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The Smallness of God in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate portrayal of the smallness of God in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, focusing on the character of Velutha. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas's concept of kenosis (self-emptying) and his philosophy of ethical responsibility, this study examines Velutha as an embodiment of divinity in the marginalized. Unlike conventional representations of God as omnipotent, Roy presents divinity in the minute, fragile, and often overlooked aspects of life. By analyzing Velutha's role within the socio-political landscape of caste and power, this paper argues that Roy redefines divinity as deeply intertwined with human suffering and ethical responsibility.

Keywords: Divinity, human existence, transcendence, marginalized voices

Introduction

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a landmark novel that explores caste, gender, and power dynamics in post-colonial India. Among its many thought-provoking themes, one of the most compelling is its redefinition of divinity—not as an omnipotent force but as a subtle presence in everyday life. This paper examines the theme of the smallness of God through Velutha, a pivotal figure who embodies resistance to oppressive structures while also illustrating the fragility of marginalized existence. Despite extensive critical engagement with the novel, much of the scholarship has focused on caste discrimination, gender politics, and post-colonial themes. However, the novel's theological dimensions remain underexplored. Instead of depicting God as an all-powerful being, Roy suggests a vision of divinity found in human vulnerability. This study fills this gap by analyzing how Velutha's character embodies divine humility and ethical responsibility, positioning him as a figure who represents the smallness of God.

This study aims to fill this research gap by analyzing how Roy reconfigures divinity through Velutha's character, positioning him as a figure who embodies the smallness of God. By examining Velutha's role in the novel, this paper will explore how

notions of power, love, and social exclusion intersect with theological and existential questions about the nature of God in the everyday.

Several scholars have examined the novel's socio-political dimensions, particularly its critique of the caste system. Scholars such as William Dalrymple and Christina Patterson have highlighted Roy's ability to blend personal tragedy with larger socio-political critiques. Meanwhile, Elsa Jose Sheba has examined the oppression of women in the novel, focusing on Ammu's experiences as a woman resisting societal norms. However, fewer studies have engaged with the novel's philosophical and theological dimensions.

This paper draws on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, particularly his concept of *kenosis* (self-emptying) and the ethical responsibility of being-for-the-other. Levinas's exploration of transcendence and human suffering provides a critical lens for understanding Velutha's character as an embodiment of divine humility and sacrifice. Additionally, Renée D.N. van Riessen's work on *Levinas' Hermeneutics of Kenosis* offers insights into how human existence and divine presence intersect in marginalized identities, which is crucial in analyzing Velutha's role in the novel.

This paper argues that Roy presents an alternative theological framework that challenges dominant religious narratives. Instead of depicting God as an omnipotent being controlling human fate, she situates divinity in the everyday experiences of the marginalized. By framing Velutha as a figure of divine smallness—an individual who experiences profound suffering yet exudes love and craftsmanship—Roy disrupts conventional hierarchies of power and divinity. The study has objectives to analyze how the novel redefines the concept of divinity through the character of Velutha, and to contribute to the broader discourse on literature and theology by demonstrating how Roy's novel reconfigures divinity within a socio-political context.

Theoretical Framework: Levinas's *Kenosis* and Ethical Responsibility

Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy centers on *kenosis*, or self-emptying, as an ethical act. In contrast to traditional views of transcendence as hierarchical, Levinas sees it as an encounter with the Other—a recognition of another's suffering and a call to responsibility. Velutha's character aligns with this philosophy, as he demonstrates compassion and self-sacrifice despite his marginalized status. His love for Ammu and his unwavering dedication to the twins reflect an ethical transcendence that challenges societal norms.

Understanding the implications of the smallness of God, antithetical role of God of small things requires a multifaceted approach that integrates literary analysis with philosophical ideas of God and Man. Renée D.N. van Riessen's *Man as a Place of God: Levinas' Hermeneutics of Kenosis* explores the intersection between the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and the Christian theological concept of *kenosis*, particularly as it relates to the understanding of human existence and the divine presence. *Kenosis*, derived from the Greek word meaning "emptying," refers to the self-emptying or self-sacrificial love exemplified by Jesus Christ in Christian theology (4-9, 179-185).

Velutha embodied the essence of divinity in his humble human form. Revered akin to a deity, his existence transcended mere mortal boundaries. As a devout Christian, he stood outside the confines of the caste system, a Hindu social construct absent in the teachings of Christianity. However, despite this, he willingly relinquished himself for the sake of others, driven by the unjust dictates of caste divisions. His altruism and selflessness epitomized Christian values, yet tragically, his love and sacrifice became ensnared in the contentious web of Hindu casteism, where they were met with controversy and injustice.

Velutha, undeniably, demonstrates remarkable responsibility towards others, earning admiration from many revered figures for his mechanical prowess. He embodies a human vessel blessed with divine talents. However, despite his extraordinary gifts, he remains a minor deity (smallness because of lower caste), and even his exceptional skills fail him when entangled in a forbidden love affair with Ammu. The convergence of Hindu and Christian ideals concerning love and sacrifice for others ultimately seals his tragic fate, denying him the chance to continue his existence.

For Velutha, Levinas' philosophy resonates strongly with his character and actions. He epitomizes the essence of ethical encounter with "the Other" (4-9) through his compassionate and responsible interactions with those around him. Despite his marginalized status in society, he consistently demonstrates a self-emptying or self-transcendence, prioritizing the needs and vulnerabilities of others above his own interests and desires (4-9). This is evident in his willingness to sacrifice himself for the well-being of his community, as well as his dedication to helping others, regardless of their social standing.

Van Riessen's exploration of how Levinas' ethical orientation towards the Other intersects with the Christian concept of kenosis further illuminates Velutha's character. Like Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition, he embodies a form of kenosis by emptying himself of any sense of superiority or entitlement, instead choosing to serve and uplift those around him. However, his story also highlights the complexities and challenges inherent in this ethical stance, particularly within the context of societal prejudices and power dynamics.

Despite his genuine intentions and selfless actions, he ultimately faces tragic consequences due to the intersecting forces of Hindu casteism and societal norms. His love for Ammu, a woman from a higher caste, and his willingness to defy social boundaries ultimately lead to his downfall, underscoring the harsh reality of the world in which he lives.

In Levinas' philosophy, the central tenet emphasizes the transcendence of the self-centered perspective of human existence. Instead, the focus is shifted towards acknowledging and responding to the presence of the other. This foundational concept encompasses a multitude of dimensions, including being-for-the-other, responsibility, hostage, obsession, substitution, and hospitality, all of which underscore the subject's engagement with and reception of the other.

Velutha and the Hermeneutics of *Kenosis*

The term marginalized voices and the concept of transcendence are deeply connected. Levinas redefines transcendence not as an escape but as an ethical engagement with the suffering Other. Velutha, though oppressed, transcends his circumstances through acts of love and sacrifice. His story highlights how true divinity is found not in dominance but in humility and ethical responsibility.

In Levinas's philosophy, transcendence is not about escaping the material world or achieving a higher metaphysical state but about moving beyond the self-centered existence to recognize and respond to the Other. This ethical transcendence requires individuals to take responsibility for those who are marginalized and oppressed, acknowledging their suffering and humanity.

In the novel, Velutha represents a *marginalized voice*—a member of the Paravan caste who exists on the fringes of society, denied agency and dignity due to caste-based oppression. However, through Levinas's lens, Velutha embodies transcendence in two significant ways:

1. His ethical responsibility toward others – Despite his oppressed status, Velutha exhibits profound care and responsibility for those around him, particularly Ammu and the twins. His actions reflect Levinas's idea of being-for-the-other, where true humanity is found in serving and responding to others, even in the face of personal suffering.
2. His suffering as a site of transcendence – Levinas argues that transcendence emerges in moments of vulnerability and ethical engagement. Velutha, through his suffering and ultimate sacrifice, embodies this idea. His tragic fate forces a confrontation with the injustices of caste and power, compelling the reader to recognize the ethical demand imposed by the marginalized.

Thus, marginalized voices in Roy's novel, particularly Velutha's, are not merely subjects of oppression but also sites of ethical transcendence, challenging readers to rethink justice, divinity, and human responsibility. Roy's portrayal aligns with Levinas's view that true transcendence is not found in dominance or authority but in the acknowledgment and care for those whom society deems insignificant.

Velutha's character embodies many of these aspects delineated by Levinas. Firstly, his innate sense of responsibility (Adahada 65-71) towards others is evident in his actions and choices throughout the narrative. Despite his marginalized status in society, he consistently prioritizes the well-being and needs of those around him, demonstrating a profound commitment to serving the other (Sheba 159-66). His tragic fate (Hancock) underscores the theme of being a hostage to societal norms and prejudices. His forbidden love affair with Ammu, a woman from a higher caste, serves as a stark reminder of the constraints imposed by societal expectations and the consequences of defying these boundaries.

Velutha consistently demonstrates compassion and solidarity with those who are marginalized and oppressed within society. Despite facing discrimination and injustice himself as a member of a lower caste, he remains committed to alleviating the suffering of others. His willingness to sacrifice his own well-being for the sake of others (Jolanta 185-200), particularly in his love for Ammu, reflects a profound sense of mercy and empathy (Benaroyo) towards those in need.

Levinas's hermeneutics of kenosis (4-9, 179-185) offers a profound framework for understanding his experiences and interactions, particularly in relation to his engagement with the divine and with others. Velutha's journey can be viewed through the lens of self-emptying or self-transcendence, as he consistently demonstrates a willingness to relinquish his own ego and desires in service to others. Despite facing numerous challenges and injustices, he remains devoted to the well-being of those around him, embodying the ethical demand of the Other through acts of compassion, sacrifice, and solidarity.

Velutha's character reflects Levinas's conception of God as the "idea of the Infinite in finite existence" (van Riessen 9). In his embodiment of compassion, solidarity, and selflessness, he serves as a manifestation of the divine within the finite realm of human existence. His willingness to empty himself of personal concerns and desires in service to others echoes the transcendent nature of Levinas's understanding of God, who surpasses finite limitations to embrace the infinite possibilities of love and compassion.

When analyzing his character through the lens of Levinas's interpretations of Isaiah 53, we gain deeper insights into his role as a righteous individual and a responsible bearer of suffering. He embodies the suffering of the righteous individual who stands for the divine and the pure amidst a world of disorder. Despite his marginalized status and the injustices he faces, he maintains his moral integrity and commitment to justice and compassion. His suffering is characterized by the absence of

triumph and hope for ultimate victory, as he ultimately meets a tragic end due to societal prejudices and discrimination. His story serves as a poignant reflection of the challenges faced by individuals who strive to uphold moral righteousness in a world marked by disorder and injustice.

Velutha's death challenges conventional notions of mortality and its implications for being-there. Unlike Heidegger's conception of death as annihilation, his death represents the end of living rather than the end of existence. His memory lives on in the hearts and minds of those who knew him, serving as a testament to the enduring impact of his life and legacy.

The narrator's philosophical perspective on death, shaped by prejudices, is particularly notable, "What came for them? Not death. Just the end of living" (321). When we observe Velutha and Ammu's fate through the lens of Levinas's philosophy, particularly his perspective on death offers profound insights into the nature of their experience and its implications for human existence.

In Levinas's framework, death is not merely the cessation of life but also the cessation of responsiveness and the end of appearing. In Velutha's context, his demise represents not just the end of his physical existence but also the end of his ability to respond to the world and to engage with others. Society's prejudices and injustices effectively silence him, denying him the opportunity to fully express himself and to live authentically.

Roy posits that Velutha was deeply struck by Ammu's beauty. "In that brief moment, Velutha looked up and saw things that he hadn't seen before. Things that had been out of bounds so far, obscured by history's blinkers" (176). He experiences a sudden recognition of her beauty. This realization is particularly significant because he belongs to the "Untouchable" caste, deemed inferior to Ammu's. Society dictates that any relationship between them is forbidden. However, despite these societal constraints, his burgeoning feelings of love compel him to transcend this artificial barrier, prompting a fresh perspective on her. Once again, history proves to be a catalyst for societal confusion, delineating who can or cannot form romantic bonds.

Religion plays a significant role in the novel, with Roy delving into its complexities and contradictions. She challenges traditional religious interpretations and norms, presenting alternative perspectives. Her exploration of untouchability and caste dynamics within Christianity adds a new dimension to religious discourse. By portraying Christians as a caste group with their own struggles and disparities, she sheds light on the intersection of religion and social hierarchy in India.

She kissed his closed eyes and stood up. Velutha with his back against the mangosteen tree watched her walk away.

She had a dry rose in her hair.

She turned to say it once again: 'Naaley'

Tomorrow. (340)

In this passage, the interaction between Velutha and Ammu is laden with symbolism and reflects the complexities of their relationship within the larger social context of caste and societal norms. The physical description of Velutha leaning against a mangosteen tree and watching Ammu walk away suggests a sense of distance or separation between them. Despite any feelings they may have for each other, societal barriers prevent them from openly expressing their affection or being together.

The presence of a dry rose in Ammu's hair carries symbolic weight. Roses are often associated with love and passion, yet the fact that it is dry suggests a sense of desolation or unfulfilled desire. It highlights the impossibility of their love within the constraints of their society.

Ammu walks away with a farewell and a hopeful gesture, suggesting that perhaps in the future their love could be realized. They come from different social backgrounds, with Velutha belonging to the "Untouchable" caste, which further complicates their relationship. The societal norms and prejudices against inter-caste relationships create additional barriers for them.

The narrator encapsulates the complex dynamics between Velutha and Ammu, shedding light on the challenges they face in their relationship within the societal framework they inhabit. He argues, "If he touched her, he couldn't talk to her, if he loved her he couldn't leave, if he spoke he couldn't listen, if he fought he couldn't win" (217). It highlights the paradoxes that Velutha faces in his relationship with Ammu. Touching her represents a physical connection, but it also implies a breach of societal norms and the risk of severe consequences due to their differing social statuses. Similarly, loving her would bind him to her emotionally, making it difficult for him to leave, yet leaving is often the only option available to navigate the constraints imposed by society.

By depicting the tragic consequences faced by Ammu for daring to love outside societal norms, Roy underscores the importance of recognizing and respecting the equality and complementarity of genders in shaping a just and harmonious society. Roy's novel particularly focuses on the tragic relationship between Velutha and Ammu, and the controversy surrounding the novel's portrayal of sexuality.

Caste and color recall to our mind, Velutha-the Paravan and an untouchable, who dared to love a touchable woman, Ammu, and they broke Love Laws that "lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much" (33). Velutha and Ammu's relationship is a central focal point that challenges the rigid social structures and norms surrounding caste and color in Indian society. Their love defies the established "Love Laws" that dictate who should love whom based on caste and social status. Their relationship crosses the boundaries set by society, daring to challenge the deeply ingrained prejudices and discriminatory practices that dictate interpersonal relationships.

Despite the purity and sincerity of their love, Velutha and Ammu face severe repercussions for their defiance of societal norms. Their relationship ultimately leads to tragic consequences, highlighting the devastating impact of societal prejudice and discrimination on individuals who dare to challenge the status quo.

Their relationship serves as a powerful commentary on the oppressive nature of the caste system and the resilience of human spirit in the face of social injustice. Their love defies the constraints of caste and color, ultimately symbolizing the transformative power of love in transcending societal divisions and fostering genuine human connections.

William Dalrymple highlights the novel's ability to evoke a range of emotions, from laughter to tears- "The joy of *The God of Small Things* is that it appeals equally to the head and the heart. It is clever and complex, yet it also makes one laugh, and finally, moves one to tears . . . Roy writes [with] a fecund, teeming visuality that is entirely her own. A masterpiece, utterly exceptional" (*Harpers and Queen*, qtd. in *The God of Small Things*, published by Penguin Books India, 2002). Christina Patterson writes her genuine comment- "*The God of Small Things* explores the tragic fate of a family which 'tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how.' They are an eclectic mix: grandmother Mammachi; her spoilt Anglophile son, Chacko; her daughter Ammu; Ammu's inseparable twins Estha and Rahel; and Baby Kochamma, grand aunt, determined to spread the bitter seeds of her early disappointment in love. From its mesmerising opening sequence, it is clear that we are in the grip of a delicious new voice . . . a voice of breathtaking beauty. The novel achieves genuine, tragic resonance. It is, indeed, a masterpiece" (*Observer*, qtd. in *The God of Small Things*).

Critics praise its genuine tragic resonance and the magic, mystery, and sadness of the narrative. These reactions from reviewers suggest that the novel is able to deeply affect readers on an emotional level: "Even later on the thirteen nights that followed this one, instinctively they stuck to the Small Things. The Big Things ever lurked inside. They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things" (338). The relationship between Velutha and Ammu is portrayed as one characterized by a sense of constraint and resignation, yet also by an intimate connection forged through their shared experiences and the pursuit of small moments of joy amidst their bleak circumstances. Despite the societal barriers and the bleak outlook of their situation, they find solace and connection in the small moments they share together. These moments serve as a refuge from the harsh realities of their lives, allowing them to momentarily escape the constraints of their social status and the oppressive forces of society.

The reference to "big things" lurking inside suggests the looming presence of societal expectations, consequences, and the weight of their circumstances. Despite their attempts to focus on the small things, the larger societal forces inevitably intrude upon their relationship, reminding them of the futility of their situation and the lack of viable options available to them. The acknowledgment that they have "nowhere to go" and "nothing" underscores the hopelessness of their predicament. With no prospects for a better future and the odds stacked against them, they cling to the small moments of happiness and connection they can find, recognizing that these fleeting moments are all they have to hold onto in the face of overwhelming adversity.

The narrator observes a tense scene- "And the Air was full of Thoughts and Things to Say. But at times like these, only the Small Things are ever said. The Big Things lurk unsaid inside" (142). The scene unfolds itself the Small Things and Big Things at the airport as Chacko, Ammu, Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Rahel, and Estha eagerly await the arrival of Sophie Mol and her mother Margaret from London. Sophie Mol is Chacko's daughter from his previous marriage to Margaret, an English woman. Chacko hasn't seen them since Margaret ended their marriage nine years ago when Sophie Mol was just a baby. Sophie Mol, being of mixed heritage, embodies the complex intersection of Indian and English identities.

As the family anxiously prepares for Sophie Mol and Margaret's arrival, they are acutely aware of the cultural differences between themselves and the incoming English visitors. They fret over their attire and carefully monitor their speech, conscious of the impression they will make as representatives of India. In this moment, the narrator observes a shift in focus from the "Big Things," such as their underlying fears of judgment and shame, to the "Small Things," like maintaining polite formalities and dressing appropriately.

Smallness and Bigness: Laltain and Mombatti

The theme of suffering and societal oppression is deeply ingrained in the novel, portraying it as an inevitable aspect of human existence. Through the lives of its characters, it illustrates the stark contrast between the privileged and the marginalized, highlighting the power dynamics and injustices prevalent in society.

"Big Man the Laltain, Small Man the Mombatti" (88) stresses the contrast between Small and Big. Velutha is identified as 'The God of Small but this description is preceded by the phrase. The Small/Big dichotomy is again underscored in someone Small who bullied all their lives by someone Big. The phrase "Big Man the Laltain, Small Man the Mombatti" underscores the recurring theme of power dynamics and contrasts between individuals of different statuses or sizes. This dichotomy between

"Big" and "Small" is a central motif throughout the novel, highlighting the disparities in society and the ways in which power is wielded.

The metaphorical usage of "Big Man" and "Small Man" suggests not only physical stature but also social, economic, and political power. The *laltain* (lantern) symbolizes authority, illumination, and prominence, while the *mombatti* (candle) represents insignificance, dimness, and vulnerability. The phrase suggests that in society, those who hold power are often seen as significant and illuminated (the "Big Man"), while those without power are marginalized and insignificant (the "Small Man").

Velutha, a pivotal character in the novel, is identified as "The God of Small Things," which emphasizes his significance in the realm of the marginalized and oppressed. However, this description is preceded by the acknowledgment of the dichotomy between "Big" and "Small," indicating that even though he holds importance in the lives of those who are marginalized, he still exists within a framework where power imbalances persist.

The metaphorical representation of "The God of Big Things" versus "The God of Small Things" symbolizes the societal hierarchy, where the powerful and affluent are likened to the "Laltain" (lantern), protected and resilient against adversity, while the marginalized and downtrodden are depicted as "mombatis" (candles), vulnerable and easily extinguished by the slightest hardship.

Velutha represents the marginalized "mombatis" pitted against the powerful "Laltain" of society, including figures like Pappachi, Baby Kochamma, Chacko, Comrade Pillai, and Inspector Thomas Mathew. His struggle against these forces symbolizes the defiance of the oppressed against the dominance of the privileged.

The title *The God of Small Things* is analyzed as a reflection of the eternal struggle between the powerful and the powerless, echoing Shakespeare's notion of humans being like "flies to wanton boys (*King Lear* 4.1.37–38)" to the gods. The title suggests a certain irony, as the gods of small things do not actively kill but are themselves vulnerable to the influence of larger forces. Shakespeare's notion of humans being like "flies to wanton boys" to the gods offers insight into Velutha's experience of vulnerability and powerlessness in the face of larger forces.

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) explores the inherent ethical tensions and conflicts that arise when individuals are stripped of societal norms and structures, left to their own devices in a state of nature. The novel portrays the descent of a group of boys into savagery and violence as they grapple with the challenges of survival and power dynamics. For Velutha, who experiences marginalization and oppression within the societal hierarchy depicted in *God of Small Things*, the themes of power, authority, and morality in *Lord of the Flies* resonate deeply. Like the boys on the island, he confronts the realities of power dynamics and ethical decision-making in a world marked by injustice and oppression.

Velutha possesses the intellectual capacity and aptitude to pursue a career as an engineer ("If he hadn't been a Parawan, he might have been an engineer" (75), a profession typically associated with higher education and social status. However, his belonging to the Parawan caste becomes a significant barrier to realizing his potential. Despite his talents and abilities, societal prejudices based on caste restrict his opportunities and confine him to a lower social position.

Velutha's proficiency with his hands is depicted through his ability to create intricate toys and carve figurines, showcasing his artistic dexterity and craftsmanship. His talent in carpentry is further emphasized, with Mammachi recognizing his potential as an engineer if not for his caste. When a bottle-sealing machine is brought to the pickle factory, "it was Velutha who reassembled it and set it up. It was Velutha who maintained

the new canning machine and the automatic pineapple slicer; Velutha who oiled the water pump and the small diesel generator; Velutha who built the aluminium sheet-lined, easy-to-clean cutting surfaces, and the ground-level furnaces for boiling fruit" (76).

When he and his father come to the Master's house to deliver the coconuts plucked from the trees in the compound, they were not allowed inside the house lest they should pollute it. "Mammachi didn't encourage him to enter the house" (77). It highlights the deeply ingrained caste-based discrimination and social hierarchy prevalent in Indian society, particularly in the context of the relationship between the lower caste workers and the upper caste landowners.

The refusal to allow Velutha and his father inside the house underscores the dehumanizing nature of caste-based discrimination, where individuals are denied basic dignity and respect solely based on their birth identity. This exclusion from the household also serves as a stark reminder of the rigid social hierarchies that dictate interactions and relationships between different caste groups.

Velutha can be interpreted as embodying the concept of a god of small things in several ways. Despite his marginalized status as an untouchable and a member of the working class, he possesses remarkable skills, intelligence, and capacity for love. However, his societal position renders him insignificant in the eyes of those who hold power and authority. This juxtaposition of Velutha's inherent worth and his marginalized status highlights the theme of smallness of gods, wherein individuals with great potential are diminished by societal structures.

The narrator's gnomic utterance, "D'you know what happens when you hurt people?" Ammu said. "When you hurt people, they begin to love you less" (112). encapsulates a profound observation about the consequences of causing pain to others. Ammu seems to possess an acute awareness of the repercussions of hurting others. She implies that hurting people has a direct impact on the way they perceive and feel about the person causing the hurt.

Velutha's defiance of societal norms and his pursuit of love with Ammu represent a form of resistance against the oppressive forces of casteism and social hierarchy. In this sense, he can be seen as a small god challenging the established order, even though his actions ultimately lead to tragic consequences. Despite his marginalized status, he exerts a significant influence on the lives of those around him. His skills as a carpenter and mechanic contribute to the functioning of the household and the pickle factory, highlighting the importance of his labor despite being undervalued by society. This underscores the idea that power and significance can exist in the smallest of actions and individuals.

The Role of Smallness and Resistance

Roy's novel invites multiple layers of interpretation, particularly in how divinity is redefined through suffering and resistance. The smallness of God is not a limitation but a radical assertion that power resides in love, endurance, and sacrifice. Velutha's silent defiance against caste oppression and his commitment to love—even when it leads to his downfall—mirror the Levinasian concept of ethical responsibility.

Furthermore, the novel contrasts small things with big things, highlighting how seemingly insignificant acts—gestures of kindness, fleeting moments of joy—hold profound meaning. In Velutha's case, his smallness does not make him powerless; rather, it situates him as a force that disrupts entrenched social hierarchies. His tragic end is not just a personal loss but a commentary on how systems of oppression function to erase voices that challenge them.

Velutha's discomfort with Ammu's eyes during their intimate moments speaks to the existential complexities of human relationships and the ethical imperative to recognize and respond to the vulnerability and humanity of others. Through Levinas's perspective, we gain a deeper understanding of Velutha's experience and the existential tensions inherent in navigating intimacy, perception, and societal barriers.

He was exasperated because he didn't know what that look *meant*. He put it somewhere between indifference and despair. He didn't know that in some places, like the country that Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy. And that *personal* despair could never be desperate enough. That something happened when personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation. 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. In the country that she came from, poised forever between the terror of war and the horror of peace, Worse Things kept happening. (19)

Here, Roy explores the concept of the "smallness" of personal despair in the face of larger, national or societal turmoil. The passage contrasts two conceptions of God - the "Small God" and the "Big God". The Small God is described as cozy, contained, private, and limited, representing personal despair and turmoil. In contrast, the Big God is depicted as vast, violent, driving, and demanding obeisance, symbolizing the overwhelming power and influence of societal or national turmoil.

It touches upon themes of insignificance and resilience in the face of overwhelming circumstances. It highlights the capacity of individuals to adapt and endure in the midst of profound suffering and chaos, even as their personal struggles seem inconsequential compared to larger societal forces. The text delves into the concept of the "smallness" of personal despair in the context of larger societal turmoil. It explores the contrast between personal and public despair, resilience in the face of adversity, and the ways in which individuals cope with overwhelming circumstances: "So Small God laughed a hollow laugh, and skipped away cheerfully. Like a rich boy in shorts. He whistled, kicked stones. The source of his brittle elation was the relative smallness of his misfortune. He climbed into people's eyes and became an exasperating expression" (19). In this part of the novel, Roy offers a poignant exploration of the smallness of personal despair and the coping mechanisms individuals adopt in the face of adversity. The description of the Small God laughing a hollow laugh and skipping away cheerfully conveys a sense of superficiality and emptiness in the face of despair. Despite the appearance of cheerfulness, there's an underlying lack of genuine joy or contentment.

The comparison of the Small God to a rich boy in shorts evokes an image of privilege and carefree indulgence. This juxtaposition highlights the contrast between the apparent lightness of the Small God's demeanor and the weight of his internal struggles. The phrase "brittle elation" suggests that the Small God's cheerfulness is fragile and easily shattered. His source of happiness stems from the perception that his misfortune is relatively small compared to larger societal or existential issues. This highlights the theme of perspective and the subjective nature of suffering.

The imagery of the Small God climbing into people's eyes and becoming an exasperating expression illustrates how personal despair can intrude upon and affect the perception of others. This intrusion emphasizes the interconnectedness of individual

experiences and the ways in which personal struggles can manifest in social interactions. The Small God's behavior, such as whistling, kicking stones, and adopting a cheerful facade, represents coping mechanisms employed to mask internal pain. These actions serve as distractions or attempts to maintain a semblance of normalcy in the face of adversity. The concept of the Small God symbolizes the insignificance of individual suffering in the larger scheme of existence. It reflects how personal despair can feel small and trivial when compared to broader societal or cosmic concerns.

Velutha's smallness of god is evident in his status as an untouchable and a member of the working class. Like other characters such as Bakha, Munoo, and Gangu, Velutha finds himself trapped within a system based on inequality and exploitation. Despite his talents and capabilities, he is rendered powerless by the oppressive forces of casteism and societal hierarchy.

Furthermore, Velutha's tragic fate underscores the theme of smallness of gods in the novel. Despite his love for Ammu and his contributions to the family's well-being, his existence is ultimately deemed inconsequential by those in power. His false implication in a charge of abduction and rape, followed by his brutal death, epitomizes the systematic injustice and violence perpetuated against the marginalized members of society.

In Christian theology, the concept of the Incarnation asserts that God took on human form in the person of Jesus Christ. Central to this belief is the idea that the infinite and transcendent God became finite and immanent in the human form. References to biblical passages such as John 1:14 ("And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us") can provide insights into the notion of the smallness of God taking on human form.

"Ammu said that human beings were creatures of habit, and it was amazing the kind of things they could get used to. You only had to look around you, Ammu said, to see that beatings with brass vases were the least of them" (50). This view can be applied to various characters in the novel, each exhibiting habitual behaviors and patterns in their own unique ways. Roy portrays a diverse array of characters whose behaviors and actions are influenced by their individual backgrounds, societal pressures, and personal experiences. The remark underscores the pervasive influence of habitual behaviors in shaping human interactions and identities, highlighting the complex interplay between individual agency and external forces. Estha and Rahel demonstrate habitual behaviors shaped by their shared past and traumatic experiences. They often retreat into their own private worlds as a coping mechanism, engaging in rituals and routines that provide them with a sense of comfort and familiarity. For example, Estha's habit of keeping silence and Rahel's tendency to escape into her imagination are manifestations of their deeply ingrained coping mechanisms.

Ammu, the twins' mother, exhibits habitual behaviors stemming from her societal constraints and personal desires. Despite her yearning for freedom and independence, she finds herself trapped in a cycle of oppressive familial expectations and societal norms. Her habitual defiance against these constraints ultimately leads to her downfall, highlighting the struggle between individual agency and societal expectations. Velutha exhibits habitual behaviors shaped by his marginalized status in society. Despite facing discrimination and oppression, he finds solace in his work and relationships with the twins. However, his habitual defiance against the caste system ultimately leads to his tragic demise, highlighting the consequences of challenging entrenched social norms.

Baby Kochamma represents the embodiment of traditional values and rigid adherence to societal norms. Her habitual manipulation and control over others stem from her desire to maintain power and status within her family and community. She

clings to her conservative beliefs and refuses to adapt to changing circumstances, leading to her isolation and bitterness. Chacko, Ammu's brother, demonstrates habitual self-indulgence and escapism as a coping mechanism for his failed marriage and disillusionment with life. He retreats into his memories of his time in England and his romanticized notions of the past, failing to confront the realities of his present circumstances. Margaret Kochamma, the twins' English relative, exhibits habitual behaviors shaped by her colonial mindset and cultural biases. Despite her initial intentions to connect with her Indian family, she remains aloof and detached, viewing them through a lens of superiority and condescension.

Velutha is “The God of Loss. The God of Small Things” (290). “He left no footprints in the sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors” (216). The term The God of Loss suggests the embodiment of loss as a deity or higher power. Loss is portrayed as a significant force in human life, capable of exerting influence and shaping experiences. This characterization personifies loss, giving it a sense of power and authority. In juxtaposition to the grandiosity of loss, the novel introduces the idea of insignificance and subtlety. This contrasts with the overwhelming nature of loss, highlighting the importance of seemingly trivial or overlooked aspects of life.

Amidst the enormity of loss, there are also small moments of beauty, significance, and joy. The description of the God of Loss leaving no footprints, ripples, or image emphasizes the intangible and elusive nature of loss. Loss is depicted as a spectral presence, leaving no tangible evidence of its existence. This absence reflects the difficulty of grappling with loss and the challenge of coming to terms with its impact. It prompts existential reflection on the nature of loss and its relationship to human existence. It raises questions about the permanence of loss, its ability to shape identity and perception, and the ways in which individuals navigate grief and resilience in its aftermath.

Velutha indeed embodies the dual characterizations of the smallness of god and the god of small things through his experiences of suffering and death. His character serves as a poignant representation of the divine qualities found within marginalized individuals, as well as the tragic consequences of societal oppression.

This character epitomizes the smallness of god by embodying qualities traditionally associated with divinity despite his marginalized status. His compassion, kindness, and capacity for love transcend the limitations imposed by societal hierarchies, showcasing the divine potential within all individuals, regardless of their social standing. Despite his marginalized position as an untouchable, his actions and interactions with others reveal a profound sense of humanity and moral integrity. His innate goodness and selflessness elevate him to a godlike status within the narrative, emphasizing the transformative power of empathy and compassion.

Velutha also embodies the god of small things through his intimate connections with the natural world and the everyday experiences of life. His character finds solace and beauty in the small moments of joy and wonder, such as his interactions with the river or his relationship with Ammu and the twins. The novel portrays him as a guardian of the small and vulnerable aspects of existence, symbolizing the divine presence within the mundane and overlooked elements of life. His reverence for the small things contrasts sharply with the larger societal forces of oppression and violence that ultimately lead to his tragic demise.

Half an hour past midnight. Death came for him.

And for the little family curled up and asleep on a blue cross-stitch counterpane?

What came for them?

Not death. Just the end of living. (321)

In this part of the text, Roy offers a poignant reflection on death and the smallness of God, particularly in the face of human mortality. The timing of death at half an hour past midnight adds a sense of inevitability and solemnity to the event. Midnight often symbolizes a boundary between life and death, with half past midnight representing a transition from one state to another.

The arrival of death is depicted as a definitive event, suggesting its indiscriminate nature and its ability to disrupt the lives of individuals and families. This moment marks the end of a life and the beginning of mourning and grief for those left behind. The description of the family as "little" emphasizes their vulnerability and insignificance in the face of death. Despite their closeness and intimacy, they are powerless to prevent the inevitable arrival of death.

The mention of the blue cross-stitch counterpane adds a sense of domesticity and familiarity to the scene. It contrasts with the profound and universal nature of death, highlighting the mundane details of everyday life that persist even in moments of tragedy. The distinction between death and "the end of living" underscores the idea that death is not simply the cessation of life but also the end of experiences, relationships, and opportunities. This suggests that death represents more than just physical mortality; it also marks the loss of the richness and complexity of life itself.

The absence of death for the family and the characterization of their experience as "just the end of living" highlights the smallness of God in the face of human suffering and mortality. While death may be a universal and transcendent force, the family's experience emphasizes the personal and intimate nature of their loss. The text offers a sobering reflection on death and the smallness of God, particularly in the context of human mortality and the profound impact it has on individual lives and families. It highlights the contrast between the universal and personal aspects of death, as well as the enduring significance of everyday experiences even in the shadow of mortality.

Conclusion

Velutha's martyrdom can be interpreted through the lens of the smallness of God and the God of small things. His tragic fate exemplifies the profound impact of individual actions and the transformative power of sacrifice in the face of societal oppression. His martyrdom reflects the smallness of God by highlighting the divine qualities inherent in his actions and sacrifices. Despite his marginalized status as an untouchable, he embodies virtues such as love, compassion, and selflessness, which transcend societal hierarchies and prejudices. His willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of others, particularly Ammu and her children, underscores the divine potential within all individuals, regardless of their social background. His martyrdom serves as a testament to the transformative power of goodness and the enduring legacy of those who embody the values of empathy and solidarity.

His martyrdom also aligns with the theme of the god of small things by highlighting the significance of individual actions and everyday moments in shaping the course of human lives. Despite his humble status as a carpenter and mechanic, his presence has a profound impact on those around him, particularly Ammu and the twins. His martyrdom underscores the fragility and vulnerability of human existence, as well as the capacity for ordinary individuals to enact extraordinary acts of courage and sacrifice. His story serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of lives and the ripple effects of individual choices in a larger social context.

Through his story, Roy explores themes of injustice, inequality, and resistance in Indian society, shedding light on the systemic oppression faced by marginalized

communities like the Paravans. His martyrdom symbolizes the cost of challenging entrenched power structures and the ongoing struggle for justice and dignity.

Velutha's martyrdom serves as a profound representation of the smallness of God, challenging conventional notions of divinity. Roy's portrayal urges readers to reconsider where divinity resides—in power or in those who suffer. By aligning with Levinas's philosophy, this study highlights how *The God of Small Things* redefines transcendence and ethics in a deeply stratified society. Through Velutha, Roy offers a radical theological perspective: that God exists not in the powerful, but in the overlooked and the oppressed.

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