Chapter – Third

History in Live Performance: Yearning for Identity
Arundhati Roy’s first and so far the only novel, *The God of Small Things*, is a social document in which she highlights many deep-rooted problems inflicting the Indian society. In 1997, she was awarded the Booker Prize for this novel. This novel caused such a great sensation on the world literary arena that it was translated into more than forty languages within a very short period of time. It received mixed responses—praise as well as criticism—from the readers, both nationally and internationally. Carmen Callil, the former member of the Booker Prize Committee, labeled it as “vulgar”, and commented upon the fellow judges’ decision to award her the Booker as “an execrable decision”. In June, 1997, Sabu Thomas, a lawyer, filed a public interest litigation against Roy on the ground that the description of the love-scene in the last chapter of the novel is obscene, and it could be damaging to public morality, and demanded the scene to be removed.

Roy in this novel tells more than one story, and the readers enjoy multiple interpretations of the narrative. The novel’s setting is Ayemenem, a village of Kerala, and the social, political, economical and cultural milieu of 1960s provides the social background. After India’s independence, the Indian people cannot come out of anglophilia, and colonialism is still rooted deeply in their psyche. The promises of ensuring equality by the Communist Party were shattered when the leaders of the party used it for their personal gain. The problem of untouchability is still a stigma on the Indian society, and the people from the lower castes live as second class citizens, and sometimes they just do not exist. The novel also highlights the trauma experienced by many children in India, and their sense of alienation which adversely affects their later life. From time immemorial, women are suppressed, exploited and marginalized in every
walk of life. Roy voices her concern in the novel for the women who are exploited socially, culturally, economically and sexually.

British colonial power during its reign in India for almost two centuries controlled Indian lives at the social, political, economic, psychic and cultural levels, and left a scar that the Indian natives cannot come out of, even today. Imperial power assumes authority over another territory, and this authority is expressed militarily for exploiting native resources. The same objective guides the efforts to control the psyche of the natives through cultural, educational and social regimentation. In 1947, the British colonial power gave way, and the people of India felt a sort of freedom and security, yet at the cultural plane they could not enable themselves to be rid of the colonial mind set. The western culture was stuck deeply in their minds. The colonized mentality wreaked by the colonizer on the indigenous inhabitants compelled people to pay obeisance to those who were higher to them in the so-called system of class division organized around caste hierarchy. More specifically, the people from lower strata of society bend their heads in front of the people from middle and upper classes, and people from all classes of the once colonized countries show their humbleness and slavish attitude towards colonial culture as superior to the indigenous culture.

Frantz Fanon talks of the psychological aspects of colonialism and myths of racism in his much acclaimed books such as *Black Skin and White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). He says that “the native intellectual has thrown himself greedily upon Western culture” which he thinks to be his own (*The Wretched* 176). He comments that the colonial domination disrupts the cultural life of the conquered people who are persuaded in various ways by the colonial power that their culture is inferior to
that of the colonizer. He further asserts that “the intellectual throws himself in frenzied fashion into the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavourably criticizing his own national culture, or else takes refuge in setting out and substantiating the claims of that culture in a way that is passionate but rapidly becomes unproductive” (190). This sort of psychic experience of colonialism, as sardonically manifested by Roy in her novel The God of Small Things, makes the Dalits and the Untouchables realize that they are born to serve the people from the upper class, and convinces the people from the upper class that anything Western is superior to that which is their own. Ng Shing Yi comments, “the postcolonial mentality may contain within itself a kind of residual enslavement which manifests in the psychic perception that white, ex-colonial powers possess an inherent superiority over black, ex-colonized subjects” (Peripheral Beings).

The cultural impact of colonialism manifests itself largely upon the people from middle and the upper classes. The Ipe family, around whom the main plot of the novel is centred, has been encroached upon by the British colonial culture. Most of the characters are anglophiles to varying degrees. As far as the affinity for the British colonial culture is concerned, three types of characters emerge in the novel. The first type of characters like Pappachi, Baby Kochamma and Chacko are the blind followers and practitioners of Western culture, which they think to be the standard culture of the civilized people; the twins Estha and Rahel come under the second category who are quite unprepared to receive that culture willingly; the third type is represented by Ammu who is sardonic and vociferously critical of the first type of characters for their being anglophiles.
Pappachi is a true embodiment of an anglophile who throughout his life tries to identify himself with Englishmen. Ammu mockingly uses the phrase “incurable British CCP” for him, the short for ‘chhi-chhi poach’ (shit-wiper) (The God of Small Things 51). Chacko confesses to the twins that “though he hated to admit it, they were all Anglophiles” (52). Empathy towards Western education is in the blood of the family. Pappachi, in order to apply for the post of Imperial Entomologist, has done six-month diploma course from Vienna. Baby Kochamma’s father, reverend Ipe, sends her to the University of Rochester in America for a course of diploma in Ornamental Gardening. Chacko is a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford.

Frantz Fanon’s theory of postcolonial psychic experience is echoed through the mouth of Chacko who thinks that the British colonizer made the colonized Indians realize “the inferiority of his culture” (The Wretched 190). Their mentality is shaped to adore the colonizers, and to despise themselves. They are unable to free themselves from their slavish mentality. They are none but prisoners of war who have forgotten their glorious past and become hopeless. “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’” (The God 53). Pappachi never feels hesitant in adoring the conquerors whom he thinks to be better, and suspects his own blood. He distrusts his own daughter Ammu when she comes back to Ayemenem, divorcing her alcoholic husband, Baba, who forces his “extremely attractive wife” to go to the bungalow of Mr. Hollick, the English manager of the tea plantation, to “be ‘looked after’” when Baba will be out for a treatment, because that is the only option, as
suggested by Mr. Hollick, to save his job (42). This distrust springs from Pappachi’s blind notion about the British as “enlightened saviours”. It is beyond his perception that “an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (42), but in reality Mr. Hollick seduced many tea-pickers and fathered a number of ragged, light skinned children. Roy ironically describes Pappachi’s endeavour to assimilate his culture with that of the British, and to identify himself with the colonizers. He, in his sky blue Plymouth car bought from an old Englishman, travels “importantly down the narrow road . . . looking outwardly elegant but sweating freely inside his woolen suits” (48).

The colonized mentality of the Ipe family is more clearly reflected in the episode of Chacko’s British ex-wife Margaret Kochamma and her daughter Sophie Mol’s arrival at the Ayemenem house. A full week called ‘What Will Sophie Mol Think?’ is devoted to the preparations being made to welcome them. Most of the family members are crazy enough to make elaborate arrangements to impress Sophie and her mother Margaret who are regarded as the superior creatures nourished on the superior civilization. The twins have to go through practical exercises in spoken English with right pronunciation to bring them up to the level of Sophie and Margaret. Baby Kochamma trains the twins.

That whole week Baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twins’ private conversations, and whenever she caught them speaking in Malayalam, she levied a small fine which was deducted at source. From their pocket money. She made them writes lines — ‘impositions’ she called them — I will always speak in English, I will always speak in English. A hundred times each. When they were done, she scored them
out with her red pen to make sure that old lines were not recycled for new punishments. (36)

Chacko’s mentality is framed in such a way that he measures whole human civilization within the parameter of British civilization. In this sense, his following speech is very symbolic: “The whole of human civilization as we know it,’ Chacko told the twins, ‘began only two hours ago in the Earth Woman’s life. As long as it takes us to drive from Ayemenem to Cochin’” (54). It seems that the journey to receive Chacko’s ex-wife Margaret and their daughter Sophie who are supposed to be from the civilized race is the beginning of the process of human civilization and their reception at the airport is the completion of the process.

Chacko’s colonized mentality convinces him of the superiority of white race, and that such a race should be provided with special care and treatment. “There would be two flasks of water. Boiled water for Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol, tap water for everybody else” (46). He is so happy and proud to have a white wife that he introduces Margaret and Sophie triumphantly to Mammachi “like a pair of tennis trophies that he had recently won” (173). Even he does not lag behind in mentally tormenting his own mother in order to praise his ex-wife who “traded me in for a better man” (249). Baby Kochamma talks to Margaret in a strange new British accent in order to bring herself at the level of Margaret and to “set herself apart from the Sweeper Class” (144). To show her acquaintance with English literature and culture, she refers to The Tempest again and again during her conversation with Sophie.

As the once colonized people cannot come out from their colonized and slavish mentality for a long time, the ex-colonizer too cannot think beyond their sense of
superiority, and hatred for ‘Black Race’. Margaret marries Chacko without the consent of her parents, because her mother does not like that wedlock and her father, conscious about their superior race, thinks of the colonized Indians as “sly, dishonest people. He couldn’t believe that his daughter was marrying one” (240). The irony lies in the fact that Margaret is not from a well-to-do family and she is working as a waitress at a café in Oxford. On the contrary, Chacko is from an aristocratic family. So in the outlook of an ex-colonizer, a colonized person is always inferior to them in all areas of life — socially, culturally and racially.

Chacko in Oxford is like a lotus-eater who likes to be amnesiac about his ancestors, about his family, about India. Forgetting the beautiful landscape of Ayemenem with Meenachal river (now to him, “The river too small. The fish too few”) (246), where he is brought up, he submits himself totally to his new British wife, and he “had no room in his heart for anyone else” (246). Even he does not think it necessary to read his mother’s letters written to him regularly, and to reply one. Chacko’s submission to the colonizers is more clearly represented in his using “Western technology as opposed to his mother’s ancient ways, to run the factory along modern financial rules”, which “only brings it to its knees, symbolically representing India’s surrender to the colonisers” (Balvannanadhan 135).

Roy condemns the new capitalism in the guise of globalization which covertly establishes the economic imperialism over the non-Western ex-colonies. This economic new-imperialism exploits the feeble slowly and stealthily as the octopus sucks blood. The postcolonial individual cannot free himself from this economic entrapment. Roy’s use of
the term ‘Heart of Darkness’ is very symbolic, and she, in an interview with Praveen Swami, says about the symbolic function of the ‘Heart of Darkness’.

………..the metaphor appears in The God of Small Things as a reversal of Conrad, a kind of laughing reference to “Heart of Darkness”. It’s saying that we, the characters in the book, are not with the White men, the people who are scared of the Heart of Darkness. We are the people who live in it; we are the people without stories………In Ayemenem in the Heart of Darkness, about what the Darkness is about. (Roy: Interview)

Like Conrad’s Kurtz, Kari Saipu, who, a paedophile, had demoralized himself as well as others, lived in the History House situated in the Heart of Darkness. Once upon a time it was a beautiful house in which Ayemenem’s ancestors lived their glorious life. With the advent of the British colonizers, its deterioration started, and in 1960s, it had been converted into a haunted house, and in the 1990s, the neo-colonialism (economic colonialism) wiped out the remaining signs of the ancestors of the colonized people of Ayemenem. The History House had been converted into a luxury hotel called as ‘Heritage’. “History and Literature enlisted by commerce. Kurtz and Karl Marx joining palms to greet rich guests as they stepped off the boat” (The God 126).

Roy’s indictment of cultural commodification is harsh and sardonic. The Kathakali ballet dance, an indigenous myth, has been utilized to recreate the half-naked foreign tourists. Alex Tickell comments: “Roy’s reference to kathakali can be read as an engagement with the wider implications of cultural commodification, both as a reflection of western desires, but also, metafictionally, as a set of choices about postcolonial identity” (69). Putting up with mockery of the foreign tourists, the poor Kathakali dancers
perform their dance to collect money. “Six-hour classics were slashed to twenty-minute cameos” *(The God 127)* to fit with the tourists’ fickle attention. After the end of the show, they feel a sort of partial identity loss, and become frustrated. “On their way back from the Heart of Darkness, they stopped at the temple to ask pardon of their gods. To apologize for corrupting their stories. For encashing their identities. Misappropriating their lives” (229). Chacko uses the image of a Kathakali dancer to promote Mammachi’s pickles on the overseas market because “it gave the products a Regional Flavour and would stand them in good stead” (47). An ancient and sacred Indian art is used as a pimp for material gain.

In the nineties, when the twins are adult, America has replaced Britain through the weapon of globalization as a form of neo-colonialism. Through the checkbook, the main bludgeon of American neo-colonialism which operates through the agents of IMF, WTO and World Bank, America controls the social, political, economic and cultural life of people all over the world, especially the people of the Third World countries. These agencies loan money to the Third World countries in order to buy American products from the “free markets” which indirectly bring their (the people of the Third World countries) own ruin. Arundhati Roy assails this economic imperialism in the guise of globalization when she says that the banks of the river are wrecked “of shit, and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils” (13). With the help of satellite channels, the western culture has been spread throughout the world. Within a night the American neo-colonialism grasps the indigenous cultures of the Third World countries. This cultural hegemony compels Baby Kochamma to dump her ornamental gardening
and follow “American NBA league games, one-day cricket and all the Grand Slam tennis
tournaments” (27). She loves the fashion and the smart, bitchy repartee of the “brittle
blondes with lipstick and hairstyles rigid with spray” who “seduced androids and
defended their sexual empires” (27) in The Bold and The Beautiful and Santa Barbara
shows on television. Even Kochu Maria, the maid servant of the family, is fascinated
with ‘WWF Wrestling Mania’.

Colonial propaganda of power relations continues still now in the ex-colonies in a
slightly changing form from racial discrimination to marginalization based on caste,
religion and gender. Roy raises her voice against the suppression and oppression of
women and the Untouchables and Dalits who are supposed to be the alien creatures in
hierarchical society. Velutha, the god of small things in the novel, is a paravan, an
untouchable who is skilful, whose necessity in the factory is immense; yet he is paid less
than any touchable worker. He is beaten to death by the touchable policemen when his
illicit sexual relationship with Ammu is disclosed. The divorcee Ammu and her twins’
position in the Ipe family is like outcasts. Pappachi’s regular physical torture of
Mammachi, Chacko’s taking over the authority of the Mammachi’s pickle factory
making her a sleeping partner, Chacko’s persuasion of Ammu about her “Locust Stand
I” (distortion of ‘locus standi’, meaning ‘no right’) (159), are the signs of “our wonderful
male chauvinist society” (57). Sophie is like a darling daughter in the family, but the
twins are not so loved. Sophie’s being non-Christian is not a problem, but the problem is
with the twins whose blood is a mix of Hindu and Christian.

Apart from the big things, there are certain small things which showcase the
anglophile mania of the Ipes. Estha’s favourite singer is Elvis Presley and favourite song
“Party”. Rahel’s use of quotation from Rudyard Kipling’s *Jungle Book*: ‘We be of one blood, ye and I’ to express her love for Ammu, Chacko’s teaching of English to the twins through constant reference to the Oxford dictionary—all of these suggest the anglophile mania of the family. To watch the movie ‘The Sound of Music’ is an extended exercise of anglophilia as Chacko himself thinks.

Roy tries to show that the West is wrong to treat the East as inferior both culturally and intellectually. Rahel’s American experience is gloomy enough. Her marriage with Larry McCaslin and her immigration to Boston, end up in a dismal job as a night clerk in a bullet-proof cabin at a gas station outside Washington, where drunks occasionally vomited into the money tray, and pimps propositioned her with more lucrative job offers. Twice she saw men being shot through their car windows. And once a man who had been stabbed, ejected from a moving car with a knife in his back. (20)

Still her immigrant status is received by the Indians with sheer admiration.

Roy is accused of being an anti-communist after her winning the prestigious Booker Prize for *The God of Small Things* that is labeled as “anti-Communist venom” (Nayanar pours scorn) for its “anti-Communist politics” (EMS attacks). Even its winning the prestigious Booker is because it is endowed with the ideology of world literature, asserts E.M.S.Namboodiripad, which is basically anti-Communist. That the novel presents the prevailing anti-communist sentiment, damaging it both ideologically and formally, is a serious failing, finds Aijaz Ahmad. He thinks Arundhati Roy is one among the radical sections of the cosmopolitan intelligentsia, who “has neither a feel for Communist politics nor perhaps rudimentary knowledge of it” (Reading Arundhati 33).
A keen and conscious reader of the novel can easily find the answer to the often asked question: Is Arundhati Roy an anti-Communist, and her novel *The God of Small Things* an anti-Communist propaganda? A reading of Roy’s non-fictions clearly suggests that she has neither any political leaning nor any affinity towards bourgeois exploitation. Rather, she is a cruise-missile against the exploiters, suppressors, oppressors, imperialists and the capitalists who throttle the meek. She is the voice of the devoiced, and a spokesperson of those whom the evil party politics renders dumb for centuries. To Roy politics is “old omelette and eggs thing” (*The God* 14), and the politician a “professional omeletteer” (14) who breaks the eggs to make omelette without any concern for the common people. They set the wrong policies and plans and it is common people who end up paying heavily. She has, no doubt, an affinity for and capability to accept communism, especially for its uncompromising battle against all kinds of suppression, exploitation and inequalities. It is not Marxism, but the misuse of Marxism by the Communist government [CPI (M)] in Kerala which she fights against.

A fiction is not a history, which should be the exact copy of the real incidents and events which society experiences, but a piece of literature that can never boast of portraying the hundred percent pictures of what has happened or is happening. In reply to Aijaz Ahmad’s charge of the novel’s failing to be realistic, it can be argued that Ahmad has scant understanding of realism in literature. Except for some fragmented incidents, such as Roy’s depiction of E.M.S. Namboodiripad’s (only historical figure in the novel) ancestral home turning into tourist hotel where old communists work as fawning bearers, the novel presents the real social, economical and political milieu of Kerala of the 1960s.
Kerala was the abode of communist movement in the post independence era. The world witnessed the first ever democratically elected communist government led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad who ascended the throne of chief minister of Kerala twice, first from 1957 to 1959 and then from 1967 to 1969. These governments failed to serve the cause of the common people, because they never dared to transcend the dogmas and traditions prevailing in Kerala. Roy beautifully describes the advent and purpose 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 heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy. (66-67)

This government was virulently criticized worldwide because of its ambiguity of purpose and its dictatorial attitude, paying less attention to whether the principles and plans to govern the people would serve them or not. Roy states:

Suddenly the communists found themselves in the extraordinary – critics said absurd – position of having to govern a people and foment revolution simultaneously. Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad evolved his own theory about how he would do this. Chacko studied his treatise on The Peaceful Transition to Communism with an adolescent’s obsessive diligence and an ardent fan’s unquestioning approval. It set out in detail how Comrade
E. M. S. Namboodiripad’s government intended to enforce land reforms, neutralize the police, subvert the judiciary and ‘Restrain the Hand of the Reactionary Anti-People Congress Government at the Centre’. (67)

That the peaceful part of the Peaceful Transition tottered to its fall within a year clearly indicates that there was something defective in E. M. S. Namboodiripad’s treatise. The vow that he would neutralize the police in public affairs came to be void when he realized within a year in Kerala’s prevailing situation the essence of using police force to attain his goal. Another promise inscribed in The Peaceful Transition to Communism that “Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad’s government intended to enforce land reforms” (67) remained a distant dream. Susan Stantford Friedman remarks: “Kerala has got the worse record of land reforms to protect the rights of untouchable people” (Feminism, State Fictions and Violence). It was in 1970 when the Communist government descended from the power that the land reforms in Kerala materialized.

Roy goes to the extent of accusing the communist rulers of being hypocrites who preached one thing and did another thing. Struggle for rights is one of the fundamental mottos of Communism, and communists believe that the progressive change in society can be possible only through the protest against all kinds of injustices and oppressions practised against the common people, and not by changing the government. To follow the communist principles this government encouraged people for revolution. But irony lies in the fact that the government simultaneously strived “to govern a people and foment revolution” (67). It implies that the people protested against their own government for its implementing wrong polices which shattered their basic rights. They were suppressed and
oppressed at different levels. The government failed to address the basics of their problems.

Within a year of formation of the Communist Government in Kerala, there prevailed a complete chaos, and every day the newspapers reported about “the riots, strikes, and incidents of police brutality that convulsed Kerala” (67). Over the next two years the political disputes degenerated into anarchy and “Kerala was on the brink of civil war. Nehru dismissed the Communist Government and announced fresh elections. The Congress Party returned to power” (68).

After eight years, in 1967, the Communist Party came to power for the second time with a coalition of Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)]. This time again the government failed to reach the grass root level, and received virulent criticism. When E. M. S. Namboodiripad went to implement his Peaceful Transition second time, the Chinese Communist Party came forward to accuse him of “providing relief to the people and thereby blunting the People’s Consciousness and diverting them from the Revolution” (68).

In a passage, the twins Rahel and Estha, while travelling with their Ammu, uncle Chacko and grand aunt Baby Kochamma in their ‘skyblue Playmouth’ car, are stranded by the marchers. The marchers are party workers, students and the laboures — Touchables and Untouchables who “carried a keg of ancient anger, lit with a recent fuse. There was an edge to this anger that was Naxalite, and new” (69). The following passage indicates the frustration, disappointment and anger prevailing in every section of society, against the fact that the Communist Government was not to serve the common people, the proletariat, but it was on the side of the bourgeoisie:
Their demands were that paddy workers, who were made to work in the fields for eleven and a half hours a day — from seven in the morning to six-thirty in the evening — be permitted to take a one-hour lunch break. That women’s wages be increased from one rupee twenty-five paisa a day, to three rupees, and men’s from two rupees fifty paisa to four rupees fifty paisa a day. They were also demanding that Untouchables no longer be addressed by their caste names. (69)

The peasants were to work in the field eleven and half hours a day without any recession. The exploitation of the labourers was extreme and there was disparity between the wages of male and female workers. Although communism talks about classless society where there must be no existence of caste system and distinction between the touchable and the untouchable, the E. M. S. Namboodiripad government could not rise above the practice of untouchability.

The Naxalites uprising was another sign of the failure of the Communist Government. In 1967, the local CPM leaders Kanu Sanyal and Charu Mazumdar with the starving peasants in the country-side led an armed insurrection in Naxalbari, a village of West Bengal. “They organized peasants into fighting cadres, seized land, expelled the owners and established People’s Courts to try Class Enemies. The Naxalite movement spread across the country and struck terror in every bourgeois heart” (68). It created terror not only in every bourgeois heart, but also in the heart of E. M. S. Namboodiripad, and that is why he “expelled the Naxalites from his party” (69). The Naxalites were fighting for the real cause of the people, especially the poor peasants and the labourers who remained starving most of the time. Roy lays the entire responsibility on the
shoulders of E.M.S. Namboodiripad for what Naxalites were doing. Kalpana Wilson finds the reason of the outrage of the CPI (M) establishment: “Roy’s very affinity for the left – in the form of the Naxalite movement as she perceives it — is one of these reasons” (Arundhati Roy and Patriarchy).

How Communism worked in Kerala is reflected through the activities and practices of Comrade K. N. M. Pillai, the main communist activist in the novel. Comrade Pillai is beautifully sketched in the novel by the narrator: “A professional omeletteer. He walked through the world like a chameleon. Never revealing himself, never appearing not to. Emerging through chaos unscathed” (The God 14). He, being a true opportunist, misuses communism for his personal gain. He organizes labour union in the Paradise Pickles & Preserves and urges the labourers for a revolution, not for the sake of the labourers, but thinking that it “would be his future constituency, would be an excellent beginning for a journey to the Legislative Assembly” (120). But for this, like a bourgeoisie, he never sacrifices his business interest. He keeps a good relation with Chacko, the co-owner of Paradise Pickles & Preserves against whom he instigates the labourers for revolution. Roy sardonically narrates this fact:

Comrade K. N. M. Pillai never came out openly against Chacko. Whenever he referred to him in his speeches he was careful to strip him of any human attributes and present him as an abstract functionary in some larger scheme. A theoretical construct. A pawn in the monstrous bourgeois plot to subvert the Revolution. He never referred to him by name, but always as ‘the Management’. As though Chacko was many people. Apart from it being tactically the right thing to do, this disjunction between the
man and his job helped Comrade Pillai to keep his conscience clear about his own private business dealings with Chacko. His contract for printing the Paradise Pickles labels gave him an income that he badly needed. He told himself that Chacko-the-client and Chacko-the-Management were two different people. (121)

Pillai does not shy away from hiding his communist identity when it becomes an obstacle in achieving petty personal interests. His son Lenin, who works for the Dutch and German embassies, has amended his name as Levin “to allay any fears his clients might have about his political leanings (128).

In a nutshell, a proper word to use for K.N.M. Pillai is hypocrite, a chameleon who changes his colour whenever he needs to protect self interest. He wants to establish himself as an influential leader in front of the people in his constituency, and he uses Chacko’s visit to his house to serve his purpose to impress the people.

He wanted to use Chacko’s visit to impress local supplicants and Party Workers . . . The more people that were seen waiting to meet him, the busier he would appear, the better the impression he would make. And if the waiting people saw that the factory Modalali himself had come to see him, on his turf, he knew it would give off all sorts of useful signals. (273)

Although Communism stands for equality for all, irrespective of caste, creed and colour, Comrade Pillai is a stern practitioner of caste system who hates the inclusion of untouchable workers in the party. The motto of classless society is far from the actual practice. That Velutha, a Paravan by caste, an untouchable, is a cardholding party
member is not acceptable to Comrade Pillai who thinks him a hitch on his path. Arundhati Roy narrates:

The only snag in Comrade K. N. M. Pillai’s plans was Velutha. Of all the workers at Paradise Pickles, he was the only card-holding member of the Party, and that gave Comrade Pillai an ally he would rather have done without. He knew that all the other Touchable workers in the factory resented Velutha for ancient reasons of their own. (121)

He waits for an opportunity to remove him from his path. He provokes Chacko to terminate Velutha from the job in the factory where he works as an indispensable worker, who is able to make things like “rosewood dining table” (28), “intricate toys – tiny windmills, rattles, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds . . . perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts” (74), mending “radios, clocks, water-pumps” (75).

‘He may be very well okay as a person. But other workers are not happy with him. Already they are coming to me with complaints . . . You see, Comrade, from local standpoint, these caste issues are very deep-rooted.’

Kalyani put a steel tumbler of steaming coffee on the table for her husband.

‘See her, for example. Mistress of this house. Even she will never allow Paravans and all that into her house. Never. Even I cannot persuade her. My own wife. Of course inside the house she is Boss.’ He turned to her with an affectionate, naughty smile. ‘Allay edi, Kalyan?’ (278)
He suggests to Chacko to send him off, because “That Paravan is going to cause trouble for you” (278).

Comrade Pillai shows himself a perfect diplomat who looks after both the sides in a dispute. Although he, appearing to be “Ayemenem’s own Crusader for Justice and Spokesman of the Oppressed” (303), delivers a lecture in Communist Party siege of Paradise Pickles & Preserves “about Rights of Untouchables (‘Caste is Class, comrades’)” (281), and claims that “the Management had implicated the Paravan in a false police case because he was an active member of the Communist Party” (303), he himself commits injustices to Velutha. When Velutha comes to Comrade Pillai for help, he mercilessly resents him on charge of “Violating Party Discipline” (287). Although he knows very well that Velutha is innocent in the case of allegation against him of attempting rape in Baby Kochamma’s FIR, he remains silent about the fact. Rather, he gives assurance to inspector Thomas Mathew that Velutha will not get any protection of the Communist Party in case he takes hard steps against him.

Roy in this novel attacks capitalism which is sponsored by Chacko, a factory owner by exploiting the poor and the powerless. Chacko, a self-proclaimed communist, runs a pickle factory called ‘Paradise Pickles & Preserves’ which is the breeding ground of all kinds of exploitation and oppression – economic, social and sexual. He is a pseudo-communist who has a mind with “feudal libido” (168), and who does not follow any of the ideals asserted by Marxism. It is an irony that Chacko, being a Marxist, taught as lecturer at Madras Christian College, an institute linked to a religious entity.
“The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to mere money relation” (Manifesto 45). The novel shows how blood relation is subordinated to the money relation. Mammachi who runs the factory successfully is displaced from the management of the factory after her husband’s death, making her “the sleeping partner” (The God 57) by Chacko. Chacko’s capitalistic mind prevents Ammu from inheriting her familial property. He tells Ammu “‘What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine’” (57), because everything in the family, he thinks, belongs to him.

There lies an irony in the use of the word ‘Paradise’ in Paradise Pickles & Preserves. Antonia Navarro-Tejero comments: “‘Paradise’ implies that industrialization and modernization are supposed to transform the state into a paradise. However, the factory is not such a paradise for the powerless; in fact, it is the setting of oppression and exploitation as much for women as for Dalits” (103).

Chacko exploits the women labourers in his factory in two ways – economically (by paying less wages in comparison to male workers) and sexually. He is a modern version of the feudal landlord who satisfies his lust on the women workers. “He would call pretty women who worked in the factory to his room, and on the pretext of lecturing them on labour rights and trade union law, flirt with them outrageously” (The God 65). Ammu mockingly comments on him: “An Oxford avatar of the old zaminder mentality—a landlord forcing his attentions on women who depended on him for their livelihood” (65). That Mammachi defends her son’s lecherous activity by considering it “a Man’s Needs” (168) is the most pathetic one. She has no concern about the women, who are the victims of Chacko’s sensuous appetite, but she is conscious of her own family reputation
and in order to keep it a secret, she makes an arrangement of letting Chacko have his sexual desire satisfied:

Mammachi had a separate entrance built for Chacko’s room, which was at the eastern end of the house, so that the objects of his ‘Needs’ wouldn’t have to go traipsing through the house. She secretly slipped them money to keep them happy. They took it because they needed it. They had young children and old parents. Or husbands who spent all their earnings in toddy bars. The arrangement suited Mammachi, because in her mind, a fee clarified things. Disjuncted sex from love. Needs from Feeling. (169)

Mammachi takes advantage of the poverty of the women workers in the factory by giving them extra money for their providing sexual satisfaction to Chacko.

Capitalism’s sole aim is to expand the capital by extracting unpaid labour or surplus value. The capitalists create a class which can be suppressed and exploited economically and socially. “The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonism” (Manifesto 41). When Chacko faces a demonstration while driving to Cochin, in which the demonstrators demand the increase of wages for both male and female workers, and abolition of the caste system, he escapes his communist responsibilities by staying silent and inactive and commands all passengers in his car to roll up the windows. Rather, Chacko protects his capital interest by implementing discrimination in the payment of wages to female and untouchable workers. “Since things were not going well financially, the labour was paid less than the minimum rates specified by the trade union” (The God 120). Even he pays
less to Velutha than a “touchable carpenter”, although he is more skillful than any of the workers of the factory.

The aim of Communism has not been achieved in Kerala. It has failed to eradicate the harmful traditions prevalent in society. It has never come forward to abolish the distinctions based on caste, creed, class, gender, and colour. It has been confined to narrow sectarianism. The slave-master pattern has been prevalent, serving the capitalist enterprise with feudal setting. Roy plays the role of a spokesperson of the exploited and the oppressed, and tears away the whole mask from the face of the politicians and capitalists who were in the guise of Marxists.

Like racism which is the fundamental factor in dividing people in European history, the caste system, a deep-rooted factor hindering the integration of people in India, affects the socio-economic and socio-cultural system of Indian society. The most unwanted and exploited ones are the untouchables, who are socially, economically, and even culturally and politically suppressed and oppressed. Untouchability in India has a long history. Several theories and opinions have been propounded in relation to the origin and development of this system in India.

Some scholars opine that the Aryans, a fair-skinned race, invaded and subjugated the dark-skinned aborigines placing them at the lower strata of society. These dark-skinned aborigines were forced to become partly the fourth class of society and partly untouchables. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, discarding this theory, said that the pre-Dravidian aborigines were forced to become untouchables by the Dravidians. He commented that “the Brahmins and the Untouchables belong to the same race” (62). Untouchability was born, Ambedkar thought, sometime around fourth century A.D., when in the frequent
clashes between the settled and the nomadic tribes, a section of the nomadic tribes were compelled to live on the outskirts of the village. They were untouchables as they used to eat the flesh of the dead cows.

Ambedkar’s estimation was opposed by U.N. Roy who said that untouchability existed before fourth century in the age of Panini, Kautilya and Buddha. The food gathering people who were in continuous conflicts with the food producing people used to take foods like flesh of dead animals and dogs which were prohibited by the settlers. These people were labeled as untouchables and had to live away from the settled communities.

According to the Rig Veda, the sacred text of the Hindus, humanity is divided into four varnas, namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras. In the social hierarchy, first come the Brahmins who are priests engaged in worshipping the gods. They are the most powerful section who control people from the rest three varnas. Then come Kshatriyas who are rulers and warriors. Vaisyas form the third segment who are land owners and merchants. In the bottom rung of the hierarchy come the Shudras that include artisans and servants. They have been the most oppressed and exploited people. A section of Shudras that include ‘Chandal’ and ‘Mritapa’ are called ‘excluded shudras’ by the grammarians like Panini and Patanjali, and ‘asat shudras’ by the law makers. They are the untouchables who are to engage in the professions like butchers, leather workers, launderers and latrine cleaners.

In South India untouchability is practised more meticulously than elsewhere in India.
Brahmanas and other ‘higher’ castes believed themselves to become polluted if Kammalan (blacksmiths, carpenters etc.) approached within sixteen hands, toddy trappers within twenty-four, Pollaya or Cheruma (peasants) within thirty-two and Paria within forty hands. Nayadi were kept at a distance of more than two hundred hands. Tanks of higher castes became unworthy of use if the untouchables passed by them. Untouchables could not wear gold ornaments, nor use umbrellas and footwear. They could not attend schools where children of other castes were enrolled. In Maharashtra, they had to drag a thorny branch to wipe out their footprints and had to be (sic) prostrate themselves at a distance when a Brahmana passed by so that their shadow might not defile the Brahmana. In Kerala, untouchability assumed its most appalling features. (Amitabh Roy 107-08)

Although in different ages, the religious leaders, social reformers and philanthropists fought untouchability, its complete eradication could never be achieved, as it served to maintain the power structure of society. In the middle ages, religious leaders such as Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Raidas, Nabhadas and Sri Chaitanyadev, and in the nineteenth century organizations such as Brahmo Samaj in West Bengal, Prarthana Samaj and Satyasodhak Samaj in Maharashtra and Arya Samaj in Punjab appealed to the people to behave humanely towards the untouchables. In the twentieth century, two great personalities, namely Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi fought for the cause of untouchables till the end of their lives. Mahatma Gandhi renamed untouchables as Harijan (which means ‘people of God’) to confer upon them human dignity and honour.
Indian Government moved to eliminate the inhuman practice of untouchability and in the Indian Constitution, Article 17 has been devoted to the cause of untouchables. It articulates: “Untouchability’ is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.” These untouchables enlisted in one of the schedules of the Constitution of India are given advantages in admissions to schools and colleges, and also a percentage of government jobs are reserved for them.

However, the life of untouchables has not been enviable even in the twentieth century when some initiatives have been taken to confer upon them the status of human beings. They are still the outcastes, the alien creatures. Even very recently about fifty million people, among whom dalits and adivasis form the majority, have been displaced by big dams and other developmental projects without any proper rehabilitation. “A huge percentage of the displaced are Adivasis (57.6 percent in the case of the Sardar Sarovar dam). Include Dalits and the figure becomes obscene” (The Algebra 62). Roy raises her voice against the oppression of untouchables because of the caste system prevalent in Kerala, and portrays a gloomy and bizarre picture of them in The God of Small Things.

The plot of the novel centres around a Syrian Christian family of Ayemenem House. It is, therefore, highly essential to assess the origin and development of Syrian Christians in India.

The Christians of Kerala are divided into five churches: Roman Catholic, Orthodox Syrian, Nestorian, Marthoma, and Anglican. Syrian Christians claim the 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. Syrian Christians have a history that predates European rule. While the Jesuits made only limited alteration to community life in 1830s and 40s, the nineteenth-century British Colonial state played a significant role in undermining Syrian Christian-Hindu connections. The old Catholic-Jacobite division gave way to as many as fourteen competing Episcopal allegiances. One of the most significant splits took place in 1888 when the Travancore High Court ruled in favour of the Jacobites (Mar Dionysius vs Mar Thomas Athanasius). The losers formed a separate ecclesiastical body, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church (Bayly 241-320). (Khurshid Alam)

Reverend E.John Ipe, the great grandfather of Rahel and Estha, was a priest of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. “Twenty per cent of Kerala’s population were Syrian Christians, who believed that they were descendants of the one hundred Brahmins whom Saint Thomas the Apostle converted to Christianity when he travelled east after the Resurrection” (The God 66). Therefore, by origin all the members of the Ipe family are Hindus. The untouchables depicted in the novel are also converted Christians.

When the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas (among them Velutha’s grandfather, Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of Untouchability. As added incentive they were given a little food and money. They were known as the Rice Christians. It didn’t take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They
were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Pariah Bishop. After Independence they found they were not entitled to any Government benefits like job reservations or bank loans at low interest rates, because officially, on paper, they were Christians, and therefore casteless. It was a little like having to sweep away your footprints without a broom. Or worse, not being allowed to leave footprints at all. (74)

The power structure is quite obvious in the caste-ridden Kerala where the untouchables, namely Paravans, Palayas and Pulayas, as mentioned in the novel, are treated as social outcasts who are not allowed to enter the houses of the touchables. Pappachi would not allow Vellya Pappen and his son to touch things touched by Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. The description of inhuman treatment of the untouchables becomes obvious when Mammach tells the twins:

…..in her girlhood, 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 footprint. In Mammachi’s time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (73-74)

Since then the condition of the untouchables has improved but not much as it should have been. The politicians, administrators and the upper castes could not strive by design to
improve the condition of the untouchables, as every powerful, in the human history, left no stone unturned to retain their power. The Communist Party in Kerala took up the problem of untouchables as a means to the objective of electoral gain. They “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” (66-67).

Michel Foucault affirms that the social codes, which are a form of discipline with clear mechanisms of punishments, control the citizens by putting forth pressure to make one fit its certain patterns of behaviour and public morality. Social punishments are in the form of prejudices, marginalization and public exclusion. These punishments thwart transgressors from escaping with their individualism, and teach rebellious citizens to obey. Social codes are formed by the powerful in order to exercise their power over the powerless. They are the means to exploit the powerless as they are always in favour of the powerful. It is the powerful of society by whom “the Love Laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much” (177). If these love laws are broken by the powerless, they must be punished to keep the social order in balance. Vellya Papen is aware of it, and, therefore, he never dares to break these laws. He is submissive to these age-old traditions made to suppress and exploit. His loyalty to the Ipe family overcomes his love for his son Velutha. On the contrary, Velutha has a rebellious spirit in him who loves to break all sorts of laws made against them, although he is not ignorant of the dire consequences of it.

Vellya Pappen and his two sons, Kuttapen and Velutha, belong to an untouchable caste called Paravan. Among them Kuttapen is a neutral character who has no significant
role to play in the novel. Vellya Pappen and Velutha serve the objective of showing how untouchables are being victimized jointly by politicians, administrators and members of upper-caste families.

Vellya Pappen, an “Old World Paravan” (76), is a docile conformist who takes for granted the social disabilities inflicted on the untouchables without daring to raise any objections. He is the perfect epitome of the ones who nourish their own exploiters with extreme loyalty and gratitude. Gramci’s concept of hegemony “that a social class achieves a predominant influence and power, not by direct and overt means, but by succeeding in making its ideological view of society so pervasive that the subordinate classes unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression” (Abrams 151), is highly applicable here in the case of Vellya Pappen who is like a mirror reflecting the image of Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. His gratitude to Mammachi and her family is “as wide and deep as a river in spate” (The God 76), because for his family for generations they have done, he thinks, so much such as giving his father, Kelan, the title to the land on which his hut stands then, paying for his glass eye when he loses one of his eyes, and arranging for Velutha’s education and giving him a job. That from generation to generation they are being exploited economically by paying them lower wages than what they actually deserve, socially by looking down upon them as creatures of lower order who are not allowed to enter their house and to touch what the touchables touch, and culturally by arranging different schools and churches for them hardly bothers him. The concept that they are born to serve the upper class people and what they do is good for them is deeply rooted in his psyche.
The restitution of Vellya Pappen’s loyalty to his masters appears too heavy to bear for him. His extreme loyalty brings unbearable torture and agony both for him and for his son Velutha. Mammachi with all her strength pushes Vellya Pappen who “stumbled backwards, down the kitchen steps and lay sprawled in the wet mud” (256) when, taking all the responsibilities of what his untouchable son has touched, he tells the “story of a man and woman, standing together in the moonlight. Skin to skin……His son and her daughter” (255-56) and takes permission “to kill his son with his own bare hands” (78). Mammachi spits in him and calls him “‘Drunken dog! Drunken Paravan liar!’” (256). When he realizes “his part in History’s Plans, it was too late to retrace his steps. He had swept his footprints away himself. Crawling backwards with a broom” (200). His son Velutha is beaten to death by an army of touchable policemen, the machinery of the powerful. His love for his son is sacrificed on the altar of his loyalty towards his masters.

Velutha is the worst sufferer in the novel, because he defies age-old traditions and rules imposed on the untouchables to exploit and oppress them. History pays him back heavily, as he challenges it by breaking the laws of history. He is a rebel who is like a “Mombatti” (candle) burning by himself without taking oil from outside. He is the representative of the exploited. For the cause of poor labourers and the untouchables he joins the procession to protest. This earns him the wrath of Baby Kochamma who later takes revenge upon him.

Velutha is highly intelligent and an excellent craftsman with an engineer’s mind. He is “The God of Small Things” who is forced to convert to “The God of Loss”, who “left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors” (265). Mammachi,
Baby Kochamma and Chacko know about his mastery in making of intricate toys, making little things for Baby Kochamma’s nativity plays or something to fix in the garden, mending machines, radio, clocks, water pumps or machines in the factory, maintaining the new canning machine and the automatic pineapple slicer and many more things in the factory. Nevertheless, Mammachi “paid Velutha less than she would a Touchable carpenter but more than she would a Paravan” (77). It is the hypocrisy on the part of Mammachi that she does not allow Velutha to enter her house “except when she needed something mended or installed” (77). And in this case his entrance into the factory premises and touching things that the touchables touch is, as Mammach thinks, “a big step for a Paravan” (77). Roy mocks at the caste conscious Ipe family who use dining table made by untouchable Velutha. It is quite similar to orthodox Brahmins who sprinkles water over their dishes after the untouchable servant has cleaned them.

To Estha and Rahel who as children know the difference only between love and hatred with complete ignorance of individual distinction on the basis of religion, caste, colour and politics. Velutha’s house is forbidden, but they often secretly visit it, as he is their best friend bonded with pure love. Baby Kochamma forbids the twins to be over-familiar with untouchable Velutha.

The word gift implies a sweet sense of token of love where there exists no wall of religion and caste, but even in his boyhood Velutha is aware of this colourful wall, because the elders have instilled in him the poison of caste-system and his position in society. Therefore, he holds the little gifts such as boats, boxes and small windmills that “he had made for her, flat on the palm of his hand so that she could take them without touching him” (175). He hates the powerful upper caste who denies to give minimum
rights to the untouchables. Sometimes he tries to hate even Ammu, because he thinks “she’s one of them” (214). His is a soul of conflict. His consciousness of the human rights yearns to be recognized as one with all the men in society, and his status of untouchability lowers his confidence. M. Dasan remarks: “Velutha is placed on the borders of society, caught in between right and wrong; sanity and insanity; morality and immorality. This untouchable master craftsman floats on the periphery of society yearning to be accepted, confided and recognised like O’Neil’s Black protagonist, Yank, in The Hairy Ape” (31-32).

Velutha is a victim of narrow politics in which Comrade K.N.M. Pillai, the local communist leader, is the supreme agent who in order to fulfill his self-interest of developing political career designs a conspiracy to remove his only competitor Velutha from his path, acting against the true principles of Communism in which caste system has no place. He deliberately instigates Chacko to sack Velutha from his job, because being an untouchable, he thinks, he may cause trouble for Chacko as other touchable workers are not happy with him. His point is that “from local standpoint, these caste issues are very deep-rooted” (The God 278). He is proud of how his wife behaves with the Paravans: “Even she will never allow Paravans and all that into her house. Never. Even I cannot persuade her. My own wife” (278). He behaves with double standards. On the one hand, he instigates Chacko to remove untouchable Velutha from the job, and on the other, he incites the untouchable workers about their rights. He articulates the communist slogan: “caste is class” which he himself does not follow.

When Ammu’s illicit sexual relationship with black-skinned Velutha is revealed, Velutha goes through innumerable mental and physical tortures. His condition is like a
lion in the cage, a helpless prey in the hands of a number of brute fowlers. In order to take revenge against Velutha whose fellow marchers once humiliated her in a procession, and to save the family from scandal without any intention to save Ammu, Baby Kochamma lodges an FIR of attempted rape of Ammu and kidnapping of three children against Velutha. A sophisticated lady Mammachi’s behaviour and use of language to insult Velutha are unbelievable. She spits in the face of Velutha and screams: “If I find you on my property tomorrow I’ll have you castrated like the pariah dog that you are! I’ll have you killed!” (284). When he goes to Comrade Pillai for help, he denies on the accusation of “Violating Party Discipline” (287). So a question is raised whether the party is constituted to defend caste rules and further the ambition of Pillai who is a brute and hypocrite. Even he does not disclose to Inspector Mathew that Velutha is a card-holding communist leader. In a nutshell, he does not want to leave any stone unturned to remove his rival in the party. He must be opportunist, because he is the creature of that society “where a man’s death could be more profitable than his life had ever been” (281).

History’s two powerful agencies have been united, and now it is another powerful agency that with the approval of the former two will take the ultimate step to teach a lesson to one who distorts and disorders the history. Therefore, an army of touchable policemen pledged to virtues of politeness, obedience, loyalty, intelligence, courtesy and efficiency “were exorcizing fear……. After all, they were not battling an epidemic. They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak” (309). Roy painstakingly describes the hypocrisy of the police and their inhuman and brutish torture of Velutha, a helpless creature in the grip of an octopus. This brutal torture is performed in front of the twins:
They heard the thud of wood on flesh. Boot on bone. On teeth. The muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in. The muted crunch of skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on a man’s breath when his lung is torn by the jagged end of a broken rib. . . . His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered, one had pierced his left lung, which was what made him bleed from his mouth. The blood on his breath bright red. Fresh. Frothy. His lower intestine was ruptured and haemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine was damaged in two places, the concussion had paralyzed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control over his bladder and rectum. Both his knee caps were shattered.

Still they brought out the handcuffs. . . . One of them flicked at his penis with his stick. ‘Come on, show us your special secret. Show us how big it gets when you blow it up.’ Then he lifted his boot (with millipedes curled into its sole) and brought it down with a soft thud.

They locked his arms across his back. (308-11)

Velutha is involved in breaking the age-old customs and rules of society, and that is why he is killed to defend the social norms and order. Baby Kochamma points out that Velutha’s murder is “a history lesson for future offenders” (336). Aida Balvannanadhan remarks on Velutha’s murder: “He is savagely emasculated by the police both in an act of
jealousy for his having had a sexual relationship with a high-caste woman, as well as a
means of dissuasion for all Untouchables, for the mere potentiality of a hybrid child this
short relationship has in it” (27).

Ammu’s sexual relationship with Velutha may procreate a half-caste child that
can cause chaos in the structure of the high-caste class. Taking reference from Manu,
Aida Balvannanadhan says: “A man from a higher caste does not alter the purity of the
offspring by marrying a woman of a lower caste while the contrary situation will alter the
purity of the race” (29). So if a touchable man enters into a sexual relationship with an
untouchable woman, it is not a social offence as it is in the contrary situation. Therefore,
it is not a crime when Chacko sexually exploits the poor untouchable women workers in
the factory. Even Mammachi defends him by considering it “‘Men’s Needs’” (The God
258) and makes an arrangement for his convenience. But untouchable Velutha’s physical
relation with touchable Ammu cannot be tolerated. History will not approve it. And
Velutha must die in order to maintain the social equilibrium. The touchable policemen
beat him to death and Baby Kochamma justifies it as a divine retribution: “‘As ye sow, so
shall ye reap’” (31). Velutha’s sowing brings him his violent annihilation, but what will
Baby Kochamma and other powerful agents of society reap for what they have sown?
The question has been echoing from generation to generation without an answer.

_The God of Small Things’s_ main plot centres around the traumatic childhood
experiences of the twins Estha and Rahel in the cruel world of adults that in a way forces
them to be alienated from everybody around them. Their traumas are related not to body
but to psyche. Rahel is the narrator of all the experiences of her and her brother Estha
whom “she had known before Life began” (93). Rahel and Estha, the two-egg twins, have
a single Siamese soul, “physically separate, but with joint identities” (2). She can perceive the taste of the sandwiches Estha eats. After twenty three years of their separation from each other, Rahel comes to Ayemenem to visit Estha, and all the memories are relived. She even remembers those memories “that she has no right to have” (2). Their parallel mental faculties help them to share each other’s happiness and sorrows, enabling Rahel to be the narrator of both their experiences.

The twins were totally different from how we find them after their return to Ayemenem. They were playful, adventurous, imaginative and innocent. Estha’s simple and imaginative mind believed that “if they’d been born on the bus, they’d have got free bus rides for the rest of their lives” (3) and the twins together thought that “if they were killed on a zebra crossing, the Government would pay for their funerals” (4). These were all sheer fantasies of the children’s minds, free of all the complexities and cruelties. Their imagination had helped them construct a utopia where everything is strange but possible.

The twins are not born to live happily forever, and a shadow prevails on their lives till the end. The children’s utopia begins to shatter. Ammu leaves her alcoholic husband when “his bouts of violence began to include the children” (42). That is the beginning of the children’s trauma which begins to affect their psyches gradually, and it remains invisible until the beginning of ‘What Will Sophie Mol Think?’ week. The twins feel a kind of identity loss when Sophie Mol is received gorgeously with warm affection and love by her biological father Chacko. At the age of five, the twins are deprived of their father’s care and love when their mother Ammu comes to her parental home permanently in Ayemenem where they are treated as unwanted intruders. The twins are too young to realize the hostility coiled around them and their mother. Ammu is annoyed
for their “wide-eyed vulnerability, and their willingness to love people who didn’t really love them” and she sometimes wants “to hurt them—just as an education, a protection” (43).

The twins are a happy-go-lucky lot till Love Laws are broken. Rahel likes to wear the Love-in-Tokyo tiara on her head to make her hair look like a fountain. Estha who likes to wear pointy shoes and Elvis puff loves to rock and roll like his favourite singer Elvis Presley’s song ‘Party’: “Some people like to rock, some people like to roll” (37). Their lives are full of possibilities, enthusiasms and adventures. Their child-like wonder compels them to travel the untraveled world where angels fear to tread. They together set out to explore the History House where once Kari Saipu, the English paedophile, lived, but now his ghost haunts. In order to fight the Kari Saipu’s ghost, they take the guise of communists as the communists do not believe in ghosts. After all Estha is prepared to fight the danger as “Anything can happen to Anyone” (194).

However, the twins soon realize who are for them and who are against in the hostile, cynical and hypocritical milieu around them. They gradually understand their position in the Ipe family. Constantly they have been reminded by Baby Kochamma of their status as doomed, fatherless urchins who have no rights to live in that family as their mother divorces her husband who is a Hindu by religion. To their maternal uncle Chacko, they are “millstone around his neck” who are not his responsibilities, and their mother “Ammu had no Locusts Stand I” (57). The sensitive twins can measure their unstable position in the family and feel a kind of identity crisis. Roy brings the metaphor of banana jam to locate the position of the twins and their divorcée mother. Banana jam made in the Chacko’s pickle factory is banned by the FPO (Food Products Organization)
for its failure to come in the category of either jam or jelly, because it is too “thin for jelly and too thick for jam. An ambiguous, unclassifiable consistency, they said” (30). Similarly, the twins and their mother do not conform to any classification, and they are “the worst transgressors” (31) who should be treated like banana jam. In another painful incident, the human cruelties reach its summit. In Sophie Mol’s funeral “they were made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family. Nobody would look at them” (5), as though they are alien creatures, the outsiders. The maid servant Kochu Maria too does not lag behind to remind Estha of his position. In one situation when Estha with his sheet wrapped around him smashes into bed without bending his knees like a stabbed corpse while rehearsing the stabbing scene of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, Kochu Maria becomes infuriated and threatens to complain to Mammachi. She expresses her arrogance: “‘Tell your mother to take you to your father’s house,’ she said. ‘There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren’t your beds. This isn’t your house’” (83).

Then the first of the most dangerous traumatic experiences is the bizarre experience at “Abhilash Talkies” which creates a permanent sore in the psyche of Estha. He becomes the victim of paedophile at the hands of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man who sexually molests Estha. He offers Estha a bottle of lemon drink at the cost of that molestation. After the incident he feels a sense of guilt. “His stomach heaved. He had a greenwavy, thick-watery, lumpy, seaweedy, floaty, bottomless-bottomful feeling” (107). A sense of fear of his mother’s loving him less if the matter is disclosed haunts him throughout his childhood.

A child is a seeker of love. He does not know the distinction between touchability and untouchability, rich and poor, upper caste and lower caste, black and white.
Wherever he gets love, he is inclined to go. When everybody except Ammu is hostile to Rahel and Estha, Velutha, an untouchable, a Paravan provides them with all the ingredients of love. It is Velutha whom Rahel can recognize anywhere at any time. “And if he hadn’t been wearing a shirt, she would have recognized him from behind. She knew his back. She’d been carried on it” (73). The episode involving the torture of Velutha inculcates in their minds a sense of abhorrence towards humanity in general, and this trauma persists throughout their life, and they become suspicious of human beings.

The worst phase of life of the twins begins when Love Laws are broken by Ammu by entering into illicit sexual relationship with untouchable Velutha. The aftermath of this is devastating to the twins, their mother and their beloved friend Velutha.

When Ammu’s illicit relationship with Velutha is revealed, Ammu is locked into her bedroom. When Rahel and Estha ask Ammu the reason of her being locked away, Ammu vents her rage upon the twins. She screams: “‘If it wasn’t for you I wouldn’t be here! None of this would have happened! I wouldn’t be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! You’re the millstones round my neck!’” (253). Sensitive Estha thinks that his mother does not love them anymore. So sulky Estha decides for a day’s outing in order to impress their importance and worth on their mother and others in the family. Sophie Mol who joins the twins in their adventure unfortunately drowns “when they collided with a floating log and the little boat tipped over” (292). However, the twins survive because unlike their cousin Sophie they know how to swim. Although it is merely an accident, Estha is deemed guilty of the death of Sophie. Sophie’s mother Margaret “slapped him until someone calmed her down and led her away” (264). Baby Kochamma deliberately tries to
convince them that they are the murderers of their cousin Sophie. “You know that I know that it wasn’t an accident. I know how jealous of her you were” (316).

The incident of Kottayam police station leaves a long lasting impression in the minds of the seven year old twins. Baby Kochamma files an FIR against Velutha alleging “attempted rape” of Ammu, kidnapping the children and his responsibility in the death of Sophie. Inspector Thomas Mathew arrests Velutha and tortures him mercilessly in police custody. That something wrong has been done against Velutha is realized by Ammu who goes to the police station to clarify the matter to Inspector Thomas Mathew whose “moustaches bustled like the friendly Air India Maharajah’s, but his eyes were sly and greedy” (7), but he declines to listen to Ammu and says that “the Kottayam Police didn’t take statements from veshyas or their illegitimate children” (8). Further, he sexually humiliates Ammu:

Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered. Inspector Thomas Mathew seemed to know whom he could pick on and whom he couldn’t. Policemen have that instinct. (8)

For the first time they see their mother cry, tears rolling down from her eyes, although her face is stony. The twins are too little to know the meaning of the words ‘veshyas’ and ‘illegitimate’, but they can perceive the intensity of the wound left by Thomas Mathew. They think that they are responsible for this state of their mother as she once said. The twins feel sick with fear.

The twins witness the barbaric beating of Velutha by the policemen, and his agony with pain. Baby Kochamma mentally blackmails the twins by forcing them to choose one
of the two options, that is, either saving themselves, and Ammu who is their mother and father both, or saving Velutha who gives them fatherly love and care. A single ‘Yes’ by Estha costs Velutha his life. He is forced to sacrifice Velutha in order to save Ammu. What they do to save themselves and their mother Ammu (but in reality to save the prestige of a touchable family) is not forgotten by both of them for years to come—childhood, teenage and adulthood. Time and again that trauma pricks their conscience which they cannot get rid of. They feel that they are the murderers of Velutha. It leaves a deep permanent scar on the mind of Estha who “carried inside him the memory of a young man with an old man’s mouth. The memory of a swollen face and a smashed, upside-down smile. Of a spreading pool of clear liquid with a bare bulb reflected in it. Of a bloodshot eye that had opened, wandered and then fixed its gaze on him” (32). The burden of this treachery agonizes his soul like an ‘octopus’, “like a mango hair between molars” (32), and leads him to aphasia.

After four days of Sophie Mol’s funeral Ammu is driven out of the house by Chacko in the presence of Rahel and Estha. “‘Get out of my house before I break every bone in your body!’” (225). That rude behaviour of Chacko haunts Rahel for years, even in dreams. She sees in her dream

a fat man, faceless, kneeling beside a woman’s corpse. Hacking its hair off. Breaking every bone in its body. Snapping even the little ones. The fingers. The ear bones cracked like twigs. Snapsnap the softsound of breaking bones. A pianist killing the piano keys. Even the black ones. And Rahel (though years later, in the Electric Crematorium, she would use the
slipperiness of sweat to slither out of Chacko’s grasp), loved them both.

The player and the piano.

The killer and the corpse. (225)

After two weeks of Sophie’s death, Estha is sent back to his father in Calcutta. The adverse psychological effect on a seven year old child like Estha cannot be denied when he is separated from his beloved mother and sister who is a dizygotic twin. Against his own willingness he is banished to his father’s residence in Calcutta. It is ironical that destiny drives Estha to the clutches of his father from whom once Ammu escaped to save herself and the twins. However, Estha is admitted to a boys’ school in Calcutta where he is an average student. He likes to be aloof and does not “participate in Group Activities” (11). He finishes his school education with mediocre results, but he has no interest in college education. He likes to engage himself in house works like sweeping, swabbing, washing clothes, cooking food and shopping for vegetables.

Slowly, over the years, Estha withdrew from the world. He grew accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquillizer on his past. Gradually the reason for his silence was hidden away, entombed somewhere deep in the soothing folds of the fact of it. (12)

To him a seventeen year old mongrel is more lovable and faithful than anyone around him.

Unlike Estha who is a passive sufferer, Rahel is rebellious, although both of them have gone through more or less the same trauma in their childhood. Rahel and Estha are
deprived of love of their father from the age of two years. They remain unwanted at their maternal uncle’s house. Only their mother provides them with both motherly and fatherly love and care of which they are very possessive. Rahel fears the possibility of reducing the intensity of Ammu’s love after Sophie Mol’s coming to the Ayemenem House because her love may be divided and Sophie will get extra care and love from Ammu. Rahel’s innocent and immature mind “watched hawk-eyed to try and gauge how much Ammu loved Sophie Mol, but couldn’t” (143). To remove her suspicion she asks Chacko whether it is possible for Ammu to love Sophie Mol more than them.

While the bizarre experiences of childhood make Estha dumb, aloof and quiet, Rahel becomes reckless and bohemian. After her mother’s departure from Ayemenem House, Rahel grows up without proper healing guidance. Chacko and Mammachi “provided the care (food, clothes, fees), but withdrew the concern” (15). This kind of negligence results in an “accidental release of the spirit” (17). She becomes independent and loses her qualities as a girl. She is humiliated in front of an assembly of stern-mouthed nuns and sniggering school girls in Nazareth Convent at the age of eleven for decorating a knob of fresh cow dung with small flowers outside her Housemistress’s garden gate. She is forced to read the meaning of ‘depravity’ from Oxford Dictionary.

In school she is extremely polite but has no friends. She gets expelled from school three times for her unusual behaviour. She is first upbraided for “hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors . . . to find out whether breasts hurt” (16). As breasts are not supposed to exist in a Christian institution, she is expelled. Her second expulsion is due to her “smoking” and the third for “setting fire to her Housemistress’s false hair bun which, under duress, Rahel confessed to having stolen” (17).
After finishing school education, she gets admission in a mediocre college of Architecture in Delhi, but in eight years she cannot manage to get the five years undergraduate degree. She uses to miss the classes. She likes to be detached from the classmates who also avoid her. Her carelessness and childhood frustration are reflected in “her bizarre, impractical building plans, presented on cheap brown paper” (18). She is suspicious of everybody including her uncle Chacko and grandmother Mammachi. She has no feeling and attraction for them. With the passage of time she learns to hate even her mother. When for the last time Ammu sick with “asthma and a rattle in her chest that sounded like a faraway man shouting” (159) comes to visit Rahel, she starts hate her own mother. “She thought of the phlegm and nearly retched. She hated her mother then. Hated her” (161). Her getting married to Larry McCaslin is an outlet for her childhood frustration and wounds, because there is no option left for her as none is to pay her a dowry.

Ammu tries to withstand the travails of destiny, but she is too helpless to fight the powers that be. When Rahel is eleven year old, Ammu, during her last visit at Ayemenem, gives her the presents which are appropriate for a seven year old child. She does it because she does not want to recognise the cruel passage of time which she and her children have gone through. She with her strong will-power attempts to wipe out the traumas of past four years, and wants to begin afresh from that point when her children were happy enough.

After a passage of twenty three long years, Rahel and Estha have re-returned to Ayemenem. It seems that the twins’ lives are like library books that can be borrowed and returned by anyone anytime. With the passage of time Estha’s condition has deteriorated.
He completely loses his all enthusiasm, liveliness and zeal for life. He is spending life that can be appropriately called ‘death in life’. Withdrawing from the world, he spends a mechanical routine life. He is alone in his kingdom. Even the news of the arrival of Rahel at Ayemenem House does not excite him. In his childhood Estha wrote ‘Un-known’ after his name, and more than two decades later he still remains unknown to everybody around him, even to Rahel who is identified together with Estha as ‘Me’.

Estha and Rahel lose the way in the journey of life. They are like rudderless ships that do not know where to go, and what their destiny is. They are like a “pair of actors trapped in a recondite play with no hint of plot or narrative. Stumbling through their parts, nursing someone else’s sorrow. Grieving someone else’s grief” (191).

A series of painful events in which the adults take active part leave permanent wounds in the psyche of the twins. The adults are the perpetrators and the children the victims. Roy brings to the light the general problems of Indian children who are being victimized everyday in the form of child abuse. Estha and Rahel are, no doubt, the victims of the elders’ negligence, hatred and suppression. Comrade K.N.M. Pillai points out the cause of the twins’ devastating lives. He thinks that “this generation was perhaps paying for its forefathers’ bourgeois decadence” (130).

Indian society is structured around two classes: the powerful and the powerless. One takes decisions and the other is at the receiving end of these decisions. The powerful’s sole purpose is to assert their power in every walk of life. The various rules, laws, norms, code of conduct have been formulated and put in place to preserve this power equation. No transgression is ever forgiven. The untouchables, the people from the lower castes, the down-trodden, tribals, minorities and women are the powerless of
society who are born to serve the interests of the powerful upper class, high caste section of society. Even within the same class, women are the worst affected, most vulnerable section of relentlessly patriarchal social sensibility and attitudes. Governed by the regulating framework of self-sacrifice, the woman puts up with miseries and abuses within the family as well as outside it. The ways in which a woman is controlled by the different institutions of the society, and the degree of the brutality a woman is subjected to is the central theme in the writings of several writers. They, including feminist critics, challenge the society based on male predominance and female subordination. Arundhati Roy, a spokesperson of the weak and the suppressed, raises her voice for the devoiced. She protests against the treatment of woman as no better than the legal, economic and sexual property of her husband sanctified by socio-legal texts.

Apart from depicting the real picture and situation of Kerala in 1960s such as the misuse of Communism by the government of the day, the suppression and injustice inflicted upon the untouchables and the colonized mentality of the people from upper strata of society, *The God of Small Things* highlights the true scenario of suppression, oppression, injustice, cruelty and inequality imposed upon women. Roy in this novel brings women from three generations with a purpose to focus on three types of women characters—submissive; rebellious and transgressive all of whom fail to defy the age-old traditions, though the rebellious try to challenge all sorts of social norms made to suppress women. Pappachi, an Imperial Entomologist and husband of Mammachi, and Chacko, a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and the son of Pappachi, are symbols of patriarchy, the eternal suppressors and controllers of women from first and second generation respectively who deliberately try and mostly succeed in making the women from all the
three generations puppets in their hands in the novel, and to keep their dominance over them, they cross the limit of humanity. Baby Kochamma, sister-in-law of Mammachi, acts as an agent of patriarchy who, even being a woman, assists Pappachi and Chacko to further the degree of brutality towards Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel.

In every walk of life a woman is governed and controlled by some men. The moment she is born she becomes the property of the males. Before marriage she is governed by her father; after marriage by her husband; and at the old age she comes under the dictatorial supervision of her son. This reality is depicted vividly by Roy in this novel taking characters from a single Syrian Christian family.

Mammachi, the woman of first generation in the novel, is a role model of the traditional Indian women—submissive, compliant, tame and meek. Although nothing is said about the earlier life of Mammachi, it is understood from her married life that she was totally controlled and governed by her parents who had chosen for her a husband who is seventeen year older than her. Marriage appears often to the women to be restrictive and oppressive. Roy compares jeweled bride to the condemned “so painstakingly decorated before being led to the gallows” (44). The institution of marriage is often futile, absurd, unjust and unfair for women. Mammachi is, not uncommon to the Indian society, subjected to constant ill-treatment and torture by her husband who thinks her his legal, economic and sexual property. She is treated as an object, and not a human being who may have emotions and feelings and who may wish to live in her own way.

Pappachi, a stern torch-bearer of patriarchy, is a sadist who often belches out all his anger and frustration at his failure to be recognized as the discoverer of a new species of moth on his wife Mammachi and daughter Ammu. He beats Mammachi regularly
every night with a brass flower vase. “The beatings weren’t new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place. One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi’s violin and threw it in the river” (47-48). Mammachi suffers this disgrace and dishonour regularly till one day Chacko stops him by twisting his vase-hand around his back and warned, “‘I never want this to happen again’” (48). It is a great irony that Mammachi is able to escape from the cruel clutches of her savage husband only to enter into the new trap of her son, another agent of patriarchy who dispossesses her from the right of her own pickle factory and makes her sleeping partner. After that incident even the fragile bond between Mammachi and Pappachi is broken totally. Papachi appears more devastating and revengeful towards Mammachi. He stops to speak with her, but always tries to insult her directly and indirectly, not only within the family, but outside it also. To create an impression of his wife’s negligence and indifference to him, he pretends to stitch the buttons that are not missing on his shirt, sitting on the verandah in front of the visitors. He is a serpent in the grass that appears to be kind, generous and polite elsewhere but rude and tyrannical at home. He buys an old car called Plymouth with an intention to humiliate Mammachi whom he never allows to sit in the car.

In our society the wife who is socially and financially more successful is subjected to constant abuse and harassment by her husband. This happens to Mammachi who becomes the victim of her husband’s jealousy. When Pappachi comes to know that his wife is showing excellence in violin lessons, he stops them. “The lessons were abruptly discontinued when Mammachi’s teacher, Launsky-Tieffenthal, made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented and, in his opinion, potentially concert class” (50). Later at Ayemenem he breaks the bow of violin and
throws it in the river. His act of jealousy is manifested also in his refusal to help his practically blind wife in her pickle-making job, because he considers it an unsuitable job for a high ranking ex-Government official. Actually it is a matter of fact that “he greatly resented the attention his wife was suddenly getting” (47). So Mammachi lives a life devoid of love, care, understanding and co-operation.

Till the point when Mammachi is a true sufferer at the hands of her sadist husband, she is able to gain the sympathy of the readers, but her change of mentality and negative attitude towards her own daughter shock the readers. Now she in collaboration with her son Chacko does to Ammu what her husband does to her. She takes the position of a male chauvinist. She perpetually makes Ammu realize that she, being a divorcee, has no right in Ayemenem House. Although both Ammu and Chacko are divorcees, Mammachi treats them differently. Her attitude towards Chacko is submissive and obedient, but towards Ammu she is dictatorial and authoritarian. Mammachi fends for Chacko’s illicit sexual relationship with pretty women working in the factory as “Man’s Needs” (168). She even makes an arrangement for a separate entrance to Chacko’s room at the eastern end of the house “so that the objects of his ‘Needs’ wouldn’t have to go traipsing through the house” (169). But her attitude towards Ammu in the similar situation is just the opposite. She brutally punishes Ammu when the latter satisfies ‘women’s needs’. She is tortured both physically and mentally. She is locked up in her bedroom, insulted and at last ostracized from Ayemenem House. Actually because of her frustration in love Mammachi is jealous of Ammu’s happiness in love with Velutha, and she wants to deprive her daughter of what she is deprived of. Her feminine instinct and motherly love and affection are completely eclipsed and she appears to be a brute. At her
last visit to Ayemenem with a serious illness with asthma and rattle in her chest, Ammu is treated by her mother as a touchable behaves with an untouchable and she asks her to visit Rahel, her own daughter, as seldom as possible.

Mammachi’s attitude towards Margaret Kochamma shows patriarchal bent of her mind. Even before she has seen her, she condemns her, and it clings to her mind that Margaret is no better than a shopkeeper’s daughter. “It wasn’t just her working-class background Mammachi resented. She hated Margaret Kochamma for being Chacko’s wife. She hated her for leaving him. But would have hated her even more had she stayed” (168). She takes Margaret not as a woman who comes to meet her ex-husband for a purpose other than sex, but as “just another whore” (169).

Ammu is essentially a tragic heroine in the novel. Her lone battle with fate and the traditions and laws imposed on women by the male chauvinistic society and the inability to taste the fruit of victory make her the most pathetic character in the novel. “Ammu had been” as Mohit Kumar Ray puts it, “humiliated and cornered by her father, ill-treated and betrayed by her husband, insulted by the police and rendered destitute by her brother” (54). Not only because of the man in her life, she has to bear the ordeal designed by Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. The cost of living for her is too heavy to bear and ultimately she is compelled to surrender to the patriarchal attitudes of her society.

Women’s education, ambitions, yearnings and aspirations have no significance for the male chauvinistic society. They are supposed to play the role of a mother, daughter-in-law and wife. That is why they have been deliberately kept illiterate so that they can spend their entire lives in the service of the family. Ammu is such a victim of male dominated society whose higher education is an “unnecessary expense” (The God
38) for Pappachi whereas his son Chacko is sent to Oxford for higher studies because he is supposed to be the future authoritarian figure who will rule over the next generation of women. Ammu’s education is interrupted. What can a girl do in this situation except remain confined to the house to do house work and wait for marriage? But the prospect of her marriage also appears to be futile because her father indifferent to her does not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry. Ammu becomes frantic. “All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother. She hatched several wretched little plans” (38-39).

One day she gets a chance to spend a summer with a distant aunt in Calcutta where she meets a young man who proposes to her. Ammu accepts the proposal although she knows him very little, because she has no choice but to take that stranger as her husband. She thinks it better to get married to him than to return to Ayemenem. But very soon she realizes the futility of her choice. He appears to be an alcoholic and materialistic man who has no sense of self-dignity and self-respect. He does not even hesitate in making a present of his wife to the tea estate manager to save his job. The boss Mr. Hollick suggests that Ammu’s husband go on leave and “Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be ‘looked after’” (42). It comes as a shock for Ammu because of her sense of self-respect, and she instantly refuses to accept the proposal. Its consequences are devastating: “He grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence. Suddenly he lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her and then passed out from the effort” (42). Her husband’s excessive physical and mental torture compels her to accumulate the courage to leave him, and one day when “his bouts of violence began to include the children” (42), she leaves him and returns to her parents where she is never welcome.
Ammu is such an unfortunate woman that fate also betrays her. She, after coming to her parents’ house, realizes that she is a nowhere woman. She feels a sense of claustrophobia. She escapes individual torture only to be subjected to collective torture. Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Chacko and Police Inspector Thomas Mathew join hands to torture her both physically and mentally. She is constantly forced to accept her position in her parents’ house as a divorced daughter who marries a man outside her caste and religion. Even Ammu’s anglophile father Pappachi does not believe his daughter, because he does not deem that “an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (42).

At the age of twenty-four she feels a sense of alienation in her parents’ house, because everybody in the family looks at her with askance glances. She is left with no hope in the future. As a divorced daughter she has no place in her parents’ house. In this connection it ought to be noted that Arundhati Roy’s mother Mary Roy won a public interest litigation case in 1986:

She challenged the Syrian Christian inheritance law that said that a woman can inherit one-fourth of her father’s property or Rs 5,000, whichever is less. The Supreme Court ruling in her case gave women equal inheritance with retrospective effect from 1956. But actually no women go to court to claim this right. Everyone said, ‘You can’t have it going back to 1956 because the courts will be flooded with complaints.’ It didn’t happen. The churches had will-making classes. They taught fathers how to disinherit their daughters. It’s a very strange kind of oppression that happens there. (The Shape 33)
Although the plot of the novel is set in 1960s, much before Mary Roy had won the case of equal inheritance for women, according to Syrian Christian inheritance law, a woman can inherit one-fourth of her father’s property or five thousand rupees. But even that is not accepted by the patriarchal society. Ammu is deprived of that one-fourth of her father’s property. Baby Kochamma thinks that “a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home” (The God 45) and a divorced daughter “had no position anywhere at all” (45). To Mammachi, Ammu’s children are bothersome. She thinks that “what her grandchildren suffered from was far worse than Inbreeding. She meant having parents who were divorced” (61).

As for Chacko, Ammu has no “Locusts Stand I” (159).

Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my Factory, my pineapples, my pickles. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property.

Chacko told Rahel and Estha that Ammu had no Locusts Stand I.

‘Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society,’ Ammu said.

Chacko said, ‘What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine.’(57)

So Chacko is a perfect epitome of male chauvinism who dispossesses his mother from her own factory and disinherit his sister from her parents’ property.

The rebellious spirit within Ammu does not allow her to accept the limits of a divorcee status, and she shows the courage to reclaim her body. She, breaking the age-old love laws, dares to enter into an illicit sexual relation with an untouchable Paravan who is
socially, culturally and economically inferior to her. Patriarchal society cannot put up with this waywardness. In this context Emma Goldman’s comment on patriarchy is highly applicable. She in *The Traffic in Woman and Other Essays on Feminism* states: “Society considers the sex experiences of man as attributes of his general development, while similar experiences in the life of a woman are looked upon as a terrible calamity, a loss of honour and all that is good and noble in a human being” (71). When that relationship is revealed, she has to go through extreme physical and mental torture at the hands of Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Chacko and Inspector Thomas Mathew. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma trick her into bedroom and lock her. Inspector Mathew’s harassment of Ammu shows how patriarchy works at the administrative level and what the women’s position in that society is. The keeper of the laws breaks the laws. He tells Ammu that “the Kottayam Police didn’t take statements from *veshyas* or their illegitimate children” (*The God 8*), but it seems that the society has given him the right to abuse Ammu sexually. “He stared at Ammu’s breasts as he spoke” and “he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. *Tap, tap.* As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered” (8). Ammu becomes an eye-sore for Chacko, who, four days after Sophie Mol’s funeral, drives her away from the house. He tells her, “‘Get out of my house before I break every bone in your body!’” (225). So helpless and hapless Ammu has no other option but to leave Chacko’s house (?) and die at the age of thirty-one in a grimy room of a hotel where there is none to shed a tear for her. Even death does not end her humiliation. “The church refused to bury Ammu. On several counts. So Chacko hired a van to transport the body to the electric crematorium. He had her wrapped in a dirty bedsheet and laid out on a stretcher” (162).
Nobody from her family except Rahel and Chacko is there in the funeral. Roy’s remark regarding Ammu’s funeral is heart-rending: “Her ashes. The grit from her bones. The teeth from her smile. The whole of her crammed into a little clay pot. Receipt No. Q498673” (163).

Although her lone battle against all adversaries ends in failure, she deserves to be praised. She wins the confidence and moral support of the readers. She confronts the androcentric notions of society by refusing surname for Estha and Rahel, because she thinks that choosing between her husband’s name and her father’s name does not “give a woman much of a choice” (37).

Ammu is aware of the ugly face of patriarchal suppression from her childhood, when she used to read Father Bear Mother Bear stories. In her growing years she closely watched her father’s ignominious treatment of her and her mother. “As she grew older, Ammu learned to live with this cold, calculating cruelty. She developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big” (181-82).

Ammu’s daughter Rahel, the woman of third generation in the novel, is far different in temperament and attitude from Ammu and Mammachi. She defies the authority of father, husband and brother. She is the symbol of emancipated and liberated woman who is fond of living in her own way confronting all the traditions, customs and laws designed to suppress women.

Even Rahel has to face the travails of life in this society. From the moment she is born, she is deprived of love and affection of her father and later, in Ayemenem House, of elders such as grandmother Mammachi, grandaunt Baby Kochamma, grandfather
Pappachi and uncle Chacko. It is only her mother who has concern and care for her. Her childhood remains traumatic. In her childhood she has seen her mother’s unbearable sufferings and miseries in the Ayemenem House. She has seen how her mother’s smiling face and caring body is reduced to ashes. She hardly forgets the trauma of Baby Kochamma’s making them (Rahel and Estha) instrumental to the death of Velutha. After the miserable death of Ammu who is her only prop, she becomes helpless and hapless. Now she is more neglected by her maternal uncle, grandmother and grandaunt. Nobody in the family has least concern about her wellbeing. These adverse circumstances and excessive negligence teach her to be patient and result in an accidental “release of the spirit” (17). She becomes reckless, daring and independent.

“Rahel grew up without a brief. Without anybody to arrange a marriage for her. Without anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore without an obligatory husband looming on her horizon” (17). So when she meets Larry McCaslin, a Research Scholar in Architecture from Boston, she doesn’t think twice to marry him. She “drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge” (18). Although Larry is not a male chauvinist, his marital relationship with Rahel is incompatible. Larry fails to understand his wife whose eyes offend him. Finally, Rahel divorces Larry when she understands the futility of their relationship. She is, unlike her mother, a strong and unhesitant character who does not feel shame or moral weakness in the face of the divorce. She is unwavering when she informs K.N.M. Pillai about her divorce: “‘We’re divorced.’ Rahel hoped to shock him into silence. ‘Die-vorced?’ His voice rose to such a high register that it cracked on the question mark. He even
pronounced the word as though it were a form of death” (130). She is an optimist. It is not despair what Larry sees in her eyes, but “a sort of enforced optimism” (19).

The optimism in Rahel makes her confident to continue with life in her own way. The separation from Larry never leaves her depressed. Like an independent woman she plunges into the battle ground for earning bread and butter for herself. She “worked for a few months as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York. And then for several years as a night clerk in a bullet-proof cabin at a gas station outside Washington, where drunks occasionally vomited into the money tray, and pimps propositioned her with more lucrative job offers” (20).

Ammu has to pay with her life for defying the love laws imposed by patriarchal society. Rahel knows it very well. She knows about the destructive consequences for doing anything which orthodox society does not approve. In spite of these consequences, what she does is more dangerous in society’s moral eyes than what her mother does. Her incestuous relationship with her brother at the age of thirty-one cannot be accepted at any cost. But she does not care a fig, and here lies the victory for women which Rahel wins.

Baby Kochamma is the most odious, detestable and nauseating character in the novel who acts as a vile agent of male chauvinistic society. She fails to gain even the least sympathy from the readers. She is the culprit on ruining the lives of Ammu, Estha, Rahel and Velutha. She may have reasons for her vile behaviour, but she cannot be absolved of all responsibilities because of them. She herself is the victim of patriarchy who turns into the tool of social oppression to others, especially the female characters in the novel. In her youth she had fallen in love with father Mulligan, a handsome Irish monk, and to get him, she converted herself to Roman Catholic belief against her father’s
will so that she could be near Father Mulligan. When she realized the futility of her effort to get her loved one, because he was already monopolized by the senior nuns, frustrated Baby Kochamma came back home to her father. It ought to be noted that Baby Kochamma’s father could not understand his young daughter’s motive for her conversion to Roman Catholic faith. Baby Kochamma’s father realized that his daughter had developed a ‘reputation’ and “was unlikely to find a husband. He decided that since she couldn’t have a husband there was no harm in her having an education. So he made arrangements for her to attend a course of study at the University of Rochester in America” (26). This passage voices patriarchal prejudice which considers daughter’s education as a poor substitute for marriage, not as something desirable and valuable for its own sake. Although the hope of getting Father Mulligan is shattered totally, she never forgets him, even at eighty-three years of age.

She is a frustrated woman who is jealous of those who succeed in getting their love. Her frustration for her unconsummated love and accumulated repressed desires make her cold, calculating and inhuman in making Ammu’s life miserable. She also incites Mammachi and Chacko to send Estha to his father in Calcutta, and to drive Ammu away from home. She is a neurotic who “had lived her life backwards. As a young woman she had renounced the material world, and now, as an old one, she seemed to embrace it” (22). Her indulgence in makeup and fashion at the age of eighty-three proves her a complete narcissist.

She is a complete bully. She is jealous of those who are successful in life and she cannot find pleasure in seeing other women happy. She deliberately intimidates Ammu for her daring to exercise her right to choose the man she marries and to leave him when
found unworthy. “Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarreling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman. The sad, Father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma” (45).

Madhumalati Adhikari in her essay ‘Power Politics in The God of Small Things’ remarks:

It is very interesting to note that in the text Roy has carried out covertly the emasculation of men by women and also imasculcation of women but not in the conventional derogatory sense. Her women learn to think and act independently and take on the role of the protector but in the process do not sacrifice their feminine qualities. (43)

Mohit Kumar Ray comments: “Seen from the feminist perspective, the novel records a progress, albeit slow, in feminism, offers some rays of hope and seems to suggest a distinct possibility of redemption.” (60). Arundhati’s portrayal of Rahel shows her hope and optimism for the emancipation and liberation of women in future from the clutches of male-dominance.

Roy writes about things that vitally affect people’s lives, especially the exploited ones. She thinks that there is no great difference between The God of Small Things and her non-fiction. She says:

Today’s world of specialization is bizarre. Specialists and experts end up severing the links between things, isolating them, actually creating barriers that prevent ordinary people from understanding what’s happening to them. I try to do the opposite: to create links, to join the dots, to tell
politics like a story, to communicate it, to make it real. To make the
connection between a man with his child telling you about life in the
village he lived in before it was submerged by a reservoir, and the WTO,
the IMF, and the World Bank. *The God of Small Things* is a book which
connects the very smallest things to the very biggest. (*The Shape 36*)

The novel is not less political than her non-fiction. She brings forth a number of issues in
the novel that are essentially social and political. Like her non-fiction, the screenplay and
reviews, the novel also shows how society faces the conflict between power and
powerlessness. She just links the gap between decisions and policies by experts and
specialists, and the understanding of them by common people. First, she tells true stories
of politics through the medium of screenplay and reviews, and then she turns to novel to
say the same.

The setting of the novel is a small place, Ayemenem of Kerala. By portraying a
picture of the people there — painful and incompatible co-existence of the rich and the
poor, master class and the slave class, the powerful and the powerless, the exploiter and
the exploited, the decision-makers and the suffered from those decisions, she actually
tells the general frame of Indian society. Although the time span of the novel is 1960s, it
is still relevant in the present time, even in greater intensity, when the disparity between
the powerful and the powerless widens. The novel tells a fact that most of the elites of
postcolonial India show their servitude and humble attitude towards their British masters
of colonial India, and these elites take the position of colonizers in independent India to
colonize and suppress ordinary people, especially the *dalits*, the *adivasis*, and the
untouchables. Pappachi, Mammachi, Chacko and Baby Kochamma are postcolonial
masters who retain their power by exploiting and oppressing the workers and the untouchables such as Vellya Pappen and Velutha. The untouchables, *adivasis* and *dalits* are the worst sufferers at the hands of the elites and the government. They never get a taste of democracy in the world’s largest democracy. Roy tells another truth of human history that a revolutionary party or group turns to a dictatorial and authoritarian one when it comes to power. The Communist Party came to power in Kerala with a lot of promises, but within a short period of time, it shattered the dreams of the common men, and the people lived a life of frustration. Indian society is inflicted with the system of patriarchal dominance over women. Roy’s portrayal of women’s suppression in the novel is very painful and heart-rending. Mammachi and Ammu are nothing but the playthings at the hands of Pappachi and Chacko. At the psychic level most of the Indians, especially the children live a frustrated life. The suffocating social, cultural and political system provides the children with a background unfavourable and unhealthy to nurture good and mentally healthy citizens.

Here arises a question: how much is Roy successful to carry out her objectives of social change? What she conveys through this novel is not received fully and appropriately. Sometimes the important messages she wants to spread among the masses are neglected and ignored. Sometimes she is criticized for insignificant matter, putting aside the relevant ones. The inconsequential matters such as the incestuous relationship between the twins Estha and Rahel and the sex-scene between Ammu and Velutha in the last chapter of the novel are much highlighted and criticized, ignoring the real problems of Indian society depicted in the novel. Sometimes the novel is read as a piece of literature meant for entertainment only. She got celebrity status after this novel, but she
was not satisfied, because her main objective is not achieved through this novel. There is no doubt that her celebrity status helps her to convince people what she believes. Her non-fiction after *The God of Small Things* is read enthusiastically and with great attention all over the world. After *The God of Small Things* she realizes that fiction can never be the effective means to carry out her main mission, and it is non-fiction that can be the appropriate and effective medium. So she turns to non-fiction again.
Works Cited


