



## Peace and Resolution in Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things*

Sunil Alone, Research Scholar, Post Graduate Teaching Department of English, RTM Nagpur University, Nagpur.  
Prof. Joby George, Research Supervisor, Principal, Bhiwapur Mahavidyalaya, Bhiwapur.

### Abstract

This paper examines Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* through three frameworks: Johan Galtung's triangle of violence, John Paul Lederach's moral imagination, and literary trauma studies. Galtung argues that lasting peace requires addressing direct, structural, and cultural violence together. Lederach treats peacebuilding as a relational, aesthetic process rooted in moral imagination. Trauma theory shows that conflict's wounds persist long after the events end. Within the novel, the Love Laws enforce caste, class, and gender hierarchy by dictating who may love whom. Ammu and Velutha break those laws. Inside the History House, caste briefly stops mattering. But Roy does not allow them survival. Velutha is killed in what the novel calls a clinical exercise of power. The twins Estha and Rahel, stripped of mother, childhood, and innocence, find in each other the only warmth left. Love in Roy's world cannot beat History. It can still redeem the person inside it.

**Keywords:** Peace, Resolution, Arundhati Roy, The God of Small Things, Untouchability

### Introduction:

People tend to think of "resolution" as an endpoint. The violence stops, some kind of balance comes back. Peace theory and conflict transformation work, plus literary trauma studies, push against that picture. Human suffering doesn't work that way at a systemic level. Resolution is more than just hostilities ending in a context of turmoil. It is a process that ethically demands of working through inequality in structure and historical trauma. Johan Galtung's theory of violence and peace is studied and linked to John Paul Lederach's moral imagination, and then read through literary trauma studies in the context of the book titled *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*. It is practised continuously and relationally. Resolution doesn't erase turmoil. Understanding turmoil means getting past the usual focus on visible conflict. Galtung's triad does this: direct, structural, cultural violence. The triangle, he argues, makes up the basic architecture of human suffering (Galtung 181). Direct violence is visible, physical and the incidents that make headlines. Galtung has pointed out something important: focusing only on direct violence, one will get a narrow picture of the violence and it won't actually result in lasting peace. There is structural violence hidden under it. Then there is another type of violence that is cultural violence. The cultural violence is described as "those aspects of culture... that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung 181). This is the storytelling and the ideology that make the unacceptable things acceptable. Myths, historical narratives and various social and cultural norms are all the ways a society makes marginalized people's suffering look invisible or deserved by suppressing it. The cultural violence justifies structural violence and structural violence sets up direct violence. Skip part of that triad in any resolution attempt and you're managing symptoms; it will not cure anything. The turmoil that keeps going after a ceasefire is unaddressed cultural and structural violence that is still poisoning the relationship. Resolution is not passive non-violence under Galtung's model of peace and resolution because it is active in reality. It is a relentless advocacy for justice and equity in society. It is also confronting cultural justifications for oppression, tearing down structural barriers and skipping the commitment to positive peace; and any declared resolution is just a pause before the cycle starts again. Getting from negative to positive peace takes a real shift in how people think collectively. It is a willingness to go with uncomfortable truths about historical and systemic complicity in society. This is where peace studies has to meet conflict transformation, and literary trauma studies too, because positive peace runs straight through psychological and historical hauntings. Legislation doesn't touch those. Neither does diplomacy, on its own.



In turmoil, where cultural and structural violence have already devastated the society and moral imagination is what lets communities portray something with no precedent in their own sidelined history. A positive peace is beyond the inherited stories of cultural violence. It is not just intellectual work for Lederach. It is spiritual, ethical, and a discipline in nature. Central to all this is the “web approach.” “The pursuit of social change [is] initiated through spatial strategies and networking” (Lederach 183). People sit embedded in relational space, a tangled web crossing the very divides, identity and history that fuel turmoil in the first place. Peacebuilding isn’t imposing a solution from outside. It’s cultivating relational spaces inside that web, carefully and strategically. Lederach pushes further, into art: “the aesthetics of social change proposes a simple idea: Building adaptive and responsive processes requires a creative act, which at its core is more art than technique” (Lederach 73). As an artistic process, peacebuilding rejects predictability. “The artistic process is not linear,” he writes, “it moves around and pops out in all kinds of unexpected ways” (Lederach 160). Serendipity. Intuition. Creative adaptation. All of it matters for navigating turmoil’s real uncertainty. Peace becomes an ongoing aesthetic practice, a continuous negotiation of the web in the face of historical and systemic trauma.

To grasp the violence Lederach’s moral imagination has to confront, turn to literary trauma studies, *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma* specifically. Trauma theory rejects clean, linear resolution outright. The deepest injuries of turmoil resist getting absorbed right away. Drawing on psychoanalysis, the text notes that for someone traumatized, “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (Davis and Meretoja 56). Belatedness is the cause of the persistence of turmoil long after direct violence stops. Galtung’s concepts of ‘structural violence’ and ‘cultural violence’ work through exactly this mechanism. Historical oppression is not a closed chapter but it is a recurring possession that haunts the present of the people. Resolution can not prevail from declaring peace or trying to erase the past of the people. It is necessary to realistically engage with the belated nature of trauma. The wounds of turmoil don’t stay behind once the event ends. They keep working on relationships long afterward.

### **Peace and Resolution in Arundhati Roy’s Writings:**

Arundhati Roy’s novel entitled *The God of Small Things* is a reflection of unwritten love laws in patriarchal society and the characters can never escape these laws in this novel. These unwritten rules dominate the people about who can love whom and how much in society. It has been reinforcing and strengthening caste, class, gender, cultural and colonial hierarchies across Ayemenem village in Kerala in the novel. Loving the wrong person is not romantic but it is very dangerous for the person who loves and the person being loved. The characters of the novel have not been granted a redemption where love conquers all issues. Instead, love in Roy’s Ayemenem is transgressive and often fatal, and yet it still manages to save something in the people who risk it. Through Ammu and Velutha’s affair, and through the strange, trauma-bound closeness between the twins Estha and Rahel, Roy suggests that love can’t beat History, but it can still redeem the person inside it, even as it destroys them.

Roy tells us early that the real beginning of this tragedy isn’t a date but a set of rules: the moment “the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much” (32). These laws come from what the novel calls the “Big God”, i.e. society, caste and history, and they punish anyone who steps outside them. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma enforce this order and mistake their own prejudice for morality. Ammu already feels like her life is finished before it’s begun, stuck in what the novel calls a “viable die-able age” (32). For any of these characters to be redeemed, something has to break.

The clearest case is Ammu and Velutha’s affair. She’s a divorced Touchable woman; he’s an Untouchable Paravan carpenter. By any measure of Ayemenem society, this is forbidden. But for both of them, it’s a refuge. Ammu has been pushed to the margins of her own family for the



crime of getting divorced, and Velutha offers her a way out of what the novel calls the “vapid, vinegary fumes” of her life (222). She doesn’t see a Paravan when she looks at him. She sees, as Roy puts it, a man shaped by his own hands: “She understood the quality of his beauty. How his labor had shaped him. How the wood he fashioned had fashioned him. Each plank he planed, each nail he drove, each thing he made had moulded him” (324). Ammu stops being a social outcast with Velutha and simply leads the life of an ordinary woman throughout her life. But, it is completely different in the case of Velutha. He has to carry the blot of untouchability throughout his life but the most important thing is that Ammu’s love briefly erases it in a systematic manner. Inside the History House, caste stops mattering. Roy writes that “Biology designed the dance. Terror timed it” (327). In the quote, desire and fear are juxtaposed systematically. Ammu even thinks of him as something close to divine: “She knew who he was—the God of Loss, the God of Small Things. Of course she did” (218). He earns that title because he exists outside History’s grand narratives, in the small, human moments that History doesn’t bother to notice. With him, she gets what the novel describes as “Seven years of oblivion” which lifts off her (328).

None of this comes free. Roy doesn’t let the affair end well. The History House, where the two of them meet, is also where the police kill Velutha and his death isn’t framed as passion or chaos but as procedure. According to the narrator, it is “a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions...of human nature’s pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly” (301). The price of the Love Laws is that one has to sacrifice his or her life and yet the love redeems something even in its ruined conditions. These laws force Estha and Rahel to watch the world as it actually is and end their innocent childhood but bind both of them to each other for good in their lives. As the narrator puts it, with real bitterness: “The cost of living climbed to unaffordable heights; though later Baby Kochamma would say it was a Small Price to Pay. Was it? Two lives. Two children’s childhoods. And a history lesson for future offenders” (327). The love kills the body. It doesn’t kill what mattered.

If Ammu and Velutha’s story is the outward rebellion against the Love Laws, the twins’ bond is the inward version of what’s left over after everything is ruined. From the start, Estha and Rahel don’t think of themselves as two people. The novel says they thought of themselves “together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us” (2). That closeness is what gets them through a world that keeps hurting them. After Sophie Mol’s death, their mother’s exile, and Velutha’s murder, that bond is the only thing left standing.

Years later, when Rahel comes back to Ayemenem, she finds Estha gone silent, having learned to disappear to seem, in Roy’s words, “inanimate, almost invisible” (11). He is shut himself away to survive the memory of Velutha’s blood and the guilt of a confession he was forced into as a child. Rahel is the only one who can reach him. What follows is one of the novel’s most debated scenes: in Estha’s darkened room, the twins share a moment of physical intimacy that has nothing to do with romance and everything to do with shared trauma and total isolation.

Roy doesn’t write it as erotic. She writes it as something closer to grief finding a shape. Roy writes, “Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons. Only that there was a snuffling in the hollows at the base of a lovely throat...Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lays down who should be loved. And how. And how much” (319). Estha and Rahel have lost their mother, childhood, emotional bond with their mother and each other’s innocence in their life. They don’t have anything left behind them but only themselves. Roy has precisely portrayed them as strangers “who had met in a chance encounter” yet who “had known each other before Life began” in this novel (319). It is the last warmth between these two siblings who have been stripped of almost everything else in their lives.

Roy also sets this kind of love against the fake, self-serving versions of it that run through the rest of the family. Baby Kochamma’s obsession with Father Mulligan is possessive but not loving. She manipulates the twins into condemning Velutha just to protect her own reputation.



Chacko's love for Margaret Kochamma is mostly nostalgia and self-pity, and it does nothing to protect his daughter. Even Mammachi's love for her children bends the moment caste and reputation are on the line. Next to all that, what Ammu, Velutha, and the twins share looks almost reckless in its honesty. It costs them something real. That's what makes it love instead of performance.

*The God of Small Things* doesn't pretend love can beat caste, class, or History. Roy isn't interested in that kind of ending. What she offers instead is smaller and harder to shake: love doesn't change the world, but it can still tell you who you are inside it. Ammu and Velutha's affair strips away the labels "divorced woman" and "Untouchable" long enough for them to meet as equals. The twins' bond does something similar, pulling them back from total isolation after everything else has been taken. The "Big God" of society still wins, in the end—it still crushes the body. But the "Small God" of Roy's title, the one made of small, forbidden moments of connection, gets to the soul first. These are all issues described in the novel. The novel has its complete focus on love, which costs everything the characters have and it is still the only thing worth having in their lives.

### Conclusion:

Roy's novel refuses the usual arc of resolution. Galtung warns that peace built on ending direct violence alone will fail; structural and cultural violence must also be addressed. Lederach treats peacebuilding as art, not technique, built on relational webs and moral imagination. Trauma theory explains why: wounds don't end with events. They return, belatedly, in the lives that carry them. *The God of Small Things* enacts this. The Love Laws function as cultural violence, legitimizing the caste order and punishing Ammu and Velutha with death. Structural violence keeps Ammu without property or real choices. Direct violence ends Velutha's life in a police cell. The twins survive only by holding each other. What Roy offers instead of resolution is honesty. Love can briefly erase the labels History assigns to people. It cannot change the system. The "Small God" of private connection survives only inside the wreckage the "Big God" leaves behind.

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