CHAPTER-IV
CHARACTERISATION

Poetic Mode: Modern fiction has been the blending of genres leading to a range of new effects such as high emotionality, irony, humour or sheer poetic utterance. Realism and the poetic mode including symbolism are no more regarded as incompatible.

James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Salman Rushdie eminently display such facts in their fiction and Arundhati Roy belongs to this category. However, the poetic fervour and the proportion of poetic content varies from author to author.

Arundhati Roy’s prose is strongly marked for such textual features as strong rhythm, alliteration, rhyme, and patterns of sound which are properly speaking, the distinguishing characteristics of poetry. The following lines are fine excellent example of free verse:

"The steel door of the incinerator went up and the muted hum of the eternal fire became a red roaring.

The heat lunged out of them like a finished beast."
Then Rahel’s Ammu was fed to it.

Her hair

Her skin

Her smile

Her voice.

The following example is own of for rhythmic prose:

The God of loss

The God of Small Things.

He left no footprints in sand, no ripples in water,

no image in mirrors.

In her handling of English syntax, Arundhati Roy show originality. The result is a tremendous gain in terms of effect. In this respect her writing is nearer to that of G.M. Hopkins and W.H. Auden rather than any writer of realistic novel. For example

“At the time, there would only be incoherence.

As though meaning had slunk out of things and left them fragmented. Disconnected. The glint of Ammu’s
needle. The colour of a ribbon. The weave of the cross-stitch counterpane. A door slowly breaking. Isolated things that didn’t mean anything.

Arundhati Roy’s crowning achievement lies in the field of imagery. She has shown herself to be the mistress of vivid, ever fresh, and most appropriate similes and metaphors which we find constellated on every page of the book. One can get an idea of her genius in this field by looking at the following examples:

1. “Rahel’s new teeth were waiting inside her gums line words in a pen”.

The simile has the same note of welcome which is associated with the writer’s feelings like the words which are patiently awaited and are most welcome and when they come they fill the heart of the writer with great joy in the same way Rahel’s teeth are awaited with joy.

2. Joe-shaped hole in the universe.

This metaphor brings out the feeling of emptiness - the vacuum, formed after the death of the dear one. Joe’s death created such a hole in the life of Margaret Kochamma. Arundhati Roy has expressed all the emotions
and feeling by the stroke of a few words in the form of a powerful metaphor.

In her handling of the English language, Arundhati Roy has revealed herself as an interesting wordsmith. She has proved a tireless experimenter with and designer of words. As a matter of fact, she appears to have learnt a great deal from James Joyce and Salman Rushdie. She made new words by combining different categories of words.

'Sicksweet' (adjective + adjective)

'Dust green' (Noun + adjective)

'Diet coloured' (Noun + Past participle)

'Angrycoloured' (Adjective + Past participle)

'Fever button' (Noun + Noun)

** Imagery**: She employs the most appropriate and striking images which add to her achievement. In this are she is very impressive, like Dickens, she possesses the child's power to apprehend things in all their sensuous glory. this power is most active in the portions of the novel where the narrator fully
invests herself with the twins' consciousness. Moreover, there is undoubtedly an autobiographical element in the story.

Without always resorting to figurative language, she can forge words which differentiate various shades, nuances, intensities and amplitudes of which readers were not conscious earlier. Under her brush, the colour green breaks itself up into such modulations as dustgreen wetgreen and mossgreen. The white light itself is depicted in its varying modulations: "the sunlight was fractured by thin trunks of tilting trees, glittering sunshine etc". "Most of Rahel's hair sat on top of her head like a fountain". The similes are so expressive that all the feedings are presented, "that sounded like a faraway man shouting".

Arundhati Roy draws images from nature and rural life. In most of the cases, the images from these domains are applied in a surprisingly fresh manner in order to produce a new effect. As the following examples will show, the author's imagination is able to find new ways for utilizing traditional sources of imagery: "Margaret Kochamma found
herself drawn towards him like a plant in a dark room towards a wedge of light".

"His own noise coiled around him like a snake".

"With every monsoon, the old car settled more firmly into the ground. Like an angular, arthritic hen settling stiffly on her clutch of eggs".

More striking, however, is Arundhati Roy's tendency to draw figurative material from modern urban life. She is highly imaginative in this respect own always scores with her original brilliant. Here are some more examples:

"It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea form a teabag"

"eyes as blue as faded jeans."

Silence is generally a negative state-absence of sound. Silence may also be localised or pervasive. Just as in the case of eyes, each kind of silence will require its specific comparison.

"Silence hung in the air like secret loss."
"The silence gathered its skirts and slid, like Spiderwoman, up the slippery bathroom wall".

The prominence of many kinds of imagery in The God of Small Things in its symbolic significance and implication in respect of the plot and character of the novel, can understandably come to the conclusion that Roy's vision of the Indian society in general and the Keralite society in particular is a negative one with a very specific meaning: through the network in images, the author has evidently suggested that our society is filthy, sick and wounded.

Coprophilia: Description of filth and excreta is very pervasive in this novel - and the special thing about the description is that in most cases these features are presented with obsession and relish. But in this novel there is a particular emphasis on its freshness. The twins from their childhood were found of blowing spit bubbles and Rahel watched with great interest the vomit streaks of the pilgrim's bus. There is an elaborate and voyeuristic account of community urination in the toilets of Abhilash Talkies where each person's manner of pissing is described in detail along with accompanying sights and sounds. In the description of Estha's sexual abuse by the man lemon drink, orange drink at refreshment counter,
coprophilia acquires coprophagous suggestion with the expression, 'White egg white.

She follows the example of many modern Indian writers in English when she describes spots and objects that are full of dirt. The four life-sized cement Kangaroos in the Arrival Lounge of the Cochin Airport had their pouches filled with cigarette stubs, used matchsticks, bottle caps, peanut shells, crumpled paper cups and cockroaches, and they were stained with red betel spit. This is quite realistic, but the odd thing is that they have a powerful fascination for Rahel.

Coprophilia is a significant motif in modern Indian fiction in English.

Elsewhere explanation of the decoration of cow-dung by Rahel as a symbolic act of defending what is low and despised in the society. But widespread coprophilia cannot be rationalised in this way. One of the other alternatives available is that in Rahel's case, there has been a fixation at the anal-erotic stage of development because this factor can produce coprophilia.

Carnography: In the novel there are some striking and vivid accounts of the matters of the flesh where the appearance, motion, stimulation and gratification of the genitalia are dealt
with. In the first presentation of the orange drink lemon drink
Man's act of masturbation with the help of Estha is an
example. In Ammu's bathroom where she sticks toothbrushes
under her breasts and on her hips as a test of whether there
has been any decline in them or not. Mammachi is shown to
imagine the sexual relation between Ammu and Velutha. The
most extended treatment of the sex act is to be found in the
love-making of Ammu and Velutha. It occupies several pages
and follows the lives with which renders are familiar in
Western fiction. In keeping with the modern trend, Ammu is
represented as being an active partner rather than a were
replaceable. She is also remarkably free from any shyness or
hesitation. This love scene involves considerations of
carnography.

**Marxism**: Marxism enters the story through the machinations
of the local leader K.N.M. Pillai. The other characters
associated with the ideology are Chacko and Velutha. What
creates problems for the critic is the status and quantum of the
Marxist matter within the scope of the story and its theme.

A writer, of course, she has the freedom to
present any theme, in whatever light she/he chooses. Like
George Orwell in Annual Farm, she/he can take a wholly
negative view of Marxism. But she/he will be liable to criticism if such matter produces artistic fault; or, instead of arising out of the story, is added from outside, or if the balance is deliberately tilted through authorial pressure.

Pillai is a political opportunist; it may also be conceded that the C.P.M. and its government did not adhere to the true Marxist principles. But the question is how much of the life of Pillai and the Marxist theory and its criticism included in the novel are strictly relevant to the plot and theme.

Although the morel is evidently autobiographical, the author has declared that “the characters in it are fictional” and that the author has taken liberties only with the location of rivers, level crossings, churches and crematoria. It is also true that even when the prototypes are easily recognised the names have been changed. Marry Roy appears simply as Ammu, her brother Isaac as Chacko and Arundhati Roy’s own brother as Estha.

The authorial rhetoric is intrusively exercised for the denigration of the Marxists in several ways. It is indirectly suggested that Kerala has been turned into hell by the communist Government. On the basis of one bad specimen of
communist functionaries, vast and unjustified generalisations are made:

"So there it was then, History and Literature enlisted by commerce. Kurtz and Karl Marx going palms to greet rich guests as they stepped off the boat".

In the chapter entitled, "Work is Struggle", the author has sought to expose the hollowness of Marxist slogans and rank opportunism and deception practiced by Comrade Pillai.

**Feminism**: This novel is a remarkable indictment of patriarchy and the injustice and oppression faced by woman in the andocentric society. Woman is victimized everywhere: as a daughter in her parents' house, as a wife in her husband's house, as a worker in a factory or as an employee in an office, whether in India or America.

The other issue of feminism covered by this novel is the struggle engaged in the women for the establishment of their identity and their economic and sexual freedom. Ammu is a valiant fighter for these causes, through the options open to her in the male-dominated order are not viable at all. She grabs the first opportunity for example from
the oppressive atmosphere of her parent's house in Ayemenem and rushes into a loveless marriage.

While living on the tea estate in Assam, Ammu declares her identity and freedom through her manners and behaviour at social gathering. When she can no longer tolerate the cruelty of her husband, she quits him even though this step involves jumping into the abyss of total economic and cultural insecurity. At the Ayemenem House, she is constantly reminded that she and her children have no locus standi, she has the courage to taunt to her brother Chacko about his hypocrisy and phallocentricism, and to move around in full independence.

Rahel has equally given odds to contend with. She displays her stamina by her actions. She indicates the falsehood of conventional attitudes through her symbolic actions already discussed. She manages to survive both in Delhi and New York in spite of oppressive make domination.

Ammu and Rahel have avoided the proper cause of feminist struggle for self-respect and freedom. They ultimately conduct themselves to a state of degraded sexual pleasure and extreme loveliness. One of them destroy herself in her illusory pursuit of redemption, although it must be
granted that her intentions remain lofty and worthy of praise. The other woman is also not in a better position. Her incestuous satisfaction promises no real break-through in the direction of feminist objectives.

However, the description as composed by Roy constantly echoes with deeper and wider sentiments that involve larger issues and human consideration.

"Once he was inside her, fear was derailed and biology took over. The cost of living climbed to unaffordable heights; though later, Baby Kochamma would say it was a small price to pay.

Was it?

Two lives. Two children’s childhoods.

And a history lesson for future offenders.

There are also crucial feminist ideas to reckon with in this account of the sex act. In this novel, attention has been drawn to the active role of Ammu in the whole proceedings the woman claims her right as an equal partner. Equally important is the right of woman to secure her full delight, which is bound to be delayed owing to the age-old suppression of the organ on which proper sexual satisfaction
for the woman actually depends. In the sexual act between Ammu and Velutha the lack of coincidence is highlighted and, what is more important from the feminist point of view, the woman insists on being fully satisfied.

The aspect fundamental to novelistic, technique involving plot, characterisation, setting dialogue etc., is the method of narration employed, or the point of view from which novelists till their stories. There are two basic ways of story-telling. The novelist can tell the story from the inside—that is, he/she can make one of the characters do it, or he can tell it from the outside, as a more-or-less omniscient author. But in choosing between these two points of view, the novelist must consider the focus of the story, number and relations of the characters, the complexity of the plot and structure, the meaning of the story in all its parts as a whole. The ultimate objective in both these methods of narration is to achieve verisimilitude. Although first person narration is the more direct method, it may not be the simpler, since such a story must inevitably remain limited to the point of view of the narrator. In the third person narration, the author is omniscient.

Two broad classes of third-person narration are usually identified. Firstly, the story told 'sequentially from the
shifting points of view of many characters usually according to who is the centre of attention at a given time in the action. Roy's novel also can be included under this category.

The second kind of third-person narration is that in which the author restricts the point of view exclusively, or almost so, to that of one character, giving his thoughts only-and depicting only the action he participates in and as it appears to him.

Arundhati Roy's novel appears to come under the second type of third-person narration, where the point of view seems to be that of seven-year-old twins Estha and Rahel. To some extent this is true; the twins and their point of view occupy large spaces of the book. Indeed, the novel has been commended for its distinct narrative voice, which is thought to be that of the girl twin Rahel.

The narrative is offered through Rahel but through an omniscient, Omnipresent narrator. And yet the auto biographical element in the novel is unmistakable. There are shades of Arundhati Roy in the way that Rahel looks, in her education and in her sense of social isolation. There are shades of Mary Roy in Arundhati Roy's Ammu. So when we look at Velutha through the eyes of the narrator, we become
conscious of how far narratorial biases and prejudices colour our reading of the text.

**Arundhati Roy's** stance in her presentation of the lower caste individual, Velutha, is patronizing. A study of other novelists' depiction of Dalit characters are similar. It evokes pity for the suffering of these individuals on relation to these characters the author casts herself in the role of the liberal narrator who sees something in these characters beyond what the world can see.

Mystery seems to be reinforcing the same logic through his technique. It is condemnation of rural India rather than concern for the Backward classes that dominates the narrative. The caste system becomes just one more focus of attack. The attack is not based on experimental truth but on a fictive creation of a homogenous society where all upper castes are oppressors and all lower castes are oppressed. They are all stock characters, and there is a startling lack of ambiguity in this portrayal. And an inaccurate representation of intra-caste relations.

The other issue that concerns the reader is the narrative technique that Roy adopts. She has managed to free herself from the shackles of conventional writing. her narrative
structure makes ample use of post present technique, new coinages, and a style which is in harmony with the narrative strategy. The staccato rhythm of her style and her choice of words at times, keeps the reader spellbound. The novel keeps shifting from the present to the past only to be brought forward to a meaningless future. Narrator puts, “Estha was Returned”. The father had remarried and almost stopped drinking. After a long but indifferent stay with the father and the step-mother, Estha is Re-returned” to Ayemenem when the father decides to migrate to Australia.

If the words “returned” and “re-returned” have been used for Estha the word “drift” has been used more than once in connection with Rahel. “After Ammu died Rahel drifted” later “Rahel drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge”. The chair in the airport lounge gives one the sense of temporary occupation after which the ‘drifting’ starts again. So it is only natural that after drifting into marriage with Larry Mc Caslin, she drifts out of it. The marriage were eight years in a college of Architecture which she left without taking a degree. And follows the divorce is a few months as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York and then a few years as an attendant
at a gas station where a pimp propositioned her and then back to Ayemenem after 23 years. As the narrator tells:

"Rahel grew up without a brief without any body to arrange a marriage for her. Without anybody who would pay for a dowry for her.....

The omniscient narrator is on the side of the universal laws. The chapter entitled "The crossing" ends thus:

He held his mundu spread above his head to dry. The wind lifted it like a sail. He was suddenly happy. Things will get worse, he thought to himself. Then better. How was walking swiftly now, towards the Heart of Darkness. As lovely as a wolf.

The God of Loss

The God of Small Things

All the events and characters are seen through the eyes of a young girl to foreground the contrast between nature and culture. A small girl is innocent and truthful. When she describes she gives the whole truth, she never edits. Rahel describes everything in all its detail. Readers can say that it is a narration of the unconscious.
“At night, Estha would stand on his bed with his sheet wrapped around him and say, "Et tu Brute? - Then fall Caesar!" and crash into bed without bending his knees, like a stabbed corpse. Kochu Maria, who slept on the floor on a mat, said that she would complain, to Mammachi. ‘Tell your mother to take you to your father’, she said. ‘There you can break as many beds as you like, These aren't your beds. This isn't your house’. Estha would rise from the dead, stand on his bed and say ‘Et tu? Kochu Maria? - Then fall Esthal’ and die again”.

Apart from childish pranks, the language used is usually the language of school-going children. The use of blend words is common is Estha and Rahel is parley. Their other habit is to read words backwards. Their practice is so perfect that they can speak sentence with words in backward order and understand them without a mistake and secretly laugh at the puzzle written on the face of the hearers.

This technique of seeing the world through the eyes of a small girl gives the advantages to the novelist to divide the world into two hemispheres the first governed by the universal laws, the world of The God of Small Things, and
the record governed by specific laws, the world of the God of Big Things. The God of Small Things is love, the one armed man seen in Ammu's dream merging into Velutha and the God of Bad Things, created by the specific laws of culture, is oppressive and demanding obeisance.

The narrative structure of The God of Small Things is authentically feminine. 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 Lake off in his essay "Language and Women's place", identifies as the critical features of WL (the Woman's Language) phonologically, grammatically and semantically. For example : The word "divorced" is spelt, as it is pronounced, as "Die-Vorced", "as though it were a form of death". In fact, in feminine sensibility as reflected in the reactions of Baby Kochamma, Mammachi or the female visitors who came to see Ammu after she had returned to Ayemenem as a divorcee, divorce is, at least metaphorically, a form of death. Pillai's reaction in the immediate context only mirrors the mind of Rahel. A careful examination of Roy's use of words clearly shows that in the novel the words are made to break free of the world's recognized meanings and absolutes into a contemporary world
of fresh usage and implications so that the full resonance of suggestion in the language is released. It is true that the author's frequent experimentation with spellings, breaking of from through splits and ruptures is a postmodern feature, the kind of liberty that Roy takes with spellings, syntax and sentence patterns reflects a feminine sensibility that characterizes and at the same time authenticates the discourse.

The God of Small Things is the 13 night story of a luminous man and luminous woman. This luminous love prospers and then suddenly perishes in the light or darkness of two years, one of which is ancient or history's fear-the fear of caste-while the other fear the fear of politics-is of a more recent origin. The ancient fear is embodied in Mammachi and, more importantly, in Baby Kochamma, K.N.M. Pillai, the local boss of the CPI (ML), is the embodiment of the other fear. These two fears dominate the world in which the two-egg twins, Rahel and Estha, and their mother, Ammu and her lover Velutha. In the same world live Baby Kochamma and K.N.M. Pallai, the patron-deities of patriarchal authority and political double-speak. Rahel correctly diagnoses the confusions that prevail in this world and how the purely personal emotions and
choices and subjected to security are approval by the laws of society:

Perhaps Ammu, Estha and She (Rahel) were the worst transgressors. But it wasn’t just them. It was the others too. They all break rules. They all break rules. They all cross 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, mothers mothers, jam jam and jally jally. It was a time when uncles became fathers, mothers lovers and cousins did and had funerals. It was a time when unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened.

Irony and Humour go hand in hand. There is ironical description of almost every character (Pappachi with his moth, Mammachi and her contact lenses, Baby Kochamma’s unrequited passion for father Mulligan, and Chacko’s “Reading Aloud Voice”. There is stock irony in the explanation that Ammu gives to her children about Mammachi’s behaviour at Pappachi’s funeral: “Ammu told the twins that Mammachi was crying more

because she was used to him than because she loved him. She was used to having
slouching around the pickle factory, and was used to bring beaten from time to time”.

Again, one cannot miss the irony in Mammachi’s pushing Vellya Pappen, Velutha’s father, with all her strength after he informs her of Ammu’s affair with velutha:

He was taken completely by surprise, Part of the taboo of being an untouchable was expecting not to be touched of being locked into a physically impregnable cocoon.

The portrayal of the father of the twins is the very apotheosis of biter irony. Again and again he is shown in an ironical light - with his alcoholism, his impulsive indulgence in falsehood, his absolute lack of principles, his deviousness, and his cruelty to his wife and children.

This irony turns into satire when Rahel, after returning to Ayemenem after 23 years, watches the “truncated” performance of the Kathakkali dancers in History House, now turned into five star hotel. As art is something that cannot be truncated, cannot be commercialised, after the performance of the Kathakali men stop at the temple to ask pardon of their gods- “To apologise for corrupting their stories. For encashing their identities. Misappropriating their lives”. This chapter “Kochu Thumban’ brings out clearly the author’s deep love and
respect for Indian culture and her furious anger at the way art has been prostituted for money.

The novel is overburdened with imagery, there are key images in the novel which no one hand show the horror embedded in the structure of the novel and on the other reveal "the beauty and strength of nature the sweet innocence of childhood, the nurturing power of love and friendship".

As Arundhati Roy has pointed out, the whole novel is centered around an image:

"The inspiration for the book was not an idea or a character but an image. The image of this sky-blue plymoth stuck at the railroad crossing with the twins inside and the Marxist procession raging around it".

The recurrent image that Arundhati Roy uses about Velutha is the red nail varnish and the birth mark in the shape of brown leaf on his back which made the monsoons come. Velutha dies with the red varnish on his nails and a smile on his elbow and shoulders. A symbol of his love for the children because it was the children who had painted his mails with red cutex that Ammu had discarded:
“The posse of Touchable Policeman had looked at them and laughed ‘What’s this?’ One had said, ‘AC DC’? Another lifted his boot with a millipede curled into the ridges of his soul. Deep rust down. A million legs.

**Arundhati Roy** sums up the camaraderie between the twins and Velutha though an image:

“It is after all so easy to shatter a story. The break a chain of thought. To ruin a fragment of a dream being carried around carefully like a piece of porcelain”.

The narrative structure of the novel is not only repetitive but also spatial. The past, the present, the future rush simultaneously to become one mixed up symphony. The first 20 pages of the book epitomize device used by Arundhati in the novel:

“They were nearly born on a bus, Estha and Rahel. The car is which Baba, their father, was taking Ammu, their mother, to hospital in Shillong to have them, broke down on the winding tea estate road in Assam. They abandoned the car and flagged down a crowded state transport Bus.
With the queer compassion of the very poor for the comparatively well off, or perhaps only because they saw how hugely pregnant Ammu was, seated passengers made room for the couple and for the rest of the journey Estha and Rahel's father had to hold their mother's stomach (with them in it) to prevent it from wobbling. That was before they were divorced and Ammu came back to live in Kerala”.

The three-dimensional past, comprising Ammu's struggle just before giving birth to Estha and Rahel, her divorce, and her return to the Ayemenem House to live with her parents, is wrapped up in an instant entirely from the focal point of author. The novelist employs the device of cinematic close-up while capturing the different levels of the past.

**The History House**: This was a beautiful house white-walled, once. But painted in weather colours now. With brushes dipped in nature's palitte. Mossgreen. Earth brown. Crumble black. Making it look older than it really was. Like sunken treasure dredged up from the ocean bed. Whale-kissed and barnacled. Swaddled in silence. Breathing bubbles through its broken windows.
A deep verandah can all around. The rooms themselves were recessed, berried in shadow. The tilted roof swept down like the sides of an immense, upside-down boat. Rotting beams supported on once-white pillars had berckled at centre, leaving a yawning, gaping hole. A History house. A History shaped hole in the universe through which, at twilight, dense clouds of silent bats bellowed like factory smoke and drifted into the night a grey haze in the rosy distance that suddenly coalesced and blackened over in the house before it plummeted through the History hole like smoke in a final running backwards kenning the roof like fur. Espaliering the floor with shit.

Kerala: A full understanding of and appreciation of Arundhati Roy’s novel The God of Small Things requires that the reader be well acquainted with the land and culture through which Arundhati Roy weaves her tale. Arundhati Roy achieves the rich descriptive texture and vivid imagery of her novel by writing about something with which she is intimately familiar, by gaining knowledge about Kerala the reader obtained the means by which to sense the passion that Roy feels for her homeland and her story.
Geography, Climate and Economy: Kerala lies on the southwest coast of the Indian Peninsula, stretching 360 miles along what is known as the Malabar coast. Its area of 15,000 square miles comprises just over one percent of the total land area of India, though its 29 million person population accounts for 3.5% of the Indian population. The state is bordered by Karnataka to the north and Tamil Nadu to the east, but Kerala is physically separated from neighboring states by the Western Ghat mountain range; this feature isolated Kerala from other Indian cultures for many years, and as a result allowed it to develop a society in which foreign culture is actually more evident than is the Indian influence.

Because of its proximity to the Arabian Sea, Kerala is the first state each season to receive the monsoon rains, which contribute significantly to the 118 inches of annual rainfall. Most of Kerala's innumerable rivers and backwaters are almost entirely monsoon fed, meaning they fluctuate in size from small rivulets in the summer to almost overwhelming volumes in the rainy season. Monsoon rains that young-Sophie Mol is taken to her death by the high, swift waters of a deceptively powerful river. Heavy rains also contribute to the agriculture which forms the basis for most of the economy of Kerala and surrounding states. The Keralian spice trade dates
back over three thousand years, and Kerala is still among the world leaders in the production and export of such spices as pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, and turmeric (Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* is partly located in Kerala; the Da Gama/Zogoiby family's fortune comes from trade in spice).

Arundhati Roy centers her story around the region of Kottayam, in the highlands of Kerala. The agriculture of this region is dominated by the production of coffee, tea and rubber; it is a rubber plantation on which the "history house" is situated, and where Velutha is first sheltered and finally destroyed.

**Language**: Though English is spoken in much of Kerala, Malayalam is by far the principle language: it is spoken by a full 96 percent of the population of Kerala, as well as four percent of the population of India. Malayalam ranks eighth among the fifteen major Indian languages in total number of speakers. The language originated from Sanskrit and Tamil, but has evolved greatly with the influx of various foreign cultures and languages into Keralian society. Malayalam now includes literally hundreds of words and idiomatic expressions
taken from such languages as English, Syria, Latin and Portuguese. Not only is Malayalam widely spoken, but it and other languages are also quite heavily read in Kerala; the state boasts a literacy rate of between 90 and 100 percent, possibly higher than any state in the world.

**Communism**: The Marxist sentiments portrayed in *The God of Small Things* are in some ways representative of the actual political climate of Kerala. In 1957 Kerala became the first state in the world (with the exception of the Italian principality of San Marino) to form a democratically elected communist government. In 1970 Kerala became the first state in India to abolish landlordism. Kerala is presently a democratic state, and is still under Marxist control.

**History, Religion and Society**: The political state of Kerala was formed on November 1st, 1956 with the joining of the Travancore - Cochin State of Malabar. However, Hindu mythology places the date much earlier; it contents that once, many thousands of years ago, the god Vishnu descended to earth in the form of his sixth incarnation, Parashurama, in order to slay evil demons. After he battled the demons
parashruma flung his A axe into the Arabian Sea, and were it landed Kerala arose from the depths of the ocean. Hinduism is strong in Kerala, as it is throughout India, but in Kerala Hinduism has long been accompanied by several other world religions, including Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

The Syrian Christian faith practiced by Ammu and her family was begun in 52 AD when St. Thomas brought Christianity to Kerala. Jews migrated to Kerala even earlier, perhaps arriving from Jerusalem as early as 587 BC. About sixty percent of the Keralan population is currently Hindu, with Christians and Muslims making up most of the remaining forty percent; small pockets of Jewish communities still exist in certain parts, including the town of Kochi and surrounding areas. One of the most apparent indications of the Hindu influence in Kerala is the prevalence and importance of the caste system in Keralan society. Though caste was originally present only in Hinduism, it was adopted and internalized by other religions as they began to appear in Kerala; caste has now become more of a social phenomenon than a religious convention in Kerala. The extreme importance of caste in the Syrian Christian society is apparent in the profound power that
it holds over the actions of such characters as Mammachi and Baby Kochamma.

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References 4

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   P. 225
   P. 37
   P. 118
   P. 306
   P. 38
   P. 159
   P. 248
   P. 287
   P. 295
   P. 33
   P. 301
   P. 91
   P. 93
   P. 336
   P. 17
   P. 290
   P. 19
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   P. 190

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