Chapter - V

A POLITICAL INTERPRETATION OF

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS
Many critics have underscored the political significance of the book. As Swathi Chandorkar points out, "Saresen suggest that Roy was applauded by at least some of the reviewers not because of the literary value of her book but because of its political significance" (Swathi Chandorkar, p.188).

_The God of Small Things_ has attracted hostile reception especially from left circles for the incorrect portrayal of the veteran communist leader M.S.Namboodiripad. Aijaz Ahmad alleges that the novel is anti-communist, "Her ideological position to communism is very much a sign of the times in the sense that hostility towards the communist movement is now fairly common among radical sections of the cosmo-political intelligentsia in India and abroad" (Ahmad, p.103).

Arundhati Roy has selected a theme, created some characters and described the surroundings-both physical and human as she wished. _The God of Small Things_ does not appear to be a political novel. The main theme of the novel has nothing to do with either presenting or evaluating political events of a particular period. Still, several times the writer found an occasion or made room to comment on the politics of Kerala between 1958 and 1970. One feels that the writer could easily have avoided reference to politics without damaging the main theme of the novel. Either directly or indirectly, the repeated references to the political events do not appear to be related to the story of the novel. They neither added nor substantiated the central theme of the novel. It was the firm and irresistible political convictions of the author that made her comment on them. The writer made uncompromising and categorical comments on political events of Kerala. Thus, it becomes a social novel by a politically committed novelist. Since this is the case, the contents automatically invite the scrutiny of political observers. In particular, certain comments and observations by Roy have raised the hackles in certain sections. The essence of these comments is as follows.

(i) E. M. S. Namboodiripad is a castist. This is how he is described: "Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the flamboyant Brahmin high priest of Marxism in Kerala" (Roy, p.67). (ii) The rise of communism in Kerala was due to interplay of communal forces instead of ideological influence. This is how she interprets the growth of communism in Kerala: "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, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution. A heavy mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy” (Roy, p.67).

(iii) E. M. S. Namboodiripad was the reason for the expulsion of naxalites from the CPI (M) in Kerala (Roy, p.69).

The above statements show that the author has selected very serious political events for airing her opinions. For a section of readers these comments may be provocative. However, the interesting thing is that the author does not seem to have even checked the accuracy of these events. Though it is within her right to support a particular strategy adopted for revolution or not, ignoring the facts does not enhance the respectability of the novel. Take the example of a state wide procession taken out by pro-CPI (M) trade unions.

According to the author, the trade unions affiliated to that party took up a state wide one - day agitation to present a memorandum to the government. Since the government was lead by the CPI (M), and the agitation was led by its affiliated unions, the author describes it as “the orchestra petitioning its conductor”. According to the author, that particular agitation was conducted in the month of December 1969. Surprisingly, no CPI (M) led government existed during that time. Of course, a coalition government was lead by the CPI (M). It came into power after the 1967 general elections held to the Kerala Legislative Assembly. But the government resigned on 24th October 1969. So there was neither a CPI (M) government nor any orchestrated petitioning, much less any engineered agitation.

The language preferred by the author to criticize Namboodiripad is quite unbecoming. Words like ‘Brahmin High Priest’, ‘running dog’, ‘Soviet Stooge’ (Roy, p.69) seem too motivated. Even the worst political enemies of Namboodiripad had some respect for his sacrifice, his intellect and his influence on the politics of Kerala. His ideas were scrutinised, criticised and even rejected by
many, but not his political integrity. Again the expulsion of Naxalites from the C.P.I.(M) was an all India issue and Namboodiripad was not personally responsible for it. The second split in the communist movement in India saw the emergence of a new party with the name CPI (ML), popular as Naxalite Party. The Kerala unit was one of the weakest units of that party. Except for the veteran leader K. P. R. Gopalan, no other leader joined that party and its existence was short-lived in Kerala.

M. K. Naik defines the genre of the political novel as a novel, which either has a strong ideological leaning or one, which depicts political events. So by traditional definitions, political novels explain how politics works in particular societies. Roy’s novel can then be called a political novel for its depiction of political events whether or not ideological leaning can be seen. To be sure, part of the fame and success of the novel is because of its preoccupation with matters related to Kerala, its society, politics, culture, economy, environment, caste question, gender issue and so on. The novel thus appears as a document on Kerala and a critique of Kerala’s social, political, religious and cultural institutions. But had it been only that, the book would have ended as yet another political allegory. The novel could also be seen as autobiographical because it is the document of a personal story of Ammu as well as the saga of the Ayemenem family, it is also the story of the growing up of the twins Estha and Rahel. As the novelist herself says, it is the experience of 37 years of her life and her fears with which anyone could agree or disagree with. She further says, “for me the book is not about what happened, but how what happened affected people” (Wibur, p.46).

It should be seen as a combination of all these, the private and the public. The development of the story and the characters are not done in isolation but in relation to the socio political, cultural milieu that prevailed in Kerala during a specific period: the sixties and the seventies of the 20th century. In The God of Small Things the historical verisimilitude of the novel is doubtful. The reference to the Communist Party, its leadership, and its policies point out certain lapses and inconsistencies. But seen from the perspective of New Historicism, Roy’s novel holds out an image of reality, her own version of Kerala’s history.
Some of the inconsistencies in Roy's novel have already been pointed, as for example the purported time of the state wide agitation. In the light of postcolonial conception of India, one can attempt an understanding of the incorrect representation of certain facts by Roy. In Roy's book one can have the brief sketch of Communism in Kerala presented through the authorial voice. Arundhati Roy discusses 'oppositional theories' regarding the success of the Communist Party in Kerala. Even Chacko and Pillai representing Communist leadership have "no really complete explanation for why the Communist Party was much more successful in Kerala than it had been almost everywhere in India except perhaps in Bengal" (Roy, p.66). Of the several competing theories propounded, the first one is that "Marxism was a simple substitution for Christianity" and the second one is that the "success of the Communist Party had to do with the comparatively high level of literacy in the state." There is an implied rejection of both these views and it is the third position, which seems to reflect the author's view, "the real secret was that Communism crept into Kerala insidiously" (Roy, p.66).

This is a challenge to the official version and is contradictory to the reason given by the Communist Party. The authorial voice argues that Communism as a reformist movement in Kerala "never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste ridden, extremely traditional community" (Roy, p.67). Roy seems to contend that the Marxist theory of class struggle which was the focus of the communist experiment in Kerala has not done much to fight against the social hierarchy based on caste prevailing in Kerala. The elderly theoreticians who put communism into practice in Kerala overlooked the institution of caste, deep rooted in the society and equated lower caste with the lower class, the proletarian. E.M.S. explained his party's positioning the 50s, which was reprinted in Social Scientist in 1981, "Our party and myself as one of its activists have thus been basing ourselves on the Marxist theory of class struggle and subordinating the problem of caste oppression to the needs of uniting the exploited against the exploitation of classes irrespective of the caste to which he belongs."

It is this theoretical lacuna in the Party of sidelining the caste question that Roy is pointing out, as observed by Dasan (p.30). One can see this reflected in the behaviour of the characters of Mr. Pillai and Chacko. Mr. Pillai in the novel is not
only the local leader of the Communist Party, but also its prospective candidate to contest election to the State Assembly (Roy, p.120). Comrade Pillai projects himself as a champion of the downtrodden, yet at the core of his heart he is a class-conscious, ‘touchable man’, belonging to an upper class community. Pillai's hypocrisy and opportunism is revealed in his contemptuous reference to Velutha as ‘that Paravan’ (Roy, p.278), i.e., by his caste name and not by his real name, although the latter is the only other card - holding member of the Marxist Communist Party at Ayemenem. He tries to persuade Chacko to fire Velutha from his service, as he perceives Velutha as a threat to his own position in the Party, “The only snag in Comrade Pillai's plan was Velutha. Of all the Party workers he was the only card holding member of the Party, and that gave Comrade Pillai an ally he would rather have done without” (Roy, p.121).

The novelist implies that Pillai's Marxism is not borne out of any political ideology or conviction. He tells Chacko, “That Paravan is going to cause troubles for you ... Send him off ... He may be very well okay as a person ... You see, comrade, from local stand point these caste issues are very deep-rooted” (Roy, p.278). Comrade Pillai virtually betrays Velutha by wilfully suppressing certain vital information about his membership of the Party, which precipitates Velutha's arrest, torture and death in police custody. Comrade Pillai, though, does not admit his unsavoury role in the elimination of Velutha,” Though his part in the whole thing had by no means been a small one, Comrade Pillai did not hold himself in any way responsible for what had happened” (Roy, p.14).

Another character is Chacko, the self-proclaimed Marxist who is sneered at by his father for his idealism. His own sister Ammu describes him as “just a case of spoiled princeling, playing comrade! comrade! An Oxford Avatar of the old zamindar mentality”, for he flirts with the women employees in the factory under the pretext of lecturing to them on labour rights and trade union law. Despite his liberal progressive ideas, Chacko also represents the high caste feudal morality. Even Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, despite being non Hindus - Brahmans converted Christians-inherited the traditional feudal norms and values. Neither of them notice any contradiction between Chacko's Marxist mind and his feudal libido. Also despite being women, they have internalised patriarchal notions. Much
Arundhati Roy wields the scalpel of her irony in her handling of several major themes in the novel. She questions the hypocrisies and misconceptions of the society. The novel makes a scathing attack on the patriarchal and feudal notions of the high caste Hindus and the touchable high caste Syrian Christians of the society. What seems a story of a house peopled by abnormal personalities turns out to be a scanning of a society. It pinpoints the lopsided marriage system, gender biases and caste issues. It appears then that people who reacted emotionally and vehemently to her work noticed only the rhetoric of sheer condemnation and failed to see the other equally important issues, which form the focus of the novel. A more fruitful method would be to engage with the novel as a whole and the world housed in it and the major issues vitiating its ethos. The inconsistencies noted in the representation of political facts may be seen as irritants and it is not the researcher's intention to justify them: but researcher's view is that they need not detract from the literary worth of the novel. They are perhaps even to be expected, going by the postcolonial and postmodernist theories. The practice of the new generation of prominent Indian English novelists is an obvious example.

Irreverence, satire, irony, interrogation of central or official narratives, as also realism, characterise the portrayal of political figures and events in the writings of Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Shashi Tharoor, Khushwant Singh, Bapsi Sidhwa and others.

Social and historical realism in The God of Small Things does not in any way run counter to the thematic objectives of the novel. It appears to have been a part of Roy's intention to cover the bare bones of the story with details of social
and historical setting and scenario in order to give the reader a feel of patterns of living and daily routine, rituals, and sartorial habits, etc. However, *The God of Small Things* is not to be taken as a novel in the realistic tradition proper. It is a modern work. Like the works of James Joyce and Salman Rushdie, it employs poetic and symbolic modes along with realistic touches here and there with the limited objective of providing the social and cultural details characteristic of the persons and groups being dealt with in the novel.

Roy writes with zest about the styles of dressing by various characters. Sophic Mol lay in her coffin “in her yellow Crimplene bellbottoms with her hair in a ribbon and made – in - England go - go bag that she loved” (Roy, p.4). Similarly, Rahel and Estha are often described in terms of their dress and hair style, “Most of Rahel’s hair sat on top of her head like a fountain. It was held together by a Love-in-Tokyo-two heads on a rubber band, nothing to do with Love or Tokyo. In Kerala Love-in-Tokyo have withstood the test of time, and even today if you were to ask for one at any respectable A - 1 Ladies’ store, that’s what you’d get. Two beads on a rubber band.” (Roy, p.37).

Estha is often seen wearing his beige and pointy shoes and his Elvis puff. Mundu is a common article of dress in Kerala worn by lower and upper classes alike. Both Velutha and Comrade Pillai are shown wearing Mundu and its disadvantage is also pointed out. Around the Fifties and the Sixties most Syrian Christian women had started wearing saris. Both Mammachi and Baby Kochamma wear saris but “Kochu Maria still wore her spotless half - sleeved white chatta with a V-neck and her white mundu, which folded into a crisp cloth fan on her behind” (Roy, p.170).

One interesting feature of realism is the presentation of the typical scenes in private or public places. In Chapter 1, there is the penpicture of a vegetable market in the following passage, “Vendors in the bazaar, sitting behind pyramids of oiled, shining vegetables, grew to recognize him and would attend to him amidst the clamouring of their other customers..... me in the crowded train. A quiet bubble floating on a sea of noise.” (Roy, p.11). In Chapter 4, the readers are taken inside an Indian picture hall where a spectator is shown his seat by a torch - man. The fans make a whirring noise and people crunch pea - nuts in the darkness. There are the smells of breathing people, hair - oil and old carpets.
In Chapter 5, the readers are taken to a doctor's clinic where Ammu and Kalyani had taken their children to get foreign objects removed from their noses.

Another interesting feature of realistic writing is the description of amusing stock characters and activities found in a certain social setting. One have several examples of this kind of sketching. One such character is the ubiquitous old lady who came to help at Sophie Mol’s funeral. Masquerading as a distant relative, she often surfaced next to bodies at funerals. She “put cologne on a wad of cotton wool and with a devout and gently challenging air, dabbed it on Sophie Mol’s forehead” (Roy, p.5). Baby Kochamma herself is something of a stock character with fixed habits and mannerisms. Another interesting example is Murlidharan, the level-crossing lunatic. He was often seen perched cross-legged on the milestone with an embarrassing posture. In Chapter 1, the author presents a vivid picture of the church and performing of a funeral ceremony according to the customs of Syrian Christians, “The priests with curly beards swung pots of frankincense on chains and never smiled at babies the way they did on usual Sundays” (Roy, p.4)

The day Chacko’s daughter arrives, there is a special function in the family for her welcome. Everyone wears a special dress. Mammachi wears a bun made of her own fallen hair. She takes out her violin and plays a movement from Handel’s Water Music. After they alight from the car, Chacko proudly leads Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol up the nine red steps. Then, the usual greetings are exchanged. Mammachi makes eager enquiries about Sophie Mol’s physique. Even though an unpleasant stir is caused by Ammu’s peevish outburst, the ceremony continues. Kochu Maria cuts a sample piece of cake for Mammachi’s approval. Mammachi directs her to give one piece each to the family members present there. She puts the pieces on a large silver tray. In the meantime, Mammachi plays a Welcome Home, Our Sophie Mol melody on her violin. She is, however stopped in the middle of her performance by Chacko.

In Chapter 12, there is a description of the temple elephant and the custom of presenting stories from the Indian epics in Kathakali. This is a custom which has not died out. The Kathakali man is a well-trained person skilled in performing stories. He regards his stories as his children who are to be handled like children.
He teases them, he punishes them, he laughs at them, because he loves them. The stories are about gods. but being for popular consumption, they are infused with ordinary human joys and sorrows. One of the stories being regularly presented is that of the Mahabhara. Although in the modernized tourist centre people ridicule the Kathakali man, “He checks his rage and dances for them” (Roy, p.231)

It appears Roy’s own experience helped her a great deal in giving us a clear idea of elementary education and the reading and composition material made available to children. The twins were precocious with their reading and the books they read were intended for a higher stage. They had completed Old Dog Torn, Janet and John and Ronald Ridout Workbooks and they had heard Ammu read parts of Kipling’s Jungle Book. Baby Kochamma was incharge of their formal education. She read to them a version of The Tempest abridged by Charles and Mary Lamb. They were fond of reciting Ariel’s ditty, ‘Where the bee sucks, there suck I’ The children were made to write stories and Estha wrote the story of Ulysses’ return home and a composition on crossing the road, he also composed a story called, ‘Little Ammu’. The children were given instruction not only in reading and writing but also in etiquette.

Certain occurrences tend to become a permanent part of the heritage of a race or community and they are recalled with great fondness by the racial group concerned. One such event occurred in 1876 when Baby Kochamma’s father was seven years old. This was the occasion when the Patriarch was visiting the Syrian Christians of Kerala. Baby Kockamma’s grandfather had taken his son to the Kalleny house in Cochin to see the Patriarch. They found themselves right in front of a group of people whom the Patriarch was addressing in the verandah, “Seizing his opportunity, his father whispered in his young son’s ear and propelled the little fellow forward. The future Reverend, skidding on his heels, …..on the Patriarch’s middle finger, leaving it wet with spit. The patriarch wiped his ring ……..Reverend Ipe continued to be known as Punnyan Kunju - Little Blessed …….to be blessed by him.” (Roy, pp. 22-23)
The treatment meted out to the untouchables is a major concern of the novel. It is, therefore in the fitness of things and thematically relevant that the author supplies us historical information in socio-logical terms, that is to say, the social condition of the untouchables in the past. Although Velutha alone is an active factor in the scheme of the novel, Roy provides useful historical knowledge in terms of human relations. After the British came to Malabar, a number of low caste people including Velutha’s grandfather, Kelan, became Christians and joined the Anglican Church in the hope of being freed from the curse of untouchability.

When converted, they were given some food and money; so they became known as the Rice-Christians. But they soon realized that this did not improve their social position. They were still discriminated against by being given separate churches, separate services and separate priests.

They even had their own pariah Bishop. In principle, such converts became free of caste discrimination, but in actual social terms they were still treated as the lowest layer within the Christian community and, as usual, regarded with derision. Naturally, therefore the upper caste Christians avoided having social and marital relations with them. The Independence brought no relief to them: since they were Christians and, therefore no longer belonging to a low Hindu caste, they were deprived of such benefit as job-reservations or bank loans at low interest rates.

It is in this historical context that the readers have to view Vellya Paapen’s worries as regards Velutha’s conduct. Vellya Paapen was an old world Paravan and, therefore he naturally felt that any attempt at social equality on the part of an untouchable would be met with most severe punishment. He had an idea of the practice of backward crawling by the Paravans in the pat. Estha and Rahel were told by Mammachi that she could remember the times when “Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprints” (Roy, pp. 73-74). In those days Paravans and other untouchables were not allowed to walk on public roads, they could not cover their upper bodies and were forbidden to carry umbrellas. When they spoke, they were required to cover their mouths with their hands so that their polluted breath did not reach near the high caste persons they happened to be talking to.
Velutha, on the other hand, was a young man of the new age. His manner of talking to and dealing with the high caste people had an unmistakable smack of independence, self-respect and social equality. This is what alarmed his father. And it is shown by the consequences that hatred towards Paravans and their oppression were still very potent in Kerala. Arundhati Roy also indicates the pace and the measure of changes that have occurred since the days of Pappachi.

In the Nineties, anyone who visits a Kerala village will be struck by the contrast between two kinds of houses that reflect the disparity between the two sections of people that inhabit them, “Other days he walked down the road. Past the new, freshly baked, iced. Gulf-money houses built by nurses, masons, wirebenders and bank clerks who worked hard and unhappily in faraway places. Past the resentful older houses tinged green with envy, covering in their private driveways among their private rubber trees. Each a tottering fiefdom with an epic of its own.” (Roy, p. 13)

The advent of satellite TV is shown to have produced considerable impact even on the life styles of the older generation. Satellite TV became the new love of Baby Kochamma who was now able to get glimpses of modern life “It wasn't something that happened gradually. It happened overnight. Blondes, wars, famines, football, sex, music, coups d'etat - they all arrived on the same train”(Roy, p. 27). Baby Kochamma enjoyed watching The Bold and The Beautiful and Santa Barbara “where brittle blondes with lipstick and hairstyles rigid with spray seduced androids and defended their sexual empires” (Roy, p. 27). Baby Kochamma was joined by Kochu Maria in pursuing their new hobby, the lady sitting on a chair and the servant on the floor.

Finally, it may be noted that realistic fiction often focuses its attention on the seamy and shadowy aspects of life. Descriptions of dirt and filth are generously supplied in The God of Small Things. One can be taken to the humble dwelling of Velutha where his disabled brother is lying in bed. Even in June of 1993 the river was no more than a swollen drain, its old, awful grandeur is gone, now its spirit is spent. “It was just a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea. Bright plastic bags blew across its viscous, weedy surface like subtropical flying-flowers” (Roy, p. 124).
On the other side of the river also, there was filth and dirt produced by the people. Children hung their bottoms over the edge and defecated directly onto the squelchy mud of the exposed river bed. The smaller ones left their dribbling mustard streaks to find their own way down. Eventually, by evening, the river would rouse itself to accept the day's offering and sludge off to the sea, leaving wavy lines of thick white scum in its wake. Upstream, clean mothers washed clothes and pots in unadulterated factory effluents. People bathed. Severed torsos soaping themselves, arranged like dark busts on a thin, rocking ribbon lawn. (Roy, p. 125). In , the prisoners’ cells at the police stations are notorious for their filth and murkiness. With Estha, the readers are allowed a glimpse of the pitch dark lock - up in which Velutha was confined. Estha heard the sound of rasping, laboured breathing and the smell of shit made him feel like vomiting. The detailed description of the pickle factory is an excellent piece of realistic writing.

It is so detailed and clear because it arises out of Arundhati Roy’s personal experiences. She has herself stated that she spent the early years of her childhood in her grandmother’s factory in Kerala and became “a formidable curry - powder packer and pickle label sticker.” (First city,p.26)

The factory has gauze doors and the premises are dark and pickle smelling. The barn owl that lived on a blackened beam contributed its droppings to the flavour of certain products. One can get a view of the raw materials, products and furniture in the order in which they are placed: Green mangoes, cut and stuffed with turmeric and chilly powder and tied together with twine, glass casks of vinegar with corks, shelves of pectin and preservatives, trays of bitter gourd, gunny bags full of garlic and small onions, heaps of fresh green peppercorns, a heap of banana peels, the label cupboard full of labels, the glue and the glue - brush, an iron tub of empty bottles, the lemon squash and the grape - crush. The place is dark. “The jam was still hot and on its sticky scarlet surface, thick pink froth was drying slowly. Little banana bubbles drowning deep in jam and nobody to help them” (Roy, p. 194).

Most of the portions written with a view to presenting social reality succeed in according verisimilitude to the novel and also add flesh and life to the story. Historical realism, as the reader has been suggested, explains some developments
and consequences which would have been regarded as unexpected and unusual in its absence. Most of the realistic material thrown in does not appear to be obtrusive or uncalled for, although some portions like the long description of the pickle factory appear to stand for themselves. However, there are certain matters, political, biographical and personal which do not appear to be well-integrated with the theme.

If one can see it on a consideration of social realism in the specific sense employed by the Marxist critics. There are clear indications that Arundhati Roy is keenly aware of the exploitation and oppression of the havenots by the upper classes. In fact, The God of Small Things encompasses the poor, the exploited and the socially rejected people of the Kerala society; they are misfits, outcasts, factory workers, and low caste people. Arundhati Roy projects class antagonism and class exploitation in terms of caste, and she cleverly makes a contrast between Touchables and Untouchables. When there is a crucial confrontation, the class affiliations come out in the open. When Velutha is discovered to be carrying on sexual relations with Ammu, all the representatives of the ruling class and its allies form a solid front - the police, the communist leader, the feudal minded elders of the family—all unite in acts of extreme savagery. Arundhati Roy also presents a study of the class character of the C.P.M. leadership. They claim to be part of the working class but in actual fact they are middle class people practicing opportunism and failing to identify themselves with the workers in an act of genuine 'declassing' and they are for the people, not of them. This feature has been taken to be a cause of the slow progress of the movement in India. There is also an attempt to trace the rise of the Naxalite movement which seems to enjoy the author's sympathy.

It is also clear that the author has a genuine concern for the downtrodden. She presents a living picture of their suffering and the injustice meted out to them. She is even capable of empathizing with them. In the third chapter, 'Big Man the Laltain, Small Man the Mombatti' she depicts the condition of the Bihari porter. In fact, this chapter symbolically focuses on class antagonism and the meaning of the symbols can be worked out in political and economic terms. Like the Laltain, the upper classes are well-fed and well-protected, whereas the lower classes lack security and are subject to the perils of economic and political upheavals.
When one carefully examines the behaviour and words of the Orangedrink Lemondrink main, one can find that in his mind he harbours a bitterness against the feudal and rich people. He asks Estha to “Think of all the poor people who have nothing to eat or drink” (Roy, pp.104-5). He is also jealous of the boy for having a grandmother who owns a pickle factory and for being given pocket money, “You’re a lucky rich boy, with pocket money and a grandmother’s factory to inherit”(Roy, p.105). If the readers psychoanalyse the man’s child abuse one will discover that the act was a symbolic wish fulfillment for gaining mastery over the upper class.

Similarly, if one closely look at Ammu-Velutha relationship, one can find that, among other things, what draws Ammu to Velutha is their common discontent against the upper class people, “Suddenly Ammu hoped that it had been him that Rahel saw in the march. She hoped it had been him that had raised his flag and knotted arm in anger. She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness, he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against.” (Roy, pp.175-76)

Vellutha certainly was aware of the class antagonism and regarded Ammu and himself as belonging to two opposite camps. He tried to hate her, “She’s one of them, he told himself. Just another one of them”( Roy, p.214).

But the attraction was so strong that he could not maintain his position. He had to jump the class boundary. However, in spite of the author’s sympathy for the poor and dispossessed and identification with them, her portrayal is fragmentary and superficial. It is deflected from its true course by a bourgeois decadent romantic theme. The orientation given to the narrative moves away from the true intents of the novel of social realism.

One of the traditions that distinguishes India from other nations is the caste system. Like racism in America and apartheid in South Africa, caste is “the sign of India’s fundamental religiosity, a marker of India’s essential difference from the West and from modernity at large” (Dirks, p.5). Yet why put focus on caste instead of other cultural phenomena/practices in the novel? Does caste carry so much
influence in Indian society? The answer is definitely positive. In a sense, the Untouchable Velutha in the novel represents the political and social upheavals which are tightly related to colonialism, hegemony, class mobilization, hybridity, and identity problems in Indian society. In addition, the stigma of untouchability is so deeply ingrained in the minds of Indian people that it may become a dangerous juggernaut. Roy's portrait on the caste system poses a challenge to this centuries-old shibboleth and she expresses her disillusionment toward the social conditions of postcolonial India where the Untouchables still face a hostile society.

Centering around caste, then, is a chain of issues which constitute the major themes of this chapter. First, a historical background of the caste system will be given for readers to better understand the fixed social hierarchy in Indian society. It then is followed with an analysis of the connection between caste, Velutha and social mobilization in the novel. Meanwhile, the situations of subalterns in India will be manifested because they are the significant "cultural others" in Indian history. Following the discussion of these "subordinates" comes the problem of identity. Under the dominance and influence of colonialism, both Indian people and India have faced some kind of identity crisis. It then moves on to the orientalist perception of India as an exotic, mysterious nation. Yet there leaves some room for justification about whether the Orient is represented correctly in academic research and historical documents.

"Postcolonial exoticism," one of the features of Roy's novel, reveals to the readers the function and significance of cultural translation both within and beyond borders. As Allison Elliott points out, the origin of caste could be dated back to 1200 BCE. Caste comes from the Spanish and Portuguese word "casta" with the meaning of "race," "breed," or "lineage."

Yet nowadays many Indians use the term "jati" instead of the ancient ones. So far, there are 3,000 castes and 25,000 subcastes in India and each is related to a specific occupation.

These different castes are categorized into four varnas: Brahmins priests; Kshatryas--warriors; Vaishyas--traders; Shudras--laborers (Elliott,"Caste and The
God of Small Things"). Outside the caste system are the Untouchables. They are considered polluted and not to be touched. Since upward mobility is hardly seen in the caste system, most people remain in the same caste for their whole life and marry within that caste. The character Velutha in the novel is then an exception of caste norms since he works in the factory owned by the Touchable and he can talk with people higher than his rank. However, the division between the Touchables and the Untouchables is deeply rooted in Kerala so that Velutha is regarded as a nonhuman--"If they hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature--had been severed long ago" (Roy, p.293).

In late 19th century, there were three different views on caste: (1) The incubus view: caste as a divisive and pernicious force, and a negation of nationhood; (2) The "golden chain" view: caste as varna--to be seen as an ideology of spiritual orders and moral affinities, and a potential basis for national regeneration; (3) The idealized corporation view: caste as jati--to be seen as a concrete ethnographic fact of Indian life, a source of historic national strengths and organized self-improvement or "uplift" (Bayly, p.154). In the words of Indira Gandhi, the original idea of caste is incorporative of the whole Hindu community, about interdependence rather than exclusion or domination (Dirks, p.235). Also, Rushdie points out that "the new element in Indian communalism is the emergence of a collective Hindu consciousness that transcends caste and believes Hinduism to be under threat from other Indian minoritics" (Rushdie, p.31). However, caste is sometimes used to decry the backwardness of Indian society. Besides, it is seen as a force impeding social equality and the better treatment of women in Indian society. The debates never seem to end over the issues about tradition, modernity, civil society, religion, politics and nationalist ideology. Since caste arouses many debates and controversies, the main questions here are: Is caste good or bad for India’s development? Can caste be seen as a scheme of social and material "disabilities"? How can India become a truly free and independent nation if it remains a "caste society"? Bayly’s question - "To whom do concepts of caste matter, and in what areas of social interaction?" - is stimulating and the value of
caste between past and present becomes suspect. However, the readers can’t deny the fact that caste was and still is inscribed by relations of power through and through. In caste society, power is inevitably encompassed by status. On the one hand, caste is converted by colonial history into a special kind of colonial civil society. On the other, caste could be seen as India’s special religious form of social self-regulation and the reason for India’s unsuitability for modern political institutions (Dirks, p.276).

Given the fact that caste is intricately interwoven with colonial history, one shall not ignore that colonialism not only happened in the past but continues to haunt the postcolonial nation in the present. For example, the British colonizers may take advantage of caste to control and assimilate those colonized. Nowadays in postcolonial India, it is still possible that the dominant authority see caste as its potent tool to demarcate the social properties and benefits between rich/poor, powerful/powerless. If caste is a sign of the past, it is also a vehicle for the construction of a different future. Rather, caste is a fit subject for historical exploration. Indeed, caste may be a colonial hangover in modern India. Yet the challenge of the postcolonial predicament is to find possible ways to transform history and at the same time acknowledge the barbaric hold caste has on us all. Put simply, one of the purposes behind a postcolonial historiography of colonialism is “to come to terms with the weight of the colonial past without turning our backs on that past” (Dirks, p.302). Furthermore, caste is closely linked with class mobilization and political associations. Caste as one recognizes it today has been engendered, shaped and perpetuated by comparatively recent political and social developments.

Also, Sen reveals that “the impact of caste, like that of gender, is substantially swayed by class” (Sen, p.208). So what exactly is the distinction between caste and class? Generally speaking, “class” is referred to social and economic criteria while the term caste is usually used by those noncaste or groups outside the pale of caste. Yet this kind of classification is not without any problem since in this case, caste becomes the product of collective power or political dominance. As is shown in the novel, Untouchables are not allowed to “touch anything that Touchables touched. Caste Hindus and caste Christians” (Roy, p.71).
Some people even convert to Christianity and join the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. After Independence, however, the Untouchables find that they are still not entitled to any government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates (Roy, p. 71).

Hence, they couldn’t enjoy the benefits like other Touchables. Officially, they are Christians and therefore casteless. It is like “not being allowed to leave footprints at all” (Roy, p. 71). In this way, caste is a source of inequality and disparity, yet belonging to a privileged caste can help people overcome barriers that hinder them from getting a better future and promising welfares. In Grossberg’s words, “belonging’ opens up the possibility of another theory of identity and otherness, of identification and affiliation” (Grossberg, p. 148). Yet ironically for those Untouchables in India, their quest for a sense of “belonging” will not necessarily put them in the right place. In contrast, their “displaced” positions make them different from others and their identity is even more thwarted than before.

Take Velutha’s case for example. Despite his untouchability and poor background, Velutha is a great help to Ammu’s family. At first, it is Mammachi who notices little Velutha’s “remarkable facility with his hands” (Roy, p. 71). Apart from the carpentry skills, Velutha has a way with machines. In Mammachi’s words, if Velutha hasn’t been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer. Unlike the scholarly Oxford-training Chacko, it is Velutha who maintains the new canning machine and the automatic pineapple slicer. It is also Velutha who oils the water pump and the small diesel generator, and so on. Increasingly, the whole family of Mammachi depends more and more on Velutha. Yet it causes a great deal of resentment among the other Touchable factory workers when Mammachi rehires Velutha as the factory carpenter and puts him in charge of general maintenance.

Actually, there is a rivalry between Touchable and Untouchable workers since both sides need money to maintain their lives. In addition, Roy reveals to us that there is a competition and struggling between the local factories, the People’s
Government and the communist party. Not surprisingly, Velutha is a member of the Communist Party (Roy, p. 248). And he participates actively in the communist movements. At first glance, the communist party seems to provide political protection for those minorities and subordinate—"They were also demanding that Untouchables no longer be addressed by their caste names" (Roy, p. 67). For instance, when Comrade Pillai notices that "all the other Touchable workers in the factory resented Velutha for ancient reasons of their own," he "stepped carefully around this wrinkle, waiting for a suitable opportunity to iron it out" (Roy, p. 115). In this way, the communist party becomes the second government/authority which monitors the social order to see if there is anything wrong.

In Michel Foucault's terms, the disciplinary power here is to reduce multiplicity (difference, variety) to manageable and useful order (Harris, p. 269). Besides, the party even promotes workers' benefits by teaching them how to demand a raise, whether they succeed or not. Given the above elaboration, the question that has to be faced here is "caste is the natural focus of political mobilization and economic redistribution, as well as the somewhat illicit marker of cultural identity and traditional pleasure" (Dirks, p. 293).

Indeed, the caste consciousness is stirred by the impact of British colonialism, yet it also results in the movement for Sanskritization, caste solidarity and caste rivalry. As R. C. Vermani observes, due to the fact that the political evolution of Indian society leads to caste solidarity, some leaders of specific castes find it useful to mobilize support from caste brethren for social recognition, jobs and political favors which is encouraged by the gradual introduction of electoral politics (R. C. Vermani, p. 137). This remark can also apply to the binary concept between "us" and "them": "we' are the ones with a legitimate claim to solidarity; it is always 'they'- one's unworthy rivals - who are given to so-called 'casteism' or 'casteist' values and actions". Nevertheless, there is always a potential danger in social hierarchy and mobilization if caste is politicized or used as a source of political implementations. Rajini Kothari, a leading political scientist in India, has warned us that "casteism in politics is no more and no less than politicization of caste" (Rajini Kothari, p. 286).
Therefore, when castes' group themselves together for political purposes. To a certain degree, the political process does not always erase divisions within caste/class groupings. Rather, it provides new opportunities for exploitation and the enrichment of elites. In the end, the policy of caste-based reservations does not help solve the problems but encourages the caste-based politicization. Ultimately, the rich and the influential get benefited most, not the poor and the weak. With regard to social hierarchy and class division, inevitably one needs to deal with subalterns in India. The term “subaltern” refers to “those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes,” as it is pointed out in Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies. Jawaharlal Nehru has once commented: “...no group, no community, no country, has ever got rid of its disabilities by the generosity of the oppressor” (Jayawardena, p.73). Here, Nehru suggests that the oppressed is usually under the manipulation of the oppressor. As David Lloyd puts it, “minority discourse forms in the problematic space of assimilation and the residues it throws up” (David Lloyd, p.222). He goes on to argue that minorities are the underdeveloped “who have yet to attain the capacity to participate in representative structures” but are those “whose numbers have been systematically controlled by exclusion or genocide”.

Given the fact that minorities are those deprived of voices and rights, the original purpose of Subaltern Studies is to “produce historical analysis in which the subaltern groups were viewed as the subjects of their own history” (Chakrabarty, p.472). Since the subaltern is not acknowledged as the maker of his own destiny and is denied the access to hegemonic power, the central issue of subaltern mobilizations is “a notion of resistance to elite domination” (Chakrabarty, p.472). Nevertheless, the protest/struggle of subalterns does not necessarily succeed. Rather, subalterns are likely to be assimilated by the dominant groups. In other words, the center domesticates the other by way of assimilation.

As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts, “intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society’s Other” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 66). Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha insists that “the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present” (Homi.K.Bhabha, p.450). Indeed, there are good reasons to
believe that those elites can do something for the subordinate. Here, one can take
the peasant movements in India for example. As Guha insists, "the peasants was a
real contemporary of colonialism and a fundamental part of the modernity that
colonial rule gave rise to in India" (Guha, p.473).

It then raises the question of the relationship between texts and power when
scholars quest for a history for the subaltern. Since historical archives are usually
collections of documents, historians of peasants and other subaltern social groups
have long emphasized the fact that peasants do not leave their own documents
(Chakrabarty, p.478). Yet Chakrabarty believes that the illiterate are not in fact
inarticulate. Instead, they can and do express their subjectivity by showing their
strong will in the protest. The difficulty in historical documents lies in whether the
truth is represented or distorted, and to what extent. Therefore, Spivak's suspicion
is not rootless to me. She asks: Are those who act and struggle mute, as opposed to
those who act and speak? How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even
as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern
speak? (70; 80). Here, I am not going to take issue with the question of "whether
the subaltern can speak." Rather, there are always two forces of contention and
vicissitude between the dominator and the dominated.

It is not without possibility that both the elites and the subalterns achieve
their purposes by cooperating well together. Sometimes, it is through the
complicity of both sides that they get the benefits.

In Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, most of the characters cross
moral boundaries. Eventually, they all get punished for doing so. In this novel, Roy
presents two kinds of morality. One of them is social morality, which can be
defined as what a group thinks is good and right or the way one should behave.
The other one is individual morality, what oneself thinks is the right way to act.
These two kinds of morality inevitably clash. In The God of Small Things, Roy
presents and, in some way, even encourages her characters to stand in the middle
of this clash. She pushes her characters to pursue their personal truths. They are
seen reveling in their freedom and courage for doing so. But, eventually, they get
punished by their families and society.
The God of Small Things takes place in the Indian state of Kerala, a state where all the largest religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism exist. This is the part of India which includes the largest number of Christians, the group to which the Kochamma family belong to. This is also the part of India with the highest literacy rate in the country. Kerala is described as developed in comparison to other parts of India. However, it is not as developed as one might think or wish it was. In an interview with David Barsamian in the book The Checkbook and The Cruise Missile, Roy explains that the caste system is still used in Kerala, that Even among the Syrian Christians n who are the oldest, most orthodox Christians in India you have caste issues (Barsamian, p. 2).

She claims that the caste system, which is often seen as something made up and used by Hindus, is used all over India, no matter what religion or social class people belong to. In the same interview, Roy tells about the status of women in Kerala. She explains that women from Kerala work and earn their own money, which can be interpreted as high status. Nevertheless, they still will get married, pay a dowry, and end up having the most bizarrely subservient relationship with their husbands (Barsamian, p.5). Both these things the caste issue and the gender issue are dealt with in the novel. Probably the biggest issue in the novel is how influenced all parts of society are by social norms, the rules that decide how every single person in their society should, or should not act. These are the rules that underpin both the gender and the caste divisions, social norms that decide that men and women who act similarly should be treated differently and the social norms that also decide that people who have had the misfortune of being born into a low caste have much less rights than people who are born into a high caste.

The women in The God of Small Things belong to men throughout their whole lives. From the day they are born until the day they get married, they are the property of their fathers. The fathers decide how their daughters should live and act; they are supposed to make sure that their daughters act according to the social norms in their community. One way to see the oppression of the female characters in the novel is by looking at how to get married. In order to marry off their daughters, the fathers have to pay a dowry to the prospective husband. To have a woman in the family is therefore such a burden that the fathers even have to pay to get rid of them, to burden another poor soul with them.
Therefore, to in any way invest in women is worthless. One example of this is when Ammu wants to go to study in college, but Pappachi refuses to send her. He does not want to waste any money on a woman’s education. According to him, it is much better that she stays at home, with her mother, and learns household chores. Pappachi does not think that sending her to college will pay off; staying home, on the other hand, is something she, since when married she is going to stay at home anyway.

As a young, unmarried woman, Ammu spends a summer in Calcutta with a distant relative. This seems to be when she starts to get into trouble, and when she starts to cross social boundaries. During this summer, she meets her future husband, the father of her future children. This man is not the kind of man her parents want her to marry; he is a stranger to the family, and, worst of all, he is a Hindu. And for a young Christian woman from the upper middle-class, a Bengali Hindu is not the right kind of man to marry. Therefore, by marrying this man, she brings shame to not only herself, but to her whole family, something that the rest of the family of course is not so pleased about. Because the women are owned by men all their lives, the only way to leave their father’s home is by marrying their second owner.

Just moving on their own is something impossible for these women and this is also the case for Ammu. When she accepts his proposal, the only thing Ammu has in mind is to get out of Ayemenem, to escape the life she will have if she returns home. At the time, She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem (p. 39). She wants to flee Ayemenem and everything that has to do with her home town; so, for her, marrying him seems to be the only solution of her problems.

However, as Nirmala C. Prakash in the article Man-Woman Relationship in The God of Small Things claims, this kind of marriage, a marriage of convenience, can be as terrible as any other unsuccessful marriage (Nirmala Praksh, p.81). It is not painful for Ammu just because they do not get her parents approval. Furthermore, what Ammu does not realize immediately is that, by marrying this
man, she does not merely cross social boundaries. Unintentionally, she also continues the family - tradition of living in a loveless marriage. And this is, as she later realizes, an even bigger mistake; by marrying him, by putting herself in a loveless marriage a situation she is not happy in she also crosses her personal boundaries.

Obviously, marrying a Hindu is, according to the society Ammu comes from, a huge mistake, and her subsequent actions do not exactly raise their thoughts of her. In the end of their marriage, Ammu’s husband asks Ammu to spend some private time with his boss. But when Ammu refuses, he beats her in punishment for not obeying him, as if she does not really have a choice. Because she is a woman, it is seen as her duty to just do as he pleases. However, when her drunken husband starts to not only beat her, but also the children, the rebellious Ammu leaves him to live in her parents house again. Her return, if possible, is seen as even more scandalous than marrying a stranger. The reason why Ammu leaves her husband is irrelevant, no matter how terrible a husband he is, no matter how he treats Ammu and their children, according to their society, divorcing him is even worse.

There are no excuses for divorces, they are just the wrong thing to be part of. End of story. Baby Kochamma, who seems to have some ‘wise’ words for every moment someone crosses societal boundaries, explains what she, and the rest of their society, think about the way Ammu lives her life,”She subscribed wholeheartedly to her commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents home. As for a divorced daughter according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage Baby Kochamma chose to remain quaveringly silent on the subject.” (Roy, pp.45-46)

The family actually treats Ammu according to Baby Kochamma’s sentiments. This is something that is revealed already in the first few pages of The God of Small Things. When beginning to read this novel, one immediately understands that Ammu and her children must have done something terrible.
One section in the novel where this is really shown is during the funeral of Sophie Mol. "Though Ammu, Estha and Rahel were allowed to attend the funeral, they were made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family. Nobody would look at them" (Roy, p.5). They are allowed to go to the funeral, but they are not treated as a part of the family anymore. Now, their social standing is as low as Velutha's, or one of the other Paravans. Nobody wants to talk with them, nobody wants to come near them, they are, as Mohit Kumar Ray in her article Locust Stand I: Some feminine critics of The God of Small Things calls it, 'virtually untouchable' (Mohit Kumar Ray, p.52). Ammu and her children are not at all wanted in the Ayemenem house; which is clearly indicated by the rest of the family. Nothing they do, from here on, will improve their standing. After Sophie Mol's arrival, this starts to seem very clear. From that moment on, the true feelings of their family slowly become more and more evident. However, after the big revelation of the love affair of Ammu and Velutha, and the death of Sophie Mol, one really comes to see how resented Ammu and the twins are by their own family.

Because of the way the novel is narrated, because it constantly switches from one time to another, this is something one as a reader gets to experience very early in the book. However, the bad treatment of Ammu and her twins is something that is written about earlier in the plot too. These three people do not seem to be seen as worthy family members, as, for example, Chacko, Baby Kochamma or even Sophie Mol are. A place where this is shown is when the Kochamma family welcomes Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol to their country. Their British cousin gets a kind of welcoming that Rahel and Estha have never and probably will never get from their family, and the reason for this is that their mother married the wrong man. Ammu, of course, loves her children. All she wants is for them to be loved. But all she sees, and has seen, since the day they were born, in her own, or rather, her parent's home, and in the rest of their community, is her children being unloved. However, this changes the day she sees the way Velutha treats them; with him, they can play and laugh as much as they want. All Velutha does is to make them happy, loving them and accepting them. This must be one of the reasons, a big reason, why 'She loves by night the man her children love by day' (Roy, p.44).
Also Velutha does things that he, according to his society, is not supposed
to do because he is a Paravan, or an untouchable. To make things easy, one can say
that he is supposed to do everything in his power so that no touchable person has to
go through the disaster of coming into contact with him. This includes obvious
physical contact like touching, but also breathing directly on another, or talking to
a touchable. In The God of Small Things, Roy presents the history of the Paravans.
She writes about Velutha’s father who lived during “the Crawling Backwards
days” (Roy,p.76).

When Paravans had to crawl backwards and sweep away their footprints so
that Brahmins or Syrian Christians did not have to step into a Paravan’s footprint
and, by this, be polluted by any untouchables. And the Paravans still, to a certain
extent, live by the rules of those times.

Vellya Paapen is always worried about his son who does not seem to ‘know
any better’. He has really accepted the boundaries he, as a Paravan, cannot cross.
He does not seem to even think about questioning them. When Vellya Paapen tells
Mammachi about Ammu and Velutha’s love affair is one passage in the novel
where Roy really shows how ingrained the rules about castes are. Just going over
to the Kochamma home and telling the story shows how important it is for him to
please them. Before telling it, Vellya Paapen already knows that the Kochammamas
knowing about the love affair will probably kill his son, but this is not enough to
stop him. Instead of just telling the Kochamma family what he knows, and then at
least going to warn his son, he even offers to kill Velutha himself. The social
norms about castes are even more important to him that his own son’s life.

The “problem” with Velutha is that he does not let the caste he is born to
prevent him from doing what he wants. Although normally Paravans do not go to
school, or at least finish high-school, he does. But were most people would stop, he
just continuous. He does not think that maybe this is too much for a Paravan to do.
So he learns to be a carpenter and starts working at a place where he still does not
have the rights a touchable would have, but where he is allowed to do a lot more
than other Paravans. It is shown that the way Velutha lives his life, and the way he
is treated, is something unique, that he is not really like the other Paravans. “To
keep the others happy, and since she knew that nobody else would hire him as a
carpenter, Mammachi paid Velutha less that she would pay a Touchable carpenter but more that she would a Paravan. Mammachi didn’t encourage him to enter the house (except when she needed something mended or installed). She thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed to the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that Touchables touched. She said that it was a big step for a Paravan.” (Roy,p. 77) Velutha is treated differently than the other Paravans, and, as Mammachi seems to see it, the only reason for this is the kindness of her good heart.

However, in a way, Mammachi takes advantage of the knowledge that Velutha possesses. She knows that given his capability, he deserves to get a much better job. But, along with this, she also knows that because he belongs to this very low caste, there is no possibility for him to get a better job than the one she has to offer him. Therefore, she can take advantage of the situation and pay him less than he deserves. For Velutha, being treated differently is not necessarily something painful; as long as he does not cross any boundaries seen as awfully important, he is still, to a certain extent, accepted. Velutha is allowed to do things that Vellya Paapen and other Paravans seem to not even dare to dream about.

However, the thing that annoys a lot of people is not just him having these rights. The thing that is so unique about Velutha is that he does not seem to think that he is fortunate. By the way he acts, it seems like he does not really care about the caste laws that so clearly control, among many others, his own father’s life. It seems as if he almost cannot see that he is a Paravan, that he has a lower caste than a lot of people, and, that being a Paravan, being Velutha, should not be something to be proud of, as social norms dictate. But Velutha does not think about these things. He does not see the difference between a touchable and an untouchable. He does not see why a Brahmin or a Syrian Christian should be worth more than him, or why he should be thankful to them, when he knows if it was not for his own intelligence, for his own capability with machines, he would never be were he now is and that none of it is because of the touchables’ kindness. The touchables in Ayemenem must be very annoyed by this, and they probably think him clueless, they probably see Velutha as ignorant because he does not seem to realize that he is subordinate to them.
What he rather should do, according to society, is to be ashamed of who he is. He should think less of himself; he should be grateful; he should be thankful to the touchables who allow him to live the life he lives, who allow him to have the advantages he has. In a way, it seems like they want him to be grateful to them for letting him live at all. It seems like they in some way even believe that it is thanks to them he is alive, that without them, there would never even be a Velutha. They do not see the kind of gratefulness that, for example, Vellya Paapen shows them. To a certain extent, by the way he acts, he does not let them feel superior to him. And this, to not really admit that he is less worthy than the touchables, is one of the worst things he does in this novel, Roy does not try to write a happy ending. So, the people who transgress the social boundaries eventually get punished for doing so. This does not necessarily mean that they get what they deserve.

They get punished for being good, or for just following their heart, without harming other people. And, in the same time, people who bring a lot of evil to the world still go through life rather easily. Both Ammu and Velutha are very good examples of people who act against the social norms and who are punished, fairly severely, for this.

The first example of people getting punished, for crossing the societal boundaries, which comes to mind, is probably Velutha. He is a good person who happens to be born in the wrong caste; he is born a Paravan, but he does not let that stop him from doing what he wants. He seems to really think that all people are equal; that being born a Paravan or a Syrian Christian does not make you worth more or less than anyone else. However, him thinking that everyone should be treated alike does not mean that everyone else will agree with him. The way he thinks and the way he acts upsets a huge amount of people. Even before the love affair with Ammu, he seems to be an outcast wherever he goes. For the touchables, he is just a Paravan, a worthless untouchable. However, he is in a way seen as even worse that other Paravans in their community; he does not feel subordinate to the touchables, and this is probably one of the worse things for an untouchable to do. But even with his own people, his own caste, he is an outcast. And the reason for this is probably the same as why he is an outsider for theouchables. The way Velutha acts and the way he is treated upsets the other untouchables. They probably feel that because Velutha does not let the touchables be superior to him, he is superior to other untouchables, that he is unique and worth more than them.
So both castes want Velutha to know his place, like the other untouchables already do. His love affair with an upper middleclass, Syrian Christian young woman, only makes people more upset than before, much more upset. He crosses almost all social boundaries that exist for his caste. Roy shows here that acting against social norms, crossing social boundaries is not something easy. She shows that crossing these boundaries is not something you can just do and then live your life the way you have always wanted to live. She shows that rebellious people, people who refrain from doing things they in their hearts know are wrong, eventually get punished, that the fairy tales do not correspond with reality; being good does not most of the time, pay off. And this is something Velutha experiences. The love affair with Ammu is the last straw, and for acting the way he does, the punishment he gets is death.

One could maybe think that Ammu gets off much easier than Velutha that she has done at least as much wrong as Velutha, but that Velutha is the only one to get punished. Nevertheless, I actually believe that Ammu is the one who gets the harder punishment; she is made to suffer for a very long time, for the rest of her life.

Velutha did not get off easily, but at least he did not suffer for years. Only twenty-four hours before dying, he was happy. In the chapter called The Crossing, the last couple of hours Velutha has before being found by the Police are presented. Here he is described as happy; he knows that his affair with Ammu is revealed and that he has to pay for it. However, he still seems to be quite optimistic about the future, "Things will get worse, he thought to himself. Then better" (Roy, p.290). And the beating and killing does not take a very long time. The happy thoughts in his mind do not have a chance to disappear entirely before he dies.

Ammu, on the other hand, does not immediately die. She suffers for a long time before she finally dies. Even before the affair with Velutha is revealed, Ammu pays for the mistakes she has made in her life, Ammu is treated differently in her family because she one time chose the wrong man. However, Ammu is not the only one suffering for this; her children, also Rahel and Estha, have to suffer because their mother chose the wrong father for them. They are treated differently for not having a father, for being children of a "Veshya’s” children of a whore, a prostitute (Roy, p.8).
After the reveal of her love affair with Velutha, Ammu is locked in a room, and later, she is taken away to live a life without her beloved children and they to lead a life without their dear mother. Ammu dies all alone in an empty, dirty room, without love, without any new happy thoughts in her mind. Therefore, her punishment is in a way much worse than Velutha's. Furthermore, even after her death, she is in a way not allowed to rest in peace. The choices she has made in her life, all the times she has transgressed societal boundaries, haunt her and her children, even after her death. One example of how wrong her actions are seen as is in the section where Ammu is dead and Rahel and Chacko have to decide what to do with the body, when it is told that the church refuses to bury Ammu, and she is sent, wrapped in a dirty bed sheet, to the crematorium, where beggars, abandoned people, and people who have died in police custody are sent to be cremated after their death (Roy, p.162). Here, I think, it is really shown how lonely Ammu must have been those last years.

The fact that the church does not even want to bury her and that the bedsheet she is sent away in is dirty shows how little she is worth in people eyes she cannot even get a decent burial or cremation, but, is sent as this useless object, almost as just some piece of garbage they need to get rid of. She has to pay for the mistakes she has made in her life with every single day, for the rest of her life, and even after this, in loneliness.

In spite of all the violence and death in this novel, it in a way ends quite happily, and especially, hopefully. It ends with the scene with Ammu and Velutha, when Ammu tells Velutha naaale, meaning tomorrow (Roy, p.340). And, in a way, this tomorrow gives hope. It feels like a future will come, that better times will come. And better times do actually come, eventually. This is discovered twenty years later after the scandal of Ammu and Velutha, when Rahel returns to Ayemenem. She has, just like her mother, married into an intercommunity love marriage and has also gotten divorced; but the difference now is that she does not really get punished for living the way she does and for making the choices she has made. People still see divorces and intercommunity love marriages as something bad, as something one should not do. But Rahel and other divorcees do not get
punished as hard as for example Ammu did, for choosing to do what they do. It is shown that their society is slowly progressing, with great losses, but still, progressing.

_The God of Small Things_ deals with the ravages of caste system in south Indian state, Kerala, the miserable plight of untouchables and also the struggle of a woman trying to have fulfillment in life in a patriarchal society is successfully presented in the novel. Certain political developments in a country at the dawn of Independence, like the formation of the congress Government at the center headed by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and mainly the impact of communist party on Kerala state has been explored in the novel.

The community represented in _The God of Small Things_ is Syrian Christian. The Christians of Kerala are divided in five churches, they are: Roman Catholic, Orthodox Syrian, Nestorian, Marthoma and Anglican. Syrian Christians claim Apostle Thomas as their founder. The term “Syrian” refers to the West Asian Origins of the group’s ancestors and to their use of Syriac as a liturgical language. For centuries, their spoken language has been Malayalam. In the novel religious differences appear in the disagreements between Father Mulligan (who belongs to the Roman Catholic Church) and Revered Ipe (who belongs to the Mar Thoma) as well as in Baby Kochamma’s conversion to Catholicism and her consequent lack of suitors.

The socio-political changes brought about by colonial rule led to the upper caste Hindus shunning the Syrian Christians. Between 1888 and 1892 every one of the main Syrian Christian denominations founded so called Evangelical society to sort out low-caste converts and built schools and chapels and publicized mass baptisms. _The God of Small Things_ thus refers to the schools of “Untouchables” built by the Great Grandfathers of the twins Estha and Rahel. However, as Roy points out, even though a number of Parvans and members of other low castes converted to Christianity, they were made to have separate churches and thus continued to be treated as “Untouchables”. After Independence, they were denied Government benefits created for “Untouchables” because officially, on paper, they were Christians and therefore casteless.
“It did not take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan to the fire. They were made to have separate churches with separate services and separate priests. As a special, favour they is-ere given their own separate Parish Bishop.” (Wilbur, p.74) Their condition further deteriorated after the Independence. Their forefathers were not allowed to leave footprints on the path. In their case, however, “It was a little like having to sweep away (their) footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all”. (Roy, p.74)

The reader is variously reminded in the novel of high-class Christians abhorrence of “Parvan smell”. To Baby Kochamma, the very thought of a Parvan touching the body of a Syrian Christian lady is abominable. The Ammu, Velutha affair clearly reflects the caste and class differences. A low caste man and an upper class divorcee have broken the “Love Laws”. Their illicit relationship shocks the entire social order. The ultimate outcome of this love-affair is the tragic death of an “Untouchable” by the “Touchable Boots” of the state police. The divorcee's affair with a Parvan horrifies not only the family but also the hypocrite Marxist leader, Comrade Pillai. Ammu goes insane and dies in grief. Caste, class, gender discrimination and culture all conspire against Velutha and Ammu.

The novel deals with another equally important issue that is the novelist’s valorization of the woman in Indian society. Gender in a patriarchal society, plays a very important role in discriminating between the powerful and the powerless. According to the ideology of male superiority and female inferiority all men are empowered to exercise “right” over all women.

The predicament of women is presented by Arundhati Roy through her female characters. These characters represent Indian women belonging to three generations. They are all exploited in The God of Small Things.

Pappachi, the ‘patriarch’ ill treats his wife who bears his beating and abuse in silence. He would donate money to orphanages and leprosy clinics. “But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to
Mammachi belongs to the upper class but she has no rights whatsoever in her husband's family. Moreover, he was always a jealous man. He does everything to assert his manliness. His violence, creating fear in his subjects, serves as a manifestation of his frustration. When Mammachi starts pickle making, he does not help her though she is turning behind and he himself has retired. Pappachi's bashing stopped when Chacko twisted his hand and warned him not to repeat it. But still Mammachi had to undergo another sufferance. “He (Pappachi) never touched Mammachi again. But he never spoke to her either as long as he lived.” (Roy, p.48)

Ammu, the biggest victim of the system, is an archetypal image of a daughter marginalized in a patriarchal society. Ammu, the central character of the novel, has only a marginal existence in the family structure. Her experiences of marital life were almost equally shattering. She had to live with a “cold calculating cruelty” (Roy, p.118) throughout her life. “Drunken violence followed by post drunken badgering at the hands of her Bengali husband” (Roy, p.42). By the time she realized that “life had been lived... she made a mistake. She married the wrong man” (Roy, p.47). It was already too late.

Rahel in the novel, the representative of the third generation, who is still better off than her grandmother and mother. Rahel has been a 'rebel' right from her childhood. She wanted to have a watch which would show time according to her wishes. In the convent, she smoked, burnt her teacher’s bun of hair and dashed against young girls to see if breasts could hurt one. Her grandmother tolerated Pappachi silently throughout the life. Ammu later had the guts to divorce her husband though she knew that she is the unwelcomed guest in her father’s house. Even then she did not give up her body and was ready to face the consequences. The third generation was Rahel who “grew up without a brief, without anybody arranging a marriage for her. Thus there is a generational shift in the attitude of three women. Through Baby Kochamma’s example the novelist shows that women are the worst perpetrators of sufferings on women.

“Along with gender-oppression, Roy comments on the colonization of the mind which many Indians suffer from.” (Ashish Nandy, p.83) Chacko’s father,
Pappachi, was very proud of his Government job to which he wore a three-piece suit unfailingly even in the extreme heat of Ayemenem. According to Ammu, Pappachi was an incurable British C.C.P., which was short for ‘Chhi-Chhi-Poach’ and in Hindi meant shit-wiper (Roy,p.51). The glorification of the west is thus visible. The Indian vs. the English dilemma is thus illustrated throughout the novel in the whole family of Ipe. Certain other issues like woman’s no right to property are also touched. Though Ammu is a daughter of the family, she has no say in any matter regarding property of household. Everything belongs to Chacko. Similarly Ammu had not the kind of education, reading or even upbringing like her brother. After growing up and completing her school she is left with the only option of waiting for marriage; as with most of Indian women.

Child negligence and child abuse is another issue. Rahel and Estha, the Siamese twins, are exploited by various kinds of persons. They behaved like “A pair of actors hopped in a recondite play with no hint as plot or narrative, stumbling through their parts, nursing someone else's sorrow. Grieving someone else's grief.” What made matters worse was the fact that no efforts would enable them to get the solace from a well meaning person who would say to them You are not the Sinner. You are the Sinned Against. You were only children. You had no control. You are the victims, not the perpetrators.” (Roy,p.191).

The novel is thus an unqualified tribute to the innocence of childhood. The treatment meted out to them at the hands of people like Comrade Pillai and Inspector Thomas Mathew was nothing unexpected. The two custodians as law and justice “ didn't trust each other. But they understand each other perfectly. They were both men whom childhood had abandoned without a trace. Men without curiously. Without doubt. Both in their own way truly, terrifying adult.” (p.262). These lines clearly explain the novelist's eagerness to empathize with children. Further, Estha is sexually abused by the Orange-Leman drink man in the theatre. This memory haunts him and leaves him frightened and insecure. The adult never paid attention to this catastrophe and they Continued to behave as though everything is all right. The God of Small Things also deals with another important theme, the theme of marriage. Society regulates marriage in a number of ways. Marriage is one of the interpersonal relationships that society sanctions unreservedly.
But all marriages in *The God of Small Things* are failures, except Margaret's second one. There are five different marriages Mammachi and Pappachi, Chacko and Margaret, Ammu and Baba, Rahel and Larry Mc Caslin, Joe and Margaret. Pappachi always beats Mammachi. Chacko, an Indian husband fails to adjust with an English wife. Margaret later marries Joe. Chacko is the representative of eastern culture whereas Margaret of west. it culture with her liberalism. Ammu and Baba's intercommunity marriage also fails. The clashes between Christian culture and Bengali Hindu culture create problems. Rahel's marriage to a foreigner also fails. Thus, the novel deals with the theme of marriages in detail.

The novel touches the political history of Kerala of the turbulent communist periods of the fifties and the sixties. Though Roy denies that *The God of Small Things* is not about history in an interview, Roy maintained that the novel is not about history but biology and transgression. But still the bold referral to the various political happenings during the time, can not be neglected. The political developments in the country at the dawn of independence, the formation of the congress Government at the center headed by Pt Jawaharlal Nehru are all recorded in the novel.

Political reference becomes more pointed as in 1957, under E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Kerela 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 Kerela more often than not. Roy writes that the reason behind the communist Party's success in Kerela was that it "Never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxist worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to." The communist movement was supposed to aim at a classless society. In spite of communism's theoretical emphasis on equality and justice, the institution of the party in Ayemenem functions from within the caste system. This institution like Christianity, is concerned with maintaining itself to acquire power.
Arundhati Roy's novel is born in the soil of Kerela and it could not take roots in any other soil. Throughout the 300 odd pages of this book, Kerela remains a vibrant, throbbing presence. The reader is never allowed to forget that one is in God's own country. The vegetation of the region, the undulating landscape, the proximity to the Arabian Sea and the backwaters of Kerela provide an immortal locale to the novel.

At the beginning of the novel itself, the lush green post-monsoon scene is created. "But by early, June the South West Monsoon breaks. The countryside twins an immodest green-Boundaries blue as tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn moss-green. Pepper ii incs snake up electric poles. Wild creepers burst through laterite banks." (Roy, p.1)

The readers have a living description of nature throughout. Roy has an eye for minute details pertaining to its shape, colour and size, moods, wishes and whims. The most integral part of this landscape is the river Meenachal, which has been referred to by the novelist as "a better happier place." The Meenachal river flows through the Kottayam district. The kids Rahel and Estha loved this river and spent many happy hours on its banks or in a boat on the river. But one can not forget Roy's concern for the degeneration of the environment. This degeneration is the result of various projects, launched in the name of development. This reveals her role in the Narmada Bachao Andolan. In an essay "The Greater Common Good", She herself says, "... the congealed monass of hope, anger, information, disinformation, political artifice, engineering ambitious, disingenuous socialism, radical activism, bureaucratic subterfuge. misinformed emotionalism and of course the pervasive, invariably dubious. politics of super national Aid." When Rahel comes back she finds a definite degeneration set in the landscape. Roy hints at the reality, how progress brings in the degeneration. The degeneration is chiefly due to economic progress, which involves a price. This change is not for the good but is for the worse.

Some western feminist critics have gone to the extent of equating nature with women. The God of Small Things portrays the exploitation of nature and woman equally, the patriarchal, imperialist and mercantile systems have caused immense destruction to both woman and nature.
The novel is, thus, of great relevance to the whole of India, socially and politically. The spread of treatment of these socio-political concerns in her fiction corroborates the truth that she is a powerful writer of talent and vision who is deep-rooted in ground reality. The readers may not agree with Roy in her views on India's need to take to nuclear testing, but in a democratic country like ours she has a right to stick to her views. With her wide experience and maturity, she may hopefully come out with better works of fiction, which she regards as a way of negotiating, with the world. She has immense possibilities despite her limitations, and one will be eager to see how well she makes most of the opportunities coming her way.