

The role of forbidden love in the guide and the god of small things



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Forbidden love is a prominent theme in both *The Guide* and *The God of Small Things*. While R. K. Narayan utilizes Raju's affair as a plot device, Arundhati Roy displays several sexual taboos as part of a broader theme to challenge societal expectations in India.

In "The Guide: A Study in Transcendence," Mary Beatina Rayen explains that *The Guide* depicts Raju's life in "three phases: his position as a tourist guide, 'Railway Raju,' his adventure with the dancer Rosie and her husband Marco; and finally his life at the village, Mangala" (Rayen 57). According to her analysis, Raju is on a spiritual journey and his affair with Rosie is just a step along the way that brings him to prison. She cites Balarama Gupta's analysis which describes Raju as "a selfish swindler, an adroit actor, and a perfidious megalomaniac."

There's a sense of karma throughout the novel, which has Raju end up in prison as the result of his own carelessness. Rayen discusses how Raju "is an accommodator" and "unable to say no to anyone," This character flaw leads him to sleep with a married woman after he notices "Rosie's loneliness and dazzling beauty." This leads Marco to pursue his revenge, resulting in Raju's imprisonment for a crime he didn't commit. Without this happening, Raju would never become the enlightened man that Velan considers holy. Thus, his affair with Rosie is a plot device that doesn't challenge Indian society as Roy does in her novel. In "R. K. Narayan's Raju: A Symbol of Sin, Suffering, and Salvation," Naveen K. Mehta explains that "happiness comes to [Raju] only when he begins to act as a selfless man," and mentions that once Raju experiences hunger, he begins a "process of purification" which leads him to the role of the swami. Every action has a purpose in *The Guide*, <https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-forbidden-love-in-the-guide-and-the-god-of-small-things/>

with Raju's sexual indiscretions playing an equally crucial role as his imprisonment. So although one is used as a plot device, the other one is used as a tool for character development.

The role of the mother is significant in both texts. While Ammu, the mother in *The God of Small Things* transgresses the sexual taboos of Indian society, Raju's mother is against his relationship with a married woman. In reaction to Raju's forbidden love, she asks why Rosie won't "go to her husband and fall at his feet" and voluntarily moves out of their house, while Ammu is forced out of her house for her transgressions (Narayan 136). The two novels differ in the sense that sex is presented more figuratively in *The God of Small Things*. Ammu's affair with Velutha, a man of the untouchable caste demonstrates rebellion against the outdated social order in India. The consequences of this affair make it clear that although the caste system had technically ended, it was still a taboo to have associate oneself with members of the Dalit class.

In "Commodity Fetishism, Patriarchal Repression, and Psychic Deprivation in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*," John Lutz argues that "Ammu's affair with Velutha and her attempts to save him...assigns transgressive erotic desire a political role." He considers Police Inspector Thomas Mathew and his violence a symbol of "patriarchy and capitalism," quoting Brinda Bose's explanation that Ammu and Velutha's affair demonstrates the "subversive powers of desire and sexuality," the "politics of gender divisions and the rules that govern them" (Lutz 58). This is a valid argument since

Inspector Thomas Mathew exploits the situation by sexually harassing

Ammu. But Inspector Mathew is the most lenient adult when it comes to

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enforcing the Indian caste system. He has Velutha beaten because Baby Kochamma convinces him that attempted to rape Ammu, not because he wants to enforce traditional love laws. When he finds out that Velutha is innocent, he threatens to have Baby Kochamma arrested. Thus, it could be argued that Inspector Mathew represents the idea that the caste system has been abolished, while Baby Kochamma represents the reality that the system is still in effect. Ammu is punished for sleeping with Velutha, even though the caste system had supposedly been abolished by then. Inspector Matthew enforces the literal interpretation of the caste system being abolished, while Baby Kochamma enforces it in practice.

This isn't to say that Inspector Thomas is interested in enforcing justice. After harassing Ammu and telling her she should "go home quietly," it's specifically mentioned that "Inspector Thomas Mathew seemed to know whom he could pick on and whom he couldn't" (Roy 5). This would Lutz analyzes Baby Kochamma through a Marxist lens, arguing that her destructive nature and "hidden impulse to dominate others" is linked with her consumerist nature (Lutz 59). He references the scene where she installs a satellite dish, enabling her to preside "over the world in her drawing room" (14). This demonstrates how Roy uses taboo sexuality to undermine the rigid class expectations in India. By having Ammu sleep with a man of the untouchable caste, she is therefore rebelling against the traditions of older family members, in this case Baby Kochamma. Still, taboo sex acts are not always used for a subversive purpose in *The God of Small Things*. An example of this would include Estha and Rahel having sex at the end of the novel. Expanding on the idea that Roy utilizes sex for symbolic purposes, the

incest between Estha and Rahel is used as a bonding experience after they had been separated for 23 years.

Both Narayan and Roy depict forbidden love in their works, but for entirely different purposes. Narayan uses it as a plot device in a larger spiritual journey, while Roy's depiction of taboo sexuality challenges the restrictive nature of the Indian social classes.