Chapter 3: Critical Study of Suzanna Arundhati Roy with a Special Emphasis on The God of Small Things

This chapter critically analyses the novel *The God of Small Things* written by Arundhati Roy and published by India Ink in 1997. The work has been credited with two coveted international awards. One is the Booker Prize in 1997 and second the New York Notable Books of the year in 1997. Novel takes up two important issues that envelop the everyday life of ordinary people in India. First is personal and private sexual behavior and secondly hypocrisy in political and social life of India. The novel focuses on the life of two fraternal twins. The work is studied for its narrative technique and art of characterization as well. Gunter Von Hummel (2011) is of the view that:

“*The book highlights the feeling of perception and feels that love and bounds have a special existence in today’s era and small things have a huge impact in the daily scheme of things.*”

With the advent of Indian independence and globalization, concept of God in India changed. God has always played vital role in the lives of Indians. Various rituals from
birth to death are related to God. Roy talks about one such God in this novel. According to her, India has two Gods. One is big, possessed by people with muscle and money power. There is a tacit compromise of mutual understanding between big people and big Gods.

Second type of God is small. It rules the lives of ordinary unprivileged sections of the Indian society. Roy has segregated the very concept of indivisible God into big and small. God is also purchased by the privileged people in the post independent Indian society. Now God belongs to those who have muscle, power and money. It doesn’t belong to the poor. So it is the God of small things. Roy writes:

"The air was full of Thoughts and Things to Say. But at times like these only the Small Things are ever said. The Big Things lurk unsaid inside." (112)

The God in the title The God of Small Things leads us to a couple of personalities in the novel. Velutha and Ammu fell in love. Velutha is God for Ammu. He also loved her a lot but they could not come together because of the difference in their caste. This is one of the focus points of the author in the first half of the action, particularly in Rahel’s dreams. The second half of the story confirms that Velutha is really the God of small things when the secret of their sexual relation becomes public.

1.1 Plot and Story

The God of Small Things is a study of the broken relationship of the people belonging to the same family. All the characters in the novel except Velutha, conspire against each
other. Their happiness lies in the unhappiness of others. It will be bold to say that they are not less than perverted human beings.

The story of *The God of Small Things* starts in 1969 and gradually moves along with the passage of time. It revolves around a small town Ayamenem in the Kottayam district of Kerala. The story focuses on the journey of the twins Estha and Rahel from the age of seven to the age of thirty one.

The story revolves around Ammu who in order to avoid the evils of dowry system in Kerala and her bossy father Pappachi goes to spend vacation in Calcutta. She avoids returning back and marries a real estate manager there, with a hope that it would change her fortune.

“He was a small man, but well built. Pleasant-looking. He wore old-fashioned spectacles that made him look earnest and completely belied his easygoing charm and juvenile but totally disarming sense of humor. He was twenty-five and had already been working on the tea estates for six years. He hadn’t been to college, which accounted for his schoolboy humor. He proposed to Ammu five days after they first met. Ammu didn’t pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem. She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision. They didn’t reply.”(39)
But she had to repent for her decision soon. She was betrayed by her husband Babu. He attempts to sacrifice the dignity of his wife in order to save his own job. The incident forced her to leave him and come back to her ancestral home at Ayamenem with the twins Rahel and Estha.

The house was already occupied by cruel Baby Kochamma who loved inflicting pleasure and pain on others. She had fallen in love with an Irish monk and even tried to be sexually close with him. Her father had rescued her from the embarrassment and sent her to America with an intention to separate the two. She remained unmarried throughout her life later. Failure in love turned her to bitterness, causing curses and sufferings on Ammu and her twins to the maximum possible effect. Whatever she had lost in her sexual adventure with Irish monk, she tried to make up for it through inflicting similar pains on other women.

Ammu’s brother Chacko was also living in the same house. He had got married with a lady known as Margaret and divorced her after the birth of Sophie Mol, due to Margaret’s extramarital affair. He takes over the reins of the business after the death of Pappachi. Chacko invites Margaret along with their daughter Sophie Mola after the death of her second husband. The story thus deals with Indian as well as western culture simultaneously. When the family was on its way to the airport to welcome Margaret, encounters a group of communal protestors. Baby Kochamma was forced to wave a red flag in the presence of Velutha. She develops a feeling of hatred towards him since then.

Velutha was working in the pickle factory of Chacko. Though he belongs to the group of outcastes, he was a skillful worker. He looked after the machines in the factory. Ammu
was attracted towards his body. Her children also began to like him. Ammu acquired a lot of physical and mental satisfaction from her association with Velutha. Velutha was a skillful craftsman but had to face a lot of harassment and embarrassment from his coworkers because of his identity. Ammu and her twins were very much attached to him.

Velutha is described in the novel in the following sentences:

“He was like a little magician. He could make intricate toys-tiny windmills, rattles, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds; he could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts. He would bring them for Ammu, holding them out on his palm (as he had been taught) so she wouldn’t have to touch him to take them. Though he was younger than she was, he called her Ammukutty–Little Ammu. Mammachi persuaded Vellya Paapen to send him to the Untouchables’ School that her father-in-law Punyam Kunju had founded.”

Ammu’s affair with Velutha is discovered and she had to face the consequences of it. She is put under house arrest and Velutha is sent across to prison. Desperate Ammu blames the twins for her plight. The twins get annoyed and decide to shift their residential base.

Sophie Mol pities the twin and sympathetically takes them along but the boat in which they were travelling capsizes and Sophie Mol was separated from the children. Baby Kochamma is stunned by the death of Sophie Mol. She approaches the police and accuses Velutha of Sophie Mol’s death, because she wanted to teach Velutha a lesson. She goes to the extent of complaining against Velutha that he had threatened the entire family and
tried to kidnap the children. On the basis of this complaint Velutha becomes a victim of the police atrocity. Surprisingly Estha supports this claim. This emphasizes the fact that the caste considerations overrule the actual facts in caste ridden Indian society.

The story takes significant turn when the police come to know about Velutha’s close connection with the Communist party of India. They fear a political unrest in the area. Baby Kochamma tricks the children to give false witness to strengthen the logic of her accusations. Velutha suffers badly in hospital. Unable to bear Velutha’s sufferings, Ammu goes to the police and reveals the truth that she was in love with Velutha. Baby Kochamma plays a mischievous trick of convincing Chacko that Ammu and her twins were responsible for his daughter’s death. Angry Chacko drives them out of the house to save the family from further humiliation.

Ammu in the meanwhile sends Eshta to his father, Babu in Calcutta as she was unable to look after him carefully. She never sees Estha again until her death. This coaxes Rahel to go to America for her studies. Meanwhile Rahel marries and divorces. Finally she reaches her ancestral home. This is the place where the twins meet after a gap of a decade and they are confused and silent all together. Quickly they understand the fact that no one will understand them better than themselves. This brings them to the bond of sexual intimacy.

1.2 Characters

Close analysis of characters of this novel shows that they possess contradictory trends of behavior. Velutha is manly but belongs to lower caste. He is skillful worker without requisite respect in society. Pappachi, Mammachi, Chacko, Ammu and Baby Kochamma are Christians without any Christian virtues. Since none of them could follow God in real
sense, they themselves became Gods of small things. Ammu suffered at the iron hands of Pappachi whereas Mammachi is an example of suppression and sacrificing life. The central characters Estha and Rahel are the modulating points in the novel. Baby Kochamma was a vindictive person. Comrade Pillai represents a selfish political power. Sophie Mol was a bridge between the western and Indian culture. The lemonade man demonstrates the lecherous side of the society. **Amar Nath Prasad (2004) is of the view that:**

“The experiences of the character in the form of a first person and the conscious and subconscious behavior are also revealed.”

Ammu can be considered as one of the most unfortunate persons in Ayamenem family. She has been in the jaws of exploitation mainly by her father followed by her husband. She is a beautiful woman who had to undergo a lot of stress. She marries Babu in order to escape her tyrant father and devilish dowry system in Kerala. But circumstances cheat her forcing her to return to her parent’s home. She faced many panicky situations to raise her twin children. Though grown up in the cosmopolitan city of Delhi she leaves her husband in Calcutta when he tries to abuse her. Her infatuation for Velutha also meets dangerous end. Chacko cremated her as she was not accepted by the Christian church for her blasphemy. She faced the evils of the caste system and sexual exploitation to the fullest
extent. She died in a small hotel, at the age of thirty one. Avoided by all in the family, she could not rightful funeral rites also.

When one reads Ammu’s story, one is reminded of Rukmani in Kamala Markandaya’s Nectar in aSieve. Both Ammu and Rukmani desperately hope that luck would favor them one day or the other. But neither the almighty God nor the close relatives help them in real sense.

Baby Kochammais Ammu’s selfish and intolerant aunt. She lived in the past and became materialistic towards her old age. At her young age she had fallen in love with an Irish monk Father Mulligan who used to pay visits to her father frequently. In spite of her numerous attempts to marry him, she couldn’t make it. Sophie Mol’s visit troubled her. She was instrumental in developing hatred in children towards Velutha. She forced Ammu to leave the house. She was confined to the boundaries of the television in her old age. She advocates the policy of caste system, untouchability and in spite of being a woman favors other women’s sexual exploitation.

Chacko is Ammu’s brother and betrays his parents’ wishes by getting married with Margaret early in life. He realizes his folly and instantly divorces Margaret. A die hard communist, he becomes an active member of the workers’ union and suffers a terrible setback when he plans to undertake an expansion of his own pickle factory. He is attracted to the unethical extramarital sexual relations with female workers in pickle factory. In spite of his amorous habits, he has deep affinity for his wife and daughter. Death of his dear daughter Sophie Mol breaks him inside out and he migrates to Canada.
“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.” (37)

Chacko’s life is filled with different kinds of paradoxes. He is both a capitalist owner of pickle factory and an active member of a Communist Party of India. He expels his wife for her extramarital relations but has the same sort of relations with women in the pickle factory. Though he himself does not possess any Christian virtues, he declines to bury Ammu in Christian cemetery for violating Christian principles.

“Up to 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 (can fling machines, cauldrons, cookers) and expanded the labor force. Almost immediately, the financial slide began, but was artificially buoyed by extravagant bank loans that Chacko raised by mortgaging the family’s rice fields around the Ayemenem House. Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my Factory, my pineapples,
my pickles. Legally this was the case, because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property.”(57)

His wife, Margaret Kochamma’s roots are in London. After her second husband’s death she reunites with Chacko but does not have any affinity with others in the family. Her daughter Sophie Molon the other hand wins the hearts of the twins with her charming and enduring nature. She believes in her own principles in life and does not follow anyone blindly. Death of Sophie Mol has a huge impact on both. She has a towering presence and is considered a bridge between the Indian and western cultures. The mere fact that she is a foundation between both the cultures is indicated by her name Sophie Mol. Name Sophie has its origin in western nomenclature whereas Mol in Malayalam means daughter. One of the themes in Indo-Anglian fiction is an encounter between the western characters and eastern characters.

Estha is Rahel’s twin brother. Baby Kochamma had great admiration for him. He was a subject of sexual exploitations very early in his life which created a sense of nausea about men in him. He is attached to his sister only. After the death of Sophie Mol he is sent to Assam to stay with his estranged father Babu. He comes back to the ancestral home at the age of thirty one.

Rahel is the twin of Estha and has her own way in the world. In fact she is devoted to her mother Ammu. The sequence of deaths surrounding the family leaves her in a sense of shock. After the death of her mother she drifts from place to place taking on all her shoulders positively. Her marriage with Larry McCaslin in the U.S ended in divorce. The experiences and memories of thirty one year are the modulating points of the story.
“They were nearly born on a bus, Estha and Rahel. The car in 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.”(3)

Both Estha and Rahel are attached to Velutha. Their mother did not mind it as she herself liked Velutha. Others in the family however detested their closeness. Baby Kochamma and Ammachi conspired against Velutha. It is ironic that Rahel was compelled to lie against Velutha, whom she liked from the bottom of her heart.

Soshamma Ipe known as Mammachi is the grandmother of the twins. She is an ideal example of a woman who supports her husband in spite of all his shortcomings. She successfully runs the pickle factory till she becomes blind towards the end of her life. Another feature of her character is that she can play violin. She is a victim of the whims of her husband Pappachi. Benaan John Ipe known as Pappachi is dominating and believes in having his own way only.
Though Velutha does not belong to the Ayamenem family, he is the most important character in the novel. He comes from the family of out caste yet he is more attractive than the men in the Ayamenem family. It is not without reasons that the twins and their mother like him.

Veluthais the untouchable who is held responsible for Sophie Mol’s death and is suspected to have an affair with Ammu. He is termed as Dalit which means he belongs to the lower strata of the society and is forced to do petty jobs. He was a skilled craftsman and an active member of the communist party of India. His suspected affair with Ammu lands him in trouble and after Comrade Pillai refuses to help him he is subjected to brutal attack by police Inspector Mathew. His problems are compounded when Estha is forced to name him as an abductor. Finally he is sent to jail where he dies later. He suffers a lot due to his caste. His father comments:

“Perhaps it was just a lack of hesitation. An unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without him being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel” (73)

Story of The God of Small Things revolves around the futility of caste politics and sexual misbehavior in Indian society. Velutha belongs to the unprivileged social caste. His birth in this caste deprives him of any social status or political gains. Extraordinary mechanical skills that he possesses usually go against his promotion and progress. He is made to work more and paid less. Even the Communist Party, which is supposed to
support benevolent cause of downtrodden, disowns him at the times when he needed it the most. Chacko ventured to exploit Velutha simply because he was cocksure that nobody would assist Velutha.

Pappachi and Chacko have conflicting personalities and contradictory identities. Duel personalities reside in them. Publicly they put on benevolent face; evil in them surfaces during their private deals with their relatives and workers. Chacko ill-treats women workers in factory sexually and is not ashamed of it a bit. Same can be said about Baby Kochamma, Mammachi and Ammu. They suffer due to their femininity. Yet they never stand together against male dominance in the family or in the society. This allows Roy to caricature them rather than characterize them. Thus the story of the novel is in fact the story of failed characters.

1.3 The themes

Novel deals with various themes. First theme is the ever dominating ever present caste system in Indian social system and the pernicious effects of it on the people who are born in the lower caste. The second theme that this novel deals with is the unbridgeable gap between the poor and the rich or privileged and unprivileged people of India. The novelist is concerned with the caste and class conflicts in the socio-economic and political life of Indians.

Novelist also exposes the hypocritical conduct of the Indians in domestic social and political fields of life. Baby Kochamma, Pappachi, Mammachi, Chacko ill-treated Ammu simply because she had married Babu secretly. They failed to realize that they were
partially responsible for her desperation. Had they given her due consideration at home, she would not have plunged into difficulties.

Another vivid example of hypocrisy in the novel is Chacko. He expels his wife Margaret for her infidelity to him without peeping into his own heart. He had sex with many women working in his pickle factory of which he was proud. He could not digest immoral relationship between Ammu and Velutha but expected Ammu to endorse his adventurous sexual habits.

Comrade Pillai’s wonder was dishonest. He did not mind Velutha presence in the political rally. He had no objection to Velutha’s membership in the party. Party boasted of its all-inclusive nature due to Velutha’s association. But the same party and the same person ditched him when he needed their help in the police station.

“The only snag in Comrade K. N. M. Pillai’s plans was Velutha. Of all the workers at ParadisePickles, he was the only card-holding member of the Party, and that gave Comrade Pillai an ally he would rather have done without. He knew that all the other Touchable workers in the factoryresented Velutha for ancient reasons of their own. Comrade Pillai stepped carefully around thiswrinkle, waiting for a suitable opportunity to iron it out.”(121)

Basic purpose of religion is to better the human life on the earth. It teaches universal brotherhood. But it doesn’t happen to be so. Religion has always become an instrument of exploitation of the people in the society. Roy has attacked Christianity and Hinduism in this novel. Velutha suffered heavily simply because of his birth in the family of
outcaste. Ammu’s family was Christian. But they did not possess Christian attributes like mercy, pity, peace and love. Roy has exposed the hypocrisy in the field of religion as well.

The novel also deals with the exploitation of weaker sex in the society. Women are punished heavily for sexual deviation but men are forgiven for any such adventure. Society treated Ammu’s affair with Velutha unethical and unacceptable while Chacko is given freedom to flirt with female workers without shame. Chacko abandons Margaret for her extramarital relations.

Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* (1978) deals with the gender discrimination and exploitation of the women in general. It shows the confinement of three women. The novel was conferred the Sahitya akademi Award and was nominated for the Booker Prize three times. The plot revolves around a character who confides herself to the boundaries of mountains to live in isolation away from the hassles of life.

Novel deals with the theme of exploitation of weak persons in the family and society. Babu misused Ammu because he knows that she had nobody else to go to. She had come to him in Calcutta in order to save her skin from Pappachi and other dominant members of the family. Babu made the most of her difficulties with her two children.

When she came back to Ayamenem with her two children after being disappointed by her husband, Chacko insulted her time and again because he knew she was helpless. When she could not extract any affection from the members of the family, she along with her twin sought refuge in Velutha’s embrace. The family put all sort of pressure on her to
cut her off from Velutha. But it did not work. A quote from the novel can show helplessness of Ammu:

“Divorce is not an option whatever the husband might be; and such an action results from a regarded atypical status in Indian society as it is clearly expressed by Baby Kochamma that she had no position anywhere at all and by Chacko: “die-vorced”? His voice rose in such a high register that it cracked on the question mark. He even pronounced the word as though it was a form of death” (130)

Velutha was a weak social link. Hence he was humiliated. Women in the pickle factory were underpaid simply because they were needy. Velutha’s professional skills, his affection for children and Ammu yielded no fruit for Velutha. Had he belonged to respectable upper class caste, he probably would have been successful in carrying his affair with Ammu.

Family, political and religious systems are supposed to protect the weaker sections of the society. Novel deals with the discord in all this systems. Family of Pappachi lacks filial affection. Nobody wants Ammu and her twins. Chacko has his own ways without caring a bit for anybody in the family.

As expected Arundhati Roy blames the patriarchal system in the society. Pappachi was a tyrant. Nobody in the family dare open his or her mouths in front of Pappachi. Women did not have any sort of liberty. That is why Ammu had to run away to far off place like Calcutta.
Behavioral pattern of the women is one of the points to be studied in patriarchal system. There are two possibilities in such atmosphere. All the women come together, not to oppose the master but to protect their own interest secretly. These women save each other in times of trouble. It also happens that they conspire against each other in order to win the favor of the monster. We see the second category of women in *The God of Small Things*.

The novel is also concerned with disorganized domestic life in India. It shows disintegrated domestic ties in India. One does not find close relationship and family bonds among the people of same family in the novel. Though they are related to each other by blood bond, emotional bond in them is missing. They are like a bag of marbles that roll to different directions once they come out of the bag. There are three generations with close blood relations but without close bonds. Chacko does not have any respect for his wife and child. Ammu’s husband Babu at Calcutta looks at Ammu as a sex worker.

The novel also deals with unsuccessful marriages. Marriage is supposed to be a merger of minds, souls and bodies of the two. There is no ideal marriage in the novel. Ammu’s marriage with an assistant in tea estate fails when the husband tries to prostitute her to his boss to keep his job. Chacko’s marriage with an English girl Margaret and Rahel’s marriage with Larry McCaslin in the U.S ended in divorce. Here is the quote from the novel that shows how Roy describes their failure of love:

“They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much?”(31)
The God of Small Things deals with the theme of caste system. It is the discrimination between two human beings belonging to two castes; upper caste and lower caste. The term caste is derived from the Portuguese word *casta* which means creed. It is known collectively as *jati* in India. The caste system has been a decisive factor in the Indian social system for centuries. Caste dictates occupation along with certain other features like race, breed and dietary habits. It is a proven fact that higher castes in India enjoyed certain privileges whereas the lower castes were subjected to deprivation of such privileges. Higher castes got opportunities along with wealth generating techniques. Ted Gioia (2009) has expressed that:

> "Matters of caste, gender and class have taken precedence over the topic of imperialism and love as a spiritual bounding is the driving force of all the characters."

Another concept related to caste system in India is untouchability. Untouchables were forced to the dirty jobs like garbage removal or toilet clearing. They had to live in secluded places specially allotted to them and were forbidden even to cast their shadow on the people from privileged castes. The greatest drawback of the caste system was its rigidity. A fixed caste mark was attached to a person forever and all the activities of such a person were confined to the conceived boundaries of the caste. Mahatma Gandhi referred to them as *harijans* and undertook steps for their uplift. Mulk Raj Anand’s
Untouchable focuses on the effects of caste system in India. The God of Small Things also portrays the serious effects of caste system. Here Velutha depicts the problems of a person belonging to the lower class. J. M. Purobit comments:

“In order to present the true picture of untouchability and other evils our society has undergone, the author gives a detailed description of historical fact also. After the British came to Malbar, a number of low caste people including Kelan, Velutha’s grandfather, became Christian and joined the Anglican Church in the hope of being liberated from the clutches of untouchability. They were given little food and money. Perhaps this is why they were known Rice Christians. But very soon they come to know that they had just jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They were given separate churches, separate priests, separate service and through a special favor they were entitled to own a separate Pariah Bishop. Their condition began to worsen after independence when they found that they were not given any benefits provided by the government like job reservations or bank loans at low interest. It was only because they were casteless.”(232)

The action of the novel begins in 1969 when the caste system in India had bared its dirty teeth. Ammu tried to challenge caste consideration through her liking for Velutha. But
she had to face their consequences. She was excommunicated and was refused an
honorable burial at the Christian cemetery.

Hinduism considered untouchability as an inheritance of sin from previous birth.
According to them it was a punishment inflicted upon a person by God for being bad in
the last birth. Obedience was the order of the day for the untouchables. Velutha had to
face many problems for daring this system. He was inflicted a lot of pain and finally had
to succumb to the evils of the system.

As a foreign reader of this novel, I am shocked to find inhuman treatment given to
energetic Velutha simply because of his caste. Velutha had no fault except the one of his
caste. He is the most skillful worker of the factory but is paid less salary because of his
caste. Marxist party in Kerala utilized his caste identity to promote their political agenda.
Comrade Pillai boasted of his party’s all inclusive character through quoting Velutha’s
example. Poor Velutha joined the party because he was given to understand that it
believed in equality and fraternity. But soon he was disillusioned. Nobody came forward
to support and help him in the face of difficulty. It is a matter of great surprise that the
police also had to act on the basis of caste considerations.

“If they hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only
because any kinship and connection between themselves and him,
any implication that is nothing else, at least biologically he was a
fellow creature had been severed long ago.”(309)

Caste system was totally abolished by the Indian government through proclamation in
1950. With the advent of globalization in nineties the caste system has been slowly
receding. The Indian government has taken an active step by reserving seats in education and jobs. In her recent interview Arundhati Roy commented:

“It's the defining consideration in all Indian politics, in all Indian marriages...The lines are blurring. India exists in several centuries simultaneously. So there are those of us like me, or people that I know for instance, to whom it means nothing...It's a very strange situation where there's sort of a gap between...sometimes it's urban and rural, but it's really a time warp.”

Discrimination between two human beings based on social and economic considerations is another important theme of the novel. People from lower caste were not permitted to enter the houses of the people from higher caste. The novel reveals the plight of the untouchables and the hardships they had to encounter. The novel also deals with the discriminatory features existing in the Indian society due to different economic situations. Baby Kochamma didn’t mix with Kochu Maria even though she was a servant in her family for several years as she belonged to the lower class. A Syrian Christian was forbidden to marry a person from Hindu community. Religious disparity is also an issue in this novel as Baby Kochamma constantly makes negative comments about Hindus. Racial discrimination was also considered a way to protect one’s identity as in the case of Chacko. The social and political system prevailing in the country is also reflected in the novel. The society laid down some rules of regulations and they had to be obeyed.

One of the themes of the novel is hypocrisy in religious and political lives of Indians. Christianity and Hinduism are the religions of mercy, peace, love and pity. Basic
principle of Hinduism is equality. Though Kochamma, Pappachi and Chacko claimed that they were Christian, we cannot see any mercy in them towards other human beings. Evils of caste system and class discrimination do not let them to be true followers of their religion. Communism also is the way of living in which people fight for equality and rights of laborers and lower class. But we see that caste system rules the communist party as well. They leave Velutha alone at the time of difficulty. Ammu and Velutha are punished heavily for voicing their concerns whereas Baby Kochamma and Pappachi can go to any extent to preserve their social identity.

One more point about the novel is people’s preoccupation with small things. In a country like India where caste system, marriage and political uncertainty are real concerns, unfortunately small things matter more for people. Estha and Rahel are configured as the disciples of God. They are not affected by the big things which occur to adults around them. Death of Sophie Mol, Velutha and Ammu has a towering presence in the story. Simultaneously they suffer from the unhealthy atmosphere of the family life. Molestation of Estha, the secrets of Sophie Mol, Ammu’s affair with Velutha and attacks on Velutha are some of the mentionable incidents in the novel. Finally Estha and Rahel are relieved of their grief when they make love.

In spite of the constant efforts by the members of the family to hide scandals, they continue to surface. The story travels from secret affair between Ammu and Velutha to an act of pleasure through sexual contacts and even to the jaws of death due to the strong opposition by the family. Story also has its small scandals like the question whether Sophie Mol is Chacko's legitimate child, Estha’s personal decision to live with Babu, the
molestation of Estha by the lemonade drinker. The novelist also reveals the cultural barriers and tensions prevalent during that era.

1.4 Point of View

Even though the novel is generally prescribed as narrative, *The God of Small Things* is narrated through the eyes of the third person, Rahel. Rahel as a seven year old child brings child’s imagination and foresight into foray. The surroundings are seen through a young mind. It also brings a child rationale, creative touch and humor to the story. Novelist’s technique can also be studied from the eyes of a twenty three year old who has been deprived of essentials during her childhood.

1.5 Narrative Technique

Novel is not narrated in sequential pattern. The flashbacks are interwoven with flash forward. A complex approach is followed through the main events in the novel and the synchronization of the memory aspect is utilized to correlate them through the eyes of the narrator Rahel. The author could obtain a great deal of flexibly through this approach. It aided her in structuring the novel.

The author uses technique of foresight to create the element of mystery. The loss of Sophie Mol forecasts events and situations before the real situation occurs. The author adopts this technique to create tension and panic by inducing the element of imagination and anticipation.

The story of *The God of Small Things* revolves around two children and their world of imagination and innocence. One of the techniques adopted by the author is capitalization
of certain words to give them a new dimension and significance like "Later" becomes "Lay. Ter." and "An owl" becomes "A Nowl". Similarly, the children restate things in ordinary way that the adults say in a new phonetic way, disjoining and recombining words. The children repeat these phrases throughout the story so that the phrases themselves gain independent and new meanings in subsequent uses. These phrases are generally of repetitive nature as they occur at several junctures. A child generally uses disjointed words to express his understanding of the world around him which adults fail to recognize. Roy also highlights the terrible effect of terror in disintegrating the children.

The cultural progression of the Indian people along with the advent of globalization is mentioned in details. Another noticeable incident is the death of Sophie Mol coinciding with the return of Rahel to Ayemenem. The reunion of Rahel with Eshta shows the effect of diverse cultures along with the flaws of the Indian caste system during the period. Estha and Rahel are the epitomes of the story and the victim of circumstances.

1.6 Setting and Structure

Novel is set in a small town called Ayemenem in south west Kerala. Kerala had a mix of Hindu, Muslim and Christian cultures with their separate share of traditions, customs and rituals.

"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, dust green trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly
baffled in the sun. The nights are clear, but suffused with sloth and sullen expectation. But by early June the southwest monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine that thrilled children snatch to play with. The countryside turns an immodest green. Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn moss green. Pepper vines snake up electric poles. Wild creepers burst through laterite banks and spill across the flooded roads.” (1)

As far as the structure of the novel is concerned, it has twenty one chapters. Long chapters are subdivided into parts while some of the chapters are very short. The author adopts a mixed approach as she shuttles her story between past and the present. Atmosphere is created by deviating from the normal storytelling to have a telling impact on the story line. The first chapter gives the outline of the story itself. All other chapters are not in sequential order of time. The last part of the story which is about the love making between Rahel and Estha is in the middle of the story. Finally the story does not have ending in the traditional sense and the author leaves the readers guessing and speculating.

1.7 Language of the novel

The heart of any novel is its language. A natural flow of words is like icing on the cake. In a country like India, English is a widely accepted language and it is a free flowing language for most of the natives.
One of the significant features of modern Indian novels is the vividness in description.

Roy opens her novel with:

"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, dust green trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clearwindowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun."(1)

When one reads these lines in the opening, one gets the feel of the things to follow.

Roy describes the horrible condition of Velutha’s body in the following words:

"His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered, one had pierced his left lung, which was what made him bleed from his mouth. The blood on his breath bright red. Fresh. Frothy. His lower intestine was ruptured and hemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine was damaged in two places, the concussion had paralyzed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control over his bladder and rectum. Both his kneecaps were shattered."(310)

This description creates a sense of horror, pity and helplessness simultaneously. That is the power of her language.
One of the striking differences between the old novelists like Narayan, Anand and modern novelists like Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai lies in the handling of English language. Old writers used English that was too verbal while modern writer’s language is compact and condensed.

Traditional grammar had set some conventions for the use of capital letters in writing. English sentence begins with capital letter. The first letter of proper noun is with capital letter. Nobody was allowed to violate them. But Roy takes liberty with the use of capital letters. For example: “Now WHAT? The WHAT snapped”, “He held his sticky Other Hand”, “A Free Cold Drink”.

She makes use of capital letters for special effects. Some examples from the text make the point clear “He was the Keeper of Records”(163), “That develops in Someone small who has been bullied all their lives in Someone big.” (182) Roy italicizes sentences in order to give them special effects:


Lesson Number One:
Blood barely shows on a Black Man. (Dum dum)

And Lesson Number Two:
It smells though.
Sickly sweet.
Like old roses on a breeze. (Dum dum)

“Madiyo? ” one of History’s Agents asked.
“Madi aayirikkum, ”another replied.
"Enough?"  

"Enough." (310)

Roy mixes English with Malayalam sometimes. To quote some examples from the text would be: "Aristocrats were people who didn't blow spit bubbles or shiver their legs or gobble, "Later" becomes "Lay. Ter." and "An owl" becomes "A Nowl". B. R. Sharma (2006) was of the view that:

"Language is a modulating feature in this work and it leads us to a world of imagination and credits Ms Roy for the uniqueness of her narrative style."

At times lines run in a verse form:

“Past glass casks of vinegar with corks...

Past trays of bitter ground, with knives and colored fingerguards.

Past gunny bags bulging with garlic and small onions...”(193)

The play on the Latin phrase Locus Standi “Locus Stand I”… on later, “Lay. Ter.”, inventions like “getting outedness”, “green mossier”, “Sad-About-Joe silence”, “Stoppited”, the use of Malayalam words “Pada Patti”, “Arayathi pennu pizhachu poyi” and songs and use of Hindi words “Raksha”, “Baba”, clubbing words together as if they are one word “thiswayandthat” using a phrase in parenthesis is as full sentence “a viable die-able age” and many more experiments illustrate her linguistic adventure.
Another stylistic quality is that *The God of Small Things* is replete with similes:

“History was wrong-footed, caught off guard. Sloughed off like an old snakeskin. ... As plain to feel as the heat on a hot day, or the fug of a fish on a taut line” (176)

Then there are sentences consisting of one or two words without a verb:

“He began to swim towards her. Quietly. ... That it belongs to him. The water. The mud. The Trees.” (333)

Lot of small things are depicted with a sense of beauty in the novel. The story moves from the past events to present and vice-versa in a pattern, coupled with emotion and excellent description.

It took four years for the novel to complete after its inception in 1996. The book is a semi-autobiography. It is narrated by Rahel and Estha when they were thirty one. They are children in 1969 when the action of the novel opens. Sense of anxiety about immediate future is experienced throughout. Example from the novel would explain the point. When the author describes the dance troupe of Kathakali, she suggests that the classical dance form is a repository of Great Stories.

“They don't surprise you with the unforeseen. They are as familiar as the house you live in. Or the smell of your lover's skin. You know how they end, yet you listen as though you don't.”(229)
Suzanna Arundhati Roy

Arundhati Roy was born in 1961. Having had her childhood days in the small town of Kerala Roy moved over to Delhi to learn architecture. She excels in arts, portraying things in a narrative and capturing point of view of different people. In the recent days she has been focusing on the Maoists who form a substantial base of the tribal belt of India. She even went to spend a few days with them in early 2009. She ridiculed the nuclear tests in 1998. Roy is a writer with belief and conviction in herself. She was sent to jail for opposing the Sardar Sarovar project in 2002.

In recent years Arundhati Roy had raised her voice against the United States of America policy to intimidate sovereign countries in the world. She also deals with social issues in her screenplays. After the tremendous response to *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy decided to come out with the second book as part of her policy of reaching out to the masses.

In addition to the Booker prize in 1997 and the New York Notable Books of the year 1997 for her novel, Roy was credited with the Sydney Peace prize in 2004 for her
outstanding contribution to political and social causes. She is the second Indo-Anglian author after Salman Rushdie to get coveted Booker Prize. Pankaj Mishra who was employed as an editor with Harper Collins recognized the potentiality of the work and sent it to three British publishers. It got published there. Roy received half a million pounds in advance and the book had rights to twenty one countries. When Arundhati Roy was asked about her emotions on winning the Booker Prize, she replied:

"For me this prize is about my past, not about my future. It is very nice for me to receive this prize, but I think that reviews and prizes are more for readers than for writers."

Arundhati Roy is known as a tireless activist fighting for social and gender justice all over the world. Though a woman by birth, she did not restrict herself to the issues related to female sex alone. The privileged and unprivileged people of the world are at the centre of her movement and agitation. She raised her voice against the military invasion of Iraq by America in 1992. Wherever she sees the misuse of political power by strong nations she fearlessly comes forward to oppose human regimentation.

Mounting expenditure of the weapons of mass destruction in the world at the cost of human dignity always infuriates her. She writes against it in news papers, journals and books. She talks against it in national and international forums. Close look at other literature by Roy shows that she has expanded periphery of her writing considerably.

*The God of Small Things* was related to issues the enforcement of patriarchy, caste system and exploitation of unprivileged members of the family like children and women in India. These issues were relevant to India’s social and political life. She later on expanded the
field of writing by taking up issues like human dignity, principles of social equality and imperial attitude of divide and rule.

As far as the plot of her novel is concerned, fraternal twins are the central characters. Shocking experiences like the accidental death of their cousin which they faced during their childhood are the main strings of the story. The novel explains the evils of the caste system as well as the political and social happenings of the time. The author narrates the centrality of story in the following words:

"A lot of the atmosphere in "God of Small Things" is based on my experiences of what it was like to grow up in Kerala. Most interestingly, it was the only place in the world where religions coincide, there's Christianity, Hinduism, Marxism and Islam and they all live together and rub each other down. When I grew up it was the Marxism that was very strong, it was like the revolution was coming next week. I was aware of the different cultures when I was growing up and I'm still aware of them now. When you see all the competing beliefs against the same background you realize how they all wear each other down. To me, I couldn't think of a better location for a book about human beings."

Arundhati Roy is the second Indian after Salman Rushdie who is considered as one of the 50 beautiful people in the world by People magazine in 1998. She lives in Delhi and is more of an activist in recent times. Arundhati Roy expressed her frank and candid opinion on many issues.
Other works by Arundhati Roy

Besides *The God of Small Things*, Roy has written two screenplays and several collections of essays. Her writings on various social, environmental and political issues have been a subject of controversy in India.

Essays about war and democracy:

The whole world crumbling on Iraq is the theme in *The Most Cowardly War in History* (June 2005) and this took place in the base of Turkey in spite of the opposition of the people there. The war in Iraq is a never ending phenomenon and more and more American troops and people of Iraq are becoming victims of war still the notion prevails is Iraq being really conquered and that is what *The War That Never Ends* about. These two essays are on American occupation of Iraq. Everybody knows that the then American president George W. Bush sent American troops to Iraq in 2003 and destroyed the nation. The war did not end even when Saddam Hussein was sent to gallows. Roy blames imperialist tendency of America.

*The Algebra of Infinite Justice* is a collection of several essays by Arundhati Roy which deals with the nuclear bombs. *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire, Consortium* (2004) explains the police firing on innocent
victims who were taking part in a protest march against the government of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. *Public Power in the Age of Empire* is about the limitations of democracy and stresses the importance of social movements in countries like Iraq. *The Checkbook and the Cruise Missile* is Arundhati Roy’s interview by David Barsamian. Arundhati Roy speaks on the topics of justice, war and corporate globalization. *Field Notes on Democracy, Listening to Grasshoppers* is about a journey of the Indian nationalism along with the economic reforms. It deals with the dark aspects of democracy and consists of a series of essays on human life in democratic nations.

Her *Collection of Essays* includes the following essays. *The End of Imagination* which was a criticism on the Indian Government’s nuclear policies. *The Greater Common Good* deals with the controversial Sardar Sarovar Project. *Power Politics* analyses that only superpowers have the right to express their feelings. *The Ladies Have Feelings* highlights the progressing and regressing India due to the evils of caste system and other social evils. *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* and *War is Peace* which reveal that the world has two distinct poles in the form of Taliban and United States of America and there is not much choice between them. *Democracy* throws light on the world’s largest democracy. *War Talk* and *Come September* are about her perception that war is the only way to deviate attention from genocide and fascism in the world.

Roy had radical views on the former President of America G. Bush’s visit to India. She advised Indian public to oppose his visit in *Baby Bush Go Home* (March 2006). *How Deep Shall We Dig* (2004) is an essay on the country which is caught in the webs of nationalism and neo-colonialism. It is the general portal of the law and order situation in Kashmir. *When the Saints Go Marching Out* is an article on the speech made by Martin Luther King, a recollection of his views and thoughts. Arundhati Roy launched a
Narmada Bacho Andolan to awaken the people who would be deprived of their essentials in the Sardar Sarovar Project. The Muthunga Incident is a letter by Roy to the then Chief Minister of Kerala, A.K. Antony condemning the attacks on innocent people. In 2003 Arundhati Roy travelled to the area, visited the movement's leaders in jail, and wrote an open letter to the then Chief Minister of Kerala, A.K. Antony now India's Defense Minister, saying "You have blood on your hands."

The Strange Case of the Attack on the Indian Parliament, 13 December, A Reader is a collection of essays on the attack on the Indian Parliament on 13th December 2001 and the loopholes and drawbacks in the investigation process. The Shape of the Beast, Conversations with Arundhati Roy is a series of interviews between January 2001 to March 2008 which reflects the changing world of corporate power and how the world is being revolutionized. Deep in the forests, under the pretense of battling Maoist guerillas, the Indian government is waging a vicious war against its own citizens. It is a war which is undocumented by a weak domestic press and fostered by corporations eager to exploit the rare minerals available in tribal lands. Roy takes readers to the unseen front lines of this ongoing battle, chronicling her months spent with the rebel guerillas in the forests, to
find the answers to India’s internal security threat in *Walking with the Comrades* (2011).

**Conclusion:**

Arundhati Roy has written mostly about the dark side of imperialism in her essays. She is of the opinion that United States of America has huge corporate empire. It rules the third world countries through economic and political policies. She is of the view that the world is divided into two sections of people who have power and those without power.

*The God of Small Things* deals with caste system, class conflict, gender exploitation and poverty. There are many writers, in India who has written on domestic issues, gender discrimination and caste segregation. It won’t be wrong to say that almost all the regional and national writers in India have taken up these issues one way or the other so there is nothing noteworthy about the selection of the same topics by Arundhati Roy in *The God of*
Small Things. What is remarkable, however is the stylistic deviations employed by her given this novel a touch of exclusiveness.

Even though The God of Small Things brought a prestigious Booker Prize for Arundhati Roy, it seems that she didn’t continue to write literary pieces. She has become a social activist by directing her energies and deviating her attention to larger cases of public injustice at the national and international levels.

American policy towards Middle East and its cruel invasion of Iraq disturbed her. She employed her pen to write against it. At times she used national and international forums to voice her opinion against imperialism. According to her, right to live has been sheathed away from the majority of people in the world. She fights against such injustice through writing.

She expressed her dissatisfaction over Indian policy towards Kashmir. She said that the people of Kashmir should be allowed to
choose between India and Pakistan through plebiscite. Though her statement irritated many people in India, she stood her ground.

Thus we see that Arundhati Roy has expanded the scope of her writing from local issues like family feud, caste, and gender discrimination to international issues like state terrorism and evading humanitarian values. In the process literary artist in her, has got a temporary setback. But I hope that experiences acquired during these agitations would give her a new insight to write a new novel in future.