CHAPTER VI
SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS

6.1 General

Through language, speakers / writers express their identity and their background. The study of language reveals social status, background, culture, etc. In some societies, a caste system prescribes fairly rigid differentiation among social groups, religion and caste dialects. In others, distinctions of social status are more fluid; class is best viewed on a continuous scale, with social distance between individuals measured by attributes such as level of education, occupation, income, etc. When an Indian novelist writes in English, it is necessary to know what constitutes the Indian-ness in the text and how is it possible to convey the sociological problems and culture in another language. The cultural contexts are represented in (or mediated) by the writer's perceptions and imagination. Literary texts, like other discourses, are not just collection of sentences but are composed of utterances reflecting culture.

Thus, the literary work is a reflection of the collective consciousness and tendencies of the society. The study of language is a multi-disciplinary field, a field to which ordinary linguistics is indispensable, but to which other disciplinary fields such as sociology, anthropology, education, folklore and poetics, are indispensable (Hymes, 1977). So in studying the language of a text all the complexities should be borne in mind. Awareness of certain modes of expression in certain contexts and cultural knowledge affect the perception and analysis of textual features. Thus a sociolinguistic approach focuses on textual dynamics, on the act of exploring the dimension of cultural context. This chapter aims at presenting the sociolinguistic profile of situations in the novel on the basis of contextual interpretation.
India has a composite and cosmopolitan culture to which the people of all the
regions of this ancient land have made their distinct contributions. Among the people
who have thus enriched Indian cultural heritage, Kerala culture is, in fact, an integral
part. It was Kerala's foreign contacts from the earliest days which helped in the
evolution of a way of life and culture noted for its catholicity and universality. The
geographical position of Kerala as the southernmost part of the Indian peninsula
separated from the rest of the States by the natural barrier of the Western ghats and
from the rest of the world by the high seas has helped the people of the land to develop
a culture marked by the virtues of unity and cohesion in every sphere of life and
activity.

6.2. Trade and commerce

The potentialities of trade with Kerala attracted the attention of trading class in
foreign countries long before other aspects of its life and culture attracted notice. As
the legendary land of spices Kerala had a mysterious fascination and charisma of its
own to the outside world even from times immemorial. The spice trade of Kerala has a
long history which can be traced back to the 3rd millennium B.C. in due course the
spice trade led to the coming of the European powers and the British conquest and
occupation of India. Apart from serving as an emporium of trade and meeting ground
of diverse cultures, it also led to spread of secularism.

6.3. Religion and society

For the first time Christianity, Islam and Judaism spread into Kerala through
trade and commercial interaction among people. Muziris (modern Cranganore),
Quillon, Calicut and Cochin became prominent nerve centers of action. The early
Dravidian society was an open society based on the principles of social freedom and
equality and the recognition of the dignity of labour. The practice of untouchability
was unknown. The iniquitous caste system of later days had not yet evolved itself. The people were, by and large, so tolerant in their outlook that they had no particular objection to offering prayers in Jain and Buddhist shrines and performing vedic rites at the same time. The Jain religion made its debut into Kerala before the Christian era. The Aryan culture and religion came to Kerala three or four centuries before the dawn of the Christian era. Vaishnavism and Saivism flourished and this resulted in the gradual process of assimilation of these two ideas.

6.4. Advent of Christianity

The story of the rise and spread of Christianity in Kerala is part of the story of the blending of diverse cultural influences and ways of life. Christianity is believed to have been introduced in Kerala in the first century A.D. Local tradition ascribes its origin in Kerala to St. Thomas, the Apostle, who is said to have landed at adjoining Muziris in 52 A.D. and converted certain Brahmin families and founded seven churches on the Malabar coast. Since its introduction, the Christian faith, though alien in its origin, come to be accepted as an indigenous faith and it made steady progress. The number of Christians seems to have been reinforced in 345 A.D. by an influx of Syrian immigrants of 400 Christians from 72 families belonging to seven tribes in Baghdad, Nineveh and Jerusalem. Christians of the age were prominent in trade and commerce and they received several privileges and favours from the native rulers. Christianity made steady progress in Kerala and the church became one of the well-established institutions in the course of the centuries.

The liturgy and organization of the church were also subjected to cultural influences during different stages of its history. The early Christian were, in fact, called Syrian Christians because they followed the Syriac liturgy. When the Portuguese established their political influence in Kerala after 1498 A.D., Latin rite
emerged as a more important and permanent factor and a large community of Latin Christians sprang up in the coastal areas. Towards the middle of the 17th century, the power of the Portuguese declined in Kerala and was replaced by the Dutch power. A section of the Christian Church owing allegiance to the Pope freed itself from Roman influence and became independent under local Bishops. Episcopal succession was secured through the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and thus began the Antioch connection of the Kerala church. With the establishment of the British power the Church Mission Society of London began work in the Syrian church.

In the immediate stages there was a high degree of co-operation between the Syrian priests and the C.M.S. missionaries but eventually there was friction between them. The C.M.S. missionaries started working independently and the Anglican Church came into existence. They concentrated their work among the low castes in the Hindu community. In the meantime some Syrian priests who were influenced by the C.M.S. tried to reform their church. This provoked opposition from the Bishops and Clergy. The reformers who were led by Abraham Marpan of Maramon formed a new church known as the Marthoma Syrian Church as distinct from the Jacobite Syrian church and the Roman Catholic church of Malabar. Thus diverse cultural influences have been at work in moulding the organization and liturgy of the church. The Christians have identified themselves with the community in which they live by adopting the language, customs and mode of dress of their Hindu brethren.

6.5. Judaism and Islam

The Jewish immigration to Kerala was the direct effect of the early commercial contacts with Israel. According to tradition, some 10,000 Jews and Jewesses came to Kerala coast in 68 A.D. in order to escape from religious persecution at home. The Jews, like the Christians, developed into a prosperous business community with the
generous patronage of the native rulers. The early commercial relations between and Kerala, the Arabs paved way for the spread of Islam in the 8th century itself. The religion of the Prophet made gradual progress with the patronage of local rulers. The patronage of the Zamorins (Rajas of Calicut) particularly helped the Muslims to become a major force in the public life of North Kerala. The Zamorin's navy was manned by Muslims. The Kunjali Marakkars, the Admirals of the Zamorin's fleet, have immortalized themselves in Kerala history by their heroic fight against Portuguese colonialism. In spite of the existence of diverse sects within Hindu Religion itself and the prevalence of several other non-Hindu faiths in the land, there was absolutely no religious rancour of any kind in the outlook of the people of Kerala even in the early days. The Vaishnavites and Saivites behaved towards one another as brothers and the Hindus as a whole treated the followers of other religions like Jainisms, Buddhism, Christianity etc. in a spirit of extreme friendliness.

6.6. Worship and Festivals

The construction of structural temples began in Kerala in the early 8th century A.D. There was accumulation of wealth in the hands of the mercantile community and they vied with one another in making donations for the construction of temples. The important deities were all the major gods and goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon like Ganapathi, Siva, Vishnu, Bhagavathi, Subramania and Sastha. Each area in the state had its own peculiarities in regard to the distribution of temples dedicated to these deities. Vishnu is worshiped in several forms such as Krishna, Narasimha and Sri Rama. Bhagavathi is worshiped as Bhadrakalli, Thampuratti, Chamundi, Annapoorneswari, Durga Parameswari, etc. The minor deities are Parasurama, Brahma, Hanuman, Saraswathi, Mariamman, Madan, Dhanvanthari, Aditya, Navagrahas, etc. Apart from these Nagas, trees and ancestors were also worshiped.
6.7. Socio-Political situation in the Novel

The novel appears like a document on the social, political and religious milieu of Kerala. The questions raised by Arundhati Roy in the novel are related to polity, society, economy, environment and status of women and projects a 1990s sensibility on the Kerala of the 1960s. There is a blend of fact and fiction in the way the novelist has dealt with reference to the communist party. Arundhati Roy's criticism of the socio-political situation moves round three nodal points; the Caste question, Gender issue, and Environmental problem.

The rigidity or caste wridden society is reflected in the situations narrated in the novel. It was a patriarchal society and education of women was not encouraged. There were strict rules regarding marital relationship. Marriage among homogenous groups was followed and extra activity other than house hold chores in women was not appreciated. This chapter attempts, to trace the sociological profile of the society presented.

6.7.1. Gender bias

Gender bias is evident in various instances such as: "Ammu finished her schooling the same year that her father retired from his job in Delhi . . . Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl. So Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with her housework" (38).

Thus we can understand the mentality of a society where a girl was meant to work at home and get married. In contrast another fact can also be inferred where people bent the rules to meet their needs in certain circumstances. One such instance is
where we find that a girl will be educated if she doesn't get married. One such instance is that a girl's father decided to educate her when he knew that his daughter's behaviour was against the norms of society and so none would propose to marry her:

"Reverend Ipe realized that his daughter had by now developed a 'reputation' and was unlikely to find a husband. He decided that since she couldn't have a husband there would be no harm in her having an education. So he made arrangements for her to attend a course of study at the University of Rochester in America" (26).

Thus we see that Baby Kochamma was a Syrian Christian by birth but converted into Roman Catholic fold to enter a convent. When she wouldn't abide by the conditions at the convent she returned home but did not reconvert. This was the reason for a scandal. The novelist says that determination in a girl was considered worse than having a hare-lip. Because of such determination in Baby Kochamma Reverend Ipe knew that no proposal would materialize for his daughter. So to ward off scandal he sent her abroad for studies.

One surprising fact is that even though the womenfolk suffered from the tentacles of society steeped in it and did not appreciate anyone who tried break the menacles. This attitude is reflected in the instance below:

"Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. Worse still, they were half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry . . . Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman" (45).
Thus jealously among women is reflected. Caste barriers were impregnable in the society during the times mentioned in the narrative.

In such a society even those who managed to break free of caste barriers and tried to live life according to their choice suffered from mental recoil of the society's oppression. In the narrative the feelings of Ammu reflects this suffering.

"She had woken up at night to escape from a familiar, recurrent dream in which policemen approached her with snicking scissors, wanting to hack off her hair. They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes in the land where long, oiled hair was only for the morally upright" (161).

Thus the plight of a woman who has crossed the lines drawn by society is reflected in the portrayal of Ammu's suffering. Women who disobeyed were often sent out of home and soon branded immoral. The novelist uses the device of comparison and contrast between the situation of a brother and sister of the same house to denote existence of gender bias. In the novel both Ammu and Chacko marry off their community and both get divorced. While Chacko is welcomed offered pity and allowances for 'men's needs', Ammu is not welcomed and insulted even by the servant. The society's partiality is further reflected in the fact where Chacko's ex-wife Margaret is considered a whore by Mammachi because she'd married Joe. Yet Baby Kochamma and Mammachi accepted Chacko's Marxist mind and feudal libido. Arundhati Roy is successful in portraying the social milieu of the societies through her characters.

Gender bias is well evident in the bits of conversation among characters. In the passage quoted below it is well evident that Inspector Thomas Mathew purposely condemned Ammu during her visit to the police station. In the society a man who has
libertine relationships is not margined out whereas moral codes are different for women. This is evident in Thomas Mathew's words.

*Ammu asked for the Station House Officer...* she told him that there had been a terrible mistake and that she wanted to make a statement. She asked to see Velutha. Inspector Thomas Mathews' moustaches bustled like the friendly Air India Maharajah's... He said the police knew all they need to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from Veshyas or their illegitimate children (7).

It is not only men of his status or educational background who speak ill of women but also uneducated or people of the lower economic strata tend to speak ill of women. The instance presented below reflects nasty pun made by a cool-drinks vendor at a cinema hall about an old wealthy woman. Once Estha had been to the theater to see 'The Sound of Music' with Ammu, Baby Kochamma and Rahel. Since he had seen the film previously he was familiar with the songs and he began to sing. The audience were disturbed and Ammu sent him outside the hall. He kept singing and a cool drinks vendor who was asleep got up.

*Ay! Eda Cherukka! The orange drink Lemon drink Man said, in a gravelling voice... now that you've disturbed me at least come and have a drink... 'No thank you,' Elvis said Politely. 'My Family will be expecting me. And I've finished my pocket money'.

*Pocket munny?' the Orange drink Lemon drink Man said... 'First English songs, and now porketmuney! Where d' you live? On the moon?...*
Ayemenem, 'Estha said. 'I live in Ayemenem. My grandmother owns Paradise Pickles and Preserves. She's the sleeping Partner.

'Is she, now?' the Orange drink Lemon drink Man said. 'And who does she sleep with?' He laughed a nastly laugh... (101 and 102).

Thus we can infer that the man has no scruples and makes ugly and immodest remark about an old widow.

In the Indian society it is common for a husband to address his wife in derogatory terms. While the wife always addressed him in honorofic terms. Comrade Pillai, a post graduate was not free of this habit. Whenever his wife Kalyani addressed him She referred to her husband as addeham which was the respectful form of 'he', whereas 'he' called he... Edi Kalyani (Hey you!), bring a plate... (270 & 273).

Thus it is evident from the above instances that gender bias was deep rooted in all the sections of society irrespective of caste and economic distinctions.

6.7.2. Classicism

Arundhati Roy makes a scathing attack on people belonging to upper classes; the high caste Hindus and the high caste Christians. The reader's attention is drawn to the lowest castes who were forced to become bonded labourers to certain high – caste groups. They lived on the land owned by their masters and could be evicted if the master was displeased with them. They were forbidden to enter temples, not allowed to enter public markets, or bathe in temple ponds. Neither men or women were allowed to wear shirts, blouses and were forbidden to come within prescribed physical distances
of higher – caste members. Though such ills have been routed out now the novel serves like a social treatise against class discrimination.

The norms had been internalized by the people and the low castes had resigned themselves to fate. This attitude is reflected in Vellya Paapen's nature.

"Velutha's father Vellya Paapen, was an Old World Paravan. He had seen the crawling backwards days and his gratitude to Mammachi and her family for all that they had done for him, was as wide and deep as a river in spate . . . His gratitude widened his smile and bent his back" (76).

Thus the resigned attitude and gratitude with which the down trodden served their masters is comparable to a river in spate. Mammachi told her grandchildren about the restrictions posed on the downtrodden and it reflects the voice of the society of the sixties. She told Ammu and Estha that "Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that touchables touched. Caste Hindus and caste Christians . . . she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint".

With passage of time some of the ills began to disappear and people began to give-up certain restrictions to suit their needs. This hypocritical trend in society is reflected in the actions of Mammachi who allowed Velutha into the house to have equipments mended or to make furniture. Yet her snobbishness is reflected in the fact that "She thought he (Velutha) ought to be greatful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all, and allowed to touch things that touchables touched. She said it was a
big step for a Paravan" (77). Their snobbery was punished when her daughter took Velutha as her lover. Mammachi couldn't bear the thought that her daughter had defiled generations of breeding. She was worried that in future "people would point at them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties. They'd nudge and whisper" (258).

The changing trends in society are reflected in the behaviour of Velutha and Vellya Paapen. Both were members of the down trodden community. While the father bore everything patiently Velutha resented. On an occasion when Mammachi overcome with anger stepped forward and pushed Vellya Paapen with all her strength, "He stumbled backwards" and fell down. "He was taken completely by surprise. Part of the taboo of being an untouchable was expecting not to be touched" (256). Thus we see that though he hadn't done anything wrong he did not get angry with Mammachi for pushing him but was shocked when she touched him. Whereas in the case of Velutha resentment is evident. Vellya Paapen was intrigued when Velutha did not submit himself to the rules. He feared his son's education, skill and self confidence. Velutha represents the class which is yearning to be accepted while floating on the brink of society. Velutha knew that his liaison with Ammu would definitely create problems, yet when Mammachi threatened him he only replied "We'll see about that", very quietly. He was not afraid.

Classicism was strong in the minds of people and so even when the off-springs of upper class people went against the norms of society and if their actions were reported by low castes, they were rebuffed. The words of Mammachi reveal this attitude among upper classes. When Vellya Paapen reported that his son and Mammachi's daughter were guilty of having clandestine relationship she could not tolerate it.
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'.

Her words reveal her derision. Though she was aware of Vellya Paapen's gratitude towards her family, she called him a liar.

Comrade Pillai who was a communist was not free of class bias. His conversation with Chacko reveals his feelings. When Chacko and K.N.M. Pillai were discussing Velutha's involvement in Communistic activities. He advised Chacko to send Velutha away.

'Oru Kaaryam Parayattey?' Comrade Pillai switched to Malayalam. 'That Paravan is goin to cause trouble for you', 'Take it from me . . . get him a job somewhere else. 'Send him away? But why? . . . Chacko said . . . Not like that Comrade Pillai said. 'He may be very okay as a person . . . you see, Comrade . . . After all, whatever job he does, carpenter or electrician . . . he is just a paravan.' (277-8).

Thus we can infer that the low castes were branded by their caste names and not by their skill.

Yet another instance of class bias is that even though the upper caste and low castes transgressed moral codes or societal norms the low castes paid more for their wrongs. They were blamed more. This is evident in the case of Ammu and Velutha. Mammachi insulted Velutha but did not deride her daughter.
Just where an old lady like her — who wore crisp ironed saris and played the
Nutcrackers Suite on the violin in the evenings — had learned the foul language that
Mammachi used that day was a mystery to everybody.

‘Out!' she had screamed, eventually. If I find you on my property tomorrow I'll
have you castrated like the pariah dog that you are I'll have you killed!’ (284).

She calls Velutha a dog and spits on him, but does not deride her daughter or
call her names. Similarly when Kalyani, Comrade Pillai's wife heard about that he
hadn't been hung for it. Thus, we see that while Ammu went uncriticized by people,
no body had pity for Velutha.

6.7.3. Political hypocracy

The novel highlights hypocracy involved in politics by caricature of a local
communist supporter named K.N.M. Pillai. He is often called Comrade Pillai.
Through Chacko and Comrade Pillai who are champions of communism Arundhati
Roy enumerates reasons for the success of communistic ideals in Kerala. The
questions raised by her are relevant to contemporary political polarization. In India the
minorities and tribal people had allied themselves with the communist movement
enamoured by the theory of class struggle but it resulted in a feeling of betrayal and led
to large scale erosion from the movement. According to the author the theory of class
struggle has not done anything to fight against the caste based social hierarchy in
Kerala. Even famous exponents of Marxism have overlooked the caste issue which is
still deep rooted in the society. Thus in the novel Comrade Pillai is a representative of
such people in real life situations.
Comrade Pillai made bombastic speeches regarding Marxist theories of a classless society to workers at Paradise Pickles. But within his heart of hearts he harboured class snobbery. Once he advised Chacko to send Velutha away from the factory. He told him not to encourage Paravans in the factory, particularly one who was a member of the communist party. He told Chacko that his wife who was timid would not encourage such people into the house. He said.

"See her, for example. Mistress of this house. Even she will never allow Paravans and all that into her house. Never. Even I cannot persuade her. My own wife" (278).

Further he told Chacko that the other labourers in the factory resented Velutha’s presence in the factory. But he couldn't give a specific reason.

"Nothing specifically as such, 'Comrade K.N.M. Pillai said. 'But see, Comrade, any benefits that you give him, naturally others are resenting it . . . After all, . . . for them he is just a paravan" (279).

We are able to infer that even justice was denied to people of lower castes. In the arrest of Velutha the inspector, Comrade Pillai and Baby Kochamma's combined efforts are evident. The words "After all, they were not battling an epidemic. They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak" (309) reflects the inhuman nature of the upper classes. Cruelty is revealed in the passage below.

"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, genocide) of human nature's pursuit of ascendency" (309).
The hollowness of communist ideology is satirized by the novelist by pointing out that K.N.M. Pillai's son is called Lenin and he is at Delhi serving the capitalist embassies. This reveals that people don't practice what they preach.

An instance which reflects hypocrisy is that ancestral homes were converted into star hotels. Following the order of the day 'The History House' was converted into a star resort. With acid sarcasm she says "The Hotel People liked to tell their guests that the oldest of the wooden houses, with its air-tight, paneled storeroom which could hold enough rice to feed an army for a year, had been the ancestral home of Comrade E.M.S. Namboodiripad, 'Kerala's Moa Tse - tung' they explained to the uninitiated'. The furniture and knick-knacks that came with the house were on display. A red umbrella, a wicker couch. A wooden dowry box. (126)

The phrase 'which could hold enough rice to feed an army' denotes that while he slyly held that much grain in store he kept preaching about helping the down trodden and against capitalism. While hoarding food and accepting dowry the communist leaders made false speeches.

6.7.4. Degradation

The novel speaks about degradation not only of environment but also degradation of cultural arts. Arundhati Roy says globalisation and the market economy and the undue importance given to promote tourism has led to deterioration of natural resources also. In the very first chapter the opening lines accentuate the badly maintained roads by the Public Works Department. Degradation of culture is presented through the plight of Kathakali dancers.
Arundhati Roy gives a vivid description of the negative aspects of the much eulogized Green Revolution with the aid of World Bank loans. Rahel a native of Ayemenem remembered the Meenachal as being warm, with green water like rippled silk. But when she returned twenty five years later the river no more than a 'swollen drain'. It nurtured only dead fish. Though it was the monsoon season there wasn't much water because a saltwater barrage had been built, in exchange for votes from the influential paddy – farmer lobby. The author's cynicism is reflected in the lines:

"So now they had two harvests a year instead of one. More rice, for the price of a river".

The changing phase of Ayemenem House due to developments in the economical side is also reflected in the novel. Humorously the author says that Estha walked past baked 'Gulf money houses'. Her description of the Meenachal's banks can be compared to Eliot's description of the Thames in The Wasteland. She says "On the other side of the river, the steep mud banks changed abruptly into low mud walls of shanty hutments. Children hung their bottoms over the edge and defecated directly onto the squelchy, sucking mud of the exposed river bed... Eventually, by evening, the river would rouse itself to accept the day's offerings and sludge off the sea, leaving wavy lines of thick white scum in its wake".

Another instance which reflects decay is that because of the development of tourism, ancestral homes were converted into star hotels. "So there it was then, History and Literature enlisted by commerce. Kurtz and Karl Marx joining palms to great rich guests as they stepped off the boat" (126).
The author is a virtual champion of environmental degradation for she presents the ill effects of tourism on the natural resources like sea-water. Guests from the hotels were ferried across the backwaters from Cochin and the speed boat left film of gasoline in its wake. The author makes a wry comment that 'no swimming' signs were put up in stylish calligraphy because the sea water was thick and toxic. There was a tall wall to screen off the slum but "On warm days the smell of shit lifted off the river and hovered over Ayemenem like a hat". Thus we are able to discern that the government is also criticized for its laxity in preservation of existing natural resources.

6.7.5. Degradation of the Performing Arts

Development in technology and revolutionary changes in the area of visual communications has led to the decline of traditional entertainments. There is no need for people to depend on cinema halls, theaters, roadside performances etc. to entertain themselves. This has led to changes in the attitude of people. This change is reflected in the passage quoted below:

"Baby Kochamma had installed a dish antenna . . . she presided over the world in her drawing room on satellite T.V. . . . It happened overnight. Blondes, Wars, famines, football, sex, music, coups d'e'tat they all arrived on the same train . . . now whole wars, famines, picturesque massacres and Bill Clinton could be summoned up like servants" (27).

With a touch of humour the author says they all arrived on the same train. As a result of such tremendous areas for diversion people lost interest in local folk art forms. One such form is the Kathakali. The novel devotes several pages to the description of performances of few cantos from the Mahabaratha and the plight of the performers who depend on their art for their livelihood. Since people lost interest in Kathakali the
performers were forced to accept assignments at the star hotels. In the hotel truncated story performances were provided as local flavour to foreign tourists. The performers acted out episodes from epics but it was reciprocated with comprehensive appreciation. While they performed by the pool the tourists indulged in nubile sex. This was an insult to the artists. Toward off humiliation they performed in local temples and accepted the few coins or appreciation they got in return. Their feelings are evident in the passage quoted below:

"... They mock him with their lolling nakedness and their lolling nakedness and their imported attention spans. He checks his rage and dances for them. He collects his fee. He gets drunk. Or smokes a joint. Good Kerala grass. It makes him laugh. Then they dance to ask pardon of the gods".

Through the narration of cantos performed in the temple Arundhati Roy presents the cultural consciousness among people in the society. People easily accepted Draupadi's being the wife of five and Kunti becoming a mother before being married though such things were taboo. With dripping sarcasm she highlights that Draupadi was "strangely angry only with the men that won her, not the ones that stalked her". This comment is an appeal to society to see reason before blindly appreciating things of ancient origin.


Certain sections in the novel depict the life of various sections of society as they exist in reality. By presenting certain instances or portraying certain characters the novelist presents the men and manners of people in Kerala. Anglophile attitude among the rich, religious squabble, boastful nature of the rich etc. are reflected through various incidents.
6.8.1. Religious squabble

Since India is secular there are various groups who follow different religions. Though the communities often live together in peace there are occasions when quarrels or squabbles which sometimes have led to serious Yffts. Moreover often people of one community indulge in deriding the others. This cannot be classified as a crime but it is common human nature to make comments about the environment. Through certain passages in the novel the novelist presents human nature. Once when Baby Kochamma, Chacko, Ammu and the twins were traveling by car to Cochin they encountered a tourist bust full of pilgrims. They were all in wait at the railway gate. The scene is a typical picture of an Indian level crossing. It is realistic because the author mentions the bus by its name. Baby Kochamma commented at the behaviour of the pilgrims.

"The bald pilgrims in Beena Mol began another bhajan. I'll tell you, these Hindus, Baby Kochamma said piously, they have no sense of privacy".

This instance is not to be interpreted as religious bias but is natural behaviour among people who live in unison. Since caste barriers are still prevalent in our society the novelist presents the plight of those who cross such lines through the plight of Ammu and her twins. She says "Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. Worse still they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry". Through such instances attention is drawn to the fact that our society is steeped in caste consciousness. Another instance of such attitude among people who were economically weak is also presented through the tendency of Kochu Maria, a servant at Ayemenem House. "Kochu Maria couldn't stop wearing her Kunukku because if she did, how would people know that despite her lowly cook's job (seventy-five rupees a month) she was a
Syrian Christian, Mar Thomite? Not a Pelaya, or a pulaya, or a paravan. But a Touchable upper – caste Christian . . . split lobes stitched back were a better option by far" (170).

By presenting such an instance where the lady wore Kunukku earring not for beauty but to display her class though it split her ear lobes. Arundhati Roy wishes to present that there are people in our society who would bear physical torment to project their community.

6.8.2. Typical Indian Scenario

It is widely known that innumerable Indians travel abroad for livelihood. This migration takes place in majority towards the United Arab Emirates or United States of America. Such people often return to their native towns or village, invest their earnings in property or betterment of their kith and kin. This kind of migration and flow of money earned in foreign countries into India is the development of recent times. This trend is presented by the author through a series of phrases which are carefully linked together. In the novel there is an occasion when the Ayemenem family go to Cochin airport to receive Chacko's ex-wife and daughter. The novelist makes use of this opportunity to present the populace in India who were eagerly awaiting for their loved ones to return from the UAE with funds to end their problems. At the airport "They were all there – the deaf ammomas, the cantankerous arthitic appoopans, the pining wives, scheming uncles, children with the runs. The fiancee's to be reassessed. The teacher's husband still waiting for his Saudi visa – The teacher's husband's sisters waiting for their dowries. The wire-bender's pregnant wife. 'Mostly sweeper class', Baby Kochamma said grimly.
The comment by Baby Kochamma reveals the attitude of the traditionally rich people towards the nouveau riche. It also reflects that people often went to the Gulf countries to do menial jobs. Arundhati Roy humorously says that the foreign returnees wore wash 'n' wear suits, sunglasses, and in their Aristocrat suitcases they brought funds for 'cement roofs for their thatched houses, and geysers for their parent's bathrooms', Maxis and high heels, Puff sleeves and lipstick, Mixy – grinders and automatic flashes for their cameras'.

Another trend among people is also reflected in the novel. Though people are educated, and occupy prestigious chair in society many are stuck in class or caste bias. This attitude is reflected in Comrade Pillai who is a post graduate and leader of the communist party at Ayemenem. He is pictured by Arundhati Roy as the very embodiment of vain boast and vengeanceful nature. After Rahel returned to Ayemenem and he heard that she and Larry were divorced his mind made devious interpretation of it. The attitude is reflected in the passage below:

"It occurred to Pillai that this generation was perhaps paying for its forefather's bourgeois decadence. One was mad. The other die-warded. Probably barren. Perhaps this was the real revolution. The Christian bourgeois had begun to self-destruct" (131).

India is a country with people steeped in superstitious beliefs. People often connect incidents in their life to fate, destiny, punishment, etc. This attitude is evident in Comrade Pillai's surmise about the Ipe family.

The novel presents peagent of India and Indianness of people. Life of people from the 1960s till present time is sketched, with touches of humour, satire, sarcasm,
cynicism and pathos. Arundhati Roy's style of evoking response by appealing to the conscience is so remarkable because in the omniscient narration the narrator's direct involvement is not present. It can be discerned that she is there pulling the curtain for every scene but she sprints off behind her portraits. There is no evidence of didactism, religious bias or political bias. The novel is a kaleidoscope of colourful designs which keep changing depending on the view.

6.8.3. Men and Manners

It is common practise among womenfolk in our country to make their children recite nursery rhymes to guests or in the presence of elders. This habit developed because in India literacy among women and English knowledge among rural women is of recent origin. So it has been a habit among people to display their child's knowledge of English. This trend has been parodied in the novel through an incident.

Once Chacko went to Comrade Pillai's house and had to wait for him and Mrs. Pillai called her ten year old niece and asked her to recite a poem for him. Very proudly she complied. The innocence of children and their blind pride over their little knowledge is reflected in the passage below:

"She clasped her hands behind her back. A film fell over her eyes . . . she swayed slightly as she spoke. At first Chacko thought it was a Malayalam translation of 'Lochinvar'. The words ran into each other 'O, young Lochin varhas scum out of the west, Through wall the vide Border his teed was the bes; when Latha finished, Chacko applauded with genuine kindness. She did not acknowledge his applause . . .".

The passage above reflects that breach of manners in children went unchecked sometimes. Another instance of this trend occurs in the case of Comrade Pillai and his
son Lenin. Sometimes educated people also resort to boasting about their children's knowledge. In the novel Comrade Pillai tries to boast to Chacko that his son was capable of reciting lines from Shakespeare. Comrade Pillai told Chacko 'He knows everything' 'Lenin Mon, tell Comrade Uncle the one Pappa taught you. Friends Romans Countrymen . . .' Lenin grabbed a handful of banana chips and bolted out of the front door" (274).

It became a fad among the elite to educate their children in convents established by Christian missionaries. In such situations children were bestowed with good education and the quality of it equaled western systems. As the saying goes that there isn't an advantage without a disadvantage, these institutions condemned the practise of local rituals. This trend is reflected through Rahel's expulsion from school.

"Rahel was first blacklisted in Nazareth Convent at the age of eleven, when she was caught outside her Housemistress's garden gate decorating a knob of fresh cowdung with small flowers. At Assembly the next morning she was made to look up depravity in the Oxford Dictionary and read aloud its meaning".

Here the cultural practices in Kerala's tradition are reflected. Placing of flowers in cowdung is done in Kerala to celebrate the birthday of Lord Vishnu's (fifth avatar - Vamana) conquest over the asura named Mahabali.

The advent of British in India brought in Christianity. Christianity which brought solace to people in many colonies all over the world came into India with the same promise. Initially the outcastes were happy and converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican church to escape the scourge of untouchability but soon they
realized it made no difference. Because in India even Christianity dons the native garb. The passage below reflects the trend:

"They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests. As a special favour they were even given their own separate Pariah Bishop" (74).

Kerala had seen many changes during the years Rahel had remained in Delhi. All the changes are described through Estha's walk around Ayemenem. Estha walked past the new, freshly baked, iced, Gulf-money houses built by nurses, masons, wire-benders and bank clerks who worked hard and unhappily in faraway places.

Aping the west nursery schools with fancy names, clubs for marital arts etc. had sprung up. Yet caste divisions predominated the society. This trend is reflected in the description of Ayemenem. There were separate schools "for untouchable children" and Tender Buds Nursery School (for Touchables).

There is a bitter note in the description.

The plight of the Kathakali dancers was unenviable. Due to decline of interest among people the younger generation began to seek job opportunities elsewhere and many gave up performing dances. But the elders couldn't change their occupation. This kind of suffering among performers of folk dances is reflected in the passage below:

"But those days he (the dancers) has become unviable. Unfeasible. Condemned goods. His children deride him. He watched them grow up to become
clerks and bus conductors. Class IV non-gazetted officers. With unions of their own. But he himself, left dangling somewhere between heaven and earth, cannot do what they do" (230).

6.9. Conclusion

This chapter brings out a detailed sketch of the sociological profile of situations portrayed in the novel. *The God of Small Things* depicts the changing phase of life in relation to economic development through various events, situations and contexts with sarcasm, humour or cynicism. Impact of caste barriers is also depicted with cynicism. The narrative statements of the author and conversational excerpts of certain characters depict the society of Kerala in 1960's.