CHAPTER 2

Arundhati Roy’s
*The God of Small Things:*
“Small Gods” Fighting with Alienation
The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced; with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside positively.

- Erich Fromm

The various manifestations of alienation have been largely dealt by today's women writer. They focus on the themes of clash between tradition and modernity, identity crisis of their protagonists, women's quest for independence, East-West Cultural conflicts, feeling of alienation and, of course, many others. In more recent years, a generation of talented women writers has emerged, and they have a style of their own. Among these contemporary women writers, Arundhati Roy has carved out a niche for herself. Salman Rushdie rightly remarks: “Most encouragingly, yet another talented generation has begun to emerge. The Keralan writer Arundhati Roy has arrived to the accompaniment of a loud fanfare. Her novel *The God of Small Things* is full of ambition and sparkle, and written in a highly wrought and utterly personal style.”

*The God of Small Things* was released first in India, on 5 April 1997. However, it had already received media's attention in the West. In India, one of the earliest discussions of the book with the author was conducted by Alok Rai in *The Sunday Review of The Times of India*, April 1997. The novel enjoys tremendous international success but more significantly, it touches the heart of individuals deeply. The novel has been acclaimed highly as a ‘brilliant novel’ and even a ‘contemporary classic.’ The novel has a unique story of three generations, but it is detailed in multifarious ways. There are several other novels dealing with such themes, yet *The God of Small Things* leaves an everlasting impact on the psyche of its readers. It maintains its charm and charisma at the every sequential reading. More than 350,000 copies were sold within the first three months after
publication. The book has been distributed in thirty countries and translated into twenty-four languages. The reactions to this novel were mostly positive throughout the world. Nevertheless, in India it received widespread criticism. The novel talks about politics, religion and caste, the topics that people normally avoid discussing. Whosoever reads the novel at first is very likely to wonder in the first place what the title suggests or implies. What does *The God of Small Things* stand for? When asked the question in an interview by Binayak, Roy replied:

To me the god of small things is the inversion of God. God’s a big thing and God’s in control. [...] Whether it’s the way the children see things or whether it’s the insect life in the book, or the fish or the stars – there is a not accepting of what we think of as adult boundaries. This small activity that goes on is the under life of the book. All sorts of boundaries are transgressed upon. At the end of the first chapter I say little events and ordinary things are just smashed and reconstituted, imbued with new meaning to become the bleached bones of the story. It’s a story that examines things very closely but also from a very, very distant point, almost from geological time and you look at it and see a pattern there. A pattern of how in these small events and in these small lives the world intrudes.  

The narrative of the novel exhibits the general characteristics of alienation, which may be defined at social, personal, and psychological level. The novel just like Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* investigates the pressures of family life upon identity. Neither book presents the consummation of incestuous longing as generating any worthwhile results; rather, incest becomes a misled urge to stabilise and identify with the family. Roy covers a broad historical spectrum which includes Pre-colonial, British colonial, Postcolonial, Hindu, Christian and Communist, and presents each epoch with its various layers and fragments of history.
The God of Small Things is a semi-autobiographical novel in tone which includes examples from the author's political beliefs and understanding of how India has been shaped and is still shaping by globalism and colonialist policies. Told from the perspective of children, the twins Rahel (girl) and Estha (boy), the story of the novel centres on events prior and posterior to the visit and death of their half-English cousin, Sophie Mol by drowning. Due to the English girl’s death, complicated by the twins’ mother’s forbidden affair with an Untouchable, Velutha, the lives of the two Indian children as well as the whole family and Velutha are completely transformed forever. The episodes are narrated by the 30-year-old Rahel, who returns from the U.S. after a divorce and a 23-year separation from her brother Estha, and the narration shifts back and forth from the 1992 to the past in 1969 and even further back across centuries to bring out the plot, present histories about the nation, the society, the religions, the village, the family and the characters, and most important of all, scrutinise how even a single event in one’s lifetime can make many people victim of alienation. The novel records some past events and chronicles the lives of a Syrian-Orthodox Christian Ipe family in Kerala. The traumatic experience throws the lives of Ammu, Velutha, Estha and Rahel to the winds. The emotional blow leaves a permanent scar on their psyche. Estha and Rahel have lost their loved ones and felt hostile circumstances around them which resulted into their sense of alienation and separation. Although the twins are different in nature, they show unhealthy symptoms of uprootedness. All these symptoms point towards a deep feeling of alienation and their steady awareness of meaninglessness in life. The main outcome of this alienation is hostility and, thus, their act of repression leads to nothing but more disappointment in life. The past made its intrusion into the twins’ lives over and over again in the form of repeated dreams, images and thoughts to remind them of the disturbing event that seemed to be forgotten but actually hammered their memories continuously.
Ammu suffers from extreme sense of alienation. She is often dragooned by the society to live a life of separation and estrangement. Ammu’s alienation takes place when she ceases to identify her surroundings just like Hegelian “social substance” i.e. estrangement from the social, political, and cultural institutions. Ammu, the novel’s adolescent central character, is the daughter of Pappachi and Mammachi and the sister of Chacko. Ammu from her childhood experiences the sense of alienation from her social environment. She is misbehaved and ill-treated by the members of her own family, badly treated by the police, and abandoned by her brother. Thus, she remains fundamentally anomic, withdrawn, and isolated.

Ammu belonged to an elite family but disapproved Aristotle’s conception that man of high ranks alone can have tragic grandeur. Actually, Ammu had her first encounter of alienation and dejection when she was just a little girl. In the author’s terminology she is a “Mombatti’ of a big house. During her growing years, the Ipe family has seen the brutal behaviour of Pappachi against Mammachi. Being too familiar with the violent scene, Ammu understood it as a deviational version of children’s fairy tale. “As a child, she had learned very quickly to disregard the ‘Father Bear Mother Bear’ stories she was given to read. In her version, Father Bear beat Mother bear with brass vases. Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation.” There was no happy ‘Father Bear and Mother Bear’ in the Ayemenem House, it was only an ill-tempered father and a “bitter, long-suffering mother” (38). Knowing well that she could not ever change her ‘Bear story’ into a better one, Ammu tried to be familiar with that. She learned to coexist with it and even find her own fun in it. The “lofty sense of injustice and the stubborn reckless streak that develop in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big” (172-173) taught her to cultivate a more tolerant attitude towards the misfortunes in her life caused by the patriarchs.
Ammu became victim of some hellish experiences as she saw the tyrannical face of her father Pappachi who used to beat his wife Mammachi. Ammu could not mask her feeling of humiliation as she was deprived of getting higher education. She wanted to fly high in the sky just like a free bird. “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. Eventually one worked. Pappachi agreed to let her spend the summer with the distant aunt who lived in Calcutta” (38-39). There, in a wedding, Ammu’s sense of alienation found a greater chance of escaping the entanglements of her life. She met a person who was an Assistant Manager of a tea estate in Assam. Ammu was in hurry to marry that man: “Ammu did not prevent to be love with him […] She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem. She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision” (39). Thus, Ammu, as a prisoner in the family walls, turned rebellious youth from a frustrated teenager. Ammu’s husband, the man the author does not even name, made his first appearance in the novel as “a small man, but well built” (39). He was not that perfect for Ammu in terms of looks, but at least he was having a pleasing personality. The marriage did not go well. Soon after the elaborate Calcutta wedding, Ammu found that the pleasant-looking man had made their marriage completely unpleasant because of his serious alcoholic addiction. When Ammu was about to give life to the newly-coming babies’, who later named as Estha and Rahel, this man was “stretch out on a hard bench in the hospital corridor,” and he “was drunk” (40). His addiction to liquor aggravated to the extent that it had not only consumed his vitality but also “had driven him into an alcoholic stupor” (40). One day he was summoned to the manager’s office and was given an ultimatum: either he has to take his beautiful wife to sleep with the lecherous boss, Mr. Hollick, or lose his job. Ammu’s husband conveyed this indecent proposal to her. This extreme sense of humiliation generated deep hatred in the
heart of Ammu. Thus, a series of fierce physical conflicts between the husband and wife broke out:

Ammu watched her husband’s mouth move as it formed words. She said nothing. 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. Ammu took down the heaviest book she could find in the bookshelf – The Reader’s Digest World Atlas – and hit him with it as hard as she could. (41-42)

The recurring violence followed by a brief moment of reconciliation, with violence and comfort, formed a cycle which “fell into a pattern” (42) in Ammu’s marital life. Thus, Ammu experienced alienation as a result of her fragmented marital life and decided to break it off. The sacrilegious tie of marriage ended in fiasco, and Ammu along with her twins returned to the parental home i.e. Ayemenem house. Though in her parental home, Ammu and children are subjected to all kinds of indignities and sufferings, yet her decision was a sheer revolt against the binary standards and male chauvinism prevailing in Indian society. Roy, in words of A. N. Dwivedi, prefers revolution against the pervading sense of alienation: “Arundhati Roy raises her banner of revolt against a male dominated patriarchal society […] Through Ammu, Arundhati raises a strong protest against the old-age agonies and sufferings of the suppressed class of women.”

Ammu’s return to Ayemenem does not provide any relief from alienation, rather in her own house, she is treated badly. Chacko, her brother used to taunt her twins and said that “Estha and Rahel were indecently healthy. And so was Sophie Mol. He said it was because they did not suffer from inbreeding like most other Syrian Christians” (61). Thus, Ammu developed a permanent sense of alienation from her family. Tortured by her insensitive husband and persecuted in her parent’s home, Ammu’s life transformed into an estranged individual in the society. Roy writes, “She spoke to no one. She spent hours on
the riverbank with her little plastic transistor shaped like tangerine. She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims” (44). In other words, she became virtually untouchable. Baby Kochamma, the Lady Macbeth of the novel, jeered at Ammu. “A married daughter had no position in her parent’s home. As for a divorced daughter, she had no position anywhere at all” (45). But, Ammu decided not to be obedient, submissive, according to patriarchal demands of the society. She cared for no “Love Laws”, when she decided to surrender herself to Velutha, who is an “Untouchable Paravan” at Ayemenem. Ammu loved Velutha from her childhood because he was a talented craftsman. Moreover, it was the secret charm of opposite sex which attracted her attention towards the well-built stout body of Velutha and naturally her suppressed womanhood revived again after a gap of several years. Ammu and Velutha started their love in such a way:

Ammu saw that he saw. She looked away. He did too. History’s fiends returned to claim them. To re-wrap them in its old, scarred pelt and drag them back to where they really lived. Where the Love Laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much. Ammu walked up to the verandah, back into the Play. Shaking.

Velutha looked down at Ambassador S. Insect in his arms. He put her down. Shaking too. (168)

This is usually how a love story begins; there are two persons looking into each other’s eyes, and suddenly they realise that they are in love. The lovers stand silently and transfixed unaware of how much time has passed by. May be a century or even longer! Nothing really matters at this moment of ecstasy. The whole world quiets down, and time is condensed. There seems to be some kind of telepathy between the two. Without saying a word, they know exactly that they share the same feeling and they are thinking about the same thing. However, in the significant scene when the male and female protagonists, Velutha and Ammu, looked at each other and realised that there was a mutual attraction
between them. Roy immediately shifts the focus from the smooth-sailing love story to the socio-historical taboos that commanded the characters to love or not to love. The turning point in the story is that her love story begins not with the lovers transfixing each other once they have made eye contacts but their turning away from the contact out of hesitation rather than embarrassment as soon as they found their gazes meet. The couple’s first reaction to the new found love was to conceal their emotions and then they retrieved to the places they belonged. One was a respectable woman in the upper class, and the other was a man of the untouchable caste. Roy in the novel introduces an oxymoronic condition by combining love with law (which are usually contrary to each other) to convey a realistic point of view that there are, in fact, social, traditional and historical reasons affecting every individual’s behaviour as one cannot have his own way in every matter related to life. Thus, love has to face many hindrances. This confrontation is a serious matter, especially in India, where the love and laws, a strange mixture of patriarchy, are the very foundation upon which the Indian society is able to stabilise itself. Roy does not only examine love from its psychological underpinnings, but in light of social mores that instruct Indian men, how to love. It is just to highlight the clash between the individual and the complicit cooperation of the deep-rooted patriarchy and caste system in India along with the colonial force. Arundhati Roy in one interview with Abraham Taisha claims that “The God of Small Things is not a book specifically about our culture – it’s a book about human nature.”

The character of Ammu is like Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, who can flirt with Antony with her infinite variety and can go to any extent for the fulfilment of love even in the time of war. Cleopatra’s love crosses the boundaries of time and space but Ammu and Velutha’s relationship crosses the borders of caste and creed. Shakespeare’s Cleopatra is naughty, fickle in flirting with Antony but Roy’s Ammu is simple, sober and faithful in
her relationship with Velutha. As a tragedy of love, the character of Ammu and Cleopatra bear resemblance in the sense that their love is altogether sincere, intense and irresistible. Ammu is unsatisfied both physically and mentally, and her desire to come closer in the life of Velutha with her sexual passion is irresistable:

Ammu, naked now, crouched over Velutha, her mouth on his. He drew her hair around them like a tent. [...] She slid further down, introducing herself to the rest of him. His neck. His nipples. His chocolate stomach. She tasted him, in her mouth. He sat and grew back to him. She felt her belly tighter under her, hard as board. She felt her wetness slipping on his skin. He took her nipple in his mouth and cradled her other breast in his callous palm. (336)

Just like Ammu’s and Velutha’s love affair, John Keats’s Madeline and Porphyro in his famous poem “The Eve of St. Agnes” point towards a deathly absence, alienation, and infertility in relation. Madeline’s and Porphyro’s erotic love affair transcended the barriers of family disputes as Porphyro entered the castle of his enemies and eloped with his beloved. Ammu’s portrayal has reversed the order as in place of Porphyro, she stepped out to meet her untouchable lover at the riverbank. Here, Ammu’s condition of normlessness can easily be perceived, since all social rules and obligations lose their hold and fail to regulate her behaviour. For the anomic or normless Ammu, social norms are null and void. Ammu’s transgression of the social norms was severely punished. Ammu, who was considered one of “the worst transgressors” of “the laws that lay down who should be loved and how, the laws that makes grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam, and jelly jelly” (31), was locked away in her bedroom like “the family lunatic in a medieval household” (239).

After her affair with Velutha had come to light, her social status dropped even lower because for one she was a widow and secondly that she had been “defiled” by a
member of the untouchable caste. Inspector Mathews taps on Ammu’s breasts in the police station, and it was a “premeditated gesture, calculated to humiliate and terrorize her” (246), rather than a single isolated instance of sexual harassment. Consequently, she is locked up in the dark room for hours. This alienated experience makes her so crazy that, in a fit of rage, she shouts at her children. Later, her own brother Chacko drags her out from the Ayemenem house. Ammu passed rest of her life in isolation, relative silence, and feeling extreme alienation. Her life becomes virtually irrelevant. Upon her all-but-unnoticed death “in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alappay” at the age of thirty-one (“a viable, die-able age”), “the church refused to bury Ammu” (154), thereby further denying Ammu any record of her participation in the Orthodox Church. Her children Rahel and Estha suffer a childhood and youth of separation and alienation.

Velutha is another character in the novel, who is tormented by the throes of alienation. His technical acumen and his religious status as a converted Christian do not grant him immunity from victimisation in a casteist society. Velutha, one of the sources of wealth for the Ipe family, is terribly exploited and alienated by the ruling class. He is alienated from his work, and is used only as a commodity. The racial discrimination with Velutha resulted into his sense of powerlessness and alienation. He suffered grievously both physically and psychologically. Trapped in the law of the old world, Velutha becomes the scapegoat for “future offenders” (318). Under the caste system of India, Velutha belongs to the untouchables, the inferior class, and a dalit in the village. As Comrade Pillai said, Velutha is just a Paravan, a stigma he has gained from birth, even though he was a card-holder member in the Communist Party. Challenging circumstances of the untouchables can be seen through the description of Velutha’s father, Vellya Pappen who is an old Untouchable. “He had seen the Crawling Backwards Paravans to enter their houses or to touch anything that Touchalbes touched” (71). Mammachi also describes to
the twins about the crawling backwards days. In Mammachi’s childhood:

Paravans have to crawl backwards with to crawl backwards with a broom to sweep away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians, people of higher class in the caste system would not pollute themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprint. In Mammachi’s time, Paravans are not allowed to walk on public area, cover their upper bodies, or carry umbrellas. They cover their mouths by hands to prevent their polluted breath defiling those whom they talk to. No one would allow Paravans to enter their houses or to touch anything that Touchalbes touched. (71)

Velutha’s plight reminds that of Bakha in Untouchable, that of Gangu in Two Leaves and a Bud and that of Munoo in Coolie. The author calls Velutha “The God of Loss” (220). He was only fourteen years old when John Klein (a carpenter) taught him the art of carpentry. At sixteen, he passed his high school exam and became an accomplished carpenter. “He built Mammachi a Bauhas dining table in rosewood and a traditional Bavarian chaise lounge in lighter jerk” (75). Velutha was also expert in repairing machines like radio, clocks and water pumps. He looked after the things in “Big Ayemenem House”, Mammachi often praised Velutha’s skills, “If only he hadn’t been a Paravan, he might become an engineer” (75). Velutha has persistent desire of betterment in life as compared to his father Vellya Pappen who is conservation and traditional. Vellya wants to live his life as untouchable only. Velutha converted himself into the Christian hoping to escape from the atrocities of the caste based society.

Though, the origin of caste has been lost in history, nevertheless, the concept of caste-system that has lasted for thousands of years and is still prevalent in democratic India as Angus Maddison claims that “the institution of caste” is “the chief characteristic of Indian society which differentiates it from the others.” According to Maddison, Indian
caste-system “segregates the population into mutually exclusive groups whose economic and social functions are clearly defined and hereditary.”

People are classified into different castes. Members of different castes kept apart in social and private life, and there should not be intermarriages. The caste system does something more than allocating jobs, since “it also defines the hierarchy and social precedence” and a clear line is drawn between the upper and the lower castes. The upper caste dominates the society in India. The underdogs are deprived of the privileges usually enjoyed by the upper caste. Roy describes the untouchable’s abject condition vividly in the novel.

Roy presents Velutha as silent sufferer. In reality, Velutha is ignorant and innocent. Unfortunately, due to his innocence and ignorance he was exploited by the corrupt police administration, and he experienced a strong sense of alienation. Velutha has to undergo many insults and abuses at the hands of the police. Here, Velutha seems very near to Mulk Raj Anand’s Bakha in the novel Untouchable. Bakha also has to suffer insults and abuses hurled on him by the elite without any reason. But the basic difference between Velutha and Bakha is that the former is more active and energetic but Velutha never believes in a frontal attack. Bakha always strives to hail and fire on the high caste people. Velutha’s life took a vicious turn when Ammu’s “troubled eyes” and “dimpled cheeks” transformed the simple Velutha into a transgressor. As a result they spend their evenings and nights together forgetting all the worries of world:

He sailed on her waters. She could feel him moving deeper and deeper into her Frantic. Frenzied. Asking to be let in further […] He lay over her, careful not to put his weight on her. He kissed her eyes. Her ears. Her breasts. Her belly. Her seven sliver stretch-marks from her twins. The line of down that led from her navel to her dark triangle, that told him where she wanted him to go. The inside of her legs, where her skin was softest. Then carpenter’s hands lifted her hips and an
untouchable tongue touched the innermost part of her. (336-337)

Velutha was not a God who can rule over her body, in reality he was simply an alienated being seeking love. In this regard, M. Adhikari says, “In Velutha’s case, it is class and caste discrimination that makes him powerless and not his gender. His greatest crime was while being a Karna he dreamt of Draupadi.”¹⁰

Velutha’s brother, Kuttapen, in Vellya Paapen’s view, is a good Paravan, for he could neither read nor write. Unlike Velutha, Kuttapen is a good Paravan because he follows the restriction of the old world. He knows his own insignificance and such awareness drives him crazy. Kuttapen is very much familiar with the prevailing uncomfortable surroundings and decided to live with this sense of alienation. Sometimes, the world seemed so large to him that it could evaporate his individuality, or it terrorised Kuttapen with his own insignificance, which also made him cry. Sheena Patchay explains that the condition of Kuttapen is “the geographies of pain which allude in the first instance to the physical dislocation of characters”¹¹ that also cause emotional and psychological trauma. Kuttapen suffers in “the silent, claustrophobic space of the hut, and his inability to move, [...]”¹² and the terror of his own insignificance. Moreover, Kuttapen’s paralysis also indicates the situation of modern Paravan, foretelling Velutha’s doom. Modern Paravans, who want to break the boundary of the caste system, are enmeshed in the web of dirty politics and the ideology that is deep-rooted in society for centuries. Velutha believes in his professional skills and believes that he may gain the favour of the Communist Party against the unjust class system, but he fails, and his failure is cunningly used by Comrade Pillai, who is profited by Velutha’s sufferings. Velutha, trapped in the order of the old world as the spirit that stocks in Kuttapen’s paralysed body, could only cry out and eventually vanish without footprints.
Kuttapen and Velutha, who endured racial discrimination, are the finest examples of untold miseries and sufferings of the innocent people. Like racism in America and in South Africa, caste is the sign of India's fundamental religiosity, a marker of India's essential difference from the West and from modernity at large. Why one focuses on caste instead of other cultural practise in the novel? Does caste carry so much influence in Indian society? The answer is definitely 'yes'. In a sense, the untouchable – Velutha represents the political and social upheavals which are candidly related to colonialism, hegemony, class mobilisation, and identity problems in Indian society. In addition, untouchability is so deeply ingrained in the mindset of the Indians that it has become a dangerous destructive force. Roy's portrayal of caste system through the character of Velutha shows a potential challenge. She expresses her disillusionment towards the social conditions of postcolonial India where the untouchables still have to face hostility in society. In such society, men are the most privileged race while women are trapped in strict social conditions. The urban elites are at the top rung of society while the poor are at the lowest rung in social hierarchy. The sub-human position of untouchables, as Roy presents in the novel, gives a sense of superiority to the upper caste people. Angus Maddison points out the helplessness of untouchables in Class Structure and Economic Growth: India and Pakistan since the Moghuls: “social disabilities greatly reinforce purely economic inequality and make social mobility very difficult.” The system was so unfair to the vast majority of the lower castes who cannot enjoy any privileges but are always burdened with the duties. This has alienated them deeply and cut them from the roots.

Like other untouchables in all parts of India, Vellya Pappen, Velutha’s father is convinced of his lot to be a slave by birth. He has devoted his loyalty to the masters in the upper caste. This sense of subjugation took the form of perpetual alienation in Vellya and
ultimately he accepted this humiliation. Vellya Pappen himself revealed the secret love affair between his son and Ammu to his masters. Vellya Pappen “had come to tell Mammachi himself. As a Paravan and a man with mortgaged body parts, he considered it his duty” (242). Vellya Pappen, “an old Paravan, who had seen the Walking Backward days” and “torn between Loyalty and Love” (242), sacrificed his love for his son, Velutha, making up his mind to be a good and well-behaved slave. Being ignorant of what cost he and his son were going to pay, Vellya Pappen merely concentrated on his loyalty for the upper caste. His betrayal for his son and his parental love was precisely a reciprocal gesture to the Ipe family’s munificence gestures. Vellya Pappen, “[...] had seen the Crawling Backwards Days and his gratitude to Mammachi and her family for all that they had done for him was as wide and deep as a river in spite” (73). Actually, Roy, in the novel, explains that Vellya Pappen’s had greatly overestimated the Ipe family’s generosity. In reality, there was always a “Touchable kitchen” (241) shut off to him. The family would never be generous enough to tolerate Vellya Pappen’s stepping into its territory. It is surly a surprise that he decided to take side with the upper-caste to enforce the love laws, no matter how badly treated he was.

Nietzsche had first analysed the ambivalence in his discussion about the master and slave moralities which may help to make Vellya Pappen’s deeds imaginable and comprehensible. Nietzsche argues that: “Morality is not something fixed for all time to be discovered in the world; rather it is a human creation [...] the typology of master and slave moralities denotes distinct psychological types of human agency which first arise out of political distinctions made between social classes.”14 The master morality is a morality of self-affirmation and self-glorification. The two types of morality coexist in one person, within one soul, yet in Vellya Pappen it is perceived the slave morality make ineffective the other one. Keith Ansell Pearson, a Nietzschean scholar, provides a simplified passage
to differentiate the slave morality from the master morality in the following words:

The nobles esteem life in terms of feelings of fullness, of overflowing power; they have a consciousness of wealth which seeks to give and bestow. By contrast, the slave type of morality, which characterizes the oppressed, and all those who suffer from life in some way, results in a pessimistic suspicion about the whole human condition. The eye of the slave turns unfavourably toward the virtues of the powerful; he esteems those qualities which will serve to ease his existence, such as pity, patience, industry, and humility. \(^{15}\)

Vellya Pappen was claimed by the slave morality, when he reported the secret love affair of Velutha and Ammu in front of his master. Mammachi’s helpful attitude towards Velutha i.e. paying for his glass eye; sending Velutha to the school, paying Velutha more than an untouchable’s salary, etc. are stressed and highlighted “because here these are the most useful qualities and almost the only means of enduring the pressure of existence.” \(^{16}\)

Vellya Pappen misjudged the truth behind Mammachi’s charity and act of benevolence. It was not any sort of genuine pity, but abundance of authoritative power. Roy writes: “Mammachi did not encourage Velutha to enter the house […] She thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that Touchable touched. She said that it was a big step for a Paravan” (74). The true face of the refined wickedness is exposed by Mammachi herself when she cursed Vellya Pappen and Velutha. Mammachi revealed her anger openly because she had recognised the dangerous disposition that Vellya Pappen foresaw in Velutha. It was “not what he did, but the way he did it. Perhaps it was just a lack of hesitation, an unwarranted assurance” (73). Velutha had become a potential competitor to his master in a way.

The feeling of powerlessness made Velutha and his father “anomic” people whose lives are circumscribed by isolation, deprivation and alienation. With the complicity of the
lower caste, Vellya Pappen’s royalty, the Ipe family quickly found the target. Velutha was arrested, brutally beaten and then brought to the police station. There, the police and the upper-caste family encountered a dilemma: it was impossible for them to set him free, but the love laws were actually unwritten laws without the legitimate power to accuse the lovers of crime. “True, he was a Paravan. True, he had misbehaved. But these were troubled times and technically, as per the law, he was an innocent man. There was no case” (29). The vicious beating and the arrest were illegal. There was no article or clause in the constitution or state law that stated explicitly that an untouchable cannot love a touchable. The first thought that came in Inspector Thomas Mathew’s (another upper caste man) mind was a “Touchable wife, two Touchable daughters – whole Touchable generations waiting in their Touchable wombs” (245). When Baby Kochamma came to report the transgression of the love laws, he proposed a solution: “The matter is very simple. Either the rape-victim must file a complaint. Or the children must identify the Paravan as their abductor in the presence of a police” (299). Baby Kochamma found a good opportunity to execute her plan, even without her involvement, “The children will do as they’re told”, Baby Kochamma said, “If I could have a few moments alone with them” (299). Velutha who was weak and powerless could not oppose the authority that supported the powerful and the elite and finally succumbed to brutal corporal punishment. On the other side, Baby Kochamma was very willing to collaborate with the policemen to put this love affair to a fatal end. She threatened Estha and made up his mind for giving false testimony to sanction the arrest of Velutha. In this way, she established a rapport between the local power and the official authority. The local power was eager to establish the authority of the Hindu tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation over thousands of years. Thomas Mathew, who was an embodiment of the political power, was not worried about the world around him, because he compared himself to a mechanic
who was serving the machine-like nation. All the policemen, including him, shared the resolute responsibility to exterminate any visible obstacle causing social disorders. Ammu’s secret love affair with Velutha was identified as a prelude to more serious trouble or even large-scale social disorder, which was likely to threaten the well-being of the other social classes that must be corrected as soon as possible. Velutha belonged to a poor class for the so-called most enlightened and educated minds, but his secret love affair was taken as act of a barbarian which was crude, immoral and unpardonable crime. The policemen “crept towards the house. Like Film-policemen, softly, softly through the grass, batons in their hands, machine guns in their minds, responsibility for the Touchable Future on their thin but able shoulders” (291). The policemen “were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak” (293); an outbreak that may imperil the caste-system in the prosperous land. The upper caste people are bent upon crushing the overreaching tendency of Velutha since it will give a wrong message to the society at large.

The slow and deliberate beating of Velutha is shocking and disgusting particularly in the context of alienation, and it is also evocative of the horror of the holocaust and its scientific attempt at genocide. As Julia Kristeva observes in *Powers of Horror*, “The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things.”17 Roy has shown her social concerns (which are based on different social conditions) when the shrewdness of the servants of law is juxtaposed with the innocent nature of Estha and Velutha. She seems perturbed by the fact that the powerful are crushing the powerless in Indian society—a practice that is going to harm the entire nation in future.

Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear—civilization’s fear of nature, men’s fear of women, power’s fear of powerlessness. Man’s subliminal
urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify. Men’s Need’s [...] Structure. Order. Complete monopoly. It was human history, masquerading as God’s Purpose, revealing herself to an under-age audience. (292-293)

The policemen still brought out the handcuffs to declare their official power as if they had not seen the disabled body in front of them that was no longer able to fight back. Or it should say, more specifically, that Velutha, as a Paravan despised by the others, had been deprived of his right and ability to fight back at the very beginning. Velutha had his “hands cuffed”, “feet fettered”, and suppressed opinions. His space was curtailed and specified, beyond the boundaries of which he would be allowed nothing, but wrath and hatred of caste-ridden society at large. Velutha stands as an embodiment of the alienated people and suggests the general predicament of the poor, downtrodden and the lower caste ones.

The violent killing of Velutha was purely an exhibition of the power of the state machinery. Putting it in Roy’s own words, it was “history in live performance” (293). Every Indian is born to be a part of History, a witness of History, and plays his role in the historical performance. “There was nothing accidental about what happened that morning. Nothing incidental. It was no stray mugging or personal settling of scores. This was an era imprinting itself on those who lived in it” (293). At the same time, there are violent transgressions from time to time, just like the one in the novel. Susan Friedman says: “This transgression of gender and caste norms and the violence of the family and state in disciplining the transgressors have life-destroying consequences for the next generation, for the children who are forever scarred by what they have witnessed.” History of India, for a large part, is written with the transgressors’ blood and the mentally-alienated victims’ tears. More importantly, the history full of disciplinary violence, as Friedman has argued, should not and cannot “be reduced to the story of colonial, postcolonial and transactional
relations outside the state. It is so real and so true within the state and within its history as well. It is the alienation faced by every Indian because caste and gender issues are part of cultural fabric of Indian society for a long time. Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Thus, Velutha is socially discarded, politically neglected and physically tortured character who wants to rise above his stature but was mercilessly pulverised.

Estha develops from a boy to a man in the novel. His development is espied from a normal, happy individual to a totally introvert, alienated, indifferent individual. A series of disastrous incidents in his life metamorphosed him into a different person altogether. When Ammu made up her mind to forsake the insensitive husband, the twins are displaced from their father’s house. At the very tender age (when he was only seven) Estha became fully aware of his pathetic life at Ayemenem house. He became conscious of the fact that as uninvited guests in their maternal grandmother’s home their happiness is like a nine day’s wonder. Estha felt that nobody loved him and he is not worthy of being loved. Baby Kochamma disliked the twins and retorts Estha: “Tell your mother to take you to father’s house [...] These aren’t your beds. This isn’t your house” (83). His increasing sense of alienation can be observed in the act of erasing his surname from his exercise book. “On the front page of the book Estha had rubbed out his surname with spit, and taken half the paper with it. Over the whole mass he had written in pencil, Unknown. Esthappen Unknown” (156). In such a detrimental environment, Estha feels stressed. Estha bumps into isolation, and as a naïve child Estha finds himself enmeshed in the social circumstances in which he and some other licentious individuals live. The sexual abuse by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man multiplies Estha’s sense of alienation, when as a child he was manipulated into masturbating at the cinema hall. This was a nightmarish experience. Estha tried hard to pull through the terrible incident but failed completely. He
thinks “The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man could walk in any minute. Catch a Cochin-Kottayam bus and be there” (194). The other debilitating incident occurs when Estha’s cousin Sophie Mol drowns in river by accident. Estha bore the brunt of Margaret Kochamma’s (Sophie’s mother) anger as she blames him for Sophie’s death and repeatedly slaps him. Estha is sent back to his father and was forced to leave his sister and mother. The separation from Rahel was a final blow to Estha’s crumbling personality and he stopped speaking. The voice returns to him only when he meets his sister. Before leaving to his father’s house, Estha was made to identify Velutha as his and Rahel’s kidnapper at the behest Baby Kochamma. Thus, he has to carry the burden of that guilt all his life.

Years later, when Estha revived his childhood memories of sexual maltreatment, his sense of isolation and alienation aggravated. Both the experiences – the sexual abuse and death of Velutha are horrible; both are associated with sticky sweetness. “Sticky sweet lemon bubbles of the drink he couldn’t drink” are associated with the “wet and hot and sticky [...] White egg white. Quarterboiled” (99) of the abuser’s exclaim on Estha’s hand. The incident leads to his social estrangement. He has lost faith in humanity. Estha “held his sticky Other Hand away from his body. It was not supposed to touch anything” (100). Not surprisingly, Estha is soon “feeling vomity” (102). Sexual abuse often leads to betrayal of the child’s trust in the adult. In his dreams, Estha used to remember the horrible incidents of his life and they made him into a socially withdrawn person. Whenever Estha contemplated on the value of his survival the “memories of a broken man” (God 14) tiptoed into his brain. Roy writes:

But worst of all, [Estha] 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. Estha.

And what had Estha done? He looked into that beloved face and said: Yes. (32)

Though many years have passed, the image of Velutha’s broken body was still fixed in Estha’s mind. When Estha was brought to Velutha, a near-corpse lying like a “pumpkin with a monstrous upside-down smile” in a pool of blood and urine spreading from him on “the scummy, slippery floor”, he retched because of “the smell of shit” (303) was there. The sight of Velutha’s bruised body was horrible to Estha. His act of vomiting had marked the border between life and death. Estha pushed himself to the side where the death seemed more ghastly. Confronting the near-corpse body of Velutha upsets his stomach, but Estha unfailingly carried out Baby Kochamma’s instruction to identify Velutha as an abductor, and finally he said “Yes” (302). At this moment Estha, was forced to make the most painful choice in his lifetime. Velutha’s broken body right in front of him demonstrated the destructive power of death and aroused his feeling of disgust. Estha was candidly clear that his mother Ammu’s fate would likely be the same as Velutha’s if he does not falsely implicate him. To rescue Ammu from death and its contaminants that were going to poison her future life, Estha was forced by the others and even himself to give the false testimony. “Yes, it was him” (32). These words, together with the image of Velutha’s dying body, constituted the core of Estha’s severe alienation and estrangement in life. In Roy’s portrayal of Estha, he was “the Keeper of Records” (156). His peculiar habit of keeping anything that could be served as a historical trace of his life, such as “bus-tickets, bank-receipts, cash-memos, check-book” (156), apparently and directly reflected his insistence on recollecting the remainders of his past. Among the evidence associated with the truth about Velutha’s death, the word “Yes” (32) was the one that Estha unconsciously preserved with the most effort.

Velutha had provided love, care and company to both the twins, that they needed
so badly. But his brutal death in the police station, that occurred in their presence, left an everlasting scar on their memory, leaving them unconnected, alone, alienated from the normal life. Memories, concerning the horrifying events, occupy the psyche without being absorbed or assimilated, compulsively return. On the contrary, what the reader sees in the novel, is how chronic silence depraves a young witness’s quality of life after subsequent gruesome events, which have alienated him from his own self. Estha had always been a quiet child, so no one could pinpoint with any degree of accuracy exactly when he had stopped talking. The result of this silence was that Estha’s became so stubborn that he suffered from a permanent loss of language. For Estha, silence came late. It should have come at the moment when he was brought to identify Velutha. Compelled to accuse Velutha, Estha was dispossessed of the right to be silent in order to save his mother Ammu. Pressurised by Baby Kochamma and Inspector Thomas Mathew, Estha falsely charged Velutha for abducting him and Rahel, an act that will save Ammu. He, thus, became structure-blind i.e. looking only at the immediate social environment. Estha embedded a permanent feeling of guilt in his soul. The result was that he lost his capacity of expression. He seemed to welcome this paralysis and paid not a bit of resistance to it as if he was making expiation for his treachery to Velutha many years ago.

Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha. It reached out of his head and enfolded him in its swampy arms. It rocked him to the rhythm of an ancient, fetal heartbeat. It sent its stealthy, suckered tentacles inching along the insides of his skull, hovering the knolls and dells of his memory, dislodging old sentences, whisking them off the tip of his tongue. It stripped his thoughts of the words that described them and left them pared and naked. Unspeakable. Numb. (13)

There was nothing wrong with Estha’s vocal cords. He just chose not to speak anymore when he finally had the right and freedom to do so. What accompanied the
silence, a dramatic deviation from societal norms of healthy behaviour, were other psychosomatic problems of disorder. By embracing silence, from which he derived unusual pleasure, Estha cocooned himself from the society around him. “Slowly, over the years, Estha withdrew from the world” (13). Autism and quietness altogether imprisoned Estha in a “very little space in the world” (12). In this little space there was nothing but complete silence in the form of alienation. Estha alienated from the society because he could not tell his painful story to anyone, and the better option he discovered was to take refuge in a silent corner of his own heart. The worst outcome, as Dori Laub sees is that “[…] the untold events had become so distorted in one’s conscious memory as to make one believe that he himself, and not the perpetrator, was responsible for the atrocities he witnessed.”

In accord with Laub’s view, Estha’s silence implies a masochistic life pattern. By shutting himself in the silent space, he enjoyed himself in “steeping in the smell of old roses, blooded on memories of a broken man” (14). He knew that he was like a ship that had lost its moorings, and floating on a wide turbulent sea. At the age of thirty, his only friend was a dog. This symbolically suggests his alienation from society and family. His alienation is corroborated in a fine imagery of the fisherman. “High cheek bones and haunted eyes. A fisherman is a white-tiled bathroom with sea-secrets in his eyes” (92). Truly, Estha knew many secrets, how he was betrayed and victimised by others. He regarded himself as a traitor since he had supported Baby Kochamma in a crime. He was one of the reasons of Velutha’s heartbreaking death, and this guilt hammered his consciousness all the time. The responsibility for Velutha’s death and Ammu’s sorrow set heavy on his heart: “It was his fault that the faraway man in Ammu’s chest stopped shouting, his fault that she died alone in the lodge with no one to lie at the back and talk to her” (308). Estha “had acquired the ability […] to appear inanimate, almost invisible to the
untrained eye” (12).

Rahel suffered the evils of alienation, too, because of the patriarchal oppression and psychological torture. Anomie is a permanent malady of Rahel. As a girl, Rahel is displaced from her father’s home, and thus she is devoid of parental affections. Rahel’s sense of disillusionment and unfulfilled desires are initially responsible for her alienation because both separated her from the family and its entities. This rejection, hurt and mental agony led Rahel to the dishonest relationships within family. She feels alienated and depressed and becomes the object of pity. Rahel was only eleven when her mother passed away, and as a child she saw the sufferings of her mother. She had been subjected to the insult and tortures within the maternal family. Rahel in her school years kept people out of her world since “she would rather decorate a knob of fresh cow dung with small flowers” (17) than socialise with the schoolmates. Plainly, she had no friends” (18). Solitary as Rahel was, whatever opinions people had about her, could not bother her. Rahel’s social isolation and alienation resulted into her abnormal behaviour at the Convent in Nazareth. She was expelled from the school due to mental illness. Her bizarre dealings with others like fighting with her seniors, pressing other girl’s breasts, setting fire to her House mistress’s false hair bun, and act of smoking show her hatred, detachment and sense of alienation. Her college life was equally careless and reckless as she spent eight years without finishing five-year degree course. She, too, is lost in her own world, aloof from the world around.

However, Rahel made genuine efforts to free herself from the clutches of alienation. To sustain her social ties, she found a husband, Larry McCasalin, of her own choice. The author writes, thus: “Rahel drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts, towards an unoccupied chair in an air port lounge […] She returned with him to Boston” (18). The memories of past haunted Rahel round the clock, but she kept her husband in
complete ignorance of the devastating event that happened in her childhood and thrown both twins in the conundrum of alienation. Larry McCaslin was very happy to find Rahel, a gorgeous girl as her wife: “He held her as though she was a gift. Given to him love. Something still and small. Unbearably precious” (19). But he saw a strange look in Rahel’s eyes like a wolf in sheep clothing, and he did not exactly know the meaning of that strange look. Soon Rahel and Larry were separated. The marriage ended into fiasco and Rahel again suffered as a victim of alienation. Like her mother Ammu, Rahel was divorced and worked for a few months as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York. There she worked as a night clerk also at a gas station and saw how some hooligans were stabbing a man. The whole experience in New York added fuel to the fire. Rahel felt that her feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction have increased. Rahel’s unsatisfactory relation in love marriage confirms some semblance of the author’s own life. Roy admitted once: “My boy friend was Goan, he is a well known architect now, and we hired a little house on the beach. We used to bake cakes and sell them [...] I left him and came back to Delhi [...] There was a whole ground for us in the college who were not particularly welcome in the hostel there – perhaps we were a little too anarchic.”

As compared to Estha, Rahel prefers to thaw the ice of isolation. Rahel used to spend holidays in her native place Ayemenem, largely ignored by Chacko her uncle, Mammachi, her grandmother and Baby Kochamma, her grandaunt. Fortunately she was not involved in identification parade of Velutha who was roped in the false abduction of the children. For Rahel, Baby Kochamma was the one to be blamed for the tragedy. She was the instigator, “doing what she was best at. Irrigating her fields, nourishing her crops with other people’s passions” (305). Rahel insisted on her belief that “Chacko breaking down doors was only the sad bull thrashing at the end of Baby Kochamma’s leash. It was her idea that Ammu be made to pack her bags and leave. That Estha be Returned” (305).
During her stay in Ayemenem, Rahel deliberately neglected Baby Kochamma’s presence in the family and, thus, she decided to show her secret revenge and punishment for cruelty and mercilessness shown by Baby Kochamma and Chacko in their dealing with Ammu and Velutha. The death of Velutha and her mother’s tragedy made such a great impact on Rahel that she had lost trust in human relationships and was dragged by another sort of alienation i.e. an alienation from the fellow human beings, from her own relatives. Her mother Ammu’s mental upheaval proved to Rahel that human relations are very fragile and vulnerable to various pressures. Even Ammu’s affection with her children did not prevent Rahel from being a soft target in the family. Rahel understood that putting too much faith in human relations could be very dangerous, and especially in love relations. She knew well what it meant by “loving a man to death” (307).

While responding to the merciless death of Velutha, Rahel in many ways resembles her twin brother Estha. Both were numbed by the horrible incident of Velutha’s death. Emotionlessness was her ultimate weapon of her self-defense against the uncertain quality of human relationship that she considered as the very reason why Velutha and Ammu were betrayed and hurt by their friends and family. Thus, both Estha and Rahel suffered from alienation. Both individuals found themselves living a life in vacuum. Rahel tried to overcome this sense of emptiness in life, which is a primary urge of every individual. Neal opines:

The search for meaning in life is a primary sustaining force in human affairs. Finding a purpose for living and sorting out what is or is not important to the human experience. The components of the quest for meaning include discovering the options available, setting personal priorities, and striving to attain goals that the individual regards as being worthwhile.\(^{22}\)

It seems that Rahel and Estha reached an unspoken agreement to be always quiet
about it. “The emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That
the two things fitted together like stacked spoons” (20-21). Quietness was imposed on
Estha by himself as the penalty for his involvement in condemning Velutha to death while
Rahel was fixated on the idea that if she could have done or not done something she might
have changed the destinies of Velutha and Ammu. But, in reality, she could not offer any
succour during the heart-rending death of Velutha. She simply remained in the Inspector’s
office, listening to “the rude sound of Baby Kochamma’s relief dribbling down the sides
of the Inspector’s pot in his attached toilet” (303). The Inspector’s “pot” that accepted
Baby Kochamma’s “stool”, in its figurative sense, represents the harmonious collusion
between Baby Kochamma and the inspector that Rahel had no ability to abort. Rahel, a
flesh embodiment of the “Small God” in Roy’s narrative, was filled with a feeling of
remorse for her powerlessness and helplessness during the grievous event of Velutha’s
death. The rest of her life was largely lived in alienation and in Asha Choubey’s words
Rahel spent her later years in a “long period of separation, dejection and desolation”23 and
still she engaged herself in nursing her injured psyche. Roy, thus, warns that individual’s
tears, despair, alienation and misfortune are relatively a small matter, not worthy for the
“Big Gods” (36). The effect of alienation is different on Estha and Rahel: while Estha
assumes an eternal silence, Rahel emerges as a rebellious girl. She runs away from the
home, from her country, from her husband in search of her self. Rahel’s husband
Larry McCaslin also observed a strange optimism in her eyes.

Estha and Rahel, the dizygotic twins, like many other alienated survivors of the
post-modern world, became themselves the crisis. There were some survival tactics,
Rahel’s “enforced optimism”, for example, is to support their living, but none of them
could alter the fact that their lives had stopped making progress. In this sense, Rahel’s
remark on Baby Kochamma is fit to describe Estha and her own bewildering experiences
of alienation. “She’s living her life backwards, Rahel thought. It was a curiously apt observation. Baby Kochamma had lived her life backwards” (23). The twins were trapped by the endless flashback or intrusive return of the indifferent experience, while Baby Kochamma actively drowned herself in the memory of her unconsummated love with Father Mulligan. Thus, Rahel’s nightmare and Estha’s isolation and emptiness serve as a brilliant example of alienation in the novel, justifying Roy’s ideas that barbaric conditions breed barbaric attitudes. Rahel and Estha share remarkable similarities; they participate in each other’s dreams and nightmares, they finish each other’s sentences, and finally they share unbounded love. Caught between the demands that family and history place on identity, the two depend upon each other for comfort, relief and stability in a monstrous world. Their final union seems like a moment of hope in the midst of their “hideous grief”, a moment of choice and identification, an affirmation of their oneness, their desires, and their potential strength. It seems a rebellion against alienated forces, against the agents of societal laws, and of necessity that would separate and dominate the twins. But Roy reminds, again and again, of the differences in twins, of their “twoness” despite the appearance of a single soul – that they are, after all, separate people and brother and sister.

Rahel and Estha struggled hard to find relief in a family, and their interactions of the immediate family seem much more real. Rahel and Estha look towards their mother and various possible fathers for attention and affirmation. Ammu plays the role of father and mother for twins, but she does not seem to succeed, as the twins search for alternative fathers or the restoration of the original. Their two substitute fathers – Chacko and Velutha – cannot ultimately fill the vacuum in their life. They regarded Chacko as the head of the family as Rahel was “pleased to have Chacko mistaken for her father like a normal family” (76) but Chacko never protected the twins. Though, Velutha loved them so much, his love extended no comfort to them as he died so soon. Even their own mother, at one
point, out of frustration cried out, “I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born! You’re the millstones around my neck” (239). They stood aghast at this unexpected behaviour of the mother. They drifted away from their family and society around due to dereliction. Andrew Koch observes:

Life is characterized by a dualism of mind and matter. Consciousness, the repository of thought and will is also a manifestation of our essential detachment from nature. Mind and matter cannot be brought together in the course of human existence. One’s first conscious thought is a confirmation of alienation, the objectification of all that is external, disconnected from the realm of thought itself.²⁴

For Estha, his sister Rahel was an inalienable part of his very self and spirit. The abrupt separation of the twins, in their early life, leads to the increasing sense of alienation. When they reunite, after two decades, in Ayemenem house they cross all the boundaries to diminish their sense of alienation. After twenty-three years, the twins remain like two lovers.

The incestuous act is not a new concept in literature. Gayle Jones’ (African-American author) Corregidora (1975) tells of a slave master who makes incestuous generations with his family of slave women. Ursa Corregidora, a tormented blue singer haunted in past and hated the Portuguese slave master Corregidora who made incestuous relations with her great-grandmother, and fathered both her grandmother and mother. Ralph Ellison’s (British author) Invisible Man (1952) includes the story of Jim Trueblood, who has impregnated both his wife and their daughter at roughly the same time. Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye and Alice Walker’s The Color Purple also focus on incestuous relationships and childhood sexual abuse. When Rahel observes Estha’s wet body in her room, she gets sexual pleasure watching him undress:
Rahel searched her brother’s nakedness for signs of herself. In the shape of his knees. The arch of his instep. The slope of his shoulders. The angle at which the rest of his arm met his elbow. The way his toe nails tipped upwards at the ends. The sculpted hollows on either side of his taut, beautiful buns. Tight plums. [...] Rahel watched Estha with the curiosity of a mother watching her wet child. A sister a brother. A woman a man. A twin a twin. She flew those several kisses at once. He was a naked stranger met in a chance encounter. He was the one she had known before life began. (93)

This kind of sexual attitude described by the author is more or less akin to Lawrence’s Oedipus complex theory which focuses on the illicit relationship of mother and son as in *Sons and Lovers*. But unlike that novel, the sexual passion surpasses the maternal instinct of Rahel and both the twins break societal norms by uniting in incestuous relationship. In reality, what instigates them for this abnormal act is not sexual happiness but a repugnant grief due to the obnoxious alienation in their life which results in hollowness. Such kind of sexual images are not simply used to convey sexual emotions but something more as Edward Said remarked that “the images, themes, motifs, that circulate in the text can be useful indicators of its ideological underpinnings.” Rahel and Estha’s union, an unsuccessful attempt to break the strict rules of society, fails. Instead of breaking from lineage, they double back on it, as Estha seeks a return to origin and wholeness through the imaging of Rahel as the mother. Within the strictures on identity placed by family, the two seek identity and oneness, a rejection of separation in an act of union; an act of “hideous grief” (311) rather than a useful rebellion. It is thus problematic to equate the two separate breakings of the love laws that bring the two creatures together. Ammu’s sexual union with Velutha is a positive and a useful act of rebellion, while the twins’ sexual union does not operate in the same way. In spite of the countless misfortunes
in their life, this very alternative is indigestible on many grounds. The erotic vulgar scenes as narrated in the novel do not seem to adhere to the boundary of Indian milieu. Thus, the experienced sexual transgression is shown in deeply personal ways. As Ruth Vanita notes, Ammu’s “ultimately death [...] suggests the novelists discomfort with this turn in plot.”

Sophie Mol’s crises give a tragic turn to the story. She lives on the margins of society and refuses to associate with Indian people (except Estha and Rahel) whom she deems inferior to her socially. In the novel, the death and the loss of Sophie Mol is another painful event in which the twins suffered crude solitariness. As “the loss of Sophie Mol stepped softly around the Ayemenem House” (17), the loss of the twins’ beloved Velutha ushered them into painful survival. Sophie Mol is the daughter of the Englishwoman, Margaret, and the Rhodes Scholar, Chacko. As compared to Rahel and Estha, she received warm welcome in the Ayemenem family. Sophie’s grandmother cordially expects her arrival. Usha Mahadevan observes; “Sophie is welcome not only because she is the son’s child, but also because she is a white one.” Her death as child, which provokes panic in postcolonial Kerala, is one of the many marks of British Imperialism that haunt the novel. The twins themselves are half-Hindu hybrids whom no “self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry” (70), comments Baby Kochamma. She herself was an “unrequited love of an Irish priest, a convert to Roman Catholicism, and a failed nun” (44). The twins felt initially hostile towards Sophie because they have been instructed strictly about how to behave when she arrived. But Sophie managed to win their favour, since she has been charming and outgoing, and moreover she rejected the adults who criticised her, when she befriended Rahel and Estha. Sophie presented a combination of Indian and British identities. Roy is careful to call her Sophie, her English name, combined with Mol (the phrase for “girl” in the local language of Malayalam). She never tries to be familiar with Indian culture, before she accidentally falls into the river and drowns. Sophie Mol is
actually culturally alienated, since the Indian culture seemed valueless to her. The post-colonial theorists like Bill Ashcroft links alienation with a sense of dislocation or displacement that some people (especially those from immigrant cultures) feel when they look to a distant nation for their values. Sophie found India as a culturally different nation, and thus searched for self-identity among the Ipe family. Thus, hybridity, the crossing of cultures, is fore grounded in the novel as an inevitable result of history, as natural as Christianity seeping “into Kerala like tea from a teabag” (33). Sophie Mol has harboured in the core of her heart a sense of isolation and alienation. Perhaps this is why she seldom developed love for Chacko. When Estha and Rahel asked her “Who d’ you love the world most?” She replied in a simple way: “Joe my dad” (144). She asserts that Joe is her real father who had never hit her. Though Sophie’s stay at Ayemenem house is very short due to her sudden and sad demise, her feeling of cultural alienation is of great significance in affecting others.

Mammachi, Pappachi and Chacko are other characters who are marred by the feeling of alienation. Mammachi, the elderly woman in Ipe family, is merely a puppet in the hands of her husband Pappachi. Her husband tried his best to suppress her individuality by beating her with a flower vase every night, until their son Chacko intervened and warned his father not to repeat that again, yet she took this as a regular incident and eventually got used to it. Though she is an upper caste, she also suffers due to patriarchy dominant in the family. Mammachi’s responses are completely different to the love affair of her son and daughter. Love is well recognised to have de-alienating power. Salvation through love is an age-old religious message in Indian context. Even in Christianity, Hegel understood love as divine essence of spirituality. In case of Mammachi, the definition of love was something else. She wanted to see Ammu as another model upper-caste woman. She wanted her to restrain herself as their caste is a
matter of public focus. Her vigorous claim that “she wanted her body back”, since “it was hers” (211) remained unspoken. The idea that female body is held in the hands of a woman’s free will and she deserves the right to refuse any “proprietary handling” (211) of the other people even her own family are definitely a taboo subject. Leela Dube’s clear observation about Indian culture is an index to figure out the complicated relationship between gender and caste in India. As she points out: “The cultural schemes which underlie the caste system are based upon a fundamental difference between male and female bodies in respect of their vulnerability to incur impurity through sexual intercourse.”

There is a hierarchy between two sexes within a caste for “the caste system is premised upon the cultural perception of a fundamental difference in male and female sexuality.”

Upper-caste women play a crucial role. Women’s vulnerability, their biological capacity for pregnancy, has brought them the responsibility of preventing the introduction of impurity into the upper caste. Ammu’s instructions to her children painfully signal that caste, in terms of purity and pollution, is the primary focus of the novel. She taught her twins that the difference between the upper and the lower castes in India is the difference between the “clean” and “dirty.” “I think it’s high time that you learned the difference between CLEAN and DIRTY. Especially in this country” (145), said Ammu. However, Ammu could not overcome inherent urge to unite with a man, and that led to her significant relationships with the ‘dirty’ lower caste Velutha. The relation was not at all tolerable by the Ipe family members, and thus, when Vellya Pappen came to Mammachi to reveal Ammu’s secret love with his untouchable son, Mammachi flew into rage.

Mammachi’s rage at the old one-eyed Paravan standing in the rain, drunk, dribbling and covered in mud was re-directed into a cold contempt for her daughter and what she had done. She thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man
who was nothing but a filthy coolie. His particular Paravan smell, like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. (244)

The particular Paravan smell, to Mammachi, is a part of the lower caste’s impurity. The hereditary impurity running in the blood of the untouchable caste has endowed a lower-caste man an animal-like image, not a human one. When an upper-caste woman crosses the boundary to touch a man that she is forbidden to be associated with, her family would think that she is mixing the impure blood into the upper caste. It is certainly taken as a challenge and a serious warning to the caste system and the social order as a whole. In brief, as Dube reiterates: “A woman’s role in biological reproduction, as we shall see, makes her primarily responsible for maintaining the purity of caste and its boundaries and calls for proper control over her sexuality.”

Marx identifies three types of alienation for the human beings; it is from things in nature that the worker (human being in general) creates; it is from other workers; and it is from the species. With pornography and violence, women are turned into the objects i.e. they are objectified into being products of their labour, and consequently are alienated not only from the above three realms, but also from themselves. Violence inflicted on Mammachi and Ammu perfectly illustrates the dirty politics of patriarchy. Roy depicts Mammachi’s husband: “Pappachi, for his part, was having trouble coping with the ignominy of retirement. He was seventeen years older than Mammachi, and realized with a shock that he was an old man when his wife was still in her prime” (46) Pappachi, retired from his government job, spent his time watching his wife running her own career successfully, and felt his manhood is hurt at a great deal. He decided to restore his masculine pride so “every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings were not new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place.” (47) The physical attack unveiled the patriarchal biases hidden in his heart under the disguise of a
respectable gentleman. His daughter, Ammu, who endured the violence with her mother recalled how the father was a double faced man, who wove a “hideous web” (171) of lies to have a good reputation outside the family but he pressurised everyone in the family to follow his rules:

He donated money to orphanages and leprosy clinics. He worked hard on his public profile as a sophisticated, generous, moral man. But alone with his wife and children turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father. (171-172)

Pappachi was highly critical of Mammachi’s pickle compounds, he was irritated by the contrast between him (a retired, useless scholar) and his wife (who has emerged as a promising female enterpriser). He was jealous of his wife’s success in business. It reminded him of his own failure as a useless entomologist, who is gradually losing his position as the only one breadwinner in the family. When he saw his authority being challenged by his versatile wife, he ventured to take back the role as the master in the household. In the domestic violence committed by Pappachi, there is a Man’s desire to control woman, to make her docile, obedient and more than that, there is a Man’s fear and frustration of his own powerlessness.

Pappachi’s fear for powerlessness and incompetence was more aroused when Mammachi’s violin teacher Launsky-Tieffenthal told him that “his wife was exceptionally talented and in his opinion, potentially concert class” (49). The praise of his wife by another man increased his inferiority complex he abruptly stopped those violin lessons. One night, after another beating by a brass flower vase, “Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi’s violin and threw it in the river” (47). Thus, he silenced Mammachi’s urge for music. Pappachi deliberately crushed her talent in music. He also wanted to ruin her pickle
industry. Alienation resulting through domestic violence damages body as well as the soul of a woman. Mammachi and Ammu, in the novel, are the representatives of tortured, exploited, harassed and alienated females. Janet Wilson opines:

A strong voice is raised against the system of patriarchal oppression operating in the Indian system. The God of Small Things presents complex relationships that are doomed one way or the other. It becomes a fertile ground for the study of various postcolonial issues of marginality such as gender bias, domestic violence, anglophilia and dowry evil in a country where various kinds of despair competed for primacy, where between the terror of war and the horror of peace terrible things kept happening.31

Roy suggests domestic violence, oppressions and humiliations add fuel to the fire of alienation as in the case of Ammu, Mammachi and Velutha. Due to this domestic violence, human being like Ammu, Mammachi and Velutha suffers from alienation frustration and meaninglessness in life. Whenever women seize the opportunity to be stronger and more brilliant than men, they either have to revolt or meekly surrender to family pressures. Due to the fear of revolt, men exert physical force on the weaker sex. Thus, in words of Vasanth Kannabiran, manhood in the novel is “defined by the degree of control men exercise over women and the degree of passivity of the women of the caste.”32

Chacko gave a temporary relief to his mother as he snatched the brass flower vase out of his father Pappachi’s hand that he used to beat his wife. “I never want this to happen again, he told his father. Ever” (47). To Mammachi, Chacko surely was a saviour. Out of her gratitude and her maternal love, Mammachi invested whatever she had for the rest of her life in her dear son. Embedded in the mother-son relationship is a traditional Indian woman’s commitment to patriarchy. After the incident, Chacko without making any conscious efforts, won a prominent place in the family. As a successor to Pappachi, he
proved that he has full control over the Ipe household. Pappachi had no other choice but to move away to “his favourite mahogany rocking chair” which eventually smashed into little bits and left nothing but “a heap of varnished wicker and splintered wood” (47). After Pappachi’s death, the transfer of power was easily done. Pappachi’s family no longer owned a handsome property to claim the title of a rich family. The upper-caste membership, she inherited from her preceding generations, had secured her superior position as an empowered elite. Kannabiran says that like other upper-caste women, Mammachi’s primary duty of life was “to protect the life of her man and ensure his longevity because her own social existence is defined by and hinged on his life.” At her husband’s funeral, she cried hard not because of her love for the deceased spouse but because of her sense of loss. The cry was, not due to any sense of estrangement or relinquishment, in fact, it was due to the loss of her source of social recognition.

Chacko was also nurtured in the same culture, in which the patriarch rules the roost. He concealed the fact that he was not able to gain a place in the job market and he quickly takes over Mammachi’s pickle factory, even though he had legally claimed ownership of all the family’s properties. “My Factory, my pineapples, my pickles” (56), Chacko used to speak it like a roaring lion. By putting an end to Pappachi’s domestic violence, Chacko created an illusion that he is the replica of a well-educated gentleman who was going to treat everyone nicely. This man (being Pappachi’s only son) who succeeded to his father’s leadership position in the family was only “a Male Chauvinist Pig” (144). Chacko yielded his male superiority in front of his English wife Margaret but the sacrifice has thrown him into alienation. Margaret asked him for a divorce when she was pregnant, not because she found weariness in their relations, but she found a better English man – Joe, who promised her to provide more charm and charisma. Margaret left him and despite the rejection, Chacko spoke of Margaret with a pride as though he
admired her for having divorced him.

Chacko was fortunate enough to live in a conservative community in which love laws do offer men more freedom. Men do not have to control their chauvinistic behaviour. Sex is a much more serious matter for a woman because the issues of caste boundaries and her own purity are involved. When Chacko’s sexual liaison with a woman in the pickles factory was discovered, ironical justification was provided by the female members in the Ipe family since they already acknowledge the masculine urges of a male: “He can’t help having a Man’s Needs, Mammachi said primly. Surprisingly, Baby Kochamma accepted this explanation, and the enigmatic, secretly thrilling notion of Men’s Needs gained implicit sanction in the Ayemenem House” (160). The family tried to hide the sexual overtures of Chacko with other female members of the society.

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 Feelings [...] Mammachi could only hope that Margaret Kochamma was not intending to resume her sexual relationship with Chacko. (160-161)

Chacko was allowed more freedom, but not excessive one. He was asked to sacrifice his satisfaction of marrying a low-caste woman in order to maintain his social identity as a member of the upper caste. His sister, Ammu, was also supposed to make the same sacrifice or otherwise she will be treated as an outcaste by the family and the society. Roy views that untouchables and women, particularly, are sufferers in reality as they have to undergo traumatic experiences. Their act of revolt is subject to punishment as Kannabiran
observes; "When the caste norms are openly flouted by elopement, pregnancy, or
discovery, that punitive action becomes necessary."

Cultural estrangement is a central component of the construct of alienation, which
has been the focus of abundant sociological and philosophical inquiry. Alienation has been
viewed as disassociation from popular cultural standards and a rejection of popular
culture. Value discrepancies do not necessarily lead to poor subjective well-being; instead,
they may reflect a desire for uniqueness, supporting A. K. Maslow’s assertion that people
often “resist enculturation and maintain a certain inner detachment from the culture in
which they are immersed.” Inevitably, the danger of cultural alienation plagues the
people who imitate the West blindly. They lose their roots in the soil of their race or
country, at the same time, they cannot identify with the coloniser completely. They
become culturally hybrid. Roy in the novel offers concern for this kind of confusion in
national identity when Chacko in his “Reading Aloud voice” (54) explained to Estha and
Rahel the meaning of “Anglophile” (50):

Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on
troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows will never be sad
enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives
never important enough. […] The Ipe family, as Chacko confessed, was a family
Anglophiles […] They were pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their
own history and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been
swept away. (51-52)

What is curious is that Chacko unconsciously refused to admit that he was such “a
mimic man”. Jean-Pierre Durix’s ‘The Post-Coloniality’ of The God of Small Things
offers a scrutiny of Chacko’s mimicry of the West. “Chacko may be one of the worst
illustrations of what he denounces. His general attitude towards British culture is that of a
mimic man. He is very proud of his stay at Oxford to the point of having his Balliol oar ‘hung from iron hoops on the pickle factory wall’.

In Roy’s words, he has attempted to “whiten himself by marrying an English woman Margaret, thus hoping to espouse British culture in the flesh” (13). His sister, Ammu, dismissed him with a single blow. “Marry our conquerors, is more like it,” Ammu said dryly, “referring to Margaret Kochamma” (51). Chacko married Margaret Kochamma and had the illusion that the mixed marriage had transformed him into a real British like her. His admiration for the colonial culture did not come to an end after the divorce as he “had never stopped loving Margaret Kochamma” (36). After his reunion with Margaret Kochamma at the airport, Chacko appeared to be a proud and happy man having a white wife. Margaret Kochamma is a prized possession of Chacko. What is more important is that she was a “white.” She was white woman as he often spoke of with a particular pride as if he had not been separated from her and he had never lost her. Like Chacko, Baby Kochamma is also mesmerised by the white skin of Margaret Kochamma and her daughter, Sophie Mol, at the airport. Sophie Mol in her eyes “was so beautiful that she reminded her of a wood-spire, of Ariel” (138). Her admiration of Sophie Mol shows the mindset of a colonised person. In imitation of the British, Baby Kochamma was so eager to express her greeting and compliments in a language with “a strange new British accent” (137). For Estha and Rahel, the adulation was nothing more than an act of boasting. Baby Kochamma herself knew that the showing-off was intended to enhance her reputation. Baby Kochamma, through this sort of articulation, proposed the problem of colonial alienation. In this context, the narrator has rightly commented, “all this was of course primarily to announce her credentials to Margaret Kochamma. To set herself apart from the Sweeper Class” (134). By trying to assimilate herself into another culture, Baby Kochamma tried to fill the gap between her and the English. She intentionally uprooted
her Indianness to identify with the British conquerors. On the other hand, she distanced herself more from the lower castes as she thought that she had made another step closer to the British. It is apparent that her grandnephews at the airport had not understood the complex meaning of their Anglophile family’s cordial welcome paid to their British relatives. They only giggled and mocked at Baby Kochamma’s artificial courtesy. Gradually, they came to know about the inferiority complex of the colonised people and realised cultural distances and resultant alienation.

The novel recorded some social and political changes, and all these lead to alienation. These issues have spawned widespread violence. Not all violence is physical, sometimes it is directed inwards and can lead to suicide: some is inspired by genuine idealism but too often this degenerates into cruelty which can be excused as a struggle with alleged evil. The scene, in which Roy describes Velutha’s suffering versus the policemen’s collective cruelty, arouses a sense of sympathy for the subaltern who is lying with fractured body parts. Further, it compels to question the righteousness of the love laws and the complex web of caste-based hierarchy behind such laws. Through the narrator, Roy seems to treat the dying Velutha as a martyr for which she has conveyed both empathy and compassion. Dying Velutha’s, “skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. His lower intestine was ruptured and hemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity” (294).

*The God of Small Things* represents the evils of our society in a critical and harsh tone. The novel, in words of Pierre, “explicitly condemns the evils of conservatism and of the caste system in particular.”37 Roy’s desire to criticise the social injustice leaves a telling effect. The couple in love paid a high price for their transgression of the social norms. In describing the lovers in such a tone of sympathy, Roy does not mean to request an unconditional forgiveness for the act of transgression. They did not ask to be let off
lightly. They only asked for punishments that fitted their crimes. Roy, as the narrator, tries to say that one should be punished according to the seriousness of his or her crime rather than the preference of the law executor. Roy is optimistic when tackling with all these issues in her novel. She seems to point towards a hope which goes beyond the text as the novel ends with the exchange of love between Velutha and Ammu. Like the intractable structural stasis that underlies the picaresque mode of Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*, an unshakeable historical determinism controls Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things*.

The novel also became a subject of criticism, as Rukmini Bhaya Nair, in her review of Roy’s novel, (which later published in a book *Desert in Bloom: Contemporary Indian Women’s Fiction in English*) writes that it is the work of a ‘narcissistic impulse’ that she appears to discount the death of Ammu as tragedy. Nair berates Roy instead for failing to end the novel with the death of Rahel, which, she believes, would have raised the work to the status of a Great Story (a tragedy rather than a fairytale). This relentlessly pursued identification between Roy and Rahel leads Bhaya Nair to miss the centrality of Ammu to the novel and so the importance of her death in determining its tone. Janet Thormann says: “*The God of Small Things* ends with the single paragraph, ‘Tomorrow,’ the women’s promise to meet her lover again as if the novel too held out the promise of a future under law that would allow desire for all human beings.” The future with hope, like many other “Big Things, lurks unsaid inside” (136). What hope is there for people like Ammu and Velutha? The answer to this question is left unanswered in the novel, but silence does not mean that it does not exist. Velutha and Ammu’s meeting represents a possibility of escaping different forms of compulsion and control that may pervert human culture, and it also paves the way for trans-caste dialogue and communication. As long as human beings put their faith in the future and strive for it, they will be taken a step closer to it just like the couple.
Thus, Estha, Rahel, Ammu, Velutha, and all other characters of the novel suffer from the negative feelings i.e. alienation, meaninglessness, isolation, depression, horror, injustice, hopelessness, coldness and despair. All the characters therein reveal their mood or discomforts, and sometimes they cannot even get along with themselves. The fact behind all this is alienation, which is caused by cultural, social, and psychological disassociations. By an examination of alienation at different levels of disassociation, a better understanding of the novel can be achieved. Roy is able to convey the trauma of alienation caused by biased attitude of the society, which is a stumbling block in the progress of a nation.
Notes and References


15 Nietzsche 167.

16 Nietzsche xiv.


19 Friedman 114.


21 “Interview with Arundhati Roy,” *First City* (Delhi City Magazine, Som Vihar, June 1997) 24.


29Dube 231.

30Dube 233.


33Kannabiran 254.

34Kannabiran 255-256.


37Durix 9.