Chapter 4

ART: ARUNDHATI ROY’S FICTIONAL WORLD
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4.1 Introduction

Roy ventures herself into the realm of art with her debut novel The God of Small Things. She brought laurels to the country by winning the coveted Booker Prize in 1997 when India celebrated the 50th anniversary of Indian Independence. Roy is the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian woman to have won this prize. She established her indelible mark as an artist in the international arena when she bagged the 29th Booker Prize for the Common Wealth Nation’s best novel. She also received yet another literary distinction by being voted among the top fifty greatest women writers of all time for her Booker Prize winning novel The God of Small Things. Her novel is placed at the 20th position among the top fifty women writers.

Mr. K. R. Narayanan, the then President of India, congratulated Roy for having brought laurels to the country at the momentous time of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of Indian Independence. Pathak quotes the words of the President of India:

I was delighted to learn that you have been awarded the Booker Prize for this year. Please accept my hearty congratulations. All of us in India are proud of your achievement (10).

Roy’s The God of Small Things was translated into more than thirty eight languages across the globe. Though the book remained in the best seller lists of both the New York Times and the London Times for many weeks, the novel became a controversial one in India and more particularly in Kerala. Its controversies were mainly associated with the Communist Party in Kerala, especially the false representation of Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the first
Chief Minister of Kerala. Roy had to face many accusations from the Communist leaders for fictionalizing the ancestral home of E. M. S. Namboodiripad and its subsequent conversion into a five-star hotel for the European tourists. A lot of agitation erupted from many parts of Kerala against Roy for depicting the Communist veteran E. M. S. Namboodiripad in the novel *The God of Small Things* from the point of view of bourgeois ideology:

The Hotel People liked to tell their guests that the oldest of the wooden houses, with its air-tight, paneled storeroom which could hold enough rice to feed an army for a year, had been the ancestral home of Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad, ‘Kerala’s Mao Tse-tung,’ they explained to the uninitiated … Comrade Namboodiripad’s house functioned as the hotel’s dining room, where semi-suntanned tourists in bathing suits sipped tender coconut water (served in the shell), and old communists, who now worked as fawning bearers in colourful ethnic clothes, stooped slightly behind their trays of drinks (126).

The excessive pornographic scenes in *The God of Small Things* resulted in filing a complaint against Roy in the court under section 292 of the Indian Penal Code for charges of obscenity. The so-called controversies increased the immense popularity of the book and the people were really mad after it to have an early glimpse of it. Roy’s fictional world is presented through *The God of Small Things* and the novel is unique in every aspect. Her fictional world encompasses a vast canvas and her screenplays have also won enough popularity within the country. Roy had acted in the role of a village girl in the award winning movie *Massey Sahib* and wrote
screenplays for *In which Annie Gives it those Ones* and *Electric Moon*. A ray of hope ascended into the horizon when the screenplay *In which Annie Gives it those Ones* was shown on the National Television in a last-night slot in 1988. In 1989, *In which Annie Gives it those Ones* won the best film award in languages other than those specified in Schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution at the National Film Festival. It also won an award for best screenplay. Through her screenplays, Roy made herself known to the public as a script writer. Her ingenious craftsmanship in storytelling resulted in the creation of *The God of Small Things* as a novel of artistic innovation. She took four and half years to complete the novel and its success was really celebrated by the media.

In the epigraph to *The God of Small Things*, John Berger writes “Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one.” His view in the epigraph supports the contentious issue that the book contains autobiographical elements. Ammu, the central character in *The God of Small Things*, represents Roy’s mother Mary Roy. She like Ammu married a Bengali man, became the mother of two children and suffered the consequences of intercommunity marriage. Rahel, one of the two-egg twins in the novel, resembles Roy who has also studied in the Delhi School of Architecture. In an interview published in *India Today* entitled “My Daughter and I” Arundhati Roy’s mother Mary Roy affirms and denies the autobiographical elements in the novel:

I was a woman separated from my husband. We are not divorced, though I tried to hide the pain from my children. It is only when I read her book that I realized that even at five she was conscious that we were unwelcome in the
native home … In the book Arundhati lampoons almost all the people who surrounded her at that time … It is a work of fiction. She had drawn the bare bones of the characters from the family. But it is not wise of me to say that I am ‘Ammu’ (26).

Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is a unique blend of fiction and reality. She has located Ayemenem as the epi-centre of her fictional world. Roy has knitted the saga of the Ayemenem House with four generations, commencing from Reverend E. John Ipe and Aleyooty Ammachi and culminating with the children Rahel, Estha and Sophie Mol. The Meenachal River has taken the role of a character in the novel *The God of Small Things*. It’s an abode of solace and comfort for most of the characters in the novel. The Meenachal River has become the part and parcel of Ayemenem House as it witnesses two major events: the death of Sophie Mol and the fervent union of Velutha and Ammu. The death of Sophie Mol was purely an accident but it was fabricated into a deliberate attempt of murder from the part of Velutha. Roy’s Ayemenem reminds us of R. K. Narayan’s ‘Malgudi’ and Thomas Hardy’s ‘Wessex’ novels. The Ayemenem of *The God of Small Things* is in fact Aymanam, the native village of Roy. Barnabas says:

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The fictional Ayemenem is a place of social, political and moral corruption. It is a society where untouchability has acceptance; where the body odour of a paravan can be offensive. It is also a place characterized by political degeneration and opportunism (296).
Ayemenem, the fictional arena of *The God of Small Things*, becomes the finest specimen of the post-colonial India. She has universalized Ayemenem with its good and bad aspects alike. The fast developing hybrid culture has been vividly portrayed by Roy in her novel. The nostalgic elements do not dominate Roy’s novel. She has portrayed her own native place and comes up with a conclusion that the so-called traditional values have now become consumer products to attract the foreigners. The fifth chapter of the novel is entitled “God’s Own Country” and it refers to Kerala and its geographical environment. When Rahel returns to Ayemenem, she goes to the Meenachal River and to her surprise

it greeted her with a ghastly skull’s smile, with holes where teeth has been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed … Once it had the power to evoke fear. To change lives. But now its teeth were drawn, its spirit spent. It was just a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea. Bright plastic bags blew across its viscous, weedy surface like subtropical flying-flowers (124).

The Meenachal River is the heart and soul of Roy’s fictional world. She can’t stop blaming the people responsible for the contamination of the Meenachal River. The river has got a lot of significance in the lives of its people. It is an index of the people living in that particular locality. Roy has thoroughly criticized the attitude of the people and their negligence to keep the rivers clean and tidy in her novel *The God of Small Things*. The pathetic condition of the river has been witnessed by Estha as he walked
along the banks of the river that smelled of shit and pesticides brought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The one that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils (13).

Roy through her novel *The God of Small Things* informs the readers across the globe that the actual ‘God’s Own Country’ is different from the ‘God’s Own Country’ of the imagination. Kerala occupies a central stage in the international tourist map mainly due to its art and culture and also due to its lush green surroundings. The History House in *The God of Small Things* becomes the ‘Heritage’ hotel for the rich European tourists (126). The European tourists are lured in such a way that they see only the brighter aspect of ‘God’s Own Country.’

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy says:

> On warm days the smell of shit lifted off the river and hovered over Ayemenem like a hat … The hotel guests were ferried across the backwaters, straight from Cochin. They arrived by speedboat, opening up a V of foam on the water, leaving behind a rainbow film of gasoline … They had built a tall wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching on Kari Saipu’s estate. There wasn’t much they could do about the smell (125).

Kari Saipu’s house had been renovated to suit the growing needs of the tourists. The ‘History House’ is now well furnished with “artificial canals and connecting bridges” (126). The ‘History House’ has lost its significance and its rich cultural heritage as it becomes “Toy Histories for rich tourists to play in” (126). In the name of tourism development, the Keralites commercialize their tradition and culture. In
the ‘Heritage’ hotel, the so-called traditional things are displayed purely from a point of view of business:

A reed umbrella, a wicker couch. A wooden dowry box. They were labelled with edifying placards which said *Traditional Kerala Umbrella and Traditional Bridal Dowry Box* (126).

In order to delve the European tourists into the magnanimity of rich Indian culture and the various art forms of Kerala, the cleaver hotel people include the truncated Kathakali performances in the tour package. Kathakali, the traditional temple art, is now performed near the swimming pool for the convenience of the European tourists. They enjoy the traditional temple art of Kerala with a lot of ease when they play with their children in the water. The traditional value of the temple art is completely lost, “So ancient stories were collapsed and amputated. Six-hour classics were slashed to twenty-minute cameos” (127). Roy’s *The God of Small Things* serves the double purpose of ‘Art for Art’s Sake’ and ‘Art for Life’s Sake’. Fiction and reality meet in the right ratio and this harmony adds to the charm of *The God of Small Things*. Prasad quotes Roy as:

Fiction for me has been a way of trying to make sense of the world as I know it. It is located very close to me – this book. It is located in the village that I grew-up. If I had to put it very simply, it is about trying to make the connections between the smallest of things and biggest ones and to see how they fit together (136).
The non-conformist and artistic elements make *The God of Small Things* unrivalled in the literary arena. Roy has strictly adhered to the original sense of the term ‘novel’, so as to present a little new thing through her work. In her endeavor to create *The God of Small Things*, Roy is not indebted to any of her predecessors. She took the liberties of an artist by burying the so-called conventions and approached the novel from a different dimension. The novel gives pleasure to the readers and more significantly it can be enjoyed as children’s book. Dodiya justifies the Booker Prize that has been awarded to Roy in the following words:

The reason why the judges chose Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* for the Booker Prize is very clear. What the judges most admired was not its Indian setting, its slightly hackneyed reworking of the old duchess and the gamekeeper plot in the story of cross-caste erotic love between a Paravan and a Syrian Christian, or the admittedly valuable insight Roy offers into the complicated politics of Kerala. It was, rather, her verbal exuberance: almost alone among the 106 entries Roy has her own voice, her own signature. For the Booker Prize, it needed a writer of Roy’s impish humour and feel of the language to see irony - and pathos - here. It is out of this tragic grandeur that Roy wove her novel. Twisting the language to suit her own storytelling. She managed to make the whole world a stage for Ayemenem and its people … Roy triumphed because unlike others, she had the guts and the overwhelming talent to invent a new idiom and vocabulary to tell the story of a seemingly remote people (3).
Roy breaks the shackles of the conventional style of the novel in *The God of Small Things* and at the same time retains some of the artistic qualities. The uniqueness of the novel rests in her innovative use of language and for that purpose Roy surpassed the limit of elementary grammar. The non-conformist and artistic elements add to the success and popularity of *The God of Small Things*. Roy is uncertain about writing another novel yet her fame will last forever with her debut novel *The God of Small Things*.

### 4.2 Non-conformist Elements in *The God of Small Things*


The original talent of the writer is seen through her non-conformist elements in the novel *The God of Small Things*. The novel makes a dawn of a new era in Indo-Anglican literature with Roy’s new artistic techniques in *The God of Small Things*. A non-conformist will be born in literature when the existing style of writing needs an immediate redress. Roy rose to the occasion with her new idiom and vocabulary.
to suit the narrative techniques of her novel. She keeps on changing the techniques throughout the novel to offer something new to the readers. Roy employs in her novel a blend of all the modern narrative techniques, such as stream of consciousness, magic realism and montage. The unification of these narrative techniques adds to the vitality and exuberance of the novel. Ahamed charges heavily on Roy for having “over-written” the novel (103). The novel *The God of Small Things* was in fact an experimental work of art in its complete sense of the term. Roy didn’t know of its worth in the beginning when she went in search of an Indian publisher. Her experimental work began to show the early signs of success when Pankaj Mishra who was then an editor with Harper Collins in India wanted to publish the book. Mishra took the initiative and sent the copies of the manuscript to three British publishers - Harper Collins, John Sadler and David Godwin. After having seen the bright prospect of this book, David Godwin came to India for getting Roy’s signature to publish the novel. Roy describes the historic venture of David Godwin in the Acknowledgements of *The God of Small Things* as “For taking that impulsive trip to India. For making the waters part.” The book was an instantaneous success and it surprised the literary world. Roy speaks about the different stages of her experiment with the novel in an interview:

*Writing The God of Small Things* was a fictional way of making sense of the world I lived in, and the novel was the technical key with which I did it. I didn’t have any drafts, because I didn’t write the novel from beginning to the end in a linear way. I would write something here, something there, until the whole book emerged. That’s one of the reasons why I didn’t show anybody
the book before it was finished. There wasn’t anything to show (When you have Written a Book 106).

Roy emerged herself as a non-conformist in literature with the publication of The God of Small Things. The non-conformist elements are presented by Roy through various artistic techniques. The book could have got only a poor response from the readers if the non-conformist elements were absent in the novel. The story of The God of Small Things is an ordinary one but its style of presentation fascinates the readers. The clandestine relationship between Ammu and Velutha and the theme of incest do not strike anyone. Roy seems to be artistically iconoclastic in her novel The God of Small Things. She has developed a new style in Indian English writing. Roy surprised the readers with her new style by playing with words and sounds. Her deviation from the normal style resulted in the spontaneous overflow of language with a lot of fun and frolic. The book conquers the minds of the readers as it is an amalgam of different artistic techniques. Roy’s extensive use of mother-tongue in the novel was in fact an immediate way of identifying herself with the milieu of the novel. She tried to imitate and hate the colonizer in her novel The God of Small Things with the use of English language. Roy could present the novel in a particular way that had not much parallel in the world of fiction.

4.2.1 Its Artistic Iconoclasm

Roy’s novel The God of Small Things got international attention for its artistic iconoclasm. She tried to experiment with the English language and explored the various innovations that could be possible even within the language. The Booker
Committee has described Roy as “an architect in literary circle molding language in all shapes and sizes as was never done before at least in the Indian literary context” (Surendran 247). Roy paid little attention to grammar and sentence structure in her novel and at the same time her language communicated the intended meaning. The new style that Roy brought out through her novel shattered the conventional methods of storytelling and the basic patterns of sentence structure. Roy upholds the principle that language is a tool of communication and the speaker of the language has the freedom to use it as one prefers. Dhawan quotes Roy as:

Language is a very reflective thing for me. I don’t know the rules, so I don’t know if I have broken them … My language is mine. It’s the way I think and the way I write (21).

Roy seems to be artistically iconoclastic in The God of Small Things. The stylistic innovations make the novel unique and this aspect brings vitality and exuberance to the novel. The novel is a linguistic experiment with the English language and every aspect of the novel is unique in its own sphere. Shomit Miller, Roy’s close friend and author, says that the book “uses language in a way that is rare … very rarely do you get someone who can tear apart the rules and give you something fresh and not pretentious” (Surendran 247-48).

Roy italicizes certain words, phrases and even sentences in her novel The God of Small Things. The words in italics convey a special meaning apart from the original ones. In the first chapter of the novel, Ammu rushes to the Kottayam police station after the funeral ceremony of Sophie Mol to rectify the mistake committed by the
police. The Police Inspector Thomas Mathew retaliated by saying “Police didn’t take statements from *veshayas* or their illegitimate children” (8). The Malayalam word ‘veshayas’ has been italicized so as to stand apart from the rest of the words. When the Inspector tapped Ammu’s breasts with his baton, the italicized words “*Tap tap*” followed as if “he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered” (8). The italicized words in the novel stand out from the ordinary ones and they reveal some of the hidden aspects of a person’s life. When Estha was admitted to a boy’s school in Calcutta, the teacher wrote in the feedback column of the annual progress report as “*An average student, or satisfactory work*” (11). The teacher added a recurring complaint against Estha who “*Does not participate in group activities.*” The words in italics expose the character of Estha and inform the readers to watch out the rest of his life. Rahel was a notorious student at Nazareth Convent and one day she was “caught outside her Housemistresses garden gate decorating a knob of fresh cowdung with small flowers” (16). As a punishment, she was asked to look up the word ‘depravity’ in the Oxford Dictionary to read aloud at assembly. Roy has italicized the word ‘depravity’ in the text and its subsequent meaning “*The quality or condition of being deprived or corrupt*” (16). Rahel was expelled from the school due to repeated complaints from senior girls. When she left the school, the teachers whispered to each other “*as though she didn’t know how to be a girl*” (17). The italicized words strike the readers as they are the key points to understand a person’s character. Estha and Rahel were forbidden to use the vernacular language. When Baby Kochamma caught them speaking in Malayalam, she ordered them to write impositions and the children wrote “*I will always speak in English, I will*
always speak in English” a hundred times each (36). The italicized sentence throws light on Baby Kochamma’s colonizing attitude towards the children. Malayalam words and songs have been italicized so as to stand apart from the English language.

As per the rules of grammar, a sentence should begin with a capital letter. If there is a proper noun in a sentence, it should also begin with a capital letter. Roy in her novel The God of Small Things has taken the liberties of an artist to use the capital letters wherever she liked. When Estha came back to Ayemenem from his father after a time gap of twenty three years, it was being referred to as “re-Returned” (9). The letter ‘R’ appears in capital form in the word ‘re-Returned.’ The novelist makes use of this technique so as to add emphasis to certain words and to invite the immediate attention of the readers. This unconventional artistic technique has been employed by the author throughout the novel. Baby Kochamma didn’t like the children and “she deemed them Capable of Anything. Anything at all” (29). The letter ‘C’ in ‘Capable’ and ‘A’ in ‘Anything’ appear in capital form to indicate the fact that the children dare to do anything at any extreme.

Roy ventures to convert her ideas in the novel through subjectless sentences. She employs subjectless sentences in The God of Small Things after having made the idea clear in the preceding sentences. Rahel used to write occasional letters to both Chacko and Mammachi but she abstained from visiting Ayemenem for a long time. Two subjectless sentences have been used by Roy in this particular context. They are “Not when Mamachi died. Not when Chacko emigrated to Canada” (18).
The novel is noted for its unorthodox way of forming sentences without space between words. An example for such a type of sentence in the novel includes:

“Whatisyourname?” (127). Words run into each other in certain sentences as in

“The singing stopped for a ‘Whatisit? Whathappened?’ and for a furrywhirring and a sariflapping”(6). Ungrammatical sentences are used in the novel as in the sentence

“The front verandah bare” (2). The sentence has no main verb and it is followed by a single word sentence “Unfurnished” (2). Some of the sentences in Roy’s novel

*The God of Small Things* are noted for their structural compactness and they communicate even without the help of verbs “An alarm clock. A red car with musical horn. A red mug for the bath room. A wife with a diamond. A brief case with important papers” (63).

Roy has employed brackets as an artistic device in the narration of *The God of Small Things*. She has extensively used brackets to stuff additional piece of information either for serious or comic effect. In the first chapter of *The God of Small Things*, there is a description of a bus journey in which pregnant Ammu is travelling along with her husband Baba. The journey is described by Roy as:

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).

The information given in the bracket reminds the readers that Estha and Rahel have been “born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs” (2). The extensive use
of brackets very often functions as the authorial voice in the novel *The God of Small Things*:

What Vellya Paapan (who knew most things) *didn’t* know was that Kari Saipu’s house was the History House (whose doors were locked and windows open) (199).

In order to intensify certain concepts in the novel, Roy resorts to the method of repetition of words and phrases. The verb ‘loved’ is repeated a number of times in the novel as “He loved them. He loved her … She loved him, they loved the children, the children loved them. They all loved each other” (105). The repetition of the word ‘past’ creates a poetic effect in the text when Ousa, the Bar Nowl, watches Ambassador E. Pelvis walk:

Past floating yellow limes in brine …

Past green mangoes, cut and stuffed …

Past glass casks of vinegar …

Past shelves of pectin …

Past trays of bitter gourd …

Past gunny bags bulging with garlic …

Past mounds of fresh green peppercorns.

Past a heap of banana peels …

Past the label cupboard full of labels.

Past the glue.
Past the glue-brush.

Past an iron tub of empty bottles …

Pat the lemon squash (193).

Nityanandam comments about Roy’s method of repeating certain words and phrases in *The God of Small Things* as:

Roy’s repeated use of this intermittent repetition called PLOCE suggests that she is attempting to bring certain kind of eloquence to her style. However, when used repeatedly it begins to jar and even indicate a poverty of linguistic resources. In Roy’s use of repetition as a linguistic stylistic device … the reader occasionally feels a certain annoyance (115).

Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is replete with innovative words and phrases. She sacrificed the rules of grammar for better convenience and rhetorical effect. Roy’s artistic iconoclasm in *The God of Small Things* broke all the so-called conventions within the English language. Roy in fact played with words and very often distorted them into various parts to see their comic effect in the novel. Roy splits a word into two or three as in the case of “Lay. Ter” (146) and “Never. The. Less” (55). Roy takes the liberties of an artist to form certain words which make sense as in the case of “stoppit” and “stoppited” (300). To achieve an expressive force within the language, Roy has deliberately given deviant spelling for certain words. Thus, ‘divorced’ is “die-vorced” (130), ‘America’ is “Amayrica” (129), ‘hello’ is “hell-oh” (143), ‘minute’ is “mint” (132) and ‘exactly’ is “eggzackly” (324). One of the innovative devices that Roy has used in the novel is the reversal
of the order of letters in certain words and sentences. Thus the phrase “The adventures of Susie Squirrel” becomes “ehT serutnevA fo eisuS lerriuqS” (59-60) and “BE INDIAN, BUY INDIAN” is transformed into “NAIDNI YUB, NAIDNI EB” (58). This method of writing words and sentences in the reverse order has been extensively used by the author. It’s rather easy for the writer but laborious for the readers.

Roy’s artistic iconoclasm in *The God of Small Things* is a genuine power play of words by a master craftsman. She has explored the various possibilities within language and enchanted the readers with her magical style. The artistic iconoclasm in Roy brought out a new paradigm in indian English writing. The innovative techniques in the novel surprised even the native speakers of English language. Roy invented a new idiom for her work of fiction that automatically gave rise to the popularity of *The God of Small Things*. Through her artistic iconoclasm in the novel, Roy not only tried to tell the story but also sell the story.

4.2.2 Its Exorbitant Use of Vernacular Language

Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is replete with vernacular language and the book seems to be difficult for the native speakers of English. The exorbitant use of the Malayalam language reveals the identity of the writer as a person who speaks Malayalam as her mother tongue. Roy has introduced so many Malayalam words, phrases and sentences to the western readers. She incorporated the Malayalam words and phrases with their English spelling in the novel and some of them didn’t have their literal translations in English. Though many writers have used vernacular
language in their works of art, no one has attempted this at the rate Roy has used in her novel *The God of Small Things*. Roy could perfectly fit in the Malayalam words within the texture of the work without sacrificing the quality of the novel. ‘Veshyas’ is the first Malayalam word that appear in the novel *The God of Small Things* (8). Roy could have substituted the Malayalam word ‘veshayas’ with its English translation ‘prostitutes’ but that would spoil the entire effect of the situation. In Malayalam, ‘veshayas’ is the most derogatory term that a person can use against a woman and it also throws light on the cultural and social background of the person concerned. Roy wanted to preserve the social implication of the word in Malayalam and to reveal the attitude of the police towards women in the society.

Reverend E. John Ipe, the grandfather of Ammu, was known as ‘Punnyan Kunju’ which in Malayalam means “Little Blessed One” (23). The English translation of the nick name doesn’t incorporate the social implication that exists in the mind of the people. The italicized phrase “Emperors of the Realm of Taste” appears on the label of ‘Paradise Pickles’ and this particular phrase is the “unsolicited contribution” of K. N. M. Pillai (46). Roy argues that “Ruchi lokathinde Rajavu”, the literal translation of that phrase in Malayalam sounded a little ludicrous than “Emperors of the Realm of Taste” (46).

Muralidharan, the level-crossing lunatic, is presented in the novel as counting the numbers in Malayalam “Onner, Runder, Moonner” which means one, two and three in English (64). This instance shows that the most suitable language a mad person can use is his mother tongue. It is the natural way of responding to a situation which adds to the realistic tone of *The God of Small Things*. One more
instance takes place in the novel when the workers shout their slogans in Malayalam “Inquilab Zindabad! Thozhilali Ekta Zindabad!” (66). The English translations of the slogans have already been given in the novel as “Long Live the Revolution!” and “Workers of the World Unite!” (66). The speakers of the Malayalam language have got a peculiar habit of mixing up Malayalam with English. Roy has brought out this mannerism of the Keralites and such kinds of sentences are spoken by Chacko in the novel as “Thanks, Keto! … Valarey thanks!” (70). Here the Malayalam words ‘keto’ and ‘valarey’ have been used along with ‘thanks.’ The English equivalent for those Malayalam words have not been given by the author in the text and ‘keto’ means ‘Do you hear?’ and ‘valarey’ means ‘so much’. Malayalam words have been used frequently by the author in the novel The God of Small Things. The Malayalam word ‘Ividay’ which means ‘here’ is not followed by any English equivalent in the novel The God of Small Things (71). Roy was least worried about the non-native speakers of Malayalam when she used so much of Malayalam words, phrases and even sentences in her novel The God of Small Things without their English equivalents. In the novel, certain interesting phrases appear as “Poda Patti!” (90) “Eda Cherukka! Orkunnilley?” (128) and “Aiyyo Paavam” (131) without any explanation in English. Roy has even ventured to use full Malayalam sentence as “Chacko saar vannu” (170) and the literal translation of the sentence is ‘Mr. Chacko has come.’ A popular Malayalam song from the ‘Onam’ boat race appears in the tenth chapter of the novel as:

*Thaiy thaiy thaka thaiy thaiy thom!*

*Enda da korangacha, chandi ithra thenjadu?*
An appeal to an over-ripe guava threatening to fall from its tree and make a mess on the ground is presented in the form of a song in Malayalam:

**Pa pera-pera-pera-perakka**

(Mr gugga-gug-gug-gug-guava,)

*Ende parambil thooralley.*

(Don’t shit here in my compound.)

*Chetende parambil thoorikko,*

(You can shit next door in my brother’s compound,)

**Pa pera-pera-pera-perakka**

(Mr gugga-gug-gug-gug-guava) (206).

To add local flavour to the novel, Roy has quoted a couple of lines from the most celebrated song from the film ‘Chemeen’:

**Pandoru mukkuvan muthinu poyi,**

(Once a fisherman went to sea,)

**Padinjaran kattathu mungi poyi,**

(The west wind blew and swallowed his boat,)

**Arayathi pennu pizhachu poyi,**
(His wife on the shore went astray,)

_Avaney kadalamma kondu poyi._

(So Mother Ocean rose and took him away) (219 - 220).

Many of the Malayalam words that appear in the second half of _The God of Small Things_ have not been italicized. Roy doesn’t want to differentiate them from the English vocabulary and they go hand in hand to add colour to the novel. In chapter ten of _The God of Small Things_, Roy gives a list of the fish that have been found in the Meenachal River. The names of fish appear in Malayalam and they include “The flat, foolish pallathi⁴, the silver paral⁵, the wily, whiskered koori⁶, the sometimes karimeen⁷” (203). In the same chapter, the menu for breakfast and lunch have been given in Malayalam as “…idi appams⁸ for breakfast, kanji⁹ and meen¹⁰ for lunch” (210). A combination of Tamil and Malayalam phrases appear in the twentieth chapter of the novel as “Rombo maduram¹¹” (323).

The twelfth chapter of the novel is entitled “Kochu Thomban.” In Malayalam, there is no such word called ‘thomban’ and the correct Malayalam word is ‘komban’ and it refers to a tusker. Roy has taken the liberties of an artist even to change the accepted words in Malayalam. A similar instance takes place in the case of a nursery rhyme:

_Koo-koo kokum theevandi_

_Kooki paadum theevandi_

_Rapakal odum theevandi_

_Thalannu nilkum theevandi_ (285).
In this nursery song, Roy has conveniently changed a word in the second line. The actual word is ‘paayum’ which means ‘run quickly’, but this word has been replaced by ‘paadum’ meaning ‘will sing.’ The native speaker can easily notice such kinds of variation and to comprehend the novel in its full sense of the term, one should be literate in the Malayalam language. Though Malayalam words and phrases have troubled the foreign readers, the novel still retains its charm by its variety and vitality. The exorbitant use of Malayalam words, phrases and sentences evoked mixed response among the critics and readers. Roy didn’t draw any demarcation in the novel with regard to the English and Malayalam language. She could have easily translated the Malayalam words into English but she tried to preserve them as they are in the novel. In order to add the cultural significance to *The God of Small Things*, Roy resorted to her mother-tongue wherever she pleased.

It is not the responsibility of the author to add meaning to the text and there is no fixed meaning for any work of art. The author of *The God of Small Things* has ceased to exist and it is up to the readers to make meaning out of it.

### 4.3 Artistic Genius of Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*

Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is a tale concerning the small things of life. It is told with the help of so many other texts like *Heart of Darkness* and *The Tempest*. The novel *The God of Small Things* opens with Rahel’s visit to Ayemenem and she is one of the “two-egg twins … Born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs” (2). Estha is the brother of Rahel and he is older by eighteen minutes. The novel doesn’t have a linear narration; instead it makes use of the third person narrative where the point of view appears itself to be that of the
seven-year-old twins Estha and Rahel. Mahadevan quotes the Booker Chairperson Githan Beer as saying, “Roy funnels the history of South India through the eyes of seven-year-old twins” (83). Bhatt sums up the narrative strategy that has been employed in the novel as:

The story is narrated at two levels of time and the novelist moves smoothly backward and forward, interweaving the present and the past wonderfully well. The narrative zooms from one particular picture to another in a cinematographical manner highlighting certain aspects of life in the novel (137).

The artistic genius of Roy lies in the mingling of the present and the past with the help of stream of consciousness technique. The omniscient narrator intervenes in between so as to present an amalgam of incidents and events in the novel The God of Small Things. Joseph Warren Beach calls it a “chronologically looping method where the story does not proceed chronologically” (Mani 10).

The novel The God of Small Things is noted for the way children use language, very often distorting it for a comic effect. Rahel, Estha and Sophie Mol spent a whole day saying:

Nictitating

ictitating

titating

itating
Roy employs separate language for adults and children. The twins Estha and Rahel are so fond of reading backward. Miss Mitten, Baby Kochamma’s Australian missionary friend, presented a book entitled *The Adventures of Susie Squirrel* to the twins when she visited Ayemenem. Miss Mitten was disappointed when she noticed the children’s habit of reading backward. The children even taught Miss Mitten what palindrome meant, the possibility of reading backward and forward with the same meaning as in the words “Malayalam” and “Madam I’m Adam” (60). Miss Mitten was under the impression that the people of Kerala are known as ‘Keralesse’ instead of ‘Keralites.’ Estha disliked Miss Mitten to such an extent that he gathered all his energy to mock her from a child’s perspective, saying “It was a Highly Stupid Impression” (60). Miss Mitten registered her complaints with Baby Kochamma about Estha’s misbehavior and the children’s peculiar habit of reading backwards. She also added that “She had seen Satan in their eyes” (60). Baby Kochamma punished the children by giving them impositions “In future we will not read backwards. A hundred times. Forwards” (60). Miss Mitten turned out to be an interesting character to the children and the manner of her death brought incessant laughter to them:
A few months later Miss Mitten was killed by a milk van in Hobart, across the road from a cricket oval. To the twins there was hidden justice in the fact that the milk van had been reversing (60).

Baby Kochamma was a strict disciplinarian, especially with Estha and Rahel. She was so particular about English pronunciation. To ridicule Baby Kochamma and arouse laughter, the word ‘pronunciation’ is pronounced by the children as “Prer NUN Sea ayshun” (154). Baby Kochamma was wounded by such kind of teasing from children as she was a Catholic nun. Baby Kochamma becomes the butt of children’s wit and ingenuity.

The novel The God of Small Things emerges itself to be a powerful work of fiction with its innovations in style and diction. Language has been used in all possible shapes to effect noticeable change in the work of art. Roy’s productive use of English language in The God of Small Things has a rare phenomenon of high suggestiveness. The story of the novel has been wonderfully woven through the architectural pattern. The various figures of speech like metaphor, simile and imagery have been employed by Roy to make the language more appealing to readers. Language is the driving force of any work of art and Roy takes the credit for blending all the features of language in her novel. In A Handbook for the Study of Fiction, Altenbernd, and Leslie L. Lewis advocate the significance of language in the following words:

Language is the medium through which literature expresses itself, so that every aspect of fiction we have already discussed depends upon the author’s
words and his way of shaping them into sentences and paragraphs. While we
are normally not as alert to the implications of language in fiction as in poetry,
we cannot afford to ignore its contribution to the whole work of art. The
author’s word choice (whether formal or informal, literal or metaphorical), the
sonority or flatness of sentence form, and the allusiveness of his diction are all
elements of language that help to the significance of the story (73).

4.3.1 Its Architectural Pattern

Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* follows the architectural pattern both in
the design and outlook. She was trained as an architect at the Delhi School of
Architecture. The training in architecture tremendously helped Roy in writing *The
God of Small Things*. In the ‘Foreword’ to *In which Annie Gives it those Ones*, Roy
says:

> Studying architecture taught me to apply my understanding of structure, of
design and of minute observation of detail to things other than buildings. To
novels, to screenplays, to essays. It was an invaluable training (xii).

The novel *The God of Small Things* has an interesting structural format as the
story of the novel begins almost from the end and ends in the middle of the story.
The entire story of the novel makes a full circle in the very first chapter itself. The
first chapter of the novel ‘Paradise Pickles & Preserves’ is actually the blueprint to
*The God of Small Things* and it prepares the readers to be more curious about the
remaining chapters of the novel. In one of her interviews entitled “For me Language
is a Skin on my Thought”, Roy speaks about the structure of the novel:
In the first chapter I more or less tell you the story, but the novel ends in the middle of the story, and it ends with Ammu and Velutha making love and it ends on the word “tomorrow” (46).

In the architectural pattern, the climax of the story appears at the beginning and this method has got a lot of similarities with the inverted pyramid style of news writing. It is an accepted style that has been preferred across the globe in which the most important aspects of the story appear at the beginning. This method has got a lot of advantages as it caters to the needs of those readers who have got limited time at their disposal. The major events that appear at the beginning act as the index so that the readers may have the thread of the story. The novel *The God of Small Things* begins with the return of Rahel to Ayemenem, the focal point of all the activities. She meets her brother Estha, one of the “two-egg twins … older by eighteen minutes” (2). The Ayemenem House is described with its residues as:

The House itself looked empty. The doors and windows were locked. The front verandah bare. Unfurnished. But the skyblue Plymouth with chrome tailfins was still parked outside, and inside, Baby Kochamma was still alive (2).

The twins were separated for the last twenty-three years and it was Baby Kochamma who called back Rahel from the United States to look after her brother Estha. He was “re-Returned” to Ayemenem when his father had “retired from his carbon black job and was emigrated to Australia … and that he couldn’t take Estha with him” (9). Thus the twins unite once again in their life after a time gap of
twenty-three years. Their reunion crosses the limit of blood relationships as they indulge themselves in the act of incest: “That the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons. Like familiar lover’s bodies” (20).

The readers get a gist of the story in the very first chapter of *The God of Small Things*. Almost all the characters are being introduced with their peculiarities in the first chapter of the novel itself. Roy, after having given an outline of the entire plot in the first chapter of *The God of Small Things*, goes ahead like an architect to build up the story with all the minutest details. The twins Estha and Rahel are introduced first in the novel as they occupy the centre stage in the novel. Baby Kochamma, the villainous character in the novel, makes her presence in the novel from the very beginning. She is an unmarried woman and her actual name is Navomi Ipe. She was called Baby and later she became Baby Kochamma “when she was old enough to be an aunt” (2). She is now eighty-three and Rahel makes an apt observation about Baby Kochamma as “she’s living her life backwards” (22). Even at the age of eighty-three, Baby Kochamma dyes her hair, puts on the make-up, lipstick and a touch of rouge on her cheeks. Baby Kochamma is fond of jewellery and the manner of wearing it has been described as:

She was wearing a lot of jewellery. Rahel’s dead grandmother’s jewellery. All of it. Winking rings. Diamond earring. Gold bangles and a beautifully crafted flat gold chain that she touched from time to time reassuring herself that it was there and that it was hers. Like a young bride who couldn’t believe her good fortune (22).
Baby Kochamma had fallen in love with a handsome young Irish monk, Father Mulligan, at the age of eighteen. She even tried to seduce the Irish monk “with weekly exhibitions of staged charity” (23). In order to create an opportunity to talk to Father Mulligan, Baby Kochamma “force-bathed a poor village child at the well with hard red soaps that hurt its protruding ribs” (23). The love affair between Baby Kochamma and Father Mulligan suffered a temporary setback when he returned to Madras. Baby Kochamma couldn’t withstand the situation and she went against her father’s wishes by becoming a Roman Catholic nun. She got special permission from Vatican and she professed her vows for entering into a convent in Madras as novice. Baby Kochamma had hidden agendas as she went into the convent. For Baby Kochamma it was “Just to near him. Close enough to smell his beard. To see the coarse weave of his cassock. To love him just by looking at him” (24). To her chagrin, Baby Kochamma couldn’t convert her dream into a reality and she had to face a gruesome situation in the convent. The new destination seems to be out of her control as “Senior sisters monopolized the priests and bishops with biblical doubts more sophisticated than hers…” (24). As a reaction to it, she cultivated a “stubborn allergic rash” towards all those people whom she met (25). Baby Kochamma was pleased to leave the convent and continued to be Roman Catholic till the rest of her life. She was later sent to the University of Rochester in America for taking a diploma in Ornamental Gardening by her father Reverend Ipe. Baby Kochamma got this opportunity to go abroad for higher studies in substitute for her marriage. The decision came from her father who “realized that her daughter has now developed a ‘reputation’ and was unlikely to find a husband” (26).
Baby Kochamma’s passionate affair with Father Mulligan appears again in the seventh chapter of the novel which has the title ‘Cochin Harbour Terminus.’ After having given an insight into the life of Baby Kochamma in the very first chapter of the novel, Roy waits till the end of the novel to add a finishing touch to the affair between Baby Kochamma and Father Mulligan. Even though Baby Kochamma was physically separate from Father Mulligan, she continued to write in her diary as a matter of routine “I love you I love you” (297). Father Mulligan later became a Vaishnava, an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu. Even after the conversion, he kept in touch with Baby Kochamma by sending greeting cards on every New Year. Baby Kochamma was so much obsessed with Father Mulligan that she kept on writing in her diary even after his death “And every night, night after night, year after year, in diary after diary after diary, she wrote: I love you I love you” (298).

In the first chapter of the novel, Rahel’s thoughts ruminate over the past events and the readers become more and more curious about the rest of the events. In ‘Paradise Pickles & Preserves’, Rahel recalls to her mind what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man has done to Estha in the Abilash Talkies and the taste of tomato sandwiches that Estha has eaten in the Madras Mail. These past events have been given a good lead in the first chapter of the novel The God of Small Things. The funeral ceremony of Sophie Mol is presented in the beginning without the cause of her death:

Sophie Mol died because she

Couldn’t breathe.

Her funeral killed her (7).
After the death of Sophie Mol, Ammu goes to the Kottayam police station along with her children. She wanted to see Velutha who was in the police custody. The connection between Sophie Mol’s death and the arrest of Velutha is not made known in the beginning. The police inspector gives an insight into Ammu’s character when he calls her ‘veshya’ in the police station. Roy establishes the link between the central characters of the novel by the result of their inevitable action. Though Roy was criticized for having given the outline of the story in the first chapter, she could still keep the readers curious to know the rest of the story. Rahel introduces Velutha in the novel through a cinematic technique. As she looks at the painted ceiling of the church, she imagines someone like Velutha who might have done the job of painting. Rahel also thought what would happen to Velutha if he fell down from the rope ladder while he was painting the high dome of the church. Velutha’s inhuman death in the police custody goes hand in hand with Rahel’s imagination of Velutha as “She imagined him dropping like a star out of the sky that he had made. Lying broken on the hot church floor, dark blood spilling from his skull like a secret “(6).

The architectural pattern of *The God of Small Things* throws light on certain characters in the very first chapter of the novel. The significance of the first chapter is realized only at the end of the novel. Roy goes on to add flesh and blood to the novel after having given the outline in the very first chapter. The novel formally ends with the amorous relationship between Velutha and Ammu: “We do it to each other to… she turned to say it once again: ‘Naaley.’ Tomorrow.”
In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu and Velutha had to suffer the consequences of their illicit relationship. After the death of Ammu, the twins were badly treated by Baby Kochamma. They were in fact separated from each other for a long time and they unite once again in their life after twenty three years. Roy also agrees with the fact that the novel *The God of Small Things* is actually designed from an architectural perspective rather than writing it as an ordinary one. Prasad quotes Roy as:

I never believed that there was any sort of direct link between studying architecture and building-buildings. So far as I am concerned, I still practice architecture. Constructing my book was actually an architectural thing (138).

The architectural pattern has in fact added readability to the novel *The God of Small Things*. The structure of the novel appears to be a little complex owing to its non-linear narrative. In order to get a complete picture of a character or an event in the novel, one has to read it again and again. Kinger quotes Alok Rai who comments about the structure of *The God of Small Things* as:

I think of it as a sort of spiral structure, a brooding around a central event whose essential contours are made known fairly early in the novel. But at each turn of the spiral, one had been to a few more places, known other feelings and persons and is, therefore, enmeshed in an ever-denser cross-referentially, is able and required to endow that central event with more context, more resonance, more poignancy (133).
Roy has displayed her artistic genius through her architectural pattern in the novel *The God of Small Things*. She could inculcate what she had learned and the architectural training immensely helped her to write the novel. The first chapter of the novel functions as an index to the entire novel, highlighting the major issues in a nutshell. In the architectural pattern, the readers have got the thread of the story in their hand so as to cope with Roy’s flash-back and flash-forward techniques. The architectural pattern is one of the unique features of the novel *The God of Small Things*.

4.3.2 Its Figurative and Poetic Modes

Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is replete with figurative and poetic expressions. The novel has a classical opening when it is compared to Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* and T. S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land.” Chaucer’s opening line from the *Prologue* “April is the month of soothe” (56) is in sharp contrast to Eliot’s opening “April is the cruellest month” in “The Waste Land” (220). The novel *The God of Small Things* also begins with the description of the season:

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 window panes and die, fatly baffled in the sun (1).
Rani upholds the contention that “the structure of *The God of Small Things* is ambivalent in that it is at once fictional and poetic” (338). The poetic features are so conspicuous in the novel that one may find difficulty in distinguishing fiction from poetry. Roy has employed ornamental language for her fictional work which is rarely found in literary circle. Some of the passages in the novel lend themselves to the role of sheer poetry as in the description of Velutha:

Who was he?

Who could he have been?

The God of Loss.

The God of Small Things.

The God of Goose Bumps and Sudden Smiles.

He could do only one thing at a time.

*If he touched her, he couldn’t talk to her, if he loved her he couldn’t leave, if he spoke he couldn’t listen, if he fought he couldn’t win* (330).

Roy’s poetic passages in her novel are allusive of Emily Dickinson’s poem “Because I could not Stop for Death.” In the poem, the poet describes her journey towards the eternal world. As she moves towards her final destination along with her companion that is Death, she visualizes the following images:

We past the school where children played

At wrestling in a ring;

We past the fields of gazing grain,
We past the setting sun (332).

When Estha ‘re-Returned’ to Ayemenem, he walked all over the place to have a glimpse of the surroundings. Roy’s description of Estha’s visit to the place in the novel bears witness to her influence of Emily Dickinson and especially the use of the word ‘past’.

He walked past the village school that his great-grand father built for Untouchable children. Past Sophie Mol’s yellow church. Past the Ayemenem Youth Kung Fu Club. Past the Tender Buds Nursery School (for Touchables), past the ration shop that sold rice, sugar, and bananas that hung in yellow bunches from the roof (13).

Roy’s *The God of Small Things* can be conceived as a poem written in prose. The various features of poetry are found in the novel and the author has employed them with much ease and perfection. Roy has taken the ‘poetic license’ to coin certain words and phrases for the sake of convenience. Roy just like William Shakespeare created the language instead of using it. To Arundhati Roy, language was not a barrier to express her mind and she tried to experiment with language by mingling different types of genres. The language of the novel is metaphoric and ornamental. It is a rare quality not easily seen in the works of fiction. Roy resorts to various figures of speech to enrich the language of her novel. In the use of similes, Roy has displayed exceptional talent and simile seems to be her forte. Roy’s similes emulate from her own experience and minute observation of life. Some of the striking examples for similes from the text include:
(a) Mammachi was almost blind and always wore dark glasses when she went out of the house. Her tears trickled down from behind them and trembled along her jaw like raindrops on the edge of a roof (5).

(b) Rahel drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge (18).

(c) Most of Rahel’s hair sat on top of her head like a fountain (37).

(d) On warm days the smell of shit lifted off the river and hovered over Ayemenem like a hat (125).

Trivedi classifies Roy’s similes into three: “Similes which deal with characters, incidents and minute observation of life” (131). The examples given below from Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* illustrate Trivedi’s classification:

(a) She (Kochu Maria) looked like a bottled foetus that had escaped from its jar of formaldehyde in Biology lab and unshrivelled and thickened with age (170).

(b) Her face was pale and as wrinkled as a dhobi’s thumb from being in water for too long (4).

(c) When Margaret Kochamma saw her little daughter’s body, shock swelled in her like phantom applause in an empty auditorium (263).

Trivedi compares Roy with Kalidasa, especially in her use of similes:

If we accept Kalidasa as the classical master of similes, no doubt Arundhati Roy is the modern master of similes. In the plays of Kalidasa similes are used
either to glorify the character or to make an event meaningful and appealing, while in Roy similes are used sometimes to narrate the inner workings of a character’s mind. Both use similes in a very suggestive way, similes are not an ornament but integral part of their works (131).

Imagery turns out to be a major tool in the hands of Roy to picturise the ordinary things of life. It is a poetic device to arouse sensory responses and experiences with the effective use of language. Roy’s use of imagery helps in the better understanding of concepts and events in the novel *The God of Small Things*. Roy has attached a lot of importance to imagery in the novel and her experience in screenplay writing definitely helped her to create certain images in the novel. Roy’s images appeal to the senses and the readers are able to form concrete picture of the scene. When Father Mulligan became a Vaishnava, he sent a photograph to Baby Kochamma. In the photograph, Father Mulligan was in saffron addressing a gathering of widows who appeared themselves in white saris. Following this description the novelist gives a beautiful imagery which makes the readers think and laugh at the same time “A yolk addressing a sea of boiled eggs” (298).

Sharma, and Sashi Bala Talwar classify Arundhati Roy’s imagery in *The God of Small Things* into seven types (86 - 88). They include visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, kinetic, kinesthetic and static imageries. Visual image suggests still pictures as in “Her hair, dyed jet black, was arranged across her scalp like unspooled thread” (21). Auditory images bring to mind the effect of sound as in the example, “The yellow church swelled like a throat with the sound of sad singing” (4). Gustatory and olfactory images appeal to the sensory organs and they have
been used profusely by the author in *The God of Small Things*. Gustatory images are suggestive of the implied taste as in “touching it with their tongues, sucking it like a sweet” (17). The novel is stuffed with olfactory images as in the example “His particular Paravan smell. Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited” (257). Kinetic and kinaesthetic images depend upon movement for their aesthetic effect as shown in the examples “grief and bitterness at her daughter’s death coiled inside her like an angry spring” (31) and “Perspiration trickled through Chacko’s hair. He felt as though a company of ants was touring his scalp” (297). The static images evoke stillness as in “the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons” (20). Imagery has played a vital role in the colourful portrayal of characters, incidents and events in the novel.

Figures of speech like metaphor and oxymoron have been glaringly used in the novel *The God of Small Things*. Metaphor is an implied comparison without using the words ‘as’ or ‘like’. The example includes “His yellow teeth were magnets” (102). Oxymoron is a speech in which two incongruous words are used together purely for poetic effect as in “Beautiful Ugly Toads” (187). Apart from the figures of speech, Roy has employed various poetic devices in her novel which add to the poetic mode of the novel. There are three prominent refrains in the novel: one for Ammu and two for Velutha. The death of Ammu is mentioned thrice in the novel and whenever the author refers to her death the refrain follows:

Not old.

Not young.

But a viable die-able age (3, 161, 327).
Velutha is the central character in the novel *The God of Small Things* and he is referred to as ‘The god of small things’ and ‘The god of loss.’ He is an allegorical figure and takes after Christ who has carried the cross of suffering for others. Roy celebrates the life and deeds of Velutha through the refrain:

The God of Loss

The God of Small Things (265, 290, 330).

The strength and weakness of Velutha has been glorified through another refrain in the novel. Velutha is creative and proficient in doing many things but he is able to do only one thing at a time, “If he touched her, he couldn’t talk to her, if he loved her he couldn’t leave, if he spoke he couldn’t listen, if he fought he couldn’t win” (217, 330).

Alliteration is a poetic device which denotes the use of the same letter or sound at the beginning of words that come together in a line of poem. The first chapter of the novel *The God of Small Things* is entitled “Paradise Pickles & Preserves” and the /p/ sound is an example for alliterative use in the novel. Roy resorts to the use of alliteration in her novel that extends the poetic dimension of the novel as:

(a) Slanting silver ropes slammed into loose earth, ploughing it up like gunfire (1).

(b) The sad singing started again and they sang the same sad verse twice (6).

(c) His lower body lay like lead, as though it belonged to someone else (207).

Along with the alliterative use of language there are a number of sentences in the novel which follow the “stress timed rhythm” (Syamala 92).
(a) Though you couldn’t see the river from the house any more, like a seashell always has a sea-sense, the Ayemenem house still had a river-sense (30).

(b) It was this that grew inside her, and eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day. To use by night the boat that her children used by day (44).

(c) They stood there. Skin to skin. Her brownness against his blackness. Her softness against his hardness (334 - 335).

Roy makes use of symbolism, paradox and irony in her novel *The God of Small Things*. Velutha is the representative of ‘the god of small things’ and ‘the god of loss.’ He is the major symbol in the novel and the author has given prominence to Velutha in the very title of the novel itself. Velutha is symbolic of black complexion, untouchability, the muted voice and the oppressed section of the society. There is a confrontation between ‘the god of small things’ and ‘the god of big things.’ In the fight against ‘the god of big things’, Velutha, ‘the god of small things’ becomes ‘the god of loss.’ Sharma, and Sashi Bala Talwar comment on the major symbolism of *The God of Small Things* as:

*The God of Small Things* stands for the life of the weak and the helpless, whether they are small creatures like blue bottles, frogs and ants or human beings such as the victims of Hollick’s lust or the women who supply Chacko’s ‘man’s needs’ or children like Estha and Rahel … *The God of Small Things* represents all those people who are victimized by the forces of history, dead convention, false pride and respectability, the tyranny of the state and the
politics of opportunism and androcentric order. *The God of Small Things* is also the simple, natural life of children and innocent creatures (43).

There is an element of paradox with regard to Velutha’s name. As Roy says in the novel, “He was called Velutha – which means white in Malayalam – because he was so black” (73). Velutha has black complexion and he should have been called ‘Karutha’ which is the Malayalam word for something black. Paradoxical name has been used by Roy to refer to Velutha. The novel *The God of Small Things* is brimming with ironic incidents and situations. When Ammu went to the police station to make a statement in favour of Velutha, she was humiliated by the police Inspector Thomas Mathew. He went to the extent of staring at Ammu’s breasts and “tapped her breasts with his baton” (8). The behavior of the police inspector is revealed through his approach to the petitioner. The ironic situation arises when the police inspector Thomas Mathew upholds the values and principles of ‘Police’ in a red and blue board that is kept behind him. It reads:

**Politeness**

**Obedience**

**Loyalty**

**Intelligence**

**Courtesy**

**Efficiency** (8).

Comrade K. N. M Pillai is an ironic character in the novel *The God of Small Things*. When Velutha knocked at Comrade Pillai’s house for help, he sent his wife to open
the door. As she returned from the door, Comrade Pillai turned out to be sexy and
“He wanted to touch her breast immediately. But he had curd on his fingers and
there was someone at the door” (286). When Comrade Pillai saw Velutha at the
door, he tried to put up a serious facial expression. He already knew that Velutha
was in trouble and the purpose of the visit was to seek political support. Velutha
was desperate to put an end to the issue as he was allegedly involved in the murder
of Sophie Mol. Comrade K. N. M. Pillai took this opportunity to advise Velutha
with the following words:

But Comrade, you should know that Party was not constituted to support
workers indiscipline in their private life. *It is not in the Party’s interests to
take up such matters. Individuals’ interest is subordinate to the organization’s
interest. Violating party Discipline means violating Party Unity* (287).

Comrade K. N. M Pillai is not disciplined in his private life. But when it comes to a
matter of authority, Comrade K. N. M. Pillai assumes a different outlook and
projects a clean image to the society.

Roy has taken a lot of liberties as an artist in her novel to mould the language
according to her whims and fancies. Roy’s deliberate violation of rules can be
justified only on the ground of poetic license. It is in fact the rights of the poets to
shape the language as they wish so as to achieve a special poetic effect for their
works. The deviant spelling, lack of space between words, constant use of italics
and capital letters, ungrammatical and subjectless sentences, words and phrases
written in reverse order and new coinage of words and phrases are being condoned
by the magic power of poetic license. The effective use of poetic license by the author supports the contention that The God of Small Things is a poetic novel.

4.4 Conclusion

The fictional world of Arundhati Roy is presented through her novel The God of Small Things. Ayemenem becomes the centre point of Roy’s fictional world and the place attains the status of immortality in the world of fiction. The literary world was suddenly stricken by the innovative use of language in Roy’s novel. The autobiographical elements predominate in the novel. Rahel, the fictional character in The God of Small Things, takes after Arundhati Roy and the novel is a superb blend of fiction and reality. Roy has rejected all offers to convert her novel into a film. She is of the opinion that “Filmmakers would infuse the book with their own imagination. My book belongs to its readers” (Dhawan 16).

The charm of the novel rests at its special appeal to the readers with the non-linear narrative and the non-conformist elements. The novel has something new to offer to the readers and the dimension of the book goes on changing with the reader’s interest. At the outset, the story of the novel appears to be an ordinary one but as the narrative unfolds it becomes more and more complicated. Chacko and Ammu seek pleasure in extra-marital relationship and Rahel and Estha cross the traditional barriers by indulging themselves in incestuous relationship. Roy gives undue importance to pornographic scenes in the novel The God of Small Things. There are certain pornographic scenes in the novel that are loosely connected to the main thread of the story. The twins Estha and Rahel noticed Muralidharan, the
level-crossing lunatic, on their way to see the film *The Sound of Music* at Cochin. Muralidharan was naked and he “perched cross-legged and perfectly balanced on the milestone. His balls and penis dangled down, pointing towards the sign which said: COCHIN 23” (62). The readers of good taste will not enjoy such kinds of pornography. In the eleventh chapter of *The God of Small Things*, Ammu appears herself naked in the bathroom. Roy irritates the readers with vulgar description in which “Ammu undressed and put a red toothbrush under a breast to see if it would stay” (222). The passionate love affair between Ammu and Velutha in the novel is justified on the ground that it is relevant to the central theme of the novel.

The novel *The God of Small Things* is distinguished for its artistic and non-conformist elements. The book can be read from many perspectives and at the peripheral level it is a book for the children dealing with fun and frolic, suspension and excitement, and trial and punishment. At the deeper level, the novel can be seen as a criticism of life. The book satirizes the male dominated society, the approach and behaviour of the police and the political parties, untouchability and the dehumanization of the environment and the cancerous effect of globalization. The readers have mixed response about the characters and the theme of the novel. The language of the novel is fresh and child-like. It is fresh because it has no parallel in the world of fiction and child-like because it is more activity oriented. Gillian Beer, Professor of English at Cambridge University and Chairperson of the Booker Prize Committee, praises *The God of Small Things* for its linguistic inventiveness, its narrative power, and its courage. It was willing to move its readers, to embroil them in events they could not control. Books
often crumble on a second reading. But Roy’s had strengthened. The brilliance of her narrative contrivance became more and more apparent. The idiom of her language refreshed the mind. And the somber story that she told gripped the emotions (Mandal 31).

Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is a novel written in verse. The poetic qualities of the novel would be lost if it is translated or paraphrased according to the formalists. The form or the way in which the matter is presented gives uniqueness to the poem. Roy’s theme is not something completely new. It is a story of social objection to a love relationship between an upper class woman and a man from the lower strata of the society. Similar themes are common in the literary scenario. Still Roy’s work attracted the attention of the literary world only because of its mesmerizing poetic charm. As Shklovsky says, “art removes objects from the automatism of perception in several ways” (21). The structure of the work, different points of view, unconventional figures of speech and peculiar use of words and sentences and even word play bring a halo to Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things*. And that halo earned her the Booker Prize for fiction.

This chapter has brought out the non-conformist and artistic elements of Roy in her fictional work *The God of Small Things*. The novel is noted for its artistic iconoclasm and the exorbitant use of vernacular language. The novel becomes poetic prose with its figurative and poetic modes. Art has paved way for activism in Roy. In her fictional work, she is more concerned about the Meenachal River and the victims of the male dominated society. The next chapter of the thesis examines
how Roy goes in search of the real subaltern characters in her non-fictional writings.

**Notes**

1 Go away you bitch.

2 Hey guy! Don’t you remember?

3 Alas! Poor thing.

4 *Etroplus maculates*

5 *Puntius*

6 *Mystus*

7 *Etroplus suratensis*

8 It is a food item made of rice powder.

9 Porridge made of rice

10 Fish

11 Very sweet

12 One of the important characteristics of English is that it is a language with stress timed rhythm. This means that in English stressed syllables tend to occur at regular intervals of time.
Works Cited


