Chapter - III

THEMATIC CONCERNS

IN

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS
Love among the characters in *The God of Small Things* is an issue concerning life and death. To love or not to, similar to Hamlet's question of to be or not to be, has been a tormenting struggle because there is always something more to think about besides love itself. A more careful consideration is required. In one's decision to give or to take love, the social hierarchy, class alienation, public's point of view and expectations must be all taken into consideration. Therefore, the exchange of love in Indians' interpersonal relations is not based on individual's personal preference, but accords with the social codes and ethical teachings that instruct Indian people on how and what to love. Roy coins the oxymoronic term, Love Laws, to refer to this set of implicit codes and constraints in the Indian society that governs how Indians should deal with their love relationships. Love Laws, "the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how" (Roy, p.33), have drawn a border line for them.

By contrast, people who overstep the boundary of the safety zone to transgress the Love Laws would be punished. In satisfying their erotic desires with the wrong person, the transgressors would have to accept the consequences as well. Unfortunately, the consequences are usually fatal. For most people who observe the Love Laws, it might be a fair deal for the transgressors to exchange their lives for the illicit love they pursues. The punishments for the law breakers such as Velutha and Ammu in the novel are authorized by both the law-abiding citizens and the policing agents of the state apparatus. However, instead of insisting on this lopsided view of love, Roy in her *The God of Small Things* attempts to argue that there is indeed another dark side of love. In an interview, Roy says, "I don't see my book as an angry critique of 'our society.' It's really a way of seeing, a way of presenting the irreconcilable sides of our nature, our ability to love so deeply yet be so brutal." (Abraham, p.89).

In *The God of Small Things* Rahel and Estha usually find themselves perplexed at their mother Ammu's way of expressing her love for them. Compared to the love the twins received from the other family members, Ammu's maternal love was extremely overwhelming. Ammu, as a single mother without the support from her husband nor assistance from her own parents, recognized that the society and her family would always
give her the cold shoulder. The strong mother-child attachment became the only consolation in her life. In the Ipe family, she loved no one except her children, and maternal love was the only thing she could afford to them.

Her cheerless childhood is another psychic factor that prompted her to intensify her maternal behavior. Ammu’s life history, same as those of many women in Dr. David M. Levy’s study of the exaggerated maternal love and maternal overprotection that he finds in many mothers, “revealed a deeply frustrated craving for love in childhood” (Brown Fred, pp.325-26). Ammu, as a little child, desperately craved for her parents’ love, but Pappchi’s domestic violence failed his wife and children completely. Since she lived her childhood in terror, and, in retrospect, the memory of her childhood, was filed and condensed into one silent movie which she repeatedly played in her mind later on in her life.

“Pappachi had been sitting in his mahogany rocking chair all along, rocking himself silently in the dark. When he caught (Ammu), he didn’t say a word. He flogged her with his ivory-handled riding crop.... When he finished beating her he made her bring him Mammachi’s pinking shears from her sewing cupboard.” (Roy, p.181) Ever since her divorce, Ammu, as if to make up the children’s loss of their biological father, determined to give them an additional amount of maternal love in substitution for the paternal love they required. Playing the double role as both the mother and the father, she tried to prove to the public that a divorcee could be an able mother who raised her children well all by herself. When Baby Kochamma made an unfavorable comment on her children’s improper acts in the Cochin Airport, Ammu immediately identified it as an oblique criticism of her ability to be a mother.

Ammu’s commands to her twins, composed of two parts, the positing of a hypothetical situation and the mapping of its possible consequences, both of which point towards a foreseeable outcome to the twin’s violation of her commands. Estha and Rahel soon realized that if they misbehaved they would be seriously punished. Their violation meant more than children’s naughtiness or childish misbehavior to their mother.
It could also indicate an end to their intimate, and, rather paradoxically, fragile mother-child relationship. Not surprisingly, Estha and Rahel as merely seven-year old kids became anxious about the possibility of losing their mother’s love. They knew that they would be real orphans without their mother. As Anupama points out, “Ammu loved her children (of course), but their wide-eye vulnerability and their willingness to love people who didn’t really love them exasperated her and sometimes made her want to hurt them—just as an education, a protection.”(Anupama Rao, p.3)

It is commonly believed that love and hurt are incompatible. People hurt each other because they don’t love each other enough. When one gets hurt, he or she begins to love the one who hurts them less. Ammu’s dialectic of maternal love diverged from the common knowledge that to love means not to hurt and to hurt means a comparatively reduction in the quantity or depth of love. To love and to hurt went side by side in her maternity. The expression of her love can also mean to hurt them. She hurt Estha and Rahel, in her opinion, because she loved them too deeply. Motivated by her great love for them, she did everything to protest them, including hurting them. To make sure that her beloved children would never get hurt by the people who did not really love them, she took the necessary precaution by hurting them herself so that they would grow tough enough to build up a self-defense mechanism to shield them away the pain caused by the people who might hurt them one day in an unsympathetic way, in a way that a mother would never do to her children.

Although Ammu tried, rather repeatedly, to convey her philosophy of love to Estha and Rahel, the twins did not fully comprehend the arbitrary relation established by Ammu between loving them (the cause) and hurting them (the effect). Quite often, the twins’ response to her love philosophy alerted Ammu to the paradox of her theory that she just could not tolerate the idea that her children could hurt her since they have equally deep love for her. Whenever she found it necessary to verbally reprimand her children for not behaving themselves, she thought her children acted in such a mischievous way just to hurt her and to shame her in front of other people.
In so thinking, she has always forgotten her oblique logic that they hurt her because they loved her, too. Whenever Estha and Rahel couldn’t resist the temptation and acted in a childish manner, Ammu took it as a personal affront for she knew that following their recklessness came the unfriendly judgments from all directions to humiliate her single-mother dignity. To protect herself from the feeling of being hurt, she had to take an effective and efficient measure to manage her children.

Instead of repeating the celebrated clichés of love, Roy in her description of the love between Ammu and her twins links the rhetoric of love with the economic logic of return. She says “When you hurt people, they begin to love you less. That’s what careless words do. They make people love you a little less.” (Roy, p.112)

The reapportionment of maternal love put Rahel in a state of fear, fear of being less loved. Ammu’s less-love theory had a destructive impact upon her twins, especially Rahel. Although Ammu didn’t make it clear whether she had transferred most of her maternal love from Rehal to Estha, Rahel still presumed that she had been cut out of her mother’s favor.

In Roy’s detailed descriptions of a little girl’s fear of her single mother’s reapportionment of love as a dynamic expression of her ambition and eagerness for educating her children successfully, the reader observes that in the parent-child interaction love is often employed as a lure to arrest obedience and respect from the children. It is naïve to deny the fact that there is a hierarchy in the love relationship between parents and children. Parents give orders to instruct their children on how to behave properly, punish them to stop their misbehaviors, and praise them to encourage their good conduct. Indian parents, compared with those of the western family, are rather sparing in giving praise to their children. For them, praise may lead to arrogance, and arrogance nurtures a defiant attitude that would question and even challenge the authorities in the family, the community and the society. Therefore, to punish the child in public is considered an elementary method to help them to reclaim deference. In Ammu and her twins’ relations with Chacko, there was not enough love and for the three of them to make their lives in the family or in the society easier.
The disharmony between Chacko and Ammu had its root in the gendered structure of the kinship system in India. As Mandelbaum observes in the typical family life and social organization in India, the difference between the status of male and female in Indian culture “is presaged by the kind of welcome which is given to a newborn infant son—with drumming, singing, and proud public announcement—while the advent of a daughter is much more quietly observed”. (David Mandelbaum, p.30)

From time to time in the novel Ammu grumbled out her discontentment with the society’s unfair treatment of divorced women and her anger at the Ipe family’s indifference towards its own daughter. Mammachi’s reaction to the forbidden love between Ammu and Velutha is exemplary since most Indians who subscribe to the ideology of the caste system would consider a person like Velutha, who belongs to the lowest caste of untouchable Paravan, subhuman. When Velutha was found to have intimate relation with Ammu, his human characteristics were all ignored by the people from the higher castes. This doesn’t mean that he was received by Mammachi as a human being before.

He had already been considered as a sub human, but, this knowledge was an open secret, a piece of shared wisdom that was nevertheless never publicly articulated. After the disclosure of his scandalous affair with Ammu, this shared and unsaid knowledge that he was but an animal to be used and exploited was publicly and shamelessly articulated by and circulated among the people in Ayemenem.

Ammu and Velutha’s love affair, an Indian version of the Romeo and Juliet story, suffered external pressure that aimed to break them up. However, the flame of love turned out to be more intense even when the opposing force emerged, while gathering more strength and momentum. The lovers did not surrender, but became more inflexible in the love relationship than they were before. Renata Salec argues in her reading of Edith Wharton’s novels that romantic love, enigmatically, demands suffering to prove its genuineness, greatness and sacredness: “Love becomes romantic because of the suffering that pertains to it.” (Renata Salec, p.189) The opposition that once was supposed to extinguish the fire of love, in fact, adds fuel to the flames. The more prohibitions are uttered against it, and the
less willing the couple in love is to give love up. Ammu could not help falling in love with Velutha, a man who resembled Ammu in many ways. Both of them lived in self-repression, with their hearts filled with seething rage against the social reality. Involuntarily, Ammu viewed Velutha as a reflection of herself onto which she projected her own desires and emotions. Obviously, the police made an example of Velutha, who could not abide his position humbly. Ammu, too, set a bad example for the other mothers. She “never completed her corrections” (Roy, p.151) because she was not given the chance to do so. She had committed the worst error in the Indian society and failed her role as an Indian mother. Indian mothers are supposed to concentrate on the pedagogy of training their children to be good members in both the family and the society.

Indian mothers’ love should serve as a disciplinary institution in which the children are imbued with a sense of responsibility for the maintenance of kinship order and social stability. In such a way, in their motherhood, women’s affection is limited to a single and public purpose. A mother’s love is not allowed to be spared for her individual desires, sexual desires especially, because it is not her private property. Although motherhood, like other chains of kinship, basically belongs to the private and domestic domain, it can also be viewed as a primary part of what Louis Althusser refers as ideological state apparatuses that oversee the social norms and the sense of hierarchy in various social relations. Ammu punished her twins for their childish misbehaviors, and the other ideological state apparatuses came to discipline her and Velutha for their transgressive act. It looks like a food chain. However, both of the parental rebuke afflicted upon the children and the physical persecution imposed upon the transgressors aim to discipline. The traditional and tyrannical power structure in the Indian culture that disciplines every Indian, in both the family and public spaces, from the birth till the death, has constituted a national history of long-term traumatization.

As the twisting tale of The God of Small Things unravels, Arundhati Roy frequently refers to an idea known as the “Love Laws,” making use of the events in her novel in which these “laws” are obeyed, the occasions upon which they are broken, and pointedly abundant parallelism to critique the disorder, disaster, and death that can be brought on by an excessively rigid social structure. As early into
The opening chapter of the novel sets up the background for the story and tells of protagonist Rahel's long-awaited return to Ayemenem. Upon her arrival, Rahel immediately begins to reflect upon the shadowy events of her past, describing them with, "It was a time when uncles became fathers, mothers, lovers, and cousins died and had funerals. It was time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened" (Roy, p.31) and eventually concluding, "That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much" (Roy, p.33). From this point on in the novel, the "Love Laws" appear frequently and continue to reinforce the death, destruction, and loss of innocence that can become associated with societal pressure and forbidden temptation.

Interestingly, however, Roy does not only shed light upon Rahel and Estha's choices concerning the "Love Laws," but also upon those of India's mythical figures and the novel's characters that belong to older generations than the twins. To this effect, Ira Mark Milne and Sara Constantakis touch on Roy's use of ancient Indian mythology when they state that, "Indian history and politics shape the plot and meaning of The God of Small Things in a variety of ways... (The novel) develops profound insights into the ways in which human desperation and desire emerge from the confines of a firmly entrenched caste society" (Roy, p.160), and it is during one of the present-day scenes, when Rahel and Estha have traveled separately to the Ayemenem temple to see traditional kathakali dancing, that the reader is first shown the "Love Laws" from a culturally and mythologically significant point of view. Rahel, standing in the back of the community temple, is observing someone whom she refers to as the "Kathakali Man," a once-respected man who uses dance to tell the stories of Indian gods.

On this particular evening, the Kathakali Man and his troupe are telling the tale of Kunti and Karna, the latter of which, Rahel describes as, "...melancholy son of Surya, God of Day. Karna the Generous. Karna the abandoned child. Karna was
the most revered warrior of them all... born to die unfairly, unarmed and alone at the hands of his brother” (Roy, p.220-221). Though the story of Kunti and Karna is a familiar one to Rahel, she watches as the Kathakali Man recnacts the meeting of the mortal woman and the demi-god son she had cast down a river after being seduced by a god.

The performance opens with Kunti revealing to Karna that she is his long-lost mother, but goes on to describe how the joy brought on by the reunion is soon, “cut short by dismay when Karna realized that his mother had revealed herself to him only to secure the safety of her five other, more beloved sons... poised on the brink of their epic battle with their one hundred cousins” (Roy, p.222). It is these sons that Kunti seeks to protect and it is for these sons she goes on to invoke the “Love Laws.” Reminding Karna that her sons are his flesh and blood, Kunti seeks to extract a promise from Karna that he will not go to war against her five other sons as planned.

The ancient tale of mother and child continues on to relate, however, that Kunti’s request is one that Karna cannot make without breaking his vow of revenge against the five men in question. Arjuna, in particular, has wronged Karna by publically reviling him as being a lowly charioteer’s son, and thus, it is Karna’s own sense of honor conflicting with his need to obey the “Love Laws” that causes the young demi-god strikes a deal that will lead to disaster. To his mother, Karna swears, “I promise you this, you will always have five sons. Yudhishtra I will not harm. Bhima will not die by my hand. The twins – Nakula and Sahdeva – will go untouched by me. But Arjuna – him I will make no promises about. I will kill him or he will kill me”” (Roy, p.222).

At this point, Kathakali Man and his troupe leave this story for another. Rahel, however, already knows the ending – knows that though Kunti had tried to obey the “Love Laws” by loving and protecting her sons, and though Karna had attempted to follow the “laws” through his promise to his mother, the story will always conclude with, “the most revered warrior of them all” dying “unfairly, unarmed, and alone at the hands of his brother.” This is the first instance of many in which the “Love Laws” become intertwined with death, the societal significance
of which is underlined by critic Douglas Dupler when he suggests that Roy’s inclusion of these stories backs Rahel’s assertion “that the story actually ‘began in the days when the Love Laws were made’... (and) shows that it is human passion that cannot be controlled and contained by cultural rules” (Douglas Dupler, p.174). By the end of the novel, Roy’s use of these stories comes to add complexity and depth to her cautionary tale by stressing the timelessness of conflict between passion and precedent.

While Roy’s use of Indian mythology in *The God of Small Things* is fascinating in and of itself, the real importance of the folklore’s appearance may lie in its ability to reflect the decisions and actions of the novel’s characters. As author and critic K.V. Surendran states, “*The God of Small Things* is a saga of lost dreams from several points of view. Almost all the characters in the novel have something to say about their loss. Even the minor characters are no exception to this rule” (K.V.Surendran, p.10). Surendran raises a valid point, as it is, in fact, often the tales of minor characters that bring the consequences of obeying the “Love Laws” into sharp focus. Surendran’s contemporary, critic Robert Ross, expands even further upon the importance of the characters that are older than Rahel and Estha, specifically the twins’ mother, with, “The adults who shape, or misshape the twin’s lives also emerge as full characters... Their mother is an independent woman who divorces an alcoholic husband, finds herself trapped in the family home, and rebels by forming a romantic liaison that leads to disaster.” Ross also comments on other members of the twins’ family with, “Their Oxford-educated Uncle Chacko, a sometimes comic character, flirts with communism and fails in his personal life, in business, and in most everything else. Their great-aunt, inappropriately called Baby Kochamma, still longs for the priest who chose the church over carnal love.” In truth, these fully-formed characters are not mere background on which Rahel and Estha’s story is painted, but actually represent both the causes and the consequences of the situations the twins face.

Each family member plays an unwitting part in shaping the action and tragedy of the novel, just as each is a projection of possible futures for Rahel and Estha. Obviously, however, the existence of characters such as Uncle Chacko and Baby Kochamma alone is not what draws the attention of literary critics and
readers alike; on the contrary, it the fact that each has a story to share and has dealt with the “Love Laws” that haunt Rahel and Estha which draws the attention. Through the course of the novel, one aspect becomes crucial to the over-all effectiveness of the story is that the “Love Laws” do not merely run through the main characters directly, but have been weaving their way through the family and the community for generations.

Baby Kochamma and Uncle Chacko’s ex-wife, Sophie Mal’s mother, for instance, each play a hand in the tragedy of the novel due to the ways in which they have been influenced by the “Love Laws.” Baby Kochamma is a bitter woman, obese and aging, who, as described by Sheila Johnson, “fell in love with a priest, converted to Catholicism, and became a nun to be near him. When this proved futile, she returned to the family home and eventually became addicted to television, which brings the greater world she had missed right to her sitting room.” Notably, Baby Kochamma’s story is one of the most overt instances of a character attempting to obey the “Love Laws” and ending up contributing to disaster. Baby Kochamma’s priest had made a commitment to the Catholic god, and society’s “Love Laws” demanded that he honor his commitment and put his love for God above all else. Baby Kochamma eventually gave up on chasing him, broken-hearted, and developed a mean-spiritedness that, decades later, would lead her straight into playing a pivotal role in the death of the twins’ adult best friend, Velutha.

Somehow even less subtle than the effects of the “laws” upon Baby Kochamma, however, are the effects of the “laws” upon Sophie Mal’s bereaved mother, Margaret Kochamma. In Margaret’s case, society’s most ancient rules have told her who to love, and how, and how much, and she followed suit, loving Sophie Mal above all else. Naturally, this overwhelming love for her daughter became the driving force that pushed Margaret over the edge upon Sophie’s death; Milne and Constantakis relate that, “When Margaret sees her daughter’s body, she feels an irrational rage towards the twins and seeks out Estha several times to slap him” (Constantakis, p.158). Unfortunately, Margaret’s unfounded certainty that Estha is to blame for her daughter’s death later contributes to the family “Returning” Estha -- after the funeral of Sophie Mal, the twins’ mother has no
choice but to send Estha to live with his father. As revealed in the novel’s opening scenes, of course, Estha’s departure would be the last time that the twins would see each other until their separate returns to Ayemenem, twenty-three years later.

Despite many of the minor characters being incredibly well-developed, the damaged protagonists of *The God of Small Things* are undoubtedly Estha (short for Esthappen) and Rahel, whose first seven years of life spent together are described as, “Those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was Forever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually as We and Us” (Roy, p.4).

Heartbreakingly, Estha and Rahel are forced to leave these years behind when they become the two characters who must constantly live with the consequences of Sophie Mal and Velutha’s deaths, their mother’s affair, Baby Kochamma’s bitterness, Margaret Kochamma’s mis-placed blame, and their own decisions to obey the “Love Laws.” Among these decisions by the twins to obey the “Love Laws,” one of the most significant ones comes at the end of the novel, after Sophie Mal’s body has been found and Velutha has been beaten to the brink of death by police officers. In this scene, Baby Kochamma has taken the twins to the local police station to lay a life-altering choice before them. By taking advantage of the seven-year-old twins’ confusion, Baby Kochamma convinces them that she will have the police officers arrest them and their mother for Sophie Mal’s death unless they agree to untruthfully testify that Velutha is to blame.

Baby Kochamma bullies Estha and Rahel that day into making a decision that would destroy one life directly and countless others indirectly. Ultimately, however, just as the “Love Laws” had demanded that Margaret love Sophie Mal above all else and above all reason, they had demanded that Estha and Rahel love Ammu more than anything, something that Roy conveys beautifully when, “Not together (but almost), two frightened voices whispered, ‘Save Ammu’” (Roy, p.302). There are many occasions upon which choosing to follow the “Love Laws” leads to unforeseen consequences for the characters of *The God of Small Things*;
however, Roy’s novel is really one about the acts of breaking the “Love Laws,” as well as the dark effects of these acts and the societal pressures that pushes her characters into them.

Commenting on this theme, critic Scott Trudell asserts that, “The Love Laws represent the strict confines on human behavior – the caste systems, social pressures, and political restrictions that horrify people beyond expression when they are broken. The central action of the novel is about breaking them, and the tragedy that results from breaking them” (Scott Trudell, p.165). Of course, just as evidence of struggles to obey the “Love Laws” can be found in the Indian mythology referenced in the book, the characters of the book’s older generations, and the characters of the generation around which the book is centered, cases of these laws being ignored, bent, or twisted can also be found in all three of these places. For instance, the folklore tale of Kunti and Karna that Rahel reenacted in the Aycmenem Temple may be one grounded in an attempt to keep with the teachings of the “Love Laws,” but is also one with, similar to Rahel and Estha’s story, a disastrous conclusion involving the breaking away from the “laws.” In the case of Kunti and Karna, the disruption of nature and the “laws” manifested itself in brother slaying brother, thus simultaneously exemplifying both the corruption of “laws” that allow Kunti to love five of her sons more than her other son and the dreadful consequences of attempting to compromise with those “laws.”

Although Roy uses references to traditional Indian stories to establish the deep-rooted history of the “Love Laws” in Kerala and the distinct lines drawn by the “laws” long ago, her own characters seem to blur these lines with increasing intensity as the novel works towards its climax. Chronologically in the center of the story but physically placed as the last chapter of the book, this scene is the one concrete event to which all the resulting chaos and disorder can be traced back to and, in fact, features two adult characters disregarding India’s “Love Laws” in one of the worst ways possible. This pivotal scene, the one that all of Rahel’s memories in the novel have been leading up to and the one that resulted in the deaths of Velutha and Sophie Mal and the separation of Estha and Rahel, centers around Ammu and Velutha. Ammu and Velutha are, respectively, a divorced upper middle-class mother and a member of India’s lowly “Untouchable” class who,
after years of being worn down by the constant grind of restrictive “Love Laws,”
turn to each other to heal old wounds. Trudell contends, “When (Ammu)
recognizes that Kerala’s social code is in the process of forcing her down Baby
Kochamma’s path of bitter, joyless confinement to the house until death, she acts
in perfectly understandable desperation and attempts to find some brief joy with
Velutha” (Scott Trudell, p.165).

This assessment may alter opinion of the last chapter of the book, which
depicts the socially unequal lovers as they initiate an affair just beyond the banks
of the Meenachal River, but it should be noted that Meenachal River is the river in
which Sophie Mal would later drown. Though Ammu and Velutha’s actions are
understandable, they brought about grave ramifications. As the novel closes, the
true story begins, and Ammu and Velutha initiate their thirteen-day tryst, a third-
person omniscient narrator aptly forewarns, “The cost of living climbed to
unaffordable heights; though later Baby Kochamma would say it was a Small Price
to Pay. Was it? Two lives. Two children’s childhoods. And a history lesson for
future offenders” (Roy, p.318).

In the days following Ammu and Velutha’s first indiscretion, both the
breaking and the obeying of the “Love Laws” reap heavy consequences and act as
a catalyst for tragedy. The scandal is uncovered by Velutha’s father, Baby
Kochamma files rape charges against Velutha, Velutha disappears, an irrational
Ammu turns against her children, and Estha, Rahel, and Sophie Mal use the boat
that Velutha had created (so that he and Ammu could cross the river at night) to
attempt to run-away from the mother that Rahel and Estha think no longer loves
them. Then, as the novel draws near its ending, the attempted run-away goes
horribly awry when the boat capsizes and Sophie Mal disappears. Unable to find
their missing cousin, Estha and Rahel continue on to the abandoned house that they
had planned to escape to, but Ayemenem police officers discover them asleep the
next morning, along with the missing Velutha. From here, Velutha is beaten for
presumed kidnapping and rape and taken into custody, Baby Kochamma forces the
twins to pin Sophie Mal’s death upon Velutha by identifying him as their
kidnapper, and Velutha dies considered a guilty man. Ammu broke the “Love
Laws” by letting herself love a man whom she wasn’t supposed to love in a society
of people embittered by what they had sacrificed in order to obey the "Love Laws", and because of this, she, along with her twins, faces a despairing fate as well and is kicked out of the family home by Uncle Chacko.

Consequentially, Ammu sends Estha to live with his father, and her own mental and physical health begin to steadily decline. As told by Rahel, Estha will eventually enter into a constant state of quietness, Rahel's life will be forever tainted by despair, and the twins will live as a broken set for twenty-three miserable years.

However, the two are reunited eventually, and though Ammu and Velutha's affair may have been the tragedy around which the action of Roy's novel revolved and one the most blatant instances of characters breaking the "Love Laws," Roy's true commentary on the consequences of the liaison appears twenty-three years later.

As it turns out, it is Rahel and Estha, broken, damaged, and desperate, who commit the final act of disobeying the "Love Laws"; the final chapter of the book depicts Ammu and Velutha's attempt to reach out to each other and heal each other, but the chapter just previous to it describes Estha's and Rahel's attempt to do so as well. Just as Roy foreshadowed in the first chapter of the novel with, "The emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness of the other... The two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons. Like familiar lovers' bodies" (21), the end of the novel brings Rahel and Estha to attempting to connect and heal in the only way possible for them. Ultimately, Roy's beautifully evocative description of Rahel and Estha's last scene together leads readers to draw their own conclusions: "There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next... But what was there to say? Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons... Only that once again they broke the Love Laws that lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much" (Roy, pp.310-311). Without a doubt, the picture that Roy paints here of Rahel and Estha's first true interaction in twenty-three years is one of the most powerful instances of the "Love Laws" being broken in The God of Small Things, if not one of the most powerful scenes in the novel overall.
Awe - inspiring as Roy’s words are, however, it may actually be Roy’s frequent use of parallelism that drives The God of Small Things’ thought-provoking analysis of the destruction caused by over-whelming social expectations and prejudices. As Trudell asserts of two literally and physically sequential scenes: “Roy’s trajectory of foreshadowing and anticipation lead to the two forbidden, taboo erotic relationships of the novel – between Ammu and Velutha, and Estha and Rahel. These are the episodes at the core of the unraveling plot and the crux of the book’s meaning” (Scott Trudell, p.164). Though Arundhati Roy is a master of character development, portrayal of emotions, and creative imagery, her use of parallelism in The God of Small Things to emphasize the tragically cyclic effects of the “Love Laws” may be one of her greatest literary accomplishments to date.

Of the several types of parallels that Roy employs, one of the most obvious ones is character parallels, with noticeable similarities between Rahel and Ammu, and Estha and Velutha. For instance, one of the many details that Roy uses to connect Rahel to Ammu lies in how, after Rahel’s return to Ayemenem, Estha often notices things such as, “(Rahel) whispers. She moves her mouth. Their beautiful mother’s mouth” (Roy, p.310). Even more importantly, however, Roy draws parallels between the decisions made by her characters and the consequences of those decisions; perhaps the greatest similarity between Ammu and Rahel manifests itself in their mutual breaking of the “Love Laws” towards the end of the novel. Notably, the reader is allowed more and more insight into Ammu’s past throughout the novel, such as the knowledge of her abuse-tainted childhood and her return to the family home in Ayemenem after a divorce from the twins’ fathers.

On this matter, Surendran recognizes that, “Being isolated everywhere, Ammu was badly in need of the company of someone who would bring her some consolation. Velutha being someone whom she knew rather well from her childhood became her natural choice” (Surendran, p.81). Viewed in this light, it seems strikingly unlikely that the fact that Rahel’s life closely echoes that of Ammu, who carried her own baggage from childhood, grew up to become a divorcée (as Rahel would before the opening of the novel), returned to Ayemenem, and ending up sexually breaking the “Love Laws” with a childhood friend, is a coincidence.
It can also be noted that novel’s present-day twins happen to be the exact age that Ammu was when she died: “Thirty-one. Not old. Not young. But a viable die-able age” (Roy, p.5). Of course, if Ammu and Rahel are similar by mere merit of their actions, Velutha and Estha must be too. Velutha and Estha each represent the male in their taboo affairs and are each living with greater social stigma that Ammu or Rahel at the time of the affair.

Velutha, an outcast of society by merit of caste ranking, is amongst those whose social standing Roy conveys with: “It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all” (Roy, p.71). Estha, on the other hand, was born into a higher social standing, but carried a sense of guilt over the events of his childhood until he eventually retreated into himself. As the narrator states, “At Sophie Mal’s funeral and in the days before Estha was Returned, (the twins) saw (Ammu’s) swollen eyes, and with the self-centeredness of children, held themselves wholly culpable for her grief” (Roy, p.307), and “Slowly, over the years, Estha withdrew from the world. He grew accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquilizer on his past” (Roy, p.13). Furthermore, the last word spoken by Estha in the novel is “yes” as he gives false affirmation that Velutha is guilty of kidnapping, thus literally and figuratively silencing both Velutha and himself. It is connections such as these between Ammu and Rahel and Velutha and Estha that ingeniously tie Rahel and Estha’s present to Ammu and Velutha’s past and relate the disastrously enduring causes and effects of the “Love Laws” in The God of Small Things as no other element of the novel would have.

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy has received praise and recognition from many organizations and critics, most of whom are in agreement with Ritu Menon’s assessment that, “The God of Small Things is a seduction from start to finish... The paper’s texture and shade evoke clotted cream; a satisfying weight and pleasing typeface make its physical crafting as elegant as its literary craft is inspired. Arundhati Roy’s meticulous attention to detail is evident in both” (Ritu Menon, p.175). Calling on her talents as an author, Arundhati Roy uses the “Love Laws,” specifically her characters’ decisions on whether or not to obey the love laws and parallelism to connect the effects of the “Love Laws” across time.
and space, to develop an intriguing story into a deeply profound novel that critiques society's paradoxical "Love Laws" and comments on the disorder that the "laws" can cause. In the closing of the story, the final gift that Roy gives her readers is hope for the future, for a breaking of the cycle of lost childhood and lost life caused by the "Love Laws," and the novel ends: "She had a dry rose in her hair. She turned to say it once again: 'Naaley.' Tomorrow" (Roy, p.321). The "Love Laws" may have defeated Ammu and Velutha, but Roy reminds readers that there is always a tomorrow, always a Rahel and Estha to learn from past mistakes.

Since History is real, infinite, dynamic and abstract, direct realistic representations are impossible. It can only be manifested through its effects and symptoms. In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy employs two techniques to represent History. One is spatialization and the other is personification. In the novel, History is personified as a patriarchal, omnipotent and despotic male, who enforces his laws and imposes punishment on those who defies the laws mercilessly.

For example, when Estha and Rahel suffer the tragic consequence after Sophie Mol's death, Roy describes history as someone who "negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws," (Roy, p.55) generates "sickening thud", and leaves smell forever in ordinary things. When Ammu sees Rahel playing happily with Velutha, which is forbidden between a Touchable and an Untouchable, History is depicted as "wrong-footed, caught off guard" (Roy, p.176), but when Velutha and Ammu look in each other's eyes lovingly, "History's fiends returned to claim them. To re-wrap them in its old, scarred pelt and drag them back to where they really lived. Where the Love Laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much" (Roy, p.177). It is History's plan to have Velva Paapen, Velutha's father, to report his son's secret affair with Ammu to Mamachi and make it known. "By the time he (Velutha) understood his part in History's Plans, it was too late to retrace his steps" (Roy, p.200). History is cruel and cold-blooded, malevolent about Love but insistent on Love Laws.

Trained as an architect, Roy is surely space-minded and adept as well in using architecture for symbolization in the novel. Susan Stanford Friedman argues, "Rather than history containing space, different spaces in the novel contain history."
The novel moves associatively in and out of these spaces, rather than sequentially in linear time...Reflecting, no doubt, Roy’s profession as an architect, each space is architecturally embodied. Buildings function as tropes in the novel—that is, as images of historical over-determination. They are more than settings or backgrounds for human action. Instead, they are locations that concretize the forces of history. They are places that palimpsestically inscribe the social order as it changes over time. Containing history, they constitute the identities of the people who move through them”. (Susan Stanford Friedman, p.119)

Indeed, Roy draws a map of Ayemenem and Akkara, with the two villages and buildings involved situated across the Meenachal River. The cartography embodies complex juxtaposition of grand history and petit history, nature and culture, power and desire, domination and subjection, patriarchy and the subaltern women, colonizers and the colonized. And it is a space that History comes concrete, the production of the inherent social forces and ideologies.

The word “History” appears in the novel for the first time when Chacko told the twins that they were a family of Anglophiles: He explained to them that history was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside. ‘To understand history,” Chacko said, “we have to go inside and listen to what they’re saying. And look at the books and the pictures on the wall. And smell the smells...’ But we can’t go in...because we’ve been locked out. And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves”. (Roy, pp.52-53).

Based on the passage, obviously what Chacko means by “history” is the Indian history, which, according to him, is cut off from them by the British colonial rule. As a result, the Ipe family, or suggestively the Indians, become Anglophiles, “pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own country and unable to retrace their steps because their footsteps had been swept away” (Roy, p.52). However, the reader would rather take Chacko’s lamentation for the
loss of native history as a yes-no ambivalence. It is a no, for, according to the book, the residues of Indian history are indeed very much alive as far as caste and gender are concerned.

It is a yes, because, it is impossible to reclaim a genuine pure traditional Indian history, because its precolonial and postcolonial histories and cultures are forever ruptured by the imposition of the colonizer's episteme. Chacko's old house is the History House in the novel. Built by an Englishman, Kari Saipu, who had "gone native" like Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's The Heart of Darkness, the house serves as a symbol of History and its palimpsesticity.

Locking the "whispering ancestors" inside and thus denying the Indian's access to their own traditional history, the house first stands for colonialism. The haunting of Saipu's spirit in the house refers to the irredeemable influence of the British colonial rule on the Indian culture and society. But later in 1992, when Rahel returned to Ayemenem, the house had been renovated into Heritage Hotel by a hotel chain, surrounded by some smaller, older wooden ancestral houses, transplanted for the enjoyment of wealthy guests from elsewhere into the tourist complex, "like a press of eager natives petitioning an English magistrate." One of the transplanted old houses "had been the ancestral home of Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad, 'Kerala's Mao Tse-tung.'" In consequence, with commercialization, capitalism and globalization, a form of spatial collage is inscribed in the space of a rural Indian village Ayemenem.

In the case of Heritage Hotel, in order to make profit by resorting to nostalgia, capitalist tourism reinscribes the space of the History House by renovating it into a hotel combined with the ancient houses transplanted from other places to produce a new space providing nostalgia as the commodity. The process of spatial reinscriptions, symbolizing India's historical passage in terms of the mode of production from semi-feudalism to colonialism and then to multinationalism or globalization and thus the coexistence of different historical residues, construes the Jamesonian concept of History or grand history, which is the point of departure of my critical interpretation of the novel. In the novel I think there is another history house; that is, the Ayemenem House, the house the Ipe family lives in. If the History House stands for grand history or the stages of modes of production, then the Ayemenem House represents petit history, or the synchronous, everyday, local history.
If the former suggests the palimpsestuality of History, the latter is a
dynamic structure of coexisting powers and ideologies interpellating the
individuals. In "The Ethical Subject of The God of Small Things," Janet Thorunn
argues on the relationship between grand history and petit history: "In The God of
Small Things, history is the mechanical reproduction of rules of exchange
perpetuating power in everyday life, and the narrative is just the enactment of the
operations of history in and through individual histories, as personal strategies,
motives and needs are caught up in social law and thereby to enact it..."(Janet
Thorunn, p.303)

Therefore, petit history is inescapably involved in grand history and the
individual is arrested in the impasse History dictates. As a result, every individual
is a historical subject, either living by the social law or transgressing the law.
Either way, one has not chance to escape the historical web, which is the saddening
lesson from The God of Small Things.

The motif of the journey, which intends to explore the issues of the complex
nature of the self, desire, and memory of the main protagonists in this novel. It aims
to show how the protagonists fail to reach a reconciliation in their struggles between
the spiritual world and the external world. The leading characters, Ammu and her
daughter Rahul, as an adult, return to their hometown, their parents’ place, their so-
called home, after divorcing their husbands. Their divorcée status is considered
anathema in their society.

However, their failed marriages provide them with freedom. Thus, their
journey home becomes a renewed opportunity for them to contemplate their inner
feelings and arrive at a certain degree of self-realization.

Poverty, economic slumps, and war are not the main causes of the despair that
have been flooding modern Indian society in Roy’s The God of Small Things, but the
crisis of the relationship between the individual and society; the mind of a human
being does not correspond to the real world. Ammu and her twins are not the only
transgressors. According to the caste system in their society, cross-caste contact is
frowned upon. Mammachi, Ammu’s mother, helps the Untouchable Velutha’s
family and offers jobs to them as fulfillment of Christian duty; however, her
daughter’s illicit love affair with Velutha is a flagrant violation of social taboo.
After their cousin Sophie Mol’s drowning, the twins have been forced to live separately from each other and their mother Ammu through the machinations of their grandaunt Baby Kochamma. They suffer a familial psychic trauma. Ammu dies of poverty, Chacko has immigrated to another country after Mammachi’s death, and Baby Kochamma lives alone with her servant. After twenty-three years of “Quietness and Emptiness” (Roy, p.336), Rahel and her fraternal brother Estha return to their ancestral home and enact their own love laws to obtain their joint identity, and their incestuous relationship makes the Ipe family’s destruction total.

In the narrative, the protagonists are divided between their inner mind and their position in their particular society. The concept of the Lacanian Mirror Stage and its relevant elements can be appropriated to analyze the confrontations and struggles between an individual’s psychic or spiritual world and his society, the external world. It can be applied to the main characters in The God of Small Things.

The psychoanalytic development of Ammu is not static, and with experiences in life Ammu grows to realize herself. Her psychic journey impacts on her life and her children, and also affects the social system. In the light of Lacan’s concept, Ammu’s life can be divided into the two stages as a metaphor of her life of thirty-one years. Before her marriage, Ammu is constrained to live with her parents, which can be regarded as the Pre-mirror Stage. During the period of her marriage and divorce, Ammu is entitled to make her own decisions, which parallels the Mirror Stage.

During this period, Ammu tries every means to escape from her parents’ home when she reaches the marriageable age of eighteen. Her parents’ home is the epitome of the family in the society; which stresses duties and obligations rather than warmth and affection, especially in terms of regulating the conduct of women.

Ammu rushes into a marriage with a man she does not love. She admits that her marriage was an unwise decision. For Ammu, her failed marriage affirms misrecognition for her expectation to escape from her unsettling homelife, and thus her divorce allows her to arrive at self-realization. After freed from marriage, Ammu is given a chance to further explore her inner world. This state illustrates the
metaphorical phase of the Post-mirror or Oedipal stage, which implies one can govern oneself and achieve the terrain of the sense of self-realization. Exile, separation and lost childhood are the price that Ammu pays for the consequences of her search for self-realization, and they symbolize the signifiers of the Other's demand of punishment for violations of the social code. If social oppression overrides human nature, the individual increases resistance in different patterns against society. Hence, Ammu's transgressions signal the problems of the society. As the child of an upper-caste Syrian Christian pickle factory owner, Ammu grows up in an environment of domestic violence, and she is treated as an orphan in her family.

After finishing her schooling, Ammu is ready for marriage. This is akin to the stage when the child stands in front of the mirror to study its image and to explore the milieu around it. Her family does not care about her, and does not prepare "a suitable dowry" (Roy, p.38) to attract suitors to come Ammu's way. Hence, Ammu is given a chance to act according to her own will, marking the emergence of subjectivity, 'self', 'I'. The image of marriage becomes an object of Ammu's desire to separate from her family.

In order to escape from her tyrannical and psychological unstable father and embittered and long-suffering mother, she accepts a proposal from a man with whom she did not love. She thinks the marriage can give her a home. Since she "married the wrong man", (Roy, p.38) her married life marked by violence. To maintaining his job, Ammu's husband intends to make use of her body in a business deal with his English manager, Mr. Hollick. Ammu refuses to submit to such a life.

Her decision to divorce her husband subverts the mores of her society, which considers divorce anathema. Her wedding ring has lost its significance. After ending her marriage, Ammu returns to her parents' home at Ayemenem, "unwelcomed" (Roy, p.42) because she has disgraced her Syrian Christian family by marrying a Hindu and then by divorcing him. The interfaith marriage taints the family's reputation. Getting divorced is even worse. Hence, Ammu and her twins are treated as unwanted relations in her mother's home. "What her grandchildren suffered from was far worse than Inbreeding", (Roy, p.61) declares her Mammachi in referring to Ammu's divorce.
On the other hand, Ammu’s journey home leads Ammu to realize that the seeds of rebellion have unconsciously percolated in her mind and have spawned a strong sense of injustice. “Must we have like some damn godforsaken tribe that’s just been discovered?” (Roy, p.180) ponders Ammu. She challenges society with her life. Ammu has experienced violence in her childhood and in her marriage, making her confrontational and quarrelsome. She experiences the visceral need to shout out her anger, which has been rooted in her soul, and provides her with a purgative joy.

The Love Laws, referred to repeatedly in the course of the narration, serve as the incarnation of the Other. They are a metaphor of the power of society over women, and children. The love she shares with Velutha serves as a symbol of mutual recognition: their sense of self or I emerges from the positive reflection of the Other. Rahel also goes through the psychic development beginning with a lack of awareness of “I”, to uncertainty of the ego, and finally to self-realization.

The second stage of Rahel’s life starts at the age of seven when she is separated from her mother and brother. It ends with her marriage in America, and Rahel has to find the meaning of “I”. After her failed marriage, she returns to her ancestral home of Ayemenem, in Kerala, where her twin brother Estha has been living and they are reunited after a separation of twenty-three years. This marks the final phase for Rahel who finally finds the love that she has been waiting for all her life the love for her twin brother, Estha.

They reunite at the age of thirty-one, the very age of their mother when she died. However, “things can change in a day.” (Roy, p.192) and they do when her cousin Sophie Mol comes into their world. Rahel begins to feel trapped by the “love laws.” During the two weeks in 1969 of Sophie Mol’s visit, Ammu has an affair with Velutha and Sophie Mol has been the center of attention; Rahel and her brother Estha, meanwhile, feel neglected by their family. Sophie Mol’s drowning serves as a signifier of the Other’s demand for punishment: Rahel is forced to live without her mother and brother. The children are Siamese twins and should not be separated. Their physical separation notwithstanding, they have “joint identities”. (Roy, p.2) Rahel learns that “lives can twist and writhe into new ugly shapes never to be remolded into a false sense of security again.” (Sampson, p.)
Two weeks in 1969, two weeks of Sophie Mol, Ammu’s death at a cheap hotel all change her life. She grows from childhood into womanhood indifferently and despairingly. The memory of Sophie Mol, loved from beginning as a subject, weighs heavily on Rahel’s psyche and she thinks that she cannot be like her. Besides, her confused sense of self in her school years makes her an extremely polite child. Had no friends. She is distained by the Other, the outer world. Rahel’s blind grandmother Mammachi and uncle Chacko provide nourishment but no loving care. Psychically, Rahel lives in a traumatized state and loses contact with reality.

Rahel’s return to her ancestral home with “no Plans, no Locusts Stand I (as a daughter who had no claim to the property)” (Roy, p.231) makes the memories come to life again. The emptiness of her soul is because her time has been halted in “The History House” for her toy wristwatch, always “Ten to two”, has been left there. She understands now what Estha told her when they were little: “Sorry doesn’t make a dead man alive” (Roy, p.35) consequently, she awaits her punishment by stopping time in her psyche just as Ammu did.

Velutha’s life and the motif of his returning home relate to his psychic development as well. The process of Velutha’s psychic development can be divided into three phases, from ignorance to muddled exploring to self-realizing; they can be analyzed by appropriating Lacan’s mirror stage. The metaphorical structure and illusion of Lacanian’s mirror stage is a psychic journey of an individual and reflection of one’s relationship with others, and the relationship between one’s inner self and the outer world.

Velutha’s journey of the search for self as subjectivity is also influenced by his outer world. As a child, his family becomes acquainted with the Ipe family. Little Velutha behaves as a low-caste is supposed to do. He presents his wooden craft tools, boxes and boats to little Ammu, holding them out on his palm so that she would not have to touch him to take them. During this period, as in Lacan’s pre-mirror stage, the ignorance phase, Velutha did not distinguish between the different classes or between himself as an Untouchable and Ammu as a Touchable. He just did what he had been taught by his family as the caretaker, as an outcaste.
The Lacanian Mirror Stage reveals the unjust society that damages human beings. The Lacanian Mirror Stage intensifies the idea that a harmonious relationship between the individual and the society is important and it has submerged in the novel as well.

In the novel, in terms of psychological development, the mixed blood of the twins implies the signifier of Roy’s desire of the tolerance of difference; the mix of religions in Kerala serves as the signifier of Roy’s desire to protest against unjust society. Hence, the cross-caste love affair portrays the progress of the individual and mirrors the hidebound or immutable social system. If the social system depicted in the novel does not make progress, an increased number of polarized transgressions will occur with tragic outcomes. The society is composed of individuals, men, women and children. Individuals depend on a just society. Harmony is an illusion of the child and the Other for the achievement of perfect subjectivity, the perfect self.

The women are oppressed because of the social norms laid down by men, and the oppression is handed down from generation to generation. Since it is the men who rule society, they represent society. Furthermore, women are meant to obey the social norms in order to avoid trouble. In other words, everyone controls every step they take.

*The God of Small Things* is the story of women’s misfortunate lives caused by male-dominated society with all its norms that separate women from men. In “Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things: A Study in Feminine Sensibility and Aspects of Style*,” critic Pratibha Verma points out that this novel deals with how the lives of women are controlled by men. We learn that the women are repressed and “denied basic amenities” since they live in a patriarchal society, defined as “a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women”. (Pratibha Verma, p.185) Roy presents a story of three generations in her novel. In “Arundhati Roy’s and Salman Rushdie’s Postmodern India”, critic Victor J. Ramraj remarks that “the first generation is from the period before India’s independence, characters such as Mammachi and Pappachi belong to this period. The time period of the second generation is the 1940s, characters involved
here are Ammu and Chacko. Finally, Ramraj adds that the characters Rahel and Estha belong to the third generation, which dates from the 1960s. Furthermore, the women from these generations are oppressed by male-dominated society in different ways. Though the oppression changes from generation to generation, being very hard in the first two generations, it is reduced in the last generation.” (Victor J. Ramraj, p. 155)

In “Man-Woman Relationship in The God of Small Things,” critic Nirmala C. Prakash points out Pappachi’s view of marriage as follows: “Wife is but a slave who can be driven out of the house at his will and whose precious possessions like piano can be as mercilessly broken...” (Nirmala C. Prakash, p. 77)

No matter what happens in a relationship, the woman has no rights whatsoever; if the woman obeys the men and behaves in the way accepted by society for a woman, she is considered a good woman. However, if the woman instead chooses to fight for women’s rights and just will not accept the life that is forced on her, then she is considered a bad woman. Bad women are those who are strong, talented, and rebellious; good women are those who are weak and not rebellious. Since men like women they can control, they like weak women. In this way, they become more superior. In fact, Prakash argues that Mammachi’s and Pappachi’s marriage is filled with “jealousy, violence, and hatred”. Since Mammachi is a successful businesswoman who gets more popular as time goes, Pappachi becomes jealous of her. In the meantime, he starts to beat her as he places the anger of his situation on his wife: He does this mainly for the reason that she is a woman and he is the man; he can do whatever he wishes with his wife. It is difficult for Pappachi to see good qualities in his wife without evoking feelings of jealousy.

When he acts on his jealousy, he oppresses his wife as he beats and treats her badly. “Though Mammachi had conical corneas and was already practically blind, Pappachi would not help her with the pickle-making, because he did not consider pickle-making a suitable job for a high-ranking ex-Government official” (Roy, p. 47). Pappachi thinks with his patriarchal mind, as he does not even consider helping his wife, even though her eyes are bad. Pappachi is of the belief
that since he is a high-ranked ex-Government official, Mammachi’s job is not good enough for him. Moreover, he is in denial if he thinks that Mammachi’s successful factory is low ranked; otherwise, he would not have been jealous of her success and popularity. In “Locusts Stand 1': Some Feminine Aspects of The God of Small Things,” critic Mohit Kumar Ray points out that “Pappachi’s jealousy of Mammachi does not begin the moment he retires because he has always been jealous of her.

For example, there is the time when they spend a couple of months in Vienna; Mammachi takes lessons in violin, but when her teacher tells Pappachi that his wife is very talented, he does not let her continue to take lessons.” (Mohit Kumar Ray, p.51)

Furthermore, just when the physical abuse of Mammachi comes to an end, a psychological abuse is introduced. In “Dreams Re-Dreamed: A Study of Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things,” critic Surendra Narayan Jha writes that “Chacko is the one who is responsible for forbidding his father from touching his mother again. As a result of this, Pappachi finds another way of oppressing her, as he never speaks to her from this day on until his death.” (Surendra Narayan Jha, p.160)

Mohit Kumar Ray adds that Mammachi accepts her situation of insults and rejections. and he points out that “she accepted the female role model imposed on her by the society – docile, submissive, ungrudging, unprotesting.” (Mohit Kumar Ray, p.62)

Anything beyond this definition of how a woman should behave would mean that she has broken the social norms laid down for women. Unless a woman wants to avoid being looked down at by people, she should live her life obeying the men. Since men represent society’s view of women, then women should just accept their situation; in other words, women should not attempt to improve their position in society, as this is a pointless thing to do. Even though Mammachi is doing a great job in the factory, she is still oppressed. If the circumstances were the other way round and Pappachi owned the factory, he would not have been
oppressed. Instead, he would have been very proud of what he accomplishes and people would look up to him. She is doomed for the reason that women must be submissive to men. However, realizing that changes of the norms for the better are impossible, she just accepts her situation and does not fight for equality between men and women.

The second generation is the period that touches one the most as the oppression is at its worse; the women are treated badly by the men but also by the women that follow the social norms strictly. Ramraj points out that “Ammu, the central character in The God of Small Things, was born in the 1940s.” (Victor.J.Ramraj, p.69) Singh declares that “this means that Ammu belongs to the second of three generations in the novel, which can also be called the intermediate generation. This generation defies patriarchy and the “dominant sexual norms of the time.” (N.P.Singh, p.66) Ammu is a victim of the patriarchal society she lives in.

Her crime is that she was born as the wrong sex. Ray adds that the oppression of Ammu begins when her father, Pappachi, does not allow her to educate herself at college “Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl” (p.38). Pappachi does not want to waste his money on his daughter’s education; girls will get married and leave the house anyway. Instead, he thinks she should stay at home and help her mother with daily chores.

Ammu and Chacko are not treated as equals by their parents; while Ammu is denied education, Chacko gets educated at Oxford. Sometimes Ammu feels as if she does not exist. A good example of this is her eighteenth birthday: “Her eighteenth birthday came and went. Unnoticed, or at least unremarked upon by her parents” (p.38). In search for more freedom and hoping to escape from this cruel reality Ammu experiences at her parents' house, she runs into a marriage that ends in divorce. Ammu is the kind of woman who does not think about the consequences of her actions, even when they entail taking a stand against society’s laws.
Although Ammu knows that she, as a Syrian Christian, should not marry a Hindu, she marries him anyway. Even though she knows that it is against the social norms of Kerala for a woman to divorce her husband, Ammu breaks the rule again and divorces her husband since she cannot tolerate his treatment of her. As a divorced woman, Ammu has no other choice than to return to her parents' home, to Ayemenem, unwelcome and with two children.

Baby Kochamma informs Ammu about her position in the family and in society and about her opinion of Ammu returning home with children. Baby Kochamma points out to Ammu 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,. . . As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage..." (Roy, p.45).

Critic Amina Amin agrees in “Breaking Laws, Crossing Forbidden Territory: An Analysis of The God of Small Things,” where she points out that "even though Ammu works as much as Chacko in the factory, she would not inherit anything from her parents because daughters do not inherit". (Amina Amin, pp.108) Another important difference in the view of women and men is the unfair treatment of Ammu’s and Chacko’s desires and how their parents fulfill or oppress those desires.

Mammachi defends Chacko’s sexual needs, declaring, “he can’t help having a Man’s Needs” (Roy, p.168). Chacko is allowed to have relationships with the beautiful women workers in the factory, who by the way come from different castes. However, when Ammu fulfills her desires with a man from a lower caste, she gets banished because it is sinful for a woman to express her sexual desires. Ammu gets punished for breaking the social norms and gets both society and her family against her. Her family banishes her instead of supporting her. In order to keep the family’s honour, pride, and good reputation, Ammu is punished for her crime. Ray points out that when Ammu goes to the police station to try to save Velutha who has been arrested, the officer offends her as he taps her breast with his baton.
Ammu is a victim of society because she wants the freedom to decide how to live her life; in fact, Ammu is a victim because she is a strong woman who believes in the freedom for women to choose their own lives. Although she knows that she will never be treated as equal to men, she also knows that she has society against her; she tries to free herself from the tyranny of the men in fulfilling her desires, until her life is taken from her.

The third generation is a period that is filled with rebellion against patriarchal society: the women do not accept their situation as oppressed. Singh claims that “Rahel was born in post-independence India, which was a period of decreased oppression compared with the previous two generations”. (p.70) Singh also points out that “Rahel lives as a rebel her whole life, as she does not think of the consequences of her actions (p.70). Rahel has a strong personality and revolts against society’s norms; however, she is denied by society, mostly because of Ammu’s actions, but also because of her own. All Rahel ever wants is to be loved by her family. Rahel is only cared for by her mother and brother, whereas the rest of the family never really cares about her.

As time goes by, with the arrival of Sophie Mol to Ayemenem, Rahel realizes that her family does not love her anymore. Although both of them come from inter-community marriages, they are, however, not treated the same. Verma points out that “her family sees Rahel as a demon while Sophie Mol is seen as an angel”. (p.185) For example, Rahel is compared with Sophie Mol as follows: “Little angels were beach-coloured … Little demons were mudbrown… with forehead bumps that might turn into horns.” (p.179).

Rahel feels left out by her family when Sophie Mol arrives; she is also jealous of the attention she gets and the special treatment she receives. Rahel feels that it is unfair that she is treated as she is; in other words, she thinks that her own family should not be the ones who oppress her. Rahel wishes to be treated as an equal to Sophie Mol, but her uncle, aunt, and grandmother make sure that it will not happen. This oppression continues and gets much worse when Ammu dies and Rahel is left in the hands of Chacko, Mammachi, and Baby Kochamma; these are
people that do not care about her. As she grows up with nobody to look out for her or to teach her about certain things, her childhood is difficult. In fact, Rahel is being punished for her mother’s mistakes, and if they could, they would have got rid of her. Having no one loving, raising and teaching her about how to behave, Rahel gets into trouble in school. Singh points out that Rahel drifts from school to school since she gets expelled for the reason that she does not know how to behave correctly. Rahel is against the patriarchal norms as she rebels against society. She acts against the value system of society that puts people in different positions by describing what is considered low as “she decorates a knob of dung with flowers”. (R.S.Sharma, p.72) In time, Rahel grows into a woman and marries a man of her own choice, just as her mother had done.

However, Prakash points out that, “in contrast with Mammachi and Ammu, Rahel divorces her husband the moment he stops to fulfill her needs. As a highly educated and modern girl, Rahel is rebellious as she refuses to accept the fates of Ammu and Mammachi”. (C.Nirmala Prakash, p.83) Even though Rahel’s husband does not oppress her as Pappachi and her father have done to their wives, she leaves him anyway. She leaves him because she believes that it is better to leave a man if you feel miserable with him than to stay with him. Finally, Rahel would have been oppressed if she had stayed with her husband, because she would have forced herself to stay in a loveless marriage and hold back her need to be loved by someone who can fulfill her and make her a complete person. Rahel is a woman who breaks the social norms of Kerala, which are rules for how a woman should behave. In fact, she lives her whole life the way she wants and does not care about the consequences. Rahel represents contemporary women in India, where the women live their lives as rebels and do not let social norms decide their lives.

The men in this novel are superior to the women since they have the laws on their side that help them degrade women. It is also shown that the oppression changes from generation to generation because the women become more rebellious for each period. The women revolt against the unjust treatment of them because they want the same opportunities as the men. Even though the women in this story develop and become braver with each generation, the men do not change their patriarchal behavior against the women at all. The women are treated more or less badly through all the generations.
India is known for its development in social, political, religious, economic and scientific fields and to which Indian writers have attracted, highlighted in different forms, particularly the novel. Jason Cowley, one of the five judges for the Booker Prize, says “The God of Small Things fulfils the highest demand of the art of fiction to see the world, not conventionally or habitually, but as if for the first time. Roy's achievement, and it is considerable, is never to forget about the small things in life: the insects and flowers, wind and water, the outcast and the despised. She deserved to win.” (Jason Cowley, p.28.)

Roy mainly focused on cultural aspects with special reference to the relationship between culture and life, the tension and interaction of characters belonging to different cultural state, the adoption and diffusion of cultures giving rise to new problems and, finally, the understanding of the various aspects of culture and their impact on the novel. Culture which may be defined as the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population.

Three cultures, namely those of Kerala, Bengal and of the West pervade The God of Small Things and are interwoven like three stand into fabric of the novel. Culture depends to a great extent on genetic, geographical, economic and social conditions. The novel begins with a depiction of the geographical and climatic conditions of Ayemenem in May. It is the hottest month of summer and also very humid, but it is the time when red bananas ripen, jackfruits burst and if one is lucky one may still find the bright mangoes. It is the hottest month of summer and also very humid, but it is the time when red bananas ripen, jackfruits burst and if one is lucky one may still find the bright mangoes. Ayemenem is a little hill-country village about two hours' drive away from Cochin.

The nearest town to it is Kottayam. Rahel's grand aunt, Baby Kochamma, and Kochu Maria, the maid servant, live in the old house on the top of the hill. Very close to the ancestral house is the river Meenachal which flows into the sea. Kerala's important aspect is it is known for its various habits, customs, food and the activities which build up the composite background of Kerala. The best examples which tell the food habit of Keralites, fish is one of the main items of the meals
together with rice or tapioca. At Mr. Pillai's house, Kalyani offers Chacko a coffee in stainless-steel glass, besides banana chips and avalose oondas, snacks prepared out of fried rice. When Estha and Rahel visit Velutha he gives them fresh tender coconut water to drink, which is a common custom in Kerala. With the passage of time however, people are swayed by multi-nationals with their artificial products such as Coca-Cola and lemonade drinks.

Roy describes the way of dressing of Kerala people which is part of their culture beside food habits. Men and Women in Kerala mostly use dress named the mundu, which very comfortable to the climatic conditions and also it is easy to lift up when one has to cross rivers or streams. But men who belong to the aristocracy preferred to be seen in a suit by the impact of Western life style. Pappachi wore a suit even after retirement at home as a symbol of superiority. Margaret Kochamma, ex-wife of Chacko, came from England and was dressed in yellow crimpling bellbottoms, hat on her head and Made-in-England go-go bag on her shoulders.

Social customs are the indicators of a culture in a society. Christians have the social custom of giving Christmas gifts to their dear and near ones. This custom is more common in the West. In the novel Pillai shows the photographs to Rahel which were taken by Chacko. The cutting of the cake on special occasions is another custom. When Margaret and Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem House, the cake prepared by Kochu Maria under the direction of Mammachi was cut while singing. Religion plays an important role in culture. Through religion people express their basic needs and aspirations in the form of three 'C's, namely Creed, Code and Cult. Baby Kochamma's family was very traditional Christian and belonged to Syrian Orthodox Church. Many of the family members and relatives were present for Sophie Mol's funeral. The congregation gathered around the coffin and sang the funeral hymns loudly. "The priests with curly beards swung pots of frankincense on chains and never smiled at babies the way they did on usual Sundays. The long candles on the altar were bent. The short ones weren't"(Roy,p.4).

On her tombstone the epithet read: 'A Sunbeam Lent To Us Too Briefly'. Since the family was very traditional, Ammu with her children Rahel and Estha attended the funeral in the Church but were not allowed to be close to other
member of the family since she had married a Hindu without the consent of the family members and violating Christian tradition. Every religion has its own traditions, customs, festivities and places of worship.

In the novel one finds the description of the Ayemenem Temple and its activities. In the temple the chenda (a kind of drum) was beaten to announce the performance of kathakali. Christian parents would not allow their children to go to the temple and "Oddly enough, it was he [Pillai] who had introduced the twins to kathakali. Against Baby Kochamma's better Judgement, it was he who took them, along with Lenin, for all night performances at the temple, and sat up with them till dawn, explaining the language and gesture of kathakali" (Roy, p.236). Though the main theme of the novel is unrelated to religion or faith the psychological and cultural influence of religion can be seen on all the chief characters. Culture can be perceived better through social stratification. In every society, one finds a division based on various factors such as religion, language, economic conditions, different interests and ideology. In Kerala one finds people of different religions Hindus, Muslims and Christians living together.

Christians were among the pioneers who tried to alleviate the condition of the untouchables. Purran Kunju the father-in-law of Mammachi, had founded a school for the untouchables. Velutha is a good example of the modern untouchable who was educated and gainfully employed thanks to modern education, but socially remained an outcaste. The education and encouragement which find a change in Velutha’s behaviour: "An unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel" (Roy, p.76).

In the novel the reader comes across cases of mixed-marriages. The plot of the novel to a great extent is built around problems faced by the characters involved in mixed marriages. These characters face cultural challenges, both from their own families and the new families into which they get married as well as from the society. In this novel one can observe four marriages with different problems and consequences. Chacko, an Indian, marries Margaret, an English lady,
in England without the consent of the parents. Ammu, a Syrian Christian first marries Babu, a Bengali Hindu according to the custom of Bengalis.

After leaving him she returns to her parents house but falls in love with Velutha, a Paravan, and so are punished severely. Rahel marries Lawrence, an American only to be divorced soon. Baby Kochamma is attracted towards Fr. Mulligan, an Irish monk, whom she could not marry. All these are love marriages and the law of love seems to transgress as well transcend the human laws and barriers. Ammu's love marriage with Babu reveals aspects of some cultural problems in the novel. Life was hard for Ammu in her own family also. She had no equal right in property" and to add to the misery, the death of Sophie Mot took place. The cause of it was attributed to her children and to Velutha, her lover. Consequently she was asked to leave the house. Vellya could never think that Ammu, a Syrian Christian, belonging to a rich family could ever fall in love with his son Velutha who was poor and untouchable. It was a social taboo for a Christian to marry a Hindu and, much worse, a Paravan. He couldn't digest it. He considered it a crime on the part of his son.

One of the important aspects of cultural studies is to be cognizant of cultural changes. Various forces, especially modernization, are bound to have effect on it. After twenty-three years when Rahhel came back to Aymenem she observed many changes. Baby Kochamma's life-style had changed from an active life of gardening to passive watching of T. V. The distinction between master and servant was also forgotten and both ate nuts from the same bowl. They were driven by the new needs created by T. V. advertisements and also suffered from new phobias. Modernization affects not only the life-style but also the natural surroundings on which life depends. One could see pollution everywhere: "Years later, when Rahel returned to the river, it greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile" (Roy, p.124). Not only water but air was also polluted: "On warm days the smell of shit lifted off the river and hovered over Ayemenem like a hat" (Roy, p.125).

In society, one culture influences another. The influence of the Western culture particularly the British on India has been great. They were in India for a long time and were regarded as superiors as well as symbols of power and
greatness. Many people in India tried to imitate them in their dress, food habits and language. It was considered prestigious to go abroad for studies and get a degree from a foreign university. It was also recognized as honourable to marry a foreigner. In the novel, the reader can find Chako going to Oxford to pursue his studies.

Chacko was carrying the corpse of Ammu in the van to be cremated in the electric crematorium and felt, “It was odd driving through bright, busy streets with a dead Roman senator on the floor of the van. It made the blue sky bluer. Outsider the van windows, people, like cut-out paper puppets, went on with their paper-puppet lives” (Roy, p.162). Modern life with its poverty and lack of cleanliness and order can be noticed easily on the railway stations. When Ammu had gone to Cochin Harbour terminus to send Estha by The Madras Mail, she saw the people homeless, hungry and hollow whose condition, he felt, was “The Stationworld. Society's circus. Where, with the rush of commerce, despair canes home to roost and hardened slowly into resignation” (Roy, p.302). Modern civilization has given rise not only to violence but also to sexual promiscuity and moral degradation, which is highlighted in the novel.

Estha's becoming a victim of child abuse in the Abhilash Talkies is a case in point. Moreover, at present we witness a kind of terror and fear everywhere. A culture of fear seems to be looming large over the society. After torturing Velutha the police Inspector experience it “Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness. Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify” (Roy, p.308).

In conclusion, one can say that man and culture are intimately interliked like the umbilical cord. Culture is a many-layered concept and a multi-faceted reality. Culture is conditioned by various factors The Geed of Small Things has brought out the cultural elements through the setting, characters, plot and interactions of the characters. The study of the novel raises certain questions in one's mind. Is Arundhati Roy using Kerala as a microcosom of various cultures in
an uneasy mix? Does she imply that crossing of 'cultural boundaries' leads to disaster?

Is Velutha really 'the God of Small Things'? Arundhati Roy has satirised these evils and has shown a way for a better future. The novel touches upon the basic human needs like love and compassion which transcend all cultural, linguistic and social barriers. It is one of the reasons why the novel is translated and read by people all over the world with much appreciation. The novel serves as a mirror to the cultural milieu of India in the last half-a-century with its uniqueness and variety. Modern civilization has made life so complicated and sophisticated that the modern man has lost his sense of meaning in life. Life has become mere routine and mechanical.