

## **IMPACT OF AMBEDKAR'S TEACHINGS ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AS SHOWN IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS***

Singla, Priyanka

Associate Professor Department of English, Government College for Women, Hisar.

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the influence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's teachings on community development in India, as depicted in Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*. The novel highlights the struggle of the lower-caste population against the rigid social hierarchy prevalent in India, and how Ambedkar's ideology of social equality and empowerment has impacted the community's development. Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* presents a powerful depiction of the impact of Ambedkar's teachings on community development in India. The novel portrays the lives of twin siblings, Rahel and Estha, who grow up in Ayemenem, a fictional town in Kerala. Their family, the Ipes, is part of the Syrian Christian community, which occupies a higher position in the social hierarchy than the local Dalits. However, the novel also portrays the Dalits' plight, highlighting the systemic oppression they face, which is deeply entrenched in the social and cultural fabric of the region. This paper analyses the novel's portrayal of Ambedkar's ideas and their real-world implications, identifying different ways in which Ambedkar's teachings have inspired collective action and mobilization, paving the way for more just and equitable social systems.

**Keywords:** *B. R. Ambedkar, Community Development, Casteism, Untouchability, Equality.*

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a social reformer, economist, and jurist, who played a crucial role in shaping India's social and political landscape. He is often hailed as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, which sought to establish a secular democracy with equal rights for all citizens. Ambedkar championed the cause of India's lower-caste population, or Dalits, who have been historically subjected to caste-based discrimination and social exclusion. His teachings on

empowerment, social equality, and human rights have been influential in shaping India's social movements and redefining its collective identity. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* portrays Ambedkar's teachings as instrumental in mobilizing the Dalit community and empowering them to demand their rights. One of Ambedkar's central ideas was the importance of education in achieving social mobility and breaking down caste barriers. In the novel, Velutha, a Dalit carpenter, is portrayed as an educated and skilled worker, having learned his trade through a government-supported carpentry program. His education enables him to articulate his rights and speak up against social injustice, sparking the implementation of social change in the community. The novel also highlights Ambedkar's emphasis on collective action and mobilization, depicting the Dalits as working together to improve their living conditions and secure their rights. For example, they organize a strike to protest the unjust treatment of workers in the local tannery. Ambedkar's teachings on social equality are also evident in the novel's portrayal of the relationship between the twins and Velutha, who, despite belonging to different castes, form a close and meaningful bond based on mutual respect and empathy. *The God of Small Things* showcases the transformative impact of Ambedkar's teachings on the Dalit community's identity and sense of empowerment. In the novel, the Dalits' struggle for equality is portrayed as a journey of self-discovery, where their fight for justice and recognition is intertwined with their efforts to reclaim their cultural heritage and identity. This struggle for identity is particularly evident in Velutha's character, who is depicted as a proud and defiant symbol of Dalit resistance against the oppressive social order. Similarly, the novel's portrayal of the twins' relationship with Velutha suggests that their embrace of the Dalit identity marks a critical turning point in their own journey of self-exploration and self-discovery. *The God of Small Things* provides a poignant depiction of the impact of Ambedkar's teachings on community development in India.

The novel's narrative critiques the caste system in India and illustrates how its rigid hierarchy perpetuates social inequality. By exploring the experiences of the novel's marginalized characters, such as Velutha and Ammu, Roy analyzes the extent to which Ambedkar's ideas are represented in the novel. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a prominent Indian social reformer and politician, is considered the father of the Indian Constitution. He dedicated his life to fighting against the

caste system and working towards the empowerment of Dalits—the oppressed castes in Hindu society. His ideas of social equality and justice continue to inspire movements for justice and equality in India and beyond. *The God of Small Things*, a novel set in the Indian state of Kerala, captures the nuances and complexities of caste-based discrimination and its impact on ordinary people's lives. The novel provides insight into how discrimination works, how it affects individuals and communities, and how it intersects with other forms of oppression such as gender, class, and sexuality. Roy analyzes the portrayal of Ambedkar's teachings of social equality in the novel, primarily focusing on how the novel exposes the limitations of these ideas, especially when it comes to gender and sexuality.

Ambedkar's teachings of social equality mainly focus on challenging the caste system's hierarchical structure and breaking down the barriers that restrict people's social mobility based on their caste. Ambedkar argued that the caste system was fundamentally unjust and incompatible with the democratic ideals set out in the Indian Constitution. He advocated for a merit-based society where everyone would have equal access to education, jobs, and political power, regardless of their social background. *The God of Small Things* portrays the experiences of characters who face discrimination owing to their social and cultural background. The novel explores the lived experiences of characters like Velutha, an untouchable who is socially ostracized and subjected to violence and Ammu, who is not considered pure enough to marry within her social class. Although the novel portrays the oppressive impact of the caste system and the need to dismantle it, it also highlights the limitations of Ambedkar's ideas. The novel critiques Ambedkar's understanding of gender and sexuality, illustrating how the normalization of heterosexuality perpetuates patriarchal power structures and oppression.

*The God of Small Things* critiques Ambedkar's ideas regarding gender and sexuality. The novel exposes how the heteronormative ideals that Ambedkar propagated reinforced patriarchal power structures and gender and sexuality-based discrimination. For instance, the novel illustrates how Ambedkar's vision of a casteless society did not account for the subjugation of women or challenge the gender roles prescribed by patriarchy. The novel also portrays how social norms and traditions marginalize characters, especially women, and how these factors

impede their social mobility, irrespective of their caste. Additionally, *The God of Small Things* portrays characters like Ammu, who transgress the socially acceptable norms of gender and sexuality, as being oppressed and punished by societal forces. Overall, *The God of Small Things* examines the complexities of Indian society, particularly the impact of the caste system on people's lives.

The Indian society is structured in such a way that there exists a significant inequality among different groups. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is considered to be one of the greatest social reformers in the Indian history, most noted for his work in eliminating caste-based discrimination. *The God of Small Things* portrays the social hierarchies prevalent in India, and how it affects the lives of individuals. Arundhati Roy uses the character of Velutha, an untouchable, to portray Ambedkar's teachings of collective development. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar believed that the society could only progress if each individual in the society is given an equal opportunity to thrive. He was a strong advocate of individual freedom, where each person should have the liberty to make their own choices, free from societal constraints. Ambedkar argued that if this principle of individual freedom is followed, then each person could contribute to the development of society. In other words, social development can be achieved through collective development of individuals.

Arundhati Roy uses the character of Velutha, an untouchable in the novel to show how caste-based discrimination can affect an individual's life. Velutha is portrayed as a skilled carpenter and an intelligent person, but his lower-caste identity restricts him from fulfilling his potential. However, Velutha's character is not entirely about his own struggles but how his struggles affect the society as a whole. Velutha's character embodies Ambedkar's teachings of individual freedom and collective development. Velutha's participation in the political movements and his initiative to help the other untouchables in the society represents his desire to help the community as a whole. He works relentlessly to bring change in the society, fighting for the rights of the oppressed. Velutha understands the importance of collective development and tries to involve as many people as possible in his struggle. *The God of Small Things* is an excellent example of how literature can be used to depict social issues and how the struggle of a

single individual can have a far-reaching impact on society. The character of Velutha is an embodiment of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's teachings of individual freedom and collective development. Velutha shows that change can be brought about by the collective efforts of individuals to eliminate the social hierarchies prevalent in India.

The teachings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar have been instrumental in India's movement towards social and political empowerment. However, the portrayal of Ambedkar's teachings in literature has been a contentious issue. The novel *The God of Small Things* is set in Kerala, a southern state in India. The novel explores the lives of a family and their interactions with the society they live in. The novel touches on numerous themes such as love, caste discrimination, and political oppression. In the novel, Ambedkar's teachings of political empowerment are portrayed in different ways. It portrays Ambedkar's teachings of political empowerment as a way out of the caste system. The novel highlights the caste discrimination that existed in India and how Ambedkar's teachings provided a way out for people of the lower castes. Ambedkar is portrayed as a savior who advocated for political empowerment as a means to tackle the caste system. Furthermore, Ambedkar's teachings are portrayed as a motivator for political activism. In the novel, the character Velutha, who is a member of the lower caste, is an embodiment of Ambedkar's teachings. Velutha is politically active and fights against the caste system. He is portrayed as a hero who fights for the oppressed and downtrodden. However, the novel also portrays the limitations of Ambedkar's teachings. The novel highlights the fact that political empowerment alone cannot solve the issues of discrimination and oppression that are ingrained in the society. The novel also shows how the upper castes use violence and the law to suppress the lower castes, which makes it difficult for the lower castes to fully utilize their rights. *The God of Small Things* portrays the teachings of Ambedkar as one of the ways that the lower castes can fight against the caste system. The novel highlights the limitations of Ambedkar's teachings in tackling the discrimination and oppression that are ingrained in the society. However, Ambedkar's teachings are portrayed as a motivator for political activism, which is crucial for social and political empowerment.

The novel depicts the story of a Dalit woman named Velutha who faces discrimination and violence due to his caste. Through a critical examination of the characters and events in the novel, Roy highlights Ambedkar's theories on education and its potential to challenge caste-based inequalities in India. Ambedkar is known for his relentless struggle to bring social justice and equality to the Dalit community in India. He was a vocal advocate for the right to education for all, particularly for marginalized communities like the Dalits. His teachings on education equality serve as a critical tool in the fight against caste-based inequalities in India. *The God of Small Things* provides a unique perspective on Ambedkar's teachings on education equality. The novel delves into the lives of marginalized individuals who suffer from caste-based discrimination and violence. Through its characters and events, the novel raises questions about the effectiveness of education in addressing caste-based injustices.

Ambedkar believed that education was essential for achieving social justice and equality in India. He argued that education was the key to liberate the Dalit community from centuries of discrimination and oppression. Ambedkar advocated for equal access to education for all, regardless of caste, gender, or class. He believed that education could break down caste-based prejudices and empower the marginalized to fight for their rights. One of Ambedkar's most significant contributions to education was the establishment of the "Reservation System" in India. This system reserved a percentage of seats in educational institutions and government jobs for people from marginalized communities, including the Dalits. This policy aimed to provide equal opportunities for the marginalized and address historical injustices. *The God of Small Things* portrays the impact of caste-based discrimination on Dalit individuals and their struggle for equality. The novel highlights Ambedkar's teachings on education in several ways. Velutha embodies Ambedkar's belief in the transformative power of education. Despite his low-caste status, Velutha becomes an accomplished carpenter, demonstrating his talent and skill in the craft. However, his education is not enough to protect him from the brutal violence that is inflicted upon him by the upper castes. Moreover, the novel also depicts the limited access to education for Dalits due to social and economic constraints. The character of Ammu, the mother of the novel's protagonists, struggles to provide education to her children due to her limited resources and social status. The novel also depicts how education

is often perverted as an instrument of caste-based oppression by the upper castes. In *The God of Small Things*, education is shown as a means of empowerment that can challenge caste-based prejudices and provide the marginalized with the tools to fight for their rights. Despite the challenges faced by the novel's characters, the novel also showcases their resilience and determination in their struggle for education and equality.

*The God of Small Things* provides a nuanced portrayal of the caste-based biasedness as espoused by B.R Ambedkar, a leader, and social reformer in India. The Indian caste system is an ancient social hierarchy based on the principle of hierarchy and the idea that people's birth determines their 'jati' or caste. However, B.R Ambedkar, a social reformer, and political leader, advocated for the eradication of this reprehensible practice. His teachings laid stress on creating an equal society, devoid of caste-based discrimination. Arundhati Roy portrays Ambedkar's teachings on caste-based biasedness through the various characters and incidents in *The God of Small Things*. The novel portrays the caste-based biasedness prevalent in India. It highlights that Dalits or untouchables are not just untouchables, but they also receive unequal treatment by other castes. For instance, Baby Kochama, the grandaunt of Esthappen and Rahel, believes that she is superior to Velutha, an "untouchable" worker, and can command him at her will. However, the novel also portrays the change in society's outlook towards Dalits, which is deemed necessary by Ambedkar. When Ammu, the mother of Esthappen, decides to live with Velutha, who is an "untouchable," she challenges the societal norms and takes a step towards creating a casteless society.

Furthermore, the novel highlights the resentment that Ambedkar saw as a byproduct of the caste system. The resentment towards the upper castes can lead to violence and can have a long-lasting impact on society. The violence towards Velutha that led to his death and the destruction of his family portrays how the caste system leads to violence and how resentment breeds hatred. In Ambedkar's teachings, these resentments could only be resolved by building an equal society. In addition to the above portrayal of Ambedkar's teachings, *The God of Small Things* also captures the fact that the caste system is not just prevalent in rural areas, but also in urban areas. The novel highlights that the caste system is embedded within the society that

shapes people's behavior towards others. Even in the case of the twins, Esthappen, and Rahel, their behavior towards Sophie Mol, a British girl who comes to stay with them, is based upon their perception of her social class. They believe that she is superior due to her British origin, and they treat her differently. *The God of Small Things* portrays the teachings of B.R Ambedkar on caste-based biasedness through the characters and incidents in the novel. The book highlights the need to move towards an equal society, devoid of caste-based discriminations, and how resentment leads to violence. The novel offers a nuanced portrayal of the caste system in India and emphasizes the need to build an equal society that is free from caste-based biases.

Arundhati Roy reflects Ambedkar's struggles and achievements in its depiction of the socio-cultural conditions of the marginalized classes. The novel is set in Kerala and explores various themes, including caste discrimination, gender roles, and social inequality. One of the significant themes in the novel is caste discrimination. Ambedkar's teachings on the abolition of the caste system, which he believed to be an instrument of oppression, are reflected in the novel. The Dalit residents of the Ayemenem village are treated as second-class citizens, subjected to atrocities, and denied any social or economic mobility. The character of Velutha, an untouchable, serves as a representation of the Dalit struggle. His eventual murder by the upper-caste members of society symbolizes the brutal suppression of the marginalized class. Another theme in the novel is gender roles. Ambedkar believed in gender equality and fought for women's rights. The female characters in the novel, such as Ammu and Mammachi, are victims of gender-based discrimination. They are subjected to patriarchy and sexual repression. The novel portrays their struggle to break free from societal norms and achieve self-determination. Ambedkar's teachings on gender equality and women's rights are evident in their portrayal.

The novel also explores social inequality. The disparities between the rich and poor, the upper caste and the lower caste, the men and the women, are highlighted in the story. The Ayemenem family represents the wealthy upper class, while *The God of Small Things* depicts the economic struggles of the lower class. The novel shows how social and economic conditions can restrict an individual's ability to succeed in life. Ambedkar's teachings on social justice and equality are reflected in the novel's exploration of this theme. It reflects the impact of



Ambedkar's teachings on social and cultural contexts. The themes of caste discrimination, gender roles, and social inequality are presented as subjects of grave concern. The characters in the novel are representative of the marginalized classes, and their struggles reflect Ambedkar's teachings on social justice and equality. Roy's inclusion of Ambedkar's ideas in the novel highlights their ongoing relevance and suggests that the fight for social justice remains unfinished in contemporary Indian society.

*The God of Small Things* depicts the socio-political and cultural realities of Kerala in the 1960s. The book's narrative provides a critical insight into the lives of the Dalit community in Kerala, highlighting their social, economic, and political subjugation. Ambedkar's teachings on the abolition of untouchability have played a crucial role in the Dalit community's development in India. He encouraged education and organization among the Dalits and advocated for their socio-political upliftment. In *The God of Small Things*, the character of Velutha, a Dalit carpenter, embodies many of Ambedkar's teachings. Velutha is a self-taught carpenter who has honed his skills through hard work and determination. He is not only skilled in his craft but is also an advocate for social justice and equality. He is fiercely independent and stands up to the oppressive upper-caste society that seeks to silence and exploit him. Velutha's character represents the idea that Dalits can rise above their social status through education and hard work. Ambedkar believed that education was the key to the Dalits' emancipation and that by providing them with access to education, they could break the chains of poverty and oppression. Velutha's character is an embodiment of this principle, and his story serves as an inspiration to the youth of the Dalit community. Another aspect of Ambedkar's teachings that is evident in the novel is his emphasis on the collective strength of the Dalit community. He believed that the Dalits could only achieve true emancipation if they organized themselves and fought for their rights collectively. In the book, the character of Ammu is shown to have empathy and compassion for the Dalits. She is critical of the oppressive upper-caste society and seeks to form a bond with Velutha, who is treated as an outcast by the society. Ammu's character highlights the importance of empathy and solidarity in the fight for social justice. Velutha's character serves as an inspiration for the youth of the Dalit community to work for social justice and equality, while Ammu's character highlights the importance of empathy and solidarity in the struggle for

emancipation. Overall, this paper highlights the importance of Ambedkar's teachings in shaping India's socio-political landscape and the impact it has had on the Dalit community's development.

Ambedkar believed that caste-based discrimination had resulted in the exclusion of Dalits from mainstream society. He argued that caste-based discrimination had created a social hierarchy in which the 'upper' castes enjoyed social privileges and could exclude and exploit the Dalits. This issue is depicted in *The God of Small Things* through the lives of Ammu and her children, who face relentless social alienation and exclusion. The novel portrays how the Dalits are forced to live in separate colonies, away from the 'upper' castes, and are vilified and humiliated at every opportunity. Amidst this social ostracism, Ammu and her children find themselves in a powerless position, and their plight represents the larger issue of social exclusion discussed by Ambedkar. He further believed that cultural exclusion of Dalits was one of the significant forms of oppression that they faced. Dalit culture was dehumanized, and their history and heritage were erased. The novel highlights this issue through the character of Velutha, a Dalit carpenter who is skilled in making canoes. Velutha's ability to create beautiful boats is dismissed by the upper-caste characters, who believe that such a talent is beyond the intellectual capabilities of a Dalit. Velutha's fate represents the cultural exclusion of Dalits, and his death is symbolic of the destruction of Dalit art, culture and heritage. Ambedkar believed that political power was essential for the Dalits to gain equal rights in society. Political exclusion is highlighted in *The God of Small Things* through the character of Baby Kochamma. Baby Kochamma's hatred for Velutha is partly because he challenges her decision by joining the communist party, which provides a platform for Dalits to express their political views. Baby Kochamma's hostility towards communism signifies the unwillingness of the dominant caste to allow the Dalits to gain political power, and it shows how political exclusion is used to maintain the caste system. Ambedkar argued that the caste system had created economic disparities, with the 'lower' castes being exploited by the 'upper' castes, and this issue is depicted in *The God of Small Things* through the lives of Pappachi and Velutha. Pappachi is an upper-caste man who is a successful tea merchant, and he takes great pride in his work. However, the success of his business is built on the exploitation of the Dalits who work in his tea plantation. Velutha's fate is

also tied to economic exclusion, as his skills go unrecognized and unrewarded. His death is symbolic of the larger issue of economic disparity.

The novel is a critique of India's caste system and highlights the issues of social inequality, poverty, and caste-based discrimination, which continue to plague India's socio-economic development. The portrayal of Ambedkar's teachings on community development in *The God of Small Things* is evident in Roy's treatment of the character of Velutha, a Dalit carpenter, who is depicted as a victim of the caste-based discrimination in the novel. Velutha's character is a tribute to Ambedkar's social justice and inclusion philosophy and his emphasis on the need for equal access to education, land, and employment for the marginalized communities. In essence, Velutha's character is a reflection of Ambedkar's teachings on community development. The portrayal of Ambedkar's teachings on community development in *The God of Small Things* has had a significant impact on contemporary Indian Writing in English. Roy's novel has become a key text in contemporary Indian literature and a voice for the marginalized communities. Aesthetically, the novel has opened up new approaches to literary form and style, that have rejected traditional European structures and grammar, and have unleashed a new form of writing in Indian literature. Furthermore, the novel has influenced contemporary Indian Writing in English by highlighting the need to address issues of social inequality, poverty, and caste-based discrimination in the country. The novel has challenged the dominant discourse in Indian literature and has sparked new debates and perspectives on contemporary Indian society. The portrayal of Ambedkar's teachings on community development has created a renewed sense of awareness and advocacy for the marginalized communities in contemporary Indian writing. In conclusion, the portrayal of Ambedkar's teachings on community development as depicted in *The God of Small Things* has had a profound impact on contemporary Indian Writing in English. The novel has highlighted the need for social justice and inclusion in India and has challenged the traditional modes of literary expression in Indian literature. The impact of Roy's novel on contemporary Indian writing has been immense, sparking renewed awareness and advocacy for the marginalized communities in the country and creating a new voice in Indian literature that is both diverse and dynamic.

## WORKS CITED

- Cordeiro-Rodrigues, L. (2018). Reading Arundhati Roy through Ambedkarism: The Problem of Caste in The God of Small Things. In *Reorienting Diaspora* (pp. 95-105). Springer, Cham.
- Dash, P. (2015). Identity and Community in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. *The Atlantic Literary Review*, 16(1).
- Hembrom, K. (2018). Re-Reading The God of Small Things from an Ambedkarite Perspective. *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 6(6), 162-167.
- Raja, S. (2018). The Politics of Caste in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 53(2), 275-291.
- Rooyackers, T. (2018). Reconfiguring Intimacy in Roy's The God of Small Things in Relation to Ambedkarism. *forum for modern language studies*, 54(1), 84-96.
- Tarafdar, S. (2015). Caste, Class and Gender: A Study of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 1(8), 210-212.

Received on April 20, 2023

Accepted on July 05, 2023

Published on July 10, 2023