Chapter 3

Modernity Transgresses the Domestic Sphere:
*The God of Small Things* and *Hu Tu Tu*

Rameeza Bee and Phoolan Devi, in order to assert their rights over a legitimate space of the citizen before law, have to prove their virtue and respectability in manners that are required by norms of femininity and domesticity. The assumptions made about their sexuality keep them outside the realm of domestic propriety that deny them full subjecthood. As figures therefore, they are essentially different from Urmila in *The Binding Vine* because she fundamentally occupies a space within the accepted sphere of domestic conformity. Urmila’s questions and rebellions are directed outwards from the domestic sphere: the historical and social contexts from where she is asking these questions make available to her a space that (though considerably ridden with dilemmas and far from any point of conceiving answers) has been acknowledged as legitimate. The transformations that this public space might induce on the domestic space are far from complete. Yet the political potential of such a space is recognized.

The domestic space that Urmila occupies is an ideal space. Even the lies and secrets
that it guards are part of its ideal nature. But what about spaces that are not so perfect? What contexts and situations make possible the exploration of a domestic space that is “threatened”? What kind of “disruptions” do these threats cause and what do they tell us of safe and proper domesticity? And significantly, who is the occupant of this domestic space and what is her role in perpetuating or preventing such disruptions? In this chapter I want to examine domestic spheres that are presented as already disrupted. I will focus on modernity as a context for the consolidation of a certain kind of subjectivity—that of the fully individualized, “privatized” subject. I shall be exploring these questions using two texts: Arundhati Roy’s Booker prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997) and a film directed by Gulzar, *Hu Tu Tu* (1998).

Both *GST* and *Hu Tu Tu* are set in a domestic space that is already threatened. This space is characterized by non-conformity and thematized is the fragmented lives of the people within this space. The shadow of disruption pervading the domestic space makes possible, as I shall endeavour to show, a different articulation of the concepts of motherhood, marriage, sexuality—the definitive parameters of “correct” domesticity.

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1. This idea of the surveillance and silence that is written into the imagining of the ideal domestic space, and the effects of it on women’s lives, is explored in more detail in the last chapter.

2. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, New Delhi: Indiaink, 1997. The impact of the publication of this novel on the general public needs no recounting, though the reception of it has been mixed. The novel has faced charges of having sold Indian womanhood, and history of communism in Kerala, among other things, to the ever gossip-hungry western world. At the same time, it has also received admiration for being an excellent first novel written by someone who is sensitive to the issues that it is dealing with. I shall refer to the novel as *GST* from now on. All references to the novel are given in the text, the page numbers within parentheses.

*Hu Tu Tu*, released in 1998, is written and directed by Gulzar. The main characters are played by Tabu, Suhasini Muley, Nana Patekar, Sunil Shetty and Shivji Satam. The film failed to make any impact at the box-office. But it received critical attention not only for the performances of Tabu and Suhasini Muley, but for its portrayal of women in high places and how they reach there. The character played by Muley as an upwardly mobile politician is one of the few portrayals of women in the scene of party politics and aspirations to a power that has always been in the hands of men. A later film, *Godmother* (1999), deals with similar themes.
Both the novel and the film open with the political potential for the exploration of women's lives within the domestic space that do not conform to acknowledged ideals. But this potential, it will become clear as I proceed, is not realized for a variety of reasons that are important in our understanding of a private sphere occupied by the humanized individual who is, one might venture to say, the subject of modernity.

There are several reasons for my choosing to read these two apparently different texts simultaneously. Firstly, the main character around whom the story revolves in both GST and Hu Tu Tu is the youngest female member of the family, who is a fully humanized modern subject, and whose modernity and humanism are presented as already “given,” almost as if she were born into it. This subject also presents the point-of-view of the narrative. The reader/viewer is required to identify with Rahel in GST and Panna in Hu Tu Tu. Rebellion is a key marker of this subject, a rebellion, as we shall see, marked as “purely personal.” What comes across as enduring and universal is the private nature of these rebellions and not the social or cultural situations from which they may have risen. Secondly, both texts contextualize mother-daughter relationship in an important way, though the treatment of it in each is entirely different from the other. The effect of this relationship is central to the development of the idea of the private, and the rebellion within, in the context of modernity. Thirdly, caste, through Velutha in GST and Bhau in Hu Tu Tu, becomes a significant factor in the development of this modern female subjecthood. The juxtaposition of caste and gender in the narrative endows both these figures—Velutha and Bhau—with a modernity that simply is, despite their circumstances of birth and differences in economic situations. It is the caste markings of these characters that bring about the final disruption of the already threatened domestic sphere. Lastly,
both narratives are resolved in a modernist revolution. It is the transgression by a modern subject that finally ruptures the domestic space. There are no caste, gender or class markings to these modern sensibilities. What is there is a humanism politicized along a single dimension. Hence, the modernist revolutions in these texts have the quality of a spectacular miracle. These points will be made clear through an exploration of two important themes in both the novel and the film: 1) the transgression of sexual boundaries, and 2) the representation of the dalit figure.

Having said this, let me look at GST. Writing, says Arundhati Roy in an interview with Urvashi Butalia, is addressing someone who is loved and respected, from a very private space (1997). The publication of that writing is also the “publicization” of that private space. Hence Roy holds firmly on to the view that it is impossible for the private self engaged in the act of creation to address its public before the act of writing is complete. Writing, then, for the author of the book that created a furor in the public sphere, is a very private act which involves an implicit trust in the reader in her/his capacity to understand and respect the private space from which the novel comes.

There is already an essentializing of the private space of writing and of the writer as a private self, engaged in communication with a privileged few who are “loved and respected” and can win the trust of the writer. The debate over the element of autobiography in the novel gives further meaning to the idea of the private. On the one hand, it raised the question of how much of the book was fact and how much fiction. Several critics tried to match the “real” Aymenem, a small town near Kottayam in Kerala, to the Ayemenem of Roy’s book, and to find similarities and differences between Ammu,
Chacko, Esthapan and Rahel in the novel and Roy’s mother, uncle, brother and Roy herself. This, one might say, is inevitable with any novel written around “real life” places and people. But in the case of GST, the question of “factuality” raised a storm of controversy, especially over the representation of Communism in Kerala, and the characterization of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the veteran Marxist leader. Roy, apparently quoting her brother, says that what is autobiographical in the novel is not the events or the characters, but the emotions—the love, the angst, the fear—that the novel reveals.

This comment is significant. The question of reliance on reality, says Roy, is relevant only so far as the outward elements of the novel are concerned. The realm of feelings, sentiments and emotions that the novel depicts are “private affairs.” In rejecting autobiography, which is considered to be one of the most “private” of literary genres, as a descriptive term for her novel, Roy is reaching out to an even more personalized realm of involvement of the writer and her work. The logic of the narration, not only within the novel but in Roy’s comments on the use of autobiography as well, lays bare a double game which makes possible the convenient mixing up of the real and the fictionalized, and the writer’s sole ownership of that realm of creativity. What we are up against, in effect, is a notion of the private which is different from the “private” as is demarcated in the private/public divide of western political theory and law, as a realm of female occupation, a space where the norms of female behaviour are defined. Instead, Roy

3. Roy’s brother, Lalit Kumar, recalls people’s surprise at hearing him speak because his fictional “counterpart,” Estha, gives up speaking towards the end of the novel. Lalit Kumar, Mary Roy, and Roy’s uncle have all been asked to comment on the reality of “their” characterizations in the novel.

4. E.M.S. Namboodiripad appears as a “real” character in the novel, i.e., he is mentioned without any camouflaging. Namboodiripad’s main objection was to the reference to his having misused public funds and party resources to better himself. This, he says, arises from the anti-communist attitude that Roy espouses. See “Kochu Karyangalude Daivam” in Jomy Thomas, ed. Arundhati Roy: Krithiyum Kazchappadam. Kozhikode: Mulberry, 1997 (Malayalam).

5. Interview with Urvashi Bhutalia. Outlook (9 April 1997).
seems to validate a private realm which is completely individualized and unavailable for anyone except the writer herself. This is possible, I want to argue, only for a woman-person whose self is already evolved as complete and humanized, and is attainable only to a subject of modernity. This idea of the private space is replicated in the novel itself, though the way in which it is done there is different from the personalized and passionate tones in which the writer answers a chaos of questions and comments.

The novel primarily deals with relationships within the family and the values that are given to the family and the domestic space. Roy begins, as I mentioned already, from a point where the domestic space is already threatened, and the fragmented lives of her characters can be seen as resulting from this threat. There are no ideal families or kinship relationships, no functional domestic ideology in the novel. The binding force of the ideal domestic space, love, is precisely what is “misplaced” here, and it is this “misplacement” that has made the domestic space vulnerable to disruption from the outside also. Through this, Roy gives the idea of the private a different meaning, and proposes another way of reconciling the already ruptured domestic space, which has wide significance for the modes of political action that may bridge the spheres of the private and the public.

One of the most interesting things that Roy does is to depict the domestic scenes as if these were scenes in a “Play.” Thus the Ayemenem House, the location of the story, is the stage set to enact this play: “Nine steep steps led from the driveway up to the front of the verandah. The elevation gave it the dignity of a stage and everything that happened there took on the aura and significance of a performance” (165). The house which should have been inhabited by people who would have been living the reality of
domesticity is thus occupied by people *enacting* lives on the fringes of respectable domesticity. Mammachi, the blind, violin-playing matriarch, is a widow who, even when her husband was alive, had stepped into the outside world of marketing by running her own pickle factory. Baby Kochamma is unmarried and has chosen to stay unmarried because of her unfulfilled love for a priest, Father Mulligan. Chacko had married a foreigner and was divorced. Ammu was a divorced mother. Ammu, Rahel and Estha walk in and out of the *Play*, sometimes consciously playing parts and sometimes watching it from the sidelines. Thus, the atmosphere of a *Play* presents the threatened domestic sphere as almost "unreal," a fiction.

The disintegration of the domestic sphere results from "rule-breaking," the transgression of sexual boundaries. It is with the breaking of the "love laws," which set out who should love whom and how much, that the Ayemenem House began its fall from grace. Everyone in the house broke laws:

They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. The laws that make grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam and jelly jelly. It was a time when uncles became fathers, mothers lovers, and cousins died and had funerals.

It was a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened (31).

The rule-breaking that is repeated through generations operates in various spheres: in the familial, societal, moral and communal, and especially in the sexual. Mammachi’s
acquiescence to Chacko’s liaisons, Ammu’s love for Velutha, and Rahel’s final union with Estha are acts that interlink them as women whose transgressions will cause the final and irredeemable (and not entirely regrettable) collapse of the already threatened domestic space.

The breaking of rules began with Mammachi. When she does not acquire enough courage to confront her husband who, as a matter of routine, beat her with brass flower vases, it is her son, Chacko, who shows that courage. Mammachi’s love for Chacko takes on the nature of the forbidden since his intervention on her behalf: “The day that Chacko prevented Pappachi from beating her ... Mammachi packed her wifely baggage and committed it to Chacko’s care. From then onwards he became the repository of all her womanly feelings. Her Man. Her only Love” (168). Her love for Chacko goes to the extent that she builds a separate entrance to the house so that he can go on with his liaisons with the women of his choice, and secretly slipped them money because a fee clarified things: “Disjuncted sex from love. Needs from Feelings” (169). She even tries to slip money to Margaret Kochamma, Chacko’s English wife who comes to visit them, because that would make her just another of the women Chacko slept with.

As for Ammu, she has to break rules. For, alongside the tenderness of motherhood, she nurtures a rage, “the reckless rage of a suicide bomber,” against her circumstances. Her marriage itself is a breaking of rule. Not only because she married an outsider, a Bengali Hindu, but because marriage itself was only a way out of the oppressive circumstances at home and not the lawful entry into another of a woman’s duties. Ammu lives an unwanted existence as a divorcee, a daughter who has no place in the domestic set up.
Ammu’s greatest sin is her love for Velutha. This sin starts forming in a dream, the dream of a cheerful, one-armed man. “The God of Losses. The God of Small Things.” When the dream becomes reality, it becomes rule-breaking. Ammu’s story underlines the fact that even in an already threatened domestic space, sexuality and its laws remain sacred. This is also where the question of caste becomes central to the novel. The complete disintegration of the domestic space happens when woman’s sexuality is unleashed and the boundaries of caste are crossed. Chacko’s libertine relationships are only “indiscretions” which are accommodated within the domestic space by the explanation that “he can’t help having a Man’s Needs,” and “the enigmatic, secretly thrilling notion of Men’s Needs gained implicit sanction in the Ayemenem House” (168). Ammu’s sin of taking charge of her own sexuality, on the other hand, is punished not only by the death of her lover but by having to die a lonely death plagued by nightmares, in a hotel room. Ammu is punished not only for attempting to invent a corresponding notion of “Women’s Needs” to that of Chacko’s Man’s Needs, but more severely for her transgression of caste boundaries in the context of sexuality.

When the story addresses Rahel, rules become redundant, for she is, one might say like the author herself, magically, indeed naturally a fully modern subject. Besides, she is “free” from the restricting norms or pressures of social and familial life. Her whole life after Ammu’s death is a string of broken rules. She floats through life without any major joys or sorrows, but is always haunted by an open wound deep inside and by the guilt that although unknowingly, she and Estha were the cause of Velutha’s death. She

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6. This, as we shall see, is significant in *Hu Tu Tu* also, where it is the daughter’s refusal to understand the mother’s sexual transgression that is central to the narrative, and, more importantly, in defining the whole identity of the daughter.
is one of the actors “trapped in a recondite play with no hint of plot or narrative” (191). Neither anger nor victimhood is available to her and, by extension, to Estha:

> It would have helped if they could have made that crossing. If they could have worn, even temporarily, the tragic hood of victimhood. Then they would have been able to put a face on it, and conjure up fury at what happened. Or seek redress. And eventually, perhaps, exorcize the memories that haunted them (191).

Estha and Rahel are separated for twenty three years. Rahel cannot communicate to Estha even through a letter: “There are things that you can’t do—like writing letters to a part of yourself. To your feet or hair. Or heart” (163-164). It is this void that allows her to make the final breaking of rules into incest, as Estha is the only person who can share the void.

Roy’s novel has been hailed as recording the changes in the lives of Malayali women over a period of time. It has been seen as representing the different steps in the journey of the Malayali woman from the restrictions of traditions to the freedom of awareness (Chandran, 1997). How representative is this representation? The three main women characters, Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel, all rebel against the given structures of domesticity. Each of these rebellions are realized through the crossing of the boundaries of sexuality. In this sense, they and their rebellions are interlinked. But what I want to argue is that the very nature of these rebellions take away any sense of historicity or of collectivity from the acts themselves, and allot them to a sphere of the personal, which seems essentially unsullied by the political processes outside. These rebellions, then, are no more Malayali than they are Chinese or American. Let me elaborate.
The language of the narrative essentializes the categories of feelings, passions, Love Laws. This is interesting because within the rules of domesticity, it is precisely these that have no place. However, the actions of the women in the Ayemenem House are based on these feelings and passions. Rebellions are premised on them. In essence, then, they are private rebellions. And they remain private and personalized because they are disconnected from any critique of domesticity itself. Mammachi, for instance, is acutely aware of the “illicit” nature of her feelings. Hence her refusal to admit the nature of her love. She is not ready for a public acknowledgement of her rule-breaking. What interests one is not an inverse reading of the Oedipal complex into the story, but the strategy of rebellion, here a private, completely individualized and (necessitated by and realized through) emotional rebellion. The privatized nature of this rebellion becomes clear in her relation to Ammu, her daughter, whose married life has many similarities to her own. But she shows no compassion or understanding towards Ammu. In fact, she never acknowledges Ammu’s pains or acquiesces to her mode of rebellion. There is clearly no attempt to connect herself and her daughter. Mammachi’s reaction to Ammu’s affair with Velutha is one of extreme intolerance. Her tolerance of Chacko’s ‘Men’s Needs’ “became the fuel of her unmanageable fury at her daughter” (258). Ammu has to be punished because she has “defiled generations of breeding” and “brought the family to its knees” (258).

And hence the plot to file a police complaint against Velutha for attempted rape. Baby Kochamma, the other woman in the family, who has locked up her sexuality in the private world of her doomed love for Father Mulligan, is her ally in the plot to lock up Ammu and consign Velutha to the police: “Mammachi provided the passion. Baby
Unlike Mammachi, Ammu is ready to give her love a name, a realization, when she goes to the police station to own up her part in the whole affair that led to Velutha’s murder by the police. And is punished by a recurrent dream, triggered off by Inspector Thomas Mathew calling her *Veshya*. Ammu’s dream of the one-armed man is replaced by policemen approaching her with snicking scissors, wanting to hack off her hair.

They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes whom they caught in the bazaar—branded them so that everybody would know them for what they are. *Veshyas*. . . . the women with vacant eyes and forcibly shaved heads in the land where long, oiled hair was only for the morally upright (161).

But this attempt to name her love is rewarded by banishment from the house, and a lonely death in a hotel room, haunted by dreams.

Twenty three years later, at “a viable, die-able age,” Rahel returns to Ayemenem, in a sense completing what Ammu had begun. Rahel can find solace only in the union with Estha which, in Roy’s mode of story telling, is in one sense pre-ordained by the fact that they are “two-egged twins” who “thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us” (2). Later Rahel thinks about Estha and herself as “them, because separately, the two of them are no longer what They were or ever thought They’d be” (3). Twenty-three years later they are “strangers who had met in a chance encounter,” who become partners in once again breaking the Love Laws (327). This final transgression is the necessary culmination, as far as Rahel is concerned, of the unaddressed act of betrayal that they were forced into as children—the betrayal of Velutha in exchange
for saving Ammu (314-320). Estha’s silence and Rahel’s wanderings come together in a sharing, not of happiness, but of a “hideous grief” (328). It is interesting that the novel does not tell us the future of this particular rule-breaking. Instead, the novel ends with the scene of Ammu’s and Velutha’s love making. At a figurative level, Rahel will continue the “forbidden love” that Ammu began.

There is a reluctance in the naming of this love: “There is very little anyone could say about what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi’s book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings” (328). At this moment, the rebellions, their effects on the two children now grown up, and the subsequent “resolution” of their disquiet, are purely and irredeemably “personal.” Transgressions in the domestic sphere, even in a middle-class Christian family of rural Kerala, are a fact. But they are essentially personal.

The starkness of this personalization of the private is enhanced by the overt political commentary that is another important part of Roy’s novel. Roy has very strong political comments about the communist history of Kerala, the practice of Marxist theory by self-acknowledged comrades, the police and their functioning, the sexual exploitation of the women workers in factories run by communist followers and so on. These criticisms are made squarely in the face of the political. The passion is of an informed observer, from a position which straddles the “inside” (by being a Malayali, a woman from the heartland of communism in India) and the “outside” (informed citizen, a modern, politically conscious writer). The socio-political critique is confined to “public” matters. The personal nature of individual lives becomes the ether in which all rebellions are dissolved, and all that may be political remain separate from an almost existential angst
of the subjects of modernity that we encounter in the novel. The fully personalized nature of the resolution is designated as redemptive, and allows to be posited as somehow above politics, also the touchstone for judging politics.

Let me now move on to the film. *Hu Tu Tu* is the story of an ordinary woman, a teacher in a rural school and her rise to political power as the chief minister of the state. It is the story of what the transformations that this woman undergoes in the public arena of party politics does to her family, especially her daughter. It is the story of “terrorism,” of organized killing and kidnapping by political rebels in retaliation against the policies of the state. It is also the story of two young people, their awakening into the social situations that they have been so far away from.7

The heroine, Panna, is very similar to Rahel in *GST*. She is a rebel with social consciousness. Unlike Rahel who, after her tumultuous childhood, spends her adult life

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7. Panna, the daughter of the chief minister Gayatri Devi, is kidnapped by an extremist group, led by Adi who was her former lover. They had been separated after an accident in which Adi was thought to be dead. The story is revealed through their remembrances of their past, and Adi’s account of how he became the terrorist leader from an aspiring pilot. Before the accident Panna was training to be an IPS officer. Both Adi and Panna shared a disillusioned life as the children of corrupt and loveless parents—Adi hated his father, a prominent businessman, and Panna grew up to be bitter and disgruntled, watching the transformation of her mother from an ordinary school teacher to a power-hungry politician. The mother’s sexual relation with the leader of her party, Sawant, destroyed what once was a happy family. Adi and Panna come together in an understanding of a disquiet they cannot name. It is through Bhau, a dalit leader, that they are finally able to name their disillusionment. Disquiet becomes political ideology and open rebellion.

Meanwhile, Gayatri Devi contests election and her opponent is Bhau. When it becomes clear that she will be defeated, she along with Adi’s father plots to kill Sawant, which will cause the elections to be conducted again. Bhau is disabled and she wins the elections to become the chief minister. It is at this stage that the accident that separates Adi and Panna occurs and the story cuts to the present.

Adi, whose body could not be found after searching the river into which their car had crashed, survived, but lost a leg. He joins the terrorist group and is masterminding a plan to release some of their people who are in the jail. Panna is to be used as the pawn. But, Gayatri Devi, unmoved by her daughter’s kidnapping, unleashes her fury on Bhau, and he is sent back to the group completely disabled, alive but a vegetable. On seeing him, Panna decides to join the terrorists in their plans. Outfitted as a suicide bomber, she accompanies Adi to a large gathering where her mother is to address her constituency, and detonates herself, killing her mother, Adi’s father, Adi and herself.
away from home, Panna lives with her family. The domestic space in this family is disrupted by the sexual transgression of the mother. Panna is witness to her mother’s transition from a rural village school teacher to the powerful politician, a transition accompanied by her change-over from loving mother to the mistress of Sawant, the leader of the political party she represents. She carries within her the disquiet stemming from her disapproval of her mother’s sexuality. Her relationship with her mother is central to her development as a young woman. She is unruly, disdainful of everyone, especially men, except her father for whom she has a love steeped in pity. She is a modern woman in all senses of the term, training in the Police Academy, bold, outspoken, free. Language is her forte. She uses language in a negation of her femininity. When she swears at one of her mother’s bodyguards he tells her to refrain from bad language. She retorts, asking him whether men have taken out a licence to use bad language. Like Rahel, she floats through life, carrying a smothering anger within her, until she meets Adi.

Adi is a kindred spirit. He carries within him the anger against his father whom he holds responsible for the death of his mother, a pious woman. The badness of Adi’s father is not sexual in nature, but is inhuman, stemming from his desire to make money and obtain power. The similarity in their situation pulls them together.

The definition of the disquiet of these two young people stems from the domestic sphere which is not “complete.” The good mother is dead, in Adi’s case literally and for Panna, metaphorically. Instead of the normal domestic qualities of love and nurturance, their families are ruled by greed and hunger for power.
At a general level, the degeneration critique that the film puts forth seems to suggest that the disintegration of the family is only a part of the disintegration of human values in the society at large. But a closer reading of the narrative structure and the characterization of the two women, Panna and Gayatri Devi, show that it is the disintegration of the values of femininity that leads the family and the society to irrecoverable deterioration. In Panna's memory, the good times of her childhood and her family, and of her mother as the teacher in the rural school, is interrupted by the entry of Sawant into the classroom to request Gayatri Devi to take an active interest in politics. Gayatri Devi does not carry her wifely and motherly virtues into the public realm. Instead she is shown as fallen, since she uses her sexuality to further her interests.

The open confrontation between Panna and her mother makes the viewpoint of the narrative clear. When her father scolds Panna for coming home late one night she retaliates by saying that she does not see any semblence of rules and regulations in this family. And to her stricken father she asks why he has never tried to control his wife and how "that man" seems to be able to intrude into their family life whenever he pleases. Overhearing this, her mother slaps her and says that it is because of "that man" that they are able to live in style. On another occasion, Sawant walks into the bedroom when Panna and her mother are having an argument and tries to intervene. Here again, unheeding her mother's protests, Panna asks him to leave the room saying, "This is a private bedroom. You can't just saunter in." In both cases the vocal protest is against the man who is intruding into the family, but the challenge is to her mother's sexuality since it is the unleashing of it which has caused the intrusion, and thus the disruption of the private.
The private nature of Panna's grief finds a reflection in the public sphere when Adi and Panna come in contact with Bhau, a dalit leader resolved to fight the inequalities in society. Bhau leads a street theatre group, putting up plays on social themes of corruption, greed, power in high places, and instigates people to acknowledge the fallen times of the present. The larger social critique that Bhau represents also carries the two voices of the general and the particular. At a general level it addresses inequalities of caste, religion, etc. and fights against the corrupt powers that rule society. At the particular level, it is addressing the corrupt rule of Gayatri Devi and her party. Gayatri Devi is shown as completely corrupt when she does not hesitate to plot the killing of Sawant, fearing that she will lose political mileage.

Adi's and Panna's sharing of their private disquiet ends with the accident that separates them. When they meet again, Adi is one of the leaders of the terrorist group. The private grief that he has been nursing is relocated onto a public realm. It is Panna who completes the rebellion that has characterized both their lives. Instead of accepting the freedom offered to her by her kidnappers led by Adi, after Bhau has been brutalized by her mother's police force, she decides to plunge into the destruction that the group has planned. With the pressing of a button on the bomb attached to her body, she kills her mother and Adi's father, the evil forces of both the private and the public, along with herself and Adi, the people who belong to neither world.

Panna's relationship with Adi is a respite from the disruptions evident within the domestic

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8. The title of the film, Hu Tu Tu, is interesting. Bhau, watching a group of village youth playing kabaddi (Hu tu tu is another name for the game), says that kabaddi should be made our national game since it is being played every day in our legislative assemblies. The whole political scenario is a game of kabaddi with each team trying to overpower the other.
sphere. The accident that separates them, with Adi disappearing and presumed to be dead, brings her back to the domestic space. She divides her time between her mother’s house and the village house where her father has taken refuge. Her visits to Bhau are her only solace. She is living a private hell, where all incidents—the disintegration of her family, the loss of Adi and his child she was carrying while she had the accident, the social evils that Bhau is fighting against—are attributed to her mother’s immorality. But apart from anger and frustration, and disobedience to her mother, she takes no action of any kind. The instigation to act comes from witnessing Bhau’s destruction.

Gulzar’s narrative resolution of the problem posed by the disrupted domestic space and its connection to a public space of politics is quite different from that of Roy. Roy, as I suggested, resolves the private rebellions of her heroine in an entirely personalized manner. There is no connection either to the public or to the political. The private nature of Panna’s rebellions are different in that they are constantly being juxtaposed by the need for rebellions in the political field. Panna’s decision to become the suicide bomber is, as can be seen, stemming from a private and personal agony and anger. Bhau’s destruction, for Panna, personifies the public relevance of her anger. In both cases, the cause of destruction is her mother. Hence, her action bridges the private and the public, in the cleansing of the evil that pervades both. It also bridges her private and public sensibilities, as the daughter of an “immoral” woman and as a restless youth living in hard and corrupt times.

The modernist understanding of women’s sexual transgressions has an embedded humanism in it. A similar humanism plays in the representation of the dalit characters
also. The representation of Velutha and Bhau is an important facet on which the story of
domestic disruptions and their resolutions are predicated. Here again there is an essential
similarity in narratorial sensibilities. As I pointed out in the beginning, both Velutha
and Bhau are endowed with a modernity that is on par with that of Ammu, Rahel or
Panna, and their modernity is in spite of their differences in circumstances or identities.

Velutha is the “God of Losses. The God of small things.” He is a paravan converted
into christianity, but still carrying his untouchability with him in a society which
perpetuates casteism. He is also given a sense of mystery and new-worldness by his
unconfirmed association with naxalites. For all of Roy’s criticism of communism, there
is no attempt to link it to the continuing existence of caste even within the christian
community. Velutha himself is endowed with an enlightenment which prevents him
from following any of the rituals of caste subordination. But this aspect of him is his
own personal emancipation. We do not encounter such a possibility in his father, Vellya
Paapen.

The humanized modernity of Velutha becomes clear if we look at the descriptions used
for him and his father. Vellya Paapen is “drunk” and “superstitious,” and when he
comes to tell Mammachi about the relationship between his son and her daughter, “each
time he opened his mouth to speak, the smell of arrack hit [Kochu Maria] like a hammer”
(254). He is described as an “old Paravan, who had seen the Walking Backwards days,
torn between Loyalty and Love” (255).

Velutha is described through the eyes of Ammu. I want to juxtapose the above short
description of Vellya Paapen with the longish description of Velutha when Ammu
acknowledges him as a grown man for the first time:

She saw the ridges of muscle on Velutha’s stomach grow taught (sic) and rise under his skin like the divisions on a slab of chocolate. She wondered at how his body had changed—so quietly, from a flatmuscled boy’s body into a man’s body. Contoured and hard. A swimmer’s body. A swimmer-carpenter’s body. Polished with a high-wax body polish (175).

There is a sudden desire in Ammu to identify an anger in him, an anger similar to the one that she nurtured: “She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness, he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against” (176). Roy seems to suggest a concordance between the situation of a middle-class christian woman and her rebellion against the norms of lives that have restricted her choices and that of a dalit man working as a servant in that household. The complexities of each situation, the differences and the similarities, are collapsed into a single larger narrative of “oppression.” Velutha’s and Ammu’s situations are definitely not the same. Though not tied to the family as a bonded labourer, Velutha definitely belongs to the casteist society that defines his existence as a servant attached to the feudal christian household, always on call. Apart from the “memory” of what Roy calls the “Walking Backwards days,” a euphemism which reduces centuries of subjugation into a three-word phrase, Velutha’s present is also unimportant in Roy’s narrative, the sole purpose of which seems to be the eroticization of his body, and the breaking of Love Laws. This is clear in the text itself. Look at Roy’s description of the moment when Velutha acknowledges Ammu’s gaze:

Centuries telescoped into one evanescent moment. History was wrong-footed,
caught off guard. Sloughed off like an old snakeskin. Its marks, its scars, its wounds from old wars and the walking backwards days all fell away. In its absence it left an aura, a palpable shimmering that was as plain to see as the water in a river or the sun in the sky. As plain to feel as the heat on a hot day, or the tug of a fish on a taut line. So obvious that no one noticed.

In that brief moment, Velutha looked up and saw things that he hadn’t seen before. Things that had been out of bounds so far, obscured by history’s blinkers.

Simple things.

For instance, he saw that Rahel’s mother was a woman (176).

The history of caste, class and gender identities are erased, and there is only the “pure” passion of man and woman. Devoid of his caste markings and his history, Velutha emerges as a humanized individual, at best an exotic symbol of eroticism.

A similar modernity is attributed to Bhau by the director’s humanism. Bhau is represented as a sensitive, elder-brotherly character who cries as easily as he gets angry. What he is fighting against is the larger causes of corruption and disintegration. The basic difference between Bhau and Velutha is that in place of Velutha’s vague connections to naxalites, Bhau leads a full-fledged political rebellion against the corrupt state. He uses the force of the non-violent “militancy” of the dalit youth in retaliation to the violent repression of the state forces. Actually in the whole film, Bhau is the only one with a clear political ideology. He has been able to straddle the private and the public in ways that Velutha never can. But it is also true that Bhau is not “dalit” in a sense that the attributes of a humanized modernity makes him a social revolutionary despite his caste. There is no caste history to his struggle either. Like Roy, Gulzar also plays down the history of Bhau.
as a dalit, but at the same time is ascertaining his dalit-ness in an attempt to validate the struggle. This, I would argue, is necessary since Panna’s rebellion against the particular disintegration of the family, of her mother’s sexual transgression needs to be fortified by Bhau’s critique of the generalized disintegration of the society.

What emerges then is the authorial ideology that intervenes with the manifestation of dalit identity. The politics of that location is appropriated to validate the critique of the transgressions in the private. But the history of the emergence of that politics, its public history is kept aside. Velutha and Bhau, then, are not *dalits*, but modern subjects whose liberal humanism makes them the legitimate partners of the transgressions and rebellions and their resolutions in the private sphere.