravan" suggests that he is a product of the ancient era. In which the backward crawling and humiliation of paravans was normalised. Vellya Paapen's story highlights the long-term effects of hegemonic control, where the oppressed internalise their own defeat and become complicit in their own marginalisation. Through these examples, Roy's novel critiques the ways power is exercised and maintained in Indian society, particularly in relation to caste and social hierarchy. The narrative encourages readers to question the dominant discourse and challenge the internalised beliefs and expectations that perpetuate oppression. When Vellya Paapen informs Mammachi about Velutha and Ammu's relationship, her passion leads her to physically push him, which is a shocking violation of the taboo against touching an Untouchable. Vellya Paapen is taken aback, not just by the physical contact but also by the fact that a Touchable has touched him. This moment highlights the deeply rooted social norms that dictate the behaviour of both Touchables and Untouchables. Mammachi's rage and Vellya Paapen's subsequent cringing and offer to kill his own son demonstrate the extreme fear and internalised oppression that infuse the lives of Untouchables. Vellya Paapen's gentleness is further evident in his attitude towards Velutha, whom he fears due to his son's confidence, assertiveness, and lack of hesitation. These traits, desirable in Touchables, are seen as insolence in an Untouchable, underscoring the separation idea of untouchable/touchable and the rigid expectations surrounding each caste. The narrative also explores the notion of "good" and "bad" Untouchables, exemplified by the contrast between Velutha and Kuttappen. While Velutha is assertive, aware of his rights, and questioning, Kuttappen is simple, humble, and innocent. The hegemonic class deems Kuttappen a "good" Untouchable because he conforms to their expectations of submissiveness and lack of knowledge. In contrast, Velutha's awareness and assertiveness make him a "bad" Untouchable, threatening the dominant discourse. This separation highlights the



power dynamics at play, in which the hegemonic class maintains control by dictating what acceptable behaviour is for each caste. The narrative critiques this system as revealing how it perpetuates oppression and marginalisation. By portraying the internalised oppression of characters like Vellya and Paapen, and the contrast between Velutha and Kuttappen, Roy's novel sheds light on the insidious nature of caste-based discrimination and stands against it.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of mimicry suggests that the colonised culture's attempt to imitate the dominant colonial culture results in a mocking or satirical portrayal of that culture. This is because the colonised culture can never fully replicate the colonial culture and therefore remains "not quite, not white". This leads to a state of cultural hybridity. Where the colonised subject is caught between their native identity and the colonial identity they attempt to connect to. Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* exemplifies the concept of mimicry through its language and character names. The novel is written in English but combines Malayalam words and phrases, creating a linguistic hybridity that reflects the cultural hybridity of the characters. The names of two characters, Baby Kochamma and Sophie Mol, are also bilingual, combining English and Malayalam. This blending of languages and cultures highlights the characters' caught-in-between status, where they are neither fully Indian nor fully British. Baby Kochamma, for instance, is a Syrian Christian who has adopted British values and customs while still retaining elements of her native culture. Her name, Baby, is a Westernised nickname, while Kochamma is a traditional Syrian Christian surname. Similarly, Sophie Mol's name combines the Western name Sophie with the Malayalam surname Mol, indicating her mixed cultural heritage. Through these examples, Roy's novel illustrates the concept of mimicry, in which the colonised culture attempts to imitate the dominant culture but ultimately creates a hybridised identity that is neither fully one nor the other. This hybridity is a key theme in the novel, reflecting the complex cultural dynamics of postcolonial India. Pappachi's character in *The God of Small Things* exemplifies mimicry, in which the colonised subject attempts to imitate the dominant colonial culture. As an Imperial Entomologist working for the British, Pappachi adopts the dressing style of his British bosses, wearing a three-piece suit and a gold pocket watch every day, even in the sweltering heat of Aye Menem. This sartorial choice is a conscious attempt to mimic the British. This signifies his aspiration to align himself with the colonial power. Furthermore, Pappachi's pride in owning a Plymouth car bought from an Englishman and his eagerness to show it off to others. This demonstrates his desire to emulate the British lifestyle. His refusal to believe Ammu's story about her husband's boss, Mr Hollick, and his willingness to please white visitors, even to the point of fawning, reveal the extent to which Pappachi has internalised the values and opinions of the colonisers. Pappachi's behaviour is a classic example of mimicry, where the colonised subject seeks to gain acceptance and. However, this mimicry also highlights the power dynamics at play where the colonised subject is forced to subjugate their own identity and agency to appease the colonial rulers. Through Pappachi's character, Roy critiques the legacy of colonialism and its ongoing influence on the lives of Indians. Pappachi's mimicry of British culture serves as a commentary on the lasting impact of colonialism on Indian society, where the desire to emulate the dominant culture can lead to a loss of traditional identity and cultural heritage. Chacko's character in *The God of Small Things* perpetuates the flawed mimicry of the British, inherited from his father, Pappachi. His "Oxford mood" is a manifestation of this mimicry, where he adopts the attitudes and behaviours of the colonisers, such as reading aloud in a lofty tone, quoting from texts and emphasising the importance of English language proficiency. Chacko's actions, like his father's, are driven by a desire to please the coloniser and demonstrate his own cultural superiority. By quoting from Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, he attempts to showcase his intellectual prowess, just as Baby Kochamma does by quoting from *The Tempest* in front of Margaret. The novel highlights the irony of this mimicry, particularly in the scene where Chacko makes the twins look up the word "Anglophile" in the dictionary. This moment underscores the absurdity of the colonised subject's desire to emulate the coloniser, even to the point of embracing the term that describes their own conquest. Furthermore, the punishment assigned to the twins for speaking Malayalam instead of English is a sharp reminder of the colonial legacy, where the imposition of English was a tool of cultural suppression. Baby Kochamma's actions mirror those



of the British colonisers, who sought to erase Indian languages and cultures in favour of their own. Through these examples, Roy critiques the enduring impact of colonialism on Indian society, where the desire to mimic the coloniser has led to a loss of cultural identity and linguistic heritage. The novel highlights the need for Indians to reclaim their own languages, cultures, and identities, rather than perpetuating the flawed mimicry of the British.

Arundhati Roy's characters, Pappachi, Chacko, and Baby Kochamma, exemplify the concept of mimicry, as described by Homi Bhabha. They attempt to emulate the culture of their colonisers, but their efforts are flawed and ultimately yield a "blurred copy" that resembles mockery rather than mimicry. Baby Kochamma's fondness for American television shows, such as *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*, illustrates her preference for Western popular culture over Indian culture. Her fascination with the "shiny clothes" and "smart, bitchy repartee" of the characters on these shows demonstrates her desire to escape into a world that is perceived as more glamorous and sophisticated than her own. Similarly, Pappachi's adoption of Western attire, including his three-piece suit and gold pocket watch, and Chacko's "Oxford mood" and quoting from Western texts, are all attempts to mimic the culture of their colonisers. However, these efforts are ultimately unsuccessful, and they come across as foolish or artificial. By portraying her characters in this way, Roy is mocking the postcolonial Indian elites who attempt to mimic Western culture. She is highlighting the absurdity of their efforts and the ways in which they are ultimately unable to fully replicate the culture they aspire to. Roy's use of mimicry as a literary device also underscores the power dynamics at play in colonial and postcolonial relationships. The colonised subject's attempt to mimic the coloniser is a manifestation of their desire for acceptance and approval, but it also reinforces the dominant culture's superiority. Through her characters' flawed mimicry, Roy critiques the legacy of colonialism and its ongoing influence on Indian society. She is encouraging readers to question the value placed on Western culture and to reclaim Indian culture and identity.

To conclude, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a powerful exploration of the oppression of marginalised groups, particularly the "Untouchables" women in a postcolonial setting. Through her novel, Roy sheds light on the brutal traditions and social taboos that perpetuate exclusion and violence against these groups. By giving voice to the powerless, such as Velutha and Ammu, Roy highlights the everyday injustices and despair faced by those on the outskirts of society. The novel critiques the patriarchal ideology that underpins the oppression of both women and "Untouchables," demonstrating how this ideology determines the standards of conduct for these groups. The violence perpetrated against "Untouchables" like Velutha is a direct result of this ideology and moral system.

Furthermore, the novel explores the plight of postcolonial citizens, who are caught between their own culture and the imposed or mimicked culture of their colonisers. This sense of displacement and disorientation is captured in Chacko's poignant statement, "Our dreams have been doctored...We belong nowhere." Throughout the novel, Roy emphasises the importance of identity and the struggle to find one's own voice and ideas. The characters' search for identity is a testament to the need to reclaim their own culture and heritage in the face of colonialism and oppression. *The God of Small Things* is grounded in historical realities, blending colonial tradition and local reality to create a rich and nuanced narrative. Roy's masterful storytelling and vivid characters bring to life the complexities of postcolonial India, making the novel a powerful exploration of identity, culture, and social justice. Ultimately, the novel is a call to action, urging readers to confront the injustices and inequalities that persist in our world today.

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