3. Caste: The present as History

One topic dealt with in the story is the caste system and particularly the position of the Untouchables. A few decades ago the caste system controlled every aspect in the life of an ordinary Indian, like the profession, the marriage partner and the everyday life. One does not really know about its origin but it is assumed that the castes were introduced by priests to steady their position of power. The myth of Purusha, the divine ancestor, can give an explanation for the emergence of the main castes called varnas in Sanskrit. The Brahmans originated from Purusha's mouth, his arms are represented by the Kshatriyas, his thighs by the Vaishyas and the Shudras are building his feet. The Brahmans traditionally were priests and academics, the Kshatriyas warriors and superior officers, the Vaishyas land owners, farmers and merchants and the Shudras mechanics and day labourers. Below these four castes the Untouchables are found, called Paria, Harijans or Dalits. The four varnas are again split into jatis (subcastes), of which 2000 to 3000 are said to exist.
Caste System in India

Throughout India, individuals are also ranked according to their wealth and power. For example, there are "big men" (bare admi, in Hindi) and "little men" (chhote admi) everywhere. "Big men" sit confidently on chairs, while "little men" come before them to make requests, either standing or crouching down on their haunches, certainly not presuming to sit beside a man of high status as an equal. Even men of nearly equal status who might share a string cot to sit on take their places carefully—the higher-ranking man at the head of the cot, the lower-ranking man at the foot.

Within families and kinship groupings, there are many distinctions of hierarchy. Men outrank women of the same or similar age, and senior relatives outrank junior relatives. Several other kinship relations involve formal respect. For example, in northern India, a daughter-in-law of a household shows deference to a daughter of a household. Even among young siblings in a household, there is constant acknowledgment of age differences: younger siblings never address an older sibling by name, but rather by respectful terms for elder brother
or elder sister. However, an older sibling may address the younger by name (see Linguistic Relations, ch. 4).

Even in a business or academic setting, where colleagues may not openly espouse traditional observance of caste or class ranking behavior, they may set up fictive kinship relations, addressing one another by kinship terms reflecting family or village-style hierarchy. For example, a younger colleague might respectfully address an older colleague as *chachaji* (respected father's younger brother), gracefully acknowledging the superior position of the older colleague.

### Purity and Pollution

Many status differences in Indian society are expressed in terms of ritual purity and pollution. Notions of purity and pollution are extremely complex and vary greatly among different castes, religious groups, and regions. However, broadly speaking, high status is associated with purity and low status with pollution. Some kinds of purity are inherent, or inborn; for example, gold is purer than copper by its very nature, and, similarly, a member of a high-ranking Brahman (see Glossary), or priestly, caste is born with more inherent purity than a member of a low-ranking Sweeper (Mehtar, in Hindi) caste. Unless the Brahman defiles himself in some extraordinary way, throughout his life he will
always be purer than a Sweeper. Other kinds of purity are more transitory--a Brahman who has just taken a bath is more ritually pure than a Brahman who has not bathed for a day. This situation could easily reverse itself temporarily, depending on bath schedules, participation in polluting activities, or contact with temporarily polluting substances.

Purity is associated with ritual cleanliness--daily bathing in flowing water, dressing in properly laundered clothes of approved materials, eating only the foods appropriate for one's caste, refraining from physical contact with people of lower rank, and avoiding involvement with ritually impure substances. The latter include body wastes and excretions, most especially those of another adult person. Contact with the products of death or violence are typically polluting and threatening to ritual purity.

During her menstrual period, a woman is considered polluted and refrains from cooking, worshiping, or touching anyone older than an infant. In much of the south, a woman spends this time "sitting outside," resting in an isolated room or shed. During her period, a Muslim woman does not touch the Quran. At the end of the period, purity is restored with a complete bath. Pollution also attaches to birth, both for
the mother and the infant’s close kin, and to death, for close relatives of
the deceased (see The Ceremonies of Hinduism; Islam, ch. 3).

Members of the highest priestly castes, the Brahmans, are generally
vegetarians (although some Bengali and Maharashtrian Brahmans eat
fish) and avoid eating meat, the product of violence and death. High-
ranking Warrior castes (Kshatriyas), however, typically consume
nonvegetarian diets, considered appropriate for their traditions of valor
and physical strength.

A Brahman born of proper Brahman parents retains his inherent purity
if he bathes and dresses himself properly, adheres to a vegetarian diet,
eats meals prepared only by persons of appropriate rank, and keeps
his person away from the bodily exuviae of others (except for
necessary contact with the secretions of family infants and small
children).

If a Brahman happens to come into bodily contact with a polluting
substance, he can remove this pollution by bathing and changing his
clothing. However, if he were to eat meat or commit other
transgressions of the rigid dietary codes of his particular caste, he
would be considered more deeply polluted and would have to undergo
various purifying rites and payment of fines imposed by his caste council in order to restore his inherent purity.

In sharp contrast to the purity of a Brahman, a Sweeper born of Sweeper parents is considered to be born inherently polluted. The touch of his body is polluting to those higher on the caste hierarchy than he, and they will shrink from his touch, whether or not he has bathed recently. Sweepers are associated with the traditional occupation of cleaning human feces from latrines and sweeping public lanes of all kinds of dirt. Traditionally, Sweepers remove these polluting materials in baskets carried atop the head and dumped out in a garbage pile at the edge of the village or neighborhood. The involvement of Sweepers with such filth accords with their low-status position at the bottom of the Hindu caste hierarchy, even as their services allow high-status people, such as Brahmans, to maintain their ritual purity.

Members of the Leatherworker (Chamar) caste are ascribed a very low status consonant with their association with the caste occupation of skinning dead animals and tanning the leather. Butchers, (Khatiks, in Hindi), who kill and cut up the bodies of animals, also rank low on the caste hierarchy because of their association with violence and death.
However, castes associated with ruling and warfare—and the killing and deaths of human beings—are typically accorded high rank on the caste hierarchy. In these instances, political power and wealth outrank association with violence as the key determinant of caste rank.

Maintenance of purity is associated with the intake of food and drink, not only in terms of the nature of the food itself, but also in terms of who has prepared it or touched it. This requirement is especially true for Hindus, but other religious groups hold to these principles to varying degrees. Generally, a person risks pollution—and lowering his own status—if he accepts beverages or cooked foods from the hands of people of lower caste status than his own. His status will remain intact if he accepts food or beverages from people of higher caste rank. Usually, for an observant Hindu of any but the very lowest castes to accept cooked food from a Muslim or Christian is regarded as highly polluting.

In a clear example of pollution associated with dining, a Brahman who consumed a drink of water and a meal of wheat bread with boiled vegetables from the hands of a Sweeper would immediately become polluted and could expect social rejection by his caste fellows. From that moment, fellow Brahmans following traditional pollution rules would refuse food touched by him and would abstain from the usual
social interaction with him. He would not be welcome inside Brahman homes--most especially in the ritually pure kitchens--nor would he or his close relatives be considered eligible marriage partners for other Brahmans.

Generally, the acceptance of water and ordinary foods cooked in water from members of lower-ranking castes incurs the greatest pollution. In North India, such foods are known as *kaccha khana*, as contrasted with fine foods cooked in butter or oils, which are known as *pakka khana*. Fine foods can be accepted from members of a few castes slightly lower than one's own. Local hierarchies differ on the specific details of these rules.

Completely raw foods, such as uncooked grains, fresh unpeeled bananas, mangoes, and uncooked vegetables can be accepted by anyone from anyone else, regardless of relative status. Toasted or parched foods, such as roasted peanuts, can also be accepted from anyone without ritual or social repercussions. (Thus, a Brahman may accept gifts of grain from lower-caste patrons for eventual preparation by members of his own caste, or he may purchase and consume roasted peanuts or tangerines from street vendors of unknown caste without worry.)
Water served from an earthen pot may be accepted only from the hands of someone of higher or equal caste ranking, but water served from a brass pot may be accepted even from someone slightly lower on the caste scale. Exceptions to this rule are members of the Waterbearer (Bhoi, in Hindi) caste, who are employed to carry water from wells to the homes of the prosperous and from whose hands members of all castes may drink water without becoming polluted, even though Waterbearers are not ranked high on the caste scale.

These and a great many other traditional rules pertaining to purity and pollution constantly impinge upon interaction between people of different castes and ranks in India. Although to the non-Indian these rules may seem irrational and bizarre, to most of the people of India they are a ubiquitous and accepted part of life. Thinking about and following purity and pollution rules make it necessary for people to be constantly aware of differences in status.

With every drink of water, with every meal, and with every contact with another person, people must ratify the social hierarchy of which they are a part and within which their every act is carried out. The fact that expressions of social status are intricately bound up with events that happen to everyone every day--eating, drinking, bathing, touching, talking--and that transgressions of these rules, whether deliberate or
accidental, are seen as having immediately polluting effects on the person of the transgressor, means that every ordinary act of human life serves as a constant reminder of the importance of hierarchy in Indian society.

There are many Indians, particularly among the educated urban elite, who do not follow traditional purity and pollution practices. Dining in each others' homes and in restaurants is common among well-educated people of diverse backgrounds, particularly when they belong to the same economic class. For these people, guarding the family's earthen water pot from inadvertent touch by a low-ranking servant is not the concern it is for a more traditional villager. However, even among those people whose words and actions denigrate traditional purity rules, there is often a reluctance to completely abolish consciousness of purity and pollution from their thinking.

It is surely rare for a Sweeper, however well-educated, to invite a Brahman to dinner in his home and have his invitation unself-consciously accepted. It is less rare, however, for educated urban colleagues of vastly different caste and religious heritage to enjoy a cup of tea together. Some high-caste liberals pride themselves on being free of "castism" and seek to accept food from the hands of very
low-caste people, or even deliberately set out to marry someone from a significantly lower caste or a different religion. Thus, even as they deny it, these progressives affirm the continuing significance of traditional rules of purity, pollution, and hierarchy in Indian caste system.

The caste system in India can be described as an elaborately stratified social hierarchy distinguishing India’s social structure from any other nation. Its history is multifaceted and complex.

Caste is a term, which is used to specify a group of people having a specific social rank and dates back to 1200 BCE. The Indian term for caste is jati, and generally designates a group that can vary in size from a handful to many thousands. There are thousands of jatis each with its own rules and customs. The various jatis are traditionally arranged in hierarchical order and fit into one of the four basic varnas the (Sanskrit word for “colors”).

The varna of Brahmans, commonly identified with priests and the learned Class.
The varna of Kshatriyas, associated with rulers and warriors including property owners.

The varna of Vaishyas, associated with commercial livelihoods (i.e. traders)

The varna of Shudras, the servile laborers

The Untouchables occupy a place that is not clearly defined by boundaries and is outside of the varna scheme. Their jobs (such as toilet cleaning and garbage removal) cause them to be considered impure and thus “untouchable.” Historically the untouchables were not allowed in temples and many other public places. In 1950 legislation was passed to prevent any form of discrimination towards the untouchables. Although legislation has affected the status of the people, they are yet very much a visible part of Indian society.

The earliest expressions of caste can be found in one of India’s vast bodies of religious scripture known as the Vedas, which are though to have been compiled between 1500 and 1000 BCE, although the time of their composition is under debate. They were transmitted orally for
many generations before being written down. Therefore, centuries may have passed before they were ever committed to writing.

These works are considered the source of ancient Indian wisdom. The first of the four basic Vedic books is the Rig Veda; a collection of over 1,000 hymns containing the basic mythology of the Aryan gods. The Rig Veda contains one of the most famous sections in ancient Indian literature in which the first man created, Purusa, is sacrificed in order to give rise to the four varnas.

Although the nation has a long and varied history, the role of the caste system pre-colonialism can be understood by focusing on the major eras in Indian history. Much of India is rural and that which is not, for the most part, is much more urban. With such a drastic difference in the city and the village there is also a difference in the way caste has been interpreted and implemented over the years.

The early system most represented something analogous to the medieval guild system. It allowed a specialization of society and each member knew their role. Much later in India's history, as India became more and more prevalent in the international scene the concept of the caste system began to have different connections. It was thought of as
backward by much of the west. The greatest changes in the perception as well as in the reality came with the coming and going of the British. British rule in many ways sharpened and expanded the norms and conventions.

In many ways the colonists saw the system as a hierarchical and inflexible means of perpetuating a Brahmin centered value system. This insistence played a big role in making the country more caste-conscious. It can be argued that the initiative in this was as much Indian as it was British. It is important, therefore, to understand India’s recent international situation. It was then, and continues to be today, in the process of adapting itself to a world that functions very differently from its own infrastructure, namely a Western-dominated global market economy. It is expected that during a period of such profound transition, a nation will do its best to assimilate to the norms set by the world powers of that time. The world power was England and its norms were founded on Western ideals.

In many ways representative government, more so in India that in any other part of England’s non-white colonial rule, furthered the development of caste affinities in the political arena. Nevertheless, for both the British and those in India, caste was used as means to not
only bridge many boundaries such as faith, region and economic status but it was also used as a tool to exclude, subjugate and disempower others. This was done in order for certain groups to gain advantage over others using the “divide and conquer” approach. India is a country in which there are hundreds of different cultures and languages: although this characteristic can be used to bring the nation together in pride, it can also be used to gain political and economic advantages. In the colonial quest for monetary exploitation, caste was used to create political allegiances and create obstacles in the path of unity.

More than one-sixth of India's population, some 160 million people live a precarious existence, shunned by much of society because of their rank as “untouchables” or Dalits—literally meaning “broken” people—at the bottom of India's caste system. Dalits are discriminated against, denied access to land, forced to work in degrading conditions, and routinely abused at the hands of the police and of higher-caste groups that enjoy the state's protection. In what has been called India’s “hidden apartheid,” entire villages in many Indian states remain completely segregated by caste. National legislation and constitutional protections serve only to mask the social realities of discrimination and violence faced by those living below the “pollution line.”
Despite the fact that “untouchability” was abolished under India’s constitution in 1950, the practice of “untouchability”—the imposition of social disabilities on persons by reason of their birth in certain castes—remains very much a part of rural India. “Untouchables” may not cross the line dividing their part of the village from that occupied by higher castes. They may not use the same wells, visit the same temples, drink from the same cups in tea stalls, or lay claim to land that is legally theirs. Dalit children are frequently made to sit in the back of classrooms, and communities as a whole are made to perform degrading rituals in the name of caste.

Most Dalits continue to live in extreme poverty, without land or opportunities for better employment or education. With the exception of a minority who have benefited from India’s policy of quotas in education and government jobs, Dalits are relegated to the most menial of tasks, as manual scavengers, removers of human waste and dead animals, leather workers, street sweepers, and cobblers. Dalit children make up the majority of those sold into bondage to pay off debts to upper-caste creditors. Dalit men, women, and children numbering in the tens of millions work as agricultural laborers for a few kilograms of rice or Rs. 15 to Rs. 35 (US$0.38 to $0.88) a day. Their upper-caste employers frequently use caste as a cover for exploitative
economic arrangements: social sanction of their status as lesser beings allows their impoverishment to continue.

Dalit women face the triple burden of caste, class, and gender. Dalit girls have been forced to become prostitutes for upper-caste patrons and village priests. Sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women are used by landlords and the police to inflict political “lessons” and crush dissent within the community. According to a Tamil Nadu state government official, the raping of Dalit women exposes the hypocrisy of the caste system as “no one practices untouchability when it comes to sex.” Like other Indian women whose relatives are sought by the police, Dalit women have also been arrested and tortured in custody as a means of punishing their male relatives who are hiding from the authorities.

The plight of India’s “untouchables” elicits only sporadic attention within the country. Public outrage over large-scale incidents of violence or particularly egregious examples of discrimination fades quickly, and the state is under little pressure to undertake more meaningful reforms. Laws granting Dalits special consideration for government jobs and education reach only a small percentage of those they are meant to benefit. Laws designed to ensure that Dalits enjoy equal rights and
protection have seldom been enforced. Instead, police refuse to register complaints about violations of the law and rarely prosecute those responsible for abuses that range from murder and rape to exploitative labor practices and forced displacement from Dalit lands and homes.

Political mobilization that has resulted in the emergence of powerful interest groups and political parties among middle- and low-caste groups throughout India since the mid-1980s has largely bypassed Dalits. Dalits are courted by all political parties but generally forgotten once elections are over. The expanding power base of low-caste political parties, the election of low-caste chief ministers to state governments, and even the appointment of a Dalit as president of India in July 1997 all signal the increasing prominence of Dalits in the political landscape but cumulatively have yet to yield any significant benefit for the majority of Dalits. Laws on land reform and protection for Dalits remain unimplemented in most Indian states.

Lacking access to mainstream political organizations and increasingly frustrated with the pace of reforms, Dalits have begun to resist subjugation and discrimination in two ways: peaceful protest and armed struggle. Particularly since the early 1990s, Dalit organizations
have sought to mobilize Dalits to protest peacefully against the human rights violations suffered by their community. These movements have quickly grown in membership and visibility and have provoked a backlash from the higher-caste groups most threatened—both economically and politically—by Dalit assertiveness. Police, many of whom belong to these higher-caste groups or who enjoy their patronage, have arrested Dalit activists, including social workers and lawyers, for activity that is legal and on charges that show the police’s political motivation. Dalit activists are jailed under preventive detention statutes to prevent them from holding meetings and protest rallies, or charged as “terrorists” and “threats to national security.” Court cases drag on for years, costing impoverished people precious money and time.

Dalits who dare to challenge the social order have been subject to abuses by their higher-caste neighbors. Dalit villages are collectively penalized for individual “transgressions” through social boycotts, including loss of employment and access to water, grazing lands, and ration shops. For most Dalits in rural India who earn less than a subsistence living as agricultural laborers, a social boycott may mean destitution and starvation.
India’s caste system is perhaps the world’s longest surviving social hierarchy. A defining feature of Hinduism, caste encompasses a complex ordering of social groups on the basis of ritual purity. A person is considered a member of the caste into which he or she is born and remains within that caste until death, although the particular ranking of that caste may vary among regions and over time. Differences in status are traditionally justified by the religious doctrine of *karma*, a belief that one’s place in life is determined by one’s deeds in previous lifetimes.

Traditional scholarship has described this more than 2,000-year-old system within the context of the four principal *varnas*, or large caste categories. In order of precedence these are the Brahmins (priests and teachers), the Ksyatriyas (rulers and soldiers), the Vaisyas (merchants and traders), and the Shudras (laborers and artisans). A fifth category falls outside the varna system and consists of those known as “untouchables” or Dalits; they are often assigned tasks too ritually polluting to merit inclusion within the traditional varna system.

Within the four principal castes, there are thousands of sub-castes, also called *jatis*, endogamous groups that are further divided along occupational, sectarian, regional and linguistic lines. Collectively all of these are sometimes referred to as “caste Hindus” or those falling within the caste system. The Dalits are described as *varna-sankara*:
they are “outside the system”—so inferior to other castes that they are deemed polluting and therefore “untouchable.”

Even as outcasts, they themselves are divided into further sub-castes. Although “untouchability” was abolished under Article 17 of the Indian constitution, the practice continues to determine the socio-economic and religious standing of those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. Whereas the first four varnas are free to choose and change their occupation, Dalits have generally been confined to the occupational structures into which they are born.

A 1997 report issued by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes underscored that “untouchability”—the imposition of social disabilities on persons by reason of their birth in certain castes—was still practiced in many forms throughout the country. The report described a number of social manifestations of caste-based discrimination in the 1990s: scheduled-caste bridegrooms were not permitted to ride a mare in villages, a marriage tradition; scheduled castes could not sit on their charpoys (rope beds) when persons of other castes passed by; scheduled castes were not permitted to draw water from common wells and hand-pumps; and in many tea-shops and dhabas (food stalls), separate crockery and cutlery were used for serving the scheduled castes.
The prevalence of “untouchability” practices was also noted by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1996, while reviewing India’s tenth to fourteenth periodic reports under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Although constitutional provisions and legal texts exist to abolish untouchability and to protect the members of the scheduled castes and tribes, and social and educational policies have been adopted to improve the situation of members of the scheduled castes and tribes and to protect them from abuses, widespread discrimination against those people, and the relative impunity of those who abuse them, points to the limited effect of these measures.

The Committee is particularly concerned at reports that people belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes are often prevented from using public wells or from entering cafes or restaurants and that their children are sometimes separated from other children in schools, in violation of article 5 (f) of the Convention.

Most Dalits in rural areas live in segregated colonies, away from the caste Hindus. According to an activist working with Dalit communities
in 120 villages in Villapuram district, Tamil Nadu, all 120 villages have segregated Dalit colonies. Basic supplies such as water are also segregated and medical facilities and the better, thatched-roof houses exist exclusively in the caste Hindu colony. “Untouchability” is further reinforced by state allocation of facilities; separate facilities are provided for separate colonies. Dalits often receive the poorer of the two, if they receive any at all.

As part of village custom, Dalits are made to render free services in times of death, marriage, or any village function. During the Marama village festival in Karnataka state, caste Hindus force Dalits to sacrifice buffalos and drink their blood. They then have to mix the blood with cooked rice and run into the village fields without their chappals (slippers). The cleaning of the whole village, the digging of graves, the carrying of firewood, and the disposal of dead animals are all tasks that Dalits are made to perform.

In villages where Dalits are a minority, the practice of “untouchability” is even more severely enforced. Individual attempts to defy the social order are frequently punished through social boycotts and acts of retaliatory violence further described below. Activists in Tamil Nadu explained that large-scale clashes between caste communities in the
state’s southern districts have often been triggered by Dalits’ efforts to draw water from a “forbidden” well or by their refusal to perform a delegated task. Dalits have responded to ill-treatment by converting, en masse, to Buddhism, Christianity, and sometimes Islam. Once converted, however, many lose access to their scheduled-caste status and the few government privileges assigned to it. Many also find that they are ultimately unable to escape treatment as “untouchables.”

3.a Multiple Dimensions of Caste in Novels

Untouchability is an important topic in the God of Small Things. When Mammachi is referring to the past, there is a part in which is said that the Untouchables were not allowed to walk on public roads and that they had to wipe out their footprints so that nobody of a higher caste could accidentally step into them. They had to cover their mouths while they were speaking so that nobody had to breathe in their polluted air. They actually were not given permission to exist. This non-existence is referred to several times in the book for example when Velutha does not leave footprints or ripples in the water. This makes him almost inhuman and supernatural.
In Hinduism one believes in rebirth. This is a considerable part of the caste system as it explains some facts which are difficult to understand. Hindus believe that if one lives a moral and religious life and does not commit crimes or injustices one will be reborn in a superior caste. As a conclusion one will be reborn in a lower caste if one does not respect moral and religious instructions and the law. Thus the Untouchables believe that it is justified that they are badly treated and avoided by the community and hence bear their nearly unbearable life. This aspect the author refers to in the person of Velya Paapen, Velutha’s father. He feels that it is not right for his son to work in the pickle factory, for this is not a position an Untouchable may hold. When Velya Paapen finds out about his son’s relationship to Ammu he is so ashamed that he offers to kill Velutha with his own hands.

In the Indian constitution of 1950 the Untouchability is legally abolished. Today any discrimination due to the caste system is forbidden by law. Nevertheless the caste system has not disappeared from everyday life. Notably in villages the Untouchables are still excluded from the society and live in separate colonies. However, contingents in the education system and in public administration are
granted to Untouchables in order to integrate them into the society and increase their standard of living.

The unjust and malice treatment meted out to the Untouchables in India have been a matter of great concern. Since times immemorial, they have been suffering severe humiliations at the hands of the upper sections of the society. Even after attaining political autonomy, there has been no improvement in their status. ‘Caste’ still continues to play a highly important role in shaping the lives of the masses. Today there are about 250 million Untouchables.

Although the Government has banned the Caste discrimination since 1950, but prejudice continues. Postcolonial Indian society has managed to achieve only political liberation, and not the social freedom; though the later certainly needs to be invoked in an active way.

Because caste has got the inherent capacity of positioning oneself, it can be, at once, both beneficial as well as dangerous, to the people who practice it. The emergence of so many regional political parties in India has only magnified this problem.
They have made the ‘untouchables’ and other castes occupying the lower hierarchy in the society a political tool through which they construct their own identities.

Caste, then, can be highly paradoxical, especially when we view it in the context of the Indian society.

Here in this paper, I propose to examine the maltreatment meted out to Velutha, one of the characters in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997). Before I proceed, it would not be a bad idea to have a look at the word ‘caste’.

The word 'caste' is derived from the Portuguese word 'casta' which means pure or unadulterated (sharing a Latin root, with the word 'chaste'). The caste system in India is an important part of ancient Hindu tradition and dates back to 1200 BCE. In ancient India there developed a social system in which people were divided into separate close communities. These communities are known in English as caste.

It is generally believed that the origin of the caste system can be found in Hinduism, but it has plagued the entire Indian social system. The caste system in the religious form is basically a simple division of society in which there
are four castes arranged in a hierarchy and below them the outcast. But socially the caste system was more complicated, with much more castes and sub-castes and other divisions. The religious theories explain how the four Varnas were founded, but they do not explain how the Jats in each Varna or the untouchables were founded. According the Rig Veda, the ancient Hindu book, the primal man - Purush - destroyed himself to create a human society. The different Varnas were created from different parts of his body. The Brahmans were created from his head; the Kshatrias from his hands; the Vaishias from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet. The Varna hierarchy is determined by the descending order of the different organs from which the Varnas were created. Other religious theory claims that the Varnas were created from the body organs of Brahma, who is the creator of the world.

Presently, there are about 3,000 castes and 25,000 subcastes in India, each related to a specific occupation. This occupation, it must be remembered, has been assigned to them by the ancient rishis. These different castes fall under four basic vernas,
Brahmins ----- priests
Kshatryas----- warriours
Vaishyas ----- traders
Sudras -------- laborers

The lot of the socially deprived, the untouchables, has occupied Indian English writers centrally and remarkable works have been written on the plight of these lowest of the lowly. One of the prominent novelists to have focused on it is Mulk Raj Anand whose novel The Untouchable has become one of the strongest works on the subject. Its protagonist Bakha, though portrayed in a different mould, is as strong as Velutha. Arundhati Roy has been targeted by critics for not treating the subject as sharply as it deserved.

The criticism loses much of its sting if we take into account the fact The God of Small Things is about several things at the same time. Questions have been raised about many social institutions, assumptions and agencies that affect common man's and woman's life. Besides being a political satire, as we have seen in the last section, it is also about the treatment of woman in traditional Indian society and,
more importantly, the untouchables, as one scholar observes, "Untouchables as a canker are dealt with in the novel at same depth"

However the untouchable protagonist Velutha reaches out in different directions to tough a number of other issues. He is the God of Small things, in represents taboos of all kinds. Jaqueline Karp Gendre says, "Untouchables simply have no existence and a woman who has an affair with one would be expelled from her caste. But even if you know no more about Kerala the tourist attraction of its Ayurvedic medicine, the universal implications of Roy's story are blatantly clear".

Hierarchical structure of power and oppression at various levels in patriarchal societies are explored in the novel. The character of Velutha 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". Not only this, he had exceptional talents for many other things. "Velutha had a way with machines, Mammachi (with impenetrable Touchable logic) often said that if only he hadn't been a Paravan, and he might have become an engineer".
He mended radios, clocks, water pumps. He looked after the plumbing and all the electrical gadgets in the house”. He was indispensable at the Ayemenem House. Velutha’s skills had impressed all. But his father Vellya Paapen "Was an old World Paravan". His heart often filled with Terror because "He had seen the Crawling Backwards Days". In a fine passage the author describes his Terror thus: "Vellya Paapen feared for his younger son".

He couldn't say what it was that frightened him. It was nothing that he had said, or done. It was not what he did, but the way he din it". Vellya Paapen's fears belong to the harsh tragic realities he had seen and experienced. He belonged to the hierarchical system and couldn't imagine transgressing the limits set by the caste system. He was extremely loyal to the Mammachi family, who paid for the artificial dye that was procured for him when he lost one in an accident.

The pitiable scene of utter surrender to the upper caste family in which we see him groveling before the elderly ladies and offering his eye removed on his palm in pouring rain in chapter 13 is symbolic of the status of the Paravan untouchables. The father-son relation shows the strain and a wide dark gap. The son has confidence in himself,
harbours different loyalty showing a dangerous tendency to step over the caste-barriers, while the father can't comprehend this beyond the fact that all this "could (and would and indeed, should) be construed as insolence"

Mammachi is quite clear about how to draw lines, and see that both the Paravans remain behind them, In the factory Velutha's talents as carpenter could hardly be ignored – he was always in demand, ever wanted by the factory for various jobs which fact was silently resented by the other workers. But here also the caste discrimination is clearly seen.

"To keep the others happy, and since she knew that nobody else would hire him as a carpenter. Mammachi paid Velutha less than she would a Touchable carpenter but more than she would a Paravan. Mammachi didn't encourage him to enter the house (except when she needed something mended or installed). She thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that Touchables touched. She said that it was a big step for a Paravan".

Velutha's subjugation is multiple. He is born Paravan, son of a Paravan, "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 adoption, the strict and unavoidable caste-system; thus the Paravans had only received the status of "untouchable Christians" with separate church and priest."

However, in Velutha Arundhati Roy presents before us a youth of new ideas and strength. Nothing can be more contrasting than the two figures of father and son – Vellya Paapen and Velutha in their different personalities, approaches and thinking. Velutha is deeply and hurtfully aware of his caste and the disadvantages this puts him into. Yet there is a spark of definance in him, a tidal wave of rebellion, mute and powerful that makes his father fear the future and Mammachi household resent him. His rebellion is best expressed in being normal as other men are, in his doing things that everyone does and in his ignoring the fact that he is separated from others by caste berried. He is the god of small things. He possesses qualities that are certainly divine, especially when they are compared to those of some of the other characters in the novel.

One of the most pleasant and happy parts of his life is that spent with Ammu's children Estha and Rahel. The author grows magnificently
lyrical when she describes the natural bondage being developed between them on different occasions. The children see in him a dependable and wonderful companion ever discovering new areas of childish adventures and inexhaustible joy. Ammu secretly admired the way Velutha would toss her daughter in the air and catch her in his arms, the way they would play small games in the green patch of shrubs and thick plants, the way he mended the fateful boat for them in which Sophie Mol met her death. These moments knew no caste taboos.

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' if properly placed in the Ayemenem context. That is because having illegitimate relations with women was something ordinary for Chako! The position of both of them is that of outcast who lead lonely life and are reduced to the condition of their own little joys at gravest risks.

Ammu's husband was an attractive young man, an Assistant Manager of a Tea Estate in Assam. Soon after their marriage she discover that he was a full blown alcoholic and in addition willing to send his extremely attractive wife to the bungalow of his English manager Mr.
Hollick. Their marriage breaks, she leaves her husband and returns un-welcomed to her parents in Aysmenem. She leads a drab and dull life. Ammu quickly learned to recognize and despair the ugly face of sympathy and as she brought about transformation in her personal ways life-dealing herself in flowers, listening to song and music on her radio, she smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims, (p.44).

Velutha was also acutely aware of his bitter isolation and hungered for love and belongingness, Three years younger than Ammu, he finds a stable haven in her, someone in whom he can find repose, his strength and confidence and find ways to believe in himself. Though Roy depicts the scene of their nights spent together on the banks of the river Meenachal with a degree of clarity the easily fits in with the tangible solidity of her descriptive art, the latent hunger of the two socially marginalized beings for being set free from all oppressive limits is symbolically. One is constantly aware of the sharp heat of pain and awareness of the final conclusion their acts are shaping in the bodily relations. Even in absolute isolation they were filled with an awful dread because they had no future. This is tellingly described by the author in this way:

"He folded his fear into a perfect rose. He held it out in the palm of his hand. She took it from him and put it in her hair."
This particular chapter clearly mirrors the horror of social injustice that eclipses the Velutha-Ammu love relationship from the beginning.

Velutha was a sincere Trade Union worker and that is how he came to repose such abundant trust in Comrade Pillai and his Marxist Party. "Velutha participated in the march organized by the Travancore-Cochin Marxist Labour Union as part of secretariat march to be organized by their colleague in Trivandrum" (K.V. Surendran). Among the demands were an hour’s lunch break for the paddy workers, increase in women worker’s wages from Re 1.25 to Rs. 3 and for men from Rs. 2.50 to Rs. 4.50 a day. He also demanded that the untouchables be not addressed by their caste names, such as "Achoo Paravan, or Kelan paravan, or Kuttan puliyyan, but just as Achoo, Kelan or Kuttan"

"The marchers that day were party workers, students and the labourers themselves, Touchable and untouchables. On their shoulders they carried a keg of ancient anger, lit with a recent fuse. There was an edge to this anger that was Naxalite, and new".

This created a flutter of panic among the beer-sipping barons. The preceding section narrates the growth of the Marxist power, its
assumption of the government in the state and its dilemmas arising out of this development. Obviously Velutha had great hopes from this government. He had also high expectations from Comrade Pillai by whose side he had remained standing loyally all along as a party worker and as a trade Unionist. Comrade Pillai failed to give him any support in the hour of Velutha's gravest crisis.

"He is in strange situation where he is made – fuss of by the touchable, rich and poor alike and hated by the touchable unskilled workers in the factory; his helplessness of the situation is also exploited by the 'kind employed' who shrewdly manipulate him as a diluted paravan".

Baby Kochamma's role in the entire Ammu-Velutha episode is sharply portrayed as that of a typical sadist. She seems to derive immense pleasure in seeing the helpless paravan being pushed to the wall and rendered totally defenseless which she condoned and even "facilitated her son Chako's sexual relations with low-caste women workers in Pickles factory in the name of 'men's needs' ", demonstrates her sorrow and disgust at the unfortunate fact that her daughter had liaison with Velutha. "She thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie"
The incident acquires high intensity of a taut dramatic moment worked up to a high key.

"Vellya Paapen kept talking, weeping, retching. Moving his mouth ... Baby Kochamma, walking past the kitchen, heard the commotion. She found Mammachi spitting into the rain, THOO! THOO! THOO! and Vellya Paapen lying in the slush, wet, weeping, groveling. Offering to kill his son. To tear him limb from limb. Mammachi was shouting, 'Drunken dog! Drunken Paravan liar".

To the police Baby Kochamma reports that an untouchable had forced himself upon her niece Ammu. The dialogue between her and the Police Inspector Thomas Matthew is quite illustrative in this respect, with him chiding her for first spoiling "these people, carry them about on your head like trophies, then when they misbehave, you come running to us for help"

Baby Kochamma supplies all information to him to build a case large and concrete enough to capture the hapless paravan, adding a sufficiently heavy dose of emotionalism. He was, she says, "Educated by her family, in the untouchables school, started by her father ..... He was trained to be a carpenter by her family, the house he lived in was given to his grandfather by her family. He owed everything to her
family". And thus Velutha is shunned by this family. Inspector Mathew is a 'prudent man'. He sends for Comrade Pillai. They discuss the case, as though they had exchanged the number and not words.... They were not friends, Comrade Pillai and Inspector Thomas Mathew, and they didn't trust each other. But they understood each other perfectly... They looked out at the world and never wondered how it worked, because they knew. They worked it. They were mechanics who serviced different parts of the same machine."

How the politics joins hands with the casteist state police in a deceitful game of exploitation is beautifully illustrated here.

"Comrade Pillai told Inspector Thomas Mathew that he was acquainted with Velutha, but omitted to mention that Velutha was a member of the Communist Party or that Velutha had knocked on his door the previous night, which made Comrade Pillai the last person to have seen Velutha before he Disappeared. Nor, though he knew it to be untrue, did Comrade Pillai refute the allegation of attempted rate in Baby Kochamma's FIR".
Though Baby Kochamma herself had been humiliated, by the police inspector, she feels no problem in joining her humiliator in pinning down Velutha. It is her valuable piece of information that finally helps the police decide about swooping on the untouchable.

It is a world of double standards, where principles and ideals are used as mask to cover the worst kind of social injustices, where cruelty and barbaric behaviour are used as tools to perpetuate the age-old exploitative system. As N.V. Raveendran says in his essay 'A Horn on the Forehead', "She is full of contempt for the envious old wretches; she dislikes the fraudulent politicians. But she is full of sympathy for the exploited classes – exploited by the rich and cheated by the trade unionists. She is like many of those who are full of feeling for the sufferers but know not the way out"

Particularly disturbing is the description of the use of brutal force on Velutha when he is finally trapped and nabbed. It is highly evocative of the intense pathos mixing our sympathy for the victim with unspeakable hatred for the perpetrators of crime. It contains a strong element of revelatory art, going deep into the essence of the act, but perhaps one of those things that Indian police itself, so devoid of the human element, commonly practices all over the country, particularly
those remote areas where authority against injustice is absent and voilence is the normal way of settling the issues. Police shows the way
More than anything else is the disturbing portrayal of the children Estha and Rahel, as they watched "blue-lipped, and dinner-plate eyed....mesmerized by something they sensed but didn't understand; the absence of caprice in what the policemen did. The abyss where anger should have been. The sober, steady brutality, the economy of it all"

And relating this incident with the age-old practice of the use of violence against the weaker section of society. Arundhaty Roy observes succinctly.

"The twins were too young to know that these were only his toy's henchmen sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws. Impelled by feelings that were primal yet paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness".
Further, she writes acidly,

"What Esthappen and Rahel witnessed that morning, though they didn't know it then, was a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions (this was not war after all, or genocide) of human nature's pursuit of ascendancy, structure, Order, Complete monopoly. It was human history masquerading as God's Purposes revealing himself to an under-age audience.

There was nothing accidental about what happened that morning ...

History in live performance.

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 severed long ago"

Mammachi's disgust at his caste affiliation matches with the police's decisive hatred and action born out of it, which join automatically Comrade Pillai's wily moves surreptitiously carried out to mark his share in the caste games. This tragic drama which is political yet
includes the personal lives of so many people, Velutha, Ammu, Rahel, Estha etc. Its impact shakes all those living in the place.

The problem of untouchability has been dealt by Jagdish Chandra Basu in his well known Hindi novel ‘Dharti Dhan Na Apna’. The location of the novel is a village named ‘Godewala’, somewhere in Punjab. Here Jagdish Chandra represents all the problems and lifestyles of such a caste like Dalit, particularly in a village, where this caste have to work in the fields and houses of zamindars for their bread and butter, Kali the hero of the novel appeared in the scene, having passed a couple of years in a city, he earned some money and came back to village. Kali belongs to Dalit caste, his area has been separated from the village and that is known as Dalit area, where everyone is poor.

They are not eating well; even they do not have the proper cloths to wear. They are uneducated, their children never go to schools even most of them are not able to take medicine whenever they need that. So, all the known persons to Kali are surprised to saw him in the village.
Kali looks like a rich and healthy person and thinks in the beginning that there is no difference between a high and low caste. He always think like an educated person, after Kali’s entrance into the house of Partapi, everyone congratulated her, now Chachi is very happy and think that, Kali will become a supporting hand forever for her, and remember with ‘Tai Nihali’, and sang,”

Jis dihare mera kali ni jammya
So ye dehara bhagga bharya
The day when kali took birth
That was the luckiest day for us

When Kali said to his chachi to make a new house in place of old one chachi surprised to listen because there is no one in all Dalit caste, who could make a house of bricks and cements. The incident that has been placed just after this clears the whole picture of village in the eyes of Kaali that nothing had been changed and every- thing was as it is. A chaudhary was beating to a Dalit man, and there was no one who could stop all this. As the victim Jeetu tried to defend himself, chaudhary became angry and said,” the son of a dog, how dare you to hold my hand?” Jagdish Chendra represented Reality about such a caste through his novel; this caste really does not have anything to
proud off, even the picturisation of their houses is so vivid that one can imagine the reality of Dalit caste.

When Jeetu became injured and lying at his own house, his mother Nihali, Kali and Gyano were talking, Kali said to Tai Nihali, "Tai, if Jeetu gets some tea than he will get some energy." Tai Nihali said," there is sugar and tea in the house, but how will arrange the milk." The lines show the real poverty of Dalit caste. Although Kali has been shown as a common person, but the entire Dalit caste has been shown as an untouchable caste.

When Kali went to the shop of Chazzu Shah than Shah behaved Kali in normal way, because shah is a professional, who knew that Kali had some money. Than shah offered cigarette to Kali and Kali said," Hukka is better than this, now shah said," you are right I have two more Hukka beside mine, one is for Jaat’s and another one is for Chammar’s, but there are different kinds of people in this world, recently a Chamar brought sugar for me and asked for Hukka, I gave him but he took it himself silently. Now Kali felt ashamed and remained helpless.

After independence more than sixty years have been passed, a lot of acts have been made for Dalit caste, but still it is the poorest caste of
almost all the villages on India, one cannot imagine about their life. Jagdish Chandra clear’s the fact of their poverty through his novel in one episode when Baba Fattu, the oldest member of Dalit caste came to know that Kali is going to build a new solid house by bricks and cements, he said,” well done son, your father could not do this and died already.” For some time he remained silent and said,” I tried a lot, I have burnt a mid night oil, early in the morning worked in the field, at noon I used to make cord, to cut and sold the grass in the evening, at night I did laboured in the night, if got luckily, but could not complete my wish to make a solid house, there is a labour in the village but no earning.” This statement shows the frustration of Baba Fattu, who belonged to Dalit caste and unfortunately, could not pass his life according to his desire.

Another aspect of caste is that there is dissimilarity in every village of India. It seems as there are only two castes, one belongs to zamindars and other belongs to their servants. In Dharti Dhan Na Apna, when Kali was playing Kabaddi, than Hardev came there, the nephew of chaudhary Harnam Singh, someone asked to play to chaudhary Hardev, than he replied with proud,” is there any player or the Chamar have been gathered only.” There are many episodes, which describes multi dimensions of caste. There is a merchant, a carpenter there is
chaudhary and Chamar, Christians and other castes are also there. In Christian community there was a priest, who always talks to others about ‘Bible’ and other important aspects of human life. It is simple that lower caste has to pass their life in search of bread and butter. They did not have enough time to think about another aspect of human life, it is easy to befool them.

The same has been done by the priest, when he converted Nand singh and his family into Christian, because Nand singh was a shoe maker, he could earn his bread but unfortunately he never respected by chaudhary, they always called him Chamar. This is the reason that first he has been converted into a Sikh than into a Christian. But the strange thing is that there is no change in the attitude of the peoples towards him.

They behaved to Santa Singh as they did before. Ghaddam Chaudhary the man with practical knowledge, one who can comments against anyone asked Nand Singh, when he become Christian, How are you Chamara?, is there any change to become a Christian? Did you do the toilet as before or it change? Nand Singh replied in a wrong way,” Ghaddam Chaudhary began to beat him with his shoe and the interested think is this, that the same shoe has been made by Nand
Singh, and Nand Singh did not get the money for this till now. Gaddam Chaudhary said to him, does not matter leather is black or red, raw or ready finally it is leather. In the same way you will be a Chamar forever.

In the post colonial dialectics ‘subaltern’ or ‘underclass’ occupies prominent place which incorporates the entire people that is subordinate in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office, or in any other way. It is the subject position that defines subalternity. Even when it operates in terms of class, age and gender, it is more psychological than physical. The lack and deprivation, loneliness and alienation, subjugation and subordination, the resignation and silence, the resilience and neglect mark the lives of subaltern, even when they resist and rise up, they feel bounded and defeated by their subject positions. They have no representatives or spokesperson in the society they live in and so helplessly suffer and get marginal place or no place at all in the history and culture of which they are the essential part as human beings.

Adiga in his debut novel The White Tiger, which begged him Man Booker Prize 2008, created two different India’s in one: “an India of Light and an India of Darkness”. It is the India of
Darkness which is focused by the novelist articulating the voice of silent majority, trying to dismantle the discrimination between the “Big Bellies and the Small Bellies” and create a society based on the principles of equality and justice. Balram Halwai, the protagonist is a typical voice of underclass metaphorically described as “Rooster coop” and struggling to set free from age-old slavery and exploitation. His anger, protest, indulgence in criminal acts, prostitution, drinking, chasing, grabbing all the opportunities, means fair or foul endorse deep-rooted frustration and its reaction against the “haves”. Bloody acts, opportunism, entrepreneurial success of Balram, emergence of Socialists in India alarm that the voice of the Under-class can not be ignored for long.

The novel endeavors to analyse the nature of underclass, its identity, causes of its emergence and ways of its subjection and articulation and reaction against it. The novel is centered on Balram Halwai, a son of a rickshaw puller, destined to make sweets becomes Ashok Sharma. His transformation from Munna—Balram Halwai—White Tiger—Ashok Sharma is the blue print for the rise of underclass.
Balram is the strong voice of underclass in which marginal farmers, landless labourers, jobless youths, poor, auto and taxi drivers, servants, prostitutes, beggars and unprivileged figure.

The underclass is the result of our policies, bureaucratic set-up, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, caste and culture conflict, superstitions, social taboos, dowry practice, economic disparity, Zamindari system, corrupt education system, poor health, services, police and judicial working. These forces collectively operate to perpetuate the underclass. This underclass constitutes Dark India.

The novel gives the detailed accounts of the Indian society—rural as well as urban and its various facets.

Laxamangarh, Gaya, Dhanbad, Delhi and Bangalore are generic represent the portrait of India. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, caste and culture conflict, superstition, dowry practice, economic disparity, Zamindari system, and exploitation of marginal farmers and landless labourers, rise of Naxalism, corrupt education system, poor health services, tax evading racket, embittered master-servant relationship, prostitution, weakening family structure, entrepreneurial success and
its fallout etc. constitute the basic structure of Indian society which largely forms the Dark image of India.

Adiga who left Manglore in 1991 when his father moved to Australia. After 15 years, returning to the city as a journalist with *Time*, he found it has changed vastly. The population of the city doubled, shopping malls and high-rise apartment buildings has reshaped the skyline. There were new five medical colleges, four dental colleges, fourteen physiotherapy colleges and three hundred fifty schools, colleges and polytechnics. The new affluence seemed to have come at a price. Looking around the transformed city, he also noticed a group of drifters and homeless men—the part of underclass who seemed to have been left out of the story of India’s growth. Adiga was curious and troubled by the sight, and during his travels in India as a journalist, he wanted to explore more. *The White Tiger* is a tale of this underclass and its life-begging for food, sleeping under concrete flyovers, defecating on the roadside, shivering in the cold, struggling in the 21st century, for its freedom.

It is extreme poverty which creates Darkness in the life of the rural as well as urban people and it perpetuates the sufferings of the underclass. Illiteracy, unemployment, Zamindari practice, social
taboos, rigid caste discrimination, caste and culture conflict, corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, economic disparity, superstitions, corrupt education system and health services, shrewd entrepreneurs, flood, mall culture etc contribute to the sufferings of underclass. It is poverty in Laxamangarh, Gaya there is an exodus of jobless youths towards big cities and the protagonist Balram Halwai and his brother are no exception:

The world of Darkness abounds with social taboos, rigid caste distinction, superstitions, caste and culture conflict. Man is known and recognized by his caste. The old driver of Stork asked Bakram: “What caste are you?” Similar question is asked by Stork: “Halwai….What caste is that, top or bottom?” Ram Persad, the servant of Stork disguised his identity because the prejudiced landlord didn’t like Muslim—he claimed to be a Hindu just to get a job and Feed his starving family. On disclosure he was sacked from the job. While playing cricket, Roshan, the grandson of Stork calls himself Azaruddin, the Captain of India. Stork reacts quickly, “call your self Gavasker, Azaruddin is a Muslim”. The marriage of Ashok and Pinky is not appreciated by the society because Pinky is not a Hindu. Later, due to caste and cultural differences their relationship is Snapped. Socio-cultural slavery is perpetuated in our society by elite,
through the process of socialization.

3.b internal and external Manifestations of Caste

3.c Caste and national identity

Diversity of community and Gender Norms

Community plays a determining role in the generation of normative patterns and the creation, continuation, transformation or reproduction of gender norms are constructed differently in each community, the variations being related to the diversity is occupational, geographical and historical factors. The various aspects of community like notions of social and personal morality, privilege defined at birth, and the space to negotiate and choose, have a direct impact on the lives of women.

Men and women belonging to the same social group do not necessarily have similar life experience. Both Pyari and Sukhram in Kabtak Pukaroon are repressed because of their lack of social status. The experience of deprivation is similar in some situations but completely dissimilar in others,
while Sukhram is between up physically, Pyari is sexually harassed. Sex, social status and community ethics thus interplay with each other to shape the nature and quality of individual experience.

Different determinants need to be examined while studying the process through which gender norms are created. Class and caste are in same cases cognate’s categories and this becomes evident in the existence of different sets of social norms for women belonging to high and low class or caste.

For example, the norm of seclusion and segregation that operates for the Rajput women of Inside the Haveli becomes redundant for the women who serve then. The division between the male and female real the public and the private sphere in the Rajput community reflect patriarchal control.

The study of these different communities provides a comparative perspective and makes us aware that a number of gender stereo types that are largely accepted by the middle class as a fixed, almost ‘natural given are actually socially constructed’. The love between Pyari and Kajari, the two wives of Sukhram in Kab Tak Pukaroon challenges the generally accepted view that wives of the seal man must be jealous of each other. The novel also shows how that Nat community does not judge female
chastity and faithfulness according to the norms of middle class sexual morality, and prostitution is considered almost a part of the natural order of things that a women cannot denies.

**Sexuality and community**

Arundhati Roy uses a compressed language, a thrifty style to foreground the essential predicament of the socially oppressed; such is the extraordinary quality of her narrative art. When in Chapter 1 the Kottayam police inspector Thomas Mathew addresses Ammu, his lecherous gaze expresses his authority making her wince. Hence is the brief, naked truth of his coercive behaviours.

"He stared at Ammu's breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from Veshyas or their illegitimate children..."
'If I were you', he said, 'I'd go home quietly'. Then he tapped her breasts with his baton Tap, tap..........

Arundhati Roy lays bare the way sex is used by those in authorities to cow down the defenseless, an age-old device that has little changed even in a democratic rule. There could be nothing more humiliating than to be called Veshya (prostitute) for a respectable woman. Thomas Mathew knows his power and is determined to make her feel it by stripping her of her dignity when he calls her children 'illegitimate'. This brief scene burns a painful spot in the reader's consciousness. Another instance where sex is used to show superior authority is the Estha-Orangedrink-Lemon-drinkman episode in Chapter 4. The casual manner in which the stall-keeper indulges it indicates the common practice, but in this very casualness one can see lurking the dark oppressive powers.

Reference to Chako's indulgences with women workers over looked by the Ayemenem House women as 'Men's Needs' is another similar example which expresses the way sex becomes an expression of certain types of social power, ranging from baton-swinging police officer to a communist sympathiser like Chako to an ordinary cold drink
seller. It silences the weak in a way no other physical exercise of power can do.

The row over Ammu-Velutha relation is the key factor in the novel that brings about catastrophe and misfortune on all. Their sexual attraction and relation is beautifully woven in more than one level. On the personal level it represents a union that openly defies all socially constructed restrictions and leads to a sense of fulfillment and contentment: 'then for what seemed like an eternity, but was really no more than five minutes, she slept leaning against him, her back against his chest, Seven years of oblivion lifted off her and flew into the shadows on weighty, quaking winds..... Amid the murderous terror of being captured and destroyed for ever, both Ammu and Velutha find momentary release from the life-destroying realities, the deathly inevitabilities into a soul-elevating feeling of mutual support and protection in the dark night on the banks of the Meenanchal.

On the social arena their meetings for thirteen nights carve a fatality for them in terms of gender and caste hostilities. In their sufferings both are utterly lonely. Both die foul, lonely deaths, crushed and abandoned by all. As Nirzari Pandit says, "Baby Kochamma is shoked by Ammu's behaviour. She believed, that though Ammu did not care for family's
reputation, she at least cared for her own. Ammu's going out and making a confession of an affair with the Untouchable was a daring step. She as a result, is feared of being capable of 'anything' and is, therefore, forced to leave the place. She dies alone in a pitiful state and after her death she is not buried in the church cemetery”.

A clandestine love-affair between the two starts and we witness a series of furtive love-meetings between them across the river in the haunted house. They do not realise that in doing so, they are trying to dismantle the traditional rules put down by the so called protectors of Indian culture. For Ammu and Velutha, caste or status do not matter. What matters most is to preserve the bond of pure love, and without a trace of doubt, we can say that they love each other very passionately. Even though Velutha knows that Ammu is a divorcee and a mother of twins, he does not hesitate to offer his full commitment to her.

The novel is replete with instances of caste politics. The dizygotic twins are told by their grandmother Mammachi that Paravans are expected "to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away the footprints so that Brahmins or Syrians Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprints"4 (pp. 73-74). This
amply demonstrates how a feeling of hatred and superiority is installed in children who are rather innocent to understand all these racial myths.

There are many other instances of social exclusion in The God of Small Things. We can see the unjust treatment meted out the dizygotic twins. They are treated in this way because they have no father/no home. The maltreatment meted out to Ammu can also be seen as an outcome of this absurd reality. Pappachi’s sister Baby Kochamma also receives a shock of her life when her dream of marrying Father Mulligan, an Irish priest, gets shattered. She starts living an isolated life in the Ayemenem house, and develops a liking in the misfortune of others. Also, facing a similar crisis in life is the character of Chacko, son of Pappachi, and the future master of the Ayemenem house. While pursuing his studies at Oxford, Chacko falls in love with Margaret Kochamma and marries her. But this marriage also turns out to be sordid bond, and soon the couple drifts apart; and Chacko returns to India. Soon after the death of his father Pappachi, Chacko starts managing the family pickle factory, Paradise Pickles and Preserves. However, he proves unsuccessful in this business, as the factory registers a severe economic crisis.
Ironically, we find the Ayemenem house giving shelter to all the sufferers in this novel.

Getting no respite in their personal lives, Chacko and Baby Kochamma prove to be a handful for the less privileged persons. If we have a look at this rude behaviour from a psychological perspective, we will find a binary opposition of exploiter/exploited working here. Since Chacko and Mammachi have failed to achieve anything significant in their lives, they are keen to set the scale straight.

Despite the fact that Velutha is a highly talented person with proven skills of carpentary, yet he what he gets in life is the social exclusion. He fails to understand why his father Vellya Paapen scolds him for his love-affair with Ammu, a high status woman; and is against this social discrimination.

Consequently, his boldness in carrying on this restricted love-affair proves a deadly menace for him. On hearing about this love-affair, Babby Kochamma conspires with the Inspector and Velutha is put behind the prison by Inspector Matthew, where he is severely beaten to death. Thus we see that untouchability is still being practiced in
Indian society. There has to be some proper implementation of laws to curb this social discrimination.

Arundhati Roy needs to be congratulated for exposing this foul play of postcolonial India to the entire world. Of course, there has been numerous works on this theme before this novel but the fact that this novel went on to win the Booker Prize has definitely brought Roy and her novel much more appraisal than the other writers.

The novel Dharti Dhan Na Apna by Jagdish Chandra is one of the most popular novels in Hindi based on the theme of caste and myths. Here Jagdish Chandra presents such a vivid picture of society, where upper caste is the boss and lower caste is the servant. Because lower caste is totally dependant on the higher caste’s like chaudhary and zamindars. They are not able to revolt against them.

There are a number of incidents of sexuality in the novel Dharti Dhan Na Apna, where Jagdish Chandra clears all the facts and the circumstances behind such types of harassment. The novel has a portrayal of a village Godhewala in Punjab. There were many communities in the village like chaudhary, Christian but the poorest was Dalit community. In the particular community it has been shown
that all of them were very poor and passed their lives as a slave to the chaudhary.

On the other hand chaudhary were rich and they were living like the master of charmer. The chaudhary had become habitual to harass the Dalit people. Chaudhary never thinks about the welfare of the Chamar, but on the other hand always creates the problem for them. It is obvious, that a chaudhary can not bear a Chamar in front of him. But in the case of sexuality it has been shown that they had always corrupt to Dalit people, everywhere they think that a Chamar is untouchable and any Dalit has no right to do anything against them. But when they saw their girls or woman they forget all the differences and trapped them in their net. These poor women were helpless because of their dependence on the upper castes.

Jagdish Chandra shows the actual condition of such a community, when Laccho, the daughter of Nickku and Preeto went to the haveli of chaudhary Harnaam Singh because she worked there as a servant for some food, then the nephew of chaudhary Harnaam Singh comment her but did not have the courage to touch. At the same time another servant Mangu from the same community of Laccho asked to Chaudhary Hardev about the girl, and said, chaudhary she is the
daughter of Preeto, to whom bade Chaudhary liked very much in his time.

Than Mangu laughed and encouraged to Hardev to do some comments on her youth. Chaudhary Hardev felt that there is not any problem to subdue her, he entered into the same room where Laccho was doing some domestic work, and he raped her. Laccho opposed him by saying,” leave me, other wise I'll complain to Bade chaudhary, but Hardev was not ready to leave her, now she did it with her consent, because she knew that rest of her family is depend on chaudhary’s family.

After this incident, Lachcho became late to her home, her mother Preeto is conscious about her late arrival but she did not interested to know the reason of her delay, but interested in the food, that Laccho brought with her. Now Preeto asked to Laccho,” whe did not you asked some more food and sugar to Mrs. Chaudhary.” Laccho replied,” Chaudhary Hardev had given some quantity of wheat, but Mrs. Chaudhary took that back.

Preeto is enough mature to understand the reason, why chaudhary Hardev had given her family is greater than their prestige .now she
remains silent and behaved that there is nothing happened and became busy in her domestic work.

Chaudhary community and this was the only way to continue their life in the same village as chaudhary cast has been shown in the novel; it is reality of our villages. They do whatever they like, and whatever they like, that is all right. The condition of Lachcho and Preeto clears that they are habitual to bear all this but the new generation that is the result of the combination of Chamar and chaudhary, how will they face such a condition like this. Actually some Dalit women have been produced their children by Chaudhries and to the son of chaudhary Buta singh. Now all chaudhary cast could not bear this and they arranged a Panchayat for this. Actually the quarrel of children becomes the matter of Chamar and Chaudhary.

All the chaudhary community began to speak against Bagga and Chamar community. after some time the oldest person of Chamar community Baba Fattu came out and said “give me a chance to top say few words”.now everybody is silent than Baba Fattu started with a low voice,” if you had taken the decision for punishment then why did call us”. He continued,’ we are Chamar, the slave to chaudhary,
whatever you will decide, we would have to accept it .it is impossible to fight to fight against a chaudhary.”

All chaudhary became silent to listen the words of Baba Fattu, then Baba replied,” you and we are living in this village by long time, we obey you as our chaudhary ,and you take to a Chamar .it was our duty to work and help you .it was your duty to care and help to us. It was your duty to share our grief and happiness. I am above seventy; all of us have been living in the same village. We were same before weather chaudhary or Chamar. There was not a single Chamar, who could see properly to a chaudhary. Now you do not think that our prestige is your own prestige. When the blood of Jaat and Chamar began to mingled, this created a problem. If your own blood beaten to your own son then why is you unhappy .Baba Fattu indicated to Bagga and said,” no one can say to see him that he is a Chamar.”

In fact Ghaddam chaudhary a maverick amongst the chaudhary declares in a passionate argument,’ I must say the children of the jaat born to Chamar women must demand a part of their father’s property’. Now it is clear that the Chamar community appear to accept several out of wedlock liaisons between their women and the chaudhary men. Many children of Chamar community are identified as the progeny of
the chaudhary the high cast landlords. The novel show that Jagdish Chander was the master to interpret a situation of a Dalit. Here he described all the problems of landless Dalit and laborer. The novel shows the relation of Jamindars and Dalit in a realistic way, where all the aspect opens one by one.
Women community and the Process of Change

There is a sumptuous contribution from women novelists to Indian Writing in English. Women writers have taken keen interest in the revelation of different aspects of our life and have ably dealt with different problems that we have been facing today. Ruch prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Venu Chitale, Attia Hosain, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Rama Mehta are some of the names of the fiction writers of our time.

Feminism, with all its implicit concerns, is brought out by these writers, from time to time and works to works with conscious or unconscious efforts. It is but natural on the part of these writers to put forth and justify the gender role in the changing course of life. At the same time they aim to put forth multiple possibilities of adversity and given embodiment to the multiple abstractions of rights, demands, responsibilities and other different existential issues or means and ways of exploitation in the hands of the adversity. It is beyond doubt that they have touched almost all the facets of life and brought out the essence of living from almost all the strata of the society.

It is interesting to note that in the novel God of Small Things there are more women than men; most of the men are shadowy, while women
are sharply portrayed and occupy the center-stage. Mammachi, Baby Koch amma, Ammu, Sophie, Mol, Rahel keep in motion the story. As we have earlier seen The God of Small Things is about several things; one of the chief issues it brings into focus is the family and social mechanism evolved over centuries in traditional Indian society to suppress women and her independence as a human being. Right at the center is the woeful tale of Ammu, mother of Rahel and Estha who suffers silently, yet simmers inside in her a deep discontent.

Family as a Subversive Site

Patricia Oberoi, the famous feminist sociologist says,

“….. Family is a dominant ideology, though which a particular set of household and gender relationship are universalized and naturalized….. it is a discourse through which this meaning is universalized and naturalized, and through which unequal power relations are observed and legitimized.”

Traditional joint families are nearly structured where some women assume dominant role with greater authority over others who are lower down and therefore, enjoy certain power. The complex structure is deeply embedded and has given rise to countless stories of personal
tragedies of unequally placed women. Their unequal position creates great misery, suffering and hardship in their lives forcing them to accept the oppressive system in a spirit of religious submissiveness and personal renunciation. There is a terrifyingly sordid side to this issue, and Arundhati Roy’s is a powerful protest against this. Like the untouchable surrounded from all sides and subjected to all kinds of indignities in order to deprive them of chances of self-enhancement.

Family as a subversive site is exemplified in the typically structured roles and behavior of the female in mates. Every woman suffers in it in her own way. As one critic observes,” it can be called the story of suffering of Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel. They all suffer in different ways. In a country like India where patriarchal system is very strong, women suffer mentally, physically and sexually.”

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personal renunciation. There is a terrifyingly sordid side to these issues, and Arundhati Roy’s novel is a powerful protest against this. Like the untouchable being surrounded from all sides and subjected to all kinds of indignities in order to deprive them of chances of self-enhancement.

Mammachi

*The old matriarch, who had pioneered the pickle making into something commercially viable and did not get any moral support from her husband Pappachi, was herself a victim of her husband’s brutality and capricious behavior. Pappachi, or Shri Bennan John Ipe, was an entomologist who identified a particular moth with dense dorsal tufts as a ‘slightly unusual race of a well known species that belonged to the tropical family Lymantriidae’*(p.49).

*He was excited and brought the matter to the higher authorities in Delhi in the department of Entomology who refused to give him due honour, but after twelve years, after Pappachi’s retirement they accepted his explanation but named it after the Acting Director of the department of Entomology. The result was a pernicious change in Pappachi, “his black moods and the sudden bursts of temper”* (p.49). He wreaked his frustration and venom on
his family, especially his wife, Mammachi. The immediate target of his furies and distempered outbursts was Mammachi, beating and humiliating her.

Mammachi had exceptional talent for music, especially violin; when they were in Vienna she took lessons from the famous music teacher Launsky Tieffenthal. It was a mistake on the part of the Austrian teacher to tell Pappachi that his wife was talented, for the remark released all the animal fury of jealousy in him. As Arundhati Roy writes,

“The beating weren’t new. What was new only the frequency with which they took place? One night Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi’s violin and threw it in the river.”

That is the ultimate male revenge and expression of jealousy for he believes that by breaking her musical instrument he would be crushing the spirit in her, blotting out all her woman’s aspirations and snuffing out the flame of her independent thinking. This is also the way to keep his wife in ‘place’ and assert his masculine power.

One of the most glaring instances of it is the ambiguous stand adopted by these women with regard to Ammu’s relation with Velutha. They
express little sympathy for Ammu’s lonely life, her tragic marital circumstances and her anxiety about her children. On the other hand, their casteist hostility finds double force in Ammu – Velutha liaison and breaks out into expressions of moral outrage while Chako’s sexual indulgences with low caste women is overlooked as ‘Men’s Needs.’

Ammu’s affair with Velutha becomes an unpardonable offence against family’s reputation and status. “She was aware of his libertine relationships with the women in the factory, but had ceased to be hurt by them. When Baby Kochamma brought up the subject, Mammachi became tense and tight lipped.

This is a typical picture of the double standard of morality practiced in traditional India. While men enjoy greater laxity and freedom, the family’s ‘dignity’ and ‘honour’ rest on woman’s blemishes moral conduct. Men are privileged, women the cross-bearers. The whole system is run by women themselves, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma symbolizing it perfectly.

At a later stage we find Baby Kochamma in a conspiratorial role, furnishing all the necessary information to the police while the inspector Thomas Mathew is brusque and brash in his treatment of
her. He scolds her for ‘spoiling these people’ carries them about on your head like trophies.” She associates and co-operates fully with the police involved in plenty of lie-telling.

Ammu presents a most pathetic picture of a woman who seeks happiness and love in a world that turns its black on her. She is utterly lonely, having abandoned her husband for his debauched tendencies, and having returned to her family, loses all normal status as a family member and is thrown into a dark corner.

She was commiserated for her tragedy by visiting women, but slipped slowly into a level where she had no choice but listen to radio music, smoke cigarettes and have midnight swims. It is this loneliness and the “reckless rage of a suicide bomber” that eventually led her to love the man her children loved by day.” (p.44)

Ammu is thrown into her room and locked up from outside. All her frustrated and oppressed energies burn out and she keeps hammering against the door and barred windows. However, as soon as she gets a chance to go out after Sophie Mole’s funeral, Ammu goes to Kottayam Police Station with her twins and gives a statement to the effect that Velutha was not a rapist. She was told to leave Ayemenem house after
the Velutha incident, because everyone in the house including Chako felt that she was mainly responsible for everything that went wrong, and told her so.

If she was allowed and given a little sympathetic consideration she would perhaps have grown into a special social woman, her dreams have future promises. But Ammu was victimized by her own family in the worst possible manner. She worked in a pickle factory, which Chako owned legally and was fond of calling, “my factory, my pickles.” As Arundhati Roy describe it,

“Chako told Rahel and Estha that Ammu had no Lactus Stand!
‘Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinistic society’,
Ammu said.
Chako said.’ What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is Also mine.”

The novel unfolds with a description of a hot May in Ayemenem, and the first character, Rahel, is introduced to the readers. Rahel, the twin sister of Estha, is constantly socially displaced whether she is at her hometown or, later, in the US with her husband. Rahel is an epitome of
the silent observant female character who falls victim of a dysfunctional family and a confining society. In spite of her vigilance and conscientiousness, Rahel fails to connect with the people around her and never realizes her full potential. Rahel’s mother, Ammu, is another interesting female character. She is deprived of the academic opportunity her brother enjoyed because she is a female for whom education is unnecessary according to her father. She is looked down upon by her own family after courageously seeking divorce from her abusive husband.

Ammu is portrayed as a smart daring person who oftentimes outwits her Oxford-educated brother, Chacko, even though she never had the same opportunities of traveling and studying abroad as he did. Eventually, Ammu is also shunned by her own Syrian Christian Church because of her audacity. A third female character worth examination is Mammachi, Ammu and Chacko’s mother. Mammachi is a successful entrepreneur who starts a pickle factory, but is constantly hindered by the male figures in her life, namely her husband and son.

Her husband constantly beats her every evening for no apparent reason, and her son causes the deterioration of the factory when he tries to “modernize” the business. Mammachi is also very skillful in playing the violin, which is but another talent that her husband hinders
probably due to his fear of being out-succeeded by his wife. In spite of all that, she is a conformist in her views of class and gender relations, never questioning the conditions of her life and of those around her.

All the characters in *The God of Small Things* are trapped within a rigidly predetermined social niche, but the female characters seem to suffer twice the plight since their gender functions as a second handcuff in addition to social class. While the female characters are portrayed as resourceful, smart, and capable of social change, they never fully mature to be strong matriarchs or “agents of social change” as Sen might call them because of the rigid social structure that deprives them of every promising opportunity.

Even though Rahel, Ammu, and Mammachi belong to an affluent property-owning class in Ayemenem, they are still deprived of fully realizing their capabilities. The Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, argues that such cases mark the difference between focusing on women’s “well-being”, i.e. passive recipients of welfare, as opposed to their “agency”, i.e. active participants in society. There is the active role of an “agent” of social change that eventually leads to women's enjoyment of the broader concepts associated with “well-being” not vice versa. Studies have shown that women are fully capable of playing prominent political, social, and economic roles in their
communities leading to holistic development outcomes that eventually benefit all members of society.

The women community in the novel Dharti Dhan Na Apna represents a typical Indian village community. In every village of India these types of women are living under such circumstances that when you study the novel you can create an image of such a woman. As in the beginning the description of the women like, Chachi Partapi, Tai Nihali and Preeto clear that they were uneducated, helpless, poor and passing their lives as an underdog. In a Dalit community there was no change in the condition of women especially in the villages, it is clear when Kali came back to his own village after a long period all the Dalit community gathered and women are more impressed to see him. They were enjoying as it was a festival, and started knitting the net of the marriage of Kali without knowing about him.

Preeto represents the old and middle generation woman of the village. She is uneducated, but smart woman and she knows all the tricks of how to control other men and earn her bread and butter. But now she is in her middle age, so her daughter Laccho goes for work in the house of chaudhary. Now it is a very common situation for a young girl
who works for her bread and butter, she has to face many problems. Chaudhary Hardev raped Laccho and she did not make any complain against him, because she knew that her family depends on the mercy of chaudhary family. This shows the helplessness of Dalit women community in the novel, Dharti Dhan Na Apna.

The Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel inside the Haveli by Rama Metha was published in 1977. The work carries double significance: (1) it is a regional novel by a woman novelist. (2) The novel predominantly depicts the women’s world in the Haveli of Rajasthan. It does not mean there is no scope for male characters. Actually, the male characters fulfill a particular requirement of the life presented and they perform specific roles assigned to them by the novelist. And, so, there is a purposeful scheme behind the distribution of male and female characters.

Throughout the history of Rajasthan, the man dominance is beyond any doubt. This dominance has socio-political, historical/cultural and economic dimensions. To connect the thing with living history of the Haveli, the novelist refers to the fact that the men of Udaypur in general and the men from Jeevan Nivas in particular had active participation in the making of history of Rajasthan. The male ancestors
are revered in the Haveli and their presence is kept up in a particular way, for the belief that they have constant visit on the Haveli. The image of these ancestors is brought out through the experience to the protagonist in the opening pages of the novel:

[....] Even after two years her father-in-law and his father were strangers to her. She had never spoken a word to them. The men including her husband seemed to disappear as soon as it was daylight. The whole day they were away in their offices or busy in their sections of the house. They came into the interior courtyards only at meal times. Though to her they were only names, their presence was felt everywhere in the Haveli. Nothing was done without consulting them. It was around their desires that the whole routine of the house revolved.

This is the description of the men presently controlling the activities of the Haveli. On the very next page we get the impression of the historical figures that is created on the mind of the protagonist. Geeta, the protagonist, unknowingly intrudes into the men’s section and happens to see the portraits hanging on the walls:

The finely chiseller faces framed in the neatly groomed beards seemed to be looking down as guardians of the Haveli and observing how
succeeding generations were living up to the traditions bequeathed to them. Their hands with long tapering fingers wore rings, the wrists, bracelets, from the neck fell heavy enameled necklaces precious stones. Looking at the strong precious faces, Geeta had thought with pride these must have been the kind of men who had fought and won battles against the Moghuls.

This impressionistic technique is useful to bring out the male dominance in the Haveli. But the fact is that Rama Mehta wants to keep this men-oriented world—the world of business, transactions, professional decisions, and money-matters—confined to drawing-rooms or men’s compartments. The title of the work itself, seems to invite us 10 enter Inside the Haveli. She wants us to enter me huge gates, the courtyards, the drawing roams and approach to the kitchen, [Or, otherwise, back doors are also there). The novelist wants us to see the private cells of women- She wants us to see the servants’ quarters and compartments where women actually dwell. The women possess the very nerve of the life.

Rama Mehta invites us to see: women in action, women in situation, women in contemplation, women gossiping, chatting, women sharing experiences of rare, exceptional or of ordinary kind. She depicts women selfish and women selfless, women self-free and self-bound. Women dominated and women dominating, women struggling,
peace-hunting and suffering. Women learning and women teaching — women in the very strand of life.

In the spread of the novel, these qualities have a varied distribution and all of them can be found in one or other women characters of the novel. Different characters can be taken as specimens to examine these qualities.

To begin with, the novel presents the simultaneous development of two major characters: Geeta and Lakshmi. These two women are of different temperaments and represent two different classes dwelling under the same roof. Geeta is the daughter-in-law of the Haveli. She is expected to enjoy all the traditional glory and prestige of the family. As the parental house of Geeia is in Bombay, the initial impression of the purdah system in the families of Rajasthan is, of course, negative. The Haveli brings her in the shackles of conventions and converts her into a willing prisoner.

Her initial impulse of revolt against a peculiar domestic system subsides in the course of time. She has to give up the thought of any life outside the Haveli. Lahshmi is a working woman from the servant's quarters. In the moment of crises, while quarreling with her husband Gangaram, she abandons the house, the small (laughter and all the responsibilities. She tries to find solace in independent living. But her tender affections for her daughter do not allow her any peace of mind—She conceals her Identity and secretly meets her daughter in her school. Thus, the novelist presents contradictory temperaments and the relative fates of the two main individual women characters.
The novel opens with a strange situation in which both these women give birth to two female children. The event catches different reactions in the respective families. Lakshmi and Gangaram worry about the dowry that would be spent in her marriage. Geeta and the whole family celebrate the event & the welcome arrival of the first child in the family. Gradually, the Haveli heads enroll both the girls (Lakshmi's daughter as well as Geeta's) in the school.

Well educated Geeta, cannot decide what to do in the oppressive environment of the Haveli. There are elderly in-laws, male and female servants and all the quarters of the house are always crowded. She has her compartment but her husband is rarely allowed to meet her in the daytime. (Men are not allowed to enter the women’s quarters unless there is something serious.) There are eager maids to chat with her and spoil her time and spare themselves from any work. But she cannot have any interest in their gossips. So, Geeta has no suitable companion to share common interests, to spend time constructively or to engage her meaningfully.

There are books but the inquisitive maids intervene and do not allow her to read peacefully. She is kept away from the kitchen, from any work, from any major or minor decision. (Of course, not out of malice for her but to keep her at ease.) She decides to make out a way to relieve herself from this awkward position. Mlien, she decides to use
her education, her only tool in her hand, in the Haveli itself. She devotes with concentration her energy in the name of Literacy campaign.

This exceeds up to the extern that she opens her classes. She starts teaching to women of all classes of the society without any discrimination. All this begins through an accident but Geeta has to suffer a lot of this noble cause. The daughters-in-law of the Haveli are not allowed to take decisions for them. There is a light jolt that Geeta gives to the conventional attitude of the elderly women in the Haveli. So, a number of obstacles stand in her way. But ultimately she seeks, achieves and preserves her pleasure. The pleasurable part of the situation is that her father-in-law, the head of the family, comes to her help. The result is that, the goddess of wealth and the goddess of enlightenment [Lakshmi and Saraswati] go hand in hand. Geeta and her father-in-law combine together and fulfill a unique purpose of the novel. This episode is the central stuff to the novel.

Despite the integration of divinity and the female, Indian traditional society was inherently misogynistic. Social institutions such as purdah, child marriage, dowry, and sati created a culture where women suffered considerable oppression. Purdah, ensured the exclusion of women especially those of high caste from social and political life.
Child marriage, often of young girls to older men forced women to fully focus their lives on their families from puberty onwards.

The Dowry made daughters economic liabilities that brought pain and suffering to the family while Sati made women realize that they were only reflections of their husband and deserved no other existence. Social isolation, subject to and dependent on males was for millennia the norm for Indian women. It is not surprising that recurrences of these traditions do still occur and in some areas may still be “acceptable”. Just as farmers today drive their bullock and camel carts into town, discussions between families produce agreements to marry their children in the traditional way involving a payment from the girl’s family and there are regular reports of violence and murder committed against brides whose price is not seen as right.

The case of Roop Kanwar, the Rajasthani widow who “immolated” herself on her husband’s funeral pyre in 1987 reverberates today in Jaipur where the final judgment on her ‘murder’ case is still only three years old. As recently as August 2006 a sati was reported in Tuslipar village in Madhya Pradesh. Not surprisingly this case has been treated as a suicide by the police.
Purdah, the seclusion of women, is still evident in the practice of widows entering ashrams to spend their lives in constant prayer. The women of Vrindravan still echo their thousands of daily incantations to Krishna, cut off from the world since their husbands’ deaths. It is easy for righteously indignant western journalists to visit India, uncover horrific, archaic and shocking acts against women and make them into news items. The scandal of the isolated sati, the tragedy of the ostracized widows, dowry murders and female feoticide all make great feature articles. This is however not the whole picture.

India has experienced intense and prolonged economic growth since embracing the free market and globalisation in 1992. This has created immense wealth, and a new middle class of between 200 and 300 million people. The new rich have aspirations well beyond those of their parents and grandparents. This is especially true for women. The above billboard can be seen along highways in many parts of India. One in Agra on the road to the Taj Mahal stands in stark contrast to the image of Mumtaz Mahal’s tomb. The devoted wife and mother who died giving birth to her thirteenth child at the age of 34 symbolises the ideal woman of previous generations but not that of the 21st century.
The young middle class woman of today has access to careers, expects to be independent, reads Indian versions of Cosmopolitan and Vogue and anticipates marriage to be an equal partnership. She has control over her fertility in a practical and simple way that is denied to many in the west.

Advertisements abound in newspapers and magazines for the i-pill, a morning after pregnancy prevention that can be taken 72 hours after sexual contact. Available over the counter without prescription from pharmacies all over India at 75 rupees ($2) the i-pill takes the shame, stigma and stress from women who prefer to keep their personal lives personal.

The image of the woman on top goes beyond the billboard for Levis. Increasingly women are taking control in businesses and organizations all over India. Nischinta Amarnath and Debashish Ghosh13 outlined 21 women who had become Chief Executive Officers, Managing Directors or Senior Partners in major Indian companies. They profiled 21 successful women in their book, “The Voyage to Excellence”, (Pustak Mahal, 2005). Indian women had reached the top of the corporate ladder in banking, media, chemicals, and fashion. Obviously in the
Indian corporate world women are making enormous steps in what is no longer a man’s domain.