CHAPTER- III

PERSPECTIVES

ON

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

IN

ARUNDHATI ROY’S GOD OF SMALL THINGS
Arundhati Roy as a novelist is known for her Perspectives on culture and identity. People know that she is a Syrian Christian, a Keralite, a modern woman and all that. Again this involves many modernist ideologies like religious identity, sect, regionalism, modern outlook and feminist identity. The following is about general modernism that has influenced the entire world.

Modernism comprised a broad series of movements in Europe and America that came to fruition roughly between 1910 and 1930. Its major exponents and practitioners included Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, Luigi Pirandello, and Franz Kafka. These various modernisms were the results of many complex economic, political, scientific and religious developments over the nineteenth century, which culminated in World War I (1914-1918). The vast devastation, psychological demoralization, and economic depression left by the war intensified the already existing reactions against bourgeois modes of thought and economic practice. Rationalism underwent renewed assaults from many directions: from philosophers such as Bergson, from the sphere of psychoanalysis, from neoclassicists such as T. E. Hulme, the New Humanists in America, and neo-Thomists such as Jacques Maritain. These reactions were often underlain by a new understanding of language, as a conventional and historical construct. The modernist writer occupied a world that was often
perceived as fragmented, where the old bourgeois ideologies of rationality, science, progress, civilization, and imperialism had been somewhat discredited; where the artist was alienated from the social and political world, and where art and literature were marginalized; where populations had been subjected to processes of mass standardization; where philosophy could no longer offer visions of unity, and where language itself was perceived to be an inadequate instrument for expression and understanding.

Hence, over the last fifty years or so, we have come to appreciate more fully the complexity and heterogeneity of literary modernism, in its nature and genesis. It is no longer regarded as simply a symbolist and imagistic reaction against nineteenth-century realism or naturalism or later versions of Romanticism. It is not so much that modernism, notwithstanding the political conservatism of many of its practitioners, turns away from the project of depicting reality; what more profoundly underlies modernistic literary forms is awareness that the definitions of reality become increasingly complex and problematic. Modernists came to this common awareness by different paths: Yeats drew on the occult, on Irish myth and legend, as well as the Romantics and French symbolists. Proust drew on the insights of Bergson; Virginia Woolf, on Bergson, G. E. Moore, and others; Pound drew on various non-European literatures as well as
T. S. Eliot, whose poetic vision was profoundly eclectic drew on Dante, the Metaphysical poets, Laforgue, Baudelaire, and a number of philosophers.

M. A. R. Habib observes, “In general, literary modernism was marked by a number of features: (1) the affirmation of a continuity, rather than a separation, between the worlds of subject and object, the self and the world. The human self is not viewed as a stable entity which simply engages with an already present external world of objects and other selves; (2) a perception of the complex roles of time, memory, and history in the mutual construction of self and world. Time is not conceived in a static model which separates past, present and future as discrete elements in linear relation; rather, it is viewed as dynamic, with these elements influencing and changing one another. Human history is thus not already written; even the past can be altered in accordance with present human interests, motives, and viewpoints; (3) a breakdown of any linear narrative structure following the conventional Aristotelian model which prescribes beginning, middle, and end. Modernist poetry tends to be fragmented, creating its own internal ‘logic’ of emotion, image, sound, symbol, and mood; (4) an acknowledgment of the complexity of experience: any given experience is vastly more complex than can be rendered in literal language. For example, the experience of ‘love’ could be
quite different from one person to another, yet language coercively subsumes these differing experiences under the same word and concept. Modernist poetry tends to veer away from any purported literal use of language which might presume a one-to-one correspondence between words and things; it relies far more on suggestion and allusion rather than overt statement; (5) a self-consciousness regarding the process of literary composition. This embraces both an awareness of how one’s own work relates to the literary tradition as a whole, and also an ironic stance toward the content of one’s own work; (6) finally, and most importantly, an awareness of the problematic nature of language. This indeed underlies the other elements cited above. If there is no simple correspondence between language and reality, and if these realms are mutually constituted through patterns of coherence, then a large part of the poet’s task lies in a more precise use of language which offers alternative definitions of reality. Eliot once said that the poet must ‘distort’ language in order to create his meaning."

Arundhati Roy’s novel The God of Small Things is a critique of tradition, communist government in Kerala, male-society, and all that. The action moves between the early 1990s and 1969, dealing with two forms of sexuality. The novel’s intricate time-shifts show how individual lives are affected by ‘History,’ but it finally argues for the superior power of
‘Biology.’ Written in a style that makes extensive use of neologisms, it can be seen as a novel in the tradition of G. V. Desani’s *All About H. Hatterr* and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children*. Dominic Head thinks this work has expanded the range of Indian fiction in English.”2

K. M. Pandey observes, “*The God of Small Things* is a polysemic novel which can be interpreted at several levels. It may be said that the novel is a satire on politics attacking specifically the Communist establishment. It may be treated as a family saga narrating the story of four generations of a Christian family. It may also be treated as a novel having religious overtones. One may also call it a protest novel which is subversive and taboo-breaking. It may also be treated as a love story with a tragic end. The novel gives good dividends if studied from the viewpoint of childhood experience. In terms of stylistic experimentation, it is the boldest novel of the Nineties as ‘*The Midnight’s Children* was of the Eighties.”3 Another critic J. P. Tripathi says, “An admirable aspect of the novel is the continuous exposure of the social, political, racial, religious and Christain hypocrisies”4

The following is a critical interpretation of Arundhati Roy’s novel which has nearly twenty chapters and the work is known for its most abstract presentation. The time-sequence is often blurred.
Chapter 1 presents the story of the dizygotic twins Rahel and Estha, Rahel’s marriage and divorce and the divorce of their mother Ammu.

The chapter begins with Roy’s description of Nature in Kerala countryside. It was raining when Rahel came back to Ayemenem. Roy describes the old house, which reminds us Kamala Das’s description of her grand-mother’s house in the poem ‘An Introduction,’ or Edgar Allan Poe’s such description in his story ‘The House of Ushar’ when at an extreme. Rahel has come to see her twin-brother Estha (ppen).

She remembers, for instance (though she had not been there), what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies. She remembers the taste of the tomato sandwiches—Estha’s sandwiches that Estha ate – on the Madras Mail to Madars. ‘And these are only the small things’¹⁵ (GST, 2-3).

There is a description of how Sophie’ Moll died of drowning. She was Chacko’s (Ammu’s brother) only daughter born to his English wife Margaret Kochamma. Her funeral killed her. ‘Dus to dus to dus to dus to dus. On her tombstone it is said ‘A Sunbeam Lent To Us Too Briefly.’ Ammu explained later that ‘Too Briefly meant For Too Short a While’ (GST, 7).
Roy describes as if in a flashback, Ammu’s visiting the police station for Velutha’s whereabouts. Because of her affair with him, Velutha is killed in jail. ‘He’s dead,’ Ammu whispered to him. ‘I’ve killed him’ (GST, 8).

The family has a letter from Ammu’s husband that he left for Australia. Estha, now back to Ayemenem, stays quite a young man. ‘He occupies very little space in the world.’ Roy describes about his education in Calcutta. Now he is ‘withdrawn from the world.’

Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria, the vinegar-hearted, short-tempered, midget cook, were the only people left in the Ayemenem house when Estha was ‘re-Returned.’ Mammachi, their grandmother, was dead. Chacko lived in Canada now, and ran an unsuccessful antiques business.

Then Rahel was left high and dry. She enrolled at Nazareth Convent at age 11. She changed schools three times, and yet had ‘no friends.’ She grew up in poverty. She had an admission into a mediocre college of architecture in Delhi and spent eight years there.

It was while she was at the School of Architecture that she met Larry McCaslin who was in Delhi collecting material for his doctoral thesis on Energy Efficiency in Vernacular Architecture. She went with him to Boston.
What Larry McCaslin saw in Rahel’s eyes was not despair at all, but a sort of enforced optimism and a hollow where Estha’s words had been. He could not be expected to understand that.

After they were divorced, Rahel worked for a few months as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York. And then for several years as a night clerk in a bullet-proof cabin at a gas station outside Washington.

Then Baby Kochamma wrote to say that Estha had been returned. Rahel gave up her job at the gas station and left America gladly. Baby Kochamma is described vividly. It was a curiously apt observation. Baby Kochamma had lived her life backwards. As a young woman she had renounced the material world, and now, as an old one, she seemed to embrace it. She hugged it and it hugged her back.

When she was eighteen, Baby Kochamma fell in love with a handsome young Irish monk, Father Mulligan, who was in Kerala for a year on deputation from his seminary in Madras. He was studying Hindu scriptures, in order to be able to denounce them intelligently.

Every Thursday morning Father Mulligan came to Ayemenem to visit Baby Kochamma's father, Reverend E. John Ipe, who was a priest of the Mar Thoma church.
At first Baby Kochamma tried to seduce Father Mulligan with weekly exhibitions of staged charity. Even she became a Roman Catholic to attract him. She entered a convent in Madras as a trainee to be near him. She wrote him letters. Very quickly she realized the futility of this effort and her father Revd Ipe brought her back, and sent her to US for education.

Two years later, Baby Kochamma returned from Rochester with a diploma in Ornamental Gardening, but more in love with Father Mulligan than ever. She had a fine garden, for years. Now she is fond of TV.

The Ayemenem House owned the Paradise Pickle & Preserves.

Chapter 2 “Pappachi’s Moth,” presents the abnormal story of Pappachi and Mammachi and developments in the life of Ammu, Chacko and Velutha and Vellya Pappen’s worry about his son, and the communist movement prospering in Kerala.

The Christian family’s identity is spoken of. Roy describes Sophie Mol’s arrival. Ammu’s identity crisis is seen. She says her children could not have a surname, because she wanted to retain her maiden name. The following paragraph amuses us about Ammu’s cultural perspective:

“Chacko was driving. He was four years older than Ammu. Rahel and Estha couldn’t call him Chachen because when they did, he called them Chetan and Cheduthi. If they called him Ammaven he called them Appoi
and Ammai. If they called him Uncle he called them Aunty, which was embarrassing in Public. So they called him Chacko” (GST, 37).

In the Plymouth, Ammu was sitting in front, next to Chacko. She was twenty-seven that year, and in the pit of her stomach she carried the cold knowledge that for her, life had been lived. She had had one chance. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man.

Roy describes Ammu’s past life in Calcutta, her marriage, and life in Assam, her delivering Estha and Rahel and finally the matter of encountering the plantation owner Hollick for sex. Ammu divorces her husband and returns to Ayemenem. Baby Kochamma, her parents, even brother Chackoo are unhappy about Ammu’s tragedy. The crisis is about her survival, and about her two orphaned Hindu children. Roy writes, “She subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a divorced daughter - according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all” (GST, 45).

Mammachi had started making pickles commercially soon after Pappachi retired from Government service in New Delhi and came to live in Ayemenem.
Roy describes Ammu’s parents. The father Pappachi is a sadist and jealous of his wife’s being in prime age. He was jealous of her talent in violin also.

Pappachi had been an Imperial Entomologist at the Pusa Institute. After Independence, when the British left, his designation was changed from Imperial Entomologist to Joint Director, Entomology. The year he retired, he had risen to a rank equivalent to Director.

His life’s greatest setback was not having had the moth that he had discovered named after him. Chacko told the twins that though he hated to admit it, they were all Anglophiles.

Chacko voices his identity crisis when he asserts: “we’re Prisoners of War. Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows will never be sad enough. Our joys are never happy enough. Our dreams are never big enough. Our lives are never important enough. To matter.”

Then, to give Estha and Rahel a sense of historical perspective (though perspective was something which, in the weeks to follow, Chacko himself would sorely lack), he told them about the Earth Woman” (GST, 53). Though the Earth Woman made a lasting impression on the twins, it was
the History House - so much closer at hand - that really fascinated them. They thought about it often.

Upto the time Chacko arrived; the factory had been a small but profitable enterprise. Mammachi just ran it like a large kitchen. Chacko had it registered as a partnership and informed Mammachi that she was the sleeping partner. He invested in equipment (canning machines, cauldrons, cookers) and expanded the labour force.

Roy speaks of the Communist party in Kerala. The reasons for its success are there. She writes, “There were several competing theories. One was that it had to do with the large population of Christians in the state. Twenty per cent of Kerala’s population were Syrian Christians, who believed that they were descendants of the one hundred Brahmins whom Saint Thomas, the Apostle converted to Christianity when he travelled east after the Resurrection. Structurally - this somewhat rudimentary argument went - Marxism was a simple substitute for Christianity. Replace God with Marx, Satan with the bourgeoisie, Heaven with a classless society, the Church with the Party, and the form and purpose of the journey remained similar. An obstacle race, with a prize at the end. Whereas the Hindu mind had to make more complex adjustments” (GST, 66).
The real secret was that communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. They offered a cocktail revolution. A heady mix of Eastern Marxism and orthodox Hinduism, spiked with a shot of democracy.

Though Chacko was not a card-holding member of the Party, he had been converted early and had remained, through all its travails, a committed supporter.

Chacko was an undergraduate at Delhi University during the euphoria of 1957, when the Communists won the State Assembly elections and Nehru invited them to form a government. Chacko’s hero, Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the flamboyant Brahmin high priest of Marxism in Kerala, became Chief Minister of the first ever democratically elected communist government in the world. Suddenly the communists found themselves in the extraordinary - critics said absurd - position of having to govern a people and foment revolution simultaneously. Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad evolved his own theory about how he would do this. Chacko studied his treatise on the *Peaceful Transition to Communism* with an adolescent’s obsessive diligence and an ardent fan’s unquestioning approval. It set out in
detail how Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad’s government intended to enforce land reforms, neutralize the police, subvert the judiciary and ‘Restrain the Hand of the Reactionary Anti-People Congress Government at the Centre.’ Unfortunately, before the year was out, the Peaceful part of the Peaceful Transition came to an end.

This is Roy’s criticism, and even attack on communism in Kerala. Critics admire her for this. One worse result of this bad Communist government of E.M.S., even during his second term, was that it inspired Naxalism. Therefore, Chinese government shifted its support to Naxalites from CPI (and CPM). Then Roy describes Velutha, a carpenter in Chako’s factory. He is also a communist worker. He was called Velutha - which means White in Malayalam because he was so black. His father, Vellya Paapen, was a Paravan, a toddy tapper.

As a young boy, Velutha would come with Vellya Paapen to the back entrance of the Ayemenem House to deliver the coconuts they had plucked from the trees in the compound. Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that touchables touched. Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood, when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or
Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprint. In Mammachi’s time, Paravans, like other untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. This speaks of the Dalit’s cultural perspective in India, and it reminds us the African-Americans’ racial problem in the West.

When the British came to Malabar, a number of Paravans, Pelayas and Pulayas (among them Velutha’s grandfather, Kelan) converted to Christianity and joined the Anglican Church to escape the scourge of untouchability. As added incentive they were given a little food and money. They were known as the Rice-Christians. It did not take them long to realize that they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They were made to have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests.

Velutha learnt expert carpentary from a German expert Johann Klein. He developed the mind of an engineer. He had a way with machines. Velutha, Vellya Paapen and Kuttappen lived in a little laterite hut, downriver from the Ayemenem house. A three-minute run through the coconut trees for Esthappen and Rahel. They had only just arrived at Ayemenem with Ammu and were too young to remember Velutha when he left. But in the months
since he had returned, they had grown to be the best of friends. Later Veluta entertains Estha and Rahel with his toys and puns.

Chapter 3 reverts to chapter 2 and takes up the theme of the similarity of the zygotic twins. J. P. Tripathy observes: “Roy explores only to surface level the similarity of the twins. Her vision is confined to biological and psychological level; no metaphysical or spiritual points are touched.”

Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* deals with ‘small things’ in life. Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” affirms that “best portion of a good man’s life lies in his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness.” Roy’s small things remind us Wordsworth. Sheobhushan Shukla thinks, “Roy has structured *The God of Small Things* around all sorts of small things. She focalizes on a whole world of small things, tiny insects, tiny creatures, small children, small happenings and small lives.”

A. N. Dwivedi adds, “In the second, I am convinced that Arundhati Roy has written her novel with the Western readership in mind. I say so because there are certain things—what she calls ‘small things’—in it that do not promote the cause of Indian aesthetics which propagates the principles of ‘Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram’ (of Truth, Goodness, Beauty). Though there is no harm if a writer keeps the Western markets in mind (as that guarantees a
handsome earning), yet it is a little painful and disquieting to see an Indian writer making a work of literature a mere saleable commodity."

The following passage reveals this: “There are big dreams and little ones. ‘Big Man the Laltain sahib, Small Man the Mombatti,’ an old Bihari coolie, who met Estha’s school excursion party at the railway station (unfailingly, year after year), used to say of dreams.

The Masters would haggle with him as he trudged behind them with the boys’ luggage, his bowed legs further bowed, cruel schoolboys imitating his gait. Balls-in-Brackets they used to call him.

*Smallest Man the Varicose Veins*, he clean forgot to mention, as he wobbled off with less than half the money he had asked for and less than a tenth of what he deserved” (GST, 89-90).

The theme of incest is a part of Christian/heathen life. The twins Rahel and Estha have it here. Roy writes of it vaguly. Look at the following:

“Rahel searched her brother’s nakedness for signs of herself. In the shape of his knees. The arch of his instep. The slope of his shoulders. The angle at which the rest of his arm met his elbow. The way his toe-nails tipped upwards at the ends. The sculpted hollows on either side of his taut, beautiful buns. Tight plums. Men’s bums never grow up. Like school satchels, they evoke in an
instant memories of childhood. Two vaccination marks on his arm gleamed like coins. Hers were on her thigh.

Girls always have them on their thighs, Ammu used to say.

Rahel watched Estha with the curiosity of a mother watching her wet child. A sister a brother. A woman a man. A twin a twin” (GST, 92-93).

Chapter 4 shows the novelist breaking literary tradition by describing in detail the pissing and excretion of Ammu and family in Abhilash Talkies and Estha’s impulsive singing landing him into the adventure with the Lemondrink man, one of the shaggiest in book of literature. A. N. Dwivedi adds, “Elsewhere too, Arundhati Roy shows her expertise in depicting erotic and passionate scenes, as in the last Chapter titled ‘The Cost of Living’ where man-woman relationship reaches full consummation.”

For example, Roy describes shabby things like pissing. Look at the following: “Rahel giggled. Ammu giggled. Baby Kochamma giggled. When the trickle started they adjusted her aerial position. Rahel was unembarrassed. She finished and Ammu had the toilet paper. Rahel liked all this. Holding the handbag. Everyone pissing in front of everyone”(GST,95).
The next obscene description pertains to the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man’s masterbation at Abhilash Talkies. Roy writes, ‘Now if you’ll kindly hold this for me,’ the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man said, handing Estha his penis through his soft white muslin dhoti, ‘I’ll get you your drink. Orange? Lemon?’

Estha held it because he had to.

‘Orange? Lemon?’ the Man said. ‘Lemonorange?’

‘Lemon, please,’ Estha said politely.

He got a cold bottle and a straw. So he held a bottle in one hand and a penis in the other. Hard, hot, veiny. Not a moonbeam.

The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man’s hand closed over Estha’s. His thumbnail was long like a woman’s. He moved Estha’s hand up and down. First slowly. Then fastly.

The lemondrink was cold and sweet. The penis hot and hard” (p. 103).

Ranjan Harish as well as C. D. Narasimhiah has criticized this aptly. The former thinks this is a bad culture. He writes, “Similarly, the entire fourth Chapter titled “Abhilash Talkies” is like a cancer in the body of the novel. It is completely useless and purposeless, and does not add in any way to the progression of the plot. After reading this Chapter, it is evident that the writer has set her eye either on swelling the size of the novel or on
catching the attention of foreign readers. The Chapter renders one tired and bored. The behaviour of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man towards an innocent boy like Estha at the Refreshment Counter during the film-interval is unquestionably unethical and objectionable. But it is in the nature of Arundhati Roy to exult in lewd and lecherous scenes.”

Roy then alludes to Kerala politics. Her target is bloody politicians like Pillai.

Earlier in the year, Comrade Pillai’s political ambitions had been given an unexpected boost. Two local Party members, Comrade J. Kattukaran and Comrade Guhan Menon had been expelled from the Party as suspected Naxalites. One of them - Comrade Guhan Menon - was tipped to be the Party’s candidate for the Kottayam by-elections to the Legislative Assembly due next March. His expulsion from the Party created a vacuum that a number of hopefuls were jockeying to fill. Among them Comrade K. N. M. Pillai was one.

Comrade Pillai had begun to watch the goings-on at Paradise Pickles with the keenness of a substitute at a soccer match. To bring in a new labour union, however small, in what he hoped would be his future constituency, would be an excellent beginning for a journey to the Legislative Assembly.

Pillai worked in the factory for its good at least outwardly. But he harboured a workers’ revolt secretly. It is said, “People of the World be
courageous, *dare* to fight, *defy* difficulties and advance wave upon wave. Then the whole world will belong to the People. Monsters of all kinds shall be destroyed. You must demand what is rightfully yours. Yearly bonus. Provident fund. Accident insurance” (GST, 120).

Comrade K. N. M. Pillai’s politics is this. He never came out openly against Chacko. Whenever he referred to him in his speeches he was careful to strip him of any human attributes and present him as an abstract functionary in some larger scheme.

It is said, “The narrator in the novel charges the Communists of Kerala with having been casteist in their approaches. For instance, K.N.M. Pillai, who is a Communist press-owner has been reported to be casteist as he does not like Velutha to be there in the Party for Velutha is an ‘untouchable,’ a ‘low-caste Hindu’”.

Since Pillai still regards a worker as an untouchable and likes him to be eased out of the Party only because the latter belongs to a caste believed to be low, he is not a Communist in the real sense of the word as a Communist stands for the equality of all and likes the State power to come into the hands of workers irrespective of their castes, colours, and creeds, as Marx, through his *Communist Manifesto*, asked all the workers of the world to unite. So Pillai is a bourgeois at heart, a chameleon, an opportunist.
B. D. Sharma adds, “The Naxalites are another group of Communists mentioned in the novel. They are reported to be indulging in plundering and committing murder, as the reporter observes: “They organized peasants into fighting cadres, seized land, expelled the owners and established People’s Courts to try Class Enemies.””

Likewise Roy writes, “E.M.S. Namboodiripad did not usher in the true Marxist revolution either in Kerala or India. On the contrary, under his government the poor continued to be poor, the oppressed to be oppressed and the weak and helpless to be weak and helpless and to suffer into the bargain” (GST,116).

Chapter 5 moves in the normal sequence of time, with the description of the river bed of Meenachal making of a barrage and double crops and introduce Comrade K. N. M. Pillai and Ammu and her children. Roy seems to criticise the advancement of science and technology. She criticizes the construction of a barrage across Meenachal river. A five-star hotel chain constructed there brought the ‘Heart of Darkness.’ Kari Saipu’s (the Anglo-Indian) house reminds us Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘House of the Ushar.’ This is a Gothic phenomenon. The Chief Minister E.M.S. Namboodiripad has a bungalow there. He is described as ‘Kerala’s Mao Tse-Tung.’ The chapter ends with Rahel and Esha’s meeting Comrade Pillai.
Preparation for the welcome of Sophie Mol and her mother Morgaret, now a widow, and already divorced from Chacko, the rehearsal of the Estha and Rahel for the receptions are satirically and humorously presented in the sixth chapter.

Roy gives a graphic description of Margaret Kochamma’s arrival with her daughter at Kochin airport. Chackoo and Ammu and her children welcome them. Chakoo is happy to welcome his ex-wife. But Margaret is not happy because her second husband Joe just passed away in a car accident. The chapter is full of conversations amongst the two parties, and the children are especially happy.

Chronological time sequence is broken again in chapter 7 with a description of Ammu’s ouster from the Ayemenem house, without the novelist giving the reason why. Thus suspense and tension are created. This chapter is entitled “Wisdom Exercise Notebooks.”

In a flashback scene, the author provides us details about Ammu’s expulsion from her family and her tragic end for adultery. Ammu loved Veluta, for he was a gentleman. Both Ammu and Velutha – were independent minds. Both sail in the same boat economically. Ammu’s marriage with ‘him’ in Assam went wrong. She got back to Aymenem House where her parent, even her brother disliked her, and her inter-caste
marriage. As a young widow, she naturally needed bodily pleasure and she got it from Velutha.

The physical attraction leading to physical union symbolizes the victory of love over the power of law, and the lovers start meeting in the dark. Ranga Rao rightly says: “In Ammu, the novelist has presented with compassion, a woman, a feminist locked in a struggle with her family, its ‘hidden morality,’ with society and tragically with herself.”

However, Ammu is not sure of permanence in this affair. This is already suggested by the dream Ammu sees. She sees a cheerful man with one arm (meaning a faulty affair) holding her close by the light of an oil lamp. This reminds us Akkamahadevi’s dream and desire to marry God Shiva. The American poet Emily Dickinson sang of this in connection with her desire to marry Jesus. Now Roy describes about the tragedy thus:

“Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey, where she had gone for a job interview as someone’s secretary. She died alone. With a noisy ceiling fan for company and no Estha to lie at the back of her and talk to her. She was thirty-one. Not old, not young, but a viable, die-able age.

She had woken up at night to escape from a familiar, recurrent dream in which policemen approached her with snicking scissors, wanting to hack
off her hair. They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes whom they had caught in the bazaar - branded them so that everybody would know them for what they were *Veshyas*. So, that new policemen on the beat would have no trouble identifying whom to harass. Ammu always noticed them in the market, the women with vacant eyes and forcibly shaved heads in the land where long, oiled hair was only for the morally upright.

That night in the lodge, Ammu sat up in the strange bed in the strange room in the strange town. She didn’t know where she was. She recognized nothing around her. Only her fear was familiar. The faraway man inside her began to shout. This time the steely fist never loosened its grip. Shadows gathered like bats in the steep hollows near her collarbone. The sweeper found her in the morning. He switched off the fan.

She had a deep blue sac under one eye that was bloated like a bubble. As though her eye had tried to do what her lungs couldn’t. Some time close to midnight, the faraway man who lived in her chest had stopped shouting. A platoon of ants carried a dead cockroach sedately through the door, demonstrating what should be done with corpses.

The church refused to bury Ammu. On several counts. So Chacko hired a van to transport the body to the electric crematorium. He had her wrapped in a dirty bedsheets and laid out on a stretcher. Rahel thought she
looked like a Roman Senator. *Et tu, Ammu!* She thought and smiled, remembering Estha” (GST, 161-162).

This passage reads like society’s ban on rebels. This reminds us literature related to priest’s refusal to bury Tess’s son in Thomas Hardy’s novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. This reminds us Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. K. M. Pandey observes, “The novel is a love story with a tragic denouement. In such stories love is always portrayed as the passionate longing of the soul of lover for the beloved which culminates in the physical union. More often than not, it challenges the social order and “challenging the keepers of the social order and guardians of its taboos, we tremble at the punishment fitting the crime, emasculation, or more generally a pervasive unsexing.’ In fact, there is no such thing as ‘love without fear.’ Naturally, tales of love are bound to be tales of terror and torment, and herein lies the most elemental of love’s paradoxes—the core of love’s exhilaration and terror. *The God of Small Things* observes this dialectical cosmology of suffering and sublimity.”

It is also worth remembering that Ammu is a Malayali woman and Malayalis are the only society in India where matriarchy prevails. But the women of even such communities adopt different standards for men and women giving priority to the former. Thus, Mammachi’s hypocrisy is
exposed as she takes proper care of fulfilling her son Chacko’s ‘Man’s Needs’ by secretly allowing lowly women to enter his room and the same woman condemns her daughter for her affairs with Velutha.

Thus, the Ammu-Velutha relationship is portrayed as a protest against the existing laws of society. It attacks the institutions of family, religion, politics and public administration, but in doing so it touches the bounds of sentimentality oscillating between a personal tragedy and an archetypal symbol.

Chapter 8 is a continuation of what happens in chapter 7. A little background of the Ayemenem House goes on. Roy describes the conservative family: the father, a sadist and egoist. Though he retired as a Central Govt officer, he could not educate his two children satisfactorily. He could not give dowry for Ammu’s marriage. Roy describes women’s struggle for survival. Mammachi engages our attention. She looks after her husband though he is jealous of her talent and modesty. She runs a cottage industry, selling pickles and preserves, which her son Chackoo later turns into a small factory.

Kochamma and her daughter Sophie Mol are described in detail.

Chapter 9 again breaks the chronological time sequence with Rahel remembering how Estha, she and Sophi Mol dressed as three ladies, visited
Velutha’s room and were entertained by him, and he partly becomes the giver of minor joys to children and in the same sequence his repair of a leaking boat brought by Estha and Rahel is presented.

The title chapter (10) of the novel ‘The God of Small Things’ presents Ammu’s afternoon-mare of, a man with one arm not able to do everything to her. Ammu recognizes this man as Velutha, her lover now.

Tension goes off in chapter 12 with the twins watching Kathakali entitled Karnashapadham and Duryodhanavadhan and Comrade Pillai meeting them in the morning.

Kerala Indians have their own cultural identities. They are religious and social. They have shown this in their art Kathakali. The local dance, displaying the mythical scenes of Karna and Duryodhana, pleases them about how the good and bad coalesce life. Roy writes about them this:

“June is low season for Kathakali. But there are some temples that a troupe will not pass by without performing in. The Ayemenem temple wasn’t one of them, but these days, thanks to its geography, things had changed.

In Ayemenem they danced to jettison their humiliation in the Heart of Darkness. Their truncated swimming pool performances. Their turning to tourism to stave off starvation. On their way back from the Heart of
Darkness, they stopped at the temple to ask pardon of their gods. To apologize for corrupting their stories. For encashing their identities. Misappropriating their lives” (GST, 228-229). Estha and Rahel watched these Mahabharata episodes.

Chapter 13 is entitled “The Pessimist and the Optimist.” Tension rises with the description of the chance attraction of Margaret to Chacko in a London hotel, their marriage, divorce, her visit to India and Sophie Mol’s death by drowning. Ammu’s is kept locked, cyclone bringing sexual explosion in Ammu and Velutha.

Roy describes the foreigner Margaret Kochamma, a woman from London. She lived in Oxford as a waitress. Chacko met her there. The winter after he came down from Balliol (he did badly his exams), Margaret Kochamma and Chacko were married without her family’s consent and without his family’s knowledge.

Eventually Chacko got a brief, badly paid assignment with the Overseas Sales Department of the India Tea Board. Hoping that this would lead to other things, Chacko and Margaret moved to London. They lived in even smaller, more dismal rooms. Margaret Kochamma’s parents refused to see her. Then she was pregnant. However, Margaret met Joe, and loved him. Joe was everything that Chacko was not. The two divorced.
Margaret Kochamma wrote regularly, giving Chacko news of Sophie Mol. She assured him that Joe made a wonderful, caring father and that Sophie Mol loved him dearly - facts that gladdened and saddened Chacko in equal measure. They wrote to each other frequently, and over the years their relationship matured. Margaret then visited Ayemenem House. Unfortunately her daughter died of drowning, and Margaret did not forgive herself.

A point of tension is reached in the next chapter (14) when Chacko visits Comrade Pillai for printing of labels and is warned to oust Velutha lest he should create trouble. Velutha is called and abused by Mammachi and he approaches Pillai for revenge without much result.

Action in chapters 15 and 16 is arranged in sequential order of time with Velutha crossing the river in one and the boat with three children capsizing in the other. Sophie Mol is drowned. Estha and Rahel escape to History House. Action moves in chronological time sequence with Velutha’s encounter by police. Ammu, leaving for Madras for a job and Paradise Pickles seized by Mr. Pillai.

Chapter 18 ‘History House’ provokes into the past and renders in detail Velutha’s being beaten to unconsciousness, while Estha and Rahel watch mutely. The next chapter is 19 called “Saving Ammu.” Religious hypocrisy
of Baby Kochamma is revealed in her prayer for the success of her lie to prove that Velutha was responsible for Sophie Mol’s death to justify his encounter. The children admit the lie under Baby Kochamma’s threat to save Ammu and themselves.

Chapter 20 “The Madras Mail” recreates a scene of the past with Ammu and Rahel seeing off Estha to his Baba in Madras. J. P. Tripathy observes, “The plot jumps the gap of 23 years in future and shows Estha and Rahel the dizygotic twins in incestuous union.”16 Memory of Sophie Mol’s first visit is recollected along with Ammu’s afternoon-mare of one-armed man. Chapter 21 “The Cost of Living” follows the law of fancy and dream. The earlier mare and its consummation in sexual fulfillment of Velutha and Ammu for 13 consecutive nights close the plot of the novel.

Roy describes of Ammu and Velutha’s union:

“Ammu, naked now, crouched over Velutha, her mouth on his. He drew her hair around them like a tent. Like her children did when they wanted to exclude the outside world. She slid further down, introducing herself to the rest of him. His neck. His nipples. His chocolate stomach. She sipped the last of the river from the hollow of his navel. She pressed the heat of his erection against her eyelids. She tasted him, salty, in her mouth. He sat up and drew her back to him” (GST, 336).
The physical attraction leading to physical union symbolizes the victory of love over the power of law and the lovers start meeting in the dark. Ranga Rao rightly says, “In Ammu, the novelist has presented with compassion, a woman, a feminist locked in a struggle with her family, its hidden morality with society and tragically with herself.”

The novel is a love story with a tragic denouement. In such stories love is always portrayed as the passionate longing of the soul of lover for the beloved which culminates in the physical union. Roy in an interview at the Frankfurt World Book Fair in Oct 1997 said that her novel is indeed a poetic yet sad book.

Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* focuses on aspects like criticism of traditional life, communism in Kerala, feminism and it has other social concerns. Some of these perspectives are discussed here in detail.

**Criticism of Tradition, Society, Politics and Marginalization:**

Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* is a harsh criticism of traditional Indian life, its society and politics. Rama Kundu writes, “In this last decade of the century, some remarkable young women writers in the Indian subcontinent appear to have registered their realization that tradition could but prove a dubious heritage for the oppressed; while it seemed sustaining in some ways, an ancient tradition with its entrenched orthodoxies
might as well prove crippling and even dangerous for the backward and the
downtrodden.”

In a way, the bulk of postcolonial New English literature being written
across the globe--from Australia to Africa, West Indies to Asia --since the
last few decades, have been generally preoccupied with the problems of the
marginalized and the underdog. In India the focus naturally falls on dalits
and women who represent the case of the underdog in this still largely
tradition-abiding society, among whom, again, the untouchable epitomises
the worst form of marginalization.

*The God of Small Things* has been claimed by some to be ‘a fiercely
reinvented memoir,’ and they quote Roy’s admission-‘that in some ways
Small Things is a story that has always been with her in support of the claim.

The novel is characterized by an unmistakable and unhesitant
‘Indianness.’ (One might recall Roy’s proud claim: ‘We write our story,’
*Time*.). This is noticeable in the basic theme, the tradition-ridden social
backdrop with its segregating mechanical ‘Love Laws,’ the ethnic element,
the sense of place (one of the major features of postcolonial literature in
English). A South Indian village with its river, its houses, dusty dirt-roads,
mud and squalor, trees, birds, the bright blue sky, the deserted house across
the river, the changes wrought about with time, and things that do not
change the sound of rain, the smell of water,—all these together contribute to make the spatial element vividly living.

One of the dominant socio-political concerns in Arundhati’s novel is the rigid caste-structure to be seen in India. This caste-oriented rigidity sometimes plays havoc with the innumerable innocent lives. The ‘bigness’ of ‘big things’ and ‘big people’ should be read in their generous and compassionate understanding of ‘small things’ and ‘small people.’ Unfortunately, in the present-day Indian society, this is not to be, and the inevitable consequence is tragic and claustrophobic. The weaker sections of our society—like the paravans, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the dalits and the have-nots inescapably suffer a good deal in the process of caste-stratifications.

Subsequently, as we learn from the novel, Ammu and Velutha turn deep lovers of each other, throwing away all scruples of caste, creed and community. Ammu being a great dreamer, even in daytime, dreams of ‘a cheerful man with one arm’ (GST, 215) who leaves ‘no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors’ (GST,216). In fact, this is the fate of all the Untouchables in the dark alleys of History.

Roy also takes up the cause of the oppressed women for a sharp focus. Though Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and Margaret are all sufferers in the
drama of life, it is Ammukutty who suffers worst and through whom Roy raises her banner of revolt against a male-dominated, patriarchal society.

Apart from what we have observed above, there is yet another social evil—that of child-abuse and child-negligence—prevalent in India which has been highlighted in *The God of Small Things*. Anyone reading Chapter 4 of the novel is at first simply revulsed and shockingly disturbed by the encounter of Estha with the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, but suddenly one realizes, on a second thought, that this Chapter (‘Abhilash Talkies’) is written with a different purpose in view to bring to the fore the question of child-abuse and child-negligence.

*The God of Small Things* also focuses on politics. Comrade Pillai is introduced in the very first Chapter of the novel. His printing press—Lucky Press—was once the Ayemenem office of the Communist Party, where midnight study meetings were held and pamphlets of the party were printed and distributed. Pillai is depicted as ‘essentially a political man’ and as ‘a professional omeletteer.’ And further: ‘He walked through the world like a chameleon. Never revealing himself, never appearing not to emerging through chaos unscathed’ (GST, 14). Pillai is not repentant, as he was not responsible, for what had happened to Velutha and Ammu, though he vividly recalls their tragic end. In Chapter 4, Pillai’s political ambitions
come out clearly and he aspires to fight the Kottayam by-elections to the Legislative Assembly. To remain in the limelight, he incites the workers of the factory to demand yearly bonus, provident fund, and accident insurance, knowing fully well that the factory is running into a heavy debt. But he never comes out openly against Chacko, the factory-manager. Similarly, he is jealous of Velutha for his being the only card-holder of the Communist Party, but he does not vent his feelings in public. Pillai wants to organise the factory workers into a labour union. In short, Pillai is portrayed as a suspicious and scheming man, who always looks to his personal gains and advances in life.

Roy attacks Comrade Namboodiripad. He is the owner of the History House-a five-star hotel chain-across the river which is spacious enough, with its air-tight and panelled storeroom, to feed an army for a year. This is his ancestral home, and here he is introduced to the visitors as ‘Kearla’s Mao Tse Tung.’ In Chapter 2, the novelist tries to explain as to why Communism is so successful in Kerala, perhaps in Bengal too. The main reasons suggested by her are: (1) it has something to do with the large population of Christians in Kerala, and Marxism is a simple substitute for Christianity: ‘Replace God with Marx, Satan with the bourgeoisie, Heaven with a classless society, the Church with the Party, and the form and
purpose of the journey remained similar’ (GST,66) and (2) it has to do something with the comparatively high level of literacy in the State. The novelist, however, hastens to add that the second reason is not due to the Communist movement, and that Communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement, it never “overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community.” According to her, the Marxists ‘worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to’ (GST, 67).

It is said, “Arundhati Roy has raised certain raging social and political problems of our times in her novel. Her preoccupations with the socio-political concerns of modern India render her a powerful writer rooted in ground reality.”

**Criticism of Communism:**

The characters described as Communists in the novel range from a former Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, to a common party worker Velutha. Namboodiripad who is the only historical character in the novel was the Chief Minister of Kerala twice, first from 1957 to 1959 A.D. and second in the late sixties from 1967 to 1969. The narrator in *The God of Small Things* reports that Namboodiripad’s ancestral home has been made a part of the hotel ‘Heritage’ and is being used as the hotel’s dining
room, and old Communists worked as fawning bearers in colourful ethnic clothes in it. Since Namboodiripad is described by the ‘Hotel People’ as ‘Kerala’s Mao Tse-Tung,’ it is evident that he is a Communist.

The novel abounds in instances of Namboodiripad’s unfair/undemocratic administrative practices. For example, ‘That instead of neutralizing the police he had started using them as his tools to achieve his goals.’ That signifies Roy’s suggesting that Namboodiripad’s political views were based on an unsound understanding of life and so they deserved rejection. Another weakness of the Communist rulers of Kerala mentioned in the passage above is that though they stood for fomenting a revolution, which means asking people to take law in their own hands and defying the government authorities, they were also rulers and had, by implication taken upon themselves the responsibility of protecting people from those who took law in their own hands. The implication is that these rulers either did not want to foment a revolution or did not want to govern and did not want to prevent people from taking law in their own hands. In either case, the implication is, they were not telling people the truth about their intentions.

The other Communist characters in the novel are not free from weaknesses even if they are the weaknesses of different sorts. One of these
characters is Chacko. This man, as the narrator reports, has a Marxist mind, no doubt, but he is also a man with ‘feudal libido.’

Roy charges them with being hypocrites, who preach one thing and practise another.

**Some Feminist Aspects:**

_The God of Small Things_ is a literary sport. It is a feminist novel as much as a political novel. It is a postmodern and autobiographical novel too.

The novel is about Ammu, a separatee, a Christian, a Keralite who is helpless in her life. She is sexually unhappy and she brakes love laws and suffers. The novel registers Ammu’s helplessness as a woman. For example, her father did not find a good husband for her and disappointment became unbearable when her husband suspended from job for alcoholism, sought to bargain by procuring his beautiful wife for his boss, Mr. Hollick, the English manager of the tea estate. Mr. Hollick suggested that he go on leave and ‘Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be ‘looked after’ (GST,42). Ammu’s refusal only aggravated her physical and mental torture. Her husband ‘grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence. Suddenly he lunged at her, grabbed her hair and then passed out from that effort’ (GST, 42). Ammu also hit back as hard as she could. But when ‘his bouts of violence began to include children” (GST, 42), Ammu had no alternative but to break off and
come back with her twins. Estha and Rahel-to the very same place from where she had tried to run away.

Ammu had been humiliated and cornered by her father, ill-treated and betrayed by her husband, insulted by the police and rendered destitute by her brother. Each of them voiced the patriarchal ideology which commanded that she should have no right anywhere as daughter, wife, sister and citizen. She was no individual to her society but just an object, a role necessarily submissive.

Mohit Ray observes, “However, it is not the malefolk alone that help to perpetrate Ammu’s tragedy. It is worth considering how women act as agents of this society to undo another woman. Even, women who have been deprived in their life, cannot disturb the society in the least, but rather choose to come down with all the unspent force of their frustration on another helpless woman.”

The novel presents three generations of women: 1) Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, 2) Ammu, and 3) Rahel, and all are unhappy in their own ways. This reminds one of the famous opening sentences of *Anna Karenina*: “All happy families are alike, but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion.”
Mammachi’s case is different. Although her husband was a high-up in the society, a noted entomologist in fact, and was seventeen years older than Mammachi, he had always been a jealous man. In Vienna when Mammachi took her first lessons in violin and her teacher told Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented, the lessons were abruptly discontinued. A sadist every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. Mammachi regularly suffered this ignominy. Compared to Mammachi, Ammu definitely registers an advance.

Now about Rahel, a child of broken home and a daughter of a divorcee-mother staying in her ancestral house, she did not get the love and affection from her elders that a child so badly needs. Consequently the marriage broke down and they were divorced. When Rahel returns to Ayemenem she is also a divorcee like her mother had been. To a large extent Rahel is an emancipated woman.

Seen from the feminist perspective, the novel records a progress, albeit slow, in feminism, offers some rays of hope and seems to suggest a distinct possibility of redemption.

The few other women that appear in the novel are, more or less, conventional types. They participate in and even contribute to the patriarchal society where women are marginalized.
The God of Small Things is pre-eminently a novel by a woman seen through the eyes of a woman. So, while the texture of the novel is suffused with feminine sensibility, the structure of the novel is also, by and large, feminine in the sense in which Luce Irigaray uses it. Irigaray, it is well-known, tries to link feminine discourse with the structure of the female genitals and treats morphological differences between the sexual organs as the source of masculine and feminine characteristics of a discourse.

Mohit Ray observes, “A careful look at the narrative structure of The God of small Things shows that the narrative keeps on drifting, not in the sense in which a stream of consciousness narrative drifts but in the sense in which it corresponds to the manifestations of the unconscious in women, which is so different from men.”

Viewed from the angles of the gynocritics, the narrative of The God of Small Things is authentically a feminine narrative. 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.

What Showalter said on reading Olive Schreiner is largely applicable to the voice we hear in The God of Small Things: “…soft, heavy, continuous,... a genuine accent of womanhood, one of the chorus of secret
voices speaking out of our bones, dreadful and irritating but instantly recognizable”

Post-Independence Indian English fiction constitutes an important part of world literature today, and quite a few women novelists have made significant contributions to it. R. P. Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukhejee, for example, just to name a few, have presented their stories from a feminist point of view. All the novels of Anita Desai, a major novelist by any standard, record a female quest for identity. Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is the latest and most valuable addition to the long list of feminist novels.

**Arundhati Roy’s Use of Language:**

John Berger can be accepted when he remarks “Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one” in regard to Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. What bothers us is not the story of the novel but the way Roy tells it. No doubt, the story of the two lives that love each other and die loving is worthy of narration. Human strife ever since the dawn of man’s rise has been nothing but a ‘hideous grief,’ for the commonest reason ‘love is a sweet poison.’ This is applicable to the main characters of the novel here. ‘Dark of Heartness tiptoed into the Heart of Darkness’ (GST, 306) of Ammukutty and Veluta, because “…they broke the Love Laws That lay
down who should be loved. And how. And how much’ (GST, 328). Man, it is sure while follows the ways unendorsed by his society, falls headlong into an unretrival ditch. This is what happens to Ammuktty, a gross-widow who falls in love with Velum, a down-trodden: ‘Biology designed the dance. Terror timed it, dictated the rhythm with which their bodies answered each other. As though they knew already that for each tremor of pleasure they would pay with an equal measure of pain. As though they knew that how far they went would be measured against how far they would be taken, so they held back. Tormented each other. Gave of each other slowly. But that only made it worse. It only raised the stakes, cost them more. Because it smoothed the wrinkles, the fumble and rush of unfamiliar love and roused them to fever pitch” (GST, 335).

A. N. Dwivedi observes, “Artistically speaking, Roy employs crisp and racy language in this novel, and her similes and metaphors are very accurate and arresting.” Roy has made an experiment in language. *The God of Small Things* is full of new lines so far as the language is concerned. Some descriptions, in part due to the lively words, phrases and expressions, are splendid: “May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute blue
bottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear window panes and die, fatly baffled in the sun (GST, 1).

Prof. O. P. Budholia comments, “As a matter of fact, Roy succeeds in patterning a new mode of language. Her linguistic pattern proves innovatory, paving the way to be fully developed.” Lively descriptions, meaningful statements, comic dialogues abound throughout the novel. Look at the statements, “It was a time uncles became fathers, mothers lovers and cousins died and had funerals. It was a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened’ (GST, 31), ‘Sophie Mol died because she couldn't breathe. Her funeral killed her’ (GST, 7), ‘Pappachi was dead by then. Chacko divorced. A Paradise pickle was seven years old. Kerala was reeling in the aftermath of famine and a failed monsoon. People were dying. Hunger had to be very high up on any government list of priorities’ (GST, 68). The descriptions related to love, life and death are still vivid:

He could do only one thing at a time.

If he held her, he couldn’t kiss her. If he kissed her, he couldn't see her. If he saw her, he couldn’t feel her (GST, 215).

Life had been lived. ‘That her cup was full of dust’ (GST, 222). Heartfelt expressions and sayings go in making the novel an interesting piece of art. The beautiful scenes like children’s love for their mother (Ammu),
Estha’s waywardness at the talkie, tutorial exercises at home, Mol’s death, the love making business and the disastrous repurcussions to the loving and loved etc., make the novel a very good reading. Lively expressions like ‘May be and may be not’ (GST, 115), ‘So, she a glass bead, and he a green gram’ (GST, 132), ‘Sometimes,’ Sophie said. ‘And sometimes not’ (GST, 153), ‘One for you and one for me’ (GST, 142), ‘Not old, not young, but a viable die-able age’ (GST, 161), ‘Her life had a size and a shape now’ (GST, 155), ‘He broke the egg but burned the omelette’ (GST, 28!), ‘The time for that had come and gone’ (GST, 334) and finally the mysterious question:

Who was he?

Who would he have been?

The God of Loss.

The God of Small Things.

The God of Goose Bumps and Sudden Smiles.

He could do only one thing at a time.

If he touched her, he couldn’t talk to her,

If he loved her, he couldn’t leave, if he spoke
he couldn’t listen, if he fought he couldn’t win.

Ammu longed for him. Ached for him with the whole of her biology (GST, 330).
Arundhati Roy makes the inanimate things talk and act the way she desires. She tells, ‘The silence was unsure of this compromise’ (GST, 152) and ‘Night’s elbows rested on the water and watched them’ (GST, 335). Music too bursts out like magic and drives the attention of us. Symbols like woman as earth, History as the rigid social code, Ayemenem House as the root of the Syrian Christian family and ‘Anything’- as an indication of everlasting uncertainty are enough to assess Roy’s maturity of thoughts. The concepts of Marxism, History, hideous grief and the sad white music of life are clearly expanded. Besides, no love description in the novel related to love or any carnal emotion looks either obscene or vulgar. For instance the images of sex like ‘melon in her blouse,’ ‘he kissed her belly’ or ‘his love went deeper into hers,’ do not distort the readers’ feelings. Typical words, phrases and sentences, like ‘love-laws,’ ‘teachrly,’ ‘Cement Kangaroors,’ ‘Jolly well Behave,’ ‘hair oil darkness,’ ‘nodder nodded,’ ‘Man less Woman,’ ‘Rabel Alone’ and ‘An Estha - shaped hole,’ contribute to the pleasure one gets out of his reading. Shortest sentences made of one word or two like ‘Dum – dum’ (GST, 119), ‘A log.’ ‘A serene crocodile’ (GST, 329). ‘Her ashes,’ ‘The grit from her bones,’ ‘the teeth from her smile,’ ‘Receipt No. Q 498673’ (p. 163) etc, do not hurt our sense of propriety. As a
diadem to all these are the songs interspersed in the description, some horizontally and others vertically, throughout the novel.

However, demerits go, with the merits of Roy’s treatment of theme. Eccentric and unacceptable things are as abundant as those of the acceptable ones. Every para, every page, and every chapter points out the linguistic as well as grammatical absurdities any ideal reader can dislike. No matter how grand the theme is and the novel has got a Booker prize, *The God of Small Things* has unpardonable linguistic peculiarities such as typical words, phrases and sentences which are unacceptable. Words wrongly constructed, sentences either broken or ungrammatical, or verbal errors equally apparent, needless brackets, italics, structures of lines, syntactic inversions, reverse words, repetitions, words running into other words, cliche, coinages, foreign words, obscure expressions, typical imagery and finally vague abstractions go together in degrading the standards of *The God of Small Things*. The errors listed above can be seen thus: clubbed words (‘Thiswayandthat’); reverse words (The serutneva of eisus lerruqs’ (p. 60); typical imagery (‘Rice-Christians,’ ‘redsteps’); repetition (‘Estha washed her face and hands and face and hands’); coinages (‘Amayrica’); cliche (‘beige and pointy shoes’); ungrammatical sentences (‘no, we can’t not go to school’); lack of punctuations (‘In Amayrica now, isn’t it’ (?); needless contracts (Further
east in a small country with similar landscapes (jungles, rivers, rice-fields, communists), vague abstractions (‘Plymouth,’ ‘Little Elvis the pelvis’); obscure words and expressions (‘Wash ‘n’ ever, No Locusts stand I); distorted words (stoppit, porketmunny, Thang God, Never, The Less nevertheless); Indian words (namaste naale etc.,); hyphanated words (an honest-to-goodness Genuine Bourgeoise, trying-not-to-cry mouth); absurd songs; senseless sounds (verrry, Enee vee ee aar): typical wordy sentences (Is. That. Clear?); half- sentences (Like old roses in a breeze); needless italics (certain, inside (GST, 13); needless capitals (LayTer, Hopes, Inbreeding, and others.

Mallikarjun Patil thinks, “However grand the tale is, or might be, its errors in terms of language and style, another aspect of the novel, namely its complexion, is an admixture of cookery guide (GST,195), a guide book and a travel-account, influenced by its author’s architectural language.”

:References:


5. All the textual references are from Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, Penguin, New Delhi, 2002.


