CHAPTER III

SOCIAL REALISM IN ARUNDHATI ROY’S

*THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*
3.1 **INTRODUCTION – NOVELIST & NOVEL:**

Arundhati Roy is one of the foremost novelists of the socially committed tradition. She shows exceptional awareness of the social crisis and sensitivity to the problems. She is one of the few Indian writers in English who is actively interested in contemporary socio-political issues. These activities are amply evidenced in a number of articles, interviews and books which she wrote on various topics in recent years. She is a dynamic political activist, vocal spokesperson of the anti-globalization movement. She is a vehement critic of neo-imperialism and of the global policies of the United States. She mixes her celebrity status with her political advocacy to speak out on social issues and achieve media impact.

*The God of Small Things* is the debut novel of Indian writer Arundhati Roy. It is a story about the childhood experiences of fraternal twins. Their lives are destroyed by the “Love Laws” that lay down “who should be loved, and how. And how much”. (1998: 168) The novel explores how the small things affect people’s behaviour and their lives. It is the history-through-hear-say of a family of Syrian Christians in Kerala. It looks at everything in the spirit of comedy. There is a lot of a devastatingly, sardonically, satirical attitude in it. The novel begins with the presentation of the ancestor Punniyan Kunju who, in 1876, had been taken by his father to see the Patriarch at Cochin.
The story of the novel *The God of Small Things* is set in Ayemenem, now part of Kottayam district in Kerala, India. The temporal setting shifts back and forth between 1969, – when fraternal twins Rahel and Esthappen are seven years old, – and 1993, when the twins are reunited at the age of 31. Malayalam words are liberally used in conjunction with English. Facets of Kerala life captured by the novel are Communism, the caste system, and the Keralite Syrian Christian way of life. Roy ends her postcolonial novel by suggesting how much theoretical, social, cultural, political and historical knowledge is involved in her portrayal of the characters Ammu, Estha and Rahel and their learning to experience in Kerala. Their changing relationship with Velutha is based on an understanding of the brutality of caste, the love laws, and of the necessity and urgency to deinstitutionalize them.

The children Estha and Rahel soon learn that their whole life can change in a day and that love and happiness can be lost in a moment. Sophie Mol is on a visit to their home in Kerala from Britain. Sophie Mol is children’s cousin, daughter of their uncle and a British woman. While playing in the bayou known as backwaters, Sophie Mol is drowned. Tragedy strikes without notice. To further complicate matters, their mother Ammu gets involved in an ill-fated love-affair with Velutha. Ammu is an upper-caste Christian woman, while Velutha is an Untouchable, member of the lowest caste in India. For this caste transgression, the untouchable is beaten to death by the police and Ammu is shunned by her family and friends. Ammu, at the age of 31, dies “at a viable die-able age.” It is true that things can change in a day.

The epigraph of this novel is a quotation from contemporary writer John Berger: “Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one”. She uses this idea to establish her nonlinear, multi-perspective way of storytelling. This gives value to the points of view as “Big” as human beings and as “Small” as a cabbage-
green butterfly. In Roy’s world, there is no definitive story. Only many different stories fuse to form a kaleidoscopic impression of events. *The God of Small Things* is distinctive not only in its method of narration, but in its South Indian setting as well. Roy has managed to integrate into the plot the rare atmosphere of Kerala. Roy uses the literary devices in a subtle manner to create the rural landscape. Her descriptions are not drawn innocently on pastoral vignettes they add up to basic framework of value conflict. The novel begins with the opening paragraphs:

May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. (1998: 1)

The novel opens with Rahel’s return to Ayemenem after hearing that her twin brother, Estha, has come home. We switch to the funeral of Sophie Mol, when the twins are seven years old. Rahel believes that Sophie is awake during her funeral and buried alive. The rest of the family refuses to acknowledge the twins and Ammu. On the train ride back to Ayemenem, Ammu cannot speak except to say “He’s dead… I’ve killed him”. Rahel and Estha have not seen each other since Estha was sent away as a child to live with Babu in Assam. Both twins have travelled somewhat aimlessly until returning to their childhood home.

The novel dwells on the cruelty of separation. In the opening of the novel, Rahel and Estha, now in their thirties, meet in the family home for the first time since childhood. They find the once-grand house neglected and grimy, its formerly well-tended grounds a tangle of growth. The psychological states of the brooding brother and unpredictable sister resemble the desolate house where they meet after their long separation. Rahel looks out on the family’s former factory, ‘Paradise Pickles and Preserves’. She contemplates how all the strangeness in her family resolves around
the incident of Sophie Mol’s death. Then, we find the family traveling to Cochin to
greet Sophie Mol and her mother, Margaret Kochamma, upon their arrival from
England. On their way, they see their servant, Velutha, marching with a group of
Communists. Back in the present, Rahel watches Estha undressed in the moonlight,
either of them saying a word.

3.2 THE NARRATIVE STYLE OF THE NOVEL:

_The God of Small Things_ is not written in a sequential narrative style in
which events unfold chronologically. The story of the novel is narrated in the third
person narrative mode. Instead, the novel is a patchwork of flashbacks and lengthy
sidetracks that weave together to tell the story of the Ipe family. The main events of
the novel are traced back through the complex history of their causes. Memories are
revealed as they relate to one another thematically and as they might appear in
Rahel’s mind. Although the narrative voice is omniscient, it is loosely grounded in
Rahel’s perspective. All of the episodes of the novel progress toward the key
moments in Rahel’s life.

As a postcolonial text, _The God of Small Things_ resists the attitudes and
ideas which underpinned British colonization of India. The different narrative threads
run throughout the novel. These threads are told out of sequence. The novel offers two
central and interwoven narrative threads. The first thread traces the traumatic events.
These events are experienced by an Indian family living in Ayemenem during a two-
week period in 1969. The family includes Mammachi, her two grown children,
Ammu and Chacko. Both are divorced. Both have returned home. Ammu has seven-
year-old twins: a daughter Rahel, and a son Estha.
Both the storylines are supplemented by backstories. These provide information about the central characters and their lives prior to the main events of the novel. These include details of Baby Kochamma’s unrequited love for Father Mulligan. There are also the circumstances of Ammu’s failed marriage to the twins’ father. There is the story of Chacko’s Oxford education and his relationship with Margaret about the narrative work. A critic Madhu Benoit suggests that:

The novel’s disorderly narration softens the blow of Roy’s intense social and political critique. By inviting the reader to put the pieces of the novel jigsaw back together as they read, Roy blurs the dividing line between author and reader . . . as the reader ‘writes’ the text. (106)

Within the narrative is an expressive silent waterway of helplessness of the twins and their mother, and the dissension between the Big God and the Small God. Pappachi is an entomologist and his discovery of a new breed of moth, is attributed twelve years later, to someone else. A dysfunctional family that the readers witness could be a result of his severe inputs. Chacko and Ammu are his children. There are many elements such as: Chacko’s Oxford education, his official running of the pickle factory, his escapades; including the story of the Untouchables, the Paravans, the lowest in the caste system. There is mention of Marxists, of communists, of the political scenario of the country at the time. It is a narration of Ammu’s intercommunity love marriage, which does not turn out well and her return to her father’s house and the brewing edgy behaviour to her personality.

Socially aware intellectuals cannot disregard the environment in the modern world. Arundhati Roy is deeply concerned about it. Her approach is not confined to writing for the environment. She is deeply involved with the agitations concerned with environmental issues like Narmada Bachao Andolan and the Campaign against Nuclear Weapons in India. The environment is one of the small things neglected for a
long time in India. The novelist has an eco-conscious. Her concern for the environment finds an adequate expression in *The God of Small Things*. A critic Jason Cowley, one of the five Booker Judges, writes: “Roy’s achievement is never to forget about ‘small things’ in life, insects and flowers, wind and water, the outcaste and despised”. (1997: 28) *The God of Small Things* has values that overall, the novel is a scathing critique of gender structure, caste structure, and communism in India.

With the flashback technique, Roy develops the theme of gender-bias. She develops this theme through the life and character of Ammu’s brother Chako. He is painted in interesting hues as a self-centered person. He cannot outwit Pillai as far as political maneuverings are concerned. He is one of those young people who talk about Marxism as a fashion.

In the novel, Roy strikes a phrase ‘led out of the history house’. This connotes different levels of meaning other than the peripheral one. It means that we are people who are forced into an anglicized pattern of thinking and practice. This is enabled by the public school education established by the colonial rulers. Roy herself is a representative of such a phenomenon. Roy reveals a complex conflict in the state of Kerala, India, such as caste-system, law, love, communism and religion. Beside the forbidden love in the novel, the reader knows the Indian history, society, culture, religion and politics from the story. Roy employs alternating narrative threads, flashbacks and flash-forwards to tell her story out of sequence in a non-linear fashion.

During a great part of the narrative, the reader sees everything through Rahel’s eyes. This gives the reader special insight into the happenings and characters. Throughout the novel, there are various moments that intersect the social reality. In one moment, everything is seen through a child’s eyes, with a child’s feelings and rationales. Later, the same facts, objects, and people are seen in a completely different
light. Roy uses a compressed language. Hers is a thrifty style to foreground the essential predicament of the socially oppressed. The novel is not written in a sequential narrative style, in it, the events unfold chronologically. This non-sequential narrative style determines the form of the novel. This style is an extremely useful authorial tool.

3.3. Characterization In The Novel:

In *The God of Small Things*, the educated ‘upper’ and ‘middle’ class characters are – Rahel, Estha, Ammu, Chacko, Baby Kochamma, Inspector Thomas Mathew. Most of them would be fluently bilingual in Malayalam and English. In contrast, the ‘lower’ class characters, such as Velutha, Vellya Paapen and Kochu Maria would be monolingual Malayalam-speakers, though Velutha and Kochu Maria are likely to have a smattering of English. The twins – Estha and Rahel – are the central protagonists of the novel.

The political discussion in the novel frequently blends fictional characters and organizations with real politicians and political parties. Comrade Pillai is an invented figure. But E.M.S. Namboodripad, the Communist Party and the Congress Party are historical entities. We have used the three places – India, Kerala and Ayemenem. These places define a larger conceptual framework for information about location, landscape, natural environment, economic resources, activities, people, language, society, religion, social milieu, ways of life, marriage and family, food and attire, music and dance, politics, local customs, and history.

Female characters predominate in *The God of Small Things*. This reflects the broader fact that women in Kerala are more empowered than in most other parts of India. They have a very high literacy rate. They are better educated. They have greater
access to vocational and professional training. They are able to join modern professions. They earn a good living before and after marriage. Usually, they enjoy greater social independence and personal freedom, especially in urban environments. Among ‘high caste’ Hindus in the state, the Nairs (Brahmins) are historically famous for their centuries-old matriarchal system. In this system, women inherit and control property, and men play a subordinate social and economic role. Among Christians, women are especially associated with the medical profession. The Christian women from Kerala have been predominant as nurses all over India for several decades.

Characters such as Baby Kochamma and Pappachi are the most rigid and vicious in their attempts to uphold that social code. On the contrary, Ammu and Velutha are the most unconventional and daring in untravelling it. Roy implies that how they are punished so severely for their transgression. Roy is keenly aware of the exploitation and oppression of have-nots, including women, by the upper classes.

The novel encompasses the poor exploited and socially rejected people of the Kerala society. They are misfits, outcastes, factory workers and low-caste people. Roy clearly points out the fatal effects of massive industrialization. The novel is a tapestry of cruelly comic memories of different characters. No character finds fulfillment of any sort. The life of a woman is considered a public affair. Her personal revolts are consequently revolts against the society as a whole. The punishment is considered as her responsibility. The public character of the lives of women gives the society the authority to exercise power over them. This makes them to conform to the social codes. A critic Ania Loomba, in her work on “The Position of Women in Post-colonial Societies”, states that:

. . . while women and gender are seen as emblematic of culture and nation, they also signify breaks or fault-lines within these categories. Women who broke the codes of silence and subservience became the objects of extreme
hostility, which, in some cases, succeeded in silencing outspoken women. The more feminist research recovers and re-interprets the lives of women under colonial rule, the clearer it becomes that women, as individuals and as a potential collectivity, constituted a threat and were thus at least partially the target of earlier patriarchal re-writings of ‘tradition’. (2005: 186)

It is an irony of civilization that people who work hardest to produce riches suffer the most and fare the worst. They are looked down upon and treated shabbily by the powerful people. We know them as ‘working class’ – a term used all over the world. They are included in the “small things” Arundhati Roy speaks for. But Indian tradition has left them as a legacy of the Aryan. The ordinary members of the working class are known generally as ‘untouchable’ or ‘Pariah’. It sounds bitter as Mahatma Gandhi named them as ‘Harijans’ (Children of God). The census authorities during the British rule referred to them as ‘exterior classes’. Now-a-days, they are popularly known as the ‘depressed’ or ‘dalits’.

The complexities of South Asian identities and kinship are at the heart of this novel. Central to the novel is a vision of the continuity between knowing the world through experience and struggle and changing the central relations of the coloniality of power. This sustains and makes the world what it is. Additionally, subalternized characters in the novel, especially children, divorced women, and peasants defy bloodlines of kinship and caste to condemn the bloodsheds of their everyday world in Kerala. In doing so, they defy both the gods of dominance and of kinship to remember what they experienced and shared with the god of small things.

Characters such as Ammu, Velutha or even Rahel and Estha are characters without roots. It is their estranged state that propels them from one crisis to another. They are presented mainly as seekers-questers for love and identity. Both Ammu and Velutha are persistently and maniacally driven by undefined hunger and vehement lust. This lust brings about their doom. Both are disturbed emotionally as well as
psychically. Both are incapable of silent submission and ungrudging suffering. They somehow pull through life. Ammu defies patriarchal domination, class and caste prejudice in public and pays with her life. Roy’s protagonists suffer from lack of parental love, disturbed infancy, broken homes. They are dissatisfied with their existence. They often choose to go out of the mainstream of life. This alienation generally manifests in immoral ties and activities. Alienation from their selves leads to a frantic search for their identity in the milieu through self-discovery and self-identification.

Hideous grieving, intimate loving, working through the coloniality of melancholia – all these idioms are woven together in this novel through Rahel and Estha. This suggests the complexity involved of coming to know oneself and expanding one’s capacity to experience with others. The figures of Rahel and Estha may well compel a reading. This tampers with the normative spheres of kinship, bloodlines. These issues sustain and monopolize the society and the nation by exposing the socially contingent character of kinship.

The most traumatized characters of the novel – the twins and their mother Ammu – reveal Roy’s careful portrait of temporal hybridity. This also reveals the mixture of amnesia and flashback, frozen time and relentless return. Rahel remains the most functional of the trio. She seems to remember the most about her story, nevertheless is haunted by recurring memories. The drowning death of her cousin, Sophie Mol, lives on most prominently in her thoughts. The death “was always there. . . It ushered Rahel through childhood (from school to school to school) into womanhood”. (17)

Roy has picked up strands of reality and juxtaposed them together. In a way, here themes are universal. Her uniqueness lies in the way she plays with space and time. This renders an oblique kind of representation of her memories. The novel has autobiographical overtones. Roy is undoubtedly Rahel, one of the twins. Ammu is
Mary Roy, Arundhati’s mother who married a Bengali man. Roy herself admits that the texture of the book is autobiographical. The incidents are not autobiographical. She has focused over minute details giving elaborate description. She is at her best when she deals with the fluidity of children’s thoughts.

3.4 **Major Themes & Issues in the Novel:**

The major themes of the novel are Indian history and Indian politics. Indian history and politics shape the plot and meaning of this novel in a variety of ways. Some of Roy’s commentary is on the surface, with jokes and snippets of wisdom about political realities in India. The novel also examines the historical roots of these realities. The novel develops profound insights into the ways in which human desperation and desire emerge from the confines of a firmly entrenched caste society.

The mechanisms of power politics often work in favour of the powerful in the society. The basic rights of the downtrodden are always denied. Roy’s true approach of life and socially conscious references come from her commitment to the causes of the oppressed classes. As Arundhati Roy states:

The theme of much of what I write, fiction as well as non-fiction, is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless, circular conflict they’re engaged in. John Berger, that most wonderful writer, once wrote: ‘Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one’. There can never be a single story. There are only ways of seeing. So when I tell a story, I tell it not as an ideologue who wants to pit one absolutist ideology against another, but as a story-teller who wants to share her way of seeing. Though it might appear otherwise, my writing is not really about nations and histories, it’s about power. About the paranoia and ruthlessness of power. About the physics of power. I believe that the accumulation of vast unfettered power by a State or a country, a corporation or an institution – or even an individual, a spouse, friend or sibling – regardless of ideology, results in excesses such as the ones I will recount here. (13-14)
Another important theme of the novel is class relations and cultural tensions. Roy evaluates the Indian post-colonial complex, or the cultural attitudes of many Indians toward their former British rulers. After Ammu calls her father a ‘[shit]-wiper’ in Hindi for his blind devotion to the British, Chacko explains to the twins that they come from a family of Anglophiles, or lovers of British culture, ‘trapped outside their own history and unable to retrace their steps’. He goes on to say that they despise themselves because of this.

A related inferiority complex is evident in the interactions between untouchables and touchables in Ayemenem. Vellya Paapen is an example of an Untouchable so grateful to the touchable class. He is willing to kill his son, Velutha, when he discovers that Velutha has broken the most important rule of class segregation – that there be no inter-caste sexual relations. In part, this reflects how many untouchables have internalized caste segregation.

Nearly all of the relationships in the novel are somehow coloured by cultural and class tension. These relationships include the twins’ relationship with Sophie, Chacko’s relationship with Margaret, Pappachi’s relationship with his family member and finally Baby Kochamma’s relationship with Father Mulligan, and Ammu’s relationship with Velutha. Characters such as Baby Kochamma and Pappachi are the most rigid and vicious in their attempts to uphold that social code. On the contrary, Ammu and Velutha are the most unconventional and daring in unraveling it. Roy implies that this is why they are punished so severely for their transgression.

There is one more interpretation of Roy’s theme. It is of forbidden love. This love is such a powerful and uncontrollable force. It cannot be contained by any conventional social code. The conventional society somehow seeks to destroy real love. That is why love in the novel is consistently connected to loss, death and
sadness. It is because all romantic love in the novel relates closely to politics and history. It is possible that Roy is stressing the connection of personal desire to larger themes of history and social circumstances. Love would therefore be an emotion that can be explained only in terms of two peoples’ cultural backgrounds and political identities.

A search of identity is the main theme. There is always a quest of ‘self’. Ammu and Velutha are emotionally and psychically perturbed. Both are relentlessly and maniacally driven by undefined hunger and feverish lust. The hunger and lust bring about their own fall. Incapable of silent submission and ungrudging suffering, they somehow pull the load of life. Roy’s novel is a blending and binding of both exterior landscape and interior vision. Her protagonists suffer from lack of parental love, disturbed infancy, broken homes. They are disgruntled with their existence and often opt out of the mainstream of life. Alienation in her characters often manifests in immoral ties and activities.

Roy talks of Kerala as a state’s religious diversity. It is a testament to many groups that have inhabited the land throughout history. This is one reason Roy’s novel takes place here. Inhabitants include Portuguese, British, rulers from all over India, and religious groups escaping persecution in their own countries. Indian multiculturalism is the central concern in the novel. One of major issues is transgression of the twins which violates all biological norms. Throughout the history, societies have circumscribed certain forms of intimacy in the family setting. Disturbing family relationships generates individual responsibilities to do incest.

There are several examples in this novel that describe the social changes that took place in India in the time of the Independence. The changes in the caste-system, the political changes and the growing significance of the communist party in Kerala are just a few examples of such changes. These changes have influenced modern
India. Very few of them had any impact on women. The position the women have in society remains quite unchanged. Estha’s account of Ammu’s birthday can be considered as an illustration of the changes in perception of male and female position. In his notebook, he tells us about the gifts he and Rahel received from Ammu: “Then in the morning we had new cloths from Ammu as a back-present Rahel was a maharani and I was Little Nehru”. (158)

Roy depicts Ammu’s first divorced husband as a callous man. Ammu is depicted as a feisty, beautiful, confined and constricted woman. She possesses her own private aches and pains. Ammu is a strict mother. Ammu’s children – Estha and Rahel – are unprotected children and very intelligent. Velutha is a low-class untouchable, a dalit, extremely carpenter and mechanic. He has a pleasing personality. Baby Kochamma is suppressed her feelings by choosing a life of celibacy and spinsterhood.

Mainly love, ideals and confidence all are forsaken, consciously and unconsciously, innocently and maliciously. This deception affects all the characters deeply in this novel. Terrible things happen during the two weeks. Estha is molested by a stranger. Chacko’s half-English daughter Sophie Mol arrives from America only to drown accidently. A love-affair between Ammu and an untouchable worker named Velutha results in his brutal beating by a group of policemen. The beating takes place in front of the twins. This results in his death.

Arundhati Roy additionally describes Indian cultural traditions e.g. Kathakali. In representing an imagined version of Indian reality, Roy emphasizes select facets of Indian existence e.g. the lasting social and psychological influences of British colonialism. In it, Roy responds to and critiques the attitudes and practices of British colonialism.
3.5 **REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL REALITY & PROTEST:**

The novel *The God of Small Things* is an explicit representation of social protest and implicit engagement with India’s socio-political history. In combination with Arundhati Roy’s activist work, this novel suggests that the novel can be read as an activist expression. The novel focuses on a single family and its local community. It is an important work for its fabricated characters and storyline, its basis on real Indian history and its political messages. A critic Vijay Dharwadkar comments:

Arundhati Roy grew up in Kerala, where her mother’s family had a home in the village of Ayemenem, located on the outskirts of the town of Kottayam, on the other side of the River Minachil. Most of the action of *The God of Small Things* takes place in a village called “Ayemenem,” set near a river called “Meenachal.” Her fictionalized village and river strongly resemble the real-life Aymanam and Minachil, and her narrative contains numerous references to the actual landscape of south-central Kerala, its people and their common customs, their music and dance, their religions and social organization, and their economic and political activities. (2002: 33)

This novel has a resonance and a readership beyond its immediate historical, geographical, social, cultural, political and linguistic contexts. The story is set in the caste society of India, at a time when members of the Untouchable Paravan or Paryan caste were not permitted to touch members of higher castes or enter their houses. The Untouchables were considered polluted beings. They had the lowliest jobs and lived in subhuman conditions. In India, the caste system was considered a way to organize society. Roy’s novel shows how terribly cruel such a system can be.

Roy’s depiction of the miserable lives of women in this novel critiques in unmistakable terms the perpetuation of the exploitative forces. Children are also included in ‘the small things’ Roy cares for. Such a concern is not so unexpected as she is the daughter of a Christian Mother. Christianity is well known for its glorification of childhood.
The untouchable characters in the novel are presented as ‘types’. The device proves useful for the purpose of giving a realistic view of the varying responses to the grim reality of the dalits. The dalits are subjected to a similar treatment by the upper castes. Their responses are not uniform. This fact cannot be disputed. We come across three characters in *The God of Small Things* which belong to the category of the downtrodden. They are Vellya Pappen and his two sons Kuttapan and Velutha. They belong to an untouchable caste called Paapen. They are today trappers according to the tradition.

Arundhati Roy gives a lot of information about the untouchables of Kerala in this connection. She also gives a generally perfect picture of dalits with their oaring responses to the caste-oppression through the device of trio. Vellya Paapen, Kuttapen and Velutha constitute the trio which depicts the three types of the dalits in Indian society. They are the docile conformist, the discontented paralytic and the rebels who move for equality and stakes his life. The novel mentions only the names of three untouchable castes namely Paravans, Palayas and Pulayas. They were not allowed to enter the house of the higher caste people. The dalits were considered as the untouchables who were not allowed to enter in the temples also.

Along with the caste system, there is a description of an economic class struggle. The Ipes are considered upper class. They are factory owners, the dominating class. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma would not deign to mix with those of a lower class. Even Kochu Maria, who has been with them for years, will always be a servant of a lower class. Much more is talked about the ‘politics’ in this novel. The society is reflected in the political, religious, cultural and historical activities of the people. The society is the base and it is the reality. The politics reflected in this novel reveals the social reality.
3.6  **The Novel – Family Saga & Novel of Social Politics:**

_The God of Small Things_ is a semi-autobiographical family saga. It represents an intergenerational storyline. In this storyline, the narrator enters and exits different psychologies and histories as portraying an intimately connected familial structure. In the novel, Roy foregrounds how private love relationships are actually socially and politically regulated. Romantic, sexual, platonic and familial love relationships in the novel become intermixed, perverted and destroyed by social politics. This social politics includes the novel’s primary foci of caste and religion, as well as politics working underneath the surface, such as gender. Roy’s vision of temporal hybridity at the end of the novel does in fact suggest the possibility of radical political change. The book is autobiographical in parts. The novelist Roy says in an interview:

A lot of the atmosphere in _The God of Small Things_ is based on my experiences of what it was like to grow up in Kerala. Most interestingly, it was the only place in the world where religions coincide; there’s Christianity, Hinduism, Marxism and Islam and they all live together and rub each other down. When I grew up it was the Marxism that was very strong; it was like the revolution was coming next week. (14/08/1997)

In the novel, social politics is often enforced by the family, even to their own detriment. Ultimately, this politics exposes the reactionary violence of reciprocal state and family ‘policing’ structures. The agent for these social politics is the family itself. We can trace these unnatural results through reworking of love-relationships within the family, and implicating the family. Kerala and India are woven into the fabric of the novel. In the novel, Roy repeatedly demonstrates that ‘the personal is political’. The public lives and private lives of her characters are mediated by intersecting social, political and religious structures that profoundly affect their behaviour within and
outside their homes, their relationships to other people, the jobs they perform, and their perceptions of the world.

However, Roy shows other types of less evident discrimination. For example, there is religious discrimination. It is unacceptable for a Syrian Christian to marry a Hindu and vice versa. Hindus can only marry a Hindu from the same caste. In more than one passages of the novel, the reader feels Rahel’s and Estha’s discomfort at being half Hindu. Baby Kochamma constantly makes disparaging comments about Hindus. On the other hand, there is discomfort even between Christian religions, as is shown by Pappachi’s negative reaction when Baby Kochamma converts to Catholicism.

Chacko suffers more veiled racial discrimination, as it seems his daughter also does. His English wife’s parents were shocked and disapproving that their daughter would marry an Indian, no matter how well-educated. Sophie, at one point, mentions to her cousins that they are all ‘wog’, while she is ‘half-wog’. The Ipes are very class-conscious and feel a need to maintain their status. Discrimination is a way of protecting their privileged position in Indian society. Betrayal is a constant element in this story. Love, ideals, and confidence are all forsaken, consciously and unconsciously, Innocently and maliciously. These deceptions affect all of the characters deeply.

*The God of Small Things* stands out among numerous literary and cinematic representations of such violent familial repression. It is set in small-town or rural Kerala. The text explores the repercussions that socially transgressive relationships might have for women within the immediate familial context. Ammu, the daughter of a Syrian Christian family, consciously crosses rigidly codified caste lines by having a relationship with an untouchable man. The revelation of this results in Ammu being forcibly confined, physically assaulted and finally banished from the family. She is separated from her twins.
This novel establishes the familial home as the site for violence directed at controlling and containing female eroticism. This transgresses socially mandated boundaries, as does Deepa Mehta’s *Fire*. This cinema is a landmark in South Asian queer cinema. Deepa Mehta explores the relationship of Radha and Sita, sisters-in-law. Both forge an erotic relationship within the confines of a traditional North Indian home. The women in *Fire* do not attempt to claim a separate space for themselves. But these women use socially acceptable homo-social arrangements to eroticize the traditionally constituted space of the home. They are discovered. Exposure results in violent retaliation.

The rural environment is a significant element. It is intermixed with the social strata, social milieu of India. It builds up the lives of the villages at different strata. It criss-crosses each other and exerts influences. These influences build up the drama with all its stresses and tensions. Roy uses the literacy devices in a suitable manner to create the rural landscape. Her descriptions are not drawn innocently on pastoral vignettes. They add up to the basic framework of value conflicts. They are sharply brought under focus by the novelist.

Kerala has always been considered a socially aware state. Its awareness level is the highest among all the states of India with a cent percent literacy rate. The tradition of Marxist politics dominates curiously. It is also a state where the roots of religious orthodoxy and conservatism go deep and spread over greater part of social life. The pathos of the lives of the men is insightfully brought out. The events in all disturbing details are narrated with a touch of realism that is inhuman and brutal. Roy’s realistic exposure is often unsettling and painful. The novel is moored in space and time. It conveys the contemporary social situation with immediacy and poignancy.
3.7 SUPPRESSION OF WOMEN – SOCIAL REALITY:

_The God of Small Things_ is a product of the social reality. It is interesting to note that in this novel, there are more women than men. Most of the men are shadowy. On the contrary, women are sharply portrayed and occupy the center-stage. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, Sophie Mol, Rahel – all keep in motion the story. The novel brings into focus the chief issue is that the family and social mechanism evolved over centuries in traditional Indian society to suppress women and her independence as a human being.

The boy’s costume reflected the changes that India has experienced. The girl’s dress is a traditional one, as though boys were encouraged to identify themselves with modern days’ heroes. The expectations placed upon girls were the same ones as in previous decades, or even centuries. A critic Ania Loomba describes the pattern of the native men’s behaviour at the time of colonialism:

Colonialism intensified patriarchal oppression, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality. The outside world could be westernized but all was not lost if the domestic space retained its cultural purity (2005: 141)

This shows the depiction of the attitude of the Indian people towards women. Women were expected to stick to the same pattern that they had followed for centuries. Their main – and often only – role is the one of an obedient, submissive housewife. Women are still considered property of their husbands, if married, and of fathers, if unmarried. We are never tired of talking about the way in which woman is exploited by man and by male-oriented society. One of our favorite themes is the theme of the exploitation of woman as a sex symbol. There is no denying the fact that in today’s world, woman is made an exhibit in all kinds of compromising sensual contexts.
The characters in *The God of Small Things* are strong women. They fight for their rights. They are prepared to face the consequences. None of them is able to imagine how different – and much crueler – the real consequences can be from what they expect. The novel implies the question that the narrator of the novel asks directly when reflecting on the events that followed one woman’s behaviour: Was it “a Small Price to Pay?” (336)

Women are treated secondary in our society. The less education a woman had, the more likely she was to get married. Baby Kochamma was allowed to study only after she had developed a reputation. This made her unlikely to get married. Rahel was only allowed to study since nobody cared about her getting married. A critic Anita Loomba argues that:

Traditionally the arguments for women’s education in the colonies rely on the logic that educated women will make better wives and mothers. At the same time, educated women have to be taught not to overstep their bounds and usurp authority from men. (2005: 182)

Roy’s women characters in the novel are exploited. They are torn between their individuality and social obligations. Ammu sacrifices her life in her quest for identity. The sufferings of Ammu’s mother and her daughter are the major concerns. There exhibits a strong contrast wherein Mammachi accepts domestic violence as her fate while Ammu dares to tread a path where she can have an identity of her own. The novel deals with the struggle within the self, the murky and melancholic moods of men and women. The novelist fathoms the depths of human psyche against the chaotic social backdrop. The novel voices the hidden and suppressed emotions of subalterns. It is an encapturing vista of Indian social life. It also depicts the unremitting struggle of women and untouchables for inscribing their identity in this cruel, conservative and male-dominating society.
The dowry plays an important role in the process of arranging a marriage. This can be seen on the examples of Ammu: “Since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals came Ammu’s way”. (38) This was in the beginning of 1960’s when a law was passed to abolish the dowry tradition in India. The tradition was apparently very problematic. But the law has failed to combat the age-old custom of dowry payment.

The novel depicts the struggle to fashion female autonomy in the context of a life in a Syrian Christian family in Central Travancore. The female character Ammu tries to crush the male-domination in her own way through sexuality. She fights against the role model mind-set. She also fights against the cultural identity of the archetype of women of the traditional Syrian Christian families. The novel problematizes the oppressive machinery based on caste-discrimination and collusion with it of certain political forces. As a research scholar, C.P. Shafeeq rightly states:

Arundhati Roy’s Booker Prize winner *The God of Small Things* is a bildungsroman novel that gives an account of the childhood experiences of the fraternal twins and the people around them. The novel unfolds a series of small things that change the lives of people. Though much of the story is told from the viewpoint of the seven-year old children, the titular protagonist of the novel, Velutha, is an ‘untouchable’ or ‘the god of small things’. Through the novel, Roy depicts the social disillusionment of the lower caste people in the South Indian State, Kerala. Despite being legitimate members of a secular democracy built upon the values of freedom, equality, and justice, the plight of the ‘untouchables’ remain the same in a hostile post-colonial society. (2014: 33)

The novel depicts the desiccated souls of women of a particular social set-up. The novel also exhibits attempts to break the patriarchal norms. Rahel and Estha’s reading the posters of backwards is the breaking of patriarchal conventions. The characters dare to transgress their boundaries in several ways. Velutha dares to forget his untouchability. Ammu crosses the norm of womanly virtues. She also dares to
forget the very fact that she is a touchable who should not allow an untouchable near her. ‘Locusts Stand I’ (Locus Standi) is forgotten. Ammu dares to feel at home in Ayemenem. The norms of patriarchy are broken. This brings disaster. Only Chacko knows the norms: “What is mine is mine. What is yours is also mine”. (28) In essence, this is the law of patriarchy that must be obeyed. Roy’s protagonists dare to break this law but not without paying a heavy price. The History House is the lawgiver. It punishes all misdemeanor that takes place in the Ayemenem House.

Estha is described as occupying very little space in the world. Ammu dies alone and sad, beaten by the world. Shadows gathered like bats in the steep hollows near her collarbone. Rahel never quite fits in, especially in such rigid confines as boarding schools. Velutha is the smallest of the small, as Ammu points out, calling her Ammukutty, ‘Little Ammu’, though she was so much less little than he was. Ammu, on the other hand, defies the androcentric notion of the male-oriented society. She emerges as a rebel, voicing her suppressed voice. The capitalist society always treated women figures as commodity. They have no right over their body. Before marriage, they are under parental guidance and after marriage, under husband’s care. That’s why, we see that Ammu is denied of her college education whereas Chacko goes to Oxford.

Even Ammu has no right in her father’s property. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma – all accepted the female role-model imposed on them by the society – docile, submissive, ungrudging, stoic resignation. So, there is no threat from them. But when Ammu challenges the norms assigned to a woman and attempts to reclaim her body, society is all set to make the wrong things right once again because: “Superior seed can fall on an inferior field, but an inferior seed cannot fall on a superior field”. (Dube, Leela. 1996: 11)

Right at the center of the novel is the woeful tale of Ammu, mother of Rahel and Estha who suffers silently, yet simmers inside in her a deep discontentment. The
novel itself stands as a newly told history. It is a way to identify different threads of time and different ways. Those times become disrupted and mingled and erased and frozen. The characters Ammu, Velutha or even Rahel and Estha are characters without roots. It is their alienated state that propels them from crisis to crisis, sucking in its wake several other characters. They are presented mostly as seekers-questers through love-questers for identity.

Roy’s novel is about what happens when the ‘little people’ start to do things against the natural order of the ‘big people’. In the line with this, the novel speaks about how history takes precedence over his or her story. The novel circles around Velutha’s, Sophie Mol’s, and Ammu’s death and the subsequent ‘social deaths’ of Rahel and Estha. The twins are forced by Baby Kochamma to ‘save’ Ammu’s sexual and caste reputation. She condemns Velutha to false charges of kidnapping and child abuse. Here, Roy shows how dominance (without hegemony) intrudes into the smallest spaces in Kerala. What Rahel and Estha experience, Roy writes:

. . . was a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions . . . of human nature’s pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly . . . If [the police] hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature had been severed long ago. [T]he posse of Touchable Policemen acted with economy, not frenzy. Efficiency, not anarchy. Responsibility, not hysteria. (293)

Chacko’s affairs with village women were considered natural by Mammachi whose “tolerance of ‘Men’s Needs’ as far as her son was concerned, became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter”. (258) An unmarried woman’s destiny was to stay for the rest of her life in her father’s home, taking her part in the life the family lives without any expectation for her future. There are no rights she can claim in return for her duties. This novel mentions such marriages that are realized only on
the ground that it is the only alternative for the women to growing old alone in their parents’ homes. Such is also the case of Ammu who married a man she did not even pretend “to be in love with. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayenemen”. (39)

Being an old maid was not an option anyone could choose. Rather it is a destiny that is advisable to avoid at any cost. Comrade Pillai feels free to drop the question in his first conversation with Rahel upon her return to Ayemenem after having lived away for over a decade. His questions poignantly illustrate the role a woman traditionally plays in a marriage:

“Any issues?”
“No,” Rahel said.
“Still in planning stages, I suppose? Or expecting?”
“No.”
“One is a must. Boy girl. Anyone,” Comrade Pillai said. “Two is of course your choice.” (130)

In Comrade Pillai’s eyes, Rahel – being “probably barren” (130) . . . stands in a sharp contrast to his son Lenin who “had a house and a Bajaj scooter. A wife and an issue”(134). There is an euphemistic way of expressing the common belief that she holds no rights whatsoever in the society. The home of her parents is the only place she can resort to:

And social death it was. It was impossible to overcome the stigma it entailed. The twenty-seven year-old Ammu is well aware that after her divorce “for her, her life had been lived. She had one chance. She made a mistake. She married a wrong man”. (38)

Women who break such a taboo are never treated well by the society and are condemned even by their families. A divorced woman has no position in her parents’ home. (45) Comrade Pillai’s reaction, when he learns that she is divorced, is symptomatic of the common view of divorced women: “Die-voiced?” His voice rose
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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”.

Roy does not fully expose the childhood of her protagonists. But whatever flashbacks she provides are enough. Her characters Estha and Rahel tend to lose their vital self in the course of their growth from infancy to adulthood. Her treatment of gender discrimination has been deeply rooted in Indian psyche since the hoary past. She probes this social phenomenon with all the technical tools at her disposal.

_The God of Small Things_ traces Estha and Rahel’s struggles to ‘work through’ the implications of their complex aesthetic relations with postcolonial Kerala and the Ayemenem House. Estha never fully recovers. He stops talking altogether. Occupying as little space as possible in Kerala, he walks “along the banks of the river that smelled like shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans”. (14) Rahel returns from a self-imposed diaspora of sorts in the United States. There she suffers a bad marriage in Boston and divorces. She labours in a New York City ethnic restaurant. They have been apart for 25 years, since December 1969. When she learns that Estha has returned to Ayemenem, she comes home.

### 3.8 VELOURHA – A SOCIO-PSYCHIC REBEL:

Arundhati Roy’s protagonist Velutha is a socio-psychic rebel. He has recalcitrant self. He finds it difficult to compromise with the social milieu. He endeavours to escape from the dreadful untouchability. But in the process, there enters another world. This is the world of Terrorism, Marxism. This is equally disturbing and disheartening. Thus there is a persistent struggle between the physical and the psychic. The temporal existence of the self in contrast to the eternity of the soul is the crux of Roy’s writing. The psyche of the characters in an aspect of the ‘individual self’ is at loggerheads with the socio-psychic reality. Roy mirrors the mythic reality of
our life through the complex interaction of the self and society. Roy seldom offers any acceptable solution or clear-cut conclusions.

Rahel’s assertion that she saw Velutha in the Communist mob causes Baby Kochamma to associate Velutha with her humiliation at the protesters’ hands. She begins to harbour a deep-hatred towards him. Velutha is an ‘Untouchable’ i.e. the lowest caste in India. He is a dalit. His family has served the Ipes for generations. He is an extremely gifted carpenter and mechanic. His skills in repairing machinery make him indispensable at the pickle factory. But he draws resentment and hostility from the other Untouchable factory workers. Rahel and Estha form an unlikely bond with Velutha. Both come to love him despite his caste status. It is her children’s love for Velutha. This causes Ammu to realize her own attraction to him. Eventually, she comes to ‘love by night the man her children loved by day’. Ammu and Velutha begin a short-lived affair that culminates in tragedy for the family.

When Ammu’s relationship with Velutha is discovered, Ammu is locked in her room. Velutha is banished. In her rage, Ammu blames the twins for her misfortune. She calls them ‘millstones around her neck’. Distraught, Rahel and Estha decide to run away. Their cousin, Sophie Mol, persuades them to take her with them. During the night, they try to reach an abandoned house across the river. Their boat capsizes and Sophie drowns. When Margaret and Chacko return from Cochin, where they picked up plane tickets, they see Sophie’s body laid out on the sofa. Margaret vomits, hits Estha. Hysterically, she berates the twins because they survived and Sophie did not.

Baby Kochamma goes to the police. She accuses Velutha of being responsible for Sophie’s death. She claims that Velutha tried to rape Ammu, threatened the family, and kidnapped the children. A group of policemen hunt Velutha down, savagely beat him for crossing caste lines. The policemen arrest him on the brink of death. The twins, huddling in the abandoned house, witness the horrific
scene. Later, when they reveal the truth to the chief of police – that they ran away by choice, and that Sophie’s death was an accident – he is alarmed. He knows that Velutha is a Communist. He knows that he is afraid that if word gets out that the arrest and beating were wrongful, it will cause unrest among the local Communists. He threatens to hold Baby Kochamma responsible for falsely accusing Velutha. To save herself, Baby Kochamma tricks Rahel and Estha into accusing Velutha of Sophie’s death. Velutha dies of his injuries overnight.

In the novel, the untouchable protagonist Velutha reaches out in different directions to touch a number of other issues. He is the ‘God of Small Things’. In fact, he is the ‘inversion of God’ as the author herself says. The untouchable represents taboos of all kinds. Velutha comes from a family of Paravans, a category of untouchables associated with fishing and boatbuilding. Although Velutha is portrayed with considerable sympathy by Roy, she does not idealize “Untouchables” in the novel. Velutha’s own father finds it impossible to deny the social hierarchy in which he has grown up, betraying his own son when his illicit relationship with Ammu is discovered. (242)

Velutha belongs to a large group of ‘outcastes’ known as ‘Untouchables’. They are deemed ‘impure’ through their occupational contact with filth, dirt, bodily fluids, etc. As an Imperial Entomologist (TGST 47-48), Pappachi was an instrument in the colonial machine that alienated Indians from their own culture and environment. Velutha is an intelligent and an excellent carpenter. He becomes “the God of loss” or “the God of small things”. His lack of complacency causes him many hardships throughout the novel. “It was not entirely his fault that he lived in a society where a man’s death could be more profitable than his life had ever been”.(267) When
succumbs to death, “he left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no images in mirror”. (265)

Hierarchical structure of power and oppression at various levels in patriarchal societies are explored in the novel. The character of Valutha has been powerfully drawn in terms of his robust physique and in-born talents for making wooden objects. “He was like a little magician.” He could make intricate toys – “tiny windmills, rattles, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds, he could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts”. (74)

Not only this, he had exceptional talents for many other things. He mended radios, clocks, water pumps. ‘Mammachi often said that if only he hadn’t been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer’. Velutha’s subjugation is multiple. He is born Paravan, son of a paravan. It is a community in Kerala, subjected to extreme ignominy through ages. To escape the inhuman humiliations, Velutha’s forefathers had embraced Christianity. But the Christians themselves had adopted, as a matter of natural form of adaptation, the strict and unavoidable caste-system. Thus the paravans had only received the status of ‘untouchable Christians with separate church and priest’.

Vellya Paapen’s fears belong to the harsh tragic realities he had seen and experienced. He belonged to the hierarchical system. He could not imagine transgressing, the limits set by the caste system. The father-son relation shows the strain and a wide dark-gap. The son has confidence in himself. He harbours different loyalty showing a dangerous tendency to step over the caste barriers. On the contrary, the father cannot comprehend this beyond the fact that all this could be constructed as insolence.

Years later, Velutha’s creative engineering skills are used at the business of Ammu’s family where he reassembled ‘bottle-sealing machines’. He maintained ‘new
cannery machines’ and automatic fruit and vegetable slicers. (72) Velutha is a pivotal character in the political debate about ‘who counts’ in Kerala and the world. He reveals an enormous ability to create culture and society for everyone around him. He has an enormous imaginative and cognitive life of experiences. The coloniality of power in Kerala has denied him as a Paravan.

Velutha’s relation with Ammu spells his rebellion. In a sense the sexual relationship that Ammu had with Velutha could be described as ‘small things’. It properly placed in the Ayemenem context. This is because having illegitimate relations with women was something ordinary for Chako. The position of both of them is that of the outcaste who lead lonely lives and are reduced to the condition of creating their own little joys at gravest risks.

Velutha is prominent because his ‘casted body or status’ signifies the cultural difference of India from other nations. The narration of Velutha reveals the intertwined relationship between caste and the social divisions in India. The transgression between Velutha and Ammu poses challenges to the traditional norms and social hierarchy of India. Rahel and Estha’s transgression brings out social taboo and incest. Social structures are so formed as to sanctity – women’s victimization.

Ammu’s dream symbolizes Velutha. Velutha is depicted as a one-armed man in the dream because he is ‘untouchable’. He was really good at working at things with his hands, but because he was untouchable. He couldn’t use that to his full potential. The people in the dream got in the way of them being together. In Ammu’s life, this represents the people in society who got in the way of them being together because of their positions in the caste-system. He is the god of goosebumps because Ammu gets happy and excited to be with him and spend time with him because he is her love. He is the god of smiles because he brings happiness to the twins and Ammu:
Who was he, the one-armed man? Who could he have been? The God of Loss? The God of Small Things? The God of Goosebumps and Sudden Smiles? Of Sourmetal Smells – like steel bus railes and the smell of the bus conductor’s hands from holding them? (207)

When Velutha, after centuries of subjugation, is trying to raise his voice he has been reduced to nothingness – a fit treatment to a biologically inferior person. So:

If they hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature – had been served long ago. They were not arresting a man, they were exorcizing fear. (309)

Arundhati Roy in one place of her novel writes that Velutha’s brother, Kuttappen is safe because he is uneducated. He never questions, only follows the rules and regulations led down by the society. Velutha, like Bakha of Untouchable (1935), questions against the deformities of the prevalent social structure. Velutha, ‘the God of Small Things’, becomes a symbol. He is a voice of all the people – neglected, rejected, exploited. He is eagerly waiting to be freed from the ideologies which try to enclose them into their rigid frameworks.

The greatest tragedy is that of Velutha. He is the only truly non-corrupt adult in the story. He becomes the repeated victim of everyone’s deception – from Comrade Pillai’s to Baby Kochamma’s, to his own father’s and, most heartbreakingly, that of Estha, who at seven years old is manipulated into accusing Velutha of crimes that he did not commit. In Velutha, Arundhati Roy presents before us a figure of new ideas and strength. Nothing can be more contrasting than the figures of father and son – Vellya Paapen and Velutha in their different personalities, approaches and thinking. Thus Velutha is the representation of the social realism. The novelist Roy has represented the social realism through the character Velutha.
3.9 **Social Reality Through the Portrayal of Ammu:**

Ammu, the mother of the children, is luckier – and more unlucky – with her love. She gets a young husband because they fall in love, though she divorces him at a later stage for quite legitimate reasons. Then she falls in love with a Parava in her native village. Then she is labeled a *veshya* for her unholy love. Ammu’s disaster with her first husband was conveniently overlooked by her entire family. They failed to take note of the fact that she was also not past prime of her youth. Her wrong choice in matrimony cannot nail her down for the rest of her life.

Chacko, her brother, falls in love in England. He has to divorce his wife after a daughter is born because his wife falls in love with an old friend of hers. Ammu’s children are unlucky in their way. They are less abandoned by their mother’s family after the early death of their mother. Their divorced father sends even the son back to his former wife’s family when he decides to quit India. The son is haunted by a sense of sin and exclusion and becomes silently and quietly mad. Ammu’s distrust of other people teaches Rahel that love is nothing to take for granted. It is something conditional and limited, thus leaving Rahel with insecurity and anxiety. Her eagerness to receive punishments can be seen as a prolongation of this: “Ammu’, Rahel said, ‘shall I miss dinner as my punishment?’ she was keen to exchange punishments. No dinner, in exchange for Ammu loving her the same as before”. (11)

When Ammu doesn’t give her any punishment, Rahel is distressed. He does not eat, “hoping that if she could somehow effect her own punishment, Ammu would rescind hers”. (115) This shows Rahel’s impassioned quest for love. Rahel is a woman who does not find any room either in her family or society. Living in her grandparent’s house, she witnesses the stark injustices met out to her mother. As she grows up unwanted, she becomes a free woman. She, unlike her mother, is not
restricted by the confines of traditional values. Rahel too could not lead a successful married life as a result of the obsession with her twin brother Estha.

After Sophie’s funeral, Ammu goes to the police, with Rahel and Estha in tow, to tell the truth about her relationship with Velutha. The police threaten her to make her leave the matter alone. Afraid of being exposed, Baby Kochamma convinces Chacko that Ammu and the twins were responsible for his daughter’s death. Chacko kicks Ammu out of the house. Chako forces her to send Estha to live with his father. Estha never sees Ammu again. She dies alone and impoverished a few years later at the age of 31.

Ammu, the greatest troublemaker, belongs to challenge any expectation for her life. She does not care much about what her revolt may trigger. The motivation for her revolt – both her rebellious behaviour and single acts of resistance – is closely described and studied. From the very first time, she decides to stand up to her parents’ will. She is raised by her mother who quietly suffered her husband’s violence. She tries to rebel against her mother. Her first act of rebellion is a way to ‘escape “the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother”’. (39)

Ammu wanted to find a husband who would marry her in spite of her lack of dowry. Dowry was the main reason why nobody came to ask for her. She is determined to have a life in no way similar to her mother’s life. She has to face her family’s rejection, since her husband is a Hindu. Her husband turns out to be very much not unlike her father. Her husband considers to lend her, his wife, to his boss in exchange for maintaining his position. This results in Ammu’s revolt against him. She files a divorce from her husband. She comes back to Ayemenem to her parent’s house. She is well aware of the condemnation her position provokes.

The social reality is depicted in the case of the divorced woman in the novel. For Kochamma, Ammu had no position anywhere at all. As for a divorced daughter
from a love-marriage, well words could not describe Kochamma’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage, Kochamma chose to “remain quiveringly silent on the subject”. (45) Since then, she is determined to follow the rules, in order to make at least her children’s lives bearable. She has a wicked character. A woman could be dangerous, if she decides, as “a woman that they had already damned, now had little left to lose, and could therefore be dangerous”. (44) Ammu gives a defiant response to her family’s insistence in maintaining caste rules coherent in Keralan culture and society. This response is to make the twins ‘promise’ her that they will ‘always love each other’. Roy refers to this as the local ‘love laws’. With this straightforward speech act of promise, Ammu tampers throughout the novel with the stable hetero-normative issues of family, bloodlines, and the bourgeois nation. Ammu is shameless. She does not admit the same kind of fears as he has: “What’s the worst thing that can happen? I could lose everything”. (334)

The consequences of Ammu’s revolt against the social codes, the love laws, lead to two people’s death. This ruins the lives of a number of other people. Her children are taken from her. She is sent away. In the eyes of other people, she becomes no-one. She loses the last remnants of respect she could still ask for. Her greatest fear of being considered a veshya, a prostitute, comes true. This happens when she comes to the police station to make a statement about what has really happened. She realizes that the truth is of no interest to anybody, as long as it offends their morality.

Ammu’s husband is convinced that once married, he can treat her as he likes. Without any trace of discomfort, he announces to her Mr. Hollick’s offer, as though lending his wife to strangers was one of his rights. Being a woman is tantamount to being a man’s property. This is a property that is at one point to be
passed on to another person. Marriage is in a way only a gift-giving ceremony that binds a desirable alliance of two families.

The girl is expected to fulfill all the expectations that are placed upon her. Her appearance is important. But it is not the only requirement. Her character must be shaped so that it matches the perspective husband’s wishes. The girl is supposed to be meek. She is supposed to be malleable without any trace of assertivity. The narrator claims in this novel that: “Displaying a stubborn single-mindedness in a young girl in those days was considered as bad as a physical deformity – a harelip perhaps, or a club foot”. (24)

Ammu rebels against her position repeatedly. She rebels always with the best of intention. She seeks a life that would allow her to realize herself fully as a woman. Despite the good intentions, she breaks the social codes that are forbidden to be broken. The punishments are condemnation in the eyes of others. She does not have to pay with her life. But two lives are lost as a consequence of the reactions her behaviour triggers. Her fight for her rights and freedom ironically end in the very opposite. The only area in which Ammu breaks the laws is her private life. Her position of a woman in the ‘wonderful male chauvinist society’ she lives in (57) does not seem to bother her as much. She never revolts against it. Her behaviour causes the reaction. This indicates that there is nothing such as a private life in her society.

Ammu’s revolt against the caste-system is reflected in the novel. Roy describes Ammu’s revolt against the caste system. Rahel’s mother Ammu experiences a mirror image of such temporal hybridity. The frozen time becomes both a sign of trauma but also a possible defense. Ammu tries to stop time as a way to shield herself against the past. After the central traumatic events of the novel, Ammu must send her son away and leave her daughter for a job. When she returns to visit four years later,
she brings the eleven-year-old Rahel. Rahel presents suitable for her past age of seven. The narrator tells us:

It was as though Ammu believed that if she refused to acknowledge the passage of time, if she willed it to stand still in the lives of her twins, it would. . . . (Ammu) seemed terrified of what adult thing her daughter might say and thaw Frozen Time. (152-153)

Ammu’s attempts to freeze time clash with the evidence of laws. She struggles to ignore time’s passage at the same time that she is faced with her inability to force time to ‘stand still’. Despite Ammu’s best efforts, time remains hybrid. Her wish to hold on to a past before the traumas took place conflicts with her present experience of Rahel. Likewise, the memory of the trauma in the past is triggered by seeing Rahel in the present. According to a critic Tirthankar Chandra:

Ammu’s rebellion (quest for identity) is an attempt at repossessing, renaming, reknowing the world, but it appears doomed from the very beginning because of the nature of the society where she has had to seek refuge with her twins after her divorce and also because of the incapacity of her kin (mother, great-aunt Kochamma) to provide an adequate model for redefining the ‘Self’. (1997: 40)

In contrast to this, her brother Chacko is privileged in every aspect of family life purely because he is a male. After schooling, Ammu is denied further education. On the contrary, her brother is sent to Oxford for higher education because: “Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl. So Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them”(38). Thus her own family becomes an obstacle between her freedom and future progress. When her family shifts from Delhi to Ayemenem, Ammu’s life is engulfed by dullness, seclusion and waiting for marriage proposals. She feels captivated in her house at Ayemenem. She desperately yearns for her identity:
There was little for young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework… All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother. (38-39)

Her father agrees to let her spend her summer with a distant aunt in Calcutta. There, at some wedding reception, she happens to meet her future husband. She marries him without any hesitation or sense of guilt. She thinks that she would be able to put an end to her unbearable relations with her parents. But unfortunately, to her bad luck, “her husband turns out to be not just a heavy drunkard but a full-blown alcoholic”. (40) Here Simone de Beauvoir remarks that:

There is a unanimous agreement that getting a husband – or in some cases a ‘Protector’ – is for her (woman) the most important undertaking… She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother’s hold, she will open up her future not only by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, in the hands of a new master. (2010: 352)

When Ammu moves to Assam with her husband, she becomes the centre of attraction of the Planters’ Club. She wears backless blouses with her saris. She carries a silver lame purse on a chain. She also smokes long cigarettes in a silver cigarette holder. She learns to blow perfect smoke rings. She breaks the patriarchal domination prevalent in the Indian system.

Ammu, being a new woman, does not yield herself before the clutches of the male-chauvinist societal structure. She escapes the asphyxiating home of her parents by her unsuccessful marriage. It ends when her drunkard husband offers her to his English boss for his career prospects. She does not bow before her new master i.e. her husband. On the contrary, she divorces him to protect her self-respect and identity. Unlike her mother, she cannot accept the bad attitude and actions of her husband.
She prefers divorce than blindly sticking to her marriage. She breaks the communal mores of India. She returns unwelcomed to Ayemenem “to everything she had fled from only a few years ago, except that now she had two young children and no more dreams”. (42) Marriage for Ammu is a horrible experience. Her husband is a reason for her physical and psychological suffering. But she rebels against such social structures. She challenges marriage that rather seems to be a ‘disciplinary institution’.

3.10 BABY KOCHAMMA – A VICTIM OF SOCIAL PREJUDICES:

The three women in this novel – Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, and Ammu – present a perfect trio of suffering women. Baby Kochamma herself is a victim of social prejudices. She is conditioned by society. She identifies herself with the ideas. She forces of oppression. Mammachi is dehumanized. Her mind becomes twisted as a result of suffering in a society dominated by men and money. On the other hand, Ammu is the rebel. She represents the defiance of the present state of society from educated, passionate and thinking women. She stands for those women who are aspiring for freedom and equality. These women are challenging the traditional ideas and conventions.

Baby Kochamma is the daughter of reverend F. John Ipe. He was a priest of the MarThoma Church. Her father was a well-known scholar in Christianity. Therefore, he was widely respected in the Christian community. So, it is not strange for the son or daughter of such a man to be attracted to religion. But her family background is not the real reason of her turning to religion in her early life. She cheats herself and people around her. She cheats her family by pretending to be religions. Her adventures in the realm of religion are an outcome of a normal biological impulse. She attempts this to promote in a deceptive gap. The attempt fails eventually.
As a result, she leads in abnormality and perversion. Her frustration in love and repressed libido provide us with the key to comprehend the cold, calculated and inhuman role. Such is the role played by her in the novel. She has become narcissist. Eventually, she goes to the extent of sadism. She has received western education. She rears all the reactionary ideas inherited from the feud past in her heart. She misses no opportunity to express them violently in word and deed. She is unkind to children. She is also unkind to the lower castes and classes. She is not kind to Hindus in general and even to women.

The multi-generational family home in Ayemenem also includes Pappachi’s sister, Navomi Ipe, known as Baby Kochamma. As a young girl, Baby Kochamma fell in love with Father Mulligan, a young Irish priest. This priest had come to Ayemenem to study Hindu scriptures. To get closer to him, Baby Kochamma converted to Roman Catholicism. Then she joined a convent against her father’s wishes. After a few lonely months in the convent, Baby Kochamma realized that her vows brought her no closer to the man she loved. Her father eventually rescued her from the convent. He sent her to America. There she obtained a diploma in ornamental gardening. Because of her unrequited love for Father Mulligan, Baby Kochamma remained unmarried for the rest of her life. She became deeply embittered over time. Throughout the novel, she delights in the misfortune of others. She manipulates events to bring down calamity on Ammu and the twins.

The death of Margaret’s second husband in a car accident prompts Chacko to invite her and Sophie to spend Christmas in Ayemenem. The day before Margaret and Sophie arrive, the family goes to a theater to see *The Sound of Music*. On their way to the theater, the family – Chacko, Ammu, Estha, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma – encounters a group of Communist protesters. The protesters surround the car. They force Baby Kochamma to wave a red flag. They chant a Communist slogan,
humiliating her. Rahel thinks she sees Velutha, a servant who works for the family’s pickle factory, among the protesters. Then, at the theater, Estha is molested by the ‘Orange drink Lemon drink Man’, a vendor working the snack counter. Estha’s experience factors into the tragic events at the heart of the narrative.

Baby Kochamma’s life started as a really promising one. She is a daughter of a well-esteemed clergyman. She apparently had all the prospects a girl could ask for. It was only at the age of eighteen, that she suddenly found out that there is one thing she could not have – the only thing she really wanted – a love of a man she liked. At that point, she decided to revolt against her fate. She does not realize how hopeless her revolt is.

Compared to Ammu, Kochamma has to face little opposition. Her behaviour is described as a defiance of her father’s wishes. (24) She acts against her father’s wishes. Yet, he is ready to help her when needed. She is not punished for her misbehaviour. On the contrary, she is helped, in her studies of gardening. She revolts and so she is a rebel. She made an active attempt to pursuit her love. It was quite foolish attempt. This revolt remains the only occasion on which she tries to fight her fate. She is never satisfied with her life. The only form her dissatisfaction with her fate takes, is the way she treats others who fight with much more vigour than she ever had the courage to exhibit. It is said in the novel that:

Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman. (45)

Baby Kochamma’s revolt was a very careful one. She only crossed the boundary between what is and what is not suitable for a girl to do once. It ruined her reputation. She never violated the lines evidently. She feels thus rightful to denounce other people’s wrong doings. Kochamma comes across a hypocritical judge of other people’s behaviour. She enforces the rules she once crosses. She imposes them on others. Kochamma conspires with the inspector. She puts Velultha behind the bars.
There he is severely beaten to death. This attitude of negativism is perhaps due to the unjust and malicious treatment meted out to her in her life: ‘the fear of being dispossessed’. A critic Amitabh Roy in his analysis of Kochamma’s character opines:

It is a pity that she submits in the name of decency and honor to the very sexist, casteist and communal prejudices that have stood in her way and denied fulfillment to her. (2005: 62)

Like Mammachi, Baby Kochamma also apparently submits to the patriarchal social norms without any hesitation. If closely examined, she puts up a line of implicit resistance against the biased socio-political and economic order in the post-colonial India. Baby Kochamma is capable of lying and double-crossing anyone whom she sees as a threat to her social standing. This is a consequence of her loss of respectability after becoming a Roman Catholicism to be close to Father Mulligan, despite her father’s disapproval. Her fear is reminiscent of that of Comrade Pillai, who betrays both Velutha and Chacko to further his own interests and that of his political party.

Baby Kochamma’s fruitless love in her ancient days for father Mulligan, the Irish monk, is presented as the comedy of the unmarriageable frustrated woman. It involves the kind and measure of cruelty that entails. Baby Kochamma is a disgruntled character. She is one who never really grows up beyond her adolescence. Her very name is full of irony. She is ‘Baby’ even at 83. Kochu in Malayalam means little. If one looks at the meaning for the honorific suffix Amma, it means mother. She is doubly childish but precociously over-sexed. Her breasts are enormous. But she is frustrated. Her parents finally decide that she cannot be married off. She is sent abroad for studies. She grows into an embittered and opinionated person who applies to everyone else a ruthlessly strait-laced morality. She cannot forgive Ammu for her marriage – and a love marriage – and an inter-communal love-marriage.
3.11 **Mammachi – A Woman of Old Generation:**

The major character in the novel *The God of Small Things* is Mammachi. This character deliberately conforms to the rules set out for her. It is ironic that the main pillar of the family is seemingly the weakest member. But at a closer inspection, we can see that the role she chooses for herself is the traditional role of the mistress of the house. In no way does she ever cross the line between the housewife and a rebel, regardless of what she must face. The novel never tells the story of her childhood or adolescence. There is almost no information on her life before her marriage aside from that she comes from a highly esteemed Syrian Christian family. The first of her life’s stories describes her as a docile wife. Her obedience is more important to her than the pursuit of her own talents.

Mammachi is the sister-in-law of Baby Kochamma, the wife of her brother Benoon John Ipe. Her real name is Soshamma. But she is generally known as Mammachi. Her husband is usually called Pappachi in the novel. She is much akin to Baby Kochamma in submitting to the traditional notions of male supremacy, love and marriage. Her disposition differs a lot from that of Baby Kochamma. Baby Kochamma suffers because she fails to have the man in her choice. Mammachi has got a husband from arranged marriage. Her husband is seventeen years older than herself. He belongs to her own country and community. Yet the marriage does not prove happy. It is because her husband develops some disorder in his personality.

Mammachi is a true representative of the old generation of women. This old generation gracefully submits themselves to the patriarchal society. She is an ‘adarsh bharatiya naari’ (Ideal Indian Woman). She believes that a woman’s primary duty is towards her husband. Her belief is that she should submit herself to the whims and fancies of her husband at all costs.
Mammachi has been a victim of her husband’s brutality throughout her life. She is either beaten with a brass vase or an ivory handled riding crop by her husband. She had exceptional talent for music, especially violin. But her husband Pappachi is jealous of her. The climax is reached when violin trainer makes the mistake of telling him that his wife is ‘exceptionally talented’ and ‘potentially concert class’. Later, he breaks the bow of the violin one night. He throws it in the river. A feeling of jealousy is expressed again when she started pickle making business. Pappachi refuses to help her because pickle-making is not ‘a suitable job for high-ranking ex-Government official’. Thus, their marriage is devoid of understanding, love and co-operation. Her blind submission to patriarchy is a defensive gesture rather than an honest agreement with hegemonic powers.

Mammachi did not seem to protest when, due to her husband’s envy, her violin lessons were “abruptly discontinued”(50). Her loyalty to her husband and obedience – the crucial characteristics of a good wife – remain the most steady of her qualities throughout her whole life, both when living with her husband and after his death. She seems to be a very passive woman. She accepts her husband’s beating without protest, not revolting even when the beating started to involve Rahel. Rather than opposing her husband, she teaches her daughter to hide well outside the home after he had “beaten her and Mammachi and driven them out of their home”. (181)

She accepts the sudden end. The daily cruel beating takes after her son’s intervention. Nor does she in any way protest when, as a punishment of a different kind, he decides not to talk to her ever again. She followed him whenever his work required that he moves, without objection. Without a word of protest, she endured his beatings. She even respected his decision not to speak to her anymore and act publicly as an oppressed husband. A critic Chilla Bulbeck argues that this is a usual pattern in
cultures where the wife’s task is to guard both her and her husband’s reputation. The matrixes of dishonour, Chilla Bulbeck claims that: “. . . may prevent wives confiding in husbands, fearing loss of their natal family honour, or wives speaking of domestic violence publicly because this shames both wife and husband.”(1998: 62)

Mammachi is portrayed as a passive member of this union. The only time her attitude to her marriage is mentioned is when Ammu explains to her children what made Mammachi cry at Pappachi’s funeral:

Ammu told the twins that Mammachi was crying more because she was used to him than because she loved him. She was used to having him slouching around the pickle factory, and was used to being beaten from time to time. (50)

A parallel between Mammachi’s life and a theatre performance can be easily drawn without much exaggerating. All her life she was expected is to act according to someone else’s requirements. She was judged by her performance. Her behaviour in public always matches her social role. She is so perfect that her public appearances resemble a theatre in which everybody has to play their part, according to their social rules. The narrator enhances this aspect of Mammachi’s demeanour by directly calling the moment when Sophie Mol finally arrives – a moment Mammachi’s been preparing such a long time – the ‘Play for Sophie’.

The only time Mammachi abandons her demureness and acts in affection is when she learns about her daughter’s behaviour. To Vellya Paapen and Velutha, she breaks out in rage. She leaves her role behind. She keeps grudges against her behaviour. She is not willing to remit any of Ammu’s offences against her values. Moral lapses become an unforgivable impeachable offence when committed by her daughter. She practices double standards that require that Ammu conforms to the same rules she has conformed to herself. On the contrary, men, especially the men of her family are allowed to any kind of behaviour on the grounds of their male needs.
To her son Chacko, she permits ‘Man’s Needs’. She does not mind his flirting with “Pretty women who worked in the factory. Mammachi appears unkind and unjust to her daughter when she visits Ayemenem fatally ill with asthma and a rattle in her chest. During that last visit, Mammachi who has developed a perverse mind, asks her if she has been drinking and suggests that she visits Rahel as seldom as possible That is highly unbecoming on the part of a mother who has given so much indulgence to her son. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma fit into the oppressive family system that blatantly victimizes Ammu. They become active oppressors. They seek to corner her. Then they drive her to her miserable death.

This novel seeks the political vision of the subaltern. The novel seeks this vision primarily through the standpoint positionality of women, children and peasants. This vision provides the context in which family members such as Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and the state police’s support of caste and the coloniality of power can be challenged, made specific, and given meaning. Mammachi’s rage is redirected into a cold contempt for her daughter for what she had done. She thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie. She imagined it in vivid details:

. . . a Parvan’s course blackhand on her breast. His mouth on hers. His black hips jerking between her legs. The sound of their breathing. His particular Paravan smell. Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. Like a dog with a bitch on heat. (257)

Roy further narrates that Mammachi’s tolerance of ‘Men’s Needs’ for her son becomes the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter:

She has defiled generations of breeding – (The little blessed one, blessed personally by the Patriarch of Antioch, an imperial Entomologist a Rhodes Scholar) and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, forever now, people would point at them at weddings and funerals. At baptism and birthday Parties they would nudge and whisper. (258)
Chako’s sexual indulgences with low-caste women are overlooked as “Men’s Needs”. Ammu’s affair with Velutha becomes an unpardonable offence against family’s reputation and status. This is a typical picture of the double-standard of morality practiced in the traditional India. Men enjoy greater laxity and freedom. Women suffer in the name of ‘infinite tenderness of motherhood’. The arrival of Margaret Kochemma provokes her desires. Finally, Velutha’s return after many years makes her to take a fatal decision to love by night her children. The secret love-affair goes on for thirteen days until it is reported to Mammachi by Veluth’s father and compounded by the accidental death of Sophie Mol.

3.12  PICTURIZATION OF CHILDREN IN OUR SOCIETY – A HARSH REALITY:

*The God of Small Things* throws light upon hierarchical structures of power. It also throws light upon the oppression at various levels in patriarchal societies. Despite all rhetorical features, the children are fully neglected in our society. Hardly any care is taken to understand them and to provide them the attention and security they need. Even when laws are enacted to protect them, they are seldom enforced. It is because the guardians are insensitive and very hypocritical for many reasons. This hard reality is revealed in *The God of Small Things*. She projects this bitter reality. She wants to draw the attention of the sensitive readers to understand the tragic picture of our children’s world.

In *The God of Small Things*, there are only three children in the novel namely – Sophie Mol, Estha and Rahel. The novel presents a contrast between the first one and the last two. All the three have certain similarities. Their parents are divorced. One of them is not Syrian Christian. That is what is common to them all. But they differ in several aspects too. Sophie Mol’s mother is a white woman while
the father of Estha and Rahel is a non-white man. Sophie Mol’s father is willing to receive her and her mother gladly. His family is equally enthusiastic about it. Estha and Rahel are forsaken by their father. Sophie Mol is elder than her cousins. A major difference lies in the fact that Sophie Mol dies soon after her arrival as she meets an accident. Estha and Rahel face several odds but survive. The novel can be viewed as a tale of ‘terror’ that destroyed the lives of Velutha and Ammu. It is also a tale of how Estha and Rahel survived.

Estha’s parents were not poor. His father was an Assistant Manager in a tea-estate in Assam. His mother’s parental home had a pickle factory. So, Estha had a bourgeois background on both sides. Estha and his sister are subjected to adversity. Their parents get divorced. His mother comes to her parental home with two children when they are quite unwanted and neglected. Estha had an unhappy childhood. It is because his father’s drunken violence followed by post-drunken badgering. It began when he was barely two. When his bouts of violence began to include the children and when the war with Pakistan began, Ammu left her husband. She returned unwelcomed to her parents in Ayemenem. Here the children, along with their mother, were unwanted a fact, that the children in their innocence could not realize instantly.

The story of Estha’s life raises naturally the question. “Why is it that he lost his speech?” The answer lies in the fact that the boy was brutalized by numerous persons like Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria, Inspector Mathews and the Soft drink man. He had no option but to suffer passively. The voice he couldn’t raise against the injustice done to himself. His dear ones seemed to have lost its utility. That is the main reason of his numbness.

Estha was a harmless child. He was so quiet that he was hardly noticed by people around him. Such an innocent child was subjected to the worst cruelty of the
adults. His childhood was destroyed. His life ruined for no fault of his own. This constitutes a major tragedy in the novel. Such wanton destruction of childhood is staggering to our imagination and pathetic to our heart. Estha occupied very little space in the world. The novelist describes not only the sad story of her novel, but also she indirectly describes the real sad-story of the children in India. The first thing that strikes us is the insensitivity of Indian adults to the psychology of the children. Even the educated people fail miserably in this respect. Sophie Mol’s guardians do not care to see that she needs the company of children.

Lacking sufficient dowry to marry, Ammu is desperate to escape her ill-tempered father, known as Pappachi, and her bitter, long-suffering mother, known as Mammachi. The present is dotted with past occurrences. The funeral, how children think, the futility of death, a child’s understanding and naivety, a mother’s tears, unrequited love, Baby Kochamma’s childhood and her unsuccessful love story, her gardening skills – are eventually jettisoned because of her fascination for foreign television soaps. The reader is presented a window into the life of the twins – Estha and Rahel. Estha was once returned to his father.

Rahel belongs to the third generation. She is less marginal character in comparison to Ammu and Mammachi. Unlike them, she never faces domestic violence. Still she remains at the periphery because of being a daughter of neglected Ammu. She too experienced insult and humiliation in the childhood as her mother witnessed. Her life is totally disturbed. Her life is totally deserted because of tormenting memories of past. Every time, Rahel protests against the adults. They “threaten to send her away”. (148) They tell her that it makes “people love her a little less”. (112) This scolding contributes to Rahel’s self-image as someone who may not be loveable.
Rahel, the daughter, marries for love in her listless life. But from her early days, she is marked by an intensity of odd questionings. Her mother dies when she is thirty-one. The family sends her away to a distant boarding school where she bumps into her seniors to find out “Whether breasts hurt”. Yet it is the odd absence of her mind and spirit in her love-making that forces her American husband to divorce her.

Rahel is a special case of a woman that breaks the laws. She does so almost unintentionally. In the same way, she accepts the consequences. Her character is the only female character in the novel that is presented all the way from her early childhood to her womanhood. This depiction helps to conceive her way of thinking and the reasons for her later behaviour. As a small girl, she had to bear the consequences of her mother’s intercommunity marriage and subsequent divorce. She was just like her mother. She was only tolerated in her grandmother’s household. Yet, she was clinging to every possible inkling being perceived as a normal child. She was constantly reminded that both she and Estha “were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry”. (45) This was reminded to her not by strangers, but by her own family.

The first childhood rebellion of Rahel and Estha was supposed to make everybody, and especially their mother, to appreciate them. The accidental death of Sophie Mol ended their careless childhood. Their rebellion resulted in a tragedy. Any punishment for any violation of any rules seemed insignificant in comparison. Her childhood and adolescence became a series of a law and rules violations. The punishments that were given to discipline her failed completely. She did not complete university education. Then she “drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge. With a Sitting Down sense”. (18)
Such an air of drifting shades her every action. The offences she commits during the years of her schooling, her studies, her marriage, even her return to Ayemenem – are described in the novel with a glimmer of indifference and absent-mindedness. Any violation of the social codes on her part was a search for relief. The final violation of the codes is a climax that needs to be done, in order to find a way out of the vicious circle: “Once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much, sharing together not happiness, but a hideous grief.” (328)

Rahel’s acts of resistance against the laws are motivated by curiousness, despair and search for relief respectively. The prime serious offence she commits is changes. This fact robs her of everything she has and needs. This also makes her numb to any kind of punishment and any kind of violation, in the future. She becomes apathetic, numb to the stimuli of the outer world. Her position among the characters in the novel is unique. Her violations are not violations as we may say. She does not care for the rules. She is immune both to the sense of violating them as well as being punished for them.

Usually, marriage is seen as the ultimate goal in a young woman’s life. The only reason for not getting married is that she does not meet the expectations of a prospective husband. Baby Kochamma had “developed a ‘reputation’ and was unlikely to find a husband. This made her father to decide that “since she couldn’t have a husband, there was no harm in her having an education”. (26) When introducing Rahel, the narrator describes what detached her from a desirable future:

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)
The most unnatural act of social transgression committed by Rahel is her incestuous love for her twin brother Estha. This is perhaps her implicit resistance toward the social order: “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” (93). The only person with whom Rahel has harmony, an empathetic link, is her own twin brother Estha, 18 minutes senior to her. Their personalities balance each other like the two halves of a circle, complementing each other.

### 3.13 Society Reality through Portrayal of Minor Characters:

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’ pickels. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property. Chako told Rahel and Estha that Ammu had no Locust St: “Thanks to our male chauvinist society’, Ammu said. Chako said, ‘What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine’. (3)

This is the crucial stage in the novel where Roy could peep into the hard crust of gender-bias. But she did not do so. She is floating on the surface taking recourse to legal position. She is wallowing in the hollow irony “male chauvinist society”. (3) Ammu’s response to Chako’s assertion “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine” only generates sarcasm. By implication, this is not the response of the author who does not know the answer, nor does she see beneath the surface of the ‘realities’. Chacko’s assertion does not generate heat to take us to any area of enlightenment.

Here Roy shows no strength, but weakness. Instead of facing the issue squarely, she relapses into irony. She fails to penetrate the surface. She fails to see
into the social assumptions and deep-rooted practices. She lets the opportunity slip by and does not rise up to the occasion. Nor her technique stands by her. There is no sharpness in her sensibility. There is no intensity in her art to handle this crucial situation. Her failure is an artistic failure. She has failed to contemplate the issue of gender-discrimination dispassionately.

The appearance of British as exploiters suggests a post-colonial tendency. They act as instruments of imperial oppression trying to crush down the colonized to the very extent of extreme pathos. Characters like Hollick symbolize the cruelty and carnality of the superior planter class. They strike a glaring contrast to the impoverished labour class.

A recent tendency shows a shift in stance in terms of portraying English as paragons of cruelty. They cease to be dark figures of villainy and crime. They are portrayed as more individualized and aware. Such a newer version of the British figure is Father Mulligan in the novel. He is a priest in Ayemenem. Later he relinquishes Christianity. He takes up Hinduism. He becomes an ardent follower of Lord Vishnu. Despite the knowledge of Baby Kochamma’s (Ammu’s aunt) staunch affection for him, he never takes advantage of her. He remains on friendly terms with her until his death.

In contrast, the enforcers of order are all described and associated with order. Chacko has studied in England and likes to read in his ‘Reading Aloud voice’. Baby Kochamma is a stickler for placing things in their proper place. This is seen even in her stated profession, gardener. Chacko, Baby Kochamma and Mammachi are all described as being large, in girth, in voice and most importantly in position. After all, it is Chacko who has locus standi, not Ammu, as the novel points out several times. Finally her bother Esthappen – whose mind has atrophied in a part-enforced and part self-willed isolation. She ends in incestuous adultery:
In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was For Ever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities.
Now, these years later, Rahel has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha’s funny dream. She has other memories too that she has no right to have. (2)

One of the early occasions is the description of the children’s idea of the circumstances of their birth. Their father works in a remote tea estate of Assam. He has to take his ‘hugely pregnant’ young wife (carrying twins) to the hospital, and they travel by car. But the car breaks down, and a crowded bus comes to their rescue:

With the queer compassion of the very poor for the comparatively well off, or perhaps only because they saw how hugely pregnant Ammu was, seated passengers made room for the couple and for the rest of the journey. Estha and Rahel’s father had to hold their mother’s stomach (with them in it) to prevent it from wobbling. (3)

This presents motherhood from an unnecessarily exaggerated reality. The children are not victims of any such thoughts. This is not good enough excuse. What this leads the reader to visualize is the point in consideration, with the narrative moving backward, then forward, then reversing itself and taking an unexpected turn. The reader also learns the falling into repetition, the reader learns of Sophie Mol’s drowning, the twins’ possible responsibility for their cousin’s death, their mother’s disgrace and banishment. The reader also learns the social structure that leads to the mistreatment of the untouchable class, the forced parting of the twins, the dwindling family fortune, and the disintegrating relationships.

Finally, each character suffers separation from family, from love, from security, and from the larger world. This painful tearing apart comes about by chance events and by small things over which they appear to have no control:
‘It’s true. Things can change in a day,’ the narrator observes. She possesses the adept business skills and starts a pickle factory all by herself, but her husband Pappachi ‘would not help her with the pickle-making because he did not consider pickle-making a suitable job for a high ranking ex-govt. official’. He beat her constantly for no apparent reason ‘the beatings weren’t new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place.’(47-48)

After Pappachi’s death, Chacko, her son, took over the factory from her. In losing her factory, Mammachi was marginalized in terms of both clan and gender. She was made a sleeping partner. According to Chacko’s philosophy, “what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine”. (57) Mammachi does not resist her tyrannical son. She concedes to his “Men’s Needs” as Chacko flirts with “pretty women who worked in the factory”. He forces them to “sit at table with him and drink tea”. (65) This is much to the dismay of his own mother. Mammachi is artistic. She has the skills of playing the violin. When her music teacher praises her exceptional talent before her husband, her music lessons are stopped abruptly because of the fear that his wife may surpass Pappachi. This is the reality in the Indian patriarchal families.

3.14 THE NOVEL – A POLITICAL STORY INTERVENING SOCIAL ISSUES:

*The God of Small Things* can be read as a potential political story in the sense that politics intervenes in the basic social issues. One of the major social issues is centrally concerned with the untouchables. Compulsions transcend the limits of party, ideology. These leaders act as any, other leader would irrespective of party. In it, Roy engages with the political legacy of communism in Kerala. Her satirical portrayal of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the first Chief Minister and his party followers created many controversies. The novel is about politics. Through its various agencies, this politics exercises decisive influence over the lives of the people of Ayemenem.
Unlike writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy presents politics as a very complex force. It is operative at different levels. This politics begins with home. This is manipulated by different people for different ends. The novel portrays the forces of power working in alliance in the novel.

Apart from the political criticism, a humanistic reading of the text reveals the sad plight of the lower caste, even in the political system supported by the proletarian values. What Roy implies is that the Marxist party in Kerala worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them. Velutha is a member of the party. Yet he does not get help from the party leader Comrade Pillai. Pillai’s double standard distances himself from Velutha in order to get support from the factory owner and other workers who hate a Paravan. At the end, Velutha is betrayed by his party men. He is mercilessly beaten to death. Here, Pillai and the police inspector Thomas Mathew are the “mechanics who serviced different parts of the same machine”. (262)

Arundhati Roy introduces to us the local political heavy weight comrade K.N.M. Pillai. She creates a cruel caricature. Pillai is indeed, right from the beginning, an epitome of all the unpleasant deceptive aspects of degenerating political tradition. This is nothing more than a means of self-promotion maintaining one’s hold over the citadel of local power by playing one against the other. The local practitioners of local politics and the ill-concealed brute forces of real evil are easily seen in men like Pillai. He represents a party that represents worker’s interests and exists on the strength of its pledge to protect them from all kinds of socio-economic exploitation. This is the cruelest irony. Their leadership survives on the slogan-raising and noisy marches challenging such a society as is based on all forms of inequality. Such leaders exist on perpetual cycle of social crisis. History dumps them into time’s dustbin. As a critic Alex Tickell states:
Throughout the novel, Roy portrays an ongoing struggle of the powerless and reminds us that godlike authority, when it manifests itself on a large ‘monolithic’ scale in religious, governmental or social forms, rarely allows power to be shared evenly among everyone and often maintains control by marginalizing particular groups. (2007: 11)

Pillai is the triumph of Roy’s subtle and complex art of characterization. She builds up this art in fragments that automatically drift into their right places. There is the simple portrayal of the lecherous oil, smearing pot-bellied man of the common family man. His devotion to the Marxist ideology stretches to the extent of christening his son Lenin. He pushes his devilish brains into plotting to trap poor Velutha. Finally, he joins hands with the state police in smashing him. Velutha represents the class of down-trodden untouchable used by the politicians and the police as mere pawns in the political game of chess.

The author has shown a great deal of artistic insight into human nature in her caricatures of Pillai and Chako. The author critiques not this party or that party. Her anger is directed against the political hypocrisy. This hypocrisy is so deeply ingrained in the politicians. They always wear the unprincipled behaviour and the glittering mask. Transcending even these small frames, the author questions the social set-up. It allows or sanctions inhuman debasement and the cruel caste-ridden structure.

The politics of the erotic depends upon how we interpret Rahel and Estha’s remarkable transformation and defiance at the end of the novel. This also depends upon how we see their melancholic relationship between their ability to experience and understand, their capacity to grieve for their mother Ammu and the peasant Velutha. This also depends upon how, in their grieving, they reinstitute kinship.

Arundhati Roy depicts a structural vision of power that does not seek to enhance autonomy as much as limit it. In this light, there is a definite statement being made on the nature of political power in India and how it needs to be changed in its effects on people. This is not merely governmental. Roy’s social realism is depicted in
the stratification of both race and caste terms. There is a definite socially realist aspect presented in the relationship between Ammu, part of the new generation, and her father, reflective of the old one and its relationship to the British.

3.15 **SUMMING UP:**

*The God of small Things* is a remarkable book in many ways. It is a rare genre in itself in woman’s writing. It belongs to the comic tradition of Aristophanes and Rabelais and such others. It is a tradition that does not fight shy of plain and even exaggerated statement of sexual and sensual themes. Arundhati Roy deals with the feminine anatomy with comic exaggeration. That is perhaps not objectionable. What is objectionable is that there is no artistic (even of the comic brand) justification for certain statements. The novel deals with sufferings of three generations of women - Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel. They react in their own ways to the situation that they are confronted with. The three generations of women hold different views on life and react in their own ways to the situation that they are faced with. They struggle throughout their lives.

The final chapter of the novel describes the first night of Ammu’s and Velutha’s affair. They are both drawn to the riverbank, where they meet and make love for the first time. After that, they continue to meet in secret and share their admiration of ‘Small Things’ such as the creatures of the riverbank. Each night as they part, they say to one another: ‘Tomorrow? Tomorrow’. On the last night, they meet before Velutha’s death, Ammu is compelled to turn back and repeat one more time: ‘Tomorrow’.

*The God of Small Things* presents life in ‘God’s own country’ as quite ungodly. Against the Godly scenery of Kerala, the characters find them sinned...
against, their childhood – innocence raped and their lives ruined. The ‘Big things’, in spite of the individual difference of the characters, unite whenever they face a threat from ‘Small things’. Ammu, the twins and Velutha get the small things together for mutual love and warmth and not for any material gains. These small things are crudely acted upon and destroyed. They leave behind no memory of pain or concern in the minds of the survivors. Their every mark is completely wiped off. The novel carries with it the disturbing motif of the permanent distancing of ‘the other’ from the mainstream life. The novel carries with it the ultimate transgression by the mainstream powerful class.
Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:


