愛與創傷—阿蘭達蒂·洛伊的《微物之神》

Love and Trauma: Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy’s debut novel *The God of Small Things*, set in a small village called Ayemenem in the southwestern India state of Kerala, where Roy was raised, tells a story of the Ipe family. Nestled inside the centre of the family chronicle spanning from the country’s colonial period to its independent present is a heartbreaking tragedy resulted from a profane romance involving a transgression of the Love Laws that takes the reader’s breath away. Love Laws, an oxymoronic term Roy creates for her novel, points toward the cultural basis upon which Indian society addresses its traditional and strict control of caste segregation and sexual discrimination. In the cross-border tension caused by the conflict between human desire and Indian socio-political constructs that suppress individual liberty Roy does not only depict the social reality in India but also proposes a scathing critique of the multilayer social restraints on Indians’ bodies and minds. Individual bodies attached to the culture, first of all, are the vehicles of various cultural signs that allotted according to the caste difference and gender asymmetry; at the same time, bodies are the specific location where the infliction of society’s power to discipline and to punish takes place. Body contact that pursues forbidden love as relief from the social oppressions leads to the ultimate penalty, death, which can destroy the body and also scar the witness’s mind. Focusing on two innocent children’s difficulty in piecing the memory fragments together to come up with a belated response to the tragedy and their melancholy fixation about the lost beloved, Roy tries to reveal the lingering effect of trauma and the symbolic death happening to the victims who can’t work through the trauma but trapped by it instead. Roy deliberately provides the novel a traumatic structure consisted of aesthetic poetics, sensual narratives, ungrammatical phrases, repeated images, fragmental passages, etc., to convey a literary experience of trauma to the reader as if they are dealing with trauma when reading the novel. Through discussing the Love Laws from a historical perspective, Roy purposes to suggest that the major trauma
in *The God of Small Things* doesn’t belong to a particular age or place. All Indians in the past, the present and the coming future share the same trauma because the Love Laws have already been a significant part of Indian culture and the practice of Love Laws will continue to traumatize Indian people from generation to generation. Besides tackling the Love Laws as the cause of Indians’ national trauma by presenting the oppression of laws, the novel also offers a remarkable point of view to discuss the cruel nature of love when love is employed as a conditional reward for the obedient in the rhetoric to command, to regulate, to threaten, to bargain, and to inspire loyalty. People’s unceasing desire to win and to give love, against our common belief in love’s sublime value, may bring about hurt, pain, fear, jealousy, mistrust, quarrels, etc., all of which can make a deep cut in any human relation or even cause more serious destruction what is generally considered as the consequence of the exercise of the power of law in its tug of war with love.
中文摘要

阿蘭達蒂·洛伊的處女作《微物之神》以作者的故鄉阿耶門連，一個位於印度南部喀拉拉省的小鎮為背景，述說一段發生在當地伊培家族中的故事。這段橫跨殖民歷史到獨立年代的家族史有一個核心，那是一齣導因於禁忌之戀的悲劇，其中牽涉了對「愛的法典」的逾越，深深地攝人心魂。洛伊特別在小說中創造出「愛的法典」這個名詞來指稱印度社會架構其傳統上在種姓隔離和性別差異上均嚴格管控的文化底石。在私慾衝撞印度社會政治的張力中，洛伊不單描繪出印度的社會現實面，同時也提出了針對印度人民在生理與心理上承受重重束縛的嚴厲批評。個人的肉體歸屬文化，首先是根據階級、性別差異給予不同文化符碼的運載體，同時也是社會展現規訓與懲罰力量的場所。追求禁忌之戀以圖解脫的肉體接觸將招致終極懲罰——死亡，死亡毀滅肉體，也重創了目擊者的心靈。洛伊藉著描寫兩名稚童苦於撿拾記憶的零散片段去拼湊出一個對那齣悲劇該有卻遲來的回應，以及他們對於亡故友人的冥頑愁思來揭示創傷的餘波蕩漾，還有一旦創傷受害者不得治癒反身陷其中所要遭逢的象徵性死亡。洛伊特意賦予小說富含美學詩意、感官記述、不合文法的語句、重複意象、斷簡殘篇的創傷論述結構來營造創傷的文學經驗，讓讀者在閱讀的同時就能感同身受。洛伊從歷史的角度去討論「愛的法典」，意圖暗示《微物之神》中最重大的創傷並非發生在特定年代或地點的個案，所有由古到今乃至未來的印度人民都有著同樣的傷痛。 「愛的法典」早已深嵌進印度文化成爲重要的一部份，並且持續地重創一代又一代的印度人。書中除了呈現「愛的法典」為印度民族創傷之源始的壓迫景況，更提出了探討愛之殘酷本質的特殊觀點。在以愛為名去命令、管理、恫嚇、協議、激發忠誠性的言語中，愛被當成一項有條件賜給順從者的獎賞。在一般的認知裡，愛有著崇高的價值。但是，人們對愛的取捨懷有永不止休的慾望卻可能引發傷害、痛楚、恐懼、妒忌、猜疑、爭吵……等等足以撕裂人際關係的產物，甚至造成通常是法律在和愛的拔河中施展權力才會造成的破壞性結果。
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Introduction

The Author

The biography of Arundhati Roy in itself is an engrossing story. Born in Shillong, Meghalaya, India on November 24, 1961, Roy was the second child in the family of Rajib, a tea plantation manager, and Mary Roy. They divorced when Roy was just a toddler. Mary, as a liberal activist, founded an experiment school Roy attended “as a guinea pig” (qtd. in Fields-Meyer and Fernandez 108) in her childhood spent in Kerala, Roy says jokingly in an interview. In Kerala, Roy spent lots of time playing with her brother Lalith in her grandmother’s pickle factory. Leaving home for Delhi as a teen at 16, Roy enrolled in the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi, where she met her first husband, the architect Gerard Da Cunha. After leaving the school without a degree in 1981, she saw her life veering to an unexpected direction. “[S]he turned her back on the drafting table to become a baker, selling chocolate cakes to tourists in her native India. Then came stints as a government researcher, an actress, a movie-set designer and an aerobics teacher,” according to Fields-Meyer and Fernandez (107). When Roy worked as a researcher at India’s Institute of Urban Affairs in 1984, she met Pradip Krishen, a divorced father having two grown-up daughters and now her husband, who asked her to star in his film. Because of the marriage the couple became career collaborators to each other. Roy wrote several screenplays that Krishen directed.

What really makes Roy a global celebrity is her literary success in her first and only work of fiction, *The God of Small Things*. No second novel followed. Roy made a startling shift from a celebrated novelist to an embattled activist. As Joy Press describes, “[h]er stinging essays critiquing American actions in Afghanistan have been circulating all over the U.S. by e-mail” (58). Roy, with her glossy black locks shorn to the skull as a notable gesture of the progressive spirit she succeeded from her mother, dedicates herself to
the current international political issues concerning globalization, capitalization, post-colonization, etc. With the publication of *The Cost of Living* (1999), *Power Politics* (2001), *War Talk* (2003) and her most recent release *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* (2004) Roy expresses her opinions passionately and infectiously. She “writes and acts like someone with nothing left to lose” (Press 58). Though Roy recognizes that there is a lot of hostility towards her controversial acts, her participation in the anti-dam movement in India for example, she shows no aptness to compromise or to be quiet. Instead, she boldly declares that “[t]he only thing worth globalizing is dissent” (qtd. in Mullaney 14). So saying, Roy dismisses the unfavorable or hostile criticism pointing towards her with a single blow. She appreciates dissent, but never yields to any dissenting opinion, and always dares to express her own.

**The Novel, The God of Small Things**

No doubt the tremendous success of *The God of Small Things* marks a momentous turn in Arundhati Roy’s life. Right before the composition of the novel, she was a screenplay writer struggling with a TV series about Indian’s nationalist movement. It was quite unexpected that the sponsor company of the project went bankrupt halfway. Roy sensed that she needed a change and she was ready for it. Roy said, “I wanted to do something alone, without the endless negotiation that cinema involves” (qtd. in Fields-Meyer and Fernandez 108). Moving to an isolated mountainside home in central India, she let her free-ranging imagination go free to make her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, possible. For Roy, a full-time literary writer sitting at the computer for five hours each morning for four and a half years at that time, the creation of the novel was an unusual experience and a revolutionary experiment. Trained as an architect, “she structured her book more like a building than a narrative” (Fields-Meyer and Fernandez 108). Roy says, “It is almost frightening to invest almost five years in something when you don’t know what the outcome
is going to be” (qtd. in Fields-Meyer and Fernandez 107). The uncertainty she worried about proved to be redundant when the novel came out in May, 1997. The novel, released in 29 countries, quickly became an international bestseller and sold several million copies. Masses of praise from the critics and readers flew in. Roy had even been compared with William Faulkner and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Roy, as Press introduces her, “herself seemed like a ready-baked literary icon: an articulate 36-year-old woman with a delicate face and glossy locks who spoke fragrant accent English and expressed feisty opinions” (58). And in October the same year, *The God of Small Things* won the Booker Prize. The money she gained from the award, around 30,000 US. Dollars, was donated to one of the largest grassroots organizations in India, Narmada Bachao Andolan.

**The Story**

Set in a small village called Ayemenem in the southwestern India state of Kerala, where Roy was raised, *The God of Small Things* tells a story about the turmoil within a local, feudal family, the Ipe family, that resulted in its decline and eventual disintegration. Elder generations in the Ipe family used to take great pride in its family history in which there was the glory of the Patriarch’s blessing given to Reverend E. John Ipe as a little boy. Since that, John Ipe, who became a Syrian Christian priest, had been well known as “Punyvan Kunju—Little Blessed One” (23), and the family established its reputation and significance in Ayemenem. John Ipe’s daughter Baby Kochamma, having a crush on her father’s good friend, Father Mulligan, in her teenage, entered a convent in hopes of being close to him. The one-sided infatuation received no feedback. Baby Kochamma returned to the family.

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1 According to the Wikipedia, Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) or Save Narmada Movement in English is “a non governmental organisation (NGO) that mobilised tribal people, *adivasis*, farmers, environmentalists and human rights activists against the Sardar Sarovar Dam being built across the Narmada river, Gujarat, India. It originally focused on the environmental issues related to trees that would be submerged under the dam water. Recently it has re-focused with the aim to enable the poor citizens especially the oustees to get the full rehabilitation facilities from the government.” See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narmada_Bachao_Andolan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narmada_Bachao_Andolan).

2 All references to *The God of Small Things* in this thesis will be to the Harper Perennial’s 1998 edition. Page numbers will be given parenthetically.
and lived on the lasting memory of the unrequited love throughout her life. Pappachi, Baby Kochamma’s brother, moving to Ayemenem after his retirement from the respected job as “an Imperial Entomologist” during the colonial period and a “Joint Director, Entomology” (47-48) after Indian’s independence, was burning with fury at the fact that the new specie of moth he discovered twelve years ago was named after someone else. Seeking outlets for his ill-humor, Pappachi inflicted domestic violence upon his wife Mammachi and daughter Ammu; meanwhile, his patriarchal authority and sense of superiority were challenged by Mammachi’s thriving pickle career. Chacko, his only son, was sent to Oxford, where he became a self-conceited “Rhodes Scholar” (232) and then married a café waitress called Margaret. Soon after the birth of their daughter Sophie Mol they divorced. Margaret Kochamma had her second marriage with Joe, the man she met when she was pregnant. Chacko, a single man without a job, a home and money in England, returned to Ayemenem to take over his mother’s profitable pickles factory. However, his management of the business turned out to be a failure that he refused to admit. His sister Ammu, a witness and also a victim suffering Pappachi’s domestic violence and persistent neglect, married a Calcutta man working in a tea estate in haste in order to flee from “her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother” (38). Unfortunately, she found that her husband was “a full-blown alcoholic” (40) who was going to offer his wife to the English manager, Mr. Hollick, in exchange for his job. Ammu left and returned to Ayemenem with her seven-year-old twins, Estha and Rahel. There in Ayemenem she fell in love with an untouchable worker named Velutha, the son of Vellya Paapan. Estha and Rahel loved Velutha, too. They visited him during the day, whereas their mother visited him at night in secret. Margaret Kochamma and Sohpie Mol made a visit to Ayemenem as a healing tour after Joe died in a car accident. The Ipe family presented a showy welcome-home reception. In this occasion, the twins found that Sohpie Mol drew the family attention away from them, and they began to have the doubt about Ammu’s love for them. They left the house to test Ammu’s love. Sophie Mol,
who insisted on going with them as an expression of her friendship with them, drowned as they tried to cross the Meenachal River. In the meantime, Vellya Pappen came to the Ayemenem house to report his son’s illicit love affair with Ammu. Baby Kochamma took advantage of Mammchi’s fury at Ammu’s violation of the traditional social norm—the Love Laws—and Chacko’s grief for Sophie Mol’s death to portray Ammu as the person to blame and be responsible for what had happened. After Baby Kochamma and Inspector Thomas Mathew teamed up to charge Velutha with abduction to justify the violent arrest putting him to death, Ammu was expelled and died afterwards, alone in a hotel room. Estha was sent to his father in Calcutta. He waited quietly to be re-returned to Ayemenem after twenty-three years. Rahel, exhibiting discipline problems in her teenage school years, won admission into a mediocre college of architecture in Delhi, where she met her future husband Larry McCaslin. They married and moved to Boston. The marriage soon broke apart. She returned home to Ayemenem. Finally, the twins reunited after their lengthy separation.

The Nation, India

Known as a member of BRICs, today’s India is commonly referred to as one of the economically biggest and strongest markets in the world. Though India seems to be united, democratic, well-off, and promising in many ways, it is still “the land of diversities par excellence” (Ram xi). The rapid growth of national economy, like a blinding flash of light, has made the unsolved social and cultural complexities, inconsistency and contractions within the country more invisible and obscure, and more aching to Roy:

What is true is that India is an artificial State—a State that was created by a government, not a people. A State created from the top down, not the bottom up.

The majority of India’s citizens will not (to this day) be able to identify her

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3 BRICs is the abbreviated term used to refer to the combination of Brazil, Russian, Indian, and China, four economically emerging markets nowadays.
boundaries on a map, or say which language is spoken where or which god is worshiped in what region. Most are too poor and too uneducated to have even an elementary idea of the extent and complexity of their own country. The impoverished, illiterate agrarian majority have no stake in the State. (Roy xxv)

For Roy, India as a nation in unity is barely an illusion. “Indian is, at best, a noisy slogan that comes around during the election,” so says Roy (xxvi). Most Indians, especially those from the underclass, have never developed a true sense of nation. The fact is that Indians are organized, not by any patriotic articulation or democratic discourse, but by a stratified and hierarchical socio-economic categorization of people that has been in use for thousands of years, that is, the caste system. The Indian caste system has never been a fairy tale. It is a fact of life at all times. It is an Indian way of looking at things, dealing with life and interacting with people. It helps to keep a sense of order and peace among people. Still today the values of the caste system are held strongly in this emerging modern country. Many Indians have to endure different kinds of suffering in their lives, such as the exploitation, discrimination, marginalization, humiliation, etc., all of which are tactically justified and rationalized in the name of caste tradition.

The Caste System

In one interview, Roy openly expresses her anxiety for her homeland, “India lives in several centuries at once” (qtd. in Bumiller C9). Although India is economically speeding up to win its title as a real developed country, it remains impotent in its dealings with many horrifying customs and ill inveteracy that are still so prevalent in its territory. For Roy, the problem of caste in India is such a plain and remarkable example. Caste as a cultural brand has structured the Indian society into what it was in the ancient times and what it still is today. In some large cities, caste barriers are largely broken down as the modernization there grants the citizens much more exposure to the air of freedom. However, the fastidiousness about
the caste and the loyalty paid to one’s caste are much difficult to eliminate, particularly in rural areas. Caste still provides a sense of community and belonging.

Traditionally, there are four major caste divisions in the Indian caste system: Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras. Caste roles are passed from the father to his children. One’s birth defines everything, including one’s marriage and occupation. Brahmins, the highest rank, which literally denotes spiritual guidance or source of knowledge, include those who are priests, teachers or lawyers. Ksatriyas work as the ruler, the warrior or the landowner, in short, the nobility. Vaisyas take on the tasks of mercantery and agriculture. Sudras are the manual and agricultural laborers, artisans, masons, etc. The four castes are classified according to one’s function, occupation and economic place in the society. Inter-caste marriage is generally not recognized, or customarily banned to keep a caste ritually clean.

Outside the main caste levels live the Outcastes, also known as the Untouchables. They are recognized as the most lowly, impure and poor group of people, who make their living by scavenging, cleaning up human and animal wastes, dealing with dead bodies, killing or hunting animals for food, tanning in leather. Untouchables, as Roy compares them to the “Pariah kites” (210) that live on the perishing animal innards in The God of Small Things, work in unclean materials. Those professions, according to Hinduism, involve too much pollution. Though in the present-day India, Untouchability has been officially abolished by the law since the constitution of India in its preamble advocates justice, liberty, equality and fraternity shared among its entire people, the status of the Untouchables has very little improvement. Most of them live the way of their untouchable forefathers, having no opportunity to get rid of their inherited stigma and impoverishment.

**The Casted Body**

As Robin Jeffrey notes in his observation on the Indian society, “[t]o maintain [caste]
system, people have to be recognisable” (20). Human body in the Indian caste system, as Robin Jeffery suggests, bears the regulations of caste and displays the mark of one’s caste identity. The body is physically and symbolically casted. It is not a personal possession, but the vehicle of cultural metaphor. First, there is an expectation in India that higher caste people will have lighter skin while the lower-caste people are dark skinned. Besides, there is a difference in the choice of fitting apparel for the body. “[People’s] costumes and styles of dress had to announce who they were,” says Jeffrey (20). A European missionary in 1887 wrote, “Anyone after living a little while in the country can at first glance tell to what caste a stranger belongs by the way he or she wears the hair or their garments” (qtd. in Jeffrey 20). The subtleties of hairstyles and accessories ensure that one’s caste identity can be distinguished and recognized even at a quick glance. The physical appearance “represent[s] daily affirmation of the superiority of certain groups and the inferiority of others” (Jeffrey 20).

Regulations or constraints of the caste system rule the surface of the body and decide different clothing for people in different social layers. More than that, one’s physical activity is limited by one’s caste, too. There are “boundaries on where particular people might go; constraints on what they might do” (Jeffrey 19). People of different castes don’t work, eat or walk together. As Anupama Rao suggests, caste had better to

be understood as a form of *embodiment*, i.e., as the means through which the body as a form of “bare life” or a mere biological surface is rendered expressive and meaningful. Caste ideologies draw on biological metaphors of stigma and defilement to enable differentiated conceptions of personhood, and to render the body a culturally legible surface. (5)

In *The God of Small Things*, the concept of spatial segregation is conveyed straightforwardly in the scene when Kochu Maria kept Vellya Paapen waiting outside the Ayemenem house, “on the topmost step, almost inside the her Touchable kitchen” (241). Vellya Pappen was
prohibited from going into the places where the hosts did not welcome the other castes, especially the untouchables. A further extension of the concept of spatial segregation renders a great deal of regulations regarding physical contact, and therefore imposes a stigma on the untouchables’ bodies. Pushed by Mammachi, Velleya Pappen “was taken completely by surprise” when he “stumbled backwards down the kitchen steps and lay sprawled in the wet mud” (243) in the downpour. “Part of the taboo of being an untouchable was expecting not to be touched,” Roy writes (243). The taboo, most significantly, implies the premier and also the elementary emphasis on caste purity. As Anupama Rao elaborates, “[t]aboo regarding touch--ritual sanctioning of practices such as spatial segregation and taboos about physical contact--operate along the axes of purity and pollution that manage bodies and physical space” (5-6).

**The Curse on Indian Women**

What the caste system involves is a kind of body politics. Symbolic regulations concerning the caste difference and the forms and the degree of intimacy imprint on the human body. As a consequence, human bodies are more than “biological bodies,” but rather “metaphorical collectivities” (Rao 6). Most importantly, caste, as Rao argues, “is an apparatus that regulates sexuality” (6). “Such ideologies are embedded in material forms of dispossession that are also always forms of symbolic dispossession,” Rao elaborates, “and they are mediated by the regulation of sexuality and gender identity through the rules of kinship and caste purity” (6). Sexuality and the concern about caste purity are closely linked together, and the complex relationship between gender and caste, without doubt, becomes the cause of the domination and oppression of the female bodies because of women’s natural ability of giving birth. “In contrast to the tenuous and fleeting role of man in the process of procreation,” as Leela Dube points out, “a woman’s role is long drawn and entails an involvement which is beyond extrication” (233). Women’s role as a mother is
crucial for “maintaining and, to some extent, changing caste” (Dube 223). Caste, based on the principle of patrilineal descent, places emphasis on the purity of the mother, and by articulating the difference between male and female bodies in respect of procreation, constitutes and produces its control over women’s sexuality and marriage. It is expectable that the culturally and socially coded management of the Indian women’s sexuality “constitute[s] a central arena in which caste impinges on women’s lives” (Dube 233). Women, in some critics’ ethical considerations, “are objectified and become instruments in […] the structures and processes implicated in the reproduction of caste” (Dube 223). Their unalterable and inflexible duty of maintaining the caste, unfortunately, becomes a curse.

Acting on the premise that the gender purity of women, especially the upper-caste women, guarantees a caste against the pollution from the without, Indians operate a scheme of caste principles of sexual asymmetry to discipline womanhood, to restrain women’s sexual desires and to arrange marriages for them. Indian women, as compared with men, are a disadvantaged group that is dispossessed of the right to choose the spouse, and is often silent on the issue of arranged marriage.4 Since her virginity is inextricably bound up with the hierarchies and boundaries of caste, a woman is expected to devote herself to marriage only once in her lifetime, that is, her “primary marriage”: “A primary marriage connotes the marriage with full rites of a virgin with a man from an appropriate caste group. A woman goes through such a marriage only once in her life” (Dube 236). On the other hand, as Dube observes, the cultural perception of sexual asymmetry allows loose management of man’s sexuality: “For a man, […] there are no restrictions on the number of times he can marry with full rites as long as the bride has not married before” (237). However, men and women all

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4 Marriage arranged by the parents is so common in India that less than 10 percent of the weddings there in the present India are love marriages. Arranged marriage that receives the support and blessings from both sides of the groom and brides’ parents and relatives is believed to be a happy and perfect union. The divorce rate in India is rather low, less than 2 percent. Refer to the web pages for the statistics, [www.geocities.com/Wellesley/3321/win4a.htm](http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/3321/win4a.htm) and [www.divorcerate.org/divorce-rate-in-india.html](http://www.divorcerate.org/divorce-rate-in-india.html).
comply with the rule that prohibits inter-caste unions. Inter-caste unions incur degradation to one caste, and the offspring of inter-caste marriages are supposed to be rendered a social status inferior to the children born to the eligible unions.

**The Love Laws**

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy introduces to her reader the caste regulation of sexuality in the Indian society, which was referred to as The Love Laws, the oxymoronic term Roy ingeniously creates for the novel, with her close observation and sharp criticism on how the tradition disciplines people’s bodies, suppresses their individual desires, and traumatizes the rebellious hearts throbbing at the terrific punishment brought by “[t]he laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much” (33). Basically, the Love Laws that points toward the cultural basis upon which Indian society addresses its traditional and strict control of caste segregation and sexual discrimination is a form of power. In the novel, the characters had perceived, more or less, a suffocating atmosphere because the power of the Love Laws, like many other forms of power, was external or alien to its object. As Judith Butler contends that “[w]e are used to thinking or power as what presses on the subject from the outside” (2). A feeling of being dominated was provoked, and the tension that grew when the characters found contradictions between the ruler, the Love Laws, and themselves made the experience of subordination become more and more agonizing for them. However, as Judith Butler has contended in *The Psychic Life of Power*, it is really paradoxical that “what ‘one’ is, one’s very formation as a subject, is in some sense dependent upon that very power is quite another” (1-2). The power that is generally identified as the source of repression, coercion, and regulation pressing from the outside is internalized without a subject’s awareness, assimilated to be a part of the subject, and eventually “become essential to the formation, persistence, and continuity of the subject” (Butler 3). Power, after all, is not absolutely negative and contradictory for the subject. Following Butler’s Foucauldian
view, we should understand power as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are. … [P]ower imposes itself on us, and, weakened by its force, we come to internalize or accept its terms…. [T]he “we who accept such terms are fundamentally dependent on those terms for “our” existence. (Butler 2)

Then, the condition of being subject to a power signifies a process of becoming a subject. So unusual it is that the subject’s self-identity is formed by power, in the pain of submission.

As a form of power, the Love Laws, in Butler’s sense, “first [appear] as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination” (3). Most characters in the novel, like many Indians that Roy has observed in the real world, were truly submissive to the customary practice of caste and sexual regulations. Yet, there are still characters, Ammu and Velutha for example, who once tried to be submissive, but finally failed in holding back their dissatisfaction and anger to which the submissive group responded with “outrage” (45) as well. As the narrator utters, all the emotional reactions to the Love Laws, such as the dissatisfaction and anger, are ambivalent in a way because it is the Love Laws, “[t]he laws that make grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam, the jelly jelly” (31), grants them a meaningful position and constitutes the very condition for their living or existence. What they hated so much, sarcastically enough, is what they had to count on. Without being noticed, a process of the internalization and reproduction of the Love Laws proceeded.

**The Indian Motherhood**

In her extensive and detailed description of the interactions between Ammu and her
twins, Roy seems to point out that motherhood as a site of cultural bearing is exactly where
the content of the Love Laws was conveyed to the following generations. Motherhood, both
in the novel and in the real life, carries the public expectation that a mother in her
motherhood bears the pedagogic responsibility to pass down the cultural legacy.
Motherhood is not just an institution of child nurturance and rearing, but also plays a
significant role in the preservation of culture. Mothers are supposed to teach the children
what their mothers had taught them before. Ammu, as an Indian mother, was well aware
that she had to give her children a lesson on the deep-rooted ideology in regard to the caste
and sexual differences in the Indian society. In the airport scene in which Ammu reproached
Rahel for hiding herself behind “the dirty airport curtain” (139), she consciously fulfilled the
maternal obligation.

“And the other thing, Rahel,” Ammu said, “I think it’s high time that you
learned the difference between CLEAN and DIRTY. Especially in this country.”

……...

“Your dress is--was--CLEAN,” Ammu said. “That curtain is DIRTY.
Those Kangaroos are DIRTY. Your hands are DIRTY.”

Rahel was frightened by the way Ammu said CLEAN and DIRTY so loudly.

As though she was talking to a deaf person. (142)

Ammu raised volume to ensure that Rahel would catch the message in her speaking and not
do the same thing again that would bring her the shame of being an incompetent mother.

Indian mothers’ duty to instill respect and deference to the caste system and their
eagerness to see their children behave in conformity with the cultural doctrines, to a
considerable degree, complicate maternal love. Maternal love can no longer be discussed
simply as a natural drive on the level of humanity. As Roy tries to suggest in her depiction
of Ammu’s severe attitude towards raising her children, Indian maternal love has to be harsh,
domineering and disciplinary sometimes so that the mother can train her child to be obedient
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and loyal, first to the parents and the family, and then to the community and society. The cultivation of obedience as a focus in child rearing has transmuted the mother-child relation in the motherhood into another hierarchy within the hierarchy of caste. Maternal love can’t remain just as a self-sacrificing and ever-forgiving affection. It appears to be a family politics that aims to manage, discipline and manipulate the children’s behaviors with its rhetoric used to extract their obedience to the concept concerning caste segregation and gender purity at their early age. The seven-year old twin characters, Estha and Rahel, in the novel were too young to fully comprehend the meaning of Ammu’s severe reprimand by which she inculcated in them the essence of Indian caste system. The children’s innocent hearts hurt by their mother’s harsh words suffered the persistent anxiety about losing her love. Rahel in particular could not stop thinking whether Ammu loved her less. The unsaid soliloquy repeating in her mind, “A little less her Ammu loved her” (107), harassed and haunted her day and night.

It is ironic that Ammu, who was always so earnest in correcting her children’s misbehaviors lest they should violate the CLEAN-DIRTY regulation in the caste system, found there was a contradiction within herself for she could not put what she had taught them into practice. She was actually doing what she had forbidden her children to do and what the Love Laws strictly forbade her to do, that is, falling in love with an untouchable. In Ammu’s secret love affair, Roy on one hand points out the universal problem that one’s deeds are usually out of accord with his or her words, and on the other hand Roy dramatizes the inhumanity of the caste system in which there is a perpetual conflict between one’s wish and the social codes that keep one away from what he or she wants.

The Conflict

Ammu was a victim in this kind of conflict. As an upper-caste woman in the novel who had faced “[t]he ‘softer’ forms of gendered domination” that “were no less oppressive
than the expropriation of manual and sexual labour experienced by lover-caste women” (Rao 17) in Pappachi’s domestic violence, Mammachi’s preference for the son Chacko, her female relatives’ disdain for her divorcee identity, she was so discontent with the sexual oppression supported by the Love Laws. Embraced by “multiple patriarchies” (Rao 27) and tormented by them, she became an angry woman in whom there was an “Unsafe Edge” (44). “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). She was propagating and promoting the philosophy of the Love Laws in her motherhood in the day time while she indulged herself in her secret love to unleash her anger in the night. The love affair embellished with a great deal of pornography in which the lovers vehemently communicated their anger at the social inequity with their bodies is itself a political gesture of resistance. The body contact Ammu has with an untouchable body allows her to temporarily shed her burden of chastity and caste purity, while enabling her to declare ownership of her body. Also, at the moment of the moonlight date, she could temporarily indulge herself in the delusion that she was the master, the god of her own life, the life filled with small, ordinary and trivial things.

Ammu and Velutha were instinctively “stuck to the Small Things” (320) in their daily lives, as if they were hoping that by doing so they could escape from the realm of the big things, in which people rationally discuss the issues regarding the country, the society, the human history, etc. The small things that fascinate the lovers “are the trivial diversions that the characters focus upon in order to avoid confronting the pain of the big things” (Kendall and Silva 61). However, as the narrator says, they were still caught by the big things because there was the trace of the big things everywhere in the small things of the everyday. “The Big Things ever lurked inside” (320). The Big Things were internalized, performed and mediated through the small things of the everyday, for instance, Ammu reprimanding her twins, Kochu Maria keeping Vellya Pappen waiting outside the kitchen, and Vellya Pappen
reporting her son’s relation to the Ipe family. Ammu and Velutha’s secret love affair ostensibly was a small thing between two individuals in their private lives, but the transgression of one of the big things in the Indian society, the Love Laws, lurked inside. The ensuing punishment afflicted on the lovers’ bodies transgressing the boundaries of the Love Laws, unfortunately, caused a trauma on the witnesses Estha and Rahel, who witnessed the brutal death of Velutha and the gradual decline towards the death of Ammu.

**Trauma**

Trauma has been generally described “as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (Caruth 1996, 3). As Freud, the forerunner of the trauma theory nowadays, points out in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the wound of the mind, unlike the wound of the body, can not be detected by the naked eyes, and therefore is hard to be healed or understood. Only through the inexplicably repeated nightmares or other behaviors the trauma victims suffered can the psychoanalyst trace the cause of trauma back to a catastrophic or overwhelming event that “is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth 1996, 4). A traumatic event that came too quickly when one was not prepared for it is not fully recognized or experienced at it occurrence. There was no instant response to the event due to the lack of preparedness that later results in the event’s lack of integration into consciousness. The traumatic history, which is not integrated but requests integration, has no way to go and return to the one who passed through it in an intrusive way, in a form of compulsive repetition “which seems to be entirely outside their wish or control” (Caruth 1996, 2). The “unwished-for repetition” (Caruth 1996, 2), which can also be termed as the traumatic symptom, constitutes the lingering effect of trauma. The shocking reality of the traumatic event returns to haunt its survivors in the symptomatic repetition, and the state of possession has made great harm to
the traumatic survivors’ health and lives.

In *The God of Small Things*, Estha and Rahel demonstrated the typical features of trauma. Roy carefully weaves her vivid and impressive descriptions of their traumatic repetitions into the text, and in the opening of the nineteenth chapter she straightforwardly reveals her attempt to unfold a story of trauma: “[Inspector Thomas Mathew] sensed the growing incoherence in the children. He noted the dilated pupils. He had seen it all before … the human mind’s escape valve. Its way of managing trauma” (297-98, emphasis added). Sitting in the police station, the twins was ignorant of the impact of the traumatic event that they didn’t “fully [graspe] in the first time” (Caruth 1996, 62), the violent death of Velutha. The impact didn’t lie in the shock and fright of the threat of death they were forced to see in Velutha’s dying body, but in their reencounter with the traumatic scene in their traumatic survival, in their belated responses to the accident which were actually symptomatic repetitions.

**Thesis Structure**

In the first chapter of this thesis, I endeavor to read *The God of Small Things* as a trauma narrative and focus on the characterization of the twin protagonists in which Roy develops her literary representation of trauma. In Roy’s description there is the most difficult part of traumatic survival, that is, the acting-out of trauma. The body tells and expresses what is unknown, inaccessible to the consciousness and what can’t be articulated by words but only through bodily performances. Estha in his recurring image and Rahel in her repeated nightmares re-experienced the traumatic past they shared but could not articulate because of “its very incomprehensibility” (Caruth 1995, 6). “What returns to haunt the victim,” according to Caruth, “is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known” (6). The incomprehensibility plus the inexpressibility of trauma results in Estha’s mutism. In his silence, Estha continued to
recapture the fragments of the traumatic event; meanwhile, he kept on reproaching himself for his complicity with the real persecutor. In fact, the novel suggests that the persecutor is not a specific character, but the very mechanism of the social disciplinary power that Roy names as the Love Laws.

In the following chapter, I intend to discuss how Roy presents the power of the Love Laws. The Love Laws set its basis upon the Indian caste system and, at the same time, aims to sustain the caste system. Within the caste hierarchies, there is a rigid sexual hierarchy. Women’s bodies are imprisoned and their sexuality is regulated against their own will to maintain the stability and purity of caste. The caste oppression survived the colonial British India and continues to torture its people even in today’s India. In the novel, to keep the Love Laws operating seems like a civic duty and public consensus. Thus, the kinship love between the parent and the child has to be subject to the Love Laws and makes necessary sacrifice. Any illicit love relationship, of course, must be cut off. In the tug of war between love and laws, the transgressing lovers, Ammu and Velutha, were brought to face their inexorable fates by the mortal force of social discipline that is substantially unjust and merciless in Roy’s point of view.

The final chapter is a rather ambitious piece. It deals with the two important love relationships in the novel at the same time, namely the mother-child bond between Ammu and her twins, and the romantic love affair between Ammu and Velutha. There in this chapter, I will add a new perspective to the thesis. From the perspective that suggests the aggressiveness and brutality of love, I will scrutinize Ammu’s maternal behaviors and argues that love and laws are not all the time distinct from each other. As Roy says in an interview that love sometimes emerges as a “brutal” (qtd. in Abraham 1998, 91) power, Ammu’s maternal love that bore the social expectation that a mother must imbue in the child the essence of the caste system had provoked in her children the feeling of being hurt because she was always so eager to correct Estha and Rahel’s childish doings and to see them feed back
with obedience. In the novel, maternal love in many occasions is not forgiving and gentle, 
but punitive and tough. It operates and functions like another form of laws. Ammu in her 
motherhood duplicated the Love Laws, but at the same time, she was resentful at the Love 
Laws. Her detestation at the Love Laws became the dynamics of her love with Velutha. It 
is regrettable that the secret love affair was found out at last. Although Roy at the end of the 
book seems to show a positive attitude with which she looks forwards to a possible tomorrow 
in which inter-caste romance will be tolerated and blessed, there is still an air of pessimism 
pervading the novel because of Velutha’s death.
Chapter One

Writing Trauma in The God of Small Things

What lies at the heart of The God of Small Things is the twin characters’ encounter with the loss of their loved ones. The family abandoned their mother Ammu, and then Ammu abandoned herself to a silent death in despair. Velutha, Ammu’s untouchable lover, was beaten to death not long after the exposure of their love affair. Estha and Rahel, bearing the witness of the couple’s tragedy, continued to be afflicted by the traumatic past throughout their lives. As the narrative jumps back and forth between the twins’ childhood and their present adulthood the reader perceives the long-lasting effect of trauma. Trauma, according to Cathy Caruth, is “not simply a problem of destruction, but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival” (24). Besides locating the very residence of trauma in the breath-taking scene of Velutha’s violent death, Roy in the novel turns to explore the baffling relation between trauma and survival by presenting the twins’ lifelong hard battle with the enigma of their traumatic survival. For Estha and Rahel, “those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that survival itself, in other words, can be a crisis” (Caruth 1995, 9). What makes the survival a crisis is the suffering of post-traumatic stress disorder, which Caruth defines concisely as

a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (1995, 4)

The characteristics of traumatic survival are found in Roy’s portrayal of the bizarre patterns of Estha and Rahel’s behaviors, which were disregarded by their family but carry outstanding significance for the critics and readers who are interested in the literary representation of
The twins’ unusual behaviors, although seemingly different in some details, embody the constellation of traumatic symptoms. Those pathological symptoms all point towards the trauma in this novel, which “is never assimilated or experienced fully at the time” it occurred, “but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (Caruth 1995, 4). The traumatic history returned, belatedly, insistently, and against Estha and Rahel’s will. The more they tried to repress it, the more they were grasped and possessed by it. The past made its intrusion into the twins’ lives over and over again in the form of repeated dreams, images, thoughts and behaviors to remind them of the traumatic event that seemed to be forgotten but actually inhabited them all the time. By reiterating, in fragmented passages and phrases that appear over and over again in the novel, the twins’ involuntary flashback to the traumatic event occurred at their age of seven, Roy reveals the lingering effect of trauma and the ordeal of traumatic survival.

Whenever Estha contemplated on the value of his survival the “memories of a broken man” (14) tiptoed into his brain: “[H]e carried inside him the memory … of a swollen face and a smashed, upside-down smile. Of a spreading pool of clear liquid with a bare bulb reflected in it. Of a bloodshot eye that had opened, wandered and then fixed its gaze on him” (32). Though so many years had passed by, the image of Velutha’s broken body was still fixed in Estha’s mind. As Caruth has asserted that “[t]o be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (1995, 4-5), the corpse image haunting Estha over the years confirmed his identity as a trauma victim. “The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life,” so writes Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (4). When Estha was brought to Velutha, a near-corpse lying like a “pumpkin with a monstrous upside-down smile” in a pool of blood and urine spreading from him on “the scummy, slippery floor,” he retched because of “[t]he smell of shit” (303) there. Velutha with his trampled body, at this moment, became the abject that Estha as a living being must “permanently thrust aside in order to live” (Kristeva 3). The act of retching or
vomiting had marked the border between life and death. Estha “[thrust himself] to the side” where the death was not and “turn[ed] [himself] away from defilement, sewage, and muck” (Kristeva 2). Confronting the near-corpse that violently upset his stomach, Estha carried out Baby Kochamma’s instruction to identify Velutha as an abductor. “Estha’s mouth said Yes” (303). He was forced to make the most painful choice in his lifetime: saving Ammu or Velutha? Velutha’s broken body right in front of him demonstrated the destructive power of death and stirred his feeling of disgust at defilement. He was clear that his mother Ammu’s fate would very likely be the same as Velutha’s. Without his complicity with Baby Kochamma and Inspector Thomas Mathew, Ammu would become another corpse. As Kristeva has asserted, “[t]he corpse, that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death” (3). To rescue Ammu from death and its contaminants that were going to engulf her, Estha was forced by the others and even himself to give the false testimony. “Yes, it was him” (32). These words, together with the image of Velutha’s dying body, constituted the core of Estha’s major trauma in the novel. The traumatic event during its occurrence was too overwhelming for Estha to “assimilate it to an established framework of understanding” (Levi 189) he already had at the age of seven. The inaccessibility of a cognitive and conscious knowledge about this traumatic experience and its reception persisted, through a period of latency, till the insistent return of the images, hallucinations and thoughts which were “absolutely true to the event” (Caruth 1995, 5) reconnected him to the horrible truth of the traumatic past in spite of fact that he was in another place and another time.

Estha, in a very significant way, was the witness who held the truth of the traumatic accident. “A witness,” notes Dori Laub, “is a witness to the truth of what happens during an event” (65). Velutha’s death was not a just treatment but a product of secret alliance of an angry family and the police. Estha’s dishonest testimony, “Yes, it was him” (32), completed the complicit identification perfectly as Baby Kochamma and the inspector wished. The
truth of the traumatic death of Velutha had been recorded in Estha’s memory, and for the rest
of his life he kept on condemning himself for his participation in putting Velutha to death.
In Estha’s case as in many other traumatized people’s, “the struggle to maintain the process of
recording and of salvaging and safeguarding evidence was carried on relentlessly” (Laub 68).
Like “the crematorium management” that “must have a system” (156) to take care of the
ashes, Estha had his own system of protecting the evidence related to this traumatic event.
In Roy’s portrayal of Estha, he was “the Keeper of Records” (156). His peculiar habit of
keeping anything that could be served as a historical trace of his life, such as “bus tickets,
bank receipts, cash memos, checkbook stubs” (156), apparently and directly reflected his
insistence on recollecting the remainders of his past. Among the evidence associated with
the truth of the event about Velutha’s death, the word “Yes” (32), because of its decisive
contribution in the flagrant collaboration between Baby Kochamma and the inspector to
declare Velutha a malicious criminal who deserved an ignoble death, was the one Estha
unconsciously preserved with the most effort, and it was the only evidence he owned.
“Hoovering didn’t seem to help. It was lodged there, deep inside some fold or furrow, like a
mango hair between molars. That couldn’t be worried loose” (32). Paradoxically enough,
Estha was passively possessed by the evidence while he actively put the evidence in his
safekeeping. The sound of “Yes, it was him”, merging with the sick sweet smell of blood and
the image of Velutha’s deformed face, became a serial of “terrible pictures in his head” (32)
visited him from time to time and imperiled his subjectivity.

Like many other trauma victims, Estha seems to have the manipulative power to manage
his memory components at will, yet the fact is that his autonomy, unknowingly, is taken over
by the objects he thinks he can control. Memories concerning the traumatic event “occupy
the psyche without being absorbed or assimilated compulsively return” (Di Prete 485). The
compulsive return of the traumatic scene and the voice “Yes, it was him” buried yet buzzing,
also the return of the “trauma of loss and guilt” (Di Prete 486) he experienced, is bestrewn
with some kind of specter or phantom quality. “The phantom’s periodic and compulsive return works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject’s own mental topography,” so suggests Nicolas Abraham (173). More significantly, as Di Prete extracts from Abraham’s definition of phantom, the uncanny “‘stranger’ or ‘foreign body,’” (485) haunting the trauma victim as a speaking other living within the traumatized self and producing words against the subject’s willingness in his language, is “making subjectivity heterogeneous” (Abraham 1994, 175).

As Laub points out in her research into the Holocaust witnesses’ attitudes towards their traumatic experiences that, “by never divulging their stories, they feel that the rest of the world will never come to know the real truth” (67), the traumatized survives not simply to salvage the historical evidence but also to tell their stories and have them listened. Though time goes by and ages the survivors, the traumatic scenes that they once witnessed don’t fade out of their memory. Overwhelming events of the past come back to haunt them in the forms of intrusive images, dreams, hallucination and thoughts, and awaken them to the need to meditate on the meaning of their traumatic survival, the roles they had played in the traumatic experiences and the responsibilities they have for easing the pain of the deceased and themselves. The “imperative to tell and to be heard” (Laub 63) emerges hence.

The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life. (Laub 63)

The struggle to tell is a life-consuming task. Through the telling and listening, the traumatized or survivor relives the traumatic event. The difference is that in the reenactment of traumatic event he is no more the helpless witness as he was in the past. This time, he is a conscious narrator of history. The act of telling, basically, is a required step during the
recovery from post-traumatic stress disorder because telling or narrating itself initiates the process of healing. The healing process of trauma “cannot take place until the trauma is brought to consciousness through narrative” (Berger 27). With the operation of narrating the trauma, a trauma victim can gradually remove himself from the shadow of pathological symptoms that was cast on his traumatic survival. Finally, the thing that he could never fully experience as it occurred is integrated into a part of his conscious understanding.

However, most traumatized always find themselves meet the very limit of expressivity when they try to put the inner compulsion to tell their stories into action. “There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory, and speech” (63), writes Laub. In her observation on the Holocaust survivors, many cases exhibit struggles with linguistic disability. They have little trust in the language they use. It seems that no adequate diction and statement is available for them to tell the things that they really want to express. Even a skillful speaker has his tongue tied when he endeavors to talk to the psychoanalyst about the kidnapping that traumatized him in his childhood. Such linguistic obstacle may depress the trauma survivor to a certain degree, and he gives up the attempt to tell and to be heard. The imperative to tell is repressed, ignored, and the traumatic truth remains buried. Like many other scholars, Laub shows grave concern for this phenomenon because the impossibility of telling can lead to a commonly prevailing silence about the traumatic truth, especially the truth of some significant historical event such as the Holocaust. Any breakthrough in the treatment of traumatic mutism helps to construct a more complete, reliable and authentic version of human history or personal chronicle. Moreover, by getting rid of the pathological silence stemming from the impossibility to tell, the survivor acquires a healthier and easier life within which he values and gives a positive judgment on his traumatic survival.

On the contrary, what the reader sees in *The God of Small Things* is how chronic silence
depraves a young witness’s quality of life after a traumatic event. “Estha had always been a quiet child, so no one could pinpoint with any degree of accuracy exactly when [...] he had stopped talking. Stop talking altogether, that is. The fact is that there wasn’t an ‘exactly when.’ It had been a gradual winding down and closing shop. A barely noticeable quietening. As though he had simply run out of conversation and had nothing left to say” (12). Silence about the trauma in Estha’s situation was so stubborn that it had developed into a permanent loss of language. For Estha, the silence came late. It should have come at the moment when he was brought to identify Velutha. Compelled to join in the complicit act to incriminate Velutha, Estha was dispossessed of the right to be silent in order to save his mother Ammu. Yet what he really gained from the sacrifice of fidelity to his friendship with Velutha was not the well-being of Ammu, but a sense of guilt. Guilt was internalized. Eventually, spontaneous silence came to obsess him, and he paid not a bit of resistance to it as if he was making expiation for his treachery to Velutha many years ago.

Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha. It reached out of his head and enfolded him in its swampy arms. It rocked him to the rhythm of an ancient, fetal heartbeat. It sent its stealthy, suckered tentacles inching along the insides of his skull, hovering the knolls and dells of his memory, dislodging old sentences, whisking them off the tip of his tongue. It stripped his thoughts of the words that described them and left them pared and naked. Unspeakable. Numb. (13)

There was nothing wrong with Estha’s vocal organs. He just chose not to speak anymore when he finally had the right and freedom to do so. What accompanied the silence, a “dramatic deviation from societal norms of ‘healthy’ behaviour” (Fox 54), were other psychosomatic problems of disorder. Within the envelopment of extreme silence from which he derived unusual pleasure, Estha disconnected his relatedness with people, the elementary part of human relatedness that counts on conversation. “Slowly, over the years,
Estha withdrew from the world” (13). Autism and quietness altogether imprisoned Estha in a “very little space in the world” (12). In this little space there was nothing but complete silence.

Witness or survivor of a traumatic event, like Estha, who clearly could not articulate his traumatic story, takes refuge in a silent corner of his or her own. This kind of sanctuary, though alienated from the crowd, doesn’t guarantee an improved pattern of life. In Laub’s opinion, the trauma survivor that chooses to be silent is, at the same time, by his own hands placing himself in a more suffering and “endless struggle with and over a delusion” in which he wrongly takes himself as a supporter of the “external evil” (64) that causes trauma. “None finds peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent,” says Laub (64). Holocaust survivors, for instance, “who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory” (Laub 64).

The “not telling” of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor’s conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events. (Laub 64)

The worst outcome, as Laub sees in one woman Holocaust survivor’s testimony, is that “[t]he untold events had become so distorted in [one’s] conscious memory as to make [one] believe that [he himself], and not the perpetrator, was responsible for the atrocities [he] witnessed” (65). Understood by the way of Laub, Estha’s silence implies a masochistic life pattern. By shutting himself in the silent space, he enjoyed himself in “steep[ing] in the smell of old roses, blooded on memories of a broken man” (14). He was prompted by the “Yes, it was him” (32) hovering around in his mind to denounce himself as a traitor to the friendship he had with Velutha and also an accomplice in Baby Kochamma’s conspiracy to charge Velutha. The responsibility for Velutha’s death and Ammu’s sorrow descended on his heart: “It was his
fault that the faraway man in Ammu’s chest stopped shouting. His fault that she died alone in the lodge with no one to lie at the back and talk to her” (308). The italics in Estha’s soliloquy indicate the great pressure of self-condemnation inside his psyche. He had ascribed Velutha and Ammu’s misfortunes to his compromise with Baby Kochamma and the inspector so that he assigned himself to a co-executioner role in the traumatic event. A distorted understanding of the traumatic event is created by the survivor’s traumatized self so much so that he or she tends to view the survival of the trauma as a disgrace. To Estha, there was an analogy between his survival and that of “Khubchand, his beloved, blind, bald, incontinent seventeen-year-old mongrel” (13). “[T]he fact that something so fragile, so unbearably tender had survived, had been allowed to exist, was a miracle” (13), a miracle to which he gave bitter smiles because it was the prize for his complicity with the authorities at the expense of Velutha and Ammu’s lives. Self-reproach led to self-disparagement. Estha “had acquired the ability … to appear inanimate, almost invisible to the untrained eye” (12). Throughout his traumatic survival he was in pursuit of neglect and apathy, either from the within or without, towards his own living.

Rahel, too, displayed the propensity for emotional “self-imprisonment” (Laub 64) albeit that she seemed to be more vigorous and extroverted compared to Estha. Roy “spent her holidays in Ayemenem, largely ignored by Chacko and Mammachi … and largely ignoring Baby Kochamma” (16-17). Thanks to her least degree of involvement in the false identification of abduction criminal, she didn’t live a life of self-inflicted blame like that of her twin brother. For Rahel, Baby Kochamma was the one to blame for the tragedy. She was the instigator, “doing what she was best at. Irrigating her fields, nourishing her crops with other people’s passions” (305). Rahel insisted on her belief that “Chacko breaking down doors was only the sad bull thrashing at the end of Baby Kochamma’s leash. It was her idea that Ammu be made to pack her bags and leave. That Estha be Returned” (305). During her stay in Ayemenem, Rahel by deliberately neglecting Baby Kochamma’s presence
in the family carried out her secret revenge and punishment for what she had done in the traumatic event. Cruelty and mercilessness shown by Baby Kochamma and Chacko in their handling of Ammu and Velutha had made so great an impact on Rahel that she tended to have a distrust of human relationship. In her mother’s example, she witnessed the vulnerability and unreliability of human relationship. There was something inexplicable in human nature that induced Baby Kochamma and Chacko to hurt Ammu. Kinship that Ammu had with them didn’t help to prevent her from being the target. As for the love relationship between Ammu and her twins, Baby Kochamma made use of it to deceive the twins into cooperating. Putting too much faith in human relationship, to Rahel, could be very dangerous, and love relationship was especially dangerous. She knew well what it meant by “loving a man to death” (307). In Roy’s description of Rahel’s belated response to the traumatic death of Velutha, Rahel, in many ways, resembles her twin brother Estha. Both were struck by “psychic numbing” (Caruth 136). Psychic numbness, so Robert Jay Lifton’s discusses with Caruth in an interview, “had elements of repression, elements of isolation, denial, […] but was primarily a cessation of feeling” (Caruth 136). Estha, who was pleased with his survival as “[a] quiet bubble floating on a sea of noise” (13), was fairly apathetic to human interactions. Rahel in her school years kept people out of her world since she would rather “decorate a knob of fresh cow dung with small flowers” (17) than socialize with the schoolmates. Plainly, she “[had] no friends” (18). Solitary as she was, whatever opinions people had about her couldn’t bother her. Emotionlessness was the extreme expression of her self-defense against the uncertain quality of human relationship that she considered as the very reason why Velutha and Ammu were betrayed and hurt by their friends and family. It continued during the days Rahel spent in Delhi, and later impoverished her marriage with Larry McCaslin: “[W]hen they made love he was offended by her eyes. They behaved as though they belonged to someone else. Someone watching. […] He was exasperated because he didn’t know what that look meant. He put it somewhere between indifference
and despair” (20).

Rahel had kept Larry McCaslin in complete ignorance of the traumatic event happening in her childhood. It seems that she and Estha reached an unspoken agreement to be always reticent about it. “[T]he emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons” (20-21). Quietness was imposed on Estha by himself as the penalty for his involvement in condemning Velutha to death while Rahel was fixated on the idea that, if she could have done or not done something, she might have changed the destinies of Velutha and Ammu. In the end, what she really played was a powerless role in the traumatic scene. She simply remained in the Inspector’s office, listening to “the rude sound of Baby Kochamma’s relief dribbling down the sides of the Inspector’s pot in his attached toilet” (303). “The Inspector’s pot” that accepted Baby Kochamma’s “stool” (30), in its figurative sense, represents the harmonious collusion between Baby Kochamma and the inspector that Rahel had no ability to abort. Rahel, a flesh embodiment of the “Small God” (20) in Roy’s narrative, was filled with a feeling of remorse for her powerlessness and helplessness during the traumatic event of Velutha’s death for the rest of her life.

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. Inured by the confirmation of his own inconsequence, he became resilient and truly indifferent. Nothing mattered much. Nothing much mattered. And the less it mattered, the less it mattered. It was never important enough. Because Worse Things had happened. (20)

Dominant social norms must be maintained regardless of the cost of living. Any individual’s tears, despair or misfortune is relatively a small matter, not worthy of the “Big God[’s]” (20) consideration as compared with the seriousness of necessary punishment for transgressors. In order to live on in a place in which the societal wholeness is the priority
and the significance of individuality is belittled, one has to learn to cope with his own fluctuating emotions, including the resentment at “the relative smallness of his misfortune”, with an attitude of “enforced optimism” (20). “What Larry McCaslin saw in Rahel’s eyes was not despair at all, but a sort of enforced optimism. And a hollow where Estha’s words had been” (20). In addition to probing the source of enforced optimism as a philosophy of life adopted by many Indians in this particularly conservative country, Roy associates this kind of masked depression closely with Estha’s quietness to provoke the reader’s attention to the destructive and pathetic effects with regard to trauma that are excessively harmful to the survivor’s development of survivor’s personality and healthy lifestyle. Estha and Rahel, like many other trauma survivors, became themselves the crisis. There were some survival mechanisms, Rahel’s enforced optimism for example, to support their living, but none of them could alter the fact that their present lives had ceased making progress. Recall of the traumatic past was so overwhelming and insistent for them, so they automatically surrendered the motive of devoting themselves to the striving for creating a better life and regular human relationship.

In this sense, Rahel’s remark on Baby Kochamma is fit to characterize Estha and her own bewildering experiences of traumatic survival. “She’s living her life backwards, Rahel thought. It was a curiously apt observation. Baby Kochamma had lived her life backwards” (23). The twins were trapped by the endless flashback or intrusive return of the traumatic experience while Baby Kochamma actively drowned herself in the memory of her unconsummated love with Father Mulligan. There is a fundamental difference: Baby Kochamma’s nostalgic recollection was a chosen act based on her will, but what happened to the twins--the return of the traumatic event in the forms of repetitive appearance of hallucinations, dreams, images, etc.--was out of their conscious control and comprehension. All the intrusive phenomena, as a whole, constituted the twins’ traumatic recollection. As Caruth has suggested, a trauma victim’s act of recovering the past is “closely and
paradoxically tied up […] with the inability to have access to it” (152) because the memory waiting to be recollected is not simple memory in nature. First of all, the memory about intolerable pain or loss “has been stored in its unassimilated form” without the mind’s immediate registration until the bodily repetition of post-traumatic pathology “makes the mind aware of its presence” (Di Prete 499). The traumatic event, “in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge” (Caruth 153). In other words, there is a functional failure or disorder of memory work. “Not having been fully integrated as it occurred,” as [Pierre Janet] says and so argued by Caruth, “the event cannot become a ‘narrative memory’ that is integrated into a completed story of the past” (Caruth 153). Because of the lack of integration into consciousness, it becomes inaccessible for ordinary cognitive activities. In trauma, willed access to the truth of the event is denied. Active recollection may be even more difficult while the trauma survivor comes under the perplexing influence of later repression and dissociation. In repression, “a subject actively pushing the unwanted traumatic memory away. Personal consciousness stays in its place, as it were; it is the traumatic memory that is removed” or “pushed downward, into the unconscious” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 168). Hiding behind the protective shield of dissociation, trauma survivors remove their presence from the traumatic scene to look at the event from a safe distance. Delusion is created that they deceive themselves as well as others into believing that the traumatic event is somebody else’s business and they don’t have to bear responsibility for it. Ironically enough, no matter how hard they try to repress the unpleasant traumatic memory and purposely detach themselves from the roles they play in the traumatic event, the experience that has no appropriate place to settle down for its lack of full integration into a part of understanding “continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time” (Caruth 153) in the form of flashback or traumatic reenactment. Contemporary research on trauma has proposed that there is an ethical need to recapture the past. Trauma “requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure” (Caruth 153).
Though the trauma survivors seem to be on the edge of collapse in the encounter with the images of traumatic reenactment that “remain absolutely accurate and precise” and “are largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control” (Caruth 151), the suffering they undergo, in an uncanny way, paves the way leading to a possible future of their survival.

The flashback or traumatic reenactment, in terms of its autonomy; that is, it is independent of conscious command, seems to provide the survivor with a bypass to the truth of a traumatic event in which any willed access is defied. “While the traumatized are called upon to see and to relive the insistent reality of the past” in the flashback, “they recover a past that encounters consciousness only through the very denial of active recollection” (Caruth 152). The flashback emerging in forms of repetitive dreams, images or hallucinations is so accurate, distinct and penetrative that the trauma survivor might mistake it for a direct experience which he can interpret consciously when he is awake or sober. In this way, the incomprehensibility of trauma can be stripped, and thus trauma is no more far away from the realm of consciousness. However, as Caruth claims, the occurrence of traumatic flashback or reenactment has highlighted and confirmed, not discredited, the inaccessibility of trauma: “The flash or traumatic reenactment conveys, that is, both the truth of an event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility” (153). In a survivor’s delayed response to a traumatic event, the obstructions created by its lack of integration into consciousness is still there and there is the inability to have entryway to it for the very fact that

[ the history that a flashback tells--as psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and neurobiology equally suggest--is, therefore, a history that literally has no place, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood. In its repeated imposition as both image and amnesia, the trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence. (Caruth 153)
Freud in his observation on trauma suggests that the incomprehensible dimension of traumatic experience is attributable to “the lack of preparedness” (Caruth 62). The event is not experienced “in time” (Caruth 62). The fright or horror of the event “is recognized as such by the mind one moment too late” (Caruth 62). As a result, there is no direct experience, but merely missed experience. It startles Freud, so argued by Caruth, that it is precisely the missing, the “lack of direct experience that, paradoxically, becomes the basis of the repetition of the nightmare” (Caruth 62). Rahel’s nightmare, for its exactness and continuity, serves as a brilliant example in the novel.

After that for years Rahel would dream this dream: a fat man, faceless, kneeling beside a woman’s corpse. Hacking its hair off. Breaking every bone in its body. Snapping even the little ones. The fingers. The ear bones cracked like twigs. Snap snap the soft sound of breaking bones. A pianist killing the piano keys. Even the black ones. And Rahel … loved them both. The player and the piano.

The killer and the corpse. (214)

Apparently, this is a dream about the persecution inflicted upon Ammu, the product of Chacko’s fierce anger that shattered the family. Ammu’s tragedy was the final plot of the traumatic event, and in its sequel, that is, Rahel’s traumatic reliving in the form of a repeated nightmare, the representation of violence, cruelty, killing and death involved in the event was still realistic and vivid. It is the surprising literalness of the returning traumatic dream, examined from Freud’s perspective, that “constitutes trauma and points toward its enigmatic core: the delay or incompletion in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely true to the event” (Caruth 1995, 5). “The return of the traumatic experience in the dream is not the signal of the direct experience” (Caruth 62) because there is no direct experience at all. Ultimately, the traumatic dream or nightmare reveals the absolute inability of the mind to “master what was never fully grasped
in the first place” (Caruth 62) and the urgent need to reclaim the history one ought to possess.

The painful repetition of flashback, either Estha’s retrospective recall of Velutha’s battered body or Rahel’s insistent nightmare, marks one of the major features of trauma. “In trauma, that is,” as Caruth figures out in her reading of Freud’s argument in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, “the outside has gone inside without any mediation” (59) to define and shape the trauma survivor’s abnormal life pattern. Estha and Rahel’s repetitive behaviors and lack of vitality tremendously diverged from the acknowledged standards for the healthy way of living. Roy’s detailed and dramatic descriptions about the manifestation of various pathologies, or more exactly symptoms, pinpoint the problem of acting-out that is characteristic of trauma victims. The “symptomatic acting out,” as James Berger says, may be understood as “an attempt to master the trauma or work through it at an unconscious level” (27). Seen in this light, the acting-out period is a necessary process with positive value in a trauma survivor’s route towards the recovery from trauma. What would happen if the acting-out is prolonged to the extent that it becomes endless and interminable? As Berger adds, acting-out, on the other hand, “indicate[s] a more complete immersion in the trauma’s repressed force” (27). Only through the operation of moderate mourning can the acting-out that may be exaggeratedly extended in some cases be converted into a prelude to the working-through of trauma. Mourning, in Berger’s explanation, is “a form of working through the traumatic fact of a loved one’s death, including the working through of unresolved conflict, hostility, or guilt that may have existed in the relationship between the mourner and the deceased” (27). “An extended period of melancholy or depression from which the mourner cannot escape,” by contrast, “presents an unconscious, guilt-ridden self-punishment brought on by the repression of the memories of such conflicts” (Berger 27). It is obvious that what had been lodged firmly in Estha and Rahel’s acting-out was not the moderate mourning process that is indispensable to the overcoming of trauma, but permanent melancholia instead.
Pathological acting-out while bathing in melancholia yields evidence that one is still entangled with the impossible relief from grieving over past losses. In such a condition, the traumatized psyche is engaged in the memory of the lost or a deceased one. The haunting of the past returns to the traumatized’s present on and on. The demarcation line between the past and the present is blurred. Rather than finding “a relation to the past that involves recognizing its difference from the present--simultaneously remembering and taking leave of or actively forgetting it, thereby allowing for critical judgment and a reinvestment in life, notably social and civic life with its demands, responsibilities, and norms requiring respectful recognition and consideration for others”, the trauma survivor in melancholia is “possessed by the past and acting out a repetition compulsion” (LaCapra 716) that may possibly have no end. It is predictable that the melancholic is going to lose contact with the present reality at last because he is entrapped by his over-concentration on the past, as Estha showed in *The God of Small Things*. The narrator in the novel has outlined the immobility of traumatic memory very early in the first chapter: “It is curious how sometimes the memory of death lives on for so much longer that the memory of the life that it purloined” (17). What is evoked on this point is the image of a mother in her difficult labor giving birth to another life and dying soon after the delivery. The memory of the deceased “slowly faded away”, but what is left by the deceased, the baby, an organic being that symbolically represents the loss of the mother, has “grew robust and alive” (17) at the cost of its mother. In *The God of Small Things*, the loss of Sophie Mol is one part of the traumatic event in which the twins suffered the loss of Velutha almost at the same time. As “[t]he Loss of Sophie Mol stepped softly around the Ayemenem House,” the loss of the twins’ beloved Velutha “ushered” (17) them into traumatic survival. The pathetic truth is that the loss of a loved one didn’t only “ushered” (17) them but also made them castigate themselves for the crimes they believed that they should be responsible for. Estha and Rahel privately identified themselves as perpetrators rather than victims, but were completely unconscious of it. To them, Velutha,
who died in the event, was the only victim. “Esthappen and Rahel both knew that there were several perpetrators (besides themselves) that day. But only one victim. And he had blood-red nails and a brown leaf on his back that made the monsoons come on time” (182). The inclination to self-condemnation, remarkably, exemplifies Freud’s observation on the melancholic, and his concept of melancholia endorses Roy’s portrayal of the crisis of traumatic survival in which normal mourning was absent.

The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning--an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished. (Freud 584)

In melancholia, the traumatized or survivor has placed a wrong meaning on the act of self-belittlement and self-condemnation. It becomes the only way to settle the relation between himself and the deceased and to account for his ethical responsibility for the traumatic event. One’s symptomatic repetition is to be justified by himself or herself and becomes the punishment he or she deserves. “[L]eaving it seems to mean betraying lost loved ones who were consumed by it,” adds LaCapra (717). Estha’s case of melancholia, understood in Dominick LaCapra’s perspective, is also “an act of fidelity” (171). Estha once betrayed Velutha as he gave the false witness to identify Velutha in the police office. Making any attempt to deny his involvement in the tragic death of Velutha by resisting the possession of the past, and the traumatic reenactment of the traumatic event happened to Velutha because of the false identification, to Estha, was very likely another betrayal. In his traumatic survival, Estha believed that he had the choice not to make the double betrayal happen, and in such a way he could compensate Velutha for the loss of loyal friendship in the accident.

Estha and Rahel’s survival in which the story of their traumatic loss is reiterated in the
compulsive repetition of traumatic symptoms uncovers the extraordinary time structure of trauma that “past, present, and future overlap” (Di Prete 492) “in a dimension of compulsive repetition that jeopardizes the possibility of a genuine future” (Di Prete 495). Apparently, the twins’ traumatic past interfered with their present lives. Time stagnated in the repetition of traumatic symptoms since the present was a timeless review of the past. The stagnation or time blocked its flow towards the future. “[T]heir positioning within a temporal structure in which past and future converge--and flatten--in a static traumatic present, a dimension shaped by the compulsive repetition and surfacing of fragments of traumatic memories” (Di Prete 492) had made their traumatic survival a passage of “endless inherent necessity of repetition, which ultimately may lead to destruction” (Caruth 63). The self had been radically altered, and then shattered. They couldn’t grasp the meaning of their survival, or they didn’t even have the feeling of being alive. “What is enigmatically suggested” in the experience of traumatic survival “is that the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in having survived, precisely, without knowing it” (Caruth 64). The state of being a “living dead”, as Berger says, is an “apocalyptic representation” that takes place in the “betweenness” of two deaths, “the first being biological and the second symbolic” (35). The trauma is in itself a sign of the impossibility of living because the lack of integration into consciousness of a traumatic event has marked a rupture of symbolization. Being incapable of narrating his own story in terms of its direct symbolic meaning, the traumatized suffers “the annihilation of the whole symbolic order and of the possibility of using symbols” (Berger 35) that the second death represents. This seems to be the case for Estha and Rahel. The incomprehensibility of trauma and a strong sense of guilt defined their traumatic survival as an experience of symbolic death. “Not Death. Just the end of living” (304). Velutha met his bodily and biological death in the traumatic event. An absolute end was put to the real death of Velutha, whereas in trauma there was no end to “the threat of death in the past” (Caruth 62) that the witnesses, Estha and Rahel, didn’t fully grasp at the first place. “Not
having truly known the threat of death in the past,” Estha and Rahel as the trauma survivor in The God of Small Things, were “forced, continually, to confront it over and over again” (Caruth 62) in the painful repetition of traumatic flashback and reenactment that, as the modern research on trauma points out, “can itself be retraumatizing” (Caruth 63).

The return of and the repeated confrontation with the threat of death that they didn’t fully know in the past transmute traumatic survival into the death of mind, that is, symbolic death. What symbolic death involves is a long slow process of dying which can ultimately lead to self-destruction. However, there is still hope of the working-through of trauma once the trauma is adequately addressed and narrated through the ritual of mourning. LaCapra’s definition of mourning quoted below, which might be sort of lengthy but truly impressive, explicitly explains its therapeutic value.

Mourning brings the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in, or recathexis of, life that allows one to begin again. In line with Freud’s concept, one might further suggest that mourning be seen not simply as individual or quasi-transcendental grieving but as a homeopathic socialization or ritualization of the repetition compulsion that attempt to turn it against the death drive and to counteract compulsiveness--especially the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes of violence--by re-petitioning in ways that allow for a measure of critical distance, change, resumption of social life, ethical responsibility, and renewal.

As LaCapra has asserted in elaborating the significance of mourning, mourning offers a bridge for the crossing from the past to the present reality and a standpoint for the traumatized to look forward towards the future. The experience of loss in trauma is cognitively captured, assigned “a status of pastness and closure” (Di Prete 493), and future is in view. On the contrary, the covering of melancholia cast on the two trauma survivors in The God of Small Things with its interaction with their fetishistic “fascination or enjoyment
of [being] the living dead,” which in Žižek’s words is “exactly the opposite of the symbolic order: [...] the radical annihilation of the symbolic texture through which the so-called reality is constituted” (132), adds complications to their recovery from trauma, and much worse, prematurely turn down the process of working-through.

Endless melancholy without mourning that caused chronic depression and masochistic behavior, as the narrator declares in the novel, stemmed from Estha and Rahel’s confusion of victims and perpetrators. Estha and Rahel suffered from the misplacement of their identities as “Sinners” and perpetrators while the wrong people, putting up a façade of innocence and uprightness, wore “the tragic hood of victimhood” (182) unjustly. They were “[a] pair of actors trapped in a recondite play with no hint of plot or narrative. Stumbling through their parts, nursing someone else’s sorrow. Grieving someone else’s grief” (182). Their lives had come to a dead end, and mourning, the salvation they needed to “conjure up fury at what had happened,” to “seek redress,” “[a]nd eventually, perhaps, exorcize the memories that haunted them” (182), didn’t make its arrival in the novel. There was no possibility of working-through in Roy’s view. Without the coming of mourning to make adjustments in their sentiments towards their loss, trauma would always be there “to be held [c]arefully and forever” because “anger wasn’t available to them and there was no face to put on this Other Thing that they held in their sticky Other Hands, like an imaginary orange. There was nowhere to lay it down. It wasn’t theirs to give away” (182). Thus far the twins’ traumatic survival, an impasse of melancholia, morbid nostalgia and compulsive symptoms in Roy’s narrative, in its incurability has provoked many literary critics and cultural observers’ to discuss the consequential ethical problems it is closely related to.

In some discussions that focus on the intricate and firmly established inveteracy in the Indian culture, there is a bold assumption that the trauma Roy depicts in The God of Small Things is, intrinsically, the product of the country’s history. As Susan Standford Friedman argues, the tyranny of the disciplinary structures in Indian society is the cause of trauma in
this novel rather than the death of Velutha. The violent killing of Velutha was purely a
dramatized and visualized embodiment of the disciplinary power. Put in Roy’s own words,
it was “History in live performance” (293). Every Indian is born to be a part of History, a
witness of History, and plays his role in the historical performance. “There was nothing
accidental about what happened that morning. Nothing *incidental*. It was no stray
mugging or personal settling of scores. This was an era imprinting itself on those who lived
in it” (293). The practice of discipline done in a violent way has never been a matter of
accident in India’s history in which the functioning of disciplinary mechanisms in both the
state and family, what the Love Laws stands for, is everywhere. There is wholehearted
submission. At the same time, there are violent transgressions from time to time, just like
the one in *The God of Small Things*. “This transgression of gender and caste norms and the
violence of the family and state in disciplining the transgressors have life-destroying
consequences for the next generation, for the children who are forever scarred by what they
have witnessed,” says Friedman (117). History of India, for a large part, is written with the
transgressors’ blood and the mentally-traumatized victims’ tears. More importantly, the
history full of disciplinary violence, as Friedman has argued, shouldn’t and can’t “be reduced
to the story of colonial, postcolonial and transnational relations outside the state” (117). It is
so real and so true “*within* the state” (117) and within its history as well. Therefore, the
trauma originated by the state’s continuous maintenance of disciplinary systems concerning
gender and caste against the individual will is not a possession belonging to any particular
person or locality. It is the trauma borne by every Indian because none of the Indians can
avoid the perpetual control of the disciplinary systems that had been the cultural fabric of
Indian society since a long, long time ago. “Equally, it could be argued that it actually
began thousands of years ago. […] That it really began in the days when the Love Laws
were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much” (33).

Viewed from Roy’s historical perspective, the trauma caused by the Love Laws in *The
"God of Small Things" seems to fall into the category of structural or quasi-structural trauma. Everyone is subject to structural trauma. All Indians are born to suffer the trauma because the disciplinary powers within the state and the family keep operating from one generation to the next and further, re-wound some people by the historical or accidental events it results in. Traumatization becomes the theme of Indian history, and Indian history as a history of trauma is to be passed on to its descendents without their knowing. Trauma, in this regard, is “a cultural process,” “a process requires time, as well as mediation and representation” to generate “collective memory” (1) that Ron Eyerman defines as “recollection of a shared past” (5), which is “similar to myth” (7). According to Eyerman, it is collective memory that “ground[s] the identity-formation of a people,” and ideologically, “signifie[s] and distinguishe[s] a race, a people, or a community” (1). Collective memory, as implied by the name, is not individually based. It accounts for the cohesion of collective identity, consciousness and behaviors within a specific group of people. In this way, it can be said that Indian people’s collective memory about their shared historical past which is congested with trauma constitutes their Indianness, their collective sense of who they are. Indians’ collective memory that is based on a series of traumatic events in the people’s past and present as they carry out their daily lives, in its traumatic meaning, is a discourse of cultural trauma. National or cultural trauma “need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all” (Eyerman 2). Through various representations that are “associated with the capacity to see and to make visible” (Eyerman 9), it becomes ingrained in individual’s consciousness and inscribed in collective memory to achieve the enduring effect of trauma. "The God of Small Things", as a trauma narrative, is indeed a representation combining “the power of telling” with “the power of looking” (Hale 8) to render the issue of cultural trauma in the Indian history visible and recognizable.

Like other structural traumas, this national trauma is not supposed to be overcome or dismissed easily. Structural trauma in itself is “humans’ confrontation with originary,
transhistorical absences” (190). Contrary to historical trauma, which “entails losses that can be enumerated and addressed socially and psychologically” (Caruth 190), and even be avoided, structural trauma includes structural absence that is in principle unavoidable. As Caruth says, structural trauma “can only be lived with” (190) and there is no other ways. Roy in the novel does convey a great deal of anxiety for the possibility of curability as she considers that the traumatic legacies weaving through the state’s history and being inherited by the following young generations like a curse is a horrible threat to the physical and psychological well-being of its people.

The paralysis and suffering of the children who have witnessed the trauma and remained frozen in its temporal frame allegorises both a regional and a national consciousness which, Roy warns, will remain similarly ossified if it does not confront and move beyond the violence of its disciplinary structures. (Friedman 117)

Perhaps it is the anxiety about the future of her native country and her fellow countrymen that induces Roy to reveal the traumatizing effects of various social evils, including social oppression, persecution and injustice, so that she wants to present the lingering and destructive effects of trauma in *The God of Small Things*.

The novel makes numerous jumps between two storylines, one set in the twins’ adulthood in 1992 and the other in their childhood in 1969. As Fox has observed, “[the] characteristics of trauma are found in the content of Roy’s novel but gain further force and significance by being repeated in its narrative structure” (35). The “traumatic structure of the narrative” (35) in *The God of Small Things* perfectly reflects the typical characteristics of traumatic symptoms. Events, dreams and images that were related to the traumatic events are repeated and referred to over and over again throughout the novel. Ungrammatical phrases and fragmental passages are scattered all over the text. The narrative style has been fashioned into a “textbook portrayal of symptoms of trauma” (Fox 54) to accord seamlessly
At the time, there would only be incoherence. As though meaning had slunk out of thins and let them fragmented. Disconnected. The glint of Ammu’s needle. The color of a ribbon. The weave of the cross-stitch counterpane. A door slowly breaking. Isolated things that didn’t mean anything. As though the intelligence that decodes life’s hidden patterns--that connects reflections to images, glints to lights, weave to fabrics, needles to thread, wall to rooms, love to fear to anger to remorse--was suddenly lost. (215)

The novel with its deliberate design conveys a literary experience of trauma to the readers as if they are dealing with trauma when reading it. It becomes easier for the readers to find identification and empathy between themselves and the traumatized characters. Nevertheless, the book means definitely more than a marvelous reading experience to Roy herself and some groups of readers, Indians particularly. What is delineated in the book is not merely an imaginative tale but the very reality of their lives and collective distress they have to face up to.
Ammu saw that he saw. She looked away. He did too. History’s fiends returned to claim them. To re-wrap 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. (The God of Small Things, 168)

This is usually how a love story begins: there are two people looking into each other’s eyes, and suddenly they realize that they are in love. The lovers stand silently and transfixed like statues, unaware of how much time has passed by. Maybe a century or even longer. Nothing really matters at this moment of ecstasy, anyway. The whole world quiets down, and time is condensed. There seems to be some kind of telepathy between the two. Without saying a word, they know exactly that they share the same feeling and they are thinking about the same thing. In The God of Small Things, Roy gives a stale plot of love which is very similar to the one mentioned above. However, in the significant scene when the male and female protagonists, Velutha and Ammu, looked at each other and realized there was mutual attraction between them, Roy immediately shifts the focus of attention from the purely overflowing of romantic affections to the socio-historical teaching that commanded the characters to love or not to love when the reader supposes everything would go smoothly. The trick is that her love story begins not with the lovers’ transfixed by each other once they have made eye contacts but their turning away from the contact out of hesitation rather than embarrassment as soon as they found their gazes met. The couple’s first reaction to the love developed just now was to conceal their emotions and then retreated to the places they belonged to in the Indian society. One was a respectable woman in the upper class, and the
other was a man of the untouchable caste. Roy in her debut novel introduces an oxymoronic term by combining love with law to convey a realistic point of view that there are, in fact, social, traditional and historical reasons affecting every individual’s behaviors as one can’t have his own way on everything and love, in particular, can’t go as far, as wild as it wants to be. Thus, love as a natural instinct of humanity confronts the strict laws from the without that lead to regulations and oppressions. The confrontation is a serious matter, especially in India, where the Love Laws, a union of patriarchal, caste and colonial influences, is the very foundation upon which the Indian society is able to stabilize and work itself. What Roy does with her *The God of Small Things* is, by examining love not from its psychological underpinnings, but in light of the philosophy and wisdom teachings of the Indian world that instruct men on how to love, to highlight the clash between the individual and the complicit cooperation of the deep-rooted patriarchy and caste system in India along with the colonial force.

Although Roy in one interview claims that “*The God of Small Things* is not a book specifically about ‘our culture’ -- it’s a book about human nature” (Abraham 1998, 91), she seems to contradict her saying that human culture in this novel, a hybrid of Indian traditions and British colonialism, does play a dominant role that regulates and even forbids the most impressive expression of human nature, love. In *The God of Small Things*, the conflict between love and the Love Laws is a conflict between human nature and human culture. In the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the conflict marks the inevitable process of socialization, and the culture’s suppression of human nature consequently becomes the necessary evil resulted from the practice of the law that represents prohibition. The beginning of the law can be traced back to the intrusion of the Name of the Father in the union of the subject with the Mother. The subject, therefore, is propelled into the Symbolic order. The intervention of the Name of the Father also means the prohibition of the primal father. That is to say, men are forbidden from the total and complete enjoyment that the
primal father commands. Men are allowed only limited enjoyment. The move from the primal father to the symbolic father is exactly the process of social organization. In order to keep a society in unity and to maintain its tranquility, prohibitions are set up in the form of law. As Todd McGowan suggests in *The End of Dissatisfaction*, “[p]rohibition has always functioned as the key to social organization as such, demanding that subjects sacrifice enjoyment for the sake of work, community, and progress” (11). Every socialized individual must pay his obedience to the law as “a societal ‘entry fee’” (12). Lacanian psychoanalysis is articulating the fundamental structure of any social order: “every social order depends on a shared sacrifice, something that must be given up by those who enter into it” (12). One sacrifices some of his satisfaction to have unlimited enjoyment, then he can have his social existence recognized, and the social order can stay in coherence.

Set in a small village called Ayemenem in the southwestern India state of Kerala, Roy’s novel presents us the Indian society, where its social order is based on the enforcement of patriarchy and the caste system. To survive in such a society as a social being means that one has to observe the prohibition and the law that the society subscribes to and that most population consents to, including the Love Laws which Roy refers to as the norm that governs how Indians talk about love. Substantially, the Love Laws is interwoven with the gender and caste classifications the society emphasizes the most. Indian society, to echo these classifications that construct itself, creates a dual standard to serve for the good of males and the upper castes. In other words, patriarchy and caste, intertwining one with the other, make their presence in the Love Laws, imperatively fashion the male-female relation in the frame of the caste system. Men share the most privilege while women suffer from the regulations upon their will; the upper caste stands for purity while the lower caste is expected to lie at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Mammachi’s completely different responses to her son’s and daughter’s cross-caste love affairs exactly manifest the double standard of the Love Laws. Mammachi, who made sense of the world by setting up a distinct boundary
between the upper and lower castes, was a leading watcher who was energetically propagating the importance of the Love Laws and its double standard.

Mammachi’s world was arranged that way. If she was invited to a wedding in Kottayam, she would spend the whole time whispering to whoever she went with, “The bride’s maternal grandfather was my father’s carpenter. Kunjukutty Eapen? His great-grandmother’s sister was just a midwife in Trivandrum. My husband’s family used to own this whole hill. (160) Even though in reality her husband’s family no longer owned a handsome property to claim the title of a rich family, the upper-caste membership she inherited from her preceding generations had secured her prior position as an empowered elite. Like other upper-caste women, Mammachi’s primary duty of life is “to protect the life of her man and ensure his longevity because her own social existence is defined by and hinged on his life” (Kannabiran 255-56). At her husband’s funeral, she cried hard not because of her love for the deceased spouse but her sense of loss, the loss of her source of social recognition that she esteemed. Whatever her husband did to her had become so taken-for-granted that she eventually got used to it. As an upper-caste woman, she shared with her other family members the caste superiority in the society, and meantime she suffered the violence of patriarchy with all Indian women.

Ammu, Mammachi’s daughter, was supposed to be another model upper-caste woman. In a society where the public concentrates it most efforts to maintain the social order by constant enforcement of tradition, the female body is strictly regulated. Ammu, though she was a divorcee who had no “Locusts Stand I” (56) no matter in her natal family or in the Indian society as a whole, was not an exception to the regulation inflicted on female body. Her vigorous claim that “[s]he wanted her body back” because “[i]t was hers” (211) remained unspoken. The ideas that female body is held in the hands of a woman’s free will and she deserves the right to refuse any “proprietary handling” (211) of the other people even her own
family are definitely a taboo subject. The regulation of women’s gendered bodies aims to keep the survival of national heritage, that is, the caste system. Leela Dube’s clear observation about Indian culture is an index for us to figure out the intricate relationship between gender and caste. As Dube has pointed out, “the cultural schemes which underlie the caste system are based upon a fundamental difference between male and female bodies in respect of their vulnerability to incur impurity through sexual intercourse” (232). There is a hierarchy between two sexes within a caste for “[t]he caste system is premised upon the cultural perception of a fundamental difference in male and female sexuality” (231). Upper-caste women play an especially crucial role. Women’s vulnerability, their biological capacity for pregnancy, has brought them the responsibility of preventing the introduction of impurity into the upper caste. As Ammu taught her twins, Rahel and Estha, the difference between the upper and the lower castes in India is the difference between clean and dirty. “I think it’s high time that you learned the difference between CLEAN and DIRTY. Especially in this country” (142), said Ammu. When Vellya Pappen came to Mammachi to reveal Ammu’s secret love with his untouchable son, Mammachi showed an outburst of anger.

Mammachi’s rage at the old one-eyed Paravan standing in the rain, drunk, dribbling and covered in mud was re-directed into a cold contempt for her daughter and what she had done. She thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie. […] His particular Paravan smell. Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. (244)

The “particular Pravan smell,” to Mammachi, is a part of the lower caste’s impurity. The hereditary impurity running in the blood of the untouchable caste has endowed a lower-caste man an animal-like image, not a human one. When an upper-caste woman cross the boundary to touch a man that she is forbidden to be associated with, her family would think that she is running the risk introducing impurity into the upper caste. To introduce impurity means to give birth to a child with that “particular Pravan smell.” It certainly will cause
Chaos to the caste system and further to threaten the social order. In brief, as Dube reiterates, “a woman’s role in biological reproduction, as we shall see, makes her primarily responsible for maintaining the purity of caste and its boundaries and calls for proper control over her sexuality” (233).

The principles of caste articulate an unbalanced power relation between men and women. With the sexual asymmetry caste boundaries characterized by the separation of one’s purity from the impurity of the other are steadied. The female body has become the site of constraint and oppression. It is a restricted area for cross-caste sexual entanglements. At the same time, it is the playground for the dominant power of patriarchy. There is a cultural ritual in the Hindu society that women’s bodies are maltreated and humiliated, so as to demonstrate manhood as a major value. It is believed that the most effective and efficient way to extract women’s respect and subjection to manhood is to discipline their bodies by violent humiliation, especially when men feel that there is an urgent need to put their fists on them for punishment. The domestic violence of Mammachi and Ammu’s marriages perfectly illustrates the sexual politics of patriarchy. Roy depicts Mammachi’s scholarly husband: “Pappachi, for his part, was having trouble coping with the ignominy of retirement. He was seventeen years older than Mammachi, and realized with a shock that he was an old man when his wife was still in her prime” (46). Pappachi, retired from his government job, spent his retirement watching his wife busy running her own career successfully, and felt his manhood hurt. He decided to restore his masculine pride in a way deserving of a real man, so “[e]very night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren’t new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place” (47). The physical attack unveiled the patriarchal biases hidden in his heart under the disguise of a respectable gentleman. His daughter, Ammu, who endured the violence with her mother recalled how the father performed this double-faced trick like weaving a “hideous web” (171) of lies to win the reputation outside the family and to sustain the subjection within the family.
He donated money to orphanages and leprosy clinics. He worked hard on his public profile as a sophisticated, generous, moral man. But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father. (171-72)

When Pappachi slouched about Mammachi’s pickle compounds, he was irritated by the contrast between him, a retired, useless scholar and his wife, a promising female enterpriser. Mammachi’s career success with economic profit should not have happened to a woman. It reminded him of his failure, as a useless entomologist, retired and gradually losing his position as the only one bread-winner in the family. He ventured to take back the role as the master in the household, since he saw his authority being challenged by his versatile wife.

In the domestic violence committed by Pappachi, there is a man’s desire to control woman, to make them docile. And more than that, there is a man’s fear of his own powerlessness. Pappachi’s fear for powerlessness and incompetence was aroused when Mammachi’s violin teacher Launsky-Tieffenthal told him that “his wife was exceptionally talented and in his opinion, potentially concert class” (49). The violin lessons were abruptly stopped. One night, after another beating by a brass flower vase, “Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi’s violin and threw it in the river” (47). This time, Pappachi shut up Mammachi’s music. Pappachi murdered her talent in music just as Pappachi wanted to ruin her pickle industry.

Domestic violence displays itself in a way causing not only physical pains but also psychic damages. All kinds of persecution, including strangling the wife’s potentials, using bad language to hurt her feelings, taking away her beloved things, forbidding her own opinions and thinking, spoiling the good public view of her, etc., all can be classified as violence.

Similarly, in Ammu’s case, once the economic stability of the household is threatened and her husband’s manhood is questioned, the wife has to be punished. Ammu’s husband, the man the author does not even name, made his first appearance in the novel as “a
small man, but well built” (39). He was not that perfect for Ammu in terms of looks, but at least he was “[p]leasant-looking” (39). The marriage didn’t go well. Soon after the elaborate Calcutta wedding, Ammu found that this pleasant-looking man had made their marriage so unpleasant because of his serious alcoholic addiction. When Ammu was in labor, the newly-born babies’ father “stretch out on a hard bench in the hospital corridor, was drunk” (40). His drinking problem became so aggravating that it had not only consumed his vitality but also “had driven him into an alcoholic stupor” (40). One day he was summoned to the manager’s office and was offered an ultimatum: either he takes his beautiful wife to sleep with the lecherous boss, Mr. Hollick, or he loses his job. It was difficult for Ammu to agree to exchange her body for her husband’s job at the tea plantation. Thus a series of fierce physical conflicts between the husband and wife broke out. “Ammu watched her husband’s mouth move as it formed words. She said nothing. He grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence. Suddenly he lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her and then passed out from the effort” (41-42). The recurring violence followed by a transient moment of reconciliation, with violence and comfort, formed a cycle which “fell into a pattern” (42) in Ammu’s marital life. Reader in Ammu’s broken marriage perceives a cowardly husband. He failed his responsibility, withdrawing from his position as a father and husband out of the family. By not giving the reader an ideal husband or a strong father image that conforms to most Hindu’s social expectations Roy raises a question about the concept of traditional masculinity: Is it more appropriate to regard masculinity as a result of cultural constructs? Although some men’s masculinity remains in doubt in the eyes of other people, they must make themselves look like a real and tough man because masculinity in a patriarchal society is a symbol of power and a living necessity for any man, and the patriarchal society, in correspondence to the men’s anxiety for deficient expression of masculinity and desire for privileges, allows men to demonstrate masculinity through torturing their women. Domestic violence awkwardly covers up the fact that men,
compared to women, can be powerless. Whenever women seize the opportunity to be stronger and more brilliant than men, they become sort of out of control to men, and men become relatively powerless. With such fear men have to impose on their women their masculine force at any moment, no matter physically or mentally. Manhood in the novel is “defined by the degree of control men exercise over women and the degree of passivity of the women of the caste” (Kannabiran 254). By this argument, grasping a full control of their wives’ bodies, as well as their heads, is an elementary measure for man to consolidate their power. Women, Ammu for instance, “learn to live with this cold, calculating cruelty” (172), internalizing it to be something they are used to.

Actually, Ammu had her first encounter with domestic violence since she was just a little girl. In her growing years, the Ipe family had always been enveloped in the gloom of Pappachi’s strike and kick on Mammachi. Being too familiar with the violent scene, Ammu understood it as a variational version of children’s fairy tale. “As a child, she had learned very quickly to disregard the Father Bear Mother Bear stories she was given to read. In her version, Father Bear beat Mother bear with brass vases. Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation” (171). There was no happy Father Bear and Mother Bear in the Ayemenem House, only an “ill-tempered father” and a “bitter, long-suffering mother” (38). Knowing well that she couldn’t ever change her Bear story into a better one with a they-live-happily-ever-after ending, Ammu learned to coexist with it and even find her own fun in it. The “lofty sense of injustice and the mulish reckless streak that develop in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big” (172-73) taught her to cultivate a more tolerant attitude towards the misfortunes in her life caused by the patriarchs.

Chacko temporarily relieved the family of its inner distress as he snatched the brass flower brass out of Pappachi’s hand that he used to beat his wife. “‘I never want this to happen again,’ he told his father. ‘Ever’” (47). To Mammachi, Chacko surely was her savior. Out of her gratitude for the salvation and her maternal love Mammachi invested
whatever she had for the rest of her life in her dear son. She had turned the son into “[h]er man. Her only love” (160). Embedded in the mother-son relationship is a traditional Indian woman’s commitment to patriarchism. Right at the turning moment Chacko stopped Pappachi from beating her, Chacko, maybe without making any conscious efforts, won the leading place in the family. As a successor to Pappachi, he was the new patriarch, who was in full control of the Ipe household. Pappachi had no other choice but receded back to “his favorite mahogany rocking chair” which eventually smashed into little bits and left nothing but “a heap of varnished wicker and splintered wood” (47). “Mammchi packed her wifely luggage and committed it to Chacko’s care. From then onwards he became the repository of all her womanly feelings” (160). After Pappachi’s death the commitment to and dependence on Chacko multiplied because “her own social existence is defined by and hinged on his life” (Kannabiran 255-56). The transfer of power was done.

Chacko, another Indian man nurtured by the same culture that has a fixation on masculinity, concealed the reality that he was not able to gain a place in the job market by taking over Mammachi’s pickle factory, even though he had legally claimed ownership of all the family’s properties. “[M]y Factory, my pineapples, my pickles,” Chacko spoke loud like a roaring lion (56). The illusion he created as he ceased Pappchi’s domestic violence that he was a well-educated gentleman who was going to treat everyone nicely vanished. This man, being Pappachi’s only son who succeeded to his father’s leadership position in the family, put it in Ammu’s words, was “a Male Chauvinist Pig” (144), too. Mammachi was once again ignored, offering her pickle factory as a gift and then being content with the title, “the Sleeping Partner” (55). Since her return to Ayemenem Ammu recognized that her condition in the family was worse than Mammachi’s because “a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a divorced daughter--according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all” (45). Ammu’s response to this gross unfairness was anger. She indignantly accused the Indian society for the discrimination against women like her,
“Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society” (56). Similar to Uma Narayan’s reflection upon how her “feminist consciousness” (Narayan 6) in India had it seeds not in its exposure to Western feminism in the course of East-West contact but to what she heard, observed, felt and experienced in her own Indian home, Ammu’s advocacy of feminism developed in a patriarchal background in which the sense that the whole society is an oppressive institution “is something that predates [their] explicit acquisition of a feminist politics and is something [they] initially learned not from books but from Indian women” (Narayan 9) themselves. Ammu’s feminist consciousness is dramatized as “the reckless rage of a suicide bomber” (43) stirred inside her that made her unpredictable. So writes Roy, “There was something restless and untamed about her. […] Even her walk changed from a safe mother-walk to another wider sort of walk. She wore flowers in her hair and carried magic secrets in her eyes. […] She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims” (43).

Rather than seeing Ammu’s struggle against patriarchy as borrowing the thoughts of the West or merely imitating the voice of Western feminists as we has the false impression that feminism is an exclusive invention of the West, we need to pay “a more complicated blend of attention […] to the interaction of politics internal to the nation with politics external to it” (Friedman 116). Though the “indigenous forms of feminism” (115) are not mature enough to elaborate a set of delicate, well-built theories, Friedman argues with a quotation from Kumari Jayawardena’s Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World that the authenticity or nativeness of this kind of post/colonial feminism shouldn’t be discredited.

[T]hose who want to continue to keep the women of our countries in a position of subordination find it convenient to dismiss feminism as a foreign ideology. … It has been variously alleged by traditionalists, political conservatives and even certain leftists, that feminism is a product of ‘decadent’ Western capitalism; that it is based on a foreign culture of no relevance to women in the Third World; […] that it alienated or diverts women from their culture, religion and family responsibilities on the one hand and from
the revolutionary struggles for national liberation and socialism on the other. (ix, 2)

Both Friedman’s and Jayawardena’s arguments pinpoint the social reality in a country like India that there has been ignorance towards the oppression women suffer. Moreover, they also draw our attention to the burgeoning feminist consciousness Indian women develop as a reaction against their experience of oppression at home as well as the unfavorable local conditions that they suffer at work. In an interview Roy speaks of her teenage life spent in Delhi after she left home and didn’t go back again for many years: “I lived on my own with a group of young people. We were all teenagers with no supervision, nobody to order out lives for us. I think that’s not as unusual here as it is in India. In India, it’s unheard of that somebody would be in that situation, especially a woman” (qtd. in Frumkes 24). Roy’s nostalgia for the freedom she once enjoyed in Delhi, to some degree, explains that India’s local condition has put women at a big disadvantage when they struggle for equality. Any intention to carry out substantial revolution is quenched. Ammu, knowing well what the chauvinist society had done to women and there was no room for her to openly resist it, cannot but entrust herself to the small and ordinary things in daily life as the last resort to unleash her emotions quietly.

Compared with Ammu, her brother, Chacko, was fortunate in living in a traditional country in which there are Love Laws offering men more freedom. Men don’t have their all behaviors meticulously controlled and sexuality rigidly contained. Dube notes the moral teaching: “In the case of inter-caste sexual relations a man incurs external pollution which can be washed off easily but a woman incurs internal pollution which pollutes her permanently” (232). Sexual involvement is a much more serious matter for a woman because the issues of caste boundaries and her own purity are involved, too. Men are invulnerable in respect of procreation. When Chacko was discovered having sexual activities with the women in the prickle factory, justification was provided by the female members in the Ipe family since they had already internalized the sexist values and biased
culture ideology of the Indian society. "He can’t help having a Man’s Needs,’ [Mammachi] said primly. Surprisingly, Baby Kochamma accepted this explanation, and the enigmatic, secretly thrilling notion of Men’s Needs gained implicit sanction in the Ayemenem House” (160). The family volunteered to wash off the external pollution of Chacko’s cross-caste activity. Mammachi

had a separate entrance built for Chacko’s room, which was at the eastern end of the house, so that the objects of his “Needs” wouldn’t have to go traipsing through the house. She secretly slipped them money to keep them happy. […]

The arrangement suited Mammachi, because in her mind, a fee clarified things.

Disjuncted sex from love. Needs from Feelings. (160-61)

Chacko was allowed more freedom, but not excessive freedom. He was asked to sacrifice his satisfaction of marrying a low-caste woman in order to maintain his social identity as a member of the upper caste. His sister, Ammu, was supposed make the same sacrifice or otherwise she would be not only an outcaste but also an outcast from society. According to Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran, “when the caste norms are openly flouted by elopement, pregnancy, or discovery, that punitive action becomes neccessary” (259). Ammu’s transgression of the caste norms was severely punished. Ammu, who was considered one of “the worst transgressors” of “the laws that lay down who should be loved and how, the laws that makes grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam, and jelly jelly” (31), was locked away in her bedroom like “the family lunatic in a medieval household” (239). Soon after that, the family banished her, leaving her dying miserably on the margin of the society.

The transgression of the Love Laws is the only big thing in The God of Small Things. The transgression results in series of deaths and eventually a trauma afflicting the younger generation. The tragedy began at the very moment when Vellya Pappen reported the forbidden love to Mammchi. In the act of secret disclosure we observe a lineal master-slave
relationship within the caste system. The origin of caste has been lost in history, nevertheless, the concept of caste system lasted for thousand of years is still prevalent in democratic India as Angus Maddison claims that “the institution of caste” is “[t]he chief characteristic of Indian society which differentiate[s] it from the others” (24). According to Maddison, Indian caste system “segregates the population into mutually exclusive groups whose economic and social functions are clearly defined and hereditary” (24-25). People are classified into different castes. Members of different castes kept apart in social and private life, and there shouldn’t be any intermarriage. The caste system does something more than allocating jobs, “it also define[s] the hierarchy and social precedence” (Maddison 28). A clear line is drawn between the upper and the lower castes. The upper caste, a caste of priests at the top of the social scale, is economically and socially dominant no matter in the city or in the country village. Manual laborers, at the bottom of the caste system, endure an unequal status due to their ritual impurity, and they are identified as untouchables. Roy describes the untouchable’s abject condition vividly.

They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched. […] Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backward 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. In Mammahi’s time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (71)

The sub-human position of the untouchables, like what Roy presents in the novel, makes their presence for all caste Hindus the source of a sense of superiority. A penniless upper-caste man is always better than a well-to-do untouchable. In fact, it is very difficult for an
untouchable to become rich because the upper caste is the direct supervisor of the production process, and the untouchable can simply work as a slave under the gaze of surveillance from the superior classes. Maddison points out the untouchable’s helplessness in his *Class Structure and Economic Growth: India and Pakistan since the Moghuls* that “[t]hese social disabilities greatly reinforce purely economic inequality and make social mobility very difficult” (130). When there is no possibility of social mobility because the untouchables are “too debilitated and too small a minority to stage a successful rebellion” (Maddison 29), they have no choice but to develop a commitment to the present life, in William Walsh’s words, “the conviction dharma--the absolute acceptance of one’s lot in a stratified, hierarchical society” (4). This sort of commitment has a lot to do with the Hindus’ general religious faith in reincarnation. The belief in reincarnation holds out the hope of rebirth in a higher social status. Once an untouchable accomplishes his task in this life with a loyal and humble heart, he is qualified for an improved next life. Consequently, members of the lower castes such as the untouchables resort to this conventional explanation and find self-comfort in seeing it as an escape from the oppressive reality. Like other untouchables in all parts of India, Vellya Pappen, convinced of his lot to be a slave by birth, devoted his loyalty to the masters in the upper caste. With no subversive ideas in him, Vellya Pappen “had come to tell Mammachi himself. As a Paravan and a man with mortgaged body parts, he considered it his duty” (242). Vellya Pappen, “an old Paravan, who had seen the Walking Backward days” and “torn between Loyalty and Love” (242), sacrificed his love for his son, Velutha, making up his mind to be a good and well-behaved slave. In this episode, love loses its battle to the teaching imposed upon the individual in the Indian culture.

Being ignorant of whatever cost he and his son were going to pay, Vellya Pappen merely concentrated on the loss and gain of the upper caste. His betrayal of his son and his parental love, to him, was precisely the feedback to the family’s munificence. Vellya Pappen, Velutha’s father, “however, was an Old-World Paravan. He had seen the Crawling
Backwards Days and his gratitude to Mammachi and her family for all that they had done for him was as wide and deep as a river in spite” (73). Actually, Roy in the novel keeps on insinuating to insinuating to her reader that Vellya Pappen’s had greatly overestimated the Ipe family’s generosity. In reality, there was always a “Touchable kitchen” (241) shut off to him. The family would never be generous enough to tolerate Vellya Pappen’s stepping into its territory. It is surly a surprise to some readers that he still decided to side with the upper caste to enforce the Love Laws, no matter how badly treated he was. Nietzsche had first analyzed the ambivalence in his discussion about the master and slave moralities which may help to make Vellya Pappen’s deeds imaginable and comprehensible. Morality, in Nietzsche’s argument, is “not a natural given but has to be seen instead as the result of an historical and psychological evolution,” and the typology of master and slave moralities “denotes distinct psychological types of human agency which first arise out of political distinctions made between social classes” (Pearson xiii). The master morality is a morality of self-affirmation and self-glorification. In contrast to “the person who abases himself, the dog-like man who lets himself be maltreated, the fawning flatterer, above all, the liar” (Nietzsche 165), the ruler with his well-cultivated master morality distances himself from the ruled by a “possession of a consciousness of difference” (Pearson xiv). “The noble type of man,” as Nietzsche has commented, “feels himself to be the determiner of values, he does not need to find approval, […] he create values” (165-66). The two types of morality coexist in one person, within one soul, yet in Vellya Pappen we perceive the slave morality overrides the other one. Keith Ansell Pearson, a Nietzschean scholar, provides us a simplified passage to differentiate the slave morality from the master morality that worth a lengthy quotation:

The nobles esteem life in terms of feelings of fullness, of overflowing power; they have a consciousness of wealth which seeks to give and bestow. By contrast, the slave type of morality, which characterizes the oppressed, and all those who suffer from life in some way, results in a pessimistic suspicion about the whole
human condition. The eye of the slave turns unfavourably toward the virtues of the powerful; he esteems those qualities which will serve to ease his existence, such as pity, patience, industry, and humility. (Pearson xiv)

Vellya Pappen, claimed by the slave morality, couldn’t help but “[recount] to Mammachi how much her family had done for his” (241) when he reported the secret love in the face of his master. These qualities of Mammachi—such as her helping hand reached out to pay for his glass eye, her benevolence of sending Velutha to the school, her charity in paying Velutha more than an untouchable’s salary, etc.—are stressed and highlighted “because here these are the most useful qualities and almost the only means of enduring the pressure of existence” (Nietzsche 167). Vellya Pappen would not be able to detect the truth behind Mammachi’s charity for the unfortunate is not genuine pity, but “abundance of power” (Nietzsche 66). “Mammachi didn’t encourage [Velutha] to enter the house …. She thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that Touchables touched. She said that it was a big step for a Paravan” (74). Nietzsche in his “Human, All Too Human” denounces the master’s or ruler’s pretended charity straightforwardly: “Signs of goodness, benevolence, sympathy are received fearfully as a trick, a prelude with a dreadful termination, a means of confusing and outwitting, in short as refined wickedness” (Nietzsche 132). In The God of Small Things the true face of the “refined wickedness” is exposed to the reader by Mammachi herself when she spat curses at Vellya Pappen and Velutha. Mammchi revealed her anger and outrage openly because she had recognized the dangerous disposition Vellya Pappen foresaw in Velutha. It was “[n]ot what he did, but the way he did it. Perhaps it was just a lack of hesitation. An unwarranted assurance” (73). The “lack of hesitation” and the “unwarranted assurance” imply that Velutha had become a man of “ressentiment” (Nietzsche 21). When a slave’s resentment “turns creative and gives birth to values” (Nietzsche 21), a slave’s revolt in morality begins. There was surely an anxiety to the master that Velutha might change
himself into a determiner of values. Velutha had become a potential competitor to his master in a way.

The upper caste has the very motivation to protect its interests. Its status as the tribe of ritual purity and also the lord of the untouchables renders it unable to compromise with any challenge from the lower levels. So the Ipe family in the novel invoked the Love Laws, and gave cruel punishment for any act of transgression. With the complicity of the lower caste, Vellya Pappen’s ignorant royalty, the family quickly found the target. Velutha was arrested, brutally beaten and then brought to the police station. There, the police and the upper-caste family encountered a dilemma: it was impossible for them to set him free, but the Love Laws were actually an unwritten law without the legislated power to accuse the lovers of crime. “True, he was a Paravan. True, he had misbehaved. But these were troubled times and technically, as per the law, he was an innocent man. There was no case” (29). The vicious beating and the arrest were illegal. There was no article or clause in the constitution or state law that stated explicitly an untouchable is forbidden to fall in love with a touchable.

Inspector Thomas Mathew, with the first thought coming into his mind being his “Touchable wife, two Touchable daughters--whole Touchable generations waiting in their Touchable wombs” (245) when Baby Kochamma came to report the transgression of the Love Laws, proposed a solution:

“The matter is very simple. Either the rape-victim must file a complaint. Or the children must identify the Paravan as their abductor in the presence of a police witness, Or.” He waited for Baby Kochamma to look at him….

………

“The children will do as they’re told,” Baby Kochamma said. “If I could have a few moments alone with them.” (299)

As an India woman who shared “the Indian preoccupation with classification and the necessity of keeping people in ‘their place in the scheme of things’” (Pesso-Miquel 37), Baby
Kochamma was very willing to collaborate with the policemen to put the cross-caste romance to a fatal end. She made Estha make up false testimony, and tactically sanctioned the arrest of Velutha. Complicity between the local power and the official authority was therefore established. The local power was eager to secure the orthodoxy of the Hindu tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation over thousands of years; the official authority, Inspector Thomas Mathew as a representative of the governmental institution of police and discipline in the newly independent country gave a helping hand.

Thomas Mathew’s nationality has been obscured throughout the whole novel. Reader hesitates to make a definite decision about his national identity because his biographical information is sparse in the novel. What informed the reader is that he possessed a very exotic name that can be easily associated with British colonization of India from 1849 to 1947, but he had an Indian look with “mustaches bustled like the friendly Air India Maharajah’s” and spoke fluent “the coarse Kottayam dialect of Malayalam” (9). Roy bestows a mixed metaphor upon this Indian policeman with a British name to invoke attention not to a specific Indian character but to India’s colonial past whose influence is still felt in India even today. On the whole, Thomas Mathew embodies a microcosm of post-colonial India. Legacy of the colonial period doesn’t die away with the country’s independence movement in 1947. It keeps on breathing, walking among Indian people, and interfering their social relations with each other. The experience of British colonization, like a phantom, haunts India and her people in many aspects, being internalized as a part of Indian’s social-political reality, to be tolerated, endured and lived with. One of the most significant colonial legacy is the consolidation of the caste system. Caste system not just survived the British colonization but also received the support from the empire to intensify itself. The import of colonial constitution did nothing to reshuffle the social classes in India or reform its social inequality, but joined the local forces to organize a complicit mechanism that practiced and manipulated the Love Laws even more powerfully than in the pre-colonial
days. With the support of the caste ideologies and the disciplinary mechanism enforced by the police, the Love Laws finally can operate as coercively, effectively and productively as the state law.

The motivation of British colonization in India was “economic, not evangelical” (Maddison 35). The aim was to obtain efficient control over the agricultural production and industries in order to gain itself the maximal economic profits. The British conqueror found that the caste system in India not only did no harm to his monopoly but also provided a ready-made source of income. The lower castes were the working labor, and the upper castes were the supervisors; the lower castes were subordinated to the upper castes, and the upper castes were subordinated to whoever held the state power. To the colonizers there was “no incentive to destroy the system. Instead they simply established themselves as a new and separate caste” (Maddison 29) above all the other castes. “The British established themselves as a separate ruling caste,” Angus Maddison describes, “Like other castes, they did not intermarry or eat with the lower (native) castes” (43). The British colonizers adopted the strategy of not spoiling the social structure already there, not “[merging] into a homogeneous culture as they did in China” (Maddison 29). They simply replaced the native “warlord aristocracy by an efficient bureaucracy and army” (Maddison 37) carefully designed for utilitarian purposes and for efficient maintenance of law and social order. Neither disturbing the way India nor introducing the British democratic experience into this primitive country the colonizers enlarged the Hindu caste system by settling themselves as the supreme ruling caste. The British ruling class’ laisser-faire attitude toward the conservative practice of caste had caused the lower castes to undergo a two-fold feeling of inferiority--culturally and racially. The untouchables once highly expected that the British could make some changes to their lives. “When the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas (among them Velutha’s grandfather, Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability” (71). Soon after the
conversion, the Paravans found what they expect was nothing but a daydream in the end. “[T]he colonizers, reproducing the British class system, reserved special churches and special priests for them” (Durix 11). The narrator ironically remarks that the Paravans realized that “they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire” (71).

The upper castes still kept their position at the top of the society, yet their ascendancy had decreased as compared with that before the colonization. Thus, the upper-caste intellectual elites had a hard time struggling to draw themselves closer to the nucleus of power through the act of mimicry. Unusual friendship allied the colonizer with the colonized. The former supported the latter to have him manage the lower castes for the interests of colonization. The latter colluded with the former to retain high social status. The interdependent relation between the upper castes and the British colonial power based on their same concern for the maintenance of the caste system had made the Love Laws and the punishment for violation possible. As far as the regime in India is concerned, the Love Laws characteristically is a compound mechanism of discipline and punishment. One central notion of such mechanism is “docility,” a request that “[a] body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault 1979, 136). The police apparatus in the modern India, like that in the colonial time, takes over the role of carrying out the functions of social discipline. As Michel Foucault explicates in his thought-provoking masterpiece Discipline and Punish, “although the police as an institution … [is] certainly linked directly to the centre of political sovereignty. … It is an apparatus that must be coextensive with the entire social body and not only by the extreme limits that it embraces, but by the minuteness of the details it is concerned with. Police power must bear ‘over everything’” (213). For this purpose, the police is given “the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance” to supervise “the most elementary particle, the most passing phenomenon of the social body” (Foucault 1979, 214). In every society, when the body “in the grip of every strict power, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or
obligations” (Foucault 1979, 136) is tamed down to be docile, the society can produce its order and harmony. Thomas Mathew, who was the physical embodiment of the political power “looked out at the world and never wondered how it worked” because he, comparing himself to a mechanic who serviced the machine-like nation, was the very person that “worked it” (248). All the policemen, including himself, shared the unshirkable responsibility to exterminate any visible obstacle causing social disorders. No doubt Ammu’s clandestine love affair with Velutha, who belonged to an abject class with the most unenlightened and uneducated minds, and was believed to be a group of barbarian, crude and immoral people, was identified as a prelude to more serious trouble or even large-scale social disorder which was likely to threaten the well-being of the other social classes that must be corrected as soon as possible. The policemen “crept towards the house. Like Film-policemen. Softly, softly through the grass. Batons in their hands. Machine guns in their minds. Responsibility for the Touchable Future on their thin but able shoulders” (291). The policemen “were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak” (293), an outbreak that may imperil the caste system in the prosperous land. In Foucault’s sense, “society as a whole does not judge one of its members, but that a social category with an interest in order judges another that is dedicated to disorder” (1979, 276). Literally, Velutha’s delinquency was an intolerable defiance of the caste system. Owing to the fact that his transgressive behavior which was alien to the society’s tradition, as it upset the caste system which has traditionally kept the society in its proper order, he was put under the social judgment and then punished.

An exploration of the complicity between Indian people and the colonizers must cover the effect of mimicry taken place in the colonized’s side. Homi Bhabha in his The Location of Culture has reminded us that “mimicry represents an ironic compromise” (86). Mimicry, Bhabha points out, indicates the colonized’s appropriating the colonial Other. The colonized parrots the lines of the colonizer in hope of becoming a perfect reflection of his colonial
master. The replication can never be perfectly achieved because there are always racial and cultural boundaries, a slippage, a gap between the colonized’s background and the foreign arrivals. Colonial mimicry produces “a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 86). Ania Loomba contends in *Colonialism-Postcolonialism* that “[t]he process of replication is never complete or perfect, and what it produces is not simply a perfect image of the original but something changed because of the context in which it is being reproduced” (89). Inevitably, the danger of cultural alienation plagues the mimicking people. They lose their root in the soil of their race or country, at the same time, they can’t identify with the colonizer completely. They become culturally hybrid. Roy in the novel offers concern for this kind of confusion in national identity when Chacko in his “Reading Aloud voice” (54) explained to Estha and Rahel the meaning of “Anglophile” (50): “Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows will never be sad enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives never important enough. To matter” (52). The Ipe family, as Chacko confessed, “were a family Anglophiles” (51). They were “[p]ointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away” (51). What is curious is that Chacko unconsciously refused to admit that he was such a mimic man. Jean-Pierre Durix’s “The ‘Post-Coloniality’ of *The God of Small Things*” offers a scrutiny of Chacko’s mimicry.

Chacko may be one of the worst illustrations of what he denounces. His general attitude towards British culture is that of a mimic man. He is very proud of his stay at Oxford to the point of having his Balliol oar ‘hung from iron hoops on the [pickle] factory wall’ (p. 57). [...] he has attempted to ‘whiten’ himself by marrying an English woman. Margaret, thus hoping to espouse British culture in the flesh. (13)
His sister, Ammu, dismissed him with a single blow. "‘Marry our conquerors, is more like it,’ Ammu said dryly, referring to Margaret Kochamma” (52). Chacko married Margaret Kochamma and had the illusion that the mixed marriage had transformed him into a real British like her. His admiration for the colonial culture did not come to an end after the divorce as he “had never stopped loving Margaret Kochamma” (36). Having his reunion with Margaret Kochamma at the airport, Chacko appeared to be “a proud and happy man” (136) having a white wife. Margaret Kochamma meant more than a wife to Chacko. What is more important is that she was a white. She was the white he often spoke of “with a particular pride” (236) as if he had not been separate from her and he had never lost her.

Like Chacko, Baby Kochamma showed a great desire for (post)colonial mimicry when she met Margaret Kochamma and her daughter, Sophie Mol, at the airport. Sophie Mol in her eyes “was so beautiful that she reminded her of a wood-spire. Of Ariel” (138). Her communication with Sophie Mol implies that there is truly a common phenomenon that a mimic person can feel a strong affinity to the colonizer. As another mimic person in the novel, Baby Kochamma was so eager to express her greeting and compliments in a language with “a strange new British accent” (137). For Estha and Rahel, the adulation was nothing more than an act of “trying to boast” (138), yet Baby Kochamma herself knew that the showing-off carried the intention to enhance her cultural standing. As the narrator has commented, “[a]ll this was of course primarily to announce her credentials to Margaret Kochamma. To set herself apart from the Sweeper Class” (138). Through the mimicking act, on the one hand, Baby Kochamma shortened the distance between her and the English. She intentionally uprooted her Indianness to identify with the British conquerors. On the other hand, she extended the distance from the upper castes to the debased castes as she thought that she had made another step closer to the British. It is apparent that her grandnephews at the airport had not yet comprehended the complex meaning of their Anglophile family’s cordial welcome paid to their British relatives. They giggled, mocking
at Baby Kochamma’s artificial courtesy. In the later chapters, they gradually made sense of
the welcome ceremony and critically treated it as the adult’s welcome-home-our-
Shophie-Mol play. The spotlight followed Sophie Mol all the way. “[T]he Play went with
her. Walked when she walked, stopped when she stopped” (177). Whoever else was a
peripheral character. Some were even excluded from the play. Rahel, standing “on the
periphery of the Play” (174), found that people in the play were deceitful and hypocritical.
When she was outside the play with Velutha, who had been excluded from the play entirely,
she experienced the most genuine affection of exchanging love between one another. The
twins shared with Velutha “a sub-world” of physical ease, “[a] tactile world of smiles and
laughter” (167) that one in the welcome play had no part in.

The scene in which Roy describes Velutha’s suffering body versus the policemen’s
collective cruelty provokes the reader’s sympathy for the weak lying with fractured body
parts; and further, it compels the reader to question the righteousness of the Love Laws and
the caste-colonialism complicity behind the laws. In the voice of the narrator Roy seems to
treat the dying Velutha as a martyrdom for which she conveys both empathy and compassion.
Dying Velutha’s “skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones
were, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. […] His lower intestine was ruptured and
hemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity” (294). The policemen still
“brought out the handcuffs” (294) to declare their official power as if they had not seen the
disabled body in front of them that was no longer able to fight back. Or we should say,
more specifically, that Velutha, as a Paravan despised by the others, had been deprived of his
right and ability to fight back at the very beginning. Velutha had his hands cuffed, feet
fettered, and opinions suppressed by the caste system. He was not allowed to touch
whatever he wanted to, not to remove himself from the place he was allotted in the society,
and not expected to speak freely about what he shouldn’t long for. The culture forces many
other Indians like Velutha to give up their free will, and they have to identify themselves as
untouchables, which do not describe what they think they really are, but are imposed on them from without. People have their social existence recognized at the cost of letting go of their individualism in many occasions. Estha, a merely seven year-old child is innocent of the hardship in the society. Estha, unaware of the social reality that was going to murder his childhood, once believed that “India’s a Free Country” (188). Was India really a Free Country and “No one could argue with that” (188)? The God of Small Things does contain many passages in which the author ventures to express her critique on “the evils of her society” (Durix 8). The novel in itself “explicitly condemns the evils of conservatism and of the caste system in particular” (Durix 9). Roy’s desire to criticize the social injustice is rather evident in the last two chapters. As the title of the final chapter suggests, the couple in love paid a high price for their transgression of the social norms. In describing the lovers in such a tone of sympathy, Roy does not mean to request an unconditional forgiveness for the act of transgression. What she cares for is whether there are “proper punishments” (309) besides severe and overdone discipline. “They didn’t ask to be let off lightly. They only asked for punishments that fitted their crimes” (309). For the couple, the children witness the infliction of the punishments on the couple, and Roy as the narrator, one should be punished according to the seriousness of his or her crime rather than the preference of the law executor. Law executor in the novel, a complicit mechanism composed of the upper-caste members and the colonizers, had the laws serve the selfishness of a certain group of people and manipulated the laws to dominate the powerless. The deep-rooted caste system has developed into a callous social mechanism that disciplines and even traumatizes the Indians by excessive punishments in the name of the Love Laws. However, Roy is optimistic when tackling with the issue of caste in her novel. She seems to point towards “a hope which goes beyond the text” (Gqola 119) as the novel ends with the exchange of love between Velutha and Ammu. The open ending does mean much more than it says. “The God of Small Things ends with the single paragraph, ‘Tomorrow,’ the women’s promise to meet her
lover again,” says Janet Thormann, “as if the novel too held out the promise of a future under
law that would allow desire for all human beings” (305). The future with hope, like many
other “Big Things, lurk[s] unsaid inside” (136). What hope is there for trans-caste romance
in India? The answer to this question is left unsaid in the novel, but silence doesn’t mean
that it does not exist or Indians should give up hopes. Velutha and Ammu’s meeting
represents a possibility of escaping different forms of coercion and control that may pervert
human culture, and it also paves the way for trans-caste dialogue and communication. As
long as we human beings always put our faith in the future and strive for it, we will be taken
a step closer to it just like the couple.
Chapter Three
The Politics of Love: On Motherhood, Kinship and Romance
in *The God of Small Things*

Love among Indians in *The God of Small Things* is an issue concerning life and death. To love or not to, similar to Hamlet’s question of to be or not to be, has been a tormenting struggle because there is always something more to think about besides love itself. A more careful consideration is required. In one’s decision to give or to take love, the social hierarchy, class alienation, public’s point of view and expectations must be all taken into consideration. Therefore, the exchange of love in Indians’ interpersonal relations is not based on individual’s personal preference, but accords with the social codes and ethical teachings that instruct Indian people on how and what to love. Roy coins the oxymoronic term, Love Laws, to refer to this set of implicit codes and constraints in the Indian society that governs how Indians should deal with their love relationships. Love Laws, “[t]he laws that lay down who should be loved, and how” (33), have drawn a border line for them. One can play it safe by observing these laws without causing any trouble. By contrast, people who overstep the boundary of the safety zone to transgress the Love Laws would be punished. In satisfying their erotic desires with the wrong person, the transgressors would have to accept the consequences as well. Unfortunately, the consequences are usually fatal. For most people who observe the Love Laws, it might be a fair deal for the transgressors to exchange their lives for the illicit love they pursues. The punishments for the law breakers such as Velutha and Ammu in the novel are authorized by both the law-abiding citizens and the policing agents of the state apparatus. It is generally believed that society needs its people to observe social norms and society would also discipline the outlaws to sustain its power and maintain its order. Violence involved in punishments is just, to use Roy’s vocabulary, a “small thing” while the laws, in contrast, are the really big things to be
valorized and prioritized.

Basically, the Love Laws are a collection of prohibitions. Law or prohibition is so invariably interpreted as an instrument of power. Power is represented as a system of law, and law has always served as “a mask for power” (Foucault 1980, 140). Foucault in his study of power and its strategies briefly summarizes the relation between law and power that law is “the principal mode of the representation of power” (1980, 141). There are various forms of power, each of which has its utility. In Three Faces of Power Kenneth E. Boulding suggests a simple classification of power into three major forms from the point of view of its consequences: “destructive power, productive power and integrative power” (24). Productive power is found in the activities of incubation, creation, building, sowing, and thinking. The kind of power that terrifies human beings the most is destructive power, “the power to destroy things” (24). For our common sense, things such as military weapons, knives, chain saws, and so on, carry the most visible and effective destructive power that can kill people or destroy valued things. The practice of the Love Laws in The God of Small Things, unquestionably, demonstrated destructive power that it can physically abuse a human being to death, while fracturing its body into parts and pieces. A mother and her children were hurt deeply because of the loss of their beloved. The power of such laws is not merely destructive power but “the ultimate kind of power”, that is, “violence” (Arendt 59).

So far, the argument above that takes love and laws as the direct opposite of each other seems to lead us to accept the traditional view that sees the power of love as definitely productive, and the power of laws as oppressive, and, therefore, unproductive. It stands to reason that love among family members should be deemed as the most productive force in people’s lives, which can light up their lives. However, instead of insisting on this lopsided view of love, Roy in her The God of Small Things attempts to argue that there is indeed

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5 Foucault also argues that law and power are not equivalent to each other. See more explanation in the seventh chapter of Power/Knowledge.
another dark side of love. For Roy, love means more than an ideal that we strive for as we have always believed; nor does love promise us a better world in which we can live happily and peacefully. Love is already a part of actual reality in our daily lives, and reality can be very cruel to people. In one interview, Roy says, “I don’t see my book as an angry critique of ‘our society.’ It’s really a way of seeing, a way of presenting the irreconcilable sides of our nature, our ability to love so deeply yet be so brutal” (qtd. in Abraham 1998, 91). When most critics and readers are marveling at Roy’s penetrative observation on Indian culture and applaud it for raising astute objections to “a plethora of social evils in our culture--patriarchal property rights, ill-treatment of divorced women, caste issues, wife battering, and so on” (Abraham 1998, 91), Roy clarifies that the purpose of this novel is not to explore culture but human nature. Human nature shows an inclination to put up divisions between the self and the other, man and woman, parent and child, old and young, domination and subordination, those “haves” and those “have-nots,” etc. In every human culture we perceive numerous vivid examples illustrating such intolerability towards an alien other, like a touchable’s detestation towards the untouchables in the Indian caste system. “There will always be those of us who make these divisions and those of us who argue against them” (qtd. in Abraham 1998, 91). Roy is quoted so saying. What is problematic about human culture is that we “make war across these divisions” while we “make love across these divisions” (qtd. in Abraham 1998, 91) at the same time. Love has been regarded as the only thing that can cross these divisions and fight against all the destructive power spoiling the goodness in human nature. To some extents, since human beings tend to take love as the very solution to overcome the social contradictions we encounter in our daily lives, Roy makes the dry and sarcastic comment that with “our ability to love so deeply yet be so brutal” (qtd. in Abraham 1998, 91), we sometimes love each other “to death” (307). So saying, Roy questions our naïve opinion on love when we view love as an elixir. Roy writes her debut novel to awaken us to reconsider whether love can be brutal, too. Deep enough to be brutal; and
Referring once again to Boulding’s classification of power, we find Roy is not alone in proffering her anatomy of love as Janus-faced. Like Roy, Boulding notes both the productive and the destructive aspect of love. According to Boulding, love creates intimacy and forges connections, but, on the other hand, love also destroys and alienates people from one another. He defines that love as a form of integrative power.

Integrative power may be thought of perhaps as an aspect of productive power that involves the capacity to build organizations, to create families and groups, to inspire loyalty, to bind people together, to develop legitimacy. Integrative power has a negative sense, to create enemies, to alienate people; it has a destructive as well as a productive aspect. (25)

The complex dynamic of the power of love remains one of the real puzzles that surprises as well as confuses people. People are bound together by love. Deep love, love in kinship for instance, binds people more closely to each other. In the love relationship based on deep and great affection, essentially, there is an anxious need for confession, proof, exchange, protection and reinforcement. To prove the truthfulness of love, A may say to B, “I do something for you because I love you so much, so you have to do something for me to show me your love.” To gauge the depth of love, B may say to A, “If you don’t do something for me, I know you don’t love me.” To protect the beloved from any possible harm, A may say to B, “You shouldn’t do something, or I will love you no more.” To maintain their love relationship in stability, B may respond by saying, “I will do what you tell me to and not to do, and you have to promise you will love me as usual.” Those dialogues are not just lines spoken by an actor or actress in a day-time soap opera. They are everywhere in our daily lives, but most of time we are unaware that we have made and heard so many discourses about love in which love is actually conveyed to the loved one accompanied by the rhetoric of threats, warning and exchange, all of which can hurt the listener deeply. The listener,
who might be so terrified of the fear of losing the other’s love, accordingly hastens to satisfy the demands made by the addressee in the name of love. There are still some other people who turn away from the demanding discourses of love, but they are to pay a dear price for keeping their autonomy: either they lose the love relationship, or, hatred grows hence to replace love. Love becomes the origin of hatred because, in the language of love, love is frequently used not to show one’s unconditional bonds to the other but as a token of a reward for the obedient. Both love and law hunt for obedience. Both are the means to secure obedience from the other people. The distinction between love and law is blurred since love, like law, demonstrates a forceful power to discipline and manipulate human behaviors.

In *The God of Small Things* Rahel and Estha usually find themselves perplexed at their mother Ammu’s way of expressing her love for them. Compared to the love the twins received from the other family members, Ammu’s maternal love was extremely overwhelming. Ammu, as a single mother without the support from her husband nor assistance from her own parents, recognized that the society and her family would always give her the cold shoulder. The strong mother-child attachment became the only consolation in her life. In the Ipe family, she loved no one except her children, and maternal love was the only thing she could afford to them. Her cheerless childhood is another psychic factor that prompted her to intensify her maternal behavior. Ammu’s life history, same as those of many women in Dr. David M. Levy’s study of the exaggerated maternal love and maternal overprotection that he finds in many mothers, “revealed a deeply frustrated craving for love in childhood” (qtd. in Brown 325). Ammu, as a little child, desperately craved for her parents’ love, but Pappchi’s domestic violence failed his wife and children completely. Since she lived her childhood in terror, and, in retrospect, the memory of her childhood, was filed and condensed into one silent movie which she repeatedly play in her mind later on in her life.

Pappachi had been sitting in his mahogany rocking chair all along, rocking
himself silently in the dark. When he caught [Ammu], he didn’t say a word. He flogged her with his ivory-handled riding crop…. When he finished beating her he made her bring him Mammachi’s pinking shears from her sewing cupboard. While Ammu watched, the Imperial Entomologist shred her new gumboots with her mother’s pinking shears. The strips of black rubber fell to the floor…. When the last strip of rubber had rippled to the floor, her father looked at her with cold, flat eyes, and rocked and rocked and rocked. Surrounded by a sea of twisting rubber snakes. (172)

To Ammu, Pappachi, who was as vicious as a serpent king surrounded by other snakes, poisoned her early life. Although a father like him didn’t give her the love she needed during her childhood, at least he, with his own failure as a negative example, obliquely instructed her about the indispensability and significance of enveloping her own children with parental love. Unfortunately, when Ammu had her own children, her husband depressed her with his incorrigible alcoholism and habitual laziness. The incompetence of the two men responsible for shaping the course of Ammu’s life--her father and husband, served as the catalyst that activated in her a “strong ‘maternal drive’” (Brown 325).

Ever since her divorce, Ammu, as if to make up the children’s loss of their biological father, determined to give them an additional amount of maternal love in substitution for the paternal love they required. Playing the double role as both the mother and the father, she tried to prove to the public that a divorcee could be an able mother who raised her children well all by herself. When Baby Kochamma made an unfavorable comment on her children’s improper acts in the Cochin Airport, Ammu immediately identified it as an oblique criticism of her ability to be a mother.

“It’s useless,” Baby Kochamma said. “They’re sly. They’re uncouth. Deceitful. They’re growing wild. You can’t manage them.”

Ammu turned back to Estha and Rahel and her eyes were blurred jewels.
“Everybody says that children need a Baba. And I say no. Not my children.
D’you know why?”

Tow heads nodded.

“Why. Tell me,” Ammu said.

And not together, but almost, Esthappen and Rahel said”

“Because you’re our Ammu and our Baba and you love us Double.”

“More than Double,” Ammu said. “So remember what I told you. People’s feelings are precious. And when you disobey me in Public, everybody gets the wrong impression.” (142)

In case people would have “the wrong impression” (142) that a divorcee like her would inevitably end up being a failure with her children behaving as uncivilized barbarians, Ammu reprimanded Estha and Rahel harshly as soon as they behaved in a way they were not supposed to. Estha should not have replied with “Fine, thank you.” when Margaret Kochamma greeted him in their first meeting with “How d’you do, Esthappen?” (138). Rahel should not have disappeared “like a sausage into the dirty airport curtain”; and moreover, she should not have greeted Margaret Kochamma, when she was forced to do so, with a mumbled “How do YOU do?” (139). For Ammu, the children’s ungraceful behaviors brought shame and blame not only to themselves but also to their mother, her culture and her upbringing. Any judgment going to her children was also a judgment made on her. For this reason, when Estha and Rahel upset her plan to win what she called “the Indo-British Behavior Competition” (139), she was infuriated. “[A]n angry feeling rose in her and stopped around her heart. A Far More Angry Than Necessary feeling. She felt somehow humiliated by this public revolt in her area of jurisdiction” (139). Ammu, holding to her conviction that since “she was [her twins’] Ammu and their Baba and she had loved them Double” (155), so they should not and could not have disappointed her, didn’t allow them to revolt against her will, especially the revolts in public. Interpreting her children’s improper
behaviors as intentional acts of revolt against her maternal authority, Ammu felt infuriated at them for shaming her in the presence of the people who had already despised her as a divorced woman. To prevent the revolt from getting worse, and to ensure that it would not be repeated in the future, lest people should look down upon her further, Ammu disciplined Estha and Rahel by issuing one threat after another. “‘If you ever,’” Ammu spoke to them solemnly, “‘and I mean this, EVER, ever again disobey me in Public, I will see to it that you are sent away to somewhere where you will jolly well learn to behave. Is that clear?’” (141).

Estha and Rahel nodded their heads three times cautiously and quietly to promise that they would never do the same thing in the future.

Ammu’s commands to her twins, composed of two parts, the positing of a hypothetical situation and the mapping of its possible consequences, both of which point towards a foreseeable outcome to the twin’s violation of her commands. Estha and Rahel soon realized that if they misbehaved they would be seriously punished. Their violation meant more than children’s naughtiness or childish misbehavior to their mother. It could also indicate an end to their intimate, and, rather paradoxically, fragile mother-child relationship. Not surprisingly, Estha and Rahel as merely seven-year old kids became anxious about the possibility of losing their mother’s love. They knew that they would be real orphans without their mother. There was not going to be anyone like Ammu who “had loved them Double” (155). What they had to do to keep Ammu by their side and her incessant devotion of love to them is to obey her. As a result, obedience and subjection were drawn out from the children’s innocent minds as they yearned for permanent maternal love. The rhetoric of love used by Ammu is deployed both to assure the twins of her love for them and to threaten them of the possibility of losing her love. It is the kind of talk of love used by a parent to manage the behaviors of her children as she emphasized that she did all these for them because she had loved them so much. Love is used to exact obedience from the object, and, in this sense, love is not dissimilar from laws. Love is not opposed to the laws; instead, love
Ammu’s brother, Chacko, once voiced his objection to her way of treating her twins. “Even children have some rights, for God’s sake” (81)! Chacko seemed to insinuate that Ammu was educating her children in a way that was simply inhumane. The communication between them was not smooth. Obviously, Ammu and Chacko did not see eye to eye with each other. On Ammu’s part, even though she was a divorced woman, and, as a consequence of it, lost her honor, she still took her private pride in herself as an able mother. Over-estimation of her maternal role compelled her to maximize her maternal love to an extent that it turned possessive and domineering. Ammu didn’t welcome Chacko or anyone else’s intervention into her ties with her children. Chacko’s intercession was refused bluntly. “‘Mind your own business,’ Ammu snapped” (81). In spite of Chacko’s protest, Ammu persisted in her “fascist” (81) way of managing her children by reproaching them harshly. When she was annoyed with Rahel for “[blowing] an inadvertent spit bubble” (80) in the Plymouth, she angrily and loudly scolded at Rahel, “Will you stop that” (81)! Not an interrogation with a question mark but an imperative Ammu sent to Rahel. Her word was not a request; instead, it was uttered as a command that Rahel had to observe. Ammu didn’t look forward to an apology. Saying sorry couldn’t reverse the wrong doing. “Sorry doesn’t make a dead man alive” (81), as Estha pointed out, what was done was done. “Things can change in a day” (156), and history allows no flash-back. Speaking with his unusual precociousness like a sophisticated wise elder, Estha, who held by his “Two Thoughts” (185), that is, “(a) Anything can happen to Anyone and (b) It’s best to be prepared” (186), in the novel played a prophetic role foretelling Velutha’s violent death. Having witnessed the policemen’s brutal abuse inflicted on Velutha, Estha learned that sometimes mischievous behaviors could cause real death and severe punishment. Compared with Velutha’s scandalous love with Ammu, love that was condemned by the society, Estha and his twin sister’s unruly behaviors, which angered Ammu, are relatively trivial matters, small
things. However, Ammu knew that children had to be forced to “learn to behave” (141) at an early age, or it would be too late when they made a mistake which was big enough to invite the state power to discipline and to punish them.

Roy has revealed to the reader that Ammu’s maternal love for her twins was self-contradictory.

Ammu loved her children (of course), but their wide-eye vulnerability and their willingness to love people who didn’t really love them exasperated her and sometimes made her want to hurt them--just as an education, a protection. (42) It is commonly believed that love and hurt are incompatible. People hurt each other because they don’t love each other enough. When one gets hurt, he or she begins to love the one who hurts them less. Ammu’s dialectic of maternal love diverged from the common knowledge that to love means not to hurt and to hurt means a comparatively reduction in the quantity or depth of love. To love and to hurt went side by side in her maternity. The expression of her love can also mean to hurt them. She hurt Estha and Rahel, in her opinion, because she loved them too deeply. Motivated by her great love for them, she did everything to protest them, including hurting them. To make sure that her beloved children would never get hurt by the people who did not really love them, she took the necessary precaution by hurting them herself so that they would grow tough enough to build up a self-defense mechanism to shield them away the pain caused by the people who might hurt them one day in an unsympathetic way, in a way that a mother would never do to her children. Ammu, as a despised divorcee without “Locusts Stand I” (56) in her family nor in the society, had suffered enough maltreatment in her life. From her firsthand experience, she had learned the callousness of the society and its people. As a consequence of this awareness that in order not to get hurt, Ammu endeavored to immunize her own children against the pain of love when people love less, and to teach them not to indulge in the fantasy of love. Meanwhile, she tried to mark the difference between her and the other people’s intentions to
hurt. People hurt each other terribly for the sake of hurting, but she hurt them for the sake of love. She hurt her children not because she didn’t love them at all or she loved them less, but because she had too much love for them. Hurting them was exactly one of her maternal expressions of love.

Although Ammu tried, rather repeatedly, to convey her philosophy of love to Estha and Rahel, the twins did not fully comprehend the arbitrary relation established by Ammu between loving them (the cause) and hurting them (the effect). Quite often, the twins’ response to her love philosophy alerted Ammu to the paradox of her theory that she just could not tolerate the idea that her children could hurt her since they have equally deep love for her. Whenever she found it necessary to verbally reprimand her children for not behaving themselves, she thought her children acted in such a mischievous way just to hurt her and to shame her in front of other people. In so thinking, she has always forgotten her oblique logic that they hurt her because they loved her, too. Whenever Estha and Rahel couldn’t resist the temptation and acted in a childish manner, Ammu took it as a personal affront for she knew that following their recklessness came the unfriendly judgments form all directions to humiliate her single-mother dignity. To protect herself from the feeling of being hurt, she had to take an effective and efficient measure to manage her children. Like many other mothers, Ammu found her solution in the idiom of love.

Metaphysical discussion of love has always rendered love a pure quality so that love inspires the aesthetics of the sublime which transcends the virtue of goodness. Instead of repeating the celebrated clichés of love, Roy in her description of the love between Ammu and her twins links the rhetoric of love with the economic logic of return. “‘When you hurt people, they begin to love you less. That’s what careless words do. They make people love you a little less’” (107). Just as Ammu taught Rahel that she had to watch her words and acts, in the real situation in human interaction love doesn’t come and go unconditionally. Neither does maternal love. The practice of love is, in fact, a carefully designed strategy
involving the choice of love object and the economic apportionment of its quantity. People who are considered to be worthy of love are given more love, but people who are unworthy of love would be deprived of love. When Rahel made an improper comment to Ammu’s compliment on the Orangedrink Lemondrink man’s generosity in the theater lobby, Ammu responded by reminding Rahel with the rhetorical question “D’you know what happens when you hurt people?” (107). Rahel instantly gathered the implication of the question that she was very likely to be regarded as a willful child who was not worthy of Ammu’s love. With “[f]rightened eyes” and “[s]ix goosebumps on her careless heart,” Rahel came to the terrifying conclusion that “[a] little less her Ammu loved her” (107). Rahel began to feel terribly sorry for what she said to Ammu in petulancy. At dinner that night, Rahel was obsessed by the anxiety about her mother’s diminishing love for her:

“Ammu,” Rahel said, “shall I miss dinner as my punishment?”

She was keen to exchange punishments. No dinner, in exchange for Ammu loving her the same as before.

“As you please,” Ammu said. “But I advise you to eat. If you want to grow, that is. Maybe you could share some of Chacko’s chicken.”

……

“But what about my punishment?” Rahel said. “You haven’t given me my punishment!” (109)

Ammu showed no interest in punishing Rahel. A missed dinner or any other physical punishment couldn’t terrify Rahel, but her mother’s indifference towards punishing her was what she was really afraid of. Ammu had always told her children that she had been so harsh on them out of her double love for both of them. Her sudden change, to Rahel, was not an expression of forgiveness but a removal of her attention and love from this one to the other one. “But now that Estha wasn’t well and Love had been re-apportioned (Ammu loved her a little less)” (109). “[Punishments] came in different sizes” (109) and different
forms. Ammu did not slap or hit Rahel as what she used to, but Rahel standing alone in the hotel room, watching Ammu leaving with Estha and listening to their fading feet sounds, was occupied by the feeling “full of sadness” (109) as if she had been slapped or hit. There was no physical punishment; however, the effect of punishment had been acutely felt for the reapportionment of Ammu’s love.

The reapportionment of maternal love put Rahel in a state of fear, fear of being less loved. Ammu’s less-love theory had a destructive impact upon her twins, especially Rahel. Although Ammu didn’t make it clear whether she had transferred most of her maternal love from Rehal to Estha, Rahel still presumed that she had been cut out of her mother’s favor. She felt that there was a gap emerging between them to alienate her from Ammu. Rahel as a sensitive little girl was overwhelmed by the destructive power of Ammu’s maternal love. “Destructive power within the family not only takes the form of injury or the threat of injury,” as Boulding clarifies, “it can also take the form of deprivation or the treat of deprivation” (81). Rahel, who did not have enough intelligence to figure out the educational purpose of Ammu’s less-love theory, recognized it as a threat of deprivation and Ammu’s patent preference for Estha as a virtual act of deprivation, deprivation of her mother’s love. The fear of losing her mother’s love grew rapidly within Rahel and soon settled down at the bottom of her heart and disturbed her from time to time. When Ammu helped her to put on the clothes in the next morning at the hotel, she kissed Ammu “on each dimple (left cheek, right cheek)” (130) and then carefully expressed her thank for the new clothes that was, in the narrator’s jesting comment, “one of those baffling aberrations in Ammu’s taste” (130) with the intention to please her. To Rahel’s surprise, Ammu’s response to her sweet manner was not as lively as she had expected. “Ammu smile. ‘You’re welcome, my sweetheart,’ she said, but sadly” (131). The “You’re welcome, my sweetheart” (131) said in Ammu’s sad tone echoed in Rahel’s head. She was struck by the fearful thought one more time: “A little less her mother loved her” (131). While Rahel was already tortured by the fear of losing her
mother’s love, her fear became aggravated by the time Sophie Mol entered her world.

Sophie Mol, the girl “[h]atted, bell-bottomed and Loved from the Beginning” (129) made no effort to earn the whole family’s affection before and after her real presence in this country. The Anglophilia family had been looking forward to her arrival ardently. “Ammu watched with her handbag. Chacko with his roses. Baby Kochamma with her sticking-out neckmole” (134). Adults lined up and craned their necks to see the landing of the flight that brought Sophie Mol to them. On watching Sophie Mol walking into the arrival lounge, Rahel was “overcome” by a complicated emotion intermingling “excitement” with “resentment” (135). On the one hand she was excited about seeing a foreign relative who aroused her itching curiosity, and on the other hand she was getting envious of all the attention this relative had attracted. For Rahel, Sophie Mol was such a tough competitor for the family’s attention. Rahel became so worried that Sophie Mol might easily take away whatever she had in the family, including her mother’s double love, and left her nothing but scolds and neglect like those she was given at Sophie Mol’s arrival. Ammu scolded her because it was considered irresponsible of her to “[commune] with cement marsupials” (135) when she was on her duty to herald Sophie Mol’s appearance. Chacko was in an ecstasy of joy all the way and busy holding a bunch of red roses. Not only his hands but also his heart was “already carrying something” “Fatly and Fondly” (135), namely his love for Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol. Absolutely, right at this moment he didn’t care how Ammu scolded at her twins and how they felt about this kind of “fascist” (81) way of education. Rahel, with the great anxiety that Ammu would followed Chacko, “watched hawk-eyed to try and gauge how much Ammu loved Sophie Mol, but couldn’t” (137). Not until around the bedtime of the same day was she able to ease her anxiety about losing Ammu’s love: “Ammu tucked her naughty daughter in and switched off the light. Her goodnight kiss left no spit on Rahel’s cheek and Rahel could tell that she wasn’t really angry. ‘You’re not angry. Ammu.’ In a happy whisper. *A little more her mother loved her*” (311-12).
In Roy’s detailed descriptions of a little girl’s fear of her single mother’s reapportionment of love as a dynamic expression of her ambition and eagerness for educating her children successfully, the reader observes that in the parent-child interaction love is often employed as a lure to arrest obedience and respect from the children. It is naïve to deny the fact that there is a hierarchy in the love relationship between parents and children. Parents give orders to instruct their children on how to behave properly, punish them to stop their misbehaviors, and praise them to encourage their good conduct. Children, young children especially, are always asked to listen to the parents and act in the way they are told to do. In India, children’s “obedience in the family is emphasized” as “dominance over social inferiors is tacitly encouraged” (Mandelbaum 30). In his research on the rearing of children in Indian villages, David G. Mandelbaum finds an interesting phenomenon that is prevalent all over the villages in the subcontinent: “In the southern village as in the northern, a child ‘should, above all, be obedient and respectful to elders’” (31). Revolts happened in the childhood must be eradicated for any of them foreshadowed a possible rebellion against the social system in the adulthood. A preparation lesson in the family is needed. Rigid caste hierarchies and class differences running through all social relations in India have so structured the cultural imaginary of Indian parents that they adopt harsh disciplinary measures to instill into their children those “cultural fundamentals” (Mandelbaum 29) when they are very young. “Within the family circle,” Mandelbaum further observes, “the child learns the fundamentals of his culture and society, [and he] is taught to become the kind of person who will, in his turn, fulfill the appropriate roles of family and society” (29). Indians believe that the hierarchy within Indian family is in many ways a social hierarchy in miniature. It is a social and cultural given, which is unchangeable, inescapable, and requires submission and commitment. “The child, as junior in the household, must soon be taught deference and obedience” (Mandelbaum 30) to make sure that he or she will show the same submission to the society’s elders and the orthodoxy of caste hierarchy and sexual difference. As a
consequence of the fitting behaviors, one will be rewarded with a social position of his or her own. The strong connection between an Indian individual and his social identity begins when he is “trained to be properly deferent, suitably observant of the hierarchy of family relations” (Mandelbaum 30). “The basic pattern of social control” (Mandelbaum 36) are reproduced, performed, learned in family relations.

Mandelbaum offers a cultural perspective for the reader to comprehend Ammu’s child rearing policy. What manifested in Ammu’s management of her children was motivated less by natural maternal instincts than by learned cultural doctrines. Her love-less theory did not come from her own idiosyncratic invention; she was recycling a set of socially accepted ideology that stresses the paramount importance of the parental control and discipline of children. To cultivate the child’s obedience, Indian parents, Ammu included, all subscribe to the belief that

a child should never be praised to his face lest this make him disobedient…. [H]is deference and his adherence to the hierarchy … are jeopardized if the child hears himself praised, “loved too much,” and so gets an overweening sense of his own importance. And a child, or anyone, who comes to feel so important will not easily accept subordinate status and a deferent demeanor that must go with it. (Mandelbaum 30)

Indian parents, compared with those of the western family, are rather sparing in giving praise to their children. For them, praise may lead to arrogance, and arrogance nurtures a defiant attitude that would question and even challenge the authorities in the family, the community and the society. Therefore, to punish the child in public is considered an elementary method to help them to reclaim deference. No matter what the parents do to keep the child under control, they are actually acting on the guiding principle of child training. That is to say, to discipline them is a reserved and indirect expression of their love for their children. Indian children are taught to comprehend that the supply of love will go on as long as they remain
obedient. Obedience brings love while disobedience brings punishment. It is a matter of course that parents love their children, but it is dangerous for the parents to make the children becoming over conceited by loving them too much. Albeit Ammu had never minced her words when declaring her deep love for Estha and Rahel, she had to force herself to be alert to the possibility that they might take her love for granted and unwittingly defy the Indian culture’s demand for obedience.

There is another hierarchy in love. Some receive more love, some less, and some none. In India, people who receive less love because of their disobedience gain less social identification or recognition, too. “Ammu explained to Estha and Rahel that people always loved best what they Identified most with” (93-94). There is the implication that love as a stimulus to exact compliance within the caste hierarchies of the Indian society and family functions as an invisible sealer either to bind people together or to bar people from making further contacts. Love builds up a sense of identification that can unite a specific group of people. Whoever unidentified by a one group has no right to its exclusive love, and is left unloved and even worse, discarded. For Indians, to identify with someone who flatly shows discontentment with his social status and deviates from the dominant social customs is as difficult as to identify with a dwarf, and what’s more, “loving a dwarf was completely out of the question” (145). Identification and love, in a sense, are synonyms. Ammu in the eyes of her natal family members was precisely a female dwarf in the household. Dreaming of escaping from the family in which she found no sense of belonging, Ammu caught the chance she got to marry a man working in an Assam tea estate. The intercommunity marriage was predestined to fail since “Ammu didn’t pretend to be in love with him. She just weighted the odds and accepted” (39). To her parents who haughtily identified themselves as Syrian Christians, marrying a pagan was unacceptable. Ammu “wrote to her parents informing them of her decision. They didn’t replay” (39). There was no silent agreement but parents’ disapproval of a daughter’s decision to betray her upper-caste birth and religion
Because of her decision to marry a Hindu man Ammu had already forfeited Pappachi and Mammachi’s love in the first place, and the divorce ensued further impoverished the Ipe family’s identification with her. Baby Kochamma, another female in the family who also lived “the fate of the wretched Man-less woman” (44-45), exhibited the most antipathy towards “the co-unfortunate” (44) as she contrasted “her restraint and her determination to do the right thing” on the subject of love and marriage with Ammu’s imprudence to run into “an intercommunity love marriage,” which made her as “a divorced daughter” with “no position anywhere at all” (45). Baby Kochamma’s “outrage” (45) at Ammu’s audacity to pursue marriage without the approval of the family elders induced her to be simultaneously suspicious of and hostile towards Ammu’s twins. “Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed fatherless waifs. Worse still, they were Half-Hindu Hybrids, whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry” (44). Their mother had served as a negative example to remind the whole family of the importance of retaining self-respect and the momentous “difference between Clean and Dirty” (142) in India especially.

In Ammu and her twins’ relations with Chacko, there was not enough love and for the three of them to make their lives in the family or in the society easier. The disharmony between Chacko and Ammu had its root in the gendered structure of the kinship system in India. As Mandelbaum observes in the typical family life and social organization in India, the difference between the status of male and female in Indian culture “is presaged by the kind of welcome which is given to a newborn infant son--with drumming, singing, and proud public announcement--while the advent of a daughter is much more quietly observed” (29). The Ipe family had never dissimulated the unreserved favor to the only son Chacko. He was sent to the Oxford while “Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense” (38) for his sister. “Chacko had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and was permitted excesses and eccentricities nobody else was” (38), but Ammu had to endure the old
female relatives’ “ugly face of sympathy” (43) for her divorce. After the death of Pappachi, the family had no doubt about Chacko’s take-over of the family’s pickle factory as his own property. “Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, he always referred to it as *my* Factory, *my* pineapples, *my* pickles” (56). Ammu’s rights were restricted by her gender: “Legally this was the case, because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property” (56). In a dialogue between Mammachi and Ammu, this power asymmetry between men and women was exposed as Ammu mocked at the foolishness of gender inequality.

Mammachi often said that Chacko was easily one of the cleverest men in India. “According to whom?” Ammu would say. “On what basis?” Mammachi loved to tell the story (Chacko’s story) of how one of the dons at Oxford had said that in his opinion, Chacko was brilliant, and made of prime ministerial material.

To this, Ammu always said “Ha! Ha! Ha!” like people in the comics. She said:

(a) Going to Oxford didn’t necessarily make a person clever.

(b) Cleverness didn’t necessarily make a good prime minister.

(c) If a person couldn’t even run a pickle factory profitably, how was that people going to run a whole country?

And, most important of all:

(d) All Indian mothers are obsessed with their sons and are therefore poor judges of their abilities. (54)

However, Ammu’s criticism of Chacko’s privileged status in both the domestic and public domains was like a fly buzzing around the household that gauged the limit of the family’s patience. Chacko, the chief beneficiary of this patriarchal family after Pappachi’s death, was rather annoyed at Ammu’s strident feminist voice. To him, it was nothing but one of her “washed-up cynicism” that “completely color[ed] everything” (68), and most of
the time he slapped her to let her know that he didn’t identify with what she said or did.

There were still some moments when sibling rivalry was replaced by the kind of mutual understanding that approximated an expression of love. For example, when Ammu used the word “Mercurochrome” to describe the “inordinately bright blood” (59) on the leper’s body they saw on the way to Cochin to, Chacko, for the first time in the novel, found a strong identification with his sister and complimented her. ‘‘Congratulations,’ Chacko said. ‘Spoken like a true bourgeoise.’ Ammu smiled and they shook hands, as though she really was being awarded a Certificate of Merits for being an honest-to-goodness Genuine Bourgeoise” (59-60). Somehow moments of this sort didn’t last long enough to make a deep impression on the reader. Those precious moments, to put in the twins’ words, were “threaded like precious beads, on a (somewhat scanty) necklace” (60). What Ammu and her twins experienced in their relations with the other family members for the most part was either indifference or tolerance. The Ipe family’s indifference towards them was due to their awkward positions within the family, and the poor recognition they received in the family was in accordance with the Indian society’s discrimination against a divorced woman and her children. The social antipathy towards Amu and her twins, in an uncanny way, distorted the kinship in the Ipe family, terminated their tie to the family, and cut off the supply of kinship love. For the family which had enjoyed high social recognition, Ammu and her twins’ return after Ammu’s divorce was not a blessing. They were considered as “millstones” (82) that had to be tolerated but not to be loved. Though they did live within the premises of the family, they had not been recognized as true members of the Ipe family from beginning to end. They found themselves occupying an unstable position of being both outsiders and insiders of the family.

From time to time in the novel Ammu grumbled out her discontentment with the society’s unfair treatment of divorced women and her anger at the Ipe family’s indifference towards its own daughter. The Ipe family had already sensed the rebelliousness, the
“Unsafe Edge” (44), in Ammu before she committed the sin of loving the untouchable, Velutha. “A liquid ache spread under her skin, and she walked out of the world like a witch, to a better, happier place. [.....] They sensed somehow that she lived in the penumbral shadow between two worlds, just beyond the grasp of their power” (43-44). Ammu, “a woman that they had already damned, now had little left to lose, and could therefore be dangerous” (44). People reached a general consensus that “it was best to just Let Her Be” (44) because they had not considered that there could be something worse done by such a damned woman until the exposure of her secret love with Velutha. A divorcee from whom her natal family severed identification fell in love with an untouchable born to live on the generosity and commiseration of those higher up on the social ladders. “The two are transgressive and are counted among the socially abject separately before they join their rage and love in an act” (Fox 51) which Roy describes in a number of the sex scenes in the last chapter that are controversially both lyrical and erotic. The union of Ammu and Velutha, according to the Indians who accused Roy of obscenity\(^6\) not long after the publication of the novel, is an expression of barbarism, the reverse of civilization. The novel in itself provides evidence to support this accusation. The narrator concludes the scene in which Ammu refused to apologize for talking about procreation in front of the family’s dearest guests with a brief comment that “She was just that sort of animal” (171). It is sure that for many other characters the “unmixable mix” (44) battling inside her had made her much like an animal, or the better, an uncivilized human being belonging to “some damn godforsaken tribe that’s just been discovered” (171). The sexual contact between Ammu and Velutha, in Mammchi’s imagination, was spurred by nothing else but wanton lust and beastly sensuality: “Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. Like a dog with a bitch on heat” (244).

\(^6\) In 1997, Roy was summoned by the first class judicial magistrate in Kochi to answer the charges of obscenity in the court on August 19. She was to defend the morality of her book “The God of Small Things.” There was a public interest petition against The God of Small Things filed by the advocate Sabu Thomas, a Syrian Christian and a lawyer in Pathanamthitta, a backwater town in Kerala. Sabu Thomas alleged that the novel was obscene and likely to corrupt or deprave the minds of its readers, and the novel should be banned unless the final chapter was removed.
What Mammchi didn’t know but would also set her rage on fire is that the animal union was initiated by Ammu, who found the man’s untouchable body sexually appealing.

She saw the ridges of muscle on Velutha’s stomach grow taut and rise under his skin like the divisions on a slab of chocolate. She wondered at how his body had changed—so quietly, from a flat-muscled body into a man’s body. Contoured and hard. A swimmer’s body. A swimmer-carpenter’s body. Polished with a high-wax body polish. (167)

Velutha responded to the erotic gaze Ammu fixed on his body with the same passion. “That she had deep dimples when she smiled and that they stayed on long after her smile left her eyes. He saw that her brown arms were round and firm and perfect” (168). Whereas Mammachi saw Velutha’s body as dirty and untouchable, in the eyes of Ammu, it evoked her sexual desires, being in itself the dwelling place of an explosive eroticism, the symbol of physical strength, and finally, the very site where the possibility of resistance resided and the glimpse of redemption glimmered. The lovers saw in each other’s bodies a trajectory to help them, at least temporarily, transcend the rigid social reality and escape the commands of the Love Laws.

Mammachi’s reaction to the forbidden love between Ammu and Velutha is exemplary since most Indians who subscribe to the ideology of the caste system would consider a person like Velutha, who belongs to the lowest caste of untouchable Paravan, subhuman. When Velutha was found to have intimate relation with Ammu, his human characteristics were all ignored by the people from the higher castes. This doesn’t mean that he was received by Mammachi as a human being before. He had already been considered as a subhuman, but, this knowledge was an open secret, a piece of shared wisdom that was nevertheless never publicly articulated. After the disclosure of his scandalous affair with Ammu, this shared and unsaid knowledge that he was but an animal to be used and exploited was publicly and shamelessly articulated by and circulated among the people in Ayemenem.
Roy, however, tries to depict Velutha in such a way that he represents physical strength on the one hand and artistic creativity on the other hand. “Veluth is … positioned as a boundary-figure, a gate-keeper, who mediated between culture and nature” (Mortensen 192). Velutha’s job as a carpenter, intrinsically, represents an effort of integrating nature with culture. He was born “with a native talent for woodwork” (Mortensen 192). Making objects with natural materials, he creatively embodied and concretized the beauty and the artistic expressions he found in nature. At the same time, as a carpenter, he was also a productive laborer in the human society. “Apart from his carpentry skills, Velutha had a way with machines” (72). During the day he worked hard to make himself a recognized member in the society, but after work he indulged himself in the embrace of nature. “He caught fish in the river and cooked it on an open fire. He slept outdoor, on the banks of the river” (73). Peter Mortensen in his essay on The God of Small Things also refers to Velutha’s proximity to nature: “Roy continually stresses Velutha’s closeness to organic life, and she at various time likens him to a fish, a snake, a wooden log and a crocodile” (192).

Estha and Rahel, two naïve children who were not totally socialized yet, was fascinated with Velutha’s affinity for the nature.

They would sit with him for hours … and wonder how he always seemed to know what smooth shapes waited inside the wood for him. They loved the way wood, in Velutha’s hands, seemed to soften and become as pliable as Plasticine…. His house (on a good day) smelled of fresh wood shavings and the sun. Of red fish curry cooked with black tamarind. The best fish curry, according to Estha, in the whole world. (75)

Although the twins were forbidden to befriend the untouchable or his natural world, they, listening to the call of nature, went stealthily and had fun there. Rahel, according to Mortensen, linked Velutha to “the river landscape that he inhabits” (5). “Rahel closed her eyes and thought of the green river, of the quiet deep-swimming fish, and the gossamer wings
of the dragonflies … in the sun. She thought of her luckiest fishing rod that Velutha had made for her…. She thought of Velutha and wished she was with him” (141). The twins enjoyed their time spent with Velutha because it was a time of ease, tranquility and freedom.

Unknown to the twins, their mother Ammu also cherished the precious time she spent with Velutha, the man with a leaf shaped birthmark on his neck. For Ammu especially, being with Velutha meant a leap out of the control of social discipline in the world of culture. In writing a novel about a subversive trans-caste love affair and even ending the novel with a scene that graphically describes the two lovers’ lovemaking in lyrical details, Roy seems to deliberately provoke her conservative readers. Provoking Roy wants to be, and, provoked, her readers indeed are. Roy had almost predicted the lawsuit accusing her of obscenity when writing this novel, and she attempts to convince the reader the union of Ammu and Velutha is not simply an animal intercourse spurred simply by lust. Their union should be more fittingly considered as a symbolic union, with the blending of the bodies, each marked by a shade of maroonness. What the lovers shared was two hearts beating as one chiming for the hope of improvements in their lives. “Ammu’s attraction to [Velutha’s] body is coeval with her hope” (Fox 51) that “it had been him that had raised his flag and knotted arm in anger. She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against” (167). The love she had for Velutha stands for an ideal free from all kinds of social power, caste, for example. The ideal love can’t sustain itself in social reality because it is not subject to any specific law but has its own way. Yet, it is identified as something subversive that can possibly endanger the stability of society and culture, so it must be wiped out as soon as possible when it emerges.

Mammachi’s and Chacko’s dislike for Velutha can be read as the civilization’s or the culture’s fear of nature. In Velutha they detected the embodiments of nature. Nature is seen as the opposite of culture and closely related to barbarism and savageness that the
culture denies. For centuries civilization and culture have been celebrated as proof and evidence of human beings’ progress towards enlightenment and modernity. Nature, as it is in The God of Small Things, is not absent but repressed. Velutha’s unique disposition in connection with the natural realm, his raw energies and natural creativity, was tolerated but, no question, repressed from unrestrained realization. Finding himself almost always out of place, Velutha chose to exile himself from Ayemenem for around four years, in search for a place where he could realize his dream and achieve social recognition for his accomplishments. “To let [a dream] be, to travel with it, as Velutha did, is much the harder things to do” (181). By having a love affair with Velutha, Ammu made her entry into his natural realm. Compared to her twins’ casual visits to Velutha’s place, her contact with the natural realm was deeper. Thus Mammachi assumed that Velutha’s natural world had corrupted her to transform her into a dangerous animal. The Ipe family demonstrated how culture deals with an animal living in the civilized crowd. Ammu was locked up like a caged beast. After that, the family banished her. The Ipe family, without a second thought, made the decision to act on their joint principle: “[P]eople always loved best what they Identify most with” (93-94). They severed the love relationship with Ammu completely because they could no longer identify with her. What the family identified most with and loved most was not the decay of culture that Velutha and Ammu’s profane love symbolized but the uplifting of culture, and that was the meaning of the family’s Anglophile complex.

Roy’s portrayal of the Ipe Family as “a family of Anglophiles” (51) dramatizes not just the phenomenon of post/colonial mimicry but also how the cultural identification, identification with another race or the colonizer, inextricably influences and even distorts Indians’ domestic life. The novel first focuses on the Ipe Family’s history of colonial mimicry. The family had been proud of Pappachi’s career as “an Imperial Entomologist” (47). Pappachi, obsessed with the delusion that being an imperial entomologist meant being an imperial citizen, became “an incurable British CCP” (50), that is, a fetishist of the British
Empire. Ammu sarcastically spoke of the hospitality Pappachi showed to the white: “He was charming and urbane with visitors, and stopped just short of fawning on them if they happened to be white” (171). His identification with the British colonizer had induced him to make a misjudgment about the nature of colonization and the colonial exploitation done to India and his fellowmen. Pappachi was fortunate to be born to a local’s higher caste which was entitled to the most social resources no matter it was before or during the colonial years. People belonging to the lower castes lived their life in quite the other way. They had the most direct and distinct experience of miseries caused by India’s local culture and the successive waves of European colonization. When Ammu accused Mr. Hollick of lusting for his employees’ wives, “Pappachi would not believe her story--not because he thought well of her husband, but simply because he didn’t believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (42). In his Anglophile logic, Ammu was a malicious liar. The dissension resulted in a complete estrangement between Ammu and Pappachi’s Anglophile family. In a family that didn’t identify with her divorcée identity and her resistance to Anglophiles Ammu suffered a lack of love. For her family, cultural identification with the colonizer went beyond the identification appealing to kinship. They had been loving her less because she refused to become another Pappachi, a “Person well disposed to the English” (51), a person blinded by Anglophile complex. The poverty of love is a kind of violence in a way. It causes no wound on the body, but stabs deep into the heart.

The Anglophile complex running through the history of Ipe family reached its climax in the welcome scenes at the airport since they found in Sophie Mol a concrete embodiment of all that they all desired but lack. *The Sounds of Music*, the entertainment program on their way to the airport that Chacko called “an extended exercise in Anglophilia” (54), had already given the characters a preview of Sophie Mol’s European features. She was the very image of the “clean, white children” (100) in the movie. “Clean children, like a packet of peppermints” (100). The Ipe family worshiped the whiteness of Sophie Mol’s skin,
“equating English whiteness with beauty” (Pesso-Miquel 35). The preference for English child is clear in the passage in which Sophie Mol was compared to a “beach-colored” “little angel”, whereas Rahel and Estha were “Littledemons” (170). “Littledemons were mudbrown in Airport-Fairy frocks with forehead bumps that might turn into horns. With Fountains in Love-in-Tokyos. And Backward-reading habits” (170). The hybridity found in the twins is a miserable mistake that people considered as a stain of the family, but Sophie Mol’s hybridity of “her mother’s color” and “Pappchi’s nose” (170) was a marriage of British culture and an Anglophile family. Sophie Mol as a hybrid character in the novel can be treated as a symbol to denounce the racial distinctions between the colonized and the colonizer. In the same vein, her return to India with her mother can be interpreted as an act cutting across the colonizer/colonized divide that repressed Indianess in the colonial period. However, what the Ipe family valued is not the Indian half of Sophie Mol’s hybrid identity, but her English half and, along with it, their affinity to her Englishness. In showing their great admiration for Sophie Mol’s white skin and her Pappchi-like nose, the Ipe family, a family of typical Anglophiles, satisfied their imaginary identification with their ex-colonizers, an identification that is both cultural (their acquisition of the English way of life) and then genealogical (Chacko’s interracial marriage with an English woman and the birth of their mix-blooded daughter). What is ironic is that the British guests felt neither love nor kinship towards their Anglophile relatives when the family couldn’t wait to express their admiration.

Sophie Mol, Chacko’s daughter, obviously did not consider Chacko her father, and did not show any daughterly affection towards Chacko, even though he was her biological father. The alienation between Sophie Mol and Chacko confused Estha and Rahel. When they asked to see Sophie Mol’s “list” (144) of people she loved in the world, they were surprised to know it was not Chakco but her stepfather Joe who ranked as the priority on the love list.

“What d’you love Most in the World?” Rahel asked Sophie Mol.

“Joe,” Sophie Mol said without hesitation. “My dad. He died two months
ago. We’ve come here to Recover from the Shock.”

“But Chacko’s your dad,” Estha said.

“He’s just my real dad,” Sophie Mol said. “Joe’s my dad. He never hits. Hardly ever.” (143-44)

With Sophie Mol’s answer Roy seems to conduct a reexamination on the ethics of love, in kinship, especially. It is generally believed that kinship, the most elementary relation that links people together, promises love. More importantly, kinship must be a love relationship, in which love is not a duty imposed by the surroundings but a natural drive. Rahel’s attitude towards the kinship between herself and Ammu generally summarizes the concept that the biological cord connecting family members is the only reason for love, and with love, kinship relation is reinforced. She loved Ammu and expected to be loved in return because she thought that it was a matter of course for a person to love her family as she told Ammu in a whisper, “We be of one blood, Thou and I” (312). It was not until Sophie Mol’s arrival that Rahel began to fluctuate between faith and doubt about the positive relationship between kinship and love. She wished to love Sophie Mol, but she soon realized that the kinship between them didn’t bring love. “‘Because we’re firstcousins. So I have to [love you],’ Rahel said piously” (144) to Sophie Mol. Love for Sophie Mol became a duty that she was obligated to perform. Love relationship between the twins and their cousin was so unnatural that it was the outcome of “a hard bargain” (253) among people, not the expression of genuine affection.

With Rahel and Sophie Mol’s Q & A, Roy explicitly points out the unnatural quality of love in human relations. “‘Me? What d’you love me for?’ Sophie Mol said. ‘Because we’re firstcousins. So I have to,’ Rahel said piously” (144). Roy, in a way, challenges the traditionally and generally accepted myth of love: love needs no reason because it is a natural instinct. In this sense, love is considered to occur automatically. When we talk about love, let us simply talk about love itself, and nothing else. Love should be an outpour of passion
and emotions that cannot be described or judged in rational terms. This kind of idealistic view on love is rather unreal and unrealistic to Roy. Roy in the novel, while questioning the idealistic concept on one hand, proposes a rather sophisticated and also critical view of how love is performed and put into practice in the minute, mundane acts in people’s everyday life. Love never occurs so easily as people tend to think. Love and the practice of it in the real life, the real world, we have to admit, involve unending proceeding of negotiations. Sophie Mol “negotiate[d] a friendship” (253) with Rahel and Estha. She thought that by doing so she could acquire the love in proportion to their kinship. In her motherhood, Ammu negotiated with her children for a set of domestic rules comprehensible to all three of them so as to manage them and to discipline them into good Indians who in all aspects conformed to the society’s public expectations. Indian mothering, like black mothering, is not solely “an individualized and private act,” but “is profoundly a political act with social and public connections and consequence” (O’Reilly 30). Motherhood as an agency of “cultural construction” (O’Reilly 29) bearing the responsibility of passing down tradition and cultural legacies, in its maternal practice, transmutes maternal love into a tactic to guide, instruct, educate, and more importantly, to manipulate and command the object of love. Love, in such a way, becomes something unnatural, or virtually, an instantiation of social dominance by one group over another; and in the real-life circumstances the language talking about love is socially constructed and designed to empower one and disempower the other.

Ammu and Velutha’s love affair seems to be a romantic episode in the novel. Love in the secret relationship is embellished with a humanistic, and even heroic quality. For Ammu and Velutha, who felt nearly suffocated by the rigid caste and gender biases of the Indian society, the very prospect of entering into an illicit love affair offered the titillation of the impossible, the forbidden, and the untouchable, providing them with the much needed assurance that they were acting, for the first time in their lives, as subject of their lives, to realize their desires. In her stay in the Ayemenem house, Ammu recognized that her identity
as a divorced daughter was a symbol of dishonor and shame to the family. Being so awkward and uncomfortable, she pressed herself to accept the suffocating atmosphere around her and gradually drew herself closer to the abyss of hopelessness. “She was twenty-seven that year, for her, life had been lived. She had had one chance. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man” (38). Ammu’s subjectivity was on the edge of falling into the abyss as the result of the long-term stifling oppression of her desires. To Ammu, who was sinking in the tough and brutal world as a fallen woman, Velutha, like a driftwood that was not far away from her, ignited in her the lingering hope for a possible and better “Tomorrow” (321). In the presence of Velutha, “[s]he danced for him. On that boat-shaped piece of earth. She lived” (319). Ammu clutched Velutha, and in the secret love affair she reclaimed the feeling of being alive through the sensual touch on her body. Her body that was young and full of vitality was examined and touched. That was the first time in her life that she began to appreciate the beauty of her body and what her body was capable of. She was shocked by it, but she found there was also sweetness and satisfaction in the shock she felt as her beautiful body performed the actions she desired but had been prohibited by the social norms. In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu’s appreciation of the beauty of her own body and her delight in exploring the manifold curves and shapes of it indicates a conscious awakening to her own sexual and individual being. It is a conscious act, a political gesture; moreover, it is a declaration of independence by which she claimed ownership of her own body and proclaimed authorship of her life story.

Ammu and Velutha’s love affair, an Indian version of the Romeo and Juliet story, suffered external pressure that aimed to break them up. However, the flame of love turned out to be more intense even when the opposing force emerged, while gathering more strength and momentum. The lovers did not surrender, but became more inflexible in the love relationship than they were before. Renata Salecl argues in her reading of Edith Wharton’s novels that romantic love, enigmatically, demands suffering to prove its genuineness,
greatness and sacredness: “[L]ove becomes romantic because of the suffering that pertains to it” (189). The opposition that once was supposed to extinguish the fire of love, in fact, adds fuel to the flames. The more prohibitions are uttered against it, and the less willing the couple in love is to give love up. This is why romantic love usually appears to be full of dramatic dynamics and how it touches people’s hearts, so that is what the reader perceives in Ammu and Velutha’s secret love. In front of the couple, there was the accusation of transgression that made them to imagine the life-threatening consequence and their potential losses: “What’s the worst thing that can happen? I could lose everything. My job. My family. My livelihood. Everything” (316). Still, Ammu determined to risk “destroying herself and her children” (304) forever to rescue Velutha. The prospect of persecution, however, did not deter the lovers from falling in love and staying in love; instead, it made the few precious moments they spent together in each other’s company more delicious and exciting as they became fully alive as human beings, desired as well as desiring.

Persecution and repression did put Ammu and Velutha’s love affair to test. But for the trials and tribulations, their love would appear to be shallow and tedious. Narrating the story of Ammu and Velutha’s tragic love, The God of Small Things criticizes the formidable and omnipresent power of two of Indian society’s foremost social institutions. Meanwhile, it also tackles with the question, so raised by Salecl: is it really the disciplinary symbolic institutions, the family and society, for example, that prevent love from realizing itself? “Is it not actually the institutions that, in a paradoxical way, produces love” (Salecl 181)? Salecl poses her query; meanwhile, she comes up with proposition that “[o]ne of the greatest illusions of love is that prohibition and social codes prevent its realization” (179). The omnipresence of these codified social norms that dominate and organize people’s private and public lives convince people of their hegemony and invincibility. Tension arises as soon as the transgressive love, like that of Ammu and Velutha, is brought to light because it has been considered as something “unthinkable” and “impossible” (242). “Nothing prepared
[Mammachi] for what she was about to hear” (242). No one has expected its occurrence because it is believed that no one dares to challenge the disciplinary power of society that forcefully guards the society’s order against any aberrant behavior. However, as Foucault reminds us, where there is power, there is resistance. The severity, inflexibility, coerciveness of social and cultural rules, as Roy reveals to the reader in the novel, is the soil for defiant counterforce and the cradle of revolutionists. People who bear too much inequality and discrimination become angry at their inferior positions and ceaseless suffering; consequently, they rise up to utter their dissatisfaction and to put their fury at the unbalanced disarticulation of social resources into rebellions and revolutions. The rapid propagation of communism in Kerala in the early twentieth century, as Roy mentions in the novel, is an obvious example. 

The reciprocal love between Ammu and Velutha is such a revolutionary gesture, too, even though it was carried out secretly, not openly. The unfriendly atmosphere of the society and its oppression of those people who are left at the margin of society to live and die by themselves help to bring Ammu and Velutha together. The seed of love germinated. The lives of the two unhappy individuals intersected because they both had harbored too much frustration, misunderstanding, anger and rage within them. Love emerges against the background of external inhibitions and obstructions set by the symbolic disciplinary institutions, and only in adversity does love appears so charming, transcendental and even sublime.

Ammu and Velutha’s secret relationship, for the most part of it, is fueled by their shared resentment at their present situations in which they sadly “linked their fates, their futures”

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7 In *The God of Small Things*, Roy devotes less effort to convey communistic ideals. What Roy attempts to present in the novel is the truth that Kerala communist politicians lied to the commoners about the reformist movement they were carried out to improve the society and took advantages of the committed hearts to benefit themselves. Roy honestly uncovers the veil of communism under which the greedy and evil politicians hide their selfishness. “The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a short of democracy” (64).
(320) to the “frailty,” “smallness,” “self-destructive pride” and “shambling dignity” (321) of a “minute spider” living in the “History House” (321). Love in this relationship is not only the outlet for their discontentment with their lives but also the mute expression of their unrealized dream for a changed India. In this way, Ammu and Velutha’s love is not merely a romantic story without any political purpose. The love scene in itself is neither obscene nor pornographic. Besides, as Salecl suggests, romantic love, to our surprise, is problematic for “love is its essence narcissistic” (187). Love is a narcissistic relation because a lover finds the identification with his or her own self right in the identification with the love object. The concept of love as a narcissistic relation offers another helpful perspective to make sense of Velutha’s special attraction for Ammu.

Suddenly Ammu hoped that it had been [Velutha] that Rahel saw in the march. She hoped it had been him that had raised his flag and knotted arm in anger. She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against.

She hoped it had been him. (167)

Ammu could not help falling in love with Velutha, a man who resembled Ammu in many ways. Both of them lived in self-repression, with their hearts filled with seething rage against the social reality. Involuntarily, Ammu viewed Velutha as a reflection of herself onto which she projected her own desires and emotions. Raged as Ammu was, she would be willing to join the communist march. So Velutha “had” (167) to be there as Ammu hoped. Velutha “had” (167) to be there because Ammu wished that she had been there. Ammu hoped that she had been the one who “had raised his flag and knotted arm in anger” (167). She hoped that she was the one standing in the place of Velutha in the march.

As an angry woman, Ammu rebelliously desired freedom. At the same time, Ammu, as a mother, had to restrain her rebellious desires so that she could maintain her motherhood and keep her twins with her. There was a split of Ammu’s self so that she was in a constant
struggle with herself. “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). In the day, Ammu was a responsible mother. In the night, she was a passionate lover. Ammu had been managing the “mix” (44) in a very careful way, trying to prevent the collision between her “tenderness” and “rage” (44), yet the latter overtook her when she was locked away because of the abrupt exposure of her secret love. She became “incoherent with rage” (238). The maternity was weakened, and Estha and Rahel, who trusted themselves to her maternal love, were hurt by this amazing change they saw in her:

“Because of you!” Ammu had screamed. “If it wasn’t for you I wouldn’t be here! None of this would have happened! I wouldn’t be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! You’re the millstones round my neck!”

She couldn’t see them crouched against the door. A surprised Puff and a Fountain in a Love-in-Tokyo…. “Just go away!” Ammu had said. “Why can’t you just go away and leave me alone?!?” (239-40)

Ammu’s scream clearly reveals the persistent and insoluble self-contradiction within herself. She had been always so energetic in teaching her children how to be good Indians, including correcting their misspellings and misbehaviors. In fact, she detested so much the knowledge she had to impart to them in her motherhood, the Love Laws. She faced the dilemma of putting what she had taught her children into practice or being faithful to her own belief by holding onto her love with Velutha. The accident beginning with Vellya Pappen’s exposure of the love affair that led to Velutha’s death, however, assigned an ending to the dilemma. The death of Velutha, publicized by the newspaper along with his crime of kidnapping and murder, can be understood as a form of “public execution” (Foucault 1979, 49). The public execution, says Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, should be understood “as a political ritual.
It belongs [...] to the ceremonies by which power is manifested” (47). The purpose is to punish the criminal and, more importantly, also to send a warning to the other people. “The ceremony of punishment”, essentially, “is an exercise of ‘terror’” and “a policy of terror” (Foucault 49). The physical punishment imposed upon the criminal’s body must be violent enough to make people aware of seriousness of the violation of the law or the discipline. What really matters in punishment is to create a feeling of terror by the horrifying scene of public execution. “[I]f severe penalties are required, it is because [the offender's] example must be deeply inscribed in the hearts of men” (Foucault 49). The terror strikes into the spectators’ hearts and causes a great impact on them that they will caution themselves not to do the same thing.

Obviously, the police made an example of Velutha, who could not abide his position humbly. Ammu, too, set a bad example for the other mothers. She “never completed her corrections” (151) because she was not given the chance to do so. She had committed the worst error in the Indian society and failed her role as an Indian mother. Indian mothers are supposed to concentrate on the pedagogy of training their children to be good members in both the family and the society. Indian mothers’ love should serve as a disciplinary institution in which the children are imbued with a sense of responsibility for the maintenance of kinship order and social stability. In such a way, in their motherhood, women’s affection is limited to a single and public purpose. A mother’s love is not allowed to be spared for her individual desires, sexual desires especially, because it is not her private property. Although motherhood, like other chains of kinship, basically belongs to the private and domestic domain, it can be also be viewed as a primary part of what Louis Althusser refers as ideological state apparatuses that oversee the social norms and the sense of hierarchy in various social relations. Ammu punished her twins for their childish misbehaviors, and the other ideological state apparatuses came to discipline her and Velutha for their transgressive act. It looks like a food chain. However, both of the parental rebuke afflicted upon the
children and the physical persecution imposed upon the transgressors aim to discipline. The traditional and tyrannical power structure in the Indian culture that disciplines every Indians, in both the family and public spaces, from the birth till the death, has constituted a national history of long-term traumatization.
Conclusion

Ammu and Velutha’s resistance to the Indian tradition failed at last. They paid a dear price for their act of transgression, despite their belief that they could be the god and goddess of every small and private thing in their lives, including their passion, their happiness and their sadness. Veluth was “The God of Small Things,” and also “The God of Loss” (312), the loss of his life and everything. So was Ammu. Since Velutha, who is presented by Roy as a savior to bring hope and joy to an unhappy and unprivileged person such as Ammu, died in a miserable way, it seems to suggest that Roy believes that there is no gods in reality after all. Gods live only in the mythology, and they leave the poor people live and die by themselves in despair, in India, a country Roy ironically names “God’s Own Country” (120). There is something even more ironic: the gods and goddesses in Indian mythology invoke and are subject to what has abused Indian people in the living reality for thousand of years, that is, the Love Laws. The gods’ and goddesses’ invocation of the Love Laws explicitly endorses the Love Laws’ authority and antiquity. As an Indian learns about the gods’ stories of his or her own culture in the childhood, he or she takes in the knowledge of the Love Laws at the same time. The knowledge is passed down, taught, accepted, assimilated and practiced in the details or small things in the everyday life. Finally, it becomes a part of reality about love and life and a local philosophy of how Indians make sense of the world. Whenever there is someone who attempts to pose a query, or even an oppositional concept, take Ammu and Velutha’s love affair for example, disciplinary penalty appealing to the Love Laws immediately declares the transgressors’ culpability and sin for violating the fundamental laws of their culture. However, for Roy, as a vehement activist, transgressive or revolutionary acts like Ammu and Velutha’s passionate love affair will not die out, and there should be more and more similar acts of transgression because the god’s own country is far from having enough of it. Thus, in the ending of the novel’s second storyline, Roy plots
another challenge to the Love Laws, a more startling and controversial one--sibling incest.

In the scene in which the twins culminated their incestuous relationship, the twins seemed to return to their mother Ammu’s womb when they indulged themselves in a boundless bliss. “Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits” (5), all of which appears to separate people from each other, vanished. What is suggested by the scene of incest is an ideal and imaginary state of wholeness and jouissance. The incest seems to create a utopia in which no symbolic restraint existed and “life was full of Beginning and no Ends” (4). However, incest has always been identified as an act of moral degradation and biological regression. In real life, incest would never be productive enough to cause any change in people’s life. It is predictable that Estha and Rahel would soon be forced to face the violence of culture that had once so brutally disciplined Ammu and Velutha. Similarly, what Estha and Rahel “shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief” (311). The gathering sense of both bliss and doom the twins felt is in any perspective identical to that felt by Ammu and Velutha’s during their few nights together. Although each pair had already foreseen the coming of their tragedies, none of them had ever shrunk from the thought of making struggle in their lives, nor had they ever regretted doing what they were doing. They were stubborn, but also brave in a sense. As the title of Chapter Thirteen implies, there is a choice between being a pessimist or an optimist, but Roy tries to say that being an activist is more important and also more difficult. The impossible would remain impossible if people refuse to take any action. There is action, so there is hope. Perhaps this is the reason why Roy advocates activism: “There’s no time to lose / I heard her say / Cash your dreams before / They slip away / Dying all the time / Lose your dreams and you / Will lose your mind” (314). In Ammu, Velutha, Estha and Rahel, the reader can perceive the expression of an activist’s courage to challenge the traditional customs and to realize the forbidden dreams. To a born activist like Roy, transgression or crime is beautiful, poetic and deserves applause, to borrow Foucault’s words, “[i]t bears within it a figure and a future”
With the murmur of the word “Tomorrow” (321) in the end of the book, Roy articulates her hope for a future for India that may be better or worse than it is today, but at least it is going to be different. It is a future created by incessant transgressions, and in every transgression there are the sparkles of bravery, creativity and love.


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