CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Our preceding discussion may make it easy for us to draw certain conclusions regarding the merit of the novel *The God of Small Things* and that of the novelist’s vision of the Indian reality where vested interests of diverse shades and graves very often hamper our view of the achievement of Arundhati Roy as a novelist and as a commentator on the predicament of the common men and women of the Indian nation. This confusion has further been increased because of the conflicting ideas and views of the critics expressed without any ambiguity. The novel was timed for its appearance when Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* was supposed to have signalled the end of the classic realist novel with its “chutnification” of history claiming thereby the irrelevance of the realists novels “fidelity to facts, its impersonal and ideologically neutral narrative voice, its technique of documentation and its veneer of discursive universality.”

Arundhati Roy’s works are written against the basic assumptions of Post-modernism which had little to do with the basic discourse and meta-narratives and they laid emphasis on indeterminancy and polysemy. The omniscient narrative voice which has been successfully used as a structural
device for conferring unity and homogeneity of different points of view in the typical realist novel was replaced by the invisible ‘metaphysical’ presence of the author. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* assumes special significance by the fact that it is neither imitative nor much derivative from Rushdie’s great example. No doubt, Roy benefits from the stylistics novelities and experimentations initiated by Rushdie but her decision to put her novel in the realistic frame is definitely her own. In this sense she has recovered and reclaim the prestige of the realist novel as manifested by its enormous popularity necessitating its translations into different languages of the world. The realistic tone of the novel is inescapable and equally inescapable is the patently present modernist syntactical experimentation, capitalization, repetition coinages and flashback. These new devices, however, do not supersede the framework of a conventional novel with a clear streak of social criticism. Even Aijaz Ahmad who is usually supposed to be an Arundhati Roy baiter is made to admit,

She (Arundhati Roy) knows that what Realist fiction always knows: love, grief, remembrance, the absolute indispensability of verisimilitude in depiction of time, place and character, so exact that we who know it to be fiction can nevertheless read it as the closest kin of fact.2

Thus it is not a small feat to harmonise the post-modernist fictional tools with the fact consciousness of the realist novel. Ahmad makes a significant point when he holds that Roy’s realism “folds into itself all the plenitude of narrative techniques that the twentieth
century has spawned and she is too deeply committed to Realism to take flight into Magic Realism...." It also amply speaks about the potential originality of the novelist who is generally marked by a compassion for the underdogs and an understanding of the issues which trouble the larger mass of people in India. Apart from the novel her two essays “The Greater Common Good” and “The End of Imagination” simply confirm this statement of ours. She becomes the fighter on behalf of those who cannot fight; she becomes a speaker for those who suffer mutely against the ruthless institutions of the State and political manoeuvres of the great and the powerful.

It is proper to assume that Roy has mingled facts of her personal life with a rich fictional fabrication enabling her to create a work of art, as R.K. Narayan has observed “In My Days” how “fiction outlasts facts”. Graham Greene has also underlined the fictional value of ordering haphazard experiences of life through the creative unity of a writer. According to him, writing out of a provocative personal life the writer tries “to reduce a chaos of experience to some sort of order and a hungry curiosity.”

Arundhati Roy is conscious of this mingling of realistic autobiographical experiences and the power of the shaping imagination which can create life size images out of the facts with chimerical nature. In this process her unusual life with no less unusual upbringing contributes a lot in developing a formula of artistic creation which happily unfolds through the tool of her
language which by its capacity for indignation makes it just an inseparable part of her personality while she is conscious that the story of The God of Small Things is "my story", she is equally emphatic about this special linguistic tool:

My language is mine, it's the way I think and the way I write. You know I don't scrabble around and try and I don't sweat the language I don't rewrite. It was just a lot of arranging.5

It is by this harmonization of fact with fiction that Roy makes her work more than "metro novels of the 1980's" and she scores comparatively more than what S. Menon Marath's The Wound of Spring has done with identical theme in the reverse pattern of the lover being a caste Hindu and the beloved being an outcaste. The difference between Menon and Arundhati Roy is quite visible. While the former deals with the typical Indian theme of "caste and caste related taboos", the latter succeeds in integrating various themes of socio-political importance involving sometimes even ethical issues and thereby giving a larger sweep to her human concerns. To close the point this could be possible by investing the work with a memoire like sense of immediacy as Roy herself says that the novel's story has "always been with her." The method used by the novelist is that of a fastidious process of selection out of the mass of chaotic biographical details and then to arrange and re-arrange them putting them in proper light and shade of time and situation. There is a kind of zooming technique by which the incidents shadowed by time come forth in all their starked
nakedness as and when desired by the organic imagination of the novelist. It is this exceptional capacity for shifting emphasis and tone with the help of a style sometimes serious, sometimes flippant and sometimes full of mimicry with ironical and satirical implications. Without this adaptability much of the burden of socio-political complexities in the novel would have stood outside the synthetic aesthetically satisfying over all fictional vision of the novelist. In passing it may be recalled that the novel is presented through the eyes of two children who are apparently separate but whose sensibilities are tuned together. That explains the subtle deviation by the novelist in her syntactical manoeuvring in the form of capitalization, lengthened pronunciation and other innovative experiments with expression.

It is again with her exceptional capacity of adopting her creative faculties, to the demand of the situation and to the idea in hand that she succeeds in making her novel to be a sort of commentary on the state of affairs prevailing in political system as well as the social and individual rights of women in the society. *The God of Small Things* has been much made of by the votaries of feminism because the novel presents different generations of women, from Baby Kochamma through Mammachi to Ammu and then on to Rahel and the one leading single trait common to all is that of suffering. All of them are unhappy women, of course, in their own individual ways. The novel seems to support the powerful opening sentence of Anna Karenina: “All happy families
are alike but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion.” The novel seems to be an illustration of what characterizes unhappy families and the misery is that the women have to feel the stings of unhappiness more than any one else in the family.

In short *The God of Small Things* is basically a novel by a woman about women seen through the eyes of a woman. Roy seems to have absorbed Virginia Woolf’s assertion that women’s writing is “often chattering and garrulous—mere talk split over paper and left to dry in pools and blots.” For the sake of brevity it is not proper to mention the name of Gynocritics. We may simply say that the narrative structure of *The God of Small Things* is authentically feminine. M.K. Ray makes a valid statement when he says, “the linguistic feature of the novel in regard to the phonological, morphological, syntactic structures and the liberty with spelling reinforce the feminist quality of the novel. It illustrates what Lakoff in his essay “Language and Women’s Place”, identifies as the critical features of WL (The Women’s Language) phonologically, grammatically and semantically.” It may be mentioned that Roy’s frequent experimentation with spellings, breaking of form through splits and ruptures is a post-modern feature, visible in the writers of this period but the liberty that Roy takes with spelling, syntax and sentence pattern symbolically represent the fracture sensibility and the fragmented world of women in the Indian society. Her feminism instead of being prescriptive remains contented with its imaginative
description. Being a young writer she probably lacks that mature vision which allows a person to take the whole issue in totality. Her attitude to feminism is similar to her emotional response to the nuclearisation of India. What she says about the bomb in *The End of Imagination* may be said also about her view of the situation of women in India:

> The bomb isn’t in your backyard. It’s in your body. And mine. No body, no nation, no government, no man, no god, has the right to put it there. We’re radioactive already, and the war hasn’t even begun. So stand up and say something. Never mind if it’s been said before. Speak up on your own behalf. Take it very personally. (p. 12)

Arundhati Roy’s works thus appear to be an imaginative presentation of the present reality—reality brought forth with all its sinisterness without suggesting any remedy or action-plan for reducing or eliminating the menace. Roy in short serves the purpose of a dust-raiser who probably has no time nor also the patience to wait for the settling of the dust when a proper reckoning aimed at the final solution of the problem could be made.

It is because of this lack of total vision on the part of the novelist that the theme of suffering becomes virtually an indictment of the socio-political rot of her native society. This fact leads us to make a comparison between James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *The God of Small Things* or even Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. Rushdie’s book was found by the *India Today* as one of the most ferocious indictment of India’s evolution since Independence. Almost the
same could be said of *The God of Small Things* which gives out rather a dark picture of Kerala and its society in the crucial ‘60s when India was defeated by China. Lechery, selfishness, filth and political degradation are too legibly written about to be ignored. In the realistic writings such things are common but in a successful work of art the stark reality emerges out of its filthiness to submerge our feelings with emotions of sympathy and profound humanity. It may be recalled that Joyce started as an inveterate critic of his country but his Leopold Bloom despite his human weaknesses is capable of showing certain qualities which redeem mankind. Bloom in his final shade strikes us as a truly humane character worthy to be the hero.

No such assertions can be made about *The God of Small Things* or about the two essays *The Greater Common Good* and *The End of Imagination*. The two essays tease our sensibility about the callous official indifference to the situation prevailing in the Narmada Valley or elsewhere in the country. It is a common fact that suffering knows no boundary and sufferers everywhere are the same. So the real suffering of the Adivasis in the forest of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and the suffering of Velutha are identical and thus contribute to the overall condemnation by the novelist of the Indian reality but even on a very careful examination we feel that Arundhati Roy has not been able to maintain the artistic objectivity. She condemns the Indian Government for squandering money on Nuclear weapons while millions are starving but she says nothing
for the poor in the Western World. It is a common knowledge that the coloured people in America have disgusting amount of squalor and indifference by the authorities in their life. She fails in making her indictment objectively universal.

The Indian writers getting western prizes have often been charged of writing with a bias and Arundhati Roy is no exception. It is certain that Roy has the first hand experience of the suffering and injustice and that she has a strong genuine sympathy with the dispossessed and suppressed people. It is also true that what she says about CPI (M) is not without basis but she makes too much of the individual failure of an individual leader to show as if it were the general story with the political party. Moreover *The God of Small Things* does not qualify to be called a political novel because it in no way shows itself concerned with the clash of ideologies or political preferences. Her purpose seems to be simply that of the spectator in the crowd clapping at the demolition of communism as a national political ideology represented by Soviet Russia. In this respect again she is distinctly on the side of the anti-communist world opinion. What she says in the novel and how she presents the political reality runs counter to what she has to offer in *The End of Imagination* and *The Greater Common Good*. It is a common fact that no battle fought for the sake of the common man could be successful without a whole-hearted commitment to a certain theoretical base. What she has to offer in her two essays therefore appear simply disjointed effort of a talented writer to evoke
sympathy for causes she herself is not sure about. In brief politics enter into the novel as well as in her two essays because the ethos which Arundhati Roy has chosen for her works could not be realistically described by excluding politics altogether.

That Arundhati Roy has western audience in her mind while writing the novel is again illustrated by her blatant private scenes very often bordering on the vulgar and the repulsive. It is much debatable whether the last chapter of the novel has got anything to do with the overall fictional statement already achieved. There are many who think that the last chapter showing the private intimacy of Ammu and Velutha are written because the formula for novel writing is not complete without scenes of voluptuous nature. Even if we admit that the scene is artistically presented in a mode which can only be called poetic yet somehow the native Indian sensibility are offended by such descriptions. Social modesty has been the hallmark of the Indian ethos and even though it is under stress but the literary sensibility need a little bit of restraint and need suggestions to replace the actual drama. Even those critics who believe that the use of poetic mode saves Arundhati Roy from the charge of pornography lack the desired force of conviction in their statement.

However *The God of Small Things* is more than the formula novel of the Western kind. Its poetic quality lift the novel clearly above the common run of fiction. It is also true that in terms of high poetry she is far outstripped by Joyce and Rushdie. She does not
sustain the sublime poetic flights of Joyce but what is special about her work is that poetry is always around her which bursts out to the surface now and then.

We must also admit that she has also evolved a style which must be called unique. She can strike the maximum effect by the most economical linguistic means. Her sentences always carry an undercurrent of connotation. In short if brevity is the soul of wit Roy's has no parallel. Her style is based on a rare solidity, condensation and above all a subtle crafting. It acquires a new freshness with her use of new images, at once appropriate and revealing and the few leading images and symbols just serve as foundations for creating the atmosphere of the novel. In other words the peculiar mood of the novel is created by the novelist with the help of her strikingly fresh images and symbols.

With such an efficiently facile imagination it is no wonder if critics are lured to regard the novel as a profound and moving tragedy in which the novelist shows the operation of ruthless deterministic forces of God and history engaged in crushing the spirit of individuals who try to lead natural human life of natural human instincts. The way the work unfolds the story informing us about the vital characters along with the time frame and the memory of incidents the gravity of which makes or mars the characters and their perceptions to the end simply give us the impression of a tragic prologue. The subsequent events are simply a
preparation for a final epilogue of great tragic intensity in the last chapter. From chapter one to the end of the novel the story holds our attention and we are all emotionally involved. What Roy says in the novel may be well applied to her own method used in the novel:

The Great Stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again. The ones you can enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably. They don't deceive you with thrills and trick endings. They don't surprise you with the unforeseen. They are as familiar as the house you live in. (p. 229)

The two essays namely *The End of Imagination* and *The Greater Common Good* may not be as significant and original as *The God of Small Things* is but they help us to understand the nature and the character of the writer. Her poetic sensibilities always make her conscious of where the shoe pinches particularly in the case of the disadvantaged sections of the society who have neither the power of knowledge nor the essential resources to undo the evil done by others to them. The nuclear explosions by the political masters of India rattles Arundhati Roy as in the case of the Narmada Valley project. In both the cases she appears to be a little bit partisan even if she is not so. She very often gives the impression of taking sides in the case of the Nuclear explosion she mentions BJP as she has mentioned Nambodaripad in *The God of Small Things*. The tone and tenor in which the political party in saddle is referred to in both the cases is far from satisfactory particularly if the writer is a
Booker Prize winner. The political overtones in *The God of Small Things* is not so much against the system as against the personal ambitions and manoeuvring of a particular political leader. Similarly she forgets the fact that India was preparing for the nuclear fission since the time of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. It is also a known secret that her successor P.V. Narasimha Rao had encouraged his successor Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee to go on with the explosion of the nuclear device. Arundhati Roy, however, for reasons known only to her chooses to denounce the political party which was led by Bajpayee. By our reading of the text nowhere we get an idea that she is against this nuclearisation as against the fact of nuclearisation by a political party which somehow fails to get her sympathy.

*The Greater Common Good* is definitely a better essay because it deals with the basic issues of human predicament of a large population accustomed to a way of life which needs some special provisions for the maintenance of the life style of their choice. It is a well argued essay suggesting the nefarious games played by the crafty politicians greedy bureaucrats and the powerful monetary institutions stationed in the West who work not out of sympathy but out of greed to earn millions in the name of monetary help to alleviate poverty and to better the life styles. The two essays however supplement Arundhati Roy's concern for the poor and the down-trodden and they help us to understand her
position not as a political ideologue but as a sensible and responsible member of the society whose sympathies lie with the oppressed and the deprived. Seen in this light alone, we can understand the political structure of the novel *The God of Small Things*. 
References


