The Politics of Desire in The God of Small Things

Among the Indian English writers, Arundhati Roy is a unique phenomenon in the sense that she has made an indelible mark on Indian English Literature solely through her single novel *The God of Small Things*. Arundhati Roy took four and a half years to complete her novel, which was published in April 1997. In the following October itself, the novel won the Booker Prize, and the event widely enhanced the great readership the novel had already attained. Apparently, the novel assumed the status of “a global best-seller” (Tickell 17), and it has been translated into over forty languages. Subsequently the novel has drawn many national and international critical responses, which have ranged from “sheer exhilaration to utter damnation” (Mandel 32).

Arundhati Roy believes a writer is not an entertainer. In her view, a writer should have an understanding about the society, and about how the engine of the society is working (“Puzhayude” 15). Accordingly, she rejects outright the term “writer- activist” which has been attributed to her when she starts writing political essays. She asks why the author of *The God of Small Things* is called a writer and the author of the political essays is called an activist (*The Algebra* 196). Her query, “since when did writer forgo the right to write non-fiction?” (*The Algebra* 196), vindicates a writer’s right to take position, to have a point of view, and to interfere in the issues of social and political significance. In her interview with N. Ram she expresses her dissent
against “the Jurassic notion that politics and literature are mutually exclusive” (187). In her opinion, her novel is no less political than any of her essays are (The Algebra 196). In her article ‘Not again’, she states, “The theme of much of what I write, fiction as well as nonfiction, is the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless, circular conflict they’re engaged in”.

Arundhati Roy remembers her past in an interview with David Barsamian, “Growing up in a little village in Kerala was a nightmare for me. All I wanted to do was to escape, to get out, to never have to marry somebody there” (33). In the novel, every character leaves Ayemenem in some juncture of their lives for various reasons of their own. A pattern of leaving and returning recurs in everybody’s life. Arundhati Roy is stringently a non-conformist not only in her writing but also in her personal life. Roy herself encapsulates her life history thus: “I had no caste, no religion, no supervision” (“The Colonization” 34). She further comments that, “I’m not rural, not urban, not completely traditional nor wholeheartedly modern. I grew up in a village. I saw rural India at work. And yet I had the advantage of having an education” (34). Her mother Mary Roy, a famous social activist won a public litigation case in 1986 against the gender inequities in the Syrian Christian law of inheritance; and Arundhati Roy’s novel also takes the same issue as one of its main focal points. Roy dedicates her novel to her mother; and her in-depth gratitude to mother for having brought her up giving her much freedom and a space of her own is evident in her words dedicating her novel to her mother: “For Mary Roy who grew me up. Who taught me to say
‘excuse me’ before interrupting her in Public. Who loved me enough to let me go” (*The God of*).

Many critics referred to the novel as highly autobiographical or as “fictionalized autobiography” (Adhikari 42), as striking similarities were often cited between the author’s life and the various incidents described in the novel. The whole novel is more or less Rahel’s reminiscence of her mother and of her childhood days, she spent in Ayemenem with her brother Estha and mother Ammu. Like Mary Roy, Ammu marries a Hindu Bengali working in a tea plantation in Assam, and later divorces him because of his severe alcoholism. K. Smitha in her study on the autobiographical elements in *The God of Small Things* observes that the novel is “intensely autobiographical” (88), and vindicates her argument by identifying the members of the author’s family standing for each character. In Smitha’s opinion, through writing the novel, the author was trying to overcome the traumatic memory of some of her past experience by recollecting and confessing it; and all the characters, Ammu, Chacko, Mammachi, Estha, and Rahel are taken from real life with fictitious names (88-89). Yet, in spite of such observations, Arundhati Roy refutes the notion that the novel is a factual representation of her life history in her interview with Shoma Chaudhury:

So, it wasn’t really about my childhood, I haven’t really written about that—may be sometime one will. The idea wasn’t to be therapeutic. For me, it was more important to see each person has got this trajectory behind him or her—that there is history at
work, politics at work, and yet there’s tenderness and it’s totally personal. (241-242)

Mary Roy also refuses to call the novel their family story although she admits, “there are many incidents and instances in the novel which closely resemble our lives”. Here it is pertinent to examine Mohit Kumar Ray’s comments regarding the multiple dimensions of the novel to which various readings and interpretations can be verily applied:

It is a modern novel in its theme and the treatment of the theme, a postmodern novel in its knotting and knitting of narrative threads, manipulation of expressive literary forms and creative ‘play’ with words, a feminist novel in the pity and terror that it evokes for the condition of women in a particular cultural milieu, a political novel in its criticism of the hypocrisy of the communist party, an autobiographical novel in the way the facts of the author’s life have been distilled into a verbal artifact and so on. (49)

Arundhati Roy observes the presence of the feudal, the caste and the patriarchal forces buttressed by political and economic powers in the modern Kerala society. Such forces are operating widely to suppress and annihilate the lives of the marginalized. The discourse of marginality also comes to the fore in Arundhati Roy’s writing. *The God of Small Things* mainly focuses upon the politics of gender and caste while unfolding the story of the four women of three generations—Shoshamma or Mammachi, Navomi Ipe or
Baby Kochamma, Ammu, and Rahel. The novel probes into the strongly patrilineal, patriarchal, feudal, and caste set up of the family from the colonial period onwards. Since these women are very different in their temperament and attitudes, they can hardly be subsumed into a single group. Their lives are formed in a strongly patriarchal society where power is vested in the upper class, upper caste man who is considered as the controller of the sexual, economic, and political power. Since they belong to a Syrian Christian household, the peculiar history of the Syrian Christians of Kerala also binds them a lot. P.K. Balakrishnan in his study on Kerala history, observes that the Syrian Christians of Kerala were powerful mainly due to their economic strength, their political influence on the British government, and the English education. Missionaries’ attempted to reform and educate them in the nineteenth century by establishing colleges and seminaries (369). The Syrian Christians considered themselves as high caste in the caste hierarchy of Kerala as they popularly believed they were the descendants of high caste or Brahmin converts of St. Thomas, the Apostle of Christ who arrived in Malabar in AD 52 (Viswanathan 13). Therefore, in the caste system of Kerala they had a position superior to that of the Nairs (Bhaskaranunny 152). In the novel, Estha and Rahel’s great Grandfather Reverend Ipe was a priest of the Mar Thoma Church who had been blessed by the Patriarch of Antioch, and so even people from faraway places came with their children to seek blessings from him. Susan Viswanathan observes in her study on Christianity: “It is a known and often confirmed fact that Syrian Christian Priests were, and are very wealthy… priests were traditionally drawn from the best households”
These factors obviously are the cause of the higher status of the family in the novel. The Ayemenem family’s penchant for English language and cultural artefacts of the West is apparently visible in the novel. The Pappachi of Estha and Rahel, Benaan John Ipe who has his higher education in Vienna and who becomes a noted Entomologist at Pusa Institute, is explicitly an anglophile. His son Chacko who has his higher education at Oxford University, marries a British Woman. When his marriage turns out to be a failure, he comes back to India and works as a lecturer at the Madras University. Later after resigning from the post, he comes back to Ayemenem as the owner of “Paradise Pickles & Preserves”. However, the double standard of the family is evident from the fact that no woman of the family gets such opportunities for higher education; or they hardly adorn any prestigious post. Baby Kochamma, the aunt of Ammu is sent to University of Rochester when no marriage proposals come on her way, but then also her father selects for her a course in Ornamental Gardening, and gives her the charge of the front garden of the Ayemenem house. These women have to fight against the adverse atmosphere that denies them proper education or economic independence, thus disabling them. Their reactions invariably vary according to their personality, and according to the conventional attitudes they have internalised. As a result, their responses range from total capitulation to explicit subversion. According to Gopinatha Pillai, Pappachi and Chacko represent phallocratic hegemony. They are created out of the peculiar post-colonial situation that prevailed in Kerala, in the fifties and sixties. Pappachi … is a
typical member of an upper middle class Christian family. He has the middle class ambitions which in those days are affiliated to getting anglicized. (88)

The novel hints at the formation of modernity in Kerala during the colonial period. The family’s upper caste/class identity is strengthened with their acquiring of English education, and their association with colonial masters. This paved the way for the development of a new bourgeoisie culture that deliberately distanced itself from the indigenous culture (P. Chatterjee 252). The family members always tried to make a distinction between themselves and the indigenous cultures of the low caste/class. At the same time, the family strongly retains its upper class /caste culture as opposed to modernity.

This patriarchal social set up largely precipitates the tragedies in Ammu’s life, and the institutions of family and marriage cripple her. From childhood onwards, she is a victim of domestic violence. Her selfish, suspicious father constantly beats up her and her mother, and humiliates them. As a girl child, she has to face the double standards of her parents. While her brother is sent to Oxford for higher studies, her father stops her education after her schooling at Delhi. “Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl… (38)”. She is expected to help her mother in housework and wait for marriage proposal. However, no marriage proposals come to her, as her father has not raised a suitable dowry. Like a conventional girl, she mistakes marriage as an escape from the dreary life. However, in her married life also domestic violence continues due to the drunken debauchery of her husband. The description of Ammu’s love
marriage is imbued with sarcasm, and it parodies the concept of romantic love. She meets her future husband, a Bengali Hindu during her visit to her aunt at Calcutta. She neither has much acquaintance with him nor does she pretend to be in love with him and, “She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem” (39). Her husband in drunken stupor gives less value to human relationships, and for him his beautiful wife is only a commodity that he can exchange with his employer for the security of his job. Ammu’s outright rejection of his proposal to please his employer Mr. Hollick, irritates her husband; and when her husband’s recurrent violence begins to include the children, she leaves him taking the two children back to Ayemenem as an unwelcome guest.

One of the important issues Arundhati Roy raises through the novel is the case of a mother who is a divorcee, in a patrilineal society. She raises the question related to her individuality, sexuality, and her right of inheritance. Susan Viswanathan in her study on the Christians of Kerala observes, “Christianity is patrilineally organized, and the house in a system of transmission becomes the symbol not merely of habitations but also of religious values and their expression” (129). Ammu and her twins are only intruders, as a married girl has no right in the family property. In her native place, she has to brave the local disapproval, and the ugly face of sympathy from the old female relatives. For Syrian Christians: “Marriage is seen as a sacramental and permanent bond, and the arrangement of a match requires the serious attention of elders. Even today, marriages within the same
denomination . . . remain the practice. Inter-religious marriages are taboo. . . (S. Viswanathan 103). In the view of her society, she has erred fatally by marrying a Hindu, and also by divorcing him after becoming a mother of two children. “A separated woman, however, has no place in Syrian Christian society. Informants say that if a woman has any moral courage. . . she will remain in her husband’s house despite all constraints” (Viswanathan 112). Ammu shows courage to leave her oppressive marital life, and come back to her home with two children. Above all Ayemenem family staunchly shares their community’s view that a married daughter has no claim upon the father’s property. Obviously, women of Syrian Christian household are totally disallowed economic power, being denied their claims on their father’s property after marriage. In the case of dowry, once money has been exchanged between families to contract marriage, it is controlled not by the woman but by her in-laws or by her husband; and at the same time after marriage she is left totally bereft of any share in her father’s property (Viswanathan 113). In Ayemenem, Ammu works for the factory *Paradise Pickles* initiated by her mother on their family property, yet Chacko always insinuates that everything to Ayemenem belongs to his property – “*my factory, my pineapples, my pickles*” (57) as Ammu can hardly claim the house or family property legally. This highly gendered law brings the final tragedy in Ammu’s life, and the refrain ‘My house, *my pineapples, my pickle*’ is sarcastically repeated in the novel. Owing to this convention, Chacko can evict Ammu from the house, shouting “Get out of *my* house before I break
every bone in your body”(225). Susan Viswanathan points out the cases of women who had undergone such evictions from their household:

The problem of disinheritance arises most acutely when women have been evicted from their *taravats* with a payment of five thousand rupees as their share of the estate, which amount, according to the Travancore Act of 1916, was a legitimate equivalent to the payment of *stridhanam*. The two cases of Mariakutty Thomas and K.C Aleykutty which appeared before the Supreme Court regarding women’s rights over property, describe the cases of women who had been ‘legally’ evicted by their brothers. (147)

Since she is hardly equipped with higher education, or a job, or any property, she has to wander from place to place in search of jobs. She can hardly fulfil her dream of owning a house and living with her children there. Personal tragedies as well as her struggles in life bring premature death to Ammu at the age of thirty-one. Evidently, she gets hardly any support from other women of the family. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria invariably endorse the sexist ideology, when they stand subservient to Chacko who represents the unique power centre of the family. The overt colonial values that linger in the society through Pappachi, Chacko, her husband, and Mr. Hollick, are highly misogynistic and try to victimise Ammu. Dr. Bettimol Mathew in her article on Syrian Christian Women opines that there are two options for a Syrian Christian woman—be a submissive, hardworking housewife or a bold outcaste (26).
Throughout the novel, the image of Ammu as a woman of grit, vigour and intellect is foregrounded in spite of her tragic end. Even though she has been denied higher education, she is often found outwitting her brother, the Oxford scholar Chacko, with her keen observation on power, her brilliant and humorous comments, and in her subversion of patriarchy. She is aware of her society’s gender biased attitudes and mocks at it. Ammu teases her Anglophile father as “an incurable British CCP” (51), teases “our wonderful male chauvinist society” (57), laughs at Chacko’s Oxford moods and his “impartial measure of his abilities” (56). She criticizes him as “An Oxford avatar of the old zamindar mentality” (65) and makes fun of Indian mothers’ obsession with their sons (56). She believes while choosing between father’s name and husband’s name women are not getting enough choice for a surname (37). Ammu, from her early days has been vigilant and sensitive to injustices and dominations, against which she registers her protests in various ways. As a child, she refuses to believe the Father Bear, Mother Bear stories. “In her version, Father Bear beat Mother Bear with Brass vases. Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation” (180). As she grows up, she becomes a rebel and insensitive to her father’s cruelty and “She developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak. . .” (181-182). She enjoys and even invites quarrels and confrontations. “Thus Ammu is basically a different type of woman with a distinct awareness regarding injustices meted out to her because of her gender (Harish, “Her Body” 48).

The novelist depicts these conflicts in Ammu’s character as “… the Unsafe Edge in Ammu. The Unmixable Mix- the infinite tenderness of
motherhood, the reckless rage of suicide bomber” (321). Institutionalised motherhood of the patriarchal society often oppresses Ammu.

Institutionalised motherhood demands of women maternal ‘instinct’ rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self. ‘Motherhood’ is ‘sacred’ as long as its offspring are ‘legitimate’—that is, as long as the child bears the name of the father who legally controls the mother. (Rich, Of Woman 42)

Ammu’s children are always scorned as fatherless waifs, and Ammu has to bear the burden to defend her children from other’s accusation. She equips them with skills in order to prove their merit in front of others. In addition, she has to prove that her children do not need a father, and she can control and teach them. Motherhood therefore is at the same time a burden and pleasure for Ammu. “You’re the millstones round my neck!” (253)—she is provoked to shout at her children. Ammu has to watch over her constantly vulnerable children who have been growing up among a group of loveless kin, and invariably tries to give them cues regarding the harsh realities of life. Through stories, she imparts various lessons to them. Unlike Mammachi, Ammu loves her son and daughter alike, and shares with them a friendly love. Ammu openly discusses with them various matters related to life, and reassures them that she is their Ammu, and Baba, and she will love them in double. The injustices she faces in her life prompts her to advice her children that they cannot trust anybody, including near relatives or friends; and her words become prophetic later regarding their fate. Ammu tries to nurture her
children fondly as independent and intelligent ones; and at the same time, she wants to build up her own individuality and her life.

Through the novel, Arundhati Roy raises the question related to individuality and sexuality of a woman who is a divorcee and a mother. As Neeru Tandon observes:

The traditional Indian concept of motherhood easily translates into a willing tolerance of a life of sacrifice, suffering and exploitation. The mother, especially if she happens to be a widow, is expected to possess archetypal fortitude and follow an intensively rigid moral pattern of life. (137-138)

A divorcee’s case is not different, since she is single. Moreover, if she is penniless and has no share in the family property, she is easily prone to social humiliation. Twenty-seven year old Ammu hates the ethos of her family that “wrinkled youth and pickled futures” (224). Through such a metaphor, Arundhati Roy mocks at the principles that are hardly supportive to the people, emotionally or intellectually. In order to flee from the boredom of her insipid, monotonous existence she resorts to occasional smoking and midnight swimming (44). Her monotonous existence conforming to the ethos of her upper class, upper caste family vexes her. She often had to “...set aside the morality of motherhood and divorceehood (44)”.

She finds in Velutha a kindred soul, and she imagines that like her he also hides in his mind a rage at the smug social order. However, the caste identity of Velutha as well as Ammu’s divorceehood and motherhood renders
her relationship with him highly repugnant to her family and the society. Ammu cannot recuperate from the resultant tragic situation she has succumbed to. As Mohit Kumar Ray comments:

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 and object, a role necessarily submissive. (54)

Being a woman Ammu has been constantly marginalised. The state neither protects Ammu, nor approves her rights as a citizen. When she goes in search of justice, the police punish her using the same gender biased attitudes. When Ammu visits the police station to make her statements that Velutha has never molested her, the police officer taunts Ammu by calling her a prostitute and by making lewd gestures at her by tapping her breasts with his baton. It is a calculated gesture from the police to humiliate, terrorize, and thereby silence Ammu, in order to hide the custodial murder of Velutha (260). Ammu being a divorcee and single, the police officer finds it easy to silence her by calling her a prostitute. In a society which considers chastity as a prime virtue of women and which keeps double standard of morality, it is easy to disarm a woman by calling her prostitute. Obviously, this experience at the police station has a lasting effect on Ammu. During her later stage when gnawing diseases and unfavourable circumstances debilitate her, she is haunted by a
recurrent nightmare of a police officer hacking her hair off with scissors, as they do to prostitutes at Kottayam bazaar in order to brand them. Ammu appears then too worried to face even her daughter as “She seemed terrified of what adult thing her daughter might say…” (160). Ammu dies with this familiar fear as her companion. Uma Chakravarti’s description of the early Indian society is true to many parts of the contemporary India also: “a close linkage existed between caste, class, the state and patriarchy. Together they provided the structural framework of institutions within which gender relations were organized” (Gendering 78). Ammu does not get justice from the agents of state as well as from the family members due to the nexus between caste, class, state and patriarchy. The political leaders, and state officials are part of this, and they deny justice to Velutha the low caste and Ammu the ‘unprivileged’ woman in spite of her upper class status.

Ammu is punished mainly because she breaks “the love laws” (328) of the patriarchal society that stipulate who should love whom and how much.

The institution of motherhood is not identical with bearing and caring for children, any more than the institution of heterosexuality is identical with intimacy and sexual love. Both create the prescriptions and conditions in which choices are made or blocked; they are not ‘reality’ but they have shaped the circumstances of our lives. (Rich, Of Woman 42)

Ammu though she belonged to an upper class/ caste family becomes an outcaste, when she deviates from the normal practices of heterosexual
marriages of her society. Her selection of a Bengali Hindu, and later a low caste even though he is a Christian convert are very unacceptable for her society. Androcentric customs of the society have thwarted the spirited vivacious intelligent Ammu by depriving her of higher education and a claim on property, and has reduced her into a destitute and an emaciated one—“Wild. Sick. Sad” (159). “Violence is thus intrinsic to the working of patriarchal norms and there is evidence for it from very early times. Women’s impulses, can be contained through a recourse to intimidation—the threat of using force, or its actual use. . . ” (Chakravarti, Gendering 77).

Similarly, the double standards of society and family are evident in the cases of different judgments meted out to Ammu and Chacko. Chacko’s marriage also is hardly a traditional one, and he informs his mother of his marriage only months after. Yet Mammachi secretly sends him money when he demands for it. Later, like Ammu, he also comes back to Ayemenem as a divorcée and father, yet leaving the child with its mother. Mammachi is eager to appease and overwhelm him with her care. When he settles in Ayemenem as the owner of her pickle factory, she even arranges a separate entrance for Chacko’s room so that he can secretly have licentious relationships with the women of his factory, to whom Mammachi regularly pays the reward for their service. Chacko’s exploitation of poor women of the factory is justified by Mammachi as “He can’t help having a Man’s Needs” (168), and “the enigmatic, secretly thrilling notion of Men’s Needs gained implicit sanction in the Ayemenem House” (168). Mammachi believes that through her relationship with Velutha, Ammu has tainted generation of breeding and has
brought disgrace to the family (250). Mammachi not only supports Chacko’s eviction of Ammu, but also fails to commiserate with Ammu even when Ammu becomes a severe patient of Asthma. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria always support those having economic power. The family’s abhorrence for Ammu is so strong that even her dead body is treated disrespectfully. The church disagrees to bury her. Her dead body covered with a dirty bed sheet, is taken to an electric crematorium, and only Chacko and Rahel attends the funeral.

The rituals of death express the relation between the body and the soul, and the symbolic relation between the living and the dead. All death ceremonies are specifically for the ‘good’ Christian, who has followed the rules and tenets of the faith. Those who have broken the law are excommunicated and denied a proper funeral. (S. Viswanathan 136-137)

Many critics think that the plot of The God of Small Things pivots around a forbidden cross-caste affair between Ammu and Velutha (Tickell 3), and many critical contentions have also been evoked based on the conventional way their love is depicted in the novel. Aijaz Ahmad argues in his article “Reading Arundhati Roy Politically” that by adopting the theme of intermeshing caste and sexuality as the ideological centre of the novel, the author is only following the already existing traditions of such works that handle “cross-class erotic utopia” (36). Commenting on the two plots and two endings of the novel, one of Ammu and Velutha, and the other of Rahel and Estha in which Rahel heals the psychic wounds of Estha through incest,
Aijaz Ahamad opines that, “It is a very great pity that a tale so masterfully told should end with the author succumbing to the conventional idea of the erotic as that private transgression through which one transcends public injuries” (38). He further accuses Roy of debilitating the theme by deploying the traditional notions of “fatal Attraction” and “erotic bliss” in the novel and the “phallic encounter” between Ammu and Velutha has nothing to do with their decision, but with their fatal attraction to each other (39). Also he alleges that Roy has debilitated the character of Ammu by leading her into an unnecessary death (40). Indira Bhatt also remarks:

Roy paints in detail the fatal attraction that Ammu feels for Velutha and how without thinking surrenders to her own desires. It is not a deliberate conscious decision on her part. As it happens in Indian films the hero and the heroine, attracted magnet-like by desire and passion come together. Roy also follows the western Freudian theory of realizing pleasure and peace through sexuality even if it be between the twins. (101)

Yet conversely, Ammu and Velutha’s relationship cannot be construed as only based on fatal attraction. They know each other from their childhood onwards. Though he is younger than her, as a boy he calls her ‘Ammukutty’ and she is presented various gifts that he makes for her like boats, boxes, windmills etc. As a grown up, Velutha always tries to wriggle out of his caste circumscriptions through his studies, talented skills and confidence. For four years, he mysteriously disappears from the village, and quite naturally many rumours spread in the village including that Velutha has
become a Naxalite. It has been only five months since he has returned to Ayemenem from his place of exile, and Mammachi who has always recognized his talents assigns him the carpentry works of her pickle factory. On their car journey to Kochi, Rahel unexpectedly identifies Velutha in a communist march, and when she excitedly shouts his name, Ammu’s expressions suddenly change; “Rahel saw that Ammu had a film of perspiration on her forehead and upper lip, and that her eyes had become hard, like marbles” (71-72). Though this baffles Rahel, it revealingly discloses Ammu’s sympathy for Velutha. Ammu hopes that Rahel may have seen Velutha in the march raising protests against the dismal and ossified social system that she loathes so much. In spite of the class, gender differences between them, she finds in him a kindred soul equally marginalized like her, and equally sharing “a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against” (176). Moreover, in the middle of her insensitive family members who constantly insinuate Ammu and her children’s lack of right on the family property, she finds in Velutha a person who loves her children sincerely. Velutha has created for her children a sub world of “hooked fingers and sudden smiles” (176). Ammu desires to escape from the hypocritical world around her to their world of sudden smiles and laughter. In addition, Ammu’s mind has always revolted against the social constrains that have been stringently enforced on her for being a single woman-- divorcee and mother—from leading a free life. In Velutha, Ammu finds a man desirable and loving and who is totally different her snobbish haughty vicious father; ignoble and degenerated husband, and selfish brother
with his “bullying power” (226). Madhumalati Adhikari observes that "Arundhati Roy has forcefully raised the question of ‘Woman’s Needs” (47) and attacks the patriarchal notions. In Chandra Nisha Singh’s opinion:

Feminine sexuality too acquires justification and merit because of its inevitable link with procreation. The dominant culture specifically rules out an independent feminine sex drive. The patriarchal power structures articulate a sexual system in which sex is valid for women only for the purpose of reproduction. (C.Singh 196)

Ranjana Harish focuses on the feminist theme in the novel, that is “feminist assertion of female body as a female estate or to be precise, feminist rejection of man’s ownership of the female body” (“Her Body” 47). Ranjana Harish explicates how Ammu asserts her right over her body through her marriage out of her community, her refusal to subdue to the demands of Mr. Hollick and her husband, and later through the way she seeks her loved one (48-49). When she falls in love with Velutha she reclaims her right over her body. Ammu’s dream of a cheerful man with one arm who can do only one thing at a time- that is if he kisses her, he cannot see her; if he sees her, he cannot feel her denotes Ammu’s unfulfilled desires. In addition, it indicates Ammu is aware of the social inhibitions she will face to gratify her needs. The novel was accused of “Lawrentian touches” (Mandal 28) and it is mainly based on Roy’s verbal description of physical union between Ammu and Velutha. Yet as Kate Millet describes “Lady Chatterley’s Lover is a quasi-religious tract recounting the salvation of one modern woman . . . through the offices of
author’s personal cult, ‘the mystery of the phallus’” (238). While male virility is displayed in D.H. Lawrence’s novel, Roy has projected a different masculine image through Velutha who is hardly domineering. Here the novelist voices a woman’s desires who watches how his body has changed from a boy’s to that of a man, and the supple grace and beauty of his body (334).

In Brinda Bose’s opinion:

In asserting her own ‘biological’ desire for a man who inhabits a space beyond the permissible boundaries of ‘touchability,’ it appears that Ammu attempts a subversion of caste/class rules, as well as the male tendency to dominate by being, necessarily, the initiator of sexual act. (“In Desire” 92)

Brinda Bose unleashes her criticism against those charges such as Arundhati Roy’s handling of sexuality in the novel is thoroughly conventional, and it undermines the more serious political issues of the novel. Brinda Bose explicates how *The God of Small Things* delineates a politics of desire. Through her sexual transgression Ammu has subverted the love laws of her society that stipulate who to love, how and how much. Brinda Bose comments that in order to read the novel politically one has to accept that there are certain kinds of politics that are related to interpersonal relations than with grand revolutions, and that “the most personal dilemmas can also become public causes, that erotics can also be a politics” (95-96). Bose refutes the notion that love and desire are elitist indulgence; and in her opinion,
sociological studies have proved that such a notion is a myth. Ammu’s politics, Brinda Bose opines is apparent in her rage against the smug, ordered world, and she defies it through her class and caste transgressions in love and desire. Her sympathies with Velutha’s leftist leanings is “as viable, though more personal” as Velutha’s politics (91).

There is then no reason why Roy’s (personalized/individualized) interrogation of the caste/class/gender/sextuality nexus should necessarily be seen as soft politics, while an intervention of communist ideology into the same nexus should raise its status, in some kind of arbitrary measurement of radicality. (Bose 91)

In this same way, Bose deems Ammu’s death also as a political statement.

Shoshamma, Rahel’s Mammachi is another subtle character whose complexity is genuinely etched throughout the novel. As a young woman Shoshamma is an abject prey of vicious malignancies of her selfish, suspicious husband. Having married a man seventeen years older than her, her married life is filled with constant physical assaults from her bad tempered, suspicious husband. She is reduced to a helpless woman, as the highly gendered society vests all power in the man. In spite of her exceptional talents in violin, her jealous husband abruptly ends her violin classes when her teacher comments on her skills. Mammachi is found hardly resisting this subjugation; and the total depravity of economic power the Syrian Christian women face might have rendered her helpless. Yet after Pappachi’s
retirement, when they come back to settle in Ayemenem, Shoshamma can skilfully subvert his authority. She launches a small-scale business, and her pickles and jam become popular. As her business thrives easily, she becomes a successful entrepreneur to the greatest fury of her husband who resents the attention his wife is gaining. Susan Viswanathan observes about Syrian Christian women:

Mothers are helpless, they know nothing about practical things, they are overly concerned about mundane events. Such treatment is the consequence of the way women were treated and expected to behave in the traditional family. They were never formally included in the affairs of the external domain, in matters relating to property inheritance or dowry. (131)

Yet in the novel, Mammachi can resist this norm, and she successfully intervenes in an external domain of business through the running of the factory. Even after Chacko appropriates the factory as his own by registering it as a partnership and making Mammachi a sleeping partner, the workers approach Mammachi whenever anything serious happens in the factory. “Perhaps this was because Mammachi fitted properly into the conventional scheme of things. She was the Modalali. She played her part. Her responses, however harsh, were straightforward and predictable (122).

In spite of this, Mammachi does not accept the same spirit of independence of her daughter. On many occasions, she behaves as a staunch conformist who accepts the economic, physical, and sexual supremacy of man
over woman. Since she lacks conviction regarding gender equality, she fails to support Ammu on all occasions when she is badly in need of a support.

Conversely, Mammachi is highly gender biased in her attitude towards her son and daughter. Evidently, the family does not encourage the loss of a son because he is the inheritor of all property, and he is the source of the economic power. In a patrilineal family, a daughter is considered as belonging to the family of the in-laws. Sudhir Kakar analyses the Indian mother’s attitude to her son: “She tends to perceive a son as a kind of saviour and to nurture him with gratitude and even reverence as well as with affection and care” (The Inner 101).

Mammachi considers Chacko as her saviour and gives him her ardent and infallible support. When he returns to Ayemenem, she pampers him with her care, adoration and infallible service. From the day when Chacko stops Pappachi from hitting her, Mammachi with a redoubled adoration, starts considering Chacko as the new master of the house, and accepts his authority. Her double standard of morality is evident in her vindication of Chacko’s libertine relationship with the women in the factory. Her class and caste consciousness is evident in her worry about Naxalites, “who had been known to force men from Good Families to marry servant girls whom they had made pregnant” (168). Moreover, she does not want Chacko to build up a sincere relationship with any of such women and so she regularly pays them for their ‘service’. (169). In fact, she hates Chacko to develop a sincere relationship with any woman other than her, and so she secretly slips money into the pocket of Margaret Kochamma’s dresses also.
Mammachi’s narrow orthodoxy, her snobbish and feudal mentality and her aggressive class and caste consciousness become evident in her attitude to Ammu and Velutha. The way she spits on the face of Velutha, when she comes to know of Ammu’s affair is again an indication of her entrenched caste consciousness and feudal mentality. Her leniency towards Velutha ends when he trespasses the caste circumscriptions. Though partially blind, she is very cunning, calculated and scheming; and she touches and feels the size of pieces of cakes before distributing them to the workers to know whether they are small enough. She gives different wages for touchable and untouchable workers. Susan Viswanathan makes observations regarding the evolution in the character of a woman in a household: “At this time, his mother, who did not express herself at all during her husband’s lifetime, now becomes a powerful matriarchal figure to whom her son will defer” (131). Mammachi also becomes later a matriarchal figure who puts everyone under her control except her son. Madhumalati Adhikari observers: “Arundhati Ray has dislodged the idea of power as being totally gender based” (46).

Baby Kochamma is the only living member of the family among the early generation. At a later stage of the narration, Baby Kochamma is an old woman of eighty, who is addicted to television and who is striving hard to withhold age through her extensive make up and jewellery. The eighteen-year-old Navomi Ipe has become a Catholic nun to fulfil her love for Father Mulligan, but later, disillusioned with the life in the nunnery she comes back to Ayemenem. Young Baby has been obviously in love with her life and her love, and obviously this earlier one is apparently different from the later
cunning, scheming, vicious Baby Kochamma who becomes one of the vilest characters in the novel. This malignity in her character is most probably a culmination of the highly frustrated, repressive, lonely life she is forced to lead throughout her life. For a society, that considers woman as a commodity, education and job are seen as having only least importance in the case of woman. Here, Baby Kochamma’s father decides to send his daughter for a two year diploma course in the Rochester University “since she couldn’t have a husband there was no harm in her having an education” (26). Even then, he selects a course befitting a woman who is supposed to remain within the premises of the house—a diploma in ornamental gardening.

The remaining years of her life are confined to the Ayemenem House. Baby who becomes obese by then, is given the charge of the front garden of the House. Except for her perfect gardening, she obviously does no other vocation, and her creativity and energy remain in numbness. She spends her life watching the vicissitudes of the lives of others especially those in the family of her brother who returns from Delhi and settles in Ayemenem House. Being a staunch moralist who believes in the respectability of her upper class family, she accepts her fate unlike Ammu. Therefore, like a schizophrenic in her old age, she keeps her doors and windows locked. Baby Kochamma is constantly haunted by the fear of being dispossessed from the property either by Naxalites or by her brother’s family who are its real owners of it (70). Being a thorough snob and an anglophile, she always tries to set herself apart from the sweeper class. Being resolute in her conformism, she cannot at any cost accept the twins who in her view are “doomed, fatherless
waifs” (45) or Ammu, who unlike her, relentlessly quarrels with a fate similar to her. Thus, she places herself on a podium of superior morality and chastity, which she believes weaker human beings like Ammu cannot achieve. In Uma Chakravarti’s words, the concept of Pativrata or chaste “was one of the most successful ideologies constructed by any patriarchal system, one in which women themselves controlled their own sexuality and believed that they gained power and respect through the codes they adopted” (Gendering 74).

Here, Baby Kochamma’s one-sided devotion to Father Mulligan continues even decades after they meet, and she considers herself as a chaste woman. She believes that her unconsummated love for Father Mulligan has been fully due to her moral restraint and her determination to do the right thing (45). In Dr. Balvinder Ghotra’s opinion, “Baby Kochamma could not think beyond platonic brand of love” (233). Her English education might have instilled in her the concept of a platonic love. Therefore, she resents Ammu who unlike her is not exhibiting the same kind of restraint. Her moral pretensions and her growing narcissism reduce her to an unpleasant character. Dr. M. Leelavati observes that a sadomasochist perversion in her character ensues from sexual suppressions in a highly discontented lonely life (97). Mohit Kumar Ray views Baby Kochamma as “a study in meanness and perversion that may result from unnatural self-repression and the consequent frustration” (55); and her unfulfilled love for Mulligan chiefly accounts for her “growing narcissism and eventual sadism” (55).

Though she has a case full of diaries dedicated to Father Mulligan in which she makes routine identical entries- I love you I love you--she cannot
love or even tolerate the two little children growing in Ayemenem; and more over, she wreaks havoc in their life. She takes revenge on Ammu and Velutha, and makes a false statement against Velutha in the police station. Later when the police question Baby Kochamma about her false statement, she blackmails Estha and makes him say that Velutha has abducted them. Baby Kochamma devises a new plan to disintegrate the unity of the three-Ammu, Estha, Rahel-by persuading Chacko to send them in three directions (322). Like Mammachi, Baby Kochamma’s allegiance is always with Chacko, and her innuendos always pain Ammu. Baby Kochamma is too reluctant to welcome Rahel and Estha as the fear of being dispossessed is haunting her (29). Rahel notices a perverted psychic inertia in Baby Kochamma who has fully lost herself under the spell of the newly installed television, and who stopped caring her garden, or her house. As a result, Ayemenem house has lost its charm and “Filth had laid siege to the Ayemenem house…” (88). In K.V. Surendran’s opinion “Baby Kochamma, ‘the Ex-nun’ in The God of Small Things surprises us with her actions and in this sense she is certainly a round character” (108) that is, a character which mirrors the psychological depth we attribute to actual human beings. She always staunchly supports Chacko the owner of the house, and shows no thrift in flattering Sophie Mol the only daughter of Chacko and in despising Ammu, Estha and Rahel.

Rahel represents the modern-emancipated woman, free from caste, religious or conventional constraints. As Arundhati Roy comments about herself, Rahel has none of the conditioning that a normal middle class Indian
girl would have; and notably many critics consider Rahel as Roy’s surrogate persona (Nair, “Twins” 181-182). Moreover, the main point of view that is unfurled through the novel is that of Rahel, though hers is not the only one. “The God of Small Things uses mainly the perspective of Rahel, a memorial reconstruction of the past through feminine sensibility…” (Ray 62) and it is above all “a novel by a woman about a woman seen through the eyes of a woman” (60). Roy depicts Ammu’s life as seen through the eyes of Rahel who comes back to Ayemenem after a gap of two decades for a reunion with her twin brother Estha. As a mature, bold and experienced woman of thirty one, Rahel now can have a better understanding of the vicissitudes of the life and death of her mother, and she helps her brother recover from his trauma by sharing his hideous grief. As a child, Rahel craves for love and security of a family, and she searches for her surrogate father in Chacko; and she cherishes each moment of her happiness with Velutha, who loves and plays with the children.

Yet the onslaught of various dreadful events that are too traumatic for her to bear, drains her childhood altogether from her. She becomes a silent witness to Sophie Mol’s death, Velutha’s murder, the excruciating pain of her mother, and the frantic loneliness of her brother by sending him back to the strange place of his father. Four days after Sophie Mol’s funeral Chacko batters down Ammu’s door and asked her to get out of the house. “Get out of my house before I break every bone of your body!” (225). For many years, Rahel has the nightmare of a fat man hacking the hair off and breaking every bone in a woman’s corpse. Yet still she loves the killer and the killed.
Thereafter, since she grows up alone in Ayemenem as a neglected, unwanted child with Mammachi and Chacko who show no concern for her, Rahel grows up largely insensitive. Rahel silently watches how Ammu’s indomitable grief and sickness vitiates her mental and physical stability, and which at last culminates in Ammu’s tragic death. The eleven-year-old Rahel alone grieves the death of Ammu, and witnesses her cremation with an immutable numbness that develops in her by that time. Neither her relatives nor the nuns of her convent are compassionate enough to understand her psychic wounds. Her teachers treat her slight eccentricities as moral perversion; and in their opinion, Rahel does not know how to be a girl, as they cannot find anything traditionally feminine in her. Here the novelist convincingly portrays how the adults’ insensitivity towards children causes to develop trauma in a child’s mind. Here neither teachers nor relatives can understand young Rahel’s eccentricities. Therefore, in schools she is blacklisted and expelled. After her schooling, when she wins admission in a college of Architecture, she hardly fares well, her lack of ambition puzzles her classmates. After Ammu’s death, Rahel as a neglected and unprotected child has been drifting from schools to schools. When Larry McCaslin proposes to her, “Rahel drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge. With a Sitting Down Sense” (18). Soon they are estranged as Larry, though he considers Rahel as a precious gift, cannot understand the reason of the emptiness of her soul or a lack of emotional attachment in her. In fact, Rahel’s personal despairs are so deep and wide that Larry cannot fathom or empathize. “The woman who has felt “unmothered” may seek mothers all her
life—may even seek them in men” (Of Woman, Rich 242). It may be her search of her lost mother or her brother, that Larry cannot understand. Yet separation from husband does not leave Rahel dependent on her natal house as in the case of Ammu, she seeks economic independence by accepting small yet various jobs. It is when working as a night clerk in a gas station, Rahel gets the letter of Baby Kochamma announcing Estha’s return, and she gladly returns to Ayemenem. By the time Estha returns to Ayemenem, the repercussions of tragedy in his life have left him fully withdrawn into total silence, and Ayemenem people consider him as a neurotic. Only Rahel understands Estha, and they now are meeting after a gap of twenty four years with minds that are being incinerated with memories of life and death, and love and betrayal. Though at first Estha hardly responds to her presence, later they share their grief through a sudden emotional discharge that turns out to be a physical as well as mental union through which they overcome their twenty four years of loneliness and grief. It is described in the novel as “Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons” (328). In Dr. M. Leelavati’s opinion incest is not an apt word to describe their union (65), and the description of their union, which is rather suggestive and brief in the novel at any cost, reach the borders of pornography (15). Rahel and Estha who have considered themselves as having a single Siamese soul and having a single identity act more or less with the same telepathic bond with which one senses the other’s presence and feeling (234). Dr. M. Leelavati calls them hermaphrodites, and similar to Ardhanariswara concept in the Indian puranas (14). In the novel the grown up Rahel and Estha are perceived not only as
brother and sister but also as man and woman. He and she, mother and son.

“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” (93). Also Rahel’s mouth appeared to Estha as “their beautiful mother’s mouth” (300) and he recovers his lost mother in Rahel. In Urbashi Barat’s opinion,

Their union, so natural, so inevitable, is, however, incestuous; indeed, in Estha’s case, doubly incestuous, for Rahel to him is now both mother and sister.

Incest, then, seems to be inevitable for Estha, who has been traumatized by childhood sexual abuse by a pederast, as much as it is for Rahel, who has vicariously experienced the horrors known by her sibling and who has been as badly hurt by the community. (93)

The novelist who gives a detailed description of the physical union of Ammu and Velutha, is only describing in a suggestive language the physical contact of Rahel and Estha. So whether it can be considered as a sexual activity as between two lovers or not, is left ambiguous in the novel.

Rahel knows that like Ammu she has no locus standi or legal standing in Ayemenem house; she has no plans regarding the future of her and her brother, and has only six hundred dollars as her earnings. Baby Kochamma has already asked her when she would leave Ayemenem. Still Rahel is strong willed and intelligent, and intimidate Baby Kochamma through her quietness, and shocks Pillai by talking openly about her divorce; “she has developed a
casual attitude to life and does not suffer from the various restrictions generally imposed by the society” (Ray 59). Rahel has achieved freedom, mobility and to an extent economic independence through her job that were largely unknown to Ayemenem women of older generation.

As a daughter, Rahel deeply empathises with her dead mother and realizes the tragic travails in the life of her mother. A strong bond of affinity is perceptible in the relationship of Ammu and Rahel, which is noticeably absent in the relationship between Ammu and Mammachi. Mammachi lives largely in deference to patriarchal social set up and believes in its misogynistic notions. She neither protects Ammu from Pappachi’s subjugation or Chacko’s eviction nor does she understand Ammu’s predicaments.

The nurture of daughters in patriarchy calls for a strong sense of self-nurture in the mother. The psychic interplay between mother and daughter can be destructive, but there is no reason why it is doomed to be. A woman who has respect and affection for her own body, who does not view it as unclean or as a sex object, will wordlessly transmit to her daughter that a woman’s body is a good and healthy place to live. (Rich, Of Woman 245)

As a mother, Ammu has not shown any discrimination in her attitude towards her son and daughter, and has drawn them towards her always through a strong bond of intimacy. It is more evident in the way children address her by calling her by name “Ammu” and their anxiety to please Ammu. Therefore,
Rahel in her thirties can understand her mother’s plight. The feeling of insecurity the adult Rahel feels in the absence of Ammu is unfathomable: “She left them behind, spinning in the dark, with no moorings, in a place with no foundation (191-192). Adrienne Rich concedes that in the literary history, mother-daughter bond is rarely analysed:

The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy. We acknowledge Lear(father-daughter split), Hamlet(son and mother), and Oedipus(son and mother) as great embodiments of human tragedy; but there is no presently enduring recognition of mother–daughter passion and rapture. (237)

The annals of patriarchy have minimized and trivialized mother-daughter relationships. The mother-son dyad appears as the eternal and determinative in theological doctrine, art, sociology or psychoanalytic theory (226).

As much as The God of Small Things is the story of Ammu and her children, it is also the story of Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol. Ammu and Margaret belong to different cultural ambience. In spite of the apparent dichotomies between their lives, and between the ways they are treated in Ayemenem, some similarities also can be pinned down between their lives. Unlike Ammu, Margaret belongs to a family of working class. While Margaret achieves economic independence through a job as a way of escape, Ammu chooses marriage as a means of escape from the stultifying life of Ayemenem. The social scenario of the 1960s in Ayemenem village in Kerala
did not permit Ammu to dream of economic independence but to dream of marriage only. Later Margaret also selects a man disregarding cultural disparities between them and without the consent of her parents. But, Margaret, a woman of fiercely independent spirit, can hardly reconcile with Chacko, who wants her to do everything for him including the basics like washing, cleaning etc. She is happy in her second marriage with Joe, a biologist who in all aspects is unlike Chacko, and who is a more suitable partner for herself and a loving father for Sophie Mol. In order to overcome the shock of the sudden death of Joe, she accepts Chacko’s invitation to Ayemenem, but she is further devastated by Sophie Mol’s death by drowning. Thus, Margaret like Ammu is left isolated as a result of the loss of her lover and child. However, Ayemenem family is eager to accept Margaret who has divorced Chacko and married another man, while Ammu and her twins are neglected and excluded. Class, gender and nation based concerns of sexual respectability may have prompted them to judge Margaret and Ammu differently. Jyoti Puri scrutinizing the general Indian situation, observes that, “Nowhere are nationalisms and womanhood more clearly linked than in the narratives on heterosexuality and womanhood”(199). Ammu’s love marriage, divorced state and affair with Velutha are strictly judged with the belief in the sexual respectability of Indian woman, while the Western women are accepted as sexually more liberal. In Nirzari Pandit’s opinion, “To all this, the problem of race is an added dimension. Fair skin, blue eyes and red-gold hair signify perfect beauty and superiority” (169). Therefore,
the dark skinned twins are humiliated and the family members pamper Sophie Mol.

Though Sophie Mol makes only a fleeting visit to Ayemenem, she always has been in the limelight of the attention and adoration of Ayemenem house and that makes her appear like a rival to the twins at first. Being the daughter of Chacko and the white child of a white mother, she becomes the sole object of admiration and affection of the patrilineal, anglophile Ayemenem family much to the frustration of Ammu and her children. She proves her strong allegiance to the childhood world of her cousins- Estha and Rahel- and rejects outright all pretensions and hypocrisies of the adult world.

Kochu Maria’s allegiance is always to the power centre of the family, as her loyalty is to Mammachi while she is alive and after her death to Baby Kochamma. There is no mention in the novel about Kochu Maria’s family but evidently, for many decades she has been serving the Ayemenem family, and probably may not have a family of her own. She is illiterate and low class but since she is a Syrian Christian she is proud, highly conformist and caste conscious. In spite of the great damage that her *kunukku* earrings do to her ears, she still wears them as a symbol of her caste status in order to show that she is a Syrian Christian, Mar Thomite. “Not Pelaya, or a Pulaya, or a Paravan. But a Touchable, upper-caste Christian. . .” (170). “The vinegar-hearted, short-tempered, midget cook” (15), imitating her masters, always tries to remind the twins that they are living on sufferance in Ayemenem house. During the arrival of Sophie Mol, Kochu Maria blatantly proclaims her allegiance to Sophie Mol, and taunts Rahel. When Mammachi and Baby
Kochamma plans to lock Ammu and drive away Velutha, Kochu Maria stands with them as their “midget lieutenant” (258). When the grown up Rahel comes back to Ayemenem, Kochu Maria is there as the only companion of Baby Kochamma and like her mistress she also has become a TV addict and both spend hours in front of TV “locked together in a noisy Television silence” (28). Much of the innocuous humour in *The God of Small Things* is directed at Kochu Maria and Baby Kochamma. In an interview with David Barsamian, Roy comments:

> Women from Kerala work all over India and all over the world. Many of the world’s nuns and nurses are from Kerala. They send all the money they earn back home to support their families. And yet the nurses, who earn comparatively huge salaries, will get married, pay a dowry and end up having the most bizarrely subservient relationship with their husbands. (33)

Roy’s characters, Ammu and Rahel are obviously exceptional in the novel. Kalyani, K. N .M Pillai’s wife, the single woman in the novel who is not associated with Ayemenem house is a typical middle class, middle aged house wife of Kerala. She is class conscious and conformist and supports her husband’s vicious politics. She is meticulous in sticking to gender roles, and Roy’s humour mocks the subservient wifely roles women usually play: “Comrade Pillai took off his shirt, rolled it into a ball and wiped his arm pits with it. When he finished, Kalyani took it from him and held it as though it was a gift. A bouquet of flowers” (272).
Roy uses caste as a political issue, and shows how caste, class and gender intersect to destroy the happiness in life. As Uma Chakravarti comments:

Class, caste and gender are inextricably linked; they interact with and shape each other: the structure of marriage, sexuality and reproduction is the fundamental basis of the caste system. It is also fundamental to the way inequality is sustained: the structure of marriage reproduces both class and caste inequality and thus the entire production system through its tightly controlled system of reproduction. (*Gendering* 27)

Unlike a low caste man/woman, Ammu as a member of Ayemenem family wields more respectability. Nevertheless, the family gradually withdraws its concern due to her deviation from its accepted norms. As far as the upper caste women are considered, they have been assigned the duty to protect and preserve the honour and dignity of the caste men. Therefore, it is believed that they should be strictly guarded and monitored. “Upper caste women are regarded as the gateways—literally points of entrance into the caste system” (Chakravarti, *Gendering* 67-68). Hence, in a caste society, the most reprehensible cases of adultery are when women have sexual relations with men of lower castes (77). Previously, severe punishments were recommended for those who violated the caste laws, including death penalty for lower caste men; and mutilation, physical punishment or excommunication for women. Ammu’s love affair with a dalit man wreaks havoc in her family and she is excommunicated. Except Ammu and Rahel, for the other women of the
novel, their self-identity is strongly related to their superior caste status. Moreover, they are perpetrators of caste/class oppressions, and on many occasions they endorse misogynistic, caste, and class values. They assume a middle class, upper caste respectability for them; and are eager to separate themselves from the low caste women, and they do not commiserate with the many unnamed female factory workers Chacko, their employer, exploits. G. Arunima opines that in contemporary India, Dalit women’s issues have not been adequately discussed either by feminism or by Dalit movements. Within the private sphere they may be oppressed by patriarchal forces, while in the public sphere they are prone to forced or unpaid labour conditions and sexual humiliations (“Some Issues” 221-222). In V. Geeta’s opinion, “Feudal land relationships and the caste system together mark the lower caste woman’s sexuality as ‘available’” (Gender 55).

Apparently, everyone is invoking the old system of law that had existed in a feudal Kerala by giving Velutha death punishment, while ignoring Chacko’s liaison with women of his factory. The old Kerala gave death sentence to a low caste man for his relationship with a higher caste woman while only mild punishments were given to high caste men (A.Warrier 124). In Uma Chakravarti's words:

Thus while a lower caste man’s alleged, or actual, sexual relationship with a ‘higher’ caste woman causes hysteria, and brings swift and violent retribution upon the lower caste man, and often on both persons …the upper caste man’s casual and
or continuous use of a lower caste woman is naturalised.

(Chakravarti, *Gendering* 85)

In the novel, the material power of Chacko over the women of his factory gives him sexual access to them, and his casual use of them is naturalised as men’s needs. A prominent feature of caste system of Kerala was that each caste strove hard to show their caste superiority; and they achieved this goal by condemning, castigating, prohibiting, and expressing their repugnance towards the lower castes (Balalakrishanan 349). In the novel also Velutha, a Paravan is repeatedly denounced and condemned by society, religion, politics and administration. Baby Kochamma exhibits her caste superiority expressing repugnance at the nasty smell of Paravans. Mammachi reiterates her caste supremacy by recollecting her girlhood days when Paravans were compelled to walk backwards with brooms, sweeping their footprints so they would not defile Brahmins or Syrian Christians (74). Inspector Thomas Mathew also resents Velutha because “He had a Touchable wife, two Touchable daughters-whole Touchable generations waiting in their Touchable wombs…” (259). For the corrupt politicians like K. N. M Pillai an untouchable’s death is actually more profitable than his life. Owing to his caste antagonism, he denies Velutha the protection of the party and moreover he betrays Velutha, but after the custody murder of Velutha, he mobilises the party members against the incident. Dr. Pradeepan Pampirinkunnu observes that an ordinary Malayalee primarily lives in his caste. At the same time, he can be a member of a revolutionary party or a rationalist or a Gandhian or a cultural activist. No one is bothered about its dichotomy and this double face is part of the
individuality of Malayalee in general (87). Dr. Balvinder Ghotra considers the novel as “an epic of subalternity” (227) as it examines the caste and gender subalternity (232).

Jacob George C. remarks that while most of women writers haven’t yet exploited humour as a mode of protest and assertion, “Arundhati Roy turns to this mode with the ease of an experienced practitioner and exploits its malleability to register the protest against Patriarchal systems of oppression and exploitation” (72). She has largely achieved this mainly through irony, exaggeration, sarcasm and wit; and through many parts of the novel, a rich, bold and unabashed humour reverberates. Humour is largely evoked in the novel through her funny caricature of certain characters, or her depiction of certain situations. Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria, K.N.M.Pillai, Chacko, Inspector Thomas Mathew, Pappachi, and Mammachi are moulded using humour in various degrees. Arundhati Roy mocks the anglophile Kerala society also. Not only the upper class families like Ayemenem, but also the ordinary families like K.N.M.Pillai’s is humorously addicted to English language, which is evident in the way they prompt their children to learn by-heart long passages from classics, and force them to utter them in front of strangers. Jacob George observes that: “Among the male-imposed taboos broken by Arundhati Roy, the significant one is the mocking of the male anatomy, particularly the genitals” (75).

Roy’s scathing, biting humour unhesitatingly lashes athypocrisies and insensitivity involved in religious, political, social and familial institutions; and in particular at the norms of male centred society. Roy remarks that the
low caste converts of Christianity have jumped from the frying pan into fire (74). Even in Christianity, they could not escape from the ignominy of their caste identity as they were still considered as untouchable or Dalit Christians and separate Churches were established for them. Bama a regional woman writer of Tamil who is a Dalit Christian records in her autobiography Karukku about the prevalent casteism within the Roman Catholic Church and about the rift between their preaching and practice (Holmstrom xviii). Roy’s phrasings such as “stern-mouthed nuns” (16); “the Senior Sisters monopolized the priests and bishops with biblical doubts more sophisticated than hers would ever be” (24-25) mocks at the unhealthy rigid moral codes of Christianity. She lampoons the monolithic, institutionalized structures Christianity and Marxist Party have assumed. “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” (66). Roy castigates the practices of Marxism in Kerala, which have failed to face the seething issue of caste openly, instead the political leaders made use of the caste for their political motives. In her opinion, the Marxists worked from within the communal divides in Kerala, and never challenged caste (66-67). Political oligarchy, and social, political, and religious injustices and hypocrisies hardly escape from the sarcasm of Roy’s writings and her brilliant lampooning.

At the same time, her political vignette has drawn much critical contentions, which allege anti-Marxist vein in Arundhati Roy’s writing. Aijaz Ahmad attributes a serious failing to the novel, that is the way it
“panders to the prevailing anti-communist sentiment” (112). Yet in spite of the comments of her Marxist detractors, Arundhati Roy obviously, through the novel, lends voices to the down-trodden, the exploited and the marginalised. She levels severe criticism upon those political, social, religious institutions, which are monopolized by a few with personal stake in those institutions. In Murari Prasad’s opinion the novel articulates marginality based on gender and caste (155); Ammu and Velutha’s marginalisation is intensified due to their lack of power. Refuting Bhaya Nair’s comment that the novel lacks the intellectual robustness of a political novel, Prasad comments that Arundhati Roy engages with how the dominant discriminates the marginalised. She also probes into the adverse effect of globalisation and neo-colonialism on local culture (169). The author insinuates how the marginalised are dispossessed invariably, by the party, society and government.

Thus Roy’s fiction neatly dovetails into her non-fiction as she speaks for the people who creep around the edges of the society. Her favourite themes such as women’s marginalization, patriarchal authority, feudal survival, State-sponsored terrorism, displacement and the dispossession of the vulnerable masses, religious bigotry and the oppressive fetters of caste system meld into one another and lend expansive and palpable substance to the concerns suggested in *The God of Small Things*. (M. Prasad 173)
Another notable feature of the novel is its largely environmental concerns. Rahel whose voice is highly perceptible in the novel keeps an emotional attachment to the Ayemenem village, and to the Meenachil River on whose banks she has spent her childhood. She is highly sensitive to the waning of the river, and to the changes that happened to the village topography. Feminists like Vandana Shiva posit that ecology is a specific feminist issue, and eco feminism has evolved. Vandana Shiva argues that indigenous peoples throughout the world had close and relatively harmonious relationships with the natural world before the rise of Western colonialism and Western science (Freedman 56). Maria Miles and Vandana Shiva observe:

Some women, however, particularly urban, middle-class women, find it difficult to perceive commonality both between their own liberation and the liberation of nature, and between themselves and ‘different’ women in the world. This is because capitalist patriarchy or ‘modern’ civilization is based on a cosmology and anthropology that structurally dichotomizes reality, and hierarchically opposes the two parts to each other: the one always considered superior, always thriving, and progressing at the expense of the other. Thus, nature is subordinated to man; woman to man; consumption to production; and the local to the global, and so on. Feminists have long criticised this dichotomy, particularly the structural
division of man and nature, which is seen as analogous to that of man and woman. (5)

The clash of two cultures--indigenous and western--is evident in the novel, and the novelist shows how a growing consumerism has alienated people from nature. Arundhati Roy in her interview with Shanmughadas mentions, “The main character is actually the river in the book” (9). She comments that in her real life also just like the twins, she was brought up by the Meenachil river and she states it is the river that makes her a writer (9). When abused by the stranger in Abhilash Talkies Estha “longed for the river. Because water always helps” (113). When she feels too awkward to greet Margaret Kochamma at the airport, Rahel also longs for “the green river” (148). For Ammu also the river is so familiar that she can find her way there blindfolded (332). For Velutha the river is part of his existence: “That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars” (333-334). During their meeting at night, "She smelled the river on him" (355). Later Ammu herself becomes a river for him: “She was as wide and deep as a river in spate” (336-337). Environmental hazards happening in Kerala society due to the growing consumerism is genuinely portrayed in the novel. When the grown up Rahel comes back to Kerala after many years, she watches how the growing consumerism and unsustainable development have littered the rivers and polluted the earth. She witnesses another river who greets her with “a ghastly skull’s smile,” (124) and limp hands. In order to get more votes from the influential Paddy-farmer lobby, a saltwater barrage is built which prevented the inflow of salt water from the backwaters (124). The
river has shrunk like a thin ribbon of thick water and, it is littered with plastic bags, defecation, soap, and unadulterated factory wastes (124-125); and water becomes toxic, thick and smelly. Kerala has transformed into a highly commercialised society where art, culture and history also have been tampered, exhibited and sold for rich tourists. The owners of five star hotel chains in Ayemenem evoke various fake regional flavours to attract the attention of rich tourists in search of exotic. They stage a mutilated twenty minutes Kathakali performance in front of the swimming pool while the tourists are frolicking in the water. The Kathakali dancers who turn to tourism to stave off starvation stage another performance at Ayemenem Temple on their way back to the hotel, in order to erase the memories of disgrace at the hotel (229).

The animal imagery also bring the novel close to nature, such as Velutha lying in the river as motionless as a serene crocodile (333), and when humiliated by all he is left as lonely as a wolf. Velutha’s unruly thoughts about Ammu are compared to a dog which is too difficult to be driven away. The child Estha’s fear regarding the paedophile also is compared to a sleeping dog that may pounce upon him any moment if disturbed. Ammu when yearning for her love appears like a bitch who keeps its children away when it has had enough of them. Moreover Estha’s bond with Khubchand, an old mongrel is too touchingly described in the novel. Apart from Khubchand, the novel is enriched with the presence of animals and insects like Kochu Thomban the elephant, Ousa the Bar Nowl, Beautiful Ugly Toads, a domineering black hen, red ants, white termite, variety of fish, wasp, high
stepping chickens, a white boat spider, a small spider who “camouflaged himself by covering his body with bits of rubbish” (338) whom Velutha calls Chappu Thampuran etc. Roy reminds the readers that the earth is theirs too, though human beings oblivious of the fact monopolise and exploit the earth.

Darshana Trivedi remarks, “In Indian fiction in English after R.K. Narayan, no novelist has realised a child’s vision of the adult world as much as Roy” (188). The seven year old twins of Ammu, Rahel and Estha in the novel, who consider themselves as “a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities” (Roy 2), are highly sensitive to their surroundings and to each happening in their lives. They know that they do not have “a normal family” (79) in which children live with both parents. Susan Viswanathan explicates how children grow up in a partilocally arranged family set up of Syrian Christians.

As they grow up, however, their father’s house grows in importance; it now becomes the centre of their consciousness particularly when they are sons. It is of this house and property that they will be heirs. This is ‘their’ own house as opposed to their mother’s house. When living partilocally, this distinction between the child’s father’s house (of primary significance to his sense of identity) and his mother’s house is most apparent, since he is living in his father’s house with paternal grandparents, near paternal uncles. (132)
Hence, Rahel and Estha in the novel are constantly treated by the Ayemenem family as living on sufferance in their maternal house, while Sophie Mol is received with great alacrity as the rightful inheritor. The misogyny of the society that negates their mother a place in Ayemenem family, dampens their spirit and distorts their lives; and at last, these smart, intelligent, sensitive and sensible children are left as mere ‘Quietness’ and ‘Emptiness’ in their later life. They become “A pair of actors trapped in a recondite play with no hint of plot or narrative” (Roy 191). Therefore, the twins grow up as victims of a gender segregation and gender oppression of the society. The narrative disrupts the notion of a happy and innocent childhood. “Childhood has been hegemonically represented as marked by certain universal and homogeneous conditions – as a state of spontaneity, play, vulnerability and clearly separated from the world of adult anxieties and responsibilities” (Sreenivas 268).

Sexual abuse on children is a usual piece of news in the media of Kerala. In the novel, Arundhati Roy probes how the incident of abuse devastates the mental stability of the child. The smart, sensitive boy suddenly becomes gloomy and panic-stricken. Estha fears that the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man may pursue him to Ayemenem, and he plans a secret boat trip to the deserted house of Kari Saipu with Rahel and Sophie Mol. The journey at last culminates in the death of Sophie Mol. Most tragically, the twins become the silent witnesses of all the horrible incidents that take place in Ayemenem house like the death of Sophie Mol, the brutal manhandling of Velutha by the police, humiliation of Ammu at the police station, and the eviction of Ammu from the house. Even the Twin Expert in Hyderabad
cannot understand the psychology of children, who writes back to the Ayemenem house that Estha and Rahel being the two-egg twins, their separation will not cause any psychic disorders in them (31-32). Cruelty and insensitivity of the adult world has disrupted their childhood, and as they grow up Estha withdraws into unusual quietness and Rahel into emotional emptiness.

Amina Amin observes the existence of two levels of text in The God of Small Things—the text and the counter text or subtext. The text projects a repressive, monolithic and unshakable power structure represented by the Ayemenem house. Conversely, the subtext subverts this through multifarious voices of dissent, and resistance.

At this level, Roy examines, questions and critiques, norms and values which over the centuries have become part of a cast/class and gender-bound adult world, at the same time that she celebrates certain experiences which can be part of a world which has not been touched by such adult prejudices and inhibitions. (18-19)

Roy has built up this subtext explicitly through the ‘authorial voice’ and implicitly through the sensibility of the twins (19). Owing to the nonlinear narrative structure of the novel, the childhood and the adulthood of the twins interestingly coexist together throughout the novel. Thereby a touching delineation of the world of children, a world of small things with all its minuscule details is interestingly rendered in the novel. In Cynthia Vanden
Driesen’s opinion, “the text presents a conflation of subversions” (373). Its poetic mode upsets the conventions of realist narrative, and the child’s consciousness in it interrogates the adult rationality and world of order. As a postcolonial text, its language constantly interrogates and displaces the hegemony of the colonial language (373-374).

Anna Clarke underlines the linguistic and cultural hybridity as a prominent feature of the novel (139). The novel is permeated with references to western Literature, classics, films, Indian mythology, and folk songs. A tension between indigenous and westernized culture pervades the novel. Actually, the children become part of both worlds—snobbish, anglophile, paedophile class/caste conscious society and a sub world of happiness the twins create in proximity with nature. Against the volition of their family, they conduct illegal escapades to the riverside, to Velutha’s hut, eat the tastiest fish curry he makes, and sing folksongs resonant with the delight of scatology. Riverside is a world beyond the hierarchical space of civilization. The children are adept in English literature, films, and songs but at the same time, they watch Kathakali at the Ayemenem temple. The grown-up Rahel and Estha watch Kathakali which enacts the great stories of Karna, Kunthi, Bhima, and Duryodhana with a memory of another mother and another brutal event in their mind; and to an extent this Kathakali performance gives a cathartic effect to their bruised soul.

A plethora of new linguistic and stylistic devices are incorporated in the novel through the sensibility of the twins. Anna Clarke remarks that the fixed and rigidly classified world of Pappachi and the adults in general is
contrasted with the unruly, uninhibited, playful and creative attitude of Rahel and Estha. Like anything else in the world language also becomes a plaything for them, which they read forward and backward, coin new words, break it, and nullify its rigidity. Their new words will always be coloured by their feelings or attitude such as they dislike the “afternoon gnnap”, laugh at Baby Kochamma’s stipulation on “Prier NUN sea ayshun” etc. (36). Their reading backwards shows at once the children’s mastery over the language as well as their high sarcasm. The novel reads the patriarchal, class, caste, consumerist society in reverse, and subverts its accepted norms. When children read backwards the six ethical values at the police station the first letters of which form the word police, an ironical suggestion of the police’s deviation from the professed values is obvious. Their reading backwards disrupts the propriety and orderliness in the world of the Australian Missionary Miss Mitten who complains there is “Satan in their eyes” which also they read backwards (60). Thus, unconsciously they are challenging the rigidity and sanctity attached to the colonized, global language and makes it theirs by distorting and twisting it for their pranks. This desecration of the laws of the language is contrasted with the reverence with which the anglophile, snobbish Malayalee society-- including the westernised upper class Ayemenem family and the middle class people like Pillai --treat the language. Arundhati Roy does not render a story suitable for the language; but is twisting and shaping the language to make it suitable for myriads of moods, feelings, emotions and imaginations that make up the texture of the story. She coins new words, omits spaces between sentences, invents neologism, abandons strict grammar
and punctuation rules, syntaxes. Lay Ter, Ousa the Bar Nowl, Locusts Stand I, Exited, stoppited, Thiswayandthat, re-Returned are a few examples of neologisms in the novel. Darshana Trivedi remarks that “The novel is provincial not only in terms of theme but also in its use of language” (188). Some words are reshaped imitating the regional dialect such as die-vorced, Mo-stunfortunate (130), a lucky rich boy with porketmunny (105); apart from the Malayalam words directly incorporated into the text. Indira Nityanandam observes that “Kerala remains a vibrant throbbing presence” throughout the novel ("God’s” 179). The novel has been highly eulogized for its extraordinary linguistic inventiveness as well as indicted for overwriting. Pier Paolo Piciucco remarks that, “very few novels by Indian writers have so far successfully made such uncompromising experimentations with the English language” (322).

Another notable feature of the novel is its peculiar narrative technique about which the author herself remarks in an interview with Reena Jana. Since she is trained as an architect, writing for her is like architecture. The course of events in the text simultaneously moves forward and backward, and the novel ends in the middle. Interestingly the first chapter of the book narrates the whole incidents in a nutshell. Every incident and occasion that is elaborated later has been mentioned in the first chapter itself. Roy comments upon this technique in her conversation with Vir Sanghvi: “In my book, I tell the whole story in the first chapter so there is no element of trying to surprise or ambush the reader”.

Certain images, words, phrases and some incidents especially those
which are emotionally soaked like Ammu’s eviction from the Ayemenem house are repeatedly used in the novel. Arundhati Roy herself remarks about it in the same interview with Vir Sanghvi: “Repetition I love, and used because it made me feel safe. Repeated words and phrases have a rocking feeling, like a lullaby. They help take away the shock of the plot. . . . ”

Certain images also repeat throughout the novel such as the image of ‘History’. Evidently history is the legacy of past – conventions, customs and rules once existed and still haunting the society. God of small things is another central image of the novel. Arundhati Roy has remarked that the main theme of her writing is the endless conflict between power and powerlessness ("Not Again"). In the novel for a concrete representation of that theme she uses the terms Big God and Small God. God of small things who appears in Ammu’s dream is Velutha, who is also a God of Loss. The image of Laltain and Mombatti also refers the same theme of conflict between power and powerlessness. In B N Singh’s opinion “Pappachi’s moth, with grey flurry and with unusually dense dorsal tufts stands for patriarchal fear. His black moods and sudden bouts of temper dominates the novel and casts its ominous shadow on the family” (147). Highly evocative and poetic images such as “A rushing, rolling, fishswimming sense” (30) are incorporated in the novel.

The last chapter of the novel “The Cost of Living” which has brought charges of pornography on the novelist narrates the secret meeting between Ammu and Velutha. Interestingly the author gives a description of the union of Ammu and Velutha after describing all horrendous aftermath of that
incident, and the series of tragedies the characters have undergone. Yet this novel technique, far from sensationalising the novel, imparts a new reading experience to the reader. Throughout the novel the readers, in spite of Roy’s humorous tinges, have been undergoing with heavy hearts the indomitable sufferings and tragedies of different characters. The last chapter lifts the reader’s mind from this torment and places them in the world of two lovers who promise each other before leaving, “Naale. Tomorrow”. It resonates as an optimistic note at the end of the novel in spite of its tragic overtones. Thereby it lends the novel two endings. It may be to foreground this aspect--that they broke the love laws of the society and united though their life ended in tragedy--that the novelist placed this chapter at the end of the novel. Priya A.S who translated the book into Malayalam calls it a book of sadness. In Brinda Bose’s opinion “It is this very sadness, perhaps, that stands as eloquent proof of the fact that the sexuality which forms the core of the novel is not dismissible, either as a non-politics or as a profoundly capitalist one that validates an eroticism divorced from any other social reality” (97). The description of the physical union of the lovers may be a deliberate act of the resistance on the part of the novelist as “Open expression of female sexuality by women writers has been one of the most restrictive taboos entailing the most stifling code of behaviour” (M. Chatterjee 133).

As for the male characters of Roy, they are as varied and vivid as her female characters, and Roy depicts male as well as female characters with much psychological depth and great humour. Pappachi who mainly belonged to the first half of the twentieth century was deeply influenced by the colonial
ethos. Even after Independence, he lived according to the standards befitting a colonial master in his Plymouth car and his suit and coat even in the hot summer days. Ania Loomba remarks:

Colonialism intensified patriarchal relations in colonised lands, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public spheres, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality. (*Colonialism* 168)

Here Pappachi, though he is a higher officer and an anglophile, continually has to face his disgracing Indian identity that may prompt him to be a tyrant at home in front of his wife and daughter. He persistently attempts to be a person as Macaulay envisages -- Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect (173). Yet, after his retirement his authority is continually questioned by his wife through her business, daughter through her marriage, and son through the way he stopped the family squabble.

Chacko who is more exposed to the new world is a complex character. Though he studied at Oxford, and was exposed to communism through his readings, Chacko cannot fully uproot himself from his feudal underpinnings. Chacko’s communism and his friendly intimacy with the children do not go in harmony with his other face -- that is the Chacko who exploits the women workers taking advantage of their poverty, Chacko the insensitive brother who evicts his sister, the cruel uncle who sends back Estha to an unknown
father and who withdraws his concern for his lonely niece Rahel. Loss of his daughter does not prompt him to protect or save the other children. He admires Margaret Kochamma owing to her independent spirit, and more because she is a White woman; so he cannot encourage the same independent spirit in the women of his native place nor does he try to develop such an independent self in himself. Palpably he is brought up in such a way by Mammachi; like all the mothers of a patriarchal social set up she performs all the domestic function for him including sewing, cleaning, feeding etc. Chacko also in turn demands such as obeisance from Mammachi. In a traditional social set up a mother’s role will be voluntarily taken over by a wife and so the system will be continued without any apparent cacophony. Yet it seems quite absurd for Margaret to see their flat in a quite messy way when she comes back from the work while Chacko is idly sitting there. The powerful Chacko and Pappachi, later in their life cut a sorry figure in front of their women.

Estha is one of the most tragic characters of the novel whose childhood is ruthlessly robbed from him by a society that is saturated with insensitivity, hypocrisy and sexual perversion. It has been through his quietness, his total withdrawal from the society that he registers his protest against a society that forces him to betray his friend, Velutha. The sexually perverted society makes his hands filthy, which he feels he has to bear forever. Above all the forced alienation he has to bear from his mother, his twin sister and the land leaves him an introvert, and in the eyes of others a neurotic.
Velutha, in spite of his attempts to outgrow his caste identity through his skills, his studies, and his communist politics becomes a wretched victim of caste antagonism. In his single room hut, his mother dies of tuberculosis lying in one corner. Now his brother Kuttappan is lying waiting for death with his broken spine and in another corner, he is preparing food for his crippled brother and father. His studies and his later association with left Party politics gives him self-assurance and confidence conspicuously missing in the dalits of earlier generation. The rise of the communist movement and the formation of trade unions under it helped in inculcating a feeling of resistance among the oppressed classes in Kerala. In the novel in December 1969, Velutha is found in a march led by the Travancore-Cochin Marxist Labour Union. Elder Rahel fondly recollects Velutha, his genial spirit and his readiness to play and sing with the children. “It is after all so easy to shatter a story…. To let it be, to travel with it, as Velutha did, is much the harder thing to do” (190). His genial spirit draws Ammu and her children towards him.

While Velutha is a man who retained his childhood with him, K.N.M.Pillai and Inspector Thomas Mathew were men whom “childhood had abandoned without a trace. Men without curiosity. Without doubt. Both in their own way truly, terrifyingly adult” (262). Roy’s brilliant lampooning exposes the degenerate, horrendous contemporary politics and administration through these characters. While K.N.M.Pillai is a man of the world and master of the house, and his wife Kalyani is a woman of the house and they keenly conform to the gender roles.
How Arundhati Roy has achieved wide popularity through her single novel remains hardly a mystery while analyzing the themes and unique artistry of the author. Her single novel adroitly handles different themes and issues; and exposes different facets of Kerala history, culture, and contemporary society. These facts enhance the image of Arundhati Roy as a brilliant writer.