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**BORDERS AND BORDERLAND: AN ANALYSIS OF ARUNDHATI ROY'S
"THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS"**

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ABSTRACT

Borders were created to perpetuate and reinforce differences that determine the inclusion and exclusion of people and reinstate the distinction between "us" and "them". Prominent theorist and researcher in border studies, Gloria Anzaldúa uses the border between the United States of America and Mexico in her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, as a "metaphor for all types of crossings-between geopolitical boundaries, sexual transgressions, social dislocations..." (Anzaldúa 2007:6) She defines a border "as a dividing line" (25) that is imagined and drawn out to "define places that are safe and unsafe." (25) The setting of Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997) reveals a society governed by borders. The caste-based border divides individuals into two distinct worlds while the gendered border lies between what society expects and what the individuals desire. However, borders are "artefacts of history and are subjected to change over time." (Cadaval 1993: 17-25) Borders have become a far more complex concept and are not seen as a stagnant "line in the sand" (Donan & Wilson 1999: 15) but "a metaphor for cultural and other borderlands." (Anzaldúa 15) A borderland is a space between two borders that allows a blending of two cultures creating a new world, a third space. So, the question that motivates this research is: To what extent is Arundhati Roy able to portray borders and create a borderland in her novel, *The God of Small Things*?

Key words: border, borderland, caste, hybrid, touchable, untouchable, Paravan, ahistorical, postcolonial

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I. Borders: Touchable and Untouchable

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* portrays a society divided by a caste-based border that separated people into "Touchable and Untouchables." (Roy 2009: 69) This social, religious and historical border, which is an internal border is perpetuated throughout the novel. There is no fixed legal or geographical border that marks the spatial division of touchables and untouchables but this internal caste-based border is a stringent imaginary

border which is understood by the society and maintained on an everyday basis for generations. When geographical and political border divides countries, each country on either side of the border have their own laws and policies to protect their citizens. The laws of one country does not reach out and affect the people of the other country, directly. However, an internal border such as a caste-based border, divide people into two communities yet the laws apply to both communities in general, but are

far more oppressive and unjust to the untouchable side of the border. The concept of untouchability stretches on to both sides of the caste border. The privileged side of the border recognises the other side to be untouchable while the other side is forced to see themselves as untouchables. The rules are laid out by a Hindu-hierarchical system and only if the rules are followed by both parties will there be a proper functioning of the border. Here one religious group's "imagined community" (Appadurai 2011: 29) is another group's "political prison." (29)

In Roy's novel, the Ayemenem family is a Syrian-Orthodox Christian family and belongs to the touchable side of the border. The family members "were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched" (Roy 73) and "nobody would" (73) allow the untouchables "into the house." (73) But, one of the central characters, Vellutha (untouchable), was allowed in the premises of the Ayemenem house and he looks after "all the electrical gadgets in the house." (75) Roy's repetitive use of 'allowed' and italicised words emphasise the strict nature of the caste-based border that favours the touchables' actions while the untouchables seek permission to speak or do anything.

When Vellutha was hired as the factor carpenter, "the other Touchable factory workers" (77) resented it because "Paravans¹ were not *meant* to be carpenters." (77) Mammachi paid Vellutha lesser than a touchable carpenter but "more than she would a Paravan." (77) More than the job, Mammachi felt that Vellutha ought to be grateful for being allowed on the factory premises and "allowed to touch things that Touchables touched." (77) This is what Roy points out as the "impenetrable Touchable logic." (77) Untouchables can access touchables' spaces depending on the convenience and whims of the touchables. Otherwise, an untouchable cannot cross the border and reach out to the touchable world but it can happen the other way around. For example, the untouchables were given a separate school founded by a touchable, Mamachi's father-in-law, Punnyan Kunju. Mammachi coaxed Vellya Paapen, to send his son, Vellutha to "the Untouchables' school." (77) Roy

does not give a name to the school and this absence of a name shows the almost irrelevant existence of the school rooted and enshrined on discriminatory grounds.

The reinstatement of the caste-based border occur through orality when stories are passed on from one generation to the other. Roy shows how the oral tradition perpetuated and asserted caste divisions when Mammachi narrates incidents to the twins, Estha and Rahel, about the "Crawling Backward Days." (77) This reinforces the binaries of touchables/untouchables, clean/polluted, etc. on a social and psychological level. Thus, Roy sheds light on how the border between touchables and untouchables is disseminated across time.

Furthermore, Roy shows how the caste-based border were strengthened by untouchables themselves, particularly when they were made aware of their untouchability and were forced to treat themselves poorly.

Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on the public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (74)

So, there is an awareness of how untouchables were expected to conduct themselves. This could be why Vellya Paapen feared his own son's "lack of hesitation" (76) and "unwarranted assurance" (76) in the way he walked and gave suggestions "without being asked." (76) Vellya Paapen believed that such qualities were "perfectly acceptable, perhaps even desirable in Touchables' (76) but since Vellutha belonged to the opposite side of the border, such qualities "could (and would, and indeed, *should*) be construed as insolence." (76) Here, Vellutha's own father showed fear and loyalty to the opposite side of the border. Vellya Paapen felt safe on his side of the border and even gets angry when his son tries to cross it in small ways. Vellya Paapen's loyalty to the touchable side of the border became clear when he betrayed his own son by exposing Vellutha and Ammu's relationship.

Therefore, Roy is not only able to portray the imaginary caste-based border but also illustrate how

¹ Paravan refers to one of the untouchable communities in Kerala, India.

the idea of the border is stronger than familial relations. Even though there is no definite geographical border that separates the touchables and untouchables, Roy demonstrates how this internal border is reinstated on a day-to-day basis, socially and psychologically.

II. **Borders: Historical and Ahistorical**

Roy explains how certain untouchables converted to Christianity “to escape the scourge of Untouchability.” (74) Roy uses a powerful metaphor, “jumped from the frying pan into the fire” (74) to show how the situation worsened for the untouchables after their religious conversion. They were still not allowed to share the space with touchables. They were forced to have “separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests.” (74) They were even given a separate Bishop referred to as “Pariah Bishop.” (74) The untouchables were then officially listed as Christians even though socially, they were not recognised as touchable Christians. The untouchables became “casteless” (74) and were not “entitled to any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates.” (74) Roy uses a simile to compare this situation to sweeping away ones “footprints without a broom” and worse than this is “not being allowed to leave footprints at all.” (74)

This image of footprints is repeated in the novel. Paravans were “expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints” (73-74) so that touchables (Brahmins or Syrian Christians) would not be defiled “by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprint.” (74) The idea of footprints become a metaphor for history. The untouchables exist outside the *varna*² system and hence, are not expected to have a history. Forcing the Paravans to sweep away their own footprints points to the idea of untouchables not being allowed to make their mark on history. Roy portrays the fear of the touchables ‘stepping into’ the polluted history of the

untouchables and hence, made the untouchables sweep away their history. By doing so, the touchables declared and preserved their history as the single dominant history. The fear of the touchables is rooted in the binary of pure versus polluted. The touchables consider themselves as the pure beings while the untouchables are considered (by the touchables) as polluted beings. This idea plays when determining whose history is worthy to be heard and recorded. In this scenario, it can be understood that there is a border between ‘pure’ history and ‘polluted’ history. The touchables force the history of the untouchables outside the dominant historical tradition of India. The touchables’ ‘pure’ history overwrites the ‘polluted’ history of the untouchables forcing them to live “outside ‘history’” (Nandy 1995: 44) and historians refer to such communities as “ahistorical.” (44) They do not belong to the historical Hindu social order (*varna* system) and are not allowed to make their history known. Conversion to Christianity can be understood as the untouchables’ attempt to not only cross the caste-based border but also the border between ahistorical and historical. Yet, this effort was unsuccessful and more internal borders were created such as Christians in contrast to Dalit Christians.

Roy creates a metaphorical border between historical and ahistorical and she also attempts to allow the untouchables to cross this border by writing about the struggle of the untouchables. By giving them a significant space and portraying their history, Roy endeavours to make the untouchables cross the border and transform the ahistorical to historical. This attempt introduces the idea of more than one history which is seen in the very beginning of the novel where Roy quotes from John Berger, “*Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one.*”(n.pag.) Roy explores “ways to transcend centrist blind spots” (Hamalainen and Truett 2011: 338) and “privilege small-scale tales,” (338-339) to create counter-narratives to the dominant opinions.

Crossing Borders: State Borders

“When people cross borders, they move from one economic, social and political space to another.” (Donan & Wilson 107) The character of

² *Varna* is a Sanskrit word which refers to a category, type or class based on professions. Details about the varna system is found in the Brahmanical text, *Manusmriti*. The varna system is divided into *Brahmins* (priests and teachers), *Kshatriyas* (warriors and leaders), *Vaishyas* (business people and merchants) and *Sudras* (service people and peasant). There are only four varnas which is why untouchables belong outside the varna system.

Ammu in Roy's novel, constantly shifts and crosses state borders. She finished her schooling in Delhi and moved to the extreme south of India, to Ayemenem because Pappachi "insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl." (Roy 38) Ammu was not happy in Ayemenem because there was nothing else a young girl of sixteen could do in Ayemenem "other than to wait for marriage proposals." (38) Ammu's two birthdays passed by, yet they went "unnoticed, or at least unremarked upon by her parents." (38) Ammu wanted to escape Ayemenem, "the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother." (39) So, with Pappachi's permission, Ammu travelled to Calcutta to spend summer with her "distant aunt." (39) Ammu even decided to marry a man she had known for only five days. She was not in love with him yet she "weighed the odds and accepted" (39) that "*anything*, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem." (39) Here, the very idea of home and family is different from the traditional sense of home that is commonly associated with parents. Ammu wanted to cross borders and move away from her family in Ayemenem to live with a distant aunt. Ammu is the "unhomely" (Varma 2012: 21) woman who has "existential issues of estrangement, alienation, exile and a metaphorical homelessness." (27)

Crossing borders and moving from one place to the other became a common pattern in Ammu's life. Her husband's family migrated from East Bengal to Calcutta after the Partition. He worked in Assam which is why after their marriage, the newly-wed couple moved to Assam. First, Ammu crossed several state borders to reach Ayemenem because her father did not see the necessity of a girl being educated further and because he had retired from his job in Delhi. Ammu moved to the North-Eastern region of India because her husband worked there. Both times, Ammu followed the men without having a choice of her own. Even travelling to Calcutta depended on her father's approval. The patriarchal culture weighed down on Ammu. She tried to escape this oppressive patriarchy that denied her further education and freedom but ends up in a marriage of convenience.

Roy presents a contrasting image of the way Ammu changed, both the times after she shifted to the two destinations. If her movement to Ayemenem, left her "desperate," (Roy 38) then shifting to Assam, made her the "toast of the Planters' Club." (40) Ammu tried to enjoy her youthful moments by wearing bold "backless blouses," (40) smoking long cigarettes, and blowing "perfect smoke rings." (40) Her shift into a modern woman almost seems like a desperate attempt to capture the two prime teenage years lost in Ayemenem trying to be a traditional woman, waiting for marriage proposals and "helping her mother with the housework." (38) Ammu experiences fleeting moments of happiness and relief throughout the novel. She was relieved when she was permitted to go to Calcutta which was short-lived when she realised that the man she married was "not just a heavy drinker but a full-blown alcoholic with all of an alcoholic's deviousness and tragic charm." (40) In October 1962, a fully pregnant Ammu was forced to leave Assam because the Indo-China "war" (40) had broken out. It was on her way to Shillong, she delivered the twins, Estha and Rahel, in a hospital "with windows blacked out." (40) Ammu's twins were born in between places, in between borders. Later, Ammu was forced to shift back to Ayemenem with her kids, without her husband.

Therefore, Roy shows how Ammu crossed several state borders with the hope of escaping traditional familial ideas only to find herself back in 'Orthodox' Ayemenem, once again faced with the familiar situation of being husbandless but this time, "unwelcomed, to her parents." (42) Roy portrays Ammu in a state of homelessness "in both material and a representational sense" (Varma 27) throughout the novel, particularly when she returns to Ayemenem, her unhomely home.

Crossing Borders: Gendered Borders

Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan's essay "Real and Imagined Women" (1993) questions the construction and representation of a "new Indian woman" (130) in "official discourses" (129) in contemporary India. Rajan states how the "female subject" (133) is expected to achieve balance between "(deep) tradition and (surface) modernity." (133) She should be able to "simultaneously and

effortlessly" (135) cross the border between tradition and modernity. The modern and contemporary side is the "liberated female" (135) who is educated, elite, westernized, and professional while the traditional values she is expected to uphold are "husband-worship, family, nurturance, self-sacrifice and sexual chastity." (135) Such women who can simultaneously be contemporary and hold on to traditional values become "harmonious symbols rather than conflictual subjects." (135)

However, Rajan states that women's groups, like religious groups, exist as "conflictual subjects and sites of conflict" (135) regardless of how media portrays women. Also, the idea of the imagined 'new Indian woman' peacefully crossing the border between two worlds and successfully negotiating aspects of each world, contrasts with the character of Ammu in Roy's novel. This is because the 'new Indian woman' is fashioned to create spaces that would "pre-empt...the possibility of crossing racial and sexual borders." (Varma 25) The "new Indian woman" is not a liberated individual but a further "gendered" (Rajan 137) female who is limited, under the patriarchal gaze. Ammu's desires and wishes are unfulfilled and she lives like an untouchable even though she belongs to the touchable community. So, Roy does not depict Ammu as the harmonious symbol but as a site of conflict because the negotiations of two worlds end up in an "the unmixable mix" (Roy 44) or what Anzaldúa calls, "dangerous crossroads." (Anzaldúa 6) Anzaldúa's "dangerous crossroad" is a third space between cultures and social systems. (6) This third space is depicted in Ammu's description of possessing "the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber." (Roy 44) The third space is known as a borderland which will be discussed later on.

Rajan points out in her essay that that the young Indian woman, or rather the "teenager" (Rajan 131) rebels and projects sexual desire. But such acts are "sanctioned" (131) by patriarchy as the "last fling of rebellion" (131) before she is "naturally tamed" (131) by domesticity and marriage. Roy depicts a contrasting situation with Ammu in which even after getting married and having children,

"there was something restless and untamed about her." (44) Ammu's walks changed from "a safe mother-walk" (44) to "another wilder walk" (44) and she carried the "air of unpredictability." (44) Ammu's border-crossings have transformed her into someone who has "a little of this and a little of that, and not quite one or the other." (Rosaldo 1993: 209)

Roy shows how society viewed Ammu's "Unsafe Edge." (Roy 44) They felt that since Ammu had little to lose, she could be "dangerous" (44) and hence, it is "best to just Let Her Be." (45) So, Roy portrays the real Indian woman through the character of Ammu, who has crossed gendered borders and lives in the "penumbral shadows between two worlds" (44) that is beyond the comprehension of the patriarchal society.

More Borders and Border-Crossings

Roy depicts more borders that various characters encounter. She also shows how certain characters find a way to cross these borders.

Chacko explained the history of "The History House" (53) to the twins and emphasised on the idea of being "trapped outside" (52) history. Chacko stated that the "family of Anglophiles" (52) who lived in the History House "were unable to trace their steps because their footprints had been swept away." (52) Here, there is a metaphorical connection between the anglophile family and postcolonial India. Once again, Roy uses the image of "footprints" as a metaphor for history. Roy's uses the image of the History House to show how India is "locked out" (53) of its own history with "ancestors whispering inside." (52) Roy provides a way to return to this history, which is "by going inside and listening" (52) to the ancestors and by "smelling the smells." (52) But, Roy's characters were not able to cross the border between the present and the past because they have been locked out and have become "Prisoners of War." (53) This war refers to the independence struggle with the British empire. Chacko declares that since the prisoners adore their "conquerors," (53) the Indians' dreams were "doctored" (53) and they "belong nowhere." (53) Even the imaginations seem to "remain forever colonised." (Chatterjee 1993: 5) This situation is similar to the plight of the untouchables who were forced to sweep away their footprints and were kept

outside history. Even their dreams were doctored and limited. For example, Mammachi says that if Vellutha was not a Paravan, "he might have become an engineer." (Roy 75) If the Indians were conquered and "invaded" (53) by the British, then, the untouchables were oppressed by those Indians who considered themselves as touchables and superior to the rest. The difference is that untouchables crossing the caste-based border is symbolic of them trying to move forwards towards a better future. Contrary to this forward motion, Roy portrays the touchables attempting to move backwards "to understand history." (53)

In the beginning of the novel, Roy mentions that borders and boundaries had separated the twins, Estha and Rahel. "Borders, Boundaries" (3) had appeared "on their separate horizons" (3) and the twins became "strangers who had met in a chance encounter." (327) So, by breaking the social and historical taboo of incest, they broke the "Love Laws." (328) Their embodied sexual experience was a way to become the people they were once, who had "known each other before Life began." (327) Here, the alphabet "l" is capitalised in "Life" to show the conditioned and gendered yet naturalised unnatural way of living in a society. This unnatural way of "Life" is made of "Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks, and Limits" (3) that decide "who should be loved. And how. And how much." (328) Thus, Estha and Rahel crossed the social and historical sexual borders to unite their worlds.

VI. **Borderland**

A borderland provides a new perspective because "living between two countries, two social systems, two languages, two cultures, results in understanding experientially the contingent nature of social arrangements." (Anzaldúa 7)

In the last chapter, "The Cost of Living" (331-340), Roy creates a borderland that blurs the caste-based border between Ammu and Vellutha. In this borderland, borders have "all gone" (336) and the two lovers have chosen to "exclude the outside world." (336) It is "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary." (Anzaldúa 25) Such a space creates a border culture which denotes the "lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country." (25) The

two worlds, touchable and untouchable, merge together to create a borderland. Roy presents this borderland as a space in close contact with the natural world. Roy uses the image of the river to compare both Ammu and Vellutha. Roy portrays Vellutha united with the river in such a way, that he belonged to it and "it belonged to him." (336) Ammu's genitalia is described as a "dark triangle" (337) which seems similar to Roy's repeated reference to the river as the "dark river." (333) Vellutha "drank long and deep from the bowl of her" (337) while Ammu noticed "the river dripping from him" (334) and "tasted him, salty in her mouth." (336) Roy's ingenious use of the river shows the merging of two rigid communities into an "unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in transition space lacking clear boundaries." (Anzaldúa 243) The merging of water-tight compartments into a state of fluidity becomes a characteristic feature of Roy's borderland.

The act of love-making is described using motion verbs such as "sailed" (Roy 337), to create an image of a boat sailing into the depths of the waters. This image is complemented by the repetition of the word "deeper" (337), followed by its use in superlative form and as an abstract noun. The movement stops with the word "drowned" (337) which paints a deathly image of the consequences faced by the lovers for crossing the caste-based borders and venturing in the borderland.

Borderlands theory facilitates an "articulation of multiple oppressions and forms of resistance to these oppressions." (Anzaldúa 7) In the concluding chapter, Roy states that Vellutha, was free to "drift slowly with the current" (Roy 333) of the river yet, he chose to swim upstream "against the current." (333) Even, Vellutha's father noticed this resistance in the "way" (76) Vellutha said or did things. Vellutha's quiet and non-rebellious way in which he "disregarded suggestions" (76) frightened the "Old World Paravan." (76)

Ammu is depicted as wearing an undergarment, "a long white petticoat" (331) with one of "Chacko's old shirts" (331) on it. Ammu's clothing shows how her innermost desires are restrained by patriarchy and the unbuttoning of her shirt (334) is symbolic of the act of shedding away

the patriarchal bonds as an act of resistance. By being the first to initiate intimacy through an intense kiss, Ammu was fighting Baby Kochamma's disgust for Vellutha's "Particular Paravan smell." (335) Even towards the end, Ammu proudly responds to herself as if answering a question. The certainty, boldness, and pride in the words "Yes Margaret...We do it to each other too" (340), shows Ammu's lack of remorse for crossing sexual and caste-based borders. Vellutha crossed the caste-based border when his "untouchable tongue touched the innermost part of her." (337) Ammu felt "herself through him" (335) as if her "body existed only where he touched her." (335) Here, Ammu's touchable existence relies on Vellutha's untouchable touch. Roy portrays the merging of two distinct worlds with powerful and effective visual imagery.

Roy's borderland is also a dangerous crossroad and the two characters are aware of this danger. Vellutha was "standing in the middle of a dark river" (333) and he was about to enter a "tunnel whose only egress was his own annihilation." (333) The gustatory image of the saltiness of the water (dripping from Vellutha's body) Ammu tasted, is symbolic of the risk they took by touching each other in a caste-ridden society. Roy shows Vellutha filled with "terror" (337) thinking of what he had done but also "how he would have done it again. And again." (337) Ammu also had similar thoughts of determination and fear. Ammu thought of "how much she loved his arms" (338) even though she knew "it was the most dangerous place she could be." (338) They chose to be satisfied with "Small Things" (338) when they should be worried about "The Big Things" (338) that lurked inside and around them. They knew that all the thirteen nights that they spent together had only worsened things and "raised the stakes." (335) Even though they knew that things would "change one day" (339), they didn't stop seeing each other. Borderland theory shows a rethinking of the "diverse and often embodied experiences of borders by those living in the interior of the perceived peripheries." (Alvarez 1995: n.pag.) Thus, Roy's borderland allows the expression of Ammu and Vellutha's voices as lived embodied experiences, despite the dangers involved.

Roy does not end her novel, or the chapter or even Ammu and Vellutha's relationship with closure, but with continuity. Every night when Ammu and Vellutha parted, they hoped to be with each other the next night. This hope is shown in the concluding word, "*Naaley*" (Roy 340) uttered by Ammu. Roy uses this loan word from the South-Indian language, Malayalam to bring authenticity to the setting. She also mentions the meaning of the word by placing it as the concluding word, "Tomorrow." (340) Roy puts a period after both the words instead of a question mark to show the firmness in their decision to cross borders.

Therefore, Roy's borderland "denotes a space in which antithetical elements mix neither to obliterate each other nor to be subsumed by a larger whole, but rather to combine in unique and unexpected ways." (Anzaldúa 6)

Conclusion

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* portray imaginary borders that divide individuals and experiences. Ammu left Ayemenem and crossed state borders to escape patriarchy and the traditional society, but Ammu ended up back in the same orthodox society. However, this time, she was not tamed or domestic in a conventional sense. While residing in Ayemenem with her children, Ammu was able to cross caste-based border and gendered borders. Ammu gained "plural personalities" (Roy 79) as a result of breaking traditional barriers and crossing borders. Roy portrays sociocultural and historical borders that is geographically nowhere yet it exists everywhere. Therefore, Arundhati Roy is able to effectively portray caste-based, gendered and sexual borders to a large extent, in her novel *The God of Small Things*.

Roy also shows the determination of characters to cross these borders and unite in a borderland despite the dangers in doing so. Ammu sarcastically thanks the "wonderful male chauvinistic society" (57) that leaves her with "no more dreams." (42) So, when Ammu gets an opportunity to dream again and fulfil her desires, she does not hold herself back, regardless of the perils. Ammu's awareness of crossing borders is seen when she tells Vellutha that she has "to go." (338) She leaves the borderland and crosses back into her touchable side of the border

only to come back to the same space the next night. Even though, the readers are aware that Ammu and Vellutha pay the cost for "living" in this borderland, Roy keeps the intimate moments as the concluding chapter to emphasise on the blurring of borders and blending of two worlds. Here, Roy's borderland can be understood as a "fluid" system that can "take on different forms and nuances." (Anzaldúa 7) With the use of intense and moving imagery and repetitions of certain ideas such as the river, Roy creates a borderland that is simultaneously, a dangerous crossroad and a space for resistance. Arundhati Roy is able to successfully create and effectively portray a borderland where the characters cross the caste-based, gendered and sexual borders and merge their distinct worlds.

Roy creates a borderland that is closely related with the natural world. She depicts her characters as not only one with each other but also one with nature. Roy creates an atmosphere where nature embraces the lovers reflecting their "fever pitch" (Roy 335) and simultaneously weeping over the "cost of living" (336) that climbed to "unaffordable heights." (336) Roy repeats the visual images of the pulsating river and the personification of weeping of the "yellow bamboo" (335) to portray this atmosphere. By closely tying the borderland with the fluidity of nature, Roy stresses on the rigid unnatural borders created by humans. Roy emphasises on the natural culture of the borderland, the border culture, that merges differences and negates the inclusion/ exclusion binary. Therefore, Roy is not only able to portray borders to a large extent but also create a borderland that becomes a site for "creative cultural production" (Rosaldo 208) and a space that challenges rigid monocultural conceptions of social reality." (Anzaldúa 7)

Roy's novel is set in the late twentieth century; however, Roy's portrayal of the borders is extremely relevant and significant in twenty first century India. The caste-based border still exists between touchables and untouchables. Untouchables have chosen a new name, 'Dalit' for themselves, which means broken or crushed. The name has changed but the border still exists and now it is between Dalits and non-Dalits. Dalits are

still oppressed and discriminated. Roy's idea of a borderland becomes important, considering the recent and rampant atrocities inflicted on individuals based on caste and gender. There is a necessity for a borderland where distinct cultures and communities can merge and create a new hybrid culture and where differences are not the dominating factor.

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