

**CIRCULATION OF HATE IN THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS: A  
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF OTHERING BASED ON CASTE AND CLASS IN  
INDIA**

**Dr. Manorama Rai**

*Assistant Professor*

*Department of Sociology*

*Dharmendra Singh Memorial College, Atola, Meerut (U.P.)*

*Email: @gmail.com*

**Abstract**

*Hate is a strong emotion and one of the most useful tools used in the marginalization of minority groups and underprivileged people within a society. Be it immigrants, people of color, women or queer people, hate based on differences with these groups results in their displacement. Using these differences, people of these groups are labeled as 'the other' by the hating group and their passionate negative attachment to this 'other' is defined simultaneously with their love for the nation and culture. We see similar patterns in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* in which the Untouchable's embodiment of loss becomes a signifier through which hate circulates and increases in affect.*

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**Dr. Manorama Rai**

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## **Introduction**

Hate is a strong emotion and one of the most useful tools used in the marginalization of minority groups and underprivileged people within a society. Be it immigrants, people of color, women or queer people, hate based on differences with these groups results in their displacement (Ahmad, 2004). Using these differences, people of these groups are labeled as ‘the other’ by the hating group and their passionate negative attachment to this ‘other’ is defined simultaneously with their love for the nation and culture (Ahmad, 2004, p. 43). We see similar patterns in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* in which the Untouchable’s embodiment of loss becomes a signifier through which hate circulates and increases in affect.

In her book *The God of Small Things* (henceforth *GoST*), Arundhati Roy describes a post-independence capitalist India suffering from caste and gender-based discrimination. On one hand there was an increase in industrialization; development and overseas education, while on the other communist parties in India had started a revolution against unfair wages and exploitation of peasants and paddy field workers (Roy, 1997, p. 67). However, the caste-ridden values in communities remained unquestioned. Communist parties in India – comprising Eastern Marxists and orthodox Hindus worked within the communal divide, leaving untouchables with two options: (1) lead a Paravan’s (untouchable’s) life without questioning the perceived superiority of the Touchables including upper caste Hindus and Christians or (2) become a Naxalite and join the extreme Marxists who are part of an armed liberation movement. Both these options didn’t leave the Untouchables much of a choice and they continued to be a symbol of loss hated by the Touchables.

In the novel we see how this hate leads to the violence suffered by Velutha and the social exclusion of Ammu from her hometown and her separation from her children. It is important to understand the processes that led to these events in the novel. Velutha’s interpellation (Althusser’s, 1970) as Untouchables and Ammu’s interpellation as an Indian woman left no space for them to negotiate their real identities. Their attempt to challenge this interpellation threatened the status and influence of Touchables. Using Sara Ahmad’s (2004) concept of organization of hate and affective economies, I argue that Velutha and Ammu are labeled as a threat to the Touchables leading to the violence that befell them, rendering them disposable. Furthermore, I compare how the circulation of hate affected Velutha vs. the way it affected Ammu.

### **Interpellation of Individuals as Untouchables**

In the world described above, Velutha wasn't just a Paravan but also a member of the Ayemenem Communist Party and a cardholder. He was a carpenter in Mammachi's factory and worked with Touchables. Above all he is the man who dared to touch, enter and love a Touchable woman. The identity Velutha was born with was not the identity he grew into and this is the reason why Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Inspector Thomas perceived him as a threat that needed to be sent away or even better, eliminated. To understand how Velutha became a threat to the Touchables, we need to understand his interpellation as Untouchables. Althusser (1970) came up with the concept of interpellation or hailing of individuals as concrete identities. With interpellation, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) influence individuals through peer pressure, rewards and enforcement to accept or reject identities, relationships and connections to social norms (Althusser, 1970).

In the GoST we see how educational, religious, cultural and political ISAs led to the interpellation of certain individuals as Untouchables who were inferior to Touchables. From different schools to different churches for these two groups, a clear line was drawn that shouldn't be crossed by either of the groups. In the same social structure Mammachi, even after seeing the talent in Velutha, told his father to send him to the Untouchables' school. She hired him as a carpenter in her pickle factory but paid him less than she would a Touchable carpenter to keep other factory workers happy. Above all, she believed that Velutha needed to be grateful because he was able to touch things that Touchables touched. She even thought it was a huge leap for a Paravan (Roy, 1997, p. 74). Despite all this discrimination, it was the influence of religious and cultural ISAs such as orthodox Hindu belief system, religious scripts and historical practices on Velutha's father, Vellya Paapen, that convinced him that he should be grateful to Mammachi for all that she has done for him and his son. Under the influence of his father and the Family ISA, Velutha grew up learning that he was not supposed to touch any Touchable. He brought Ammu small gifts holding them out on his palm so she wouldn't have to touch him. The change that we see in adult Velutha later in the book was his way of challenging his interpellation as Untouchable.

Though we don't find out what Velutha was up to during the years he was missing, on his return he found work for himself in Paradise Pickle & Preserves. Being the only touchable working in the factory did not distress him in any way. Roy describes Velutha's confidence in himself in terms of his father's fear:

His father feared for him not because of *what* he said but the *way* he said it. Not because of *what* he did, but the *way* he did it. Mostly Vellya Paapen feared the

lack of hesitation in Velutha, the way he walked, the way he held his head, the quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel (p. 73).

It is evident in the book that after his return, Velutha did not conform to the identity of the Untouchables and believed that he had a right to equal wages and freedom of expression. His personal views were also reflected in his political action when he participated in the march on the way to Cochin. Above all, his courage to love Ammu back was proof that he challenged his interpellation as Untouchable, social structures and history. When Mammachi sacked and threatened to kill him after finding out about his affair with Ammu, he didn't quietly accept his fate. His response, "We'll see about that" (p. 269) and his attempts to seek help from Comrade Pillai showed his resilience. Velutha's resistance to his identity as an Untouchable marks him as a threat to the Touchable community.

### **Circulation of Hate**

Velutha's attempt to question societal norms, challenge history and fight oppression marked Velutha as the undeserving 'other' who had come to steal from the Touchables. This hate transformed into a fear of loss that like him more Paravans will threaten the community of Touchables. The circulation of these emotions is what aligns Baby Kochamma, Inspector Thomas Mathews, Comrade Pillai and the other policemen against the Untouchables and results in the heinous violence that befell Velutha. To understand this, I draw on Sara Ahmad's (2004) concept of emotional reading of hate. According to Ahmad (2004, p. 43), "emotional reading of hate works to stick or bind the imagined subjects and the white nation together." Though here she is focusing on the passionate feeling of hate towards the imagined other in the American context, it can be applied to the caste-based politics of hate in India. Baby Kochamma attempts to get Velutha in trouble by provoking Chacko and Mammachi into believing that Velutha will be their "Nemesis" (p. 175); grafting the image of the protester who humiliated her in front of the crowd onto Velutha (p. 78); her disgust at the "particular Paravan smell" and her wonder at how Ammu could stand making love to Velutha (p. 75); interpretation of their act of love as rape by a "sex crazed Paravan" who preyed on three women alone in the house (p. 245-246) are examples of the passionate negative attachments to the other (in this case Velutha) described by Ahmad (2004). The hate felt by Baby Kochamma highlights the signs through which hate circulates: smelly, sex-crazed and violent Pravans or Untouchables. The circulation of these signs results in the accumulation of hate (Ahmad, 2004).

Highlighting Baby Kochamma's hate here is important since she is one of the major architects of the violent episode that takes Velutha's life, destroys Ammu's and spoils the childhood of Estha and Rahel. As Roy (1997, p. 305) puts it, "She manages it by doing what she is best at. Irrigating her fields, nourishing her crops with other people's passion." Unpacking the word passion here is important. It was because of Baby Kochamma's belief that she was superior, she's a Touchable who were symbol of cleanliness, prosperity and educated class, she felt it was the Touchables' responsibility for ridding the country of the sweeper class who are inbreeding and spoiling the country. She identified Untouchables as dirty, smelling and aggressive creatures who shouldn't be allowed to mingle with the Touchables. Other characters like, Inspector Thomas and Comrade Pillai's wife shared Baby Kochamma's sentiments. Inspector Thomas was deeply concerned about finding out that a Paravan, an Untouchable, "had taken from the Touchable Kingdom" (p. 246) and had not been caught.

Here the passionate emotion of hate felt by these characters is because of the love they have for the "Touchable Kingdom." They justified their hate because they saw Untouchables as a threat, as individuals who stole jobs in a Touchable factory, raped Touchable women and above all threatened to take their position as Touchables in the society by marching in protests against inequality. In Ahmad's (2004) words, Untouchables embodied the threat of loss: loss of reputation, loss of status, loss of influence, loss of jobs (in the case of Velutha) and signify danger. The circulation of these signifiers caused a rippling effect of emotions, called affect (Ahmad, 2004). Ahmad (2004) says that hate is economic and it circulates between signs and signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement. This passionate negative attachment or hate does not reside in the object of hate. In the GoST, hate here doesn't reside in Velutha or the Untouchables but is produced as an effect of circulation and accumulates over time leading to hate crimes and violence, as happened in the case of Velutha.

Mammachi and Comrade Pillai were different because they negotiated with their hate for convenience. Both these characters needed Velutha. Mammachi needed him for her factory and Comrade Pillai needed him for his small communist revolution. Their negotiation however doesn't stop the circulation of hate. On the contrary, their acts of inviting Velutha into the Touchable Kingdom were perceived as "spoiling" (p. 245) the Untouchables who then misbehave in their Kingdom. Mammachi and Comrade Pillai's perceived generosity (though in reality they use Velutha for their benefit) fueled the affective economy and the accumulated hate transformed into the expulsion of the Untouchable thief.

### **Disposability and Violence**

Velutha became disposable in the Touchable's quest to protect their future. Even though he was a party member and cardholder, Comrade Pillai didn't want to help him because the "party was not constituted to support workers' indiscipline in their private life" (p. 271). In reality, his touchable future and political career relied on the expulsion of a Paravan working in the pickle factory. Inspector Thomas believed that the future of the Touchable Kingdom relied on punishment being served. Roy (1997) writes that the policemen who sought out Velutha across the river on the veranda of the old house did not proceed to arrest him because of the "responsibility of the touchable future on their thin shoulders (p. 291)." The violence they participated in was carefully planned and executed to get rid of Velutha:

If the policemen hurt Velutha more than they intend to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature – had been severed long ago. They were there not to arrest Velutha but to exorcise fear. The touchable policemen acted with the economy, not frenzy. Efficiency, not anarchy. Responsibility, not hysteria (p. 293).

The disposability of Velutha is further proved by the conspirators' interpretation of the violent crime. In the eyes of Inspector Thomas, Comrade Pillai and Baby Kochamma, what they conspired to do was justified. Even on finding out that the rape never happened, nothing had been stolen from the Touchable Kingdom and that the information provided by Baby Kochamma was a work of fiction, Inspector Thomas didn't help Velutha or prosecute Baby Kochamma. According to him it was justified to save the police department and a fellow Touchable because they were aligned not only in hate but also in the hate crime. Baby Kochamma never felt the dread because according to her "As ye sow, so shall ye reap (p. 31)." Somehow she believed that Velutha had deserved to be brutally beaten to death. Even Comrade Pillai didn't hold himself responsible for what happened to Velutha and dismissed it as the "Inevitable Consequence of Necessary Politics (p. 15)." These characters' response to the violence proves that Velutha was disposable in the eyes of the Touchables.

### **Interpellation of Women as Dependants**

Of all the characters in the GoST, Ammu is special in her own right for the decisions she had made in her life and the way she navigated gender inequalities in the world described by Roy (1997). Interpellation of women in India as passive individuals is enforced by cultural and family ISAs (Althusser, 1970). These ISAs

not only ensure that women embrace their identities as individuals whose only job is to take care of the household but also make them accept their relationship with men as the latter's dependent. Families use religious and social references to enforce these ideologies on women. These identities run so deep that women suffering from domestic violence by their husbands don't question them. Instead they endure it for the sake of their family's reputation and their children's future, as we see in the case of Mammachi. Her acceptance of the idea that she was dependent on a man was such that after her husband (who used to beat her) passed, she replaces his position in the house with Chacko (Roy, 1997). Similarly, Baby Kochamma, even though she had the possibility of becoming independent after getting her diploma from an American university, comes back home to her father's house to "do the right thing (p. 45)."

Mentioning these women is important to understand how Ammu was different. Ammu didn't fit into the identity of a regular woman (women's identity as defined by ISAs) in the post-independence India Roy (1997) describes. She had strong opinions about patriarchy and male chauvinism. Ammu had endured domestic violence in her father's house as well as her husband's house. Unlike Mammachi, in both the situations she showed the will to escape this violence. But the women in those times didn't have the resources to rebuild their lives without a man. Her decisions exemplify courage and independence but they were criticized by the members of her own family. For instance, Chacko told Rahel and Estha that Ammu had no Locusts Stand I, disregarding the fact that it was a male chauvinist society that left her with no resources to plan for a future independently (p. 56). It was because Ammu's father thought that higher education for her was "an unnecessary expense" (p. 38), that she never got the education needed to get a job in the city that would have been enough to give her children a good life.

Unlike other women in her family, Ammu had an independent will for which Baby Kochamma hated her. We see no alignment between Ammu and Baby Kochamma, even though their struggles were somewhat similar (both of them being man-less women). Baby Kochamma believed that she is different from Ammu and deserved to be in her father's house because her unrequited love for Father Mulligan had been "entirely due to her restraint and her determination to do the right thing (p. 45). On the other hand, Ammu had no place in her father's house because she was a divorced daughter from an inter-community love marriage who had "half-Hindu hybrid" fatherless children (p. 45). Above all, Baby Kochamma despised Ammu because unlike herself and Mammachi, Ammu was not a creature of habit who believed she just had two options: (1) endure domestic violence or (2) accept that

she had to lead her life as a “man-less woman (p. 44).” On the contrary, Ammu quarreled with her fate and rejected both these options, challenging the interpellation of women as dependents.

### **Comparing Ammu and Velutha as Objects of Hate**

Unlike Velutha, the hate that Baby Kochamma felt for Ammu was not circulated through signs and signifiers but was a result of resentment due to personal reasons. It is important to understand how Ammu got caught up in the violence, despite being a Touchable. Here acts of violence don't imply physical violence but refer to name-calling, and abusive language that causes mental injuries (Ahmad, 2004, p. 56). Ammu transcended the limits of touchability and became associated with Untouchability the night she met Velutha at the banks of the river. Her love for Velutha and the fact that they had sex became a sign through which hate circulated. To explain this, I use Ahmad's (2004) concept of hated bodies and the definition of projection mentioned by her: “self projects all that is undesirable onto another, while concealing any traces of that projection so that the other comes to appear as a being with a life of its own (p. 49).” Though the concept of hated bodies of untouchables is quite clear, Ammu got pushed out of the boundaries of Touchability into Untouchability after the people of Ayemenem found out about her love for Velutha. Ammu then embodied all that is undesirable about the untouchables: loss of reputation, loss of status, and loss of jobs as the factory was seized after Comrade Pillai marched on Paradise Pickles & Preserves to protest Velutha's sacking and death. Ammu is blamed for this loss and not those who conspired to sack and kill Velutha because of the circulation of hate for the Untouchables and most importantly Ammu's acceptance of the untouchable Velutha.

It was due to the affective economy of hate that Ammu and her children, though allowed to attend Sophie Mol's funeral, were made to stand separately as if Velutha's Untouchability had seeped into them permanently (p. 7). It was the circulation of hate that controlled how Inspector Thomas treated Ammu when she had gone to the police station to clarify that there had been some confusion about the whole incident:

Inspector Thomas stared at Ammu's breasts and said that the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from Vaishyas (prostitutes) and their illegitimate children. When Ammu tried to fight and said that she'll see about that, the Inspector came around his desk, approached Ammu with his baton, tapped her breasts with it and said, “If I were you, I'd go home quietly (p. 9).



These acts of violence deeply disturbed Ammu and for the rest of her short life she lives with the fear that the policemen will approach her to hack off her hair like they did with other prostitutes (p. 154).

The only difference between the violence faced by Velutha and the violence faced by Ammu is the length of time it takes to kill them. Velutha didn't survive the night after he was brutally beaten in the name of law and preserving the Touchable Kingdom. On the other hand, Ammu died each day till she drew her last breath as a result of the violence that shamed her publicly for loving an Untouchable man, got her thrown out of her family home and separated her from her children. Like Velutha, she also became disposable. The church refused to bury Ammu and she was taken to a crematorium where nobody except beggars, police-custody dead and derelicts were cremated and none of her family was present besides Chacko and Rahel (p. 155). While Velutha was forgotten after his exclusion (in his case, his death) from social proximity, Ammu was remembered and hated long after her exclusion (her exile from her hometown) for she threatened the Touchables' investment of hate and betrayed her own kind by loving an Untouchable man.

### **Conclusion**

The God of Small Things highlights the marginalization of the Untouchables and women, and the socio-economic injustice in India. This article explores the interpellation of Velutha and Ammu as concrete identities forced on them by different Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser's, 1970). Both the characters challenged their perceived identities through their decisions and actions. Velutha was not a usual Paravan. He was a carpenter in a factory owned by Touchables and worked with Touchable colleagues. He was also a Communist Party member and a cardholder. On the other hand, Ammu was a Christian divorcee with two half-Hindu children. Most importantly, they were in love with each other – a Touchable and an Untouchable. Both of them embodied loss of reputation, loss of status and loss of employment felt by Touchables. They were seen as a threat to the Touchable Kingdom which led to their expulsion through violence (Ahmad, 2004).

The extent of violence faced by Velutha was due to the circulation of hate for the Untouchables and its accumulation over time (Ahmad, 2004). The extent to which he was beaten was not due to the rage generated in that very instant at the old house across the river. It was the result of the responsibility felt by the Touchable policemen to protect their history and their community from the sex-crazed Paravans who steal from the Touchable Kingdom. The violence suffered by Ammu was a result of her identity shifts from a Touchable to an Untouchable caused by her

relationship with Velutha. One may argue that Ammu was not beaten to death and maybe that's because her newly acquired Untouchable status (or a prostitute) couldn't erase her Touchable history. But the above analysis suggests that the violence suffered by Ammu resulted from similar processes of circulation of hate as in the case of Velutha and rendered both of them disposable.

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