



**Cross-cultural Transplantation and its Effects on Human Well-being in “*The God of Small Things*”**

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**Abstract:**

Many critics and research scholars have explored the familial, social, political, and sexual issues along with class discrimination and traditional love laws in ‘*The God of Small Things*’. But most of them paid the least heed to the cross-cultural transplantation manifested in the form of various love affairs and family bonding among the leading characters in the story. Apart from trying to locate and interpret them, the present research tries to disclose how the traditional caste and social principles, values, and beliefs react to these relationships and employ all possible means to silence the voices that attempt to defy age-old views in pursuing their fulfillment. The present paper, therefore, attempts to delve into various relationships in the novel to expose how patriarchy, socio-economic, and religious stratification interfere with those affinities that deteriorate the physical and mental health of the characters.

**Keywords:** Cross-culture, Transplantation, Exploitation, Psychology, Well-being



**Introduction:**

*'The God of Small Things'* exhibits many relationships where some significant characters entangle themselves with partners from other cultures, regions and religions. Such relationships are believed to breed hybridization from a diasporic perspective. However, it may not happen always in the same lines. In many cases, these kinds of relationships end in utter frustration, despair, and trauma, which probably affect the physical and psychological health and fitness of the people. The research study, therefore, strives to investigate the love affairs and marriage of Ammu, a Syrian Christian, with Babu from Bengal and again her divorce from him, her love and physical relationship with Velutha, an untouchable paravan, Baby Kochamma and Irish Monk Father Mulligan, Rahel, and her husband Larry McCaslin from America to attain the main objectives of the research.

**Literature Review:**

Carmagnani (2022) explored how Arundhati Roy's novel uses multimodal mental imagery, an integral part of the authentic manifestation of trauma, and integrates different types of media like movies and age-old folk dances to shape the discourse of trauma and healing, enhancing readers' responses.

Sheba (2021) analyses how Roy portrays an unpleasantly difficult situation of Indian women in the setting of Ayemenam, a southern Indian state of Kerala, where the chain of relationships is very common and complex, which traps the female characters and subjecting them to repeated suppression. The paper scrutinizes how Indian women are challenging circumstances in a patriarchal society and how they are depicted in Arundhati Roy's *'The God of Small Things'*. It further explores the gender disparities and continual repression experienced by female characters, showcasing the compelling portrayal of the injustices imposed upon women by patriarchal norms, caste restrictions, and societal norms governing relationships.

According to Saeed (2021), the traumatic experiences of her female characters under the impact of social class and gender discrimination are focused on in the novel *'The God of Small Things'* by Arundhati Roy. The novel explores themes of unsuccessful life, widowhood, discrimination, and persecution women face, the consequences of illicit relationships, and the impact of rebellion against the caste-bound social system. The discussion section summarizes the impact of rebellion against the caste-bound Indian social system on the lives of Ammu and Velutha, highlighting their tragic outcomes due to the lack of support from family and society.

Dhami (2021) primarily discovers that the paper examines the traumatic ordeals of characters in *'The God of Small Things'*, emphasizing the psychological repercussions they endure due to societal influences such as gender, class, and caste, ultimately resulting in profound psychological anguish and susceptibility.



Kara (2021) analyses various forms of individual and mass traumas experienced by the novel's characters. He further examines the complex psychological and social aspects that affect the victims' perception of traumatic experiences.

Sibi (2020) interprets the traumatic experiences of the children of the Ayemenem house, especially Rahel and Estha, because of the psychological torture they received in the family as well as in society at different stages of their lives.

Giri (2020) also examines the multiple traumas experienced by Rahel and Estha in the novel, as well as their causes, symptoms, and responses to the children's experiences.

Mrak (2018) discusses how Arundhati Roy addresses caste violence and trauma in her novel through a complex narrative structure, focusing on a traumatic event affecting the characters since childhood and the biopolitics of social mechanisms and violence as a means of upholding the law. The novel is caught within a duality and a perpetual repetition, which represents not only the eternal return of trauma but also the constant tension that derives from the hegemony of the caste system and the violence it produces.

N. K. Agarwal (2013) conclusions encompass the significant and enduring effects of childhood trauma on emotional, psychological, and social growth, the difficulties in managing emotions and impulses, and the lasting sway of traumatic distress on individuals' existence.

Outka (2011) discusses the trauma of the leading figures of the novel caused by their interim affairs and relationships. She also examines short-term interbreeding of the characters from different cultures, religions, and castes, anticipating their possible sufferings in the long run.

Longworth (2006) interprets the characters' traumas from Sigmund Freud's theory of trauma and the readers' ethical dilemmas while exploring the inter-caste love laws.

Fox (2002) discusses the profound impact of Arundhati Roy's novel *'The God of Small Things'* on readers, attributing its power to a narrative deployment of the abject and the traumatic. The discussion section of the paper explores how the literary power of *'The God of Small Things'* is intricately linked to its narrative deployment of the abject and the traumatic, emphasizing the repeated references to traumatic events and the character of Velutha as a symbol of both trauma and social abjection. Kristeva's view on literature representing crises and apocalypses is also discussed.

### **Research Gap:**

Almost all the papers reviewed so far focus on the traumatic experiences of some novel characters, paying almost no heed to the reasons for those traumas and their consequences on the physical and psychological health of the novel's leading characters. They often overlook the cross-cultural interactions evident in the various love affairs and family bonds among the main characters. The



paper, therefore, intends to focus on how traditional caste and social norms react to these relationships, using all available methods to suppress voices that challenge long-established beliefs in their quest for fulfillment. Thus, this paper seeks to analyze the different relationships in the novel to show how patriarchy, socio-economic factors, and religious hierarchies disrupt these connections, ultimately harming the characters' physical and mental well-being.

### **Objectives:**

- ☞ To identify cross-cultural transplantation in the form of various relational affairs through the novel's main characters.
- ☞ To find out different forms of discrimination, physical and sexual assault, and psychological trauma that usher the way to the deterioration of the health and fitness of the victims.
- ☞ To show how the patriarchy and traditional family setup torment the mental health of the people in the story.
- ☞ To explore the socio-economic structure and caste-based religious agencies that oppress marginalized people.
- ☞ To highlight the voice and resistance of the subaltern against the prevalent social norms and prejudices.

### **Research Method:**

The qualitative descriptive method has been used to examine the data collected from primary and secondary sources to attain the research goal. Arundhati Roy's '*The God of Small Things*', '*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*', '*The Doctor and the Saint: Caste, Race, and Annihilation of Caste*', and '*Azadi: Freedom, Fascism, Fiction*' have been used as primary sources where the data related to cross-cultural transplantation through various relational affairs and its effect on health and fitness in the form of physical and psychological repressions have been collected as notes. Books, book chapters, journal articles, website articles, and newspaper articles on the literary works of Arundhati Roy have been used as secondary sources in this study. Information from all these sources related to the main idea of the research has also been accumulated and examined delicately. The researcher has also conducted a thorough literature review to show the contribution of other research scholars to authenticate and validate the research topic.

### **Discussion:**

#### **Patriarchal Familial Oppression:**

Arundhati Roy presents a 1960s Indian society in '*The God of Small Things*' that practices an extreme form of patriarchy. This society has utterly victimized Ammu. Her loving father used to flog her with his ivory-handled riding crop along with her mother, which she never exposed to anyone. According to Roy (1997), Ammu learned to live with this cold, calculating cruelty as she grew older. She developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops



in *Someone Small*, who has been bullied all her life by Someone Big. She did precisely nothing to avoid quarrels and confrontations. She was also deprived of the property of the Ayemenem house by her brother Chacko, which Roy puts it as “What is yours is mine and what is mine is also mine” (Roy, 1997, p. 57).

Ammu is also deprived of receiving proper education. She was sent to Ayemenem to stay home after her father's retirement. According to her father, spending money on Ammu's education is unnecessary, whereas her brother was sent to England for his higher education. She has been confined within the house, helping her mother with household work and waiting for marriage proposals. As a modern girl, she could not accept such a life of traditional family setup and tried to escape the house, being psychologically frustrated.

### **Ammu and Babu:**

Being frustrated and desperate by the traditional family system, Ammu contemplated escaping from the Ayemenem house and getting rid of her annoyed father. Circumstantially, she left the house contrary to the desires of her parents. She went to Calcutta on some false excuses and married Babu, an Assistant Manager of a tea garden in Asam. Surendran quoted Theodore Dreiser, who observes: “When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of the two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or becomes worse” (Surendran, 2007, p. 75). Unfortunately, she runs into a grave problem in her marriage. Her husband is an alcoholic and highly self-centered person. He lunges at her, grabs her hair, and punches her. Drunken violence is followed by post-drunken badgering. He also wanted Ammu to sleep with Mr. Hollick, his boss, to keep his job intact and secure his promotion. He also becomes violent against her children. Ammu lost all her patience in such a state and decided not to continue her marital relationship with Babu. When Babu's natural character is revealed to Ammu, she tears the knot of her marriage. Ammu is thus neglected, ignored, and humiliated by her husband and has lost all hopes and dreams. She has returned to her parent's house, which she escaped for a better future, knowing divorced or separated women are considered unnecessary burdens to their parental home.

The world of Ammu has been confined to the front and back verandahs of Ayemenem. A comparison can be drawn between Ammu and Joseph, the central character in Saul Bellow's novel *Dangling Man*, where the quest goes inward to his private room, where the perspectives end in the walls (Bradbury, 1985, p. 135). What is common between Ammu and Joseph is that both discover their existential dilemma, an existence without essence in a hostile world. In such a state, she has been living the life of a psychological patient bearing all the insults from the other members of the family.

### **Ammu and Velutha:**

Despite all patriarchal repression, humiliation, and negligence, Ammu did not accept traditional family value systems like her mother and aunt. Ammu endured sorrows, griefs, and abuses like an



experienced lady, which made her bold, and she took many initiatives to keep her health fit to be liked and loved by someone else. She started to sing songs, listen to music, and walk out. She also tried decorating herself by keeping flowers in her hair, magic secrets in her eyes, and having midnight swims. She also examines her beauty in the mirror and tests the structure of her body to see whether it can attract someone to her by keeping a toothbrush on her breast. According to Trudel (2006), Ammu reveals that she understands herself through her body and sexual identity, and she seeks out Velutha, an untouchable man from the lower caste, to discover the beautiful part of her body. This act of Ammu is considered an unsafe edge and an unmixable mix even by the narrator. Indeed, this urge for freedom works inside Ammu and directs her to love a man boldly at night, whom her children love during the day. This sexual attraction between Ammu and Velutha represents a coalition that rebels against all socially constructed restrictions and leads to a sense of fulfillment and contentment: “Then, for what seemed like an eternity, but was no more than five minutes, she slept leaning against him, her back against his chest. Seven years of oblivion lifted off her and flew into the shadows on weighty, quaking winds” (Roy, 1997, p. 337).

Ammu, thus, committed the ultimate transgression and transplantation by loving the low-caste Velutha, entering the forbidden territory, and crossing the social boundary set by the traditional family system. Both of them found momentary release from the cruel realities of life. They transcended the deadly inevitabilities into soul-elevating mutual support and protection on the banks of the river Meenachal. However, she has to pay a cruel price for these short physical relationships. The female inmates have become her active oppressors, seeking to corner her and then drive her to a miserable death. As a divorcee, she has already lost her status in the Ayemenem house and everything, loving Velutha.

Mammachi and Baby Kochamma scolded Ammu for her genuine love for Velutha and considered this love responsible for the death of Sophi Mol. So, they locked Ammu in her bedroom and wanted her to leave the house for good. They also filed a rape case against Velutha. She was also humiliated by local police Inspector Thomas Mathew as “he stared at Ammu’s breast as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam police did not take statements from Veshyas or their illegitimate children... ‘If I were you,’ he said, ‘I would go home quietly.’ Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap, tap” (Roy, 1997, p. 8). In this regard, Surenderan (2007) observes, “The novelist is certainly sharpest in her criticism of the police...How insecure women are in the hands of the protectors of law is clear from the way Inspector Mathew treats Ammu...The irony of the situation is that there is a mute witness to whatever takes place in the police station in the name of maintaining law and order.” Chako, her brother, decided her lot in this situation. She was asked to leave the house, leaving one child at Ayemenem's house and sending one child to his father Babu in Calcutta. Thus, she has been separated from her children, family, husband, and her love Velutha.



Ammu leaves Ayemenem and looks for jobs in anonymous places. Eventually, she manages to get a job, but she cannot continue in any job because of her illness. She lost her latest job, a receptionist in a cheap hotel, as she had been ill for many days. She is now tired, exhausted, sick, and defeated by society. In such a state, she goes to Bharat Lodge for a job interview for the post of secretary and dies in a filthy room of the house. It is an ignoble death. She dies away from her family and children with all her agonies and humiliations. The church also refuses to give her a burial. She is, therefore, like a pariah cremated in electric cremation: "Nobody except beggars, derelicts, and the police custody dead were cremated there.

### **Rahel and Larry McCaslin**

Rahel, the daughter of Ammu, is one of the novel's protagonists, and most of the story's events are told through her viewpoint, both as a child and as an adult. Being separated from her twin brother Estha, she moved from school to school and changed jobs frequently after the death of her mother. Finally, she met Larry McCaslin, an American research scholar, at a Delhi college while pursuing her architecture degree. She married him on a whim and moved to The United States. However, their marriage did not last long as Rahel could not emotionally connect to her husband, especially when they made love. When Larry felt like she was not paying attention to their relationship, he felt disconnected from Rahel and decided to divorce her. Once their marriage fell apart, Rahel worked many jobs in the US and moved back to Ayemenem to see her brother.

Although Rahel loved and married Larry, she could not continue the relationship since she had many bitter experiences with love. As a child, she saw the brutal fate of her mother's passion for both her father and Velutha. As a drunkard, her father used to beat her mother and wanted her to sleep with his boss for his promotion. She also witnessed the grave defamation her mother bore from her family, society, and local police administration for her love for Velutha. The betrayals of her mother's family also primarily scarred her. All these acetous events used to haunt her and set her back from connecting with someone. This is the same feeling for which she could not connect with her husband Larry, which resulted in a divorce. This is a psychological problem which she could not overcome. Therefore, to feel close to someone, she commits incest with her brother in a crescendo of horror and grief at the end of the novel.

### **Baby Kochamma and Father Mulligan:**

Baby Kochamma's family name is Navomi Ipe, although she is not a baby. She carries the title of Kochamma, a humble, eminent, and dignified woman. However, she appears opposite to what her name means. In the story, she is Ammu's aunt and Rahel's grandmother. When she was a girl, Baby Kochamma was infatuated with Father Mulligan, an impressive and aristocratic Irish monk who used to visit her father, Rev. E. John Ipe, every weekend. She tried to fascinate and flirt with him by pretending to discuss different issues in the Bible. She also converted to Roman Catholicism and joined a nunnery to remain close to him when he shifted to Madras. However, when she



realized that he was not paying any attention to her love for him, she left the nunnery, decided to live her life with his memory, and remained unmarried throughout her life.

When she grew older, she locked herself within the four walls of Ayemenem's house, which largely affected her health. She spent most of her time alone watching television. The life of Baby Kochamma is a tale told by an idiot, complete with sound and fury, signifying nothing (Shakespeare, 1977, p. 219). Thus, Babby Kochamma renounces the materialistic world and upholds the values of the traditional family setup. According to Roy, she has been living her life backward. She abandoned the material world at a very early stage of her life. It also seems she has cuddled and hugged such a deserted life with no charm, beauty, or joy in her old age (Roy, 1997, p. 22). As a result, she has become a selfish, self-centered, snippy, and just downright mean woman who takes pleasure in tormenting and plotting against Ammu and Velutha, just like a masochist.

### **Chako and Margaret:**

The narrator recounts the relationship between Chacko and Margaret Kochamma, detailing how they met when Margaret worked as a waitress in London. Initially appearing as a disheveled intellectual, Chacko caught Margaret's attention with a joke, and they started dating. Margaret felt a sense of personal growth and mistakenly attributed it to her love for Chacko. Chacko admired Margaret's English independence and rarely spoke about his background, finding it insignificant compared to hers. Despite objections from Margaret's family, they got married. Even Chako didn't disclose his love for Margaret and their marriage to his family. However, financial difficulties arose soon after their marriage and Chacko's physical appearance changed dramatically. Margaret eventually found solace in Joe, leading to their divorce. Heartbroken, Chacko returned to India to teach at a college.

### **Conclusion:**

The research study has examined the cross-cultural relationships between Ammu and Babu, Ammu and Velutha, Rahel and Larry, Baby Kochamma and Father Mulligan, and Chako and Margaret. No substantial development of the relationship among these characters has been found. Instead, all the relationships ended in frustration, despair, and humiliation, which affected the characters' physical and psychological health and fitness. The marriage between Ammu and Babu ended in divorce, preceded by physical and sexual assault. Her relationship with Velutha brought her utter illness, leading to her death. Baby Kochamma is leading a life of seclusion with all evil spirits like a psychological and imprisoned patient. On the other hand, Rahel ended her relationship with Larry McCaslin, unable to connect herself with him. She also lost her sense of whom to love and connect with and committed incest with her twin brother Estha. The fate of all relationships proves the narrator's comment that self-transplantation is an unmixable mix.





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