FICTION AS TRANSGRESSION

Arundhati Roy: *The God of Small Things*

*The God of Small Things* (GOST) enacts the eternal drama of confrontation between the powerful and the powerless. The central crisis is not the woman's powerlessness, but the general victimization that is inherent in a system affecting men and women alike. In an essay titled "Come September" in *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* (2005), Arundhati Roy states that, “The theme of much of what I write, fiction as well as non-fiction, is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless, circular conflict they're engaged in” (Roy 13). Roy believes that "the accumulation of vast unfettered power" by a state, country, corporation, institution, or even an individual, a spouse, friend or sibling – whatever be the ideology, results in excesses. She also adds, “... my writing is not really about nations and histories, it’s about power. About the paranoia and ruthlessness of power. About the physics of power” (Roy 14).

Amina Amin's study, "Text and Counter text: Oppositional Discourse in *The God of Small Things,*" discovers how in the novel several discourses 'inform' the narrative and 'negotiate and compete' with one another as if for supremacy. There is also present an 'oppositional discourse' of independent
existence wherein each discourse is transformed into the counter of the other. Textually, the author builds up a formidable power structure of a caste ridden, stratified, repressive social set up, which is amply represented by the Ayemenem household. Women, children and the deprived are in the clutches of this all-pervasive power structure. Within this overweening power structure, Roy subtly weaves in resistance and dissent. The all-encompassing net of power that traps individuals is palpable in Roy's text. Michel Foucault’s theories about the working of power in society are significant here:

> Power must be analysed as something that circulates . . . .

> It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target, they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. 

(Gordon 109)

*The God of Small Things* speaks of the power structures that lie embedded in a patriarchy. Opposition to patriarchy is central to all feminist
struggles. Patriarchy is a term that acquires different meanings in the different discourses in which it plays a part. Psychoanalysts, sociologists and anthropologists use it with subtle degrees of differentiation. Even the feminist use of the term is shifting. Radical feminists like Kate Millet use ‘patriarchy’ to represent the power relationships by which men dominate women. Marxist feminists give it a narrower and more precise interpretation, using it to denote the relations between women's subordinate position and the organisation of capitalist modes of production. To psychoanalysts like Juliet Mitchell patriarchy signifies a society in which the father enjoys either actual or symbolic power, with women being relegated to the subordinate role of property and object of exchange. Male domination, all theorists agree, pervade sexual, psychological, social and economic areas of life. They inform all the major institutions of society - politics, the law, police, medicine and the universities. The problematic position of the female protagonist trapped in these power structures, and her efforts to struggle free of them is the theme of many woman - centred works of fiction. In some cases, women also collude with men in oppressing and exploiting their own sex.

A feature of Roy's novel which strikes the reader is the focus she places on the all-encompassing nature of male power. Ammu is obviously trapped in the web of male power - structures. Roy moves from describing nets of exploitation and violence perpetrated by individual men in the private domain of the home, to depicting analogous ones in the public by institutions
like the law, the police, the Roman Catholic community and schools (for example, Rahel's school). In the novel emphasis is placed on the way male dominated institutions support individual men in their attempts to subjugate women. It also depicts the sex/caste/class confrontation. The family unit is presented as one of the principal sites of women's oppression and exploitation.

Roy looks at power and truth not from the point of view of those who exercise power and define truth, but from the point of view of those who are subjugated and imposed upon. At the receiving end are Ammu, the twins and Velutha, besides other nameless women and the marginalized. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma may wield power and exercise it to hurt several others, but the fact remains that these victors are victims too.

Mammachi and Baby Kochamma have had unhappy pasts. Mammachi, seventeen years her illustrious husband Benaan John Ipe’s junior, becomes the butt of his ire and jealousy. Mammachi’s husband, the Imperial Entomologist, is by nature and in practice an 'imperialist'. Mammachi's violin classes are abruptly discontinued the moment "Mammachi's teacher, Launsky-Tieffenthal, makes the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented and, in his opinion, potentially concert class" (GOST 50). Later, when Mammachi finds a niche for herself through her pickle business, she is in for more victimization. The high-handed entomologist disregards her lowly job but at the same time resents the attention that his
wife begins to get. With Pappachi wife-beating carried out with a brass flower vase, becomes a regular feature, until his son Chacko interferes and ends this cruel exercise.

Baby Kochamma, Pappachi’s sister, has been the hapless victim of an unfruitful love affair. The Father Mulligan – Baby Kochamma affair started off with Biblical discussions and culminated in an impossible infatuation.

Father Mulligan was more than merely flattered by the emotion he aroused in the attractive young girl who stood before him with a trembling, kissable mouth and blazing, coal black eyes. *(GOST 23)*

Baby Kochamma was attractive, and the affinity was mutual, since "the young girl and the intrepid Jesuit, both (quaked) with unchristian passion, using the Bible as a ruse to be with each other" *(GOST 24)*. The cleric "had young Baby Kochamma's aching heart on a leash, bumping behind them, lurching over leaves and small stones. Bruised and almost broken" *(GOST 24)*. Baby Kochamma's conversion to Roman Catholicism and entry into a convent in a bid to get closer to Mulligan proved futile. By the time she was withdrawn from the convent she did not qualify for marriage since she had gained a 'reputation' *(GOST 26)*. Armed with a diploma in ornamental gardening she returned from Rochester only to find the embers of her infatuation still glowing. With a vengeance, as it were, Baby Kochamma
"raised a fierce, bitter garden" (GOST 26) and continued to jot down love-slogans to her beau long after he turned to Hinduism and passed away.

Bitterness sinks deep into these women and they take it out on vulnerable persons within the family circle. Mammachi nurses a suppressed hatred for her daughter-in-law, Margaret, while Baby Kochamma grows into a villainous creature of monstrous proportions reeking vengeance on hapless Ammu, Velutha and the children, Estha and Rahel.

Patriarchal control at its worst has a strong presence in the text. It plagues the Syrian Christian community, doling out injustice in large measure to its women and transgressors. Roy's description of Pappachi's photograph subtly touches upon the cold iron streak in the man:

His light brown eyes were polite, yet Maleficent, as though he was making an effort to be civil to the photographer while plotting to murder his wife . . . . He had an elongated dimple on his chin which only served to underline the threat of a lurking manic violence. A sort of contained cruelty. (GOST 51)

The photograph in all its stillness penetrates to unsettle the warmth of the room. Pappachi unleashes a reign of terror in his house over the womenfolk. Just as he physically abuses his wife, he expresses his displeasure towards his daughter, Ammu, by ruthlessly cutting up her prized gum boots.
Ammu is denied education because educating a girl is not specially profitable and gives no promise of returns. Her impulsive marriage to a Bengali Hindu is a desperate attempt to escape "from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter long-suffering mother" (GOST 39). Her father-in-law cleverly takes possession of their new car, all the jewellery and the wedding presents. Her husband proves to be an alcoholic, an outrageous liar and a vile trickster. He is even prepared to save his job by bartering his wife for official advancement at the instance of Mr. Hollick. Ammu ends up back home - an uninvited liability with the twin 'millstones' round her neck only to be subjected to more torture through the prejudices and the indignities that her community perpetuates.

*The God of Small Things* traces the tragic decline and fall of Ammu. In her own home Ammu is faced with an identity crisis. She is fully conscious of the fact that "choosing between her husband's name and her father's name didn't give a woman much of choice" (GOST 37). She has no 'Locus Stand I' anywhere. Disgraced, she lives in the periphery of the Ayemenem house – a divorced, ex-wife of a Hindu, condemned several times over for crossing sacred boundaries. From the frying pan in Calcutta, it is straight into the fire of Ayemenem that Ammu lands in her native village. Chacko, her brother, lords it over her as he is the sole owner of all the property. He is the high-riding bully who, despite being a divorcee himself, is free to satisfy his 'Man's needs' through a private entry to the house, most
understandingly arranged for by his mother. A strange mix of character - "a Marxist mind and a 'feudal libido" (GOST 168) keep him afloat on the turbulent waters of the village. Instigated by Baby Kochamma, it is Chacko who asks Ammu to pack her bags and clear off after the Velutha episode. Baby Kochamma also masterminds the 'Return' of Estha to his estranged father in Calcutta. A family is thus fragmented. A poignantly deep relationship between Ammu and her twins is violated and ends in a painful physical separation never to be restored.

On many occasions, Ammu openly strikes out at the male chauvinist Chacko. She sees through the viles of a male-dominated society and revolts against Mammachi's blind approval of her son. In the novel Ammu makes it clear that she is not impressed with the superior image of Chacko that Mammachi tries to foist on everyone. To quote Ammu:

(a) Going to Oxford didn't necessarily make a person clever.

(b) Cleverness didn't necessarily make a good Prime Minister.

(c) If a person couldn't run a pickle factory profitably, how was that person going to run a whole country?

And most important of all:
All Indian mothers are obsessed with their sons and are therefore poor judges of their abilities.

Later in the novel Ammu snaps at Chacko for his mock-concern for the twins. "Stop posing as the children's Great Saviour!" Ammu said. "When it comes down to brass tacks, you don't give a damn about them. Or me" (GOST 85). Ammu's sharp repartees voice the indignation of the oppressed woman. The text is loaded with the protest of an angry young woman struggling to be heard.

In course of time, Ammu's acts of defiance that culminate in her 'illicit' alliance with an untouchable take their toll. People and systems that matter turn against her, ostracize and alienate her. She is thrown out by her sibling Chacko and her closest relatives. The community will have nothing to do with a transgressor who has broken all its age-old rules. The custodians of the law too view her as a prostitute 'available' for batons to tap on. Inspector Thomas Mathew "tapped on Ammu's breast with his baton as though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered" (GOST 8). It is suggested in the novel that even the church would be defiled in accepting her mortal remains. And so it is that when Ammu dies her dead body is accorded only a pagan cremation at a place "where nobody except beggars, derelicts and the police-custody dead
were cremated" (*GOST* 162). Thus family, community, law and the church turn their backs on one who had chosen to face life on her own terms. Ammu falls a victim to the powers that be, to the devious designs of an overweening patriarchy.

In *The God of Small Things* it is not the womenfolk alone who are victimized; the children and the outcastes also are preyed upon. Rahel and Estha, like their mother, are unwanted 'guests' in the Ayemenem household always confronted by the threat of 'exile'. The fact that they have a Hindu father is held against them. Baby Kochamma picks on them mercilessly but at the same time shows her undisguised approval of Chacko’s daughter, the half English Sophiemol. In Sophiemol’s case her hybridity is viewed as an asset. The twins are branded: "They're sly. They're uncouth. Deceitful. They're growing wild" (*GOST* 149). What one notices here is a systematic ‘othering’ in progress. Those who do not fit into the norm, are considered as aberrations and always have to bear the cross of the negative values ascribed to them.

Baby Kochamma's manipulative plans to 'save' the family's reputation provide an ideal opportunity to execute the secret agenda of wreaking vengeance on Velutha. Baby Kochamma capitalizes on the children's vulnerable point: their mother, Ammu. She blackmails them emotionally. A verbal account of the horrors that Ammu would have to undergo in prison if
she is charged by the police frightens the innocent twins. Faced with a chilling choice, they opt to say "yes" to the policeman's query in the cell where Velutha has been confined. The moment that Estha says "yes" signals his fall from grace, the loss of innocence. As the text poignantly expresses: "Childhood tiptoed out" and soon after, "Silence slid like a bolt". Estha is silenced. He becomes "a quiet quick bubble floating on a sea of noise" (GOST 11). The silence that befalls Estha is pervasive in the narrative. Ammu, hemmed in by Chacko, Baby Kochamma and Mammachi, is silenced. Velutha is also silenced. With this, in The God of Small Things hierarchies are once again reaffirmed and the law upheld - but the poignancy lies in what happens to Ammu, Estha, Rahel and Velutha.

Another major incident in the novel takes place at Abhilish Talkies where the family has gone to watch ‘The Sound of Music’. Estha’s loud singing inside the theatre as the film is being shown irritates Ammu who asks him to go outside. It is here that Estha gets talking to the Orangedrink Lemondrink man whose paedophilic overtures towards the boy end up with Estha holding a cold lemon drink in one hand and the Orangedrink Lemondrink man’s penis in the other. At the end of a distasteful exercise "Esthappen Yako finished his free bottle of fizzes, lemon-flavoured fear" (GOST 105). This fear haunts the boy, goading him to seek refuge in desperate ways. The fatal boat ride across the river to the History House
germinates from this lurking fear and urge to 'hide' from the paedophile. This is another instance of the way power operates to intimidate the defenceless.

A third category that has to face the ire of power structures presented in the novel is the socially marginalized Paravan. In a caste-ridden society where "Paravans are expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their foot prints" (GOST 73-74) that might otherwise defile the Brahmins and Syrian Christians, conversion held the promise of escape from untouchability. But these Rice-Christians as the Paravan converts were referred to, did not take long to realise that they "had jumped from the frying pan into the fire" (GOST 74). They were received into the faith but with separate churches, services, priests, and to top it all, a Pariah Bishop. Vellya Paapen the "Old World Paravan" is servile and totally indebted to Mammachi and her family. But his son Velutha is not as mindful as his father of the old order. His father is aware of this, yet is unable to pinpoint exactly what it is about his son that scares him:

Perhaps it was first a lack of hesitation. An unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel. (GOST 76)
It is perhaps these very same qualities that draw Ammu to him. However when Velutha’s act of transgression is brought to light, he too becomes a victim of overbearing power structure. His own father exposes his son’s crime and asks for punishment. Velutha is disowned by his family and his employers, and loses the protective support of the Party as well. The law also subdues him. Velutha’s fate is not dissimilar to that of Ammu’s. Between them lie shredded the lives of the twins. The power structures thus pick on the vulnerable: women, children and outcastes.

The God of Small Things dallies with the past but has also strong roots in the present. It evolves into a protest novel, raising banners (like Velutha and his comrades) against social injustice, upper caste snobbery, exploitation and the sheer ruthlessness of power mongers. It lays bare the enormity of man's innate cruelty – "the sublimal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify" (GOST 308). The twins witness a re-enactment of Raudra Bhima "crazed, blood thirsty . . . in search of death and vengeance" (GOST 236). Comrade Pillai tells the bewildered children that Bhima was "searching for the beast that is in him” (GOST 236). The implication is clarified in the observation that follows immediately after:

Search for the man who lives in him was perhaps what he really meant because certainly no beast has essayed the
boundless, infinitely inventive art of human hatred – no
beast can match its range and power. (GOST 236)

Power, translated into ugly violence, lies coiled within the matrix of
the text. The chilling description of the policemen's brutality inflicted on
Velutha (in the chapter titled "The History House") is menacing. We are
introduced to "Mens Needs" of a different sort. Estha and Rahel witness,

... a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions ... of human nature's pursuit of ascendancy. Structure
Order Complete monopoly. It was human history,
masquerading as God's purpose, revealing herself to an
under-age audience. (GOST 309)

What we see is a violation of childhood innocence, of human dignity,
and human life. A violation that is carried out with "economy", "efficiency"
and “responsibility”. A sample of "History in live performance" (GOST 305).
Comrade Pillai and Inspector Thomas Mathew are "men whom childhood had
abandoned without trace" (GOST 262).

Hélène Cixous in "Sorties" lists a double braid or "dual hierarchical
oppositions" wherein the woman is associated with a negative/weak/passive
value.

Where is She?
Activity/Passivity
Sun/Moon
Culture/Nature
Date/Night

In *The God of Small Things* it is Velutha, the oppressed, who is identified with nature. He is untouched by the corrupt adult world and even bears a special sign that marks him out from ordinary "men": “An autumn leaf at night. That made the monsoons come on time" (*GOST* 311). Velutha as the Monsoon-bringer, as the hapless victim, as the lover at night clearly makes a crossover to the feminine 'principle'. He ventures out on a moon-lit night for his tryst with Ammu. The description of the lovers’ meeting in the river amply locates Velutha’s domain: nature.

His feet touched the muddy riverbed. As he rose from the dark river and walked up the stone steps, she saw that the world they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars. (*GOST* 334)

Ammu observes a Velutha of infinite beauty and "supple grace". Velutha's indulgence towards the children and his easy involvement in their make-believe world mark him apart from the other overbearing men in the story. He curtsies like the English dairymaid in *The King's Breakfast* obeying
Rahel's strict instructions (*GOST* 175) and readily becomes part of their world of make-believe. Rahel appreciates "the sweetness of that gesture . . . Instinctively colluding in the conspiracy of their fiction, taking care not to decimate it with adult carelessness" (*GOST* 190). Rahel is full of gratitude for Velutha's infinite tenderness in not ruining a dream that needed to be held like "a piece of porcelain". It is Velutha who again figures as the one-armed swimmer in Ammu's "afternoon-mare", the God of Loss – the God of Small Things. Ammu and the children, in their unconditional acceptance of Velutha flout societal norms of "who should be loved, and how. And how much" (*GOST* 33).

A central motif of the novel is the act of transgression. The protagonists are ready to break social laws and even face the eventuality of death for desire and for love. Ammu spends wearisome days confined to "a front verandah and pickle factory" (*GOST* 43) and finds that her "life had been lived" (*GOST* 38) and that she is left with no more chances or choices. A fleeting exchange of glances between her and Velutha a particular morning changes it all, "centuries telescoped into one evanescent moment, History was wrong footed, caught off guard" (*GOST* 176). Walls crumble, boundaries blurr at the shocking realisation that" he was not necessarily the only giver of gifts. That she had gifts to give him too" (*GOST* 177). There is an untamed nature lying dormant in Ammu – the unsafe Edge (*GOST* 44) and an air of unpredictability. Through a battered childhood she had "developed a lofty
sense of injustice and (the) impish, reckless streak that develops in someone small who has been bullied all their lives by someone Big” \((GOST\ 182)\). In the act of giving her body and being to Velutha, Ammu's rebellion is articulated. She finds in him a kindred spirit: “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” \((GOST\ 176)\).

Brinda Bose in her essay “In Desire and in Death: Eroticism as Politics in Arundathi Roy’s *The God of Small Things*” \((1998)\) analyses the "reckless rage" of this woman:

Her (Ammu's) own politics are embedded in her "rage" against the various circumstances of her life, and it is through this sense of shared raging that she finds it possible to desire the untouchable Velutha. It is not only sexual gratification that she seeks, she seeks also to touch the untouchable. \((65)\)

By asserting her "biological" desire for a man who inhabits a space beyond permissible boundaries, a space of untouchability, it seems that Ammu attempts a subversion of caste/class rules. She also upsets traditional notions of masculinity by being the initiator of the sexual act. Ammu discovers that "she too can be a giver of gifts". She begins "to love by night the man her children loved by day" \((GOST\ 202)\). On that eventful night when
she goes to Velutha, as she listens to her radio 'something stirs inside her’ and a liquid ache spreads under her skin, and she walks out of the world like a witch, to a better, happier place (GOST 44). Ammu does not 'submit' herself to a superior masculine passion but gifts Velutha her body. 'Her brownness against his blackness. Her softness against his hardness. Her nut-brown breasts (that wouldn't support a tooth brush’) against his smooth ebony chest" (GOST 335). Mammachi, when she comes to know of Ammu’s transgression, has nightmarish visions of Ammu's sexual act with a coarse Paravan. Roy makes it clear that to be a ‘giver of gifts’ is a woman’s prerogative as well.

Another instance of a subversive oppositional discourse that runs counter to the text’s main discourse may be read in the incestuous relationship between Rahel and Estha. The closeness of the twins, "Siamese souls" culminating in a forbidden union may be interpreted as the sexual solace that Rahel offers Estha for his unspeakable pain. This act of incest transcends and violates all biological norms. What becomes obvious here is the subversive power of desire and sexuality operating in an area that is rife with the politics of gender divisions and the social rules governing them. Roy's novel has both pain and pathos at its centre. Here shame and defeat are allied issues. "But the politics of the novel is contained in the subversion of this shame and defeat through the valourization of erotic desire," says Bose (70).
Rukmini Bhaya Nair, in "Twins and Lovers: Arundhati Roy's God of Small Things" (2004), analyses Roy's fictional style to show that there is "an interesting psychological conflict in her work between residual memories of subjugation and a personal commitment to future political emancipation – the idea of a Utopian tomorrow" (177). Bhaya Nair elaborates on the predicament of the post-colonial woman writer in English who is faced with "an existential dilemma: how to escape the linguistic trap, the gilded cage, of her historical situatedness" (178). The English language, once viewed as an instrument of violation is today being absorbed as an Indian tongue. This has led to experimentation of an extreme sort. Bhaya Nair calls this "contortionist poetics", wherein language is turned inside out. Memory-gnawing into the past comes easy to Roy. It becomes a treasure-trove into which the author plunges and achieves "a feminization of memory" (179). According to Rukmini Bhaya Nair the author works on it delicately as one would on an embroidery of memories in a bid to forget pain and to understand her life better. Roy excels "as a rag-picker of memory . . . separating the relevant detail from its surround of grunge with unerring accuracy" (180). What is disconcerting, however, is the fact that there is a shift in the focalizer. If Rahel's is the consciousness through which the narrative operates, there are sudden fissures that appear as the voice of the omniscient narrator breaks through. Rahel's feminine perspective is undermind. One is left to muse over the "tension between Roy as a 'controlling' author and Roy as the 'vulnerable'
character Rahel . . ." (181). Roy is at her best when she speaks through the consciousness of Rahel. Language takes on a life of its own.

Roy's "commitment to craft, to verbal detail, the intimate care with which the self in the mirror is observed", (Nair, 184) are what make her writing "womanly" according to Rukmini Bhaya Nair. According to Bhaya Nair:

If a woman's literary domain has come to be identified with the personal, if it consists in the sharp, sensitive observation of detail, then Roy is right there. If romance and sentiment, not to say sentimentality, are women's staples, then Roy is right in there too. (186)

The author's liberal use of stylistic devices are what make the text unique. For instance there are:

(a) Circling repetitions:

He said there were only black cat shaped holes in the universe. There were squashed Miss Mitten-shaped stains in the universe. Squashed crows that had tried to eat the squashed frog-shaped stains in the universe. Squashed dogs that ate the squashed crow-shaped stains in the universe (GOST 82).

(b) Single word sentences:
Feathers. Mangoes. Spite (GOST 82).

(c) Sentence-long paragraphs:

It hadn't changed, the June Rain (GOST 10).

(d) Stand-up capitals within sentences:

But the middle of a respectable river, or the Other Side, was no place for children to Linger, Loll or Learn Things (GOST 204).

(e) Nonsense rhymes:

Fast faster fest
Never let it nest
Until the fast is faster
And the faster's fest (GOST 104).

(f) Tricks with morphology:

Inflectional effect as in –

Margaret Kochamma told her to Stoppit.

So she Stoppited (GOST 141).

Derivational neologisms –

'Where're going?' Rahel asked

'Feeling vomity', Estha said (GOST 107).

Other examples include "co-hecklers", "co-ambassadors", "cemently", "re-Returned", "out-doorsy" and several more.

(g) Reverse or 'mirror' writing often embellished with caps:

'NAIDNI YUB, NAIDNI EB' (GOST 58).
Coinage through word-compounding:

Thimble – drinker

Coffin – Cartwheeler (GOST 135).

Satin – lined

Brass handle shined (GOST 11).

Roy has been both complimented and condemned for her innovative stylistic experimentation. C.D. Narasimaiah, has vehemently criticized Roy's style calling her a "self-hypnotized word retailer" (ii) and throws back at Roy her own words from the novel. “The careless, reckless lives are mistaken for artistic confidence, though in truth their creator was no artist” (GOST 17). Narasimaiah scoffs at the "unwanted details and massing of colours" and accuses Roy of "peddling" words and "manipulating" them. These so-called excesses with words have also been marked out as Roy's strength.

In a review of *The God of Small Things*, Geetha Doctor pays rich encomiums to the cinematic quality of Roy’s narration. According to Doctor it is teasing, tantalizing and even terrifying, in varying degrees of speed, ranging from the dreamy to the shocking. Her lines read like a prose *haiku* that has an incantatory effect and verges on becoming a shorthand for thinking beautiful thoughts. The teasing structure of the text with its non-linear narration and overwhelming word play contributes to a suppleness hitherto unknown to Indian English fiction. Roy differs from almost all of her
contemporaries in writing, even thinking differently. She has herself asserted that her concerns are more biological than historical.

In negotiating between the personal and the political we see the emergence of a 'feminist epistemology' in Roy’s text. The child-like inquisitiveness with which the focalizer examines personal histories is a unique feature of Roy’s text. The sensibility presented here is essentially feminine and is best displayed in her exquisite portrayal of the child's world. The visual world – nature, people or things – is recorded with immense accuracy and absolute lack of embarrassment. When following events through the consciousness of Rahel we are guided by the authentic voice of childhood. Roy stretches imagination and language to weave the anguished world of Estha’s and Rahel’s childhood. The vulnerability of the twins is brought out touchingly by the writer:

To Ammu her twins seemed like a pair of small bewildered frogs engrossed in each other's company, lalopping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic. Entirely oblivious of what trucks can do to frogs.

(GOST 43)

David Myers in “Contemporary Tragedy and Paradise Lost in The God of Small Things” says,
It is Roy's linguistic ability to reconstruct our world through the words and the eyes of the gifted twin children, Estha and Rahel, which makes *The God of Small Things* a masterpiece. (Dhawan 364)

Roy's text constantly breaks away from conventional grammar and syntax, disobeys rules of punctuation and manages to deftly run sense impressions together with synaesthetic richness. Her linguistic techniques make her prose poetic. Words are packed with suggestiveness. A sense of 'defamiliarization' is put in place as experiences are shaped with an intense vocabulary. Colour, texture, sound, taste . . . merge and impregnate sentences, and prepare us for a particular atmosphere that is building up in the story:

Estha saw how Baby Kochamma's neckmole licked its chops and throbbed with delicious anticipation. Der-dhoom, Der-dhoom. It changed colour like a chameleon.

Der-green, der-blue black, der-mustard yellow.

Twins for tea

It would bea . . . . (GOST 141)

The build-up is amazing. A menacing purposefulness, getting set to pounce on a hapless victim. Roy's 'feel' for the language and her way with
words is unique. Children are vulnerable. So are women and the outcastes. While Ammu and Velutha are social/moral transgressors, Rahel and Estha may be considered to be linguistic transgressors. Their clever games of reading backwards, splitting words and compounding them challenge established structures of language.

Roy has this wonderful trickster's ability to change the contours of the English language 'thiswayandthat'. Snatches of bawdy folk songs, popular film songs, liberal and casual intrusions of Malayalam words (Oower, Aiyyo Pavam, Sundari, Kunukku, and so on), conscious subversion of standard syntax (the book is 'For Mary Roy who grew me up'), and use of conversational Malayalam syntax (Pillai says "His daughter's daughter is this") invest the text with an ethnic vibrance.

The appeal of the story, its novelty, lies in its telling. Lakshmi Padmanabhan, in a tribute to Roy, “Salaam to a Sorceress” says,

. . . Arundhati's craft is witchcraft – a wily, winsome wizardry with words, metaphors, thoughts and observation with which she surrounds the events and people of her story. (13)

Jason Cowley who was the Booker judge comments in an article “Why We Chose Arundhati”: 
Though the ending is flagged off as early as page four, Roy employs a circuitous narrative so that events emerge elliptically and out of chronological sequence. She cannily uses cinematic techniques – timeshifts, endless fast forwards, and reversals, rapid editing – simultaneously to accelerate and delay the coming disaster. An atmosphere of foreboding, sometimes lapsing into portentousness hangs over the narrative. (5)

Roy's daring postmodernist narrative strategy endows the text with a uniqueness all its own. However, into the structure of an eminently believable child's eye view of the adult world, is a micro-narrative embedded in the macro-narrative, or, vice-versa. The micro-narrative is of the grown-up twins in the present, the divorced Rahel back at Ayemenem to meet “re-returned” Estha, who occupies very little narrative space. The macro-narrative encompasses three major stands of the total plot:

1. the doomed love between Ammu and Velutha leading to their deaths.
2. the drowning of Sophie mol.
3. the traumatized childhood of the twins.

The novel takes off from the present with Rahel returning to Ayemenem twenty three years after the time of the main action. The opening chapter of
thirty three pages gives a gist of all the major events in the story. The rest of the novel is a reworking of these major issues from different perspectives.

Roy makes unconventional use of time in the novel. There is a constant slipping back and forth between several time frames. There is no linear progression of events. The text plays intriguingly with time and space. Boundaries blur. In an interview to *The Week* (October 1997) Roy explains how she structured the narrative. It was written,

the way an architect designs a building . . . it wasn't as if I started at the beginning and ended at the end. I would start somewhere and I'd colour in a bit and then I would deeply stretch back and then stretch forward. It was like designing an intricately balanced structure. (46)

Anna Sujatha Mathai, in a review of the novel in Indian Literature (1997) celebrates "the magic that runs like quick silver through the veins of this book", and also applauds the explorative techniques of narration:

Taking one step forward, two steps backward, often referring to the Terror that is to come, Roy examines the human frailties and failings that lend to the central tragedy, with a cool, ruthlessly probing, but always child-like, always human eye. (189)
Roy’s innovative play with language may be seen as a subversive device to circumvent power structures.

Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have written at length on how language may be used to counter phallogocentrism. They exhort women to express themselves freely by ‘returning to their bodies’, and their sexuality which has been repressed all these ages. Kristeva speaks of bodily drives that survive cultural pressures and emerge in "semiotic discourse". This language, also used by male writers such as Joyce, Mallarme and Artaud, is gestural, rhythmic and preferential. These writers re-experience their infantile jouissances subconsciously and construct texts that defy the rules of conventional language. For Kristeva this semiotic discourse is a writer's return to the pleasures of her/his pre-verbal identification with the mother. There is a turning away from the logic of paternal discourse. According to Kristeva, women speak and write like "hysterics", as outsiders, to male-dominated discourse. This is so because of their marginal position, as also because of the dominating drives related to anality and childbirth. Hence their semiotic style is different and one that challenges the dominating male discourse. To challenge and resist masculinist thinking, women need to forge a new language, establish a different point of view different from phallogocentric norms.
Luce Irigaray considers man-centred concepts as denying meaningful representation of women. She focusses on women's bodies and sexual pleasure as the starting point for female self-consciousness. She speaks of "plurality in feminine language" and relates it to the morphology of the female sex. Woman experiences pleasure just about everywhere and her pleasure is "more diversified, multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle . . ." (Warhol and Herndl 359). Her language, likewise, "goes off in all directions" escaping "coherence of any meaning" (Warhol and Herndl 359). Irigaray, therefore, advocates the assertion of female jouissance in order to subvert phallocentric-oppression.

Hélène Cixous, in her manifesto for écrite fémminine, "The Laugh of the Medusa" finds woman's sexuality superior to phallic single-mindedness. Her libido is cosmic. Cixous links woman's diffuse sexuality to woman's language. She says:

Her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours. She lets the other language speak – the language of thousand tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death . . . . Her language does not contain, it carries, it does not hold back, it makes possible.

(Warhol and Herndl 361)
Cixous exhorts women to "put herself into the text" as she needs to wake up to the wealth of her imaginative powers. "Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing their stream of phantasms is incredible" (334).

To write, women have to 'return' "from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond "culture"; from their childhood which men have been trying desperately to make them forget, condemning it to "eternal rest". The little girls and their "ill-mannered" bodies immersed, well-preserved, intact into themselves, in the mirror. Frigidified. But are they ever seething underneath. (Warhol and Herndl 335)

The linguistic experiments in the text become an act of transgression. Cixous' questions problematize 'writing'. She asks: "I wonder: when writing, am I transgressing? . . . Am I transgressing by writing what I am writing? Or by not writing what I am not? Or both?" (Sellers 97).

A feminist text, according to Cixous is "volcanic" because it subverts, sweeping away syntax. It sets about changing "the rules of the old game" (Warhol and Herndl 338). Woman can prove her strength if she can dismantle male discourse from "within". She must, says Cixous,
Roy's candour in the narrative is one of the ways of confronting the structures of patriarchy. Cixous identifies this hidden project in transgressive writing:

I think that one transgresses (1) the law of silence that must be observed in the face of everything that is bigger, more real, more living, more complex etc., in the face of almost everything . . . in the face of god-things and god-beings. But precisely, I say to myself, there is also the other law, the law of the echo, according to which one should know when it is allowed and when it is necessary to not demand the law of silence. (Sellers 97)

A reading of Roy's text as a sample of écriture féminine throws up exciting discoveries. At the very outset, the child-focalizer – Rahel – presents the adult world rife with prejudices and hypocrisy with a candour that cannot be ignored. Cixous says: "We've been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them, with that stupid sexual
modesty; we've been made victims of the old fool's game" (Warhol and Herndl 342).

Rahel is condemned for moral corruption subsequent to her behaviour in school. She collides against her seniors to see if breasts hurt. She is punished severely for her "depravity", and even faces expulsion. "In that Christian institution, breasts were not acknowledged. They weren't supposed to exist, and if they didn't could they hurt?" (GOST 16). The teachers' verdict is that Rahel "didn't know how to be a girl" (GOST 17). Denying one's sexuality, or being oblivious to it is considered a virtue, the norm.

Later in the story, Roy gives a vivid and sensitive description of Ammu seriously studying her own body. She tests the tautness of her breasts with a tooth brush; studies her hair, look critically "at her round, heavy behind" (GOST 223) which seemed to belong to a more voluptuous body. She wraps her hair about her face looking like a medieval executioner – "a slender, naked executioner with dark nipples and deep dimples when she smiled" (GOST 223). Ammu indulges her body. Cixous says:

To write an act which will not only "realize" the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs,
her immense bodily territories which have been kept
under seal. (Warhol and Herndl 335)

The twins also exult in their familiarity and closeness to their mother's body:

In the afternoon silence . . . her children curled into the
warmth of her. The smell of her. They covered their
heads with her hair. (GOST 221)

They explore Ammu's midriff and the seven silver stretch marks. Rahel
sucks her mother's soft stomach and studies her "shining oval of spit". A
significant metaphor used in the text throws up a vivid picture of their
physical intimacy. "She (Ammu) shrugged her children off the way a bitch
shrugs off her pups when she's had enough of them" (GOST 222).

Roy’s unemotional, detached observation of the orangedrink –
lemondrink man’s act of masturbation is another case in point. She cleverly
tones her description with a cool, even sarcastic indifference. An “act”
accepted as perfectly normal in the male world is juxtaposed with the
bewilderment and shock that takes its toll on an innocent child. Roy
successfully verbalizes the unspoken, and in doing so, punctures a major
phallocentric, often justified act.

Rahel and Estha, the two-egg twins or "Dizygotic" according to
medical books are born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs.
Though they are not identical, their similarity lies "in a deeper, more secret place" (*GOST* 2). The mystery of their combined identity deepens as the text explains:

In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was For Ever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually as We or us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities. (*GOST* 2)

Rahel wakes up giggling at Estha's funny dream, knows what happened to him at the Abhilash Talkies, can taste Estha's sandwiches that Estha alone ate on the Madras Mail. The twins can read each other's minds, their thoughts spill over and mingle. Twenty three years later, at the age of thirty one, they have evolved into definite sizes and shapes. "Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits" (*GOST* 3) define them. Nevertheless, the absence of Estha had left a vacuum, a "hollow where Estha's words had been". The emptiness persists even after Rahel's marriage.

He (McCaslin) couldn't be expected to understand that.

That the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the
quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together.
Like stacked spoons. Like familiar lovers' bodies.

(GOST 20)

Meeting Estha twenty three years later does not change the intimacy very much. When Estha walks straight past her, into the rain,

She could feel the rhythm of Estha's rocking, and the wetness of rain on his skin. She could hear the raucous, scrambled world inside his head.

(GOST 21)

Rahel relentlessly searches for the Estha of her childhood. She watches him in the bathroom, searching in her brother's nakedness signs of herself.

Rahel watched Estha with the curiosity of a mother watching a wet child. A sister a brother. A woman a man.

A twin a twin.

(GOST 93)

Estha, secure in his silence, also sees that his sister is lovely, "grown into their mother's skin" (GOST 300). Her beautiful, hurt mouth reminds him of "Ammu's mouth". Rahel is a mirror image of their mother who Estha had 'lost' at the age of seven.

They sit together in their adulthood "a pair of actors trapped in a recondite with no limit of plot or narrative" (GOST 191). Burdened by the memories of the past they see no way out to ease the dead weight of their
grief. There is no counsellor who could assure them: "You're not the sinners. You're the Sinned Against. You were only children. You had no control. You are the victims not the perpetrators" (GOST 191). In this hour of grief the twins cannot articulate their sorrow / feelings. What follows is an act of consolation – a mutual licking of old wounds. This could be their way of seeking "redress", of exorcizing "the memories that haunted them" (GOST 191).

The act of incest may also be viewed as Esthas and Rahel's desire to return to the period of pre-separation from the mother, to a Kristevan pre-Oedipal state of semiotic fusion. The pre-Oedipal mother is "a figure that encompasses both masculinity and femininity" (Moi 164). The twins come together in a physical union. "There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi's book) would separate sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings" (GOST 328). The Love Laws are broken once again. But Rahel sees in Estha a deeper and more ancient relationship. "He was the one that she had known before Life began. The one who had once led her (swimming) through their lovely mother's cunt" (GOST 93). The union becomes a necessity for the survival of the twins- a reassurance of their oneness with their mother. The "Quietness" in one fits perfectly well with the "Emptiness" of the other. The moment marks the cross-over from the symbolic to the semiotic – a recapturing of a pristine state undivided from their mother. But they share "not happiness, but hideous
grief" (GOST 328). In a sense, an attempt is made to steal back the cheated years of childhood – an instinctive act that can heal their wounds by binding them together. Like the two-egg twins that swam in their mother's womb, Estha and Rahel once again become "Me" together. The "twin midwives of Ammu's dream" once again throw the Love Laws into total disarray. The 'incest' is a reunificatin with Ammu who had told them (quoting Kipling) "we be of one blood, ye and I" (GOST 329).

The sensuousness of the language used, the dizzy heights to which it is stretched in a bid to keep pace with a flighty imagination, the nonchalant use of taboo words and the overall suppleness endow the text with a uniqueness all its own. Roy's narrative seems to be a materialization of Cixous’s project:

Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. Our naptha will spread, throughout the world, without dollars – black or gold – nonassessed values that will change the rules of the old game.

(Warhol and Herndl 338)

As Cixous observes, a definition of a feminine practice of writing is impossible but it "will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate"
(Warhol and Herndl 253). Needles to say that *The God of Small Things* is a text that transgresses received norms in more ways than one.

In searching the depths of the gender – power, caste/ class – power nexus and throwing ample light on their manifestations in societal power structures, the text emerges as a woman – text. It becomes more so for the strategies it adopts to counter the phallogocentric power structures thematically and linguistically.