CHAPTER – III
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BIG THINGS: POLITICS OF HUMBUG

*The God of Small Things* can be viewed as an embodiment of Arundhati Roy’s views about the politico-economic philosophy of communism because in this novel a lot has been said about communists and communism. The characters described as communists in this novel range from a real-life former Chief Minister of Kerala Mr. E.M.S.Namboodiripad to a common party worker Velutha. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, who is the only historical character in the novel was the Chief Minister of Kerala twice, first from 1957 to 1959 and secondly in the late 'Sixties from 1967 to 1969. The narrator in *The God of Small Things* reports that E.M.S. Namboodiripad's ancestral home has been made a part of the hotel 'Heritage' and is being used as the hotel's dining room, and old communists "worked as fawning bearers in colourful ethnic clothes" (126) in it.

Since E.M.S. Namboodiripad is described by the "Hotel People" as "Kerala's Mao Tse-Tung" (126), it is evident that he is a communist and since he has been described as the Chief Minister of Kerala in the years in which the historical E.M.S. Namboodiripad was the Chief Minister of Kerala, one has to come to the conclusion that the novel's E.M.S. Namboodiripad is a historical character irrespective of what the novelist says about him. Even though the author claims: "The characters are all fictional" the narrator talks of the performance of the government of E.M.S. Namboodiripad on his becoming Chief Minister of Kerala in 1957, and describes the position of the communist rulers of Kerala as "extraordinary", if not "absurd", when she reports:
Suddenly the communists found themselves in the extraordinary-critics say absurd-position of having to govern a people and foment revolution simultaneously. Comrade E.M.S. Namboodiripad evolved his own theory about how he would do this. Chacko studied his treatise on The Peaceful Transition to Communism with an adolescent's obsessive diligence and an ardent fan's unquestioning approval. It set out in detail how Comrade E.M.S. Namboodiripad's government intended to enforce land reforms, neutralize the police, subvert the judiciary and 'Restrain the Hand of the Reactionary Anti-People Congress Government at the Centre'.

Unfortunately, before the year was out, the Peaceful part of the Peaceful Transition came to an end. (67)

The novelist is drawing attention to the fact that there was something wanting in E.M.S. Namboodiripad's postulates, as even though he aimed at a peaceful transition to communism the transition did not remain peaceful even for one year and soon there were "riots, strikes and incidents of police brutality" (67). The implication is that Namboodiripad's views about the situation prevailing in Kerala in 1957 were based on a faulty understanding of that situation and that instead of neutralizing the police he had started using them as his tools to achieve his goals. This also implies that E.M.S. Namboodiripad had realized within a year that at least in the situation prevailing in Kerala in 1957, it was essential for a communist ruler to use the police to achieve his goals and that when he had prepared the treatise The Peaceful Transition to Communism he had not been
aware of that fact. That signifies Arundhati Roy's suggestion that E.M.S. Namboodiripad's political views were based on an unsound understanding of life and so they deserved rejection.

Another weakness of the communist rulers of Kerala mentioned in the passage quoted above is that though they stood for fomenting a revolution, which means asking people to take law in their own hands and defy the government authorities, they were also rulers and had, by implication, taken upon themselves the responsibility of protecting people from those who took law in their own hands. The implication is that these rulers either did not want to foment a revolution or did not want to govern and did not want to prevent people from taking law in their own hands. In either case, the implication is, they were not telling people the truth about their intentions.

*The God of small Things* also caused controversy in its country when Kerala Chief Minister E.K Nayanar claimed that it had its own acclaim in the West only because of its "anti-communist venom"(163). Writers, historians, novelists and even politicians largely disagreed with Nayanar. He was "being silly" is the verdict of the eminent historian, novelist and columnist, Khushwant Singh. Vertan Marxist leader E.M.S. Namboodiripad took exception to the way three Communist characters were portrayed. However, Shiv Sena Minister for Cultural Affairs of Maharashtra Pramod Navalkar said Communists themselves had been in the forefront in criticizing others; they should accept the democratic principles. They cannot restrict freedom of expression if it does not fit into their principles. And other critics heaped praise on a distinctive literary work of art.
The Marxist ideology located in the background is not a simple effort to concretize time and history. The rise of Marxism after the decline of British imperialism is noteworthy as it denotes the shift of political power. Consequently the novel projects the rise of the ilk of Mr. K.N.M. Pillai and the fall of the Anglophile represented by Chacko. Political power directly linked with social power enables Pillai to become economically affluent. His political and economic supremacy gives him the right to pass judgments on the so-called moral defaulters and keep his own lapses in the dark. His rise to power qualifies him to control police or the governmental authority. He is not a good man but goodness and power in today’s society are negatively conceptualized. Despite the ideals of Marxism, he turns out to be an exploiter of the powerless. Arundhati Roy has been no stranger to controversy; from her mother’s campaigning through her own article on Shekar Kapur’s celebrated film ‘Bandit Queen’ about Phoolan Devi, in which Roy charged Kapur with exploiting Devi and misrepresenting both her life and its meaning. That ended with a court case, and her giving up the world of film.

The narrator in the novel charges the Communists of Kerala as casteists in their approaches as she reports: "The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them. They offered a cocktail revolution, “a heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy” (67). The fact has been evinced in the behaviours of characters too. For instance, K.N.M. Pillai, who is a communist
press-owner, has been reported to be a casteist as he does not like Velutha to be there in the Party, for Velutha is an 'untouchable', a low-caste Hindu. The narrator reports the fact in the following words:

The only snag in Comrade K.N.M. Pillai's plans was Velutha. Of all the workers at Paradise Pickles, he was the only card-holding member of the Party, and that gave Comrade Pillai an ally he would rather have done without. He knew that all the other Touchable workers in the factory resented Velutha for ancient reasons of their own. Comrade Pillai steeped carefully around this wrinkle, waiting for a suitable opportunity to iron it out. (121)

The other communist characters in the novel are not free from weaknesses even if they are the weaknesses of different sorts. One of these characters is Chacko, a member of the bourgeoisie who dons the communist hide to protect the interests of his pickle factory and sexual needs. This man, as the narrator reports, has a Marxist mind, no doubt, but he is also a man with "feudal libido" (168) as he has "his libertine relationships with the women in the factory" (168). If a man with a Marxist mind too regards women as things made to gratify his hedonistic desires, he is as bad as any feudal lord and, the implication is, he deserves to be guillotined like the French feudal lords of the eighteenth century.

Marx rejects the bourgeois social system also on the ground that in it people are loose-moralled and have illicit relationships with poor workers of the fair sex. In Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* this communist factory owner is notoriously lecherous.
Though he is not a card-holding member of the party, Chacko had remained a committed supporter of the ideology of communism. During the days when he was running the factory, this self-proclaimed Marxist would first win the pretty women who worked in the factory on the pretext of lecturing them on labour rights and trade union laws and then flirt with them shamelessly. Ammu rightly calls him an “Oxford avatar of the old zamindar mentality—a landlord forcing his attentions on women who depended on him for their livelihood” (65).

Both Mammachi and the self-righteous Baby Kochamma do not see any contradiction between Chacko’s Marxist mind and feudal libido; Mammachi goes to the extent of building a separate entrance for the ‘objects’ of Chacko’s ‘Needs’ to enter the House easily. She secretly gives them money which they accept because they have young children and old parents to feed. The arrangement suited Mammachi because ‘a fee clarified things’ (169).

But it is with regard to Velutha, the Paravan, that Chacko’s Marxist and Christian avowals are tested and found hollow. Velutha’s only fault is that he has a couple of years of schooling unlike his elders. He has also trained himself to become a skillful carpenter. He has a way with machines which made him indispensable at the factory. He was hired as the factory carpenter and allowed to enter the factory premises and touch things that Touchables touch—a big step for an ‘unwarranted assurance’ which became a cause for resentment for the workers at the factory.

Both Chacko and Pillai are apprehensive of Velutha’s association with the party. Chacko wants Velutha to remain only an excellent carpenter with an
engineer’s mind. Pillai sees the danger of Velutha receiving the special treatment he receives in Chacko’s factory which he fears might antagonize the other labourers. He therefore asks Chacko to send Velutha away and get him a job elsewhere. Events after Sophie Mol’s death take such a turn that Velutha does not have to be thrown out by Chacko and his family. For the viciousness of Baby Kochamma, the heartless disowning of Velutha by Pillai and the savage brutality of the police together conspire to have him butchered to death. And yet to say that Velutha becomes a victim of this power game is only partly true. For in this foul drama, the innocent twins Rahel and Estha specially become victims of a depraved power game which plays havoc with their lives. Years after these events, the factory stands abandoned after being seized by the communist party.

Ironically, the siege was led by no other than comrade Pillai, Ayemenem’s own ‘Crusader for Justice’ and ‘Spokesman of the oppressed’ (303). He had claimed that the ‘Management’ had implicated the Paravan in a false police case because he was an active member of the communist party and had indulged in ‘Lawful Union activities’. The factory which was once full of giant cement ‘Pickle and Tam’ vats now stood abandoned. “The lonely drummer drummed. A gauze door slammed. A mouse rushed across the factory floor. Cobwebs sealed old pickle vats. Empty, all but one in which a small heap of congealed white dust lay. Bone dust from a barn owl. Long dead, Pickledowl” (328). The factory built and operated on principles of injustice and dishonesty and hypocrisy degenerates and disintegrates.
Since Pillai still regards a worker as an 'untouchable' and likes him to be eased out of the Party on that count, he is not a communist in the real sense of the word. A communist stands for the equality of all and likes the state power to come into the hands of workers irrespective of their castes, colours, and creeds, as Marx, through his Communist Manifesto, willed. Moreover, if these communists are not bold enough to challenge communal divides, it is impossible for them to be impartial as governors. For the first qualification of a governor is that he is absolutely just and impartial as a ruler and, unlike Shakespeare's *King Lear*, administers justice not on the basis of the love people bear him, but on the basis of their rights and the services they render to the state.

The Naxalites are another group of communists mentioned in the novel. They are reported to be indulging in plundering and committing murder, as the reporter observes: "They organized peasants into fighting cadres, seized land, expelled the owners and established People's Courts to try Class Enemies" (68). The details of a murder committed by the Naxalites of Kerala given by the novelist arouse disgust for the people committing them:

That May there was a blurred photograph in the papers of a landlord in Palghat who had been tied to a lamp post and beheaded. His head lay on its side, some distance away from his body, in a dark puddle that could have been water, could have been blood. (68-69)

This is tantamount to saying that during the reign of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the Naxalites were indulging in nothing less than plundering and murdering the rich and the land-owning people and had no regard either for law or
ethics. But since these people too were communists and started indulging in such activities during the reign of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, they owed their existence to Namboodiripad's policies and programmes, maybe his programme of 'fomenting a revolution' (67). That implies Arundhati Roy suggesting that it was E.M.S. Namboodiripad who was responsible for what the Naxalites were doing.

Arundhati Roy goes to the extent of saying that even Marx's understanding of life was not faultless, as it is based on the assumption that workers "have nothing to lose but their chains" (19) but the fact remains that the jobs the workers have are a privilege which is not available to a large section of population. India, she depicts in this novel, is a country in which there exist a host of unemployed persons as compared to whom the employed workers are a privileged section of population. And that must be the reason why Mammachi's remark, "Tell them to read the papers. There's a famine on. There are no jobs. People are starving to death. They should be grateful they have any work at all" (121-122) throws cold water on the workers zeal for fighting Chacko for better wages.

In other words, Arundhati Roy's view may be interpreted to mean that the communist programme of action is meant for a state of affairs in which workers have nothing to lose but their own principles of establishing an egalitarian, welfare society. In fact, the conditions prevailing in Arundhati Roy's Kerala are not that bad for the workers. That implies suggesting that a political philosophy based on a faulty analysis of the prevailing situation cannot be free from faults. When the narrator reports that the communist rulers never challenge communal divides, she
means to charge them with hypocrisy; they preach one thing, but practice another which is diametrically the opposite.

Another weakness that the narrator finds in K.N.M. Pillai is that even though as a communist he wants the workers of the Paradise Pickles factory to organize themselves into a union and "urge(s) them on to revolution" (120), yet he tries to protect his own business interests with Chacko, the owner of the Paradise Pickles. The fact has been mentioned sarcastically by the narrator in the following words:

Comrade K.N.M. Pillai never came out openly against Chacko. Whenever he referred to him in his speeches he was careful to strip him of any human attributes and present him as an abstract functionary in some larger scheme. A theoretical construct. A pawn in the monstrous bourgeois plot to subvert revolution.... Apart from it being tactically the right thing to do, this disjunction between the man and his job helped Comrade Pillai to keep his conscience clear about his own private business dealings with Chacko. (121)

The implication is that far from being truthful and straightforward, Pillai is a tactful and cunning man who never gives up his own economic interests; rather keeps them above the cause of communism, and thus, he is a bourgeois at heart and pays only a lip-service to communism. When the narrator says: "... Comrade K.N.M. Pillai was essentially a political man. A professional omeletteer. He walked through the world like a chameleon. Never revealing himself, never appearing not to. Emerging through chaos unscathed" (14). It becomes crystal
clear that Pillai is an opportunist who can stoop to any level to achieve his goal including the use of hypocrisy.

In 1957, under E.M.S Namboodiripad, Kerala became the first Indian state to elect a Communist Government. Despite a damaging split in the party in 1964, there have been communist-led Governments in Kerala more often than not. Roy writes that the reason behind the communist party’s success in Kerala was that it has “never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them never appearing not to” (16). This double standard is emphasized when comrade Pillai incites the workers of Paradise Pickles and Preserves to strike against their owner Chacko, but refers to the latter in theoretical terms:

He never referred to him by name, but always as the ‘management’.

As thought Chacko was many people. Apart from it being tactically the right thing to do, this disjunction between the man and his job helped comrade Pillai to keep his conscience clear about his own private business dealings with Chacko. His contract for printing the paradise pickles labels gave him income. (121)

Pillai’s double standards are also seen when, despite his slogans of “caste is class” (121), he deliberately distances himself from Velutha in order to maintain the support of Chacko’s other workers who dislike working with a Paravan. Chacko himself appears to be an armchair communist with no real understanding of the politics around him. Roy’s representation of the communist party has met
with much criticism from the party. The late EMS Namboodiripad criticized *The God of Small Things* for promoting sexual anarchy and bourgeois values (Deccan Herald 6) while the Marxist Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. E.K. Nayanar, said that Roy had painted a “factually incorrect” picture of the social conditions in Kerala during the period 1950-70 and of the role played by communists during that period (Deccan Herald 7).

Even Marxism, which upholds the cause of the deserted and the have-nots is seen doing just the opposite of what it is meant for. Inspector Mathew is going to arrest Velutha. But before the arrest he wants to be fully assured whether Velutha has any political support or whether he is operating alone. The callous Pillai not only disowns Velutha as a party worker, but also does not refute the false allegation of abduction and rape by Baby Kochamma. This gives a chance for the corrupt police to inflict torture and savagery to the innocent Velutha. Here, by this beautiful episode Arundhati Roy seems to satirize the bogey and artificiality, which form the core of politics. In modern politics, the thing that matters is not honesty and truth but falsehood and deception, frailty and cruelty. Politics is just like the players of the stage, the 'Kathakali Men' who act the role of virtuous soul on the stage but "went home to beat their wives" (236).

Velutha, the communist worker, comes from the ranks as he belongs to the section of communists who are the muscle power of the party and takes part in demonstrations "marching with a red flag... with angry veins in his neck" (71). He may be "The God of Small Things" as the novelist chooses to describe him in the title of the novel, as he is able to make things like "rosewood dining table" (28),
and "intricate toys, tiny windmills, rattle, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds; ... perfect boats, out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts" (74), "mends radios, clocks [and] water pumps" (75), but "he is the devil of a big thing spawned a monster" (78) in his father's eyes as he develops illicit relations with Ammu, his employer's sister and pays no regard to the ethical rule that another man's wife is to be regarded as one's mother and another man's property is to be regarded as a lump of soil with the result that all efforts "to contain the scandal and salvage the family reputation in Inspector Thomas Mathew's eyes" (259) end in nothing as this Police Inspector starts calling Ammu a veshya (a whore) and regards her children as illegitimate" (8).

In England, Channel coverage of the Booker included a round-table debate by literary 'stars' Melvyn Bragg, A.S. Byatt, Will Self, and Cermen Callil. Callil (the previous year's chair of the Booker Judges) pronounced The God of small Things as "an execrable book" which should have never reached the shortlist. The English response reveals more about the damaging insularity and racism of the English literary scene than it does about the novel. Over and over again Roy's book was called "derivative" because it was about India -Salman Rushdie had already "done India- whereas the Irish novel which was also up for the prize was praised for its theme of return to a troubled homeland- “a favourite theme for Irish novelists at the moment, amounting almost to a genre”, as one critic put it.

The supreme court in the controversial Sardar Sarovar case, filed by the Narmada Bachao Andolan, has come down heavily upon the statements, press releases and interviews of the leaders of the movement and an article by Arundhati
Roy in her individual capacity on matters connected with the case reported in 1999 (8 SCC 308). After a hearing spread over five years, the apex court had issued an interim order permitting the State of Gujarat to raise the height of the dam to 85 meters. The state of Gujarat had filed a petition for contempt, bringing to the notice of the court, the activities of the NBA in reaction to the interim order and their threats to protests, public meeting and undertaking satyagrahas.

The court taking serious note of the activities of the NBA and the support Ms. Arundhati Roy received ruled:

Under the right to freedom of speech, no party can be given a license to misrepresent the proceedings and the orders of the court and deliberately paint an absolutely wrong and incomplete picture, which has the tendency to scandalize the court and bring it into disrepute or ridicule. The right to criticize in good faith, in private or in public, the judgment of the court, cannot be exercised with malice or by an attempt to impair the administration of justice. Indeed the freedom of speech and expression is the lifeblood of democracy but is subject to certain qualifications.

The court’s attention in this regard had been drawn to an article in the weekly news magazine ‘Outlook’ which contained excerpts from the book The Greater Common Good by Arundhati Roy. The court condemned the action of the NBA and its leaders Ms. Medha Patker and Mr. Dharmadhikari who, after giving assurances to the court, acted in breach of the injunction by making comments on pending proceedings. The courts further held:
Litigants must realize that courts cannot be forced by pressure tactics to decide pending cases in the manner in which the party concerned desires. It will be a negation of the rule of law, if the courts were to act under such pressure. However, the court did not consider it appropriate to pursue the matter any further, as nothing had come to its notice to show that Ms. Arundhati Roy had continued her objectionable writings, after the contempt proceeding.

After winning the Booker Prize, Arundhati spent a year on a whirlwind tour of interviews and book readings.

It's such an artificial environment just now. All I see is the inside of these incredibly posh hotel rooms that make you want to laugh because they're so ridiculously posh. I hope that I'm right, but I don't think that it's going to affect me that much. Suppose I had written this book as a means of climbing out of my current life or catapulting myself to a different society or wanting to move into a different country...

This statement proclaims her genuine anger against those in politics and public affairs who use their position to amass wealth which in real terms, to Roy, is only filth. She continues, "I just wrote this book because I wanted to write it and not because I wanted to change my life...I don't want to trade my life in for another. So I don't think it's going to make that much of a difference. Also I know that fame is something that comes and goes". 
Following the whirlwind that was the Booker Prize, Arundhati settled to a celebrity’s life in New Delhi. However, she did not wallow in the luxury it held out. She continued to raise her voice against issues which she believed to be social inequities; she took up a number of big political issues and published a number of books on political subjects.

Roy examines how the power of money operates in the Ayemenem House and in the pickle factory and how far it is responsible for the family’s degeneration. She builds up a chain of cause and effect skillfully from the point when Chacko converts to the communist movement during his undergraduate days. It was the time when “comrade E.M.S Namboodiripad, the flamboyant Brahmin high priest of Marxism” (67), became Chacko’s hero. Soon, his enthusiasm for a political philosophy that asserts to protect the honour and dignity of the workers, degenerates into exploitation of the same class for his ‘feudal libido’. He also makes a travesty of the gender equality of the sexes by violently pushing the Ammu-Velutha sexual episode to irreparable damages.

The breach of devotion to an ideology with impelled by an avarice for money, power and sexual vulgarity can be seen in the life of Comrade Pillai also. One night Comrade Pillai is eating his supper when Velutha approaches him for help in the allegation of rape and abduction. On this occasion, all of a sudden Pillai is possessed by madness for sex seeing his wife’s breast when she raises her hand to open the door for Velutha who was knocking at it. He even wants to touch the breasts of his wife. But the curd on his hand and the knock at the door come in the
way of his lewdness. After all she was his wife and he need not have been aroused so at that odd time.

Velutha, the paravan, then enters and prays earnestly to help him on the ground that he has been a loyal and devoted worker of the party throughout his life. But his requests fall flat on him. He, in a very straightforward way, just like a corrupt politician, remarks: "you should know that Party was not constituted to support worker's indiscipline in their private life" (287). What a great irony! A man who speaks of discipline is himself a great breaker of discipline.

A leader must be a man of good character in both private and public. But the case here is just the opposite. His wife is his own possession and so he can enjoy her at the private time. But his sexual passions burst like volcanic eruptions within a second. This is really a great breach of manner on the part of a leader who is supposed to lead the path of a number of people. In short, *The God of Small Things* shows a patriarchal domination of a caste-ridden structure where men dominate women, the possessed override the non-possessed, the powerful crush the weak and the touchables trample the untouchables. Ranga Roa, in his article "The Booker of the Year", rightly observes:

Roy's book is the only one I can think of among Indian novels in English which can be comprehensively described as a protest novel.

It is all about atrocities against minorities, small things: children and youth, women and untouchables. (71)

Comrade Pillai is an opportunist. The touchable workers of the factory are sour with the fact that the untouchable Velutha has been appointed as the chief
mechanic of the factory. They are fearful that this way Velutha may become their boss. So, they request Comrade Pillai to discharge Velutha from his position. Comrade Pillai does not want to lose a considerable number of votes of the touchable workers for the sake of just one member, a good and staunch member though. So, he makes false statement to the police that Velutha is not a party man. If he had taken some political steps, the life of Velutha could have been saved. It is he who helped Baby Kochamma's conspiracy in several ways. Contrary to his Maoist slogans- 'Annihilation of the class Enemy,' ‘Caste is Class,’ he doesn't help Velutha against Chacko as he is their common enemy. Contrarily, to add fuel to fire, he gives his tacit support to torture Velutha. He says to Chacko:

But see, comrade, any benefits that you give him [Velutha], naturally others are resenting it. They see it as a partiality. After all, whatever job he does, carpenter or electrician or whatever-it-is, for them he is just a Paravan. It is a conditioning they have from birth. This I myself have told them is wrong. But frankly speaking, Comrade, change is one thing. Acceptance is another. (279)

Roy's exposure of opportunistic politics in the book is very real and authentic. But if this portrayal is judged on the basis of literature, she doesn't stand well. Arundhati Roy has given the names of some of the living politicians of Kerala which made the work controversial. She should have presented a satire on politics, let it be Marxism, like George Orwell through some images and symbols, allegory or parallels. Art doesn't mean the description of the thing in a straight way, but through the demands of art.
Though Inspector Thomas Mathew is a minor character, he plays a major role in the book. Through this character, Arundhati Roy seems to fling a harsh irony at the police administration where corruption is prevalent in every nook and corner. It is he who tortures Velutha in such a way in his police custody that the latter breathes his last. Roy says that the word POLICE stands for politeness, obedience, loyalty, intelligence, courtesy and efficiency. But if we judge the character of Thomas Mathew, he seems to be devoid of all these virtues. He is never polite. When Ammu goes to see Velutha, Inspector Thomas Mathew doesn't behave decently with this lady. He speaks the coarse Kottayam dialect of Malayalam and uses some vulgar words which are not supposed to be spoken before a lady. He stares at Ammu's breasts. He says the police know all they need to know and that the Kottayam police do not take statement from 'Veshyas' or their illegitimate children. To crown the effect, he even taps her breasts with his baton as gently as though he is choosing mangoes from a basket.

Moreover, Thomas Mathew does not discharge his duty well. He favours those who are associated with the political leaders. And he feels a sense of joy and victory in torturing a man like Velutha who is a dalit and one deserted by the party for whose causes he fights valiantly all his life. When Velutha is under his custody, he wants to be assured whether he has any political connection or not. He, in fact, verifies with Comrade Pillai whether he will extend any support to Velutha. Mr. K. N. P. Pillai makes it clear in a straightforward way that the culprit, Velutha, has no political connections with his party. Emboldened by this blatant lie, the police inspector delights in torturing Velutha mercilessly. Velutha, is an untouchable
Paravan, a dalit of the village. His piteous plight reminds us of Bakha in *Untouchable*, Gangu in *Two Leaves and a Bud* and Munoo in *Coolie*. Though he is an outcaste, he is gifted with so many virtues. He symbolically stands for “The God of Small Things”.

Arundhati Roy develops this character to the level of a tragic hero who suffers and attains tragic grandeur. His tragic death arouses a sense of pity and catharsis in the readers. The author calls him "the God of Loss" (217). What Edwin Muir observes about a dramatic figure can be mostly applicable to Velutha. Muir observes: “The dramatic figure is the opposite of the man of habit; he is the permanent exception. He breaks habit, or has it broken for him; he discovers the truth about himself, or in other words develops. He dramatizes his real nature, where the flat character dramatizes his second nature or at best something in him, which has been real but is so no longer” (142).

Velutha is an expert craftsman. He was 14 when Johan Klein, a carpenter from a carpenter's guild in Bavaria, came to Kottayam. It is he who taught the art of carpentry to Velutha. Every afternoon, after school, Velutha caught a bus to Kottayam, where he worked with Klein till dusk. At the age of sixteen, he finished his high school and became an accomplished carpenter. He developed a “Garman design sensibility” (75). The author observes:

He built Mammachi a Bauhaus dinning table with twelve dinning chairs in rosewood and a traditional Bavarian chaise lounge in lighter jack. For Baby Kochamma's annual Nativity plays he made her a stack of wire-framed angels' wings that fitted onto children's backs
like knapsacks, cardboard clouds for the Angle Gabriel to appear between, and a dismantlable manger for Christ to be born in. When her garden cherub's silver are dried up inexplicably, it was Dr. Velutha who fixed its bladder for her. (75)

Apart from the skill of carpentry, Velutha has a special knowledge of repairing machines like radios, clocks, and water-pumps. It is he who looks after the plumbing and all the electrical works at the Big Ayemenem House. Mammachi often says, "If only he hadn't been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer" (75). Moreover, when Mammachi decided to enclose the back verandah it was Velutha who "designed and built the sliding folding door that later became all the rage in Ayemenem" (75). He also oils the water pump and the small diesel generator. To put it in short, he is a sort of Ekaalivan. The fortunate side of his story is that his German mentor and guru Klein is not the Dhronachari of the great Indian epic Mahabharat. Klein was happy and willing to teach the untouchable and the lowly Paravan unlike Dhronar who not only refused to teach the low-caste Ekaalivan but also had the thumb of the self-taught outcaste cut off vindictively for mastering archery.

Velutha has a strong sense of uplifting from bottom to top. His father, on the other hand, is a traditional, conservative man who wants to lead a life of subjugation only, just like the father of Bakha in Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand. Velutha, along with a number of dalit untouchables converts to the Christian religion only to immune himself from the victimization of a casteist society. But his conversion and his technical expertise, apart from many other good things,
never bring any fruitful result in this callous society. Velutha, along with his father, always goes to the Ayemenem House to deliver coconut plucked from the trees. But they are never allowed to enter the house. They were not permitted to touch a thing that a 'Touchable' touches. Mammachi remembers the days:

when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom sweeping away their foot prints so that Brahmins and Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's foot print. In Mammachi time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on 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. (72-74)

Velutha has to undergo so many insults and abuses engendered by police, politics and society. Here again the character of Velutha is very near to Bakha in the novel Untouchable. Bakha has to suffer insult and abuse without any rhyme or reason. He suffers only because he is an untouchable. In a fit of anger he bursts out: "Why are we always abused? The sanitary inspector that day abused my father. They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung. They hate dung. I hate it too" (63). But the basic difference between Bakha and Velutha is that the former is more active and aggressive than the latter. Velutha never believes in a frontal attack. He is a man of sober nature and congenial behaviour. Bakha, on the other hand, at least strives to raise hail and fire (though he doesn't do it) on the high caste people. M.R. Anand observes:
But there was smouldering rage in his soul. His feeling would rise like spurts of smoke from a half smothered fire in fitful jerks when the re-collection of abuse or insult he had suffered kindled a spark in the ashes of remorse inside him. (64)

But such an emotion, full of rage and anger, is not part of the character of Velutha. He is a silent sufferer. He never behaves like a roaring tiger; never tries to hammer out the age-old norms of society and tradition; never behaves like a rough and savage man- a man who has nothing to do with etiquette and manner, decorum and decency. He is a man of innocence and ignorance. But unfortunately, this innocence is badly caught in the web of casteist mentality and the corrupt police administration. Though Velutha is a great carpenter and a skilled mechanic, still he does not command respect in society. His father is dead against any type of education or advance knowledge in a Paravan. He thinks that such accomplishments could (and would, and should) be construed as insolence. Further Vellya quickly degenerates into nagging and bickering which ultimately leads to a sense of unpleasantness between the father and the son.

Consequently, in course of time, Velutha begins to avoid going home. He works late, catches fish in the river and cooks it in an open fire. He also spends the night out doors. All of a sudden, he is not seen for at least five months. He does not say anybody about his exile. When he comes to Ayemenem, Mammachi again rehires him as the factory carpenter and the general maintenance of the whole factory is given charge to him. But this causes a great stir among the factory
workers, because the touchable workers of the factory are so wild with casteism that they think that the Paravans are not meant to be carpenters.

So, in order to keep the workers happy, Mammachi pays Velutha less than she would give to touchable workers: “In Velutha's case, it is class and caste discrimination that makes him powerless and not his gender. His greatest crime is that while being a Karna he has dreamt of Draupadi” (160).

The real tragedy begins in the life of Velutha when he comes in contact with Ammu or rather when Ammu's troubled eyes and dimpled cheeks turn Velutha a transgressor as well as a victim. His facile entry into the secret heart of a touchable woman proves to be a costly doom in the life of this inexpensive low-caste man. There is no point in nitpicking about whether Velutha develops his weakness for Ammu or vice-versa. The fact is that they spend their pleasurable nights on the bank of the river, just beside the History House, which brings their history to an infamous end. Clouded eyes held clouded eyes in a steady gaze and a luminous woman opened herself to a luminous man. She was as wide and deep as a river in spate. He sailed on her waters. She could feel him moving deeper and deeper into her. “He lay over her, careful not to put his weight on her. He kissed her eyes. Her ears Her breast. Her belly” (337). But the weight of all the forces of the anti-dalit combine brought the roller coaster joy ride to a fatal end to the paravan and the ignominy of family ostracism and ultimate death in penury to the woman who had once been a bold rebel.

This illicit relationship was dead against the attitude of both Marxism and socialism. The Ayemenem leader, Comrade Pillai, doesn't approve of this not
because he is a staunch follower of the Marxist ideology, but because it serves his selfish ends. He is such a leader who only knows how to make capital out of every mishap. He plays double games. Velutha goes to Pillai for help. But in this critical juncture, he leaves Velutha in the lurch. He doesn't make any political intervention with the police. The police administration is also not happy to see the illicit relationship between Velutha and Ammu not because of any moral stance, but only because it is an invaluable opportunity to bring the rebel among the dalits to their feet. Velutha is severely beaten by the police in the police custody. He is wrongly charged with the alleged murder of Sophie Mol, though she was accidentally drowned in the river while playing on the boat. The police beat Velutha so mercilessly that he dies in custody. Arundhati Roy presents a scene of heart-rending pathos in describing the piteous plight of this untouchable:

Blood spilled from his skull like a secret. His face was swollen and his head looked like a pumpkin, too large and heavy for the slender stem it grew from. A pumpkin with a monstrous upside down smile.

Police boots stepped back from the rim of a pool of urine spreading from him, the bright, bare electric bulb reflected in it. (319-320)

It is not Velutha, the untouchable who doesn't sweep off his foot prints as his forefather does, who alone is destroyed; it is in reality an entire section of society that is annihilated on the irrational logic of being low-born. Velutha is Roy's construct of man trying to break loose of slavery imposed by man on man. People like Mammachi, Kochamma, Chacko, Pillai and institutions like police and other authorities are her construct of divisive forces that render humanity worse
than the animals that prey on the lesser ones to establish their rule of lawlessness.

In this independent democratic country, his footprints are erased by the jungle raj of the establishment represented by the police, state and tradition. Patriarchy and society punish both the woman who has 'defiled generations of breeding' (258) and the paravan who has challenged the age long tradition of untouchability. Both these Mombatties fall victims to the unacknowledged fear, "civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness" (308). Laxmi Parasuram points out:

Velutha's place in history was predetermined-he was not expected to see many things that were out of bounds for him, obscured by history's blinkers. He was the God of Loss, God of Small Things, of Goose Bumps and sudden smiles who had to go about furtively denying his own presence. But one day changed the whole course of his life; he was caught in the noose of history with a suddenness, which the big brought upon the small.

In short, Velutha, the silent sufferer, takes no cognizance of social conventions and restrictions and thus comes in conflict with history, administration and social code of conduct. Roy has so beautifully portrayed his character that the readers are very soon drawn towards him; that his tragic fall arouses an atmosphere of pity and catharsis in the mind of the readers; that they are so richly enamoured with the virtue of Velutha that they are bound to show their sympathy to him. The author is also of the opinion that the tragic upheaval going on in the innocent mind of Velutha can't be exactly felt by a man who doesn't have any
experience regarding it. She observes: "You can never understand the nature of brutality until you see what has been loved being smashed" (161).

Velutha is a socially discarded, politically neglected and physically tortured character who wants to rise above his stature but is mercilessly put down to the lowly ground; a character who harbours in his heart of hearts a great love for Ammu and her twins; a character who, though a great expert in his work and duty, is not properly rewarded; a character who though thoroughly devoted to the cause of the party, is not helped by the leader of the party Mr. Pillai, a character who has to suffer the scourge of untouchability. All the so-called big powers are frauds, humbugs whose one and only motive is to humble the truly big, powerless and a miniscule minority as they are.