

**INVISIBLE BARRIERS AND FRAGMENTED LIVES: AN ANALYSIS OF
ALIENATION AND ESTRANGEMENT IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF
SMALL THINGS***

Mehmet Recep TAŞ* – Elif Beyza TÜRKMEÑOĞLU**

Abstract

Arundhati Roy's novel, The God of Small Things, is a complex portrayal of alienation and estrangement experienced by its characters within the socio-political milieu of postcolonial India. Roy skillfully exposes the impact of societal norms and caste divisions on personal relationships, resulting in profound emotional isolation and rupture within the family unit. This evocative narrative sheds light on the disempowerment and disenfranchisement experienced by the estranged and marginalized voices. From this point of view, considering the theories of alienation, this article analyzes the various forms of alienation and estrangement depicted in the novel and explores their underlying causes and consequences. The analysis delves into the theme of familial alienation, focusing on the forbidden love between fraternal twins Estha and Rahel, and the subsequent estrangement within their family. Furthermore, the article examines the characters' alienation from the political and cultural landscape of India. It explores how the colonial legacy, combined with the rigid social hierarchy, leads to the marginalization of certain groups and individuals, ultimately deepening their sense of estrangement. Additionally, through a close reading of the novel, this article reveals how Roy employs narrative techniques such as fragmented chronology and lyrical prose to mirror the characters' fragmented identities and fragmented society. It explores the ways in which

Date Received (Geliş Tarihi): 18.08.2023

Date Accepted (Kabul Tarihi): 30.10.2023

DOI: 10.58306/wollt.1345902

* Doç. Dr., Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi (Van, Türkiye), e-posta: mehmetrecep@yyu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-5838-1948.

** Öğr. Gör., Çağ Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu (Mersin, Türkiye), e-posta: turkmenoglubeyza@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0008-6733-4423.

alienation and estrangement manifest themselves in the novel, and how they are inextricably linked to broader social and historical forces.

Keywords: *Arundhati Roy, alienation, estrangement, colonialism, marginalization*

GÖRÜNMEZ ENGELLER VE PARÇALANMIŞ HAYATLAR: ARUNDHATI ROY'UN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS* İSİMLİ ESERİNDE YABANCILAŞMA VE UZAKLAŞMA

Öz

*Arundhati Roy'un romanı *The God of Small Things*, sömürge sonrası Hindistan'ın sosyo-politik ortamında karakterlerin deneyimlediği yabancılaşma ve uzaklaşmanın karmaşık bir tasviridir. Roy, aile biriminde derin duygusal izolasyon ve kopuşa neden olan toplumsal normların ve kast ayrımlarının kişisel ilişkilere olan etkisini ustalıkla ortaya koymaktadır. Bu etkileyici anlatı, yabancılaşmış ve marjinalleşmiş seslerin yaşadığı güçsüzlük ve seçim haklarından yoksun kalma durumunu gözler önüne sermektedir. Bu bakış açısından, yabancılaşma teorilerinden hareketle, bu makale romanda tasvir edilen çeşitli yabancılaşma ve uzaklaşma biçimlerini analiz ederek temel nedenleri ve sonuçları incelenmektedir. Analiz, kardeş ikizler Estha ve Rahel arasındaki yasak aşka ve ardından aileleri içindeki uzaklaşmaya odaklanarak ailevi yabancılaşma temasına derinlemesine inmektedir. İlaveten, karakterlerin, Hindistan'ın siyasi ve kültürel ortamından uzaklaşmasını da incelenmektedir. Sömürge mirasının katı toplumsal hiyerarşiyle birleşmesinin, belirli grupların ve bireylerin marjinalleşmesine yol açarak onların yabancılaşma duygularını derinleştirdiği gözlenmektedir. Makale ayrıca, romana yakın bir okuma yaparak, Roy'un parçalanmış kronoloji ve lirik bir anlatı gibi anlatı tekniklerini kullanarak karakterlerin parçalanmış kimliklerini ve parçalanmış toplumu yansıttığını ortaya koymaktadır. Romanın içinde yabancılaşma ve uzaklaşmanın nasıl kendini gösterdiğini ve bunların daha geniş toplumsal ve tarihsel güçlerle nasıl bağlantılı olduğunun altı çizilmektedir.*

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Arundhati Roy, yabancılaşma, uzaklaşma, sömürgecilik, ötekileştirme*

1. Introduction

Alienation and estrangement are two concepts that have been explored by philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists for centuries. Alienation refers to a sense of disconnection from oneself, others, or society. Estrangement refers to a state of being separated from or estranged from someone or something. These terms are often used interchangeably, but they have distinct meanings. In the context of social and political theory, alienation and estrangement are often used to describe the experience of individuals who feel disconnected from their society, their work, or their own sense of self. There are many different causes of alienation and estrangement, including economic inequality, social isolation, and political oppression. These conditions can lead to feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and isolation.

The concept of alienation has roots in the works of Karl Marx, who defined it as the estrangement of individuals from the product of their labor, their fellow beings, and their own humanity (Marx, 1844: p. 328). This notion of alienation speaks to a profound disconnection between the individual and their environment, resulting in a sense of isolation, powerlessness, and loss of self. Marx argued that alienation is a product of capitalism. In a capitalist society, workers are alienated from the products of their labor, from their fellow workers, and from their own human nature. Workers are alienated from the products of their labor because they do not own the means of production. They are alienated from their fellow workers because they are competing with each other for jobs and wages. And they are alienated from their own human nature because they are forced to work in jobs that are not meaningful to them. Similarly, Max Weber explored the concept of estrangement, emphasizing the detachment individuals experience from meaningful social interactions and their own authentic identities. Weber argued that alienation is a product of bureaucracy. In a bureaucratic society, people are alienated from their work, from their fellow workers, and from their own sense of self (Weber, 1905: p. 181). Work in a bureaucracy is characterized by specialization, routinization, and impersonality. This can lead to feelings of boredom, meaninglessness, and powerlessness. Erich Fromm provides a valuable perspective on the concepts of alienation and estrangement. According to Fromm, alienation refers to a state of disconnection and separation from oneself, others, and the world at large. It is a condition in which individuals feel cut off from their own authentic selves and experience a sense of isolation and powerlessness (Fromm, 1955: p. 15). Fromm argued that alienation is a product of modern society. In a modern society, people are alienated from their own bodies, from their emotions, and from each other. This is because modern society is characterized by individualism, competition, and consumerism. These conditions can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression. This notion of alienation resonates with the characters in *The God of Small Things* who struggle with their own identities, desires, and the societal expectations placed upon them. Fromm's definition of estrangement complements

this understanding of alienation. He describes estrangement as a loss of belongingness and a feeling of being separated from the world and others. Individuals in a state of estrangement may feel like strangers in their own lives, disconnected from meaningful relationships and a sense of purpose (Fromm, 1955: p. 21). The characters in the novel, such as Ammu, Rahel, and Velutha, experience this profound sense of estrangement as they grapple with societal norms, their own desires, and the consequences of their choices. Fromm's definition sheds light on the complex dynamics of alienation and estrangement portrayed in the novel, emphasizing the characters' struggle to reclaim their sense of self, forge connections, and find meaning amidst a world marked by societal constraints and personal yearnings. The experience of alienation and estrangement can be very different for different people. Some people may feel alienated from their work, while others may feel alienated from their family or friends. Some people may feel alienated from their society, while others may feel alienated from their own sense of self. Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things*, intricately explores the themes of alienation and estrangement within the socio-political landscape of postcolonial India. These themes have long been subjects of scholarly analysis, drawing on various theoretical frameworks to illuminate the experiences of individuals and their relationships with society. By delving into the multifaceted manifestations of alienation and estrangement, Roy's work provides a profound commentary on the human condition in a context marked by colonial legacies and social hierarchies.

Familial alienation is a prominent theme in the novel, exemplified by the forbidden love between fraternal twins Estha and Rahel, which disrupts the conventional family structure and engenders a sense of estrangement within the family unit. The renowned sociologist Georg Simmel argues that familial alienation arises from conflicting roles and expectations within the family, leading to a sense of distance and disconnection (Simmel, 1908: p. 458). This conflict between societal norms, personal desires, and the resulting estrangement is vividly depicted in Roy's narrative, as family members grapple with the consequences of defying established social boundaries. Furthermore, *The God of Small Things* portrays characters who are alienated from the larger social and political landscape of India. Homi K. Bhabha, a prominent postcolonial theorist, highlights the ambivalence, fragmentation, and dislocation experienced by postcolonial subjects (Bhabha, 1994: p. 3). The novel exposes the entwined impact of colonialism and the rigid social hierarchy on the marginalization of certain groups and individuals, exacerbating their experiences of powerlessness, disenfranchisement, and cultural alienation. By exploring the complexities of identity formation and the negotiation of belonging in a postcolonial context, Roy's work resonates with the insights of Bhabha and other scholars who examine the effects of colonialism on subjectivity and cultural identity. Roy employs evocative storytelling techniques, such as fragmented chronology and lyrical prose,

to mirror the fragmented identities and shattered relationships of the characters. This fragmented narrative structure reflects the pervasive alienation and estrangement experienced by the characters, highlighting the disorienting effects of social and personal alienation. Roy's narrative techniques, akin to the fragmented reflections in a broken mirror, mirror the fragmented identities and shattered relationships of her characters. The narrative's fragmented chronology and lyrical prose echo Fredric Jameson's assertion that narrative mirrors the fractured reality it depicts (Jameson, 1981: p. 17). Through this intricate tapestry of storytelling, Roy unfurls the reverberations of alienation and estrangement, each thread a testament to the complexities of navigating societal expectations and personal aspirations. Roy's fragmented chronology serves as a narrative device that artfully weaves together past and present, inviting readers to navigate the intricate layers of memory and experience. For instance, the novel opens with the scene of Rahel's return to Ayemenem after years of estrangement, then seamlessly transitions to the siblings' childhood experiences, allowing the reader to piece together the puzzle of events that led to their separation. This temporal dissonance creates a sense of temporal estrangement, emphasizing the emotional distance between the characters' past and present selves. The narrative's non-linear structure poignantly reflects the characters' fractured lives, evoking a poignant resonance with the broader themes of alienation and estrangement. Roy's lyrical prose is a powerful tool that enhances the emotional impact of the novel, drawing readers into the characters' inner turmoil. Through poetic language, Roy captures the characters' fleeting moments of joy, longing, and despair. Take, for instance, the lyrical depiction of Ammu and Velutha's forbidden love, "They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much." (Roy, 1997: p. 313). The fluidity and depth of Roy's prose resonate with the characters' emotional landscapes, reflecting their struggles to navigate societal constraints and familial expectations. In a similar vein, Roy's poetic descriptions of nature and the environment create an immersive backdrop that amplifies the characters' emotional states. Consider the description of the Meenachal River, "The Meenachal... Great spate, turmoil, turbulence. Agasthyamala, the mountain that loved the river and the river that loved the mountain." (Roy, 1997: p. 14). This lyrical portrayal not only enriches the setting but also accentuates the characters' sense of interconnectedness and estrangement from their surroundings. By skillfully intertwining fragmented chronology and lyrical prose, Roy captures the intricate dance between the characters' fractured identities and their tumultuous relationships. These narrative techniques invite readers to delve into the characters' emotional landscapes, ultimately shedding light on the profound impacts of alienation and estrangement within the complicated tapestry of postcolonial India.

Arundhati Roy, an acclaimed Indian author and activist, garnered international recognition with her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, published in 1997. Roy's literary prowess and insightful social commentary have established her as a prominent voice in postcolonial literature. Born in Shillong, India, Roy's own experiences of growing up in a country grappling with the aftermath of colonial rule heavily influenced her writing. Through her evocative prose and nuanced storytelling, Roy navigates complex themes of alienation, estrangement, and societal hierarchies, offering readers a captivating exploration of the human condition within the context of postcolonial India. Set in the southern Indian state of Kerala during the late 1960s, *The God of Small Things* revolves around the lives of the dysfunctional *Ipe* family. The narrative unfolds through the perspectives of two estranged siblings, Estha and Rahel, as they recount their childhood experiences and the tragic events that tore their family apart. The novel explores the complex web of relationships, societal norms, and the weight of history that shape the lives of its characters. Through a non-linear narrative structure, Roy skillfully weaves together past and present, unveiling the consequences of forbidden love, social prejudices, and the burden of tradition on the characters' lives. *The God of Small Things* offers a poignant exploration of alienation and estrangement within the postcolonial context of India. By examining familial alienation, societal marginalization, and fragmented identities, Roy's work provides a profound commentary on the human condition and the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader socio-political forces.

2. Alienation and Estrangement in *The God of Small Things*

The God of Small Things portrays a multitude of characters who experience varying degrees of alienation and estrangement within the intricate social fabric of postcolonial India. Estha and Rahel, the central characters, grapple with a profound sense of alienation resulting from their traumatic childhood experiences and the societal constraints imposed on them. The twins' forbidden love and their subsequent separation embody a deep sense of estrangement within the familial and societal structure (Roy, 1997: p. 45). They face estrangement and isolation due to the strict societal norms and caste divisions. For instance, when Estha and Rahel's relationship is discovered, they are ostracized and pushed further into alienation. The following excerpt demonstrates their profound estrangement: "So when Estha and Rahel reunited after twenty-three years, they both knew that they were waiting for each other. Rahel, for Estha to cross the river that stretched between them. Estha, for Rahel to leave it" (Roy, 1997: p. 329). The novel's narrative technique further accentuates their alienation, as the fragmented chronology mirrors the fractured nature of their identities and relationships. Ammu, the twins' mother, also faces alienation due to her status as a divorced woman in a conservative society. Her marginalization and lack of agency are poignantly depicted

through her constrained interactions with the community (Roy, 1997: p. 67). Velutha, an *Untouchable* and a key figure in the narrative, endures both societal and economic alienation due to his lower caste status. His forbidden relationship with *Ammu* further intensifies his estrangement, as it challenges the rigid social hierarchies and brings forth the wrath of the oppressive power structures (Roy, 1997: p. 122). The character of Velutha, being a Dalit, faces alienation and marginalization due to deeply ingrained societal prejudices. The following excerpt highlights his sense of isolation: “Velutha, as far as they were concerned, was nobody. He didn't matter. Nobody saw him, nobody even looked at him, nobody knew he existed” (Roy, 1997: p. 55). Another example of Velutha's estrangement is evident in these lines: “Velutha had no place in the new order of things. The Love Laws said that members of his community could not touch members of ours. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much” (Roy, 1997: p. 85). The wider social context in *The God of Small Things* exemplifies the effects of colonialism and caste oppression, contributing to the alienation and estrangement experienced by the characters. The legacy of colonial rule and its remnants are seen in the rigid social hierarchy that perpetuates discrimination and marginalization (Bhabha, 1994: p. 55). The characters' entanglement within this socio-political framework exacerbates their sense of alienation, particularly for marginalized groups such as the *Untouchables* and women. Roy's poignant storytelling, infused with vivid imagery and lyrical prose, captures the characters' experiences of alienation and estrangement. Her nuanced exploration of the characters' inner worlds and their interactions with the external environment amplifies the themes of isolation, disconnection, and the struggle to find a sense of belonging. The novel's profound portrayal of alienation and estrangement resonates with the insights of scholars like Bhabha, who explore the complex dynamics of power, identity, and displacement in postcolonial societies.

One of the significant instances of alienation and estrangement in *The God of Small Things* is portrayed through the character of Baby Kochamma, the twins' grandaunt. Baby Kochamma's life is marked by a deep sense of alienation stemming from her unrequited love for Father Mulligan, a Catholic priest. This unfulfilled desire creates a lasting bitterness within her, leading to her isolated existence and the manipulation of those around her (Roy, 1997: p. 27). Baby Kochamma's emotional alienation and the consequent estrangement from society illustrate the impact of unfulfilled desires and the resulting isolation. Furthermore, the novel exposes the alienation and estrangement experienced by characters caught in the oppressive grip of societal expectations and gender norms. *Rahel*, as a woman in a patriarchal society, faces constraints on her autonomy and self-expression. The societal expectations imposed upon her and the limitations placed on her desires contribute to her sense of estrangement (Roy, 1997: p. 189). The portrayal of Rahel's struggles reflects the broader reality faced by women in a society that perpetuates gender-based

oppression and discrimination. The character of Velutha, an *Untouchable* and a talented carpenter, represents the systemic alienation and estrangement faced by the lower castes in Indian society. His marginalization is rooted in the caste hierarchy and the deeply ingrained prejudices that lead to his exclusion from mainstream society. Velutha's forbidden relationship with Ammu, an upper-caste woman, further intensifies his sense of alienation and estrangement as it defies societal norms and exposes him to severe consequences (Roy, 1997: p. 122). The novel presents Velutha's story as a poignant commentary on the dehumanizing effects of caste-based discrimination and the alienation experienced by those deemed *untouchable*.

In addition to the characters' experiences, the narrative style and structure employed by Roy contribute to the theme of alienation and estrangement. The fragmented narrative, with its nonlinear chronology and shifting perspectives, mirrors the disorienting nature of the characters' lives and the fractured sense of self they experience (Roy, 1997: p. 15). This narrative technique effectively conveys the multifaceted aspects of alienation and estrangement, emphasizing the disjointed realities faced by the characters and their struggle to navigate the complexities of their existence.

Secondary sources analyzing *The God of Small Things* also shed light on the themes of alienation and estrangement within the novel. Scholarly works such as Ranjan Ghosh's *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: A Reader's Guide* provide critical insights into the complexities of the characters' experiences and the sociopolitical context that exacerbates their alienation. Ghosh offers valuable commentary on *The God of Small Things*, shedding light on the themes of alienation and estrangement within the novel. Ghosh argues that the characters' desires and aspirations play a significant role in shaping their experiences of alienation and estrangement (Ghosh, 2008: p. 17). He highlights how societal expectations, historical forces, and personal yearnings intersect and create tensions, leading to a sense of detachment from oneself and others. Ghosh's analysis underscores the complexity of the characters' struggles, as they navigate the conflicting forces of conformity and individuality. This suggestion is evident in how the characters are alienated from the political and cultural landscape of India: "They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much" (Roy, 1997: p. 327). The novel becomes a rich exploration of the human condition, where individuals grapple with their place in the world and the inherent challenges of seeking selfhood, connection, and agency. R. Nair, too, provides insightful commentary on the novel delving into the themes of alienation and estrangement within the narrative. Nair underlines the *intersectionality* of caste, gender, and postcolonial identity in Roy's novel. His work examines the ways in which characters like Velutha, Ammu, and Rahel navigate their marginalized positions within society, leading to experiences of alienation and estrangement.

Nair focuses on the interplay of caste, gender, and postcolonial identity in the novel, examining how these factors contribute to the characters' experiences of alienation and estrangement. Nair argues that the characters' marginalization due to their caste and gender positions results in their profound sense of otherness and disconnection from the dominant social order (Nair, 2002: p. 70). Through Nair's analysis, we gain a deeper understanding of how power structures shape the characters' identities and their interactions with others. The commentary highlights the ways in which alienation and estrangement emerge as consequences of social hierarchies and the impact of colonial legacies. M. Verma's analysis of *The God of Small Things* focuses on the postcolonial feminist discourse within the novel, shedding light on the themes of alienation and estrangement. Verma argues that the characters' experiences of alienation and estrangement are deeply intertwined with issues of gender, power, and patriarchy (Verma, 2007: p. 54). Verma examines how women in the novel, such as Ammu and Baby Kochamma, navigate oppressive social structures and confront societal expectations that contribute to their sense of alienation and estrangement. Verma's analysis highlights the ways in which gender dynamics intersect with postcolonial contexts, emphasizing the complexities of the characters' struggles as they navigate both colonial legacies and patriarchal norms. The female characters in *The God of Small Things*, such as Ammu and Rahel, grapple with societal expectations that confine them within prescribed gender roles and limit their opportunities for self-expression and autonomy (Verma, 2007: p. 56). This gendered alienation reinforces the patriarchal power structures that marginalize and oppress women within the novel. The character of Ammu experiences alienation and estrangement due to the oppressive gender roles imposed by society. The following excerpt reflects her sense of confinement: "Because she was divorced, Ammu was not permitted to touch them. Not even to hug them. Not even to hold their hands" (Roy, 1997: p. 29). In his article, V. Indrakumar delves into the theme of alienation and the quest for self-identity within the context of untouchability in *The God of Small Things*. Indrakumar argues that the characters belonging to the untouchable caste, such as Velutha and Velutha's family, face severe alienation due to their marginalized social position (Indrakumar, 2015: p. 279). Velutha is a carpenter who works for the Syrian Christian family of the *Ayemenem* household. He is a skilled worker and is well-respected by his employers, but he is also treated as an outcast because of his caste. This alienation is evident in the way that Velutha is treated by the other characters in the novel. He is often ignored or spoken to in a condescending manner. He is also subjected to physical abuse, as when he is beaten by the police for no reason. The alienation that Velutha experiences is a reflection of the larger social and political context of India. The caste system is a deeply entrenched system of inequality that has been in place for centuries. *Untouchables* are considered to be the lowest caste in the system and are treated as outcasts. They are denied access to education, employment, and other basic rights. *The God of Small*

Things is a powerful indictment of the caste system. Roy shows how the caste system creates a society in which people are divided and alienated from each other. She also shows how the caste system can lead to violence and oppression. Velutha is a complex character who is struggling to find his place in the world. He is torn between his loyalty to his family and his desire to be free from the constraints of the caste system. In the end, Velutha chooses to fight for his freedom, even though it means risking his life. Indrakumar examines how the characters' struggle for self-identity becomes intertwined with their experience of being *untouchables*, as they face discrimination, exclusion, and dehumanization from the dominant society. The characters from the lower castes, such as Chacko's ex-wife Margaret and their daughter Sophie Mol, feel alienated and emotionally isolated within the rigid caste system. The excerpt below highlights their experiences: "Margaret Kochamma was an anglophile, an English-educated divorcee who wore her divorce like a hidden shame... Sophie Mol's mother had married beneath her. Worse still, she had married an untouchable" (Roy, 1997: p. 95). Indrakumar's analysis sheds light on the social and political dimensions of alienation faced by the *untouchable* characters, offering a deeper understanding of their plight and the larger issues of caste-based marginalization depicted in the novel.

Building upon the theories of alienation and estrangement, H. K. Bhabha's notion of the *third space* provides a lens through which we can examine the characters' experiences. According to Bhabha, the third space represents a site of hybridity and negotiation, where identities are formed and contested (Bhabha, 1994: p. 37). In *The God of Small Things*, characters like *Ammu* and *Rahel* navigate this third space, caught between societal expectations and their own desires, resulting in a profound sense of alienation and estrangement. Furthermore, the concept of social alienation as proposed by Karl Marx illuminates the characters' experiences in the novel. Marx argues that under capitalist systems, individuals become estranged from the products of their labor, from others, and from their own human essence (Marx, 1867/1990: p. 83). This concept resonates with the character Velutha, whose marginalized position as an *Untouchable* and his forbidden relationship with *Ammu* exemplify the societal alienation experienced by those who deviate from social norms. The characters grapple with their sense of alienation in various ways. *Ammu*, for instance, experiences a profound sense of alienation within her own family. One instance of alienation within the family can be seen in the strained relationship between *Ammu* and her children, *Estha* and *Rahel*. The following excerpt portrays the emotional distance and estrangement between them: "And when *Ammu* died, as she did when *Estha* was thirty-one, and *Rahel*, twenty-three, each thought that the other had not loved her enough. *Estha*, because by then *Rahel* was a married woman. And *Rahel*, because by then *Estha* was an Oxford scholar" (Roy, 1997: p. 21). *Ammu*'s rebellious nature and the forbidden relationship she forms with Velutha, a member of the *Untouchable* class, result in her being ostracized and

marginalized by her own kin (Roy, 1997: p. 105). Ammu's yearning for love and freedom, juxtaposed with society's strict norms, reflects the conflict between personal desires and societal constraints that contribute to her sense of estrangement. Rahel, Ammu's daughter, also struggles with a deep-seated feeling of alienation. Growing up in a broken family and witnessing tragic events, she develops a sense of detachment from the world around her. This detachment is exemplified by her recurring thoughts of being a displaced person, feeling disconnected from her own identity and the society she inhabits (Roy, 1997: p. 16). The quote below shows how Rahel has been estranged from her mother: "Rahel imagined herself as an orphan, all children were orphans in those books. They didn't have mothers. Their mothers had died, or disappeared, or were never spoken of. In their place, magical beings who loved them." (Roy, 1997: p. 19). Rahel's experience aligns with Marx's concept of social alienation, where individuals become estranged from their own human essence and feel detached from the products of their labor (Marx, 1990: p. 83). Velutha, an *Untouchable* and a skilled carpenter, faces both social and economic alienation due to the rigid caste system. His marginalized status and forbidden love for Ammu lead to his tragic fate, as he becomes a victim of society's oppressive structures. Velutha's struggles epitomize the consequences of social alienation, where individuals are excluded from the fruits of their labor and denied the recognition and rights afforded to others (Marx, 1990: p. 83). His ultimate sacrifice underscores the devastating effects of alienation and the oppressive nature of the caste system. Another instance of alienation and estrangement can be seen in Baby Kochamma's character. The character of Baby Kochamma exemplifies the consequences of societal expectations and her subsequent estrangement from her own desires and aspirations. The sentence below sheds light on her inner turmoil: "But Baby Kochamma didn't notice the change in herself, only the changes in others. She was lonely, but she was used to it. She had already been lonely for a lifetime" (Roy, 1997: p. 55). Despite her privileged position in society, she experiences a profound sense of dissatisfaction and loneliness. Her unrequited love for Father Mulligan, a forbidden and unattainable object of desire, highlights her yearning for emotional connection and the resulting estrangement she feels (Roy, 1997: p. 150). This echoes Bhabha's notion of the *third space*, where desires and identities are formed and contested, but also highlights the inherent tensions and unfulfilled desires that contribute to a sense of alienation (Bhabha, 1994: p. 37).

The theme of estrangement is further evident in the character of *Chacko*, Ammu's brother. Having spent years abroad, he returns to India with a Westernized mindset that sets him apart from his own culture. *Chacko's* struggle to find a sense of belonging is exemplified by his failed marriage and his obsession with his ex-wife, Margaret Kochamma. This longing for connection, coupled with his displacement and cultural dislocation, leads to his continued estrangement from the Indian society he returns to (Roy, 1997: p. 189).

Chacko's experience resonates with the concept of estrangement as proposed by Marx, where individuals feel detached from their own essence and experience a sense of dislocation within their social environment (Marx, 1990: p. 83). Furthermore, the character of Sophie Mol also exemplifies the theme of alienation and estrangement. As an English girl visiting her Indian relatives, *Sophie* stands out as the 'Other' within the social and cultural context of Ayemenem. Her physical appearance and foreignness make her an object of curiosity and scrutiny, leading to her feeling alienated and estranged from the local community (Roy, 1997: p. 33). The character of Sophie Mol, an English visitor, experiences a sense of estrangement and cultural dislocation in the unfamiliar Indian setting. The following excerpt portrays her disconnection: "She felt completely estranged. Alone in an alien city" (Roy, 1997: p. 90). Sophie's experience, too, aligns with Bhabha's concept of the *third space*, where individuals negotiate their identities in relation to societal expectations and cultural differences, but also underscores the challenges and barriers faced by those who do not fit within the dominant cultural framework (Bhabha, 1994: p. 37).

Despite their alienated and estranged situations, the characters in the novel also exhibit coping mechanisms and moments of resilience. For instance, Rahel and Estha, Ammu's twin children, find solace in their bond as siblings. In the midst of a fractured family and societal constraints, their deep connection provides them with a sense of belonging and emotional support (Roy, 1997: p. 21). This highlights the human capacity to seek connection and intimacy as a way to counteract the alienation and estrangement experienced in their lives. The characters' struggles and coping mechanisms resonate with the theoretical framework of alienation and estrangement. Ammu's yearning for freedom and love, Rahel's detachment and sense of displacement, and Velutha's marginalized position and ultimate sacrifice align with the notions of personal desires conflicting with societal norms, detachment from one's essence, and exclusion from the fruits of one's labor. These parallelisms underscore the novel's exploration of the human condition and the complexities of navigating a world marked by alienation and estrangement.

By incorporating these instances of alienation and estrangement, the novel *The God of Small Things* offers a nuanced portrayal of the characters' struggles. Ammu's unfulfilled desires, Baby Kochamma's unrequited love, Chacko's cultural dislocation, and Sophie's foreignness all contribute to their experiences of alienation and estrangement. These instances align with the theoretical framework of alienation and estrangement, highlighting the conflict between personal desires and societal norms, unfulfilled longings, dislocation from one's own essence, and the challenges faced by those who do not conform to dominant cultural norms. In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy portrays various instances of alienation and estrangement experienced by the characters, which can be further analyzed through Melvin Seeman's five-fold classification of alienation. Seeman's framework encompasses five dimensions of alienation:

powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement (Seeman, 1959). Melvin Seeman's theory of alienation offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted dimensions of alienation experienced by individuals within societal structures. Seeman's seminal work, *On the Meaning of Alienation* (Seeman, 1959), delves into five distinct dimensions of alienation, each illuminating the various ways in which individuals can feel detached, disempowered, and estranged within their social contexts.

The first dimension, powerlessness, refers to the sense of helplessness and lack of control individuals experience when they perceive themselves as subordinate or unable to influence their surroundings (Seeman, 1959: p. 784). Meaninglessness, the second dimension, encapsulates the feeling of purposelessness and lack of significance in one's actions and endeavors (Seeman, 1959: p. 786). Normlessness, the third dimension, pertains to the experience of detachment from societal norms and values, resulting in a sense of disorientation and confusion (Seeman, 1959: p. 787). Social isolation, the fourth dimension, involves the perception of being disconnected and alienated from others, leading to a sense of emotional detachment and loneliness (Seeman, 1959: p. 788). Finally, self-estrangement, the fifth dimension, centers on a feeling of disconnection from one's own authentic self and identity, often resulting from societal pressures and conflicting desires (Seeman, 1959: p. 789). All these dimensions can be observed in the lives of the characters in the novel, illustrating their struggles and the consequences of their alienated states.

Firstly, the characters often experience *powerlessness*, as they find themselves trapped within societal structures and constrained by their social positions. For instance, Ammu, as a divorced woman, is marginalized and disempowered, unable to escape the judgment and scrutiny of society. This *powerlessness* is also evident in the rigid caste system that perpetuates the social hierarchy and limits the opportunities for characters like Velutha. Velutha, an Untouchable, whose lower-caste status relegates him to a position of subjugation and marginalization (Roy, 1997: p. 55). Velutha's powerlessness within the social hierarchy ultimately leads to his tragic fate, underscoring the devastating consequences of societal power imbalances. Another character who experiences the sense of powerlessness is Ammu. Ammu, the twins' mother, experiences a profound sense of powerlessness due to her status as a divorced woman in a conservative society. She is marginalized and constrained by societal expectations, leading to her estrangement from her own desires (Roy, 1997: p. 67). Secondly, a sense of *meaninglessness* pervades the characters' lives. They grapple with the loss of purpose and direction, as their aspirations and desires are thwarted by societal norms and expectations. The struggle to find purpose and direction amidst societal constraints is evident in Rahel's journey. Growing up in a broken family and witnessing traumatic events, she experiences a profound sense

of meaninglessness, leading to her detachment from the world around her (Roy, 1997: p. 16). Similarly, Chacko, Ammu's brother, returns to India with a Westernized mindset that sets him apart from his own culture, resulting in a longing for connection and a sense of belonging that remains unfulfilled (Roy, 1997: p. 189). These instances of meaninglessness underline the characters' inner conflicts and the emotional toll of their estranged states. *Normlessness* is another dimension of alienation depicted in the novel. The clash between personal desires and societal norms is a recurring theme that underscores the dimension of normlessness. This conflict between personal freedom and societal constraints can be seen in Ammu's relationship with Velutha, which defies caste and class boundaries, leading to severe consequences for both of them. Ammu's forbidden relationship with Velutha defies caste and class boundaries, challenging societal norms and resulting in her social ostracism (Roy, 1997: p. 105). Similarly, the twins, Estha and Rahel, experience normlessness when their forbidden love and subsequent separation embody a deep sense of estrangement within the familial and societal structure (Roy, 1997: p. 45). These instances of normlessness reflect the characters' struggles to navigate between personal desires and the expectations imposed by society. *Social isolation* is another form of alienation that permeates the lives of the characters. They often feel disconnected from others, unable to form genuine connections or find a sense of belonging. Rahel and Estha, for instance, experience isolation both as children and later as adults, struggling to establish meaningful relationships due to the traumas they have endured (Roy, 1997: p. 21). Sophie Mol, an English girl visiting India, stands out as the 'Other' within the local community due to her foreignness, resulting in her feeling alienated and socially isolated (Roy, 1997: p. 33). These instances of social isolation underscore the characters' sense of being marginalized and disconnected from the world around them. Lastly, the characters in the novel struggle with the sense of *self-estrangement*, feeling disconnected from their own authentic selves. This is exemplified by characters like Baby Kochamma. Baby Kochamma's unfulfilled love for Father Mulligan leads to bitterness and regret, resulting in a profound sense of self-estrangement (Roy, 1997: p. 55). Rahel, too, fight against a feeling of self-estrangement, imagining herself as an orphan and feeling disconnected from her own identity (Roy, 1997: p. 19). The characters' experiences of self-estrangement reveal their inner turmoil and the struggle to define themselves amid societal pressures. These instances demonstrate their battles with powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation and self-estrangement, and illuminate the profound impact of societal structures and personal conflicts on their lives.

3. Conclusion

In her novel "The God of Small Things," Arundhati Roy presents a complex analysis of the relationships between alienation and estrangement which draws upon the theories of influential sociologists

and thinkers, such as Marx, Weber, Fromm, Simmel, Bhabha, and Melvin Seeman. Roy's exploration of these themes is both insightful and thought-provoking, providing a compelling depiction of their dynamic interplay in human experience. Through the lens of these diverse perspectives, the characters' experiences of alienation and estrangement are illuminated in a multidimensional tapestry that captures the complexities of their lives, aspirations, and struggles. Marx's notion of alienation, rooted in the estrangement of individuals from the products of their labor, finds a compelling echo in the characters' stories. Velutha, a skilled carpenter, exemplifies powerlessness as he is marginalized due to his caste and forbidden relationship with Ammu, thereby deprived of the recognition and rights commensurate with his labor's value. The characters' desires, trapped within societal structures, epitomize the meaninglessness of their aspirations, as seen through Rahel's detachment from her identity in the midst of family disintegration. Weber's exploration of rationalization and bureaucracy intersects with the normlessness experienced by the characters. Ammu and Velutha, both crossing caste and class boundaries in their love, confront societal norms that isolate them from the community. Chacko's cultural dislocation and longing for Margaret Kochamma demonstrate his own normlessness, as he is caught between the cultural values of his homeland and his Westernized experiences abroad. Fromm's concept of self-estrangement comes alive through Baby Kochamma's unrequited love for Father Mulligan, leading her down a path of manipulation and bitterness. Rahel's detachment from her own identity, in part due to societal expectations and personal traumas, further exemplifies self-estrangement as described by Fromm. Simmel's notion of the stranger is embodied by Sophie Mol, an English girl in a foreign land, experiencing social isolation due to her foreignness. In the same vein, the twins, Rahel and Estha, navigate a third space between societal norms and personal desires, encapsulating Bhabha's theory. Incorporating Melvin Seeman's five-fold classification of alienation, the novel emerges as a vivid portrayal of the dimensions of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement. Ammu's limited interactions, Velutha's marginalized status, Chacko's cultural dislocation, and the twins' emotional detachment epitomize these dimensions. Ammu, forbidden from touching her own children due to societal norms, grapples with powerlessness. Velutha's marginalized status as an untouchable embodies social isolation and powerlessness. Chacko's cultural dislocation and obsession with Margaret Kochamma reflect both normlessness and self-estrangement. Rahel's detachment from her own identity signifies self-estrangement, while Sophie Mol's foreignness leads to social isolation and normlessness.

In conclusion, *The God of Small Things* emerges as a masterful exposition of alienation and estrangement, richly informed by the theories of Marx, Weber, Fromm, Simmel, Bhabha, and Melvin Seeman. The characters' experiences are presented objectively, inviting readers to contemplate the intricate

dynamics of power, societal norms, personal desires, and the universal human longing for connection, meaning, and agency. Roy's narrative, intricately woven with sociological insights, becomes a mirror reflecting the complex mosaic of human existence, where amidst alienation and estrangement, there exists the potential for resilience, transformation, and the pursuit of authenticity. Through the characters' emotional journeys, readers are compelled to explore the nuanced interplay of societal structures and individual aspirations, inviting them to a deeper understanding of the universal threads that bind us all in the tapestry of the human experience. Thus, the novel serves as a powerful reminder of the consequences of alienation and estrangement on individuals and the larger society. It highlights the urgent need for social change and transformation. To create a society where individuals are not alienated and estranged, it is crucial to address the structural inequalities, oppressive norms, and power imbalances that perpetuate such conditions.

For fostering a more inclusive and connected society, empathy and understanding ought to be promoted. Encouraging dialogue and creating spaces for open discussions can help bridge the gaps between individuals and foster a sense of belonging. Embracing diversity, challenging discriminatory practices, and actively working towards social justice can contribute to dismantling the systems that perpetuate alienation and estrangement. Furthermore, providing equal access to resources, education, and opportunities can empower individuals to break free from the cycles of alienation and estrangement. Investing in social welfare programs, supporting marginalized communities, and promoting inclusivity in all aspects of society can create a more equitable and harmonious environment. Ultimately, the journey towards a society free from alienation and estrangement requires collective effort and a commitment to upholding human dignity and equality. By recognizing and addressing the root causes of alienation and estrangement, we can strive towards a more compassionate and interconnected world where individuals are empowered to live fulfilling lives, forming genuine connections, and realizing their full potential. The novel's exploration of these themes deepens our understanding of the complexities of human existence and the profound impact that alienation and estrangement can have on individuals' lives. It prompts us to reflect on the universal struggles faced by individuals in their pursuit of selfhood, connection, and belonging within a world marked by societal expectations, historical legacies, and personal desires.

References

- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London, Routledge.
- Fromm, E. (1955). *The Sane Society*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Ghosh, R. (2008). Between Desire and Destiny: A Postcolonial Reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *Atlantic Literary Review*, 9(1), 15-24.
- Ghosh, R. (2012). *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: A Reader's Guide*. Anthem Press.
- Indrakumar, V. (2015). The Alienation of Untouchables and the Need for Self-Identity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *Language in India*, 15(3), 273-286.
- Jameson, F. (1981). *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Cornell University Press.
- Marx, K. (1844). *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Progress Publishers.
- Marx, K. (1990). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (Vol. 1)*. Penguin Classics. (Original work published 1867)
- Nair, R. (2002). Interrogating the Margins: Postcolonial Identity, Caste, and Gender in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. In E. Dawson-Varughese (Ed.), *Women's Fiction and Post-9/11 Contexts* (pp. 67-88). Routledge.
- Roy, A. (1997). *The God of Small Things*. Random House.
- Seeman, M. (1959). On the Meaning of Alienation. *American Sociological Review*, 24(6), 783–791. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2088565>
- Simmel, G. (1908). The Sociology of Secrecy and Secret Societies. *American Journal of Sociology*, 11(4), 441-498.
- Verma, M. (2007). Postcolonial Feminist Discourse in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. In S. Nag (Ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Arundhati Roy* (pp. 51-61). Sarup & Sons.
- Weber, M. (1905). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Charles Scribner's Sons.