

Hybridity, Marginalization and the Politics of Transgression in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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'The God Of Small Things', is written in the postcolonial Anglophone by Arundhati Roy. The adjective 'postcolonial', signifies the fact that the novel or any other genre of writing, transcends the peripheries of locality, region and nation, to emerge in the global scenario, proceeding the aftermath of colonization.

J.P. Tripathi aptly pointed out: "The novel *The God of Small Things* exposed the social, political, racial, religious and Christian hypocrisies." ¹ (Tripathi 23)

Arundhati Roy refers to the metaphor, "the heart of darkness" which is taken from Joseph Conrad's novel, 'The Heart Of Darkness'. She says that, "in Ayemenem, in the heart of darkness, I talk not about the White man, but about the Darkness, about what the Darkness is about." (Frontline, August 8, 1997). The darkness refers to the subjugation, ignorance and marginalization of the colonized people in Kerala.

In 'Black Skin, White Masks', Frantz Fanon suggested that colonialism, with its preconceived notions of white racial superiority over non-white peoples has created a sense of alienation and marginalization in the self-identity of the colonized people. Fanon asserts, "As I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro. There are two ways out of this conflict. Either I ask others to pay no attention to my skin, or else I want them to be aware of it." ² (Frantz Fanon). A white skin epitomizes beauty and purity. The history, language, culture and beliefs of the white colonizers are imposed on the colonized and considered superior to the local indigenous culture.

Indira Bhatt asserted that: "The novel is all about atrocities against the small things- childhood and youth, women, young and old and the untouchables." ³ (Bhatt 44) The power structures embodied by Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and the policeman, ensure that the transgressors- Ammu, Velutha, Rahel and Estha, remain vulnerable and marginalized. They become victims of the caste system, gender-based inequality, and inflexible law enforcement.

Pappachi, the grandfather, adapts to the ways of the Occident by driving a Plymouth and smoking a cigar and possesses all the accoutrements of a Britisher, yet he still believes in the subjugation of women and resents his wife's business acumen and success. He continues to beat his wife and children.

The story revolves around Ammu, a woman who is a helpless victim, tormented by the patriarchal society. She was not given the privilege of higher education by Pappachi, her father, while her brother Chacko was sent to Oxford for higher studies. When her family is unable to accumulate sufficient dowry for a marriage proposal, she becomes desperate to escape her abusive father and bitterly tormented mother. She convinces her parents to let her visit her distant aunt residing in Calcutta. To avoid returning to Ayemenem, she marries a man who

assists managing a tea estate. Later she discovers to her utmost shock, that her husband is an alcoholic who beats her and even attempts to prostitute her to his employer so that he can retain his job. After she gives birth to twins, Estha and Rahel she leaves her husband and returns to her parents' home, where unfortunately, she again resumes a subjugated and marginalized role. Also living at the house are Chacko her brother, Mammachi, and her aunt Baby Kochamma who is in love with an Irish priest Father Mulligan. Margaret, Chacko's estranged wife too returns with their daughter Sophie Mol after her second husband dies in an accident.

Ammu feels unwelcome at Ayemenem and her father does not even believe her when she confides in him about how her husband wanted to sell her to his English employer to save his own skin. Pappachi "didn't believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man's wife." (42) She is doubly marginalized as she is considered a patriarchal and colonial possession. Mammachi, who has put up with years and years of incessant beating, marginalization and humiliation, is quite discontent with her rebellious, and now divorced daughter. Baby Kochamma despises her even more because she feels that Ammu is "quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman." (44-45). Baby Kochamma uses Ammu as a scapegoat to wreck vengeance on a society that has been indifferent to her physical and emotional needs. She releases her frustrations by causing upheavels in Ammu's life.

Ammu and the twins live on 'sufferance' in her parents' house where she is spurned at by all her relatives. Susan Friedman observes: " - - the state resists violence imposed from outside its borders - - - at the same time that it sanctions or turns a blind eye to male violence against women within its borders." ⁴. (Friedman 114)

Her brother Chacko reminds the twins that their mother has no 'locus standi', no legal rights to inherit the factory or the house for instance (56). He mispronounces the word as 'Locust Stand I' making it sound like a grasshopper suggesting that their mother is like a parasite in their house. In the end, Ammu is finally rendered destitute by her very same brother. During these tormenting circumstances, Ammu falls in love with Velutha, who works as a carpenter in the pickle factory, but their love story too ends with disastrous and tragic consequences.

If Ammu is on the margin, her children are even more so. They are "Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would even marry", in the eyes of Baby Kochamma (44). Their vulnerable position makes Ammu very protective towards them and even if she is "quick to reprimand" them she is "even quicker to take offence on their behalf" (42). Even though Ammu is despised by her family, she is also sometimes feared by them because they can sense an 'unsafe edge' in her, being "a woman that they had already damned, [who] now had little left to lose, and could therefore be dangerous" (44). These apprehensions compel them to display a pretension of respect by keeping a distance from her, especially on the days that the "radio played Ammu's songs" (44). Rahel ponders over this 'unsafe edge' and this 'air of unpredictability' that surrounds Ammu: "It was what she had battling inside her. An unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber." (44). This illustrates the opposing forces that Ammu natures within her; as a mother she protects her children but as an individual, she is desperate to break free and rebel against the 'smug, ordered world' that envelops her.

McLeod had rightly commented in response to Spivak that: “The subaltern can speak, but they are not able to have transactions between speakers and listeners. Their muteness is created by the fact that even when women uttered words, they were not properly interpreted. - - Hence, the silence of the female as subaltern is the result of a failure of interpretation, and not a failure of articulation.”⁵ (McLeod 195). The muteness is a superficial camouflage that conceals the inability of the patriarchal and racial society to interpret the subaltern.

In the case of Velutha, it is obvious to see that he is subordinated and marginalized. Being a Paravan and an Untouchable, the society he lives in still regards his caste as inferior and unclean. Roy portrays a euphemistic picture of his status when he appears in Ammu’s dream: “He left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors.”(206). This is a reflection of the subaltern position of the Untouchables in the bygone days. Mammachi tells her grandchildren about those days when “[p]aravans 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).

The name of Velutha means, “White in Malayalam- because he was so black.” (Roy 70). Untouchables are denied the fundamental human rights. They are not permitted to enter the house of the upper classes, or walk on “public roads” or even “cover their upper bodies, or to carry umbrellas.” (Roy 71). They have to even cover their mouths with their hands while speaking so that their polluted breath is not a nuisance to others. Velutha is encouraged to go to a school for Untouchables only. Velutha faces inhuman treatment by his own countrymen because: “If they hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature- had been severed long ago.” (Roy 293) Caste acted as a colonial crapulence.

According to Anil Nair, Roy’s novel suggests that “the sanctification of everything small can turn into the pursuit of something big.” With the passage of time, Velutha crosses several lines; apart from learning how to read and write. He becomes a trained carpenter, when traditionally a paravan should focus on the trivial ‘smaller things’ like toddy tapping or picking coconuts. He secretly becomes a member of the Communist party and participates in political marches and rallies. Eventually, he crosses the most forbidden line of all, that of having a relationship with a Touchable, upper-caste woman. So being a Paravan, Velutha transgresses numerous lines that the society expects him to stay confined in. However, he still remains one of the most oppressed characters in the novel- despite the fact that he is a man.

Arundhati Roy makes a distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed. The third chapter of the novel is entitled, “Big Man Laltain, Small Man, the Mombatti”. By the term ‘Laltain’, Roy means the elite and high class people and ‘Mombatti’ refers to the weaker sections of the society. Velutha and Ammu constitute the mombattis in the novel.

The children who symbolize the ‘small things’ are victimized to the hilt. They flout all conventions by making Velutha, a ‘paravan’ or an untouchable, their God- the God of small things. He shares a special relationship with them and becomes a part of their world. The powerless are marginalized by the exploiters. Estha is exploited sexually by the soda seller who renders him insecure, petrified and mute.

Cilano observed that the twins' recognition of the roles played in the past, the choices made by them, and the guilt that overpowered them throughout their lives: "is almost automatically predetermined", they return to their trauma constantly being reminded of their marginal position, and "this moment of return and recognition also entails an acknowledgement of the [past] by a character who would rather suppress it." ⁶ (Cilano. 36)

The carnal colonizer is represented by Mr. Hollick. Ammu's husband Babu, almost loses his job due to excessive alcoholism and he pleads with Mr. Hollick, his employer at the tea estate not to sack him. Mr. Hollick perversely suggests that Ammu should be sent to his Bungalow to be "looked after." (p.42) The British are projected as the prototypes of oppression.

'The God of Small Things,' portrays life in 'God's own country'- Kerala as ungodly. The characters are victimized and their life is overshadowed with despair and gloom. The novel highlights the motif of isolation of 'the other' and their ultimate transgression by the exploiters. Throughout the narrative, the natural world- the plants in the garden, the monsoon rains, and particularly, the river-push against the expanses of their confinement and creep into "civilized spaces". Similarly, love, restricted by both verbal and unarticulated rules, pushes at the peripheries of what is acceptable to emerge through the repression-of "civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness" (292)- as an incestual relationship between the twins.

Roy adumbrates the undertones of the "small lives" being governed by the Big God- the British colonizer. The destiny of human beings was manipulated by the Big God. "That Big God howled like a hot wind, and demanded obeisance. Then Small God (cozy and contained, private and limited) came away cauterized, laughing numbly at his own temerity." (20) The Paravans and Pulayas joined the Anglican Church to escape the "scourge of untouchability" (74) They received a little money and food as an incentive. But later they discovered that they were still discriminated against. After independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits as they were Christians and therefore casteless. They were torn between two worlds- one rejected by them and the other not ready to accept them.

The colonizer, in the guise of Inspector Thomas Matthew, taps Ammu's chest twice with his baton, in the novel to humiliate and terrorize her, showing the hegemony of the imperial rule. He is portrayed as the one who knows, "whom he could pick on and whom he couldn't (Roy 10). He is proud of his status- "He had a Touchable wife, two Touchable daughters- whole touchable generations waiting in their Touchable wombs." (Roy 245) But Velutha, despite being a Communist, does not get any protection from the Communist party when he is accused of raping Ammu. The police even pronounce a death penalty without even investigating the whole truth. According to Friedman, "identity is constructed relationally through difference from the other." (Mappings 19) Velutha's identity is obliterated because of his inability to resist the colonial hegemony. This sounds the death knell of the smaller beings. India is betrayed by the colonizer just as Velutha is cheated by the Communist party. They become the scapegoats of the prejudiced, bigoted society that crushes them mercilessly.

The 'small things' represent the marginalized world of Ammu and Velutha that is overshadowed by subjugation, oppression, violence and injustice. Baby Kochamma's foreign education enhances the cultural differences between herself and others in the colonized world, while Mammachi and Ammu are victims of domestic violence. Mammachi is beaten by her

husband with a brass flower every night. “Scars of old beatings from an old marriage” blight her life. Ammu too endures humiliation and violence due to her divorce. The family members: “squeezed her knee and gloated.” (Roy 43). As a married daughter, she has no position and as a divorced daughter she has surrendered her rights to the world where she lives. She is doubly marginalized. “Colonized women are rendered doubly marginal because of their colonized gender and position.”⁷ (Ballantyne and Burton 411). Velutha too is doubly marginalized- as he is the colonized ‘other’ as well as an ‘untouchable’.

Bell Hooks said that marginality “nourishes one’s capacity to resist.”⁸ (Huggan 20). Ammu violates patriarchal norms and transgresses the boundaries of her caste to love an untouchable man. She violates the social code by asking her husband Baba for a divorce.

The marginalized fabric interwoven in their lives is evident from Ammu’s brother Chacko’s statement: “But we can’t go in - - - because we’ve been locked out.” (Roy 52). This statement highlights the trauma that is inflicted as a result of the colonized oppression and the Anglophile roots. Chacko asserts: “We’re Prisoners of War, - - - Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas - - - our lives never important enough. To matter.” (Roy 52). On the one hand, Chacko is very English, because he has become accustomed to English habits and English culture and on the basis of these values he, for example, prevents his father from beating his mother. But, on the other hand, he falls back into a pattern that follows the strict moral precepts when he batters down Ammu’s bedroom door and expels her from the Ayemenem house: “Get out of my house before I break every bone in your body!”

Baby Kochamma and Chacko have been under the protective umbrella of the colonizer as they have been educated in the Occident, yet they are insecure and supercilious about their self-positioning as Indians. Chacko’s wife, Margaret Kochamma- the ‘outsider’ keeps a distance from the local Indian culture.

At the beginning of the novel, we are told about cousin Sophie Mol’s tragic death and her funeral is depicted vividly. Both Rahel and Estha are overcome by guilt that they had let their little cousin accompany them on the perilous boat trip in the monsoon season. Yet her death is now considered so trivial that “the Government never paid for Sophie Mol’s funeral because she wasn’t killed on a zebra crossing.” (Roy 6). The “zebra crossing” symbolizes the hybridity that is all-pervasive in the novel.

Hybridity occurs in postcolonial societies both as a result of conscious efforts of colonial subjugation like when the colonial hegemonic power invades, encroaches and controls the colonized or when they compel the indigenous people to absorb and accept the new paradigms devised for their suppression.

Rahel expresses her love for her mother Ammu by quoting from Rudyard Kipling’s ‘Jungle Book’: “We be of one blood, ye and I.” (p.329). At the same time, Estha, her twin, is an ardent admirer of Elvis Presley and wishes to emulate him. The twins seem to be fabricating a new identity that is alien to them. When Rahel tries to tell Mammachi that Estha vomited at the movie theatre, Ammu silences her and it is this silencing that makes Rahel aware of her status as an outsider, an outcast and a girl, one of a pair of “Half-Hindu Hybrids.” (44)

Their uncle Chacko, quotes from ‘The Great Gatsby’, the story of an “Oxford man”. (p.38). Priority was given to the English language and parents ensured that their children learnt to converse fluently in it. Chacko’s daughter, Sophie Mol, is half English and half Indian. When she arrives from London, Mammachi is extremely apprehensive about her grandchildren’s ability to speak English fluently. This highlights the subservience to the imperial language and culture. Constant comparisons are drawn between the cousins, making Estha and Rahel feel inferior and embittered. “Sophie Mol is loved from the beginning even before she arrives and when she died the loss of Sophie Mol became more important than her memory.” (p.186). She is not at all seen as a hybrid in Ayemenem, but only as an English girl:

“It was about nine in the morning when Mammachi and Baby Kochamma got news of a white child’s body found floating down river where the Meenachal broadens as it approaches the backwaters.” Sophie is always referred to as being ‘white’ and being ‘English’, her Indian heritage is not mentioned. She is preferred to the twins by her anglophile Indian relatives. Only Ammu remains reserved towards Sophie and Margaret. Sophie tries to adapt herself to her cousins. She wants to be with them when they escape- and wants to make friends with them, by even giving them presents.

The novel is set in Kerala which is “a historical meeting point between cultures,”⁹ (Mullaney 7), so it is hybridized in aspects of religion, language and culture. In terms of language also, ‘The God Of Small Things’, is full of hybridity. The novelist Arundhati Roy is Indian, but writes her novel in English. Throughout the text, however, the reader frequently comes across Malayalam words, poems or songs. Sometimes an English translation is given, but sometimes the reader is left with the Malayalam sentences only. The reader who does not know Malayalam, cannot comprehend what is sung during the Onam boat race. Sometimes characters in the book do not speak English and cannot understand the other characters, for example, Kochu Maria exclaims: ‘Estha would rise from the dead, stand on his bed and say-“Et tu? Kochu Maria? – Then fall Estha!” and die again.’ Kochu Maria was certain that ‘Et tu’ was an obscenity in English and was waiting for an opportunity to complain about Estha to Mammachi. But it also happens that characters speak English, but do not know what they are saying. They have learned to pronounce a word, but its no meaning for them. For instance, when Comrade Pillai’s son Lenin cites Shakespeare: “lend me yawYERS;”. The twins , Estha and Rahel, too, often play with English words and sometimes words are written as they imagine them: ‘They had to form the words properly, and be particularly careful about their pronunciation. Prer NUN sea ayshun.’

Ammu and Velutha belong to different castes and so they represent the hybrid cultures of India. Similarly Rahel and Estha are half-Hindu hybrids whom no Syrian Christian would ever consider marrying. Their act of transgression questions the cogency of this homogeneous culture. As Shumona Dasgupta said, that hybridity is “a subversive concept that resists homogenization and stagnation.”¹⁰ (117). She agrees with Homi Bhaba that these hybrid identities occupy a ‘third space’ of cultural in betweenness. Friedman feels that hybridity: “disturbs, intervenes, unsettles, interrogates, ironizes, denaturalizes, transgresses by refusing to ‘fit’ established categories.” (Mappings 89).

‘The God Of Small Things’, is a book about the tragic catastrophe that befalls a family, brought on by the culmination of a series of small events that lead to enormous repercussions for the protagonists of the novel, the dizygotic twins Estha and Rahel, and their mother Ammu. It delves into the lives of the small and marginalized who, unwilling to fit into the pre- conceived

roles and restrictions laid down for them by society and history, inadvertently bring about their own devastation. Roy personifies patriarchal norms in the Indian society in the form of abusive, manic and tyrant males that stifle the hopes and lives of the women around them. Ammu's desires and her innate nature transgresses on the fate imposed upon her by her family and society and it is through her character that Roy gives a critique of patriarchal traditions enclosed in the matrix of an elite and educated family in India.

The daughter of an abusive, "ill-tempered father and a bitter, long suffering mother", Ammu has no means of achieving freedom as she lacks both a college education, which her father felt was "an unnecessary expense for a girl" and a "suitable dowry"(38-9). Ammu's desperation to escape a life in her parents' house compels her to marry the first man who proposes to her for she believes that "anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem"(39). Yet, once again Ammu's dreams are ruined as not only does her husband turn out to be a "full-blown alcoholic" but also later becomes abusive towards her and her children, causing her to return to Ayemenem, "unwelcomed", because as the daughter, she has no "Locusts Stand I" on her paternal property (42, 56). Even though Ammu lacks a college education or any adequate exposure to the intellectual world, she is "just that sort of animal" who fights against the injustice she perceives in the world (180). It is Ammu's "lofty sense of injustice and the obstinate, reckless streak that develops in someone small who has been bullied all their lives by someone Big", that lead her to transgressing social mores and norms by falling in love with Velutha, an untouchable, thus transgressing both moral and caste boundaries marked by society and history (40).

Velutha too provokes the ire of society and history because he challenges societal beliefs regarding the caste system. Even though he is an untouchable, Velutha has not only gained an education but is a trained and "accomplished carpenter" which arouses the jealousy of other touchable workers in the pickle factory (75). In turn, Velutha receives lesser remuneration than all other workers by Mammachi even though she agrees that his "remarkable facility with his hands" could have made him "an engineer" had he not been a "Paravan"(75). Not only does Velutha rebel against the future that history and society have in store for him, but he is also a member of the Communist party, "a Naxalite"(77). Velutha's talents and intelligence cross the boundaries laid down by Indian history and society where untouchables are seen as unskilled labourers, like Velutha's father Vellya Paapen, who are born to only serve the touchables. Not only does Velutha transgress social boundaries by his "lack of hesitation" and "unwarranted assurance" considered "insolence" in an untouchable, it is this "sureness" that leads to his friendship with Estha and Rahel and later forbidden relationship he has with Ammu (78).

Ammu and Velutha's relationship can be recognized as the attempt of both of them to revolt against "the smug, ordered world" (167). Roy describes the start of Velutha and Ammu's relationship in the following passage:

"Standing in the shade of the rubber tree with coins of sunshine dancing on his body, holding her daughter in his arms, glanced up and caught Ammu's gaze. Centuries telescoped into one evanescent moment. History was off-footed, caught off-guard. This knowing slid into him cleanly, like the sharp edge of a knife. Cold and hot at once. It only took a moment. Ammu saw that he saw. She looked away. He did too. History's fiends returned to claim them. To rewrap

them in its old, scarred pelt and drag them back to where they really lived. Where the love laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much”(214).

In the passage above, Roy gives us the moment when Ammu and Velutha realize their desire for each other, which before them had been “obscured by history’s blinkers”(176). When Ammu sees her daughter playing with Velutha intimately and in that innocent act breaking a social taboo of touching a Paravan, she realizes that she was envious of both of them and it is that realization that leads to history being caught “off-footed, off-guard”(214). But when Velutha and Ammu look at each other and Velutha realizes Ammu’s desire for him “history’s fiends return to claim them.”(214). It is the irony of history that it designates as its “deputy”, Vellya Paapen, Velutha’s own father, whose “Terror” at what his son had touched, “Entered”, “Loved” led him to disclose Ammu and Velutha’s secret love to Mammachi and even offer to “kill his son with his own bare hands.”(199,78). Thus Ammu and Velutha end up paying heavily for their love, which transgresses on “History’s Plans”(199).

While Ammu and Velutha’s love might have “made the unthinkable thinkable and the impossible really happen”, for most contemporary readers their love is completely comprehensible and legitimate (242). On the contrary, the scene of Estha and Rahel’s love-making challenges a still very widely held social taboo of incest. Estha and Rahel’s love making scene, with its subtle imagery, becomes a way for Estha and Rahel, to overcome the “Quietness and Emptiness” inside of them, to share their “hideous grief” and try to become the people who had “known each other before life began”, instead of “strangers who had met in a chance encounter”(328). While the love making of Estha and Rahel is a transgressive act that “once again broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how much”, it also becomes a way for Roy to radically confront her readers with the fact that their own conceptions of right and wrong are also steeped in history and society (33). At the same time, the gender transgression committed by the male dancer portraying the character of Kunti in the play, (unlike Velutha, Ammu or the twins), is socially sanctioned as it portrays femininity from a male perspective.

The relationship between the touchable and the untouchable was abhorred by Ammu’s family whereas they encouraged Chacko to flirt with the poor women of the factory to satisfy his “Men’s Needs”. (295) The double standardness of society is revealed to us when Chacko and Ammu commit the same mistake but the punishment for Ammu is severe and relentless. The rules are different for the Laltain and Mombatti and it is even more pathetic for a Mombatti woman. As Ketu Katrak observed that: “Male power and male sexuality are legitimate; female sexuality, understood as female power, must be controlled and bounded through social custom, primarily within marriage. - - -[W]omen are socialized into subsuming sexuality within a spiritual realm, leaving behind the realms of the physical, of desire, of pleasure.”¹¹ (qtd in Chari. 136. Note 7).

The History house also plays an important role in the book as it is the place where Estha and Rahel hatch their plan of escape, “Because Anything can Happen to Anyone”(198). Sadly, instead of proving to be the safe haven the twins dreamt of it as, it provides the backdrop for the shattering of their world as it is the location where Velutha is violently beaten almost to death by the police and thus where Ammu, Velutha, Rahel and Estha’s “dreams are captured and

redreamed”(306). When Chacko explains the history of their anglophile family to the twins, he states “history was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside. ‘To understand history,’ Chacko said, ‘we have to go inside and listen to what they’re saying. And look at the books and the pictures on the wall. And smell the smells”(52). Roy metaphorically connects Chacko’s anglophile family to a postcolonial India that according to Chacko has been “trapped outside”, its own past and has therefore become, “pointed in the wrong direction”(53). The History House had been owned by an Englishman, Kari Saipu, who had “gone native” and is thus perceived as a symbol of the English colonization of India (52). Saipu’s past, like that of the British colonial Raj, is also ridden with transgression as Saipu turned out to be a pedophile who shot himself when his “young lover’s parents” took “the boy away from him and sent him to school”(52). The history house becomes the symbol of Indian history where Indians have been “locked out” of their past with their “ancestors whispering inside.”(52-3). Indians cannot understand their ancestors’ words because, “Our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures our dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves.”(53). The war that Chacko is talking about is India’s freedom, which India has won and yet lost because of the adverse effects of globalization, which have led to an almost identical colonization of India by multinational corporations. This is evident in the changes that the History house experiences with time for when Rahel returns to Ayemenen, the History house has been transformed into a Heritage Hotel, with “Toy histories for rich tourists to play in.”(126).

Svetlana Boym affirmed that reflective nostalgics are haunted by the return of the repressed, as they: “see everywhere the imperfect mirror images of home, and try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts.”¹² (Boym 251). The twins are perpetually living with the ghosts of the past, and due to their trauma, time appears to have frozen like Rahel’s toy watch with the hands painted on it.

Susan Stanford Friedman highlights the fact that the twins, of course, do enter the History House and witness for themselves that it “is not owned solely by the colonizers, the nation outside the nation; it has also been built and occupied by the nation as it institutionalizes violence within its own borders.” (Friedman 122)

Though Ammu and Velutha’s story meets a tragic end, Roy makes their story one of fulfillment and hope rather than of despair by placing the scene of their lovemaking, their act of rebellion, right at the very end of the novel. Ammu and Velutha’s love making scene is embellished with explicit imagery. This bold portrayal of Ammu and Velutha’s lovemaking is the revolt of the ‘small’ against the “obeisance” of the “Big God”, a way of resisting by the weak and marginalized in society through a bodily act (19). Ammu and Velutha’s “faith in fragility” and in “Stick[ing] to Smallness”, is Roy’s way of keeping the struggle of the individual against “Structure. Order. Complete monopoly”, “Human history, masquerading as God’s purpose” alive even in the end (321,309). The book’s concluding word, Ammu and Velutha’s promise for a “Tomorrow” is Roy’s way of impressing upon the reader the politics of the novel shrouded in the hope for a brighter future (321).

The biological instinct, as well as the desire to violate the social taboo, cause Ammu, Velutha and the twins to commit acts of transgression. Brinda Bose asserted that there is a

“deliberate validation of erotic desire as an act of transgression.”¹³ (59). The transgression between Ammu and Velutha is out of their free will stemming from desires of the flesh. Transgression also generates strength and acts as a medium of protest against the taboos and love laws imposed by society. Love laws are: “the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much.” (33).

Even the incestuous love between Estha and Rahel is a way of opposing the pressures of societal sanctions. Their transgression highlights the issues of hybridity, gender oppression and incest. Roy has tried to give a voice to the voiceless and speaks for the marginalized and subjugated people living in Ayemenem.

As David Punter pointed out: “The figuration of the fantasy of wholeness as incest underscores the impossibility of moving forward into free, independent relationships while the entire apparatus of caste and empire binds and forbids at every move.”¹⁴ (Punter 199)

The transgression committed by Ammu and Velutha, creates a schism, which eliminates the fixed boundary between the binaries of national/ personal, religious/ secular and moral/ decadent. Velutha symbolizes the ‘unheard voices’ that belong to ‘the others’ or the colonized. It is through transgression that new heterogeneous cultures and identities are created. Each marginalized character overcomes the burden of the past suffering and constructs their new identity by dismantling the social taboos and laws. The transgression is physical as well as symbolic. The symbolic can be portrayed through the border-crossing of the river in the novel.

Anna Froula reiterated that Ammu’s: “unconventional movements across these unforgiving boundaries corrupt her ‘two-egg twins’ and draw them into her placelessness, where the systematic Love Laws punish them for the very threat they pose to the social order.”¹⁵ (Froula 39,41).

At one point, Ammu reprimands Rahel that she must learn “the difference between CLEAN and DIRTY, especially in this country.” (149) The small cracks are reminders that from the Western perspective of their colonial heritage they are all “dirty”. Sabina Sawhney argued lucidly: “If doubt and confusion still exist, if people still articulate their dissatisfaction with the existing order of things, it is because the attack on the ‘indigenous elites’ is motivated by the lingering influence of colonial ideologies.”¹⁶ (Sawhney 94)

The transgression committed by Estha and Rahel looms large and permeates their thoughts which are obsessed with their cousin Sophie’s death. Rahel notices the change of colour of the church dome and a black cat, which forewarns the reader that some kind of misfortune is lurking around. It is at the funeral that the twins learn that “the world had other ways of breaking men.” (Roy 8).

Estha “had always been a quiet child, so no one could pinpoint with any degree of accuracy exactly when (the year, if not the month or day) he had stopped talking.” (Roy 12). The cause for his silence lay- “hidden away, entombed somewhere deep in the soothing folds of the fact of it.” (Roy 13). His trauma escalated with the sexual overtures of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man in the cinema. The separate reference to ‘Orangedrink’ and ‘Lemondrink’ too symbolizes the hybrid culture of Estha.

The tragedy of Velutha as a result of his affair with Ammu is justified by the police who assert that, “they were not arresting a man, they were exorcising fear.” (Roy 293). The betrayal of Comrade Pillai and history leave his life meaningless. Velutha is suspected of kidnapping the children and is therefore, implicated in the disappearance of Sophie Mol. The beating he receives is to remind him of his inferior place as a Paravan, a place that is pre-decided for him in the play directed by Baby Kochamma. She accuses him of attempting to rape Ammu. Baby Kochamma convinces the twins that they and Ammu are going to prison unless one of the twins “fingers” Velutha as a kidnapper. When Estha then answers the inspector in the affirmative, “childhood tiptoed out”, “silence slipped in like a bolt” (303) and Estha never speaks again. Then Baby Kochamma uses Ammu as a scapegoat and brainwashes Chacko that Ammu and the twins are to blame for his daughter’s death. After Velutha’s death, Ammu dies too, completely ostracized by her family and society. The church refuses to bury her because she is a blot to everyone in Kerala. Ammu’s twins are considered illegitimate as her inter-communal marriage with Baba does not receive a societal sanction.

Chacko laments about the roots of their family: “They were a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away.” (Roy 51). The twins have learnt: “how history negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws.” (Roy 54).

The Meenachal river signifies the dangers of the politics of transgression. It takes away the life of Sophie Mol and spells doom on the twins of the Ipe family. It is the secret rendezvous of Ammu and Velutha and later Velutha embraces his misfortune and ominous death there. By crossing the borders of the river symbolically, they have committed transgression. The Meenachal also functions symbolically as the space in which Velutha can be free to “drift slowly” with the current” (315), unhindered by societal dictates, the space wherein the law ceases to operate, the metaphorical “river of life.” Being in the river, for Velutha, allows for a certain amount of mobility, but crossing the river is a transgressive act that deserves punishment. When Ammu sees Velutha, she is aware that “as he rose from the dark water - - - she saw that the world they stood in was his” (315) and during their intimacy Ammu was “wide and deep as a river in spate.” (318) Within the river, the laws had no sway.

Though Ammu teaches her children how to behave well, she herself violates the love laws. First, she marries a man from a different caste and religion - Ammu is a Malayali, Baba a Bengali; Ammu a Syrian Christian, Baba a Hindu. Therefore, the twins are considered illegitimate and deprived of love. They are given the basic amenities but not love and concern. Second, Ammu breaks the caste taboo by having an affair with Velutha, the untouchable. The abyss of their doomed love is blighted by shadows and oblivion. Through her transgression, Ammu consummates her love and inner ambitions to control her own life. She breaks the shackles of male domination, the chains which render her incapable of choosing her own husband and the inability to live her life on her own terms.

Estha and Rahel get separated from each other after Sophie Mol’s death. Estha is sent away to live with Ammu’s ex-husband, while Rahel stays in Ayemenem. After twenty-three years, they get a chance to meet each other. Their past haunts them as they embark on their journey to adulthood. The death of their three loved ones- Sophie Mol, Velutha and finally Ammu retards their growth and causes a deep schism in their lives. Now they only have each other to turn to as they are enveloped by a feeling of insecurity. These tragic events adumbrate the cause of the

twins' incestuous love and reunion with each other. They follow in their mother's footsteps by committing transgression and violating all the social taboos of incest. The repressed physical desire of Estha is transformed into an Oedipal complex, whose target is Rahel his twin sister and not Ammu.

In his book, 'Transgression', (2003), Chris Jenks said to transgress is to: "go beyond the bounds, to violate or infringe, to announce and even laudate the commandment, the law or the convention." ¹⁷. ('Transgression' .2). Jenks pointed out that transgression is not like opposition since it involves hybridization, "the mixing of categories and the questioning of the boundaries that separate categories." (9) Transgression generates a kind of a victory or a sense of achievement.

The transgression between Rahel and Estha highlights the hybrid relationship between India and England. It opens up the vistas of complicity, intrigue and intercourse between the colonizer and the colonized. The physical reunion of the twins creates an androgynous undertone that India and England represent the two sides of the same coin. Hybridization not only involves fusion but also the creation of a new identity, a 'mutation', subverting the traditional norms.

Sara Upstone remarked that the children and lovers do, however, reclaim a marginal space of belonging and safety by: "asserting their identity on the most intimate spatial scale" – their bodies- and so even if *The God of Small Things* appears to be "a hopeless novel, there is optimism in the fact that while characters may be unable to re-vision their lives at national level, their deferral of such subversions to seemingly 'smaller' spaces offers some opportunity for the marginal to assert its voice." ¹⁸(Upstone. 76-77)

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