

**Love Laws:
Entrapping Subordinates and Teaching Them Who They Can Love, and How Much.**

Humans are born curious, with no knowledge of the outside world. Over time society conditions a person and his/her beliefs, feelings on what is right and wrong, and most importantly what is “normal”. But, are we as humans conditioned to love? Or is the ability to love human nature, natural? In The God Of Small Things, Asundhati Roy brings these questions about love out into the open and, through the twins Rahel and Estha, she shows the reader that people are born innocent and loving, but are conditioned to follow the “Love Laws” which “lay down who should be loved and how and how much” they can love (33). Humans learn whom they can and cannot love through the constructed rules of the systems engrained in society such as patriarchy, class, militarism, and the caste system. Ammu becomes the lowest woman on the totem pole, but she started off near to the top. Her life shows how someone can be strong and capable, but due to all of the constraints of the “Love Laws”, becomes an angry shell of a person, bound by society’s ideas and by men.

The twins play with language and have imagination. They realize that there are love laws, but they do not follow them because they see society’s constraints and the way people act in accordance to the world’s standards as “a play”. Ammu is the first one to lay down the laws because she fears for her twins. She sees them as “a pair of small bewildered frogs... lolloping arm and arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic” (42). Ammu knows that the harsh world of rules and hierarchy is a dangerous place for two loving children. They learn the “Love Laws” through her; they are the innocence and purity, and she is the aftermath of society.

“Love Laws” have always been a part of India’s culture and globalization only further instilled them. As Colleen Cohen says in the article *Showcasing India*: “we live in a world where everyone seems to be watching satellite television and drinking coke; it is also a world where making, claiming, and maintaining local identity and culture is increasingly important” (Rupal 81). In other words, India is becoming increasingly European, but at the same time it must keep its identity and culture. This is why the caste system is still so engrained in society. It has been a huge part of India’s culture from the very beginning. So, even with globalization, “the world becoming a single place” (Ashcroft 127), and “Eurocentrism”, European culture traditions becoming accepted as the norm (Ashcroft 107), evading India, the Untouchable and Touchable labels will remain. “Globalization [is] the dynamic reorganization of borders and boundaries from the most local and intimate scale of the body to that of the global. In the reorganization of the borders, previously established boundaries are challenged” (Rupal, 81-82), but only by those who are from the colonizing country. Those who are part of the “subaltern” group, or the inferiors to the ruling class, are only pushed further into docilely following these rules. This is why Ammu’s life is over after she gets divorced and Margaret is allowed to leave Chacko without any bad consequences, even though Ammu is leaving an abusive, alcoholic husband and Margaret just wants a “put together” English man.

This is not the first time Ammu has encountered an abusive man who maintains his power; Ammu grew up seeing the predominance of patriarchy. Her father, Pappachi, is the stereotypical upper class man. He gives back to the community, has a good job, and is well respected. But, this is just his shell. He is a facade. At home he is abusive to no end and never gives any love. When he retired and Mammachi started to get attention from her pickle-making, he became jealous and “resented the attention his wife was suddenly getting” (46). He began to

beat her every night with a brass vase. “The beatings weren’t new” (47), only more frequent. When Chacko finally stopped him from abusing her, Pappachi “never touched Mammachi again. But he never spoke to her either as long as he lived” (47). Women under the “Love Laws” are subject to emotional and mental abuse, as well as physical abuse, but the men, like Pappachi, tend to play the victim. Pappachi would pretend to sew buttons (that were not missing) on to his shirt in order “to create the impression that Mammachi neglected him... further corroding Ayemenem’s view on working wives” (47).

As Ammu got older and “watched her father weave his hideous web” (171) she began to understand how the system worked and that there was no way she could change it. Ammu still got married because “there was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework” (38). Ammu even moved to Calcutta because she was not getting any marriage offers at home in Ayemenem. When she finally agreed to get married she “didn’t pretend to be in love. She just weighed the odds and accepted” (39). Her husband, Baba, turns out to be abusive and an alcoholic. Due to his alcoholism and bad behavior. He was about to lose his job when the boss— an Englishman who already had many half-Indian children running around— makes him an offer. The Englishman told Baba that he has a beautiful wife and that Baba should go out of town and leave Ammu with him to be “looked after” (41). Ammu realizes how bad her situation is getting and leaves for the sake of herself and her kids. She gets “die-vorced”, which means her life is over; “Her life had been lived. She had one chance. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man” (38). A woman’s sole job in this society is to be a good wife and a mother and she must always be under the control of a man. When Ammu is trying to figure out her surname after the divorce, she tells the twins “choosing between her husband’s name and her father’s name didn’t give a woman

much of a choice” (37). Rahel and Estha know that she is supposed to be married, but she is all they need. They tell Ammu “you’re our Ammu and our Baba and you love us Double” (142).

Even when Ammu comes home to Ayemenem and leaves her husband, she is still subject to patriarchy. Chacko, her brother and the heir to the Paradise Pickle Factory, tells Ammu “thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine” (56). Rahel and Estha understand that it’s a chauvinist society and Rahel even tells Sophie Mol that Estha might turn “Into a Male Chauvinist Pig” (144). They also see how Chacko uses “my” in reference to everything. They see that Mammachi takes care of Chacko because he has become “her man... her only love” (100) since Pappachi stopped interacting with her. Mammachi even believes that he has a “man’s needs” (160) and creates a separate door for his lovers. This is because all of these women have been taught that they need a man; they all have “an age-old fear of being dispossessed” (67). This is why “divorce is worse than inbreeding” (59); the status quo must remain, the rules should never be broken, and no woman should be independent and manless. For a woman marriage is “getting decorated before being led to the gallows” (43), but being alone is a far worse fate because all of society turns its back and sends the independent woman to the bottom of the totem pole, as it has to Ammu.

Even if a single or divorced woman is of a higher class than a man in charge, he still treats her like a lesser being, an object. When Ammu, who comes from an upper class family, goes to the police station to sort out the misconceptions of Velutha, the police officer not only acts down on her, but he taps her boobs with his baton as if she is not worthy of respect. Militarism is another strong force in enforcing the Love Laws and a woman’s place in society. Comrade Pillai is the perfect example of this. Mrs. Pillai does everything for him and he does admit that “inside the house she is Boss”, but she is still confined to the house. She is the

“Mistress of [the] House” (264), while Comrade Pillai, [has] the easy authority of the Man of the House” (258). Part of his authority is calling Mrs. Pillai “‘edi’ which is, approximately, ‘Hey, you!’” while she refers to him as “‘addeham’ which is the respectful form of he (256). So, even though Comrade Pillai is one to admit that his wife does have some power and even calls her a boss, he is still like every other man because he does not respectfully talk to her.

In the entire story Velutha and Ammu are the only adults who are strong, able, and capable of real love, but this does not matter in the world of “Love Laws”. All that matters is who can love whom and how much they can be loved. The Paravans are the “disposable people” that Rob Nixon discusses in “Slow Violence”; they are worth nothing and when someone is worth nothing they can’t be loved. Velutha is a “Paravan”, an “Untouchable”. Due to the history of extreme othering, the “social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group” (Ashcroft 188), he is considered the lowest on the totem pole. Even the factory workers who are his inferiors think he is below them, because “for them he is just a Paravan”; it is a “conditioning they have from birth” (264). Yet, the twins tell Sophie Mol that Velutha is “the man [they] love” (144) because they understand that things can make someone love you less, but they don’t yet understand that love and who you love is supposed to be limited.

When Ammu finally cracks and tries to get out of her misery, she and Velutha break the “Love Laws” and have a sexual relationship. It ends in disaster. Ammu is sent away and Velutha is killed by the police. But, it gets even more shocking. The reason anyone knows about their relationship is because of Velutha’s dad, Vellya Paapen, tells Mammachi and Baby Kochamma about it. The “Love Laws” are so strong that Vellya Paapen feels more of an accountability to his superiority than a love for his own flesh and blood. The caste system is so deep-seated in the

culture of India that Vellya Paapen believes that a relationship between an Untouchable (Velutha) and a Touchable (Ammu) is a worse fate than the fate of his own son and his son's happiness.

The men in this society are “without curiosity. Without doubt... they [look] out at the world and never [wonder] how it works because they [know]. They [work] it” (248). Grown men are the opposite of the twins who embody innocence and curiosity. Rahel and Estha are slowly learning how the world works. They're vulnerable and they have a “willingness to love people who [don't] really love them” (43) that goes away with age. The children are the only characters in the book who are able to have real conversations about love; they are not caught up in the politics and feel and see what is truly there. But, even Rahel who has made a list of those she loves, in attempt to organize the turmoil of their lives, is “torn forever between love and duty” (144). Everyone in this family and in this world has “tampered with the laws” (31), but the laws do not matter to those who are in charge and thus they are allowed to break them. But, for the subordinates, like Ammu, there is misery whether or not they follow the laws.

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