CHAPTER 2

*The God of Small Things*

While India was celebrating the golden jubilee of its Independence in 1997, there unfolded a literary event which confirmed the prophesy of Salman Rushdie who had made a bold assertion to the effect that the day is not far when Indian novelists would be in “a position to conquer English literature.” The literary event was the publication of *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. The work was her maiden literary venture but was powerful enough to bag the coveted Booker Prize. The appearance of the novel and its immediate recognition stormed the literary world as is evident from the plethora of opinions, reviews, interviews and critical and appreciative writings caused by the appearance of the single work achievement of Arundhati Roy. Little wonder that the book had a tremendous sale as by 2001 the number of books sold abroad reached the impressive total of 350000 copies as it came to be translated into more and more European languages. The enormous popularity led to mixed reactions while on the whole the book received favourable responses from writers and critics, it also invited adverse comments and articles not only from literary journals but from socio-political activists and party organs who found themselves exposed by the
stingy pen of the novelists. John Updike, a novelist himself, was just amazed by the sheer structural brilliance of the novel and his review strikes the essence of the novel’s merit:

This is a first novel... the author hits the long socio-cosmic ball but is also exquisite in her short game. Like a devotionally built temple, *The God of Small Things* builds massive interlocking structure of fine, intensely felt details. A rosary is held up to the light: “Each greedy bead grabbed its share of sum”.

Of the many positive assessments of *The God of Small Things* the above one has been quoted here for the simple reason that while it underlines rather succinctly the finer points of the work, it also corroborates and confirms what Rushdie had said about the capabilities of the Indian novelists about conquering the English Language. The book review by John Updike is significantly entitled “Mother Tongues: Subduing the Language of the Colonizer”. We may in the course of our discussion, return to the various grades and shades of critical opinion on the book later to make the claim of the novel to greatness more transparent. It is sufficient, however, to show that the book received fair commendation from well-informed authorities on the craft of fiction.

Arundhati Roy got procurement as a prominent novelist in the history of Indo-Anglian fiction writing and amazed the world by winning the Booker Prize 1997 for her very first novel *The God of Small Things*. The profile of this fiction is based on love, madness, hope, and infinite joy. The novel gives a detailed picture of life and society in their cultural, social, political and religious aspects in
Kerala—the state marked by high literacy rate and yet obscurantist practices. This is an autobiographical novel which depicts the profile of society as seen by the eyes of novelist.

_The God of Small Things_ is the admirable contribution of Arundhati Roy which presents such a plot construction which is considered richly influenced by Austen’s art of delineating domestic lives. Roy concentrates her mind mostly on a village Ayemenem which is situated in Kottayam district in Kerala. She peeps into the life of whole nation suffering from different impediments of social, political and economic origins. The village is like any other Indian village where members of different communities and religions live together harmoniously, wherein intra-caste/religious controversies and conflicts, if at all present, rarely surface. Beneath the surface, however, there is much that is far from being desirable. Thus the location of the place round which the action of this novel revolves is actually agonizing because of the amalgamated confusions having no clear cut margins. _The God of Small Things_ is a novel based on the story of a helpless, lonely woman Ammu. She is the central character of the novel. The author has depicted her story from childhood to adolescence. In her childhood she faced a lot of cares and anxieties, and her life is devoid of the simple joys of childhood. Her father Pappachi often used to beat her and also her mother Mammachi and the child just stands petrified by the violence with a brass-vase. The sight of her father tearing apart the shoes she had brought for herself sticks to her memory because the shoe to her childhood imagination
appears as a beautiful object. She is not even allowed to study in a college because according to Pappachi it is not useful for girls and thus she remains deprived of higher education. She becomes a complete victim of the cruelty of her father. The bruised psyche of the child is graphically recalled by the novelist:

On one such night, Ammu, aged nine hiding with her mother in the hedge, watched Pappachi’s natty silhouette in the lit windows as he flitted from room to room. Not content with having beaten his wife and daughter (Chacko was away at school) he tore down curtains, kicked furnitures and smashed a table lamp. An hour after the lights went out, disdaining Mammachi’s frightened pleading, little Ammu crept back into the house through a ventilator to rescue her new gumboots that she loved more than anything else.²

She could not save the boots because when she enters she is confronted by her father who after thrashing her with a crop-lash cuts the boots with her mother’s shears. The novelist has portrayed the social structure of a typical family where women are badly treated by men. This is a male dominated conservative framework of society where women have to face a marathon struggle. The life of women is worse than that of animals. The sensitive little Ammu carries the scars of these frightening memories through her life which does influence her vision and attitudes later.

If her childhood is spent in fears, her youth also brings little solace to her. After the retirement of her father from the government service in Delhi, the family returns to her native village. Almost eighteen, the girl has nothing significant to do except for waiting for
marriage. The meager means of her father rules out the possibility of a good arranged marriage as it needs money. She finds the village insensitive to her feelings. Her father’s usual fits of bad temper and her mother’s suffering therefrom makes her to think of escaping from that horrible place. “She hatched several wretched little plans. Eventually one worked. Pappachi agreed to let her spend the summer with a distant aunt who lived in Calcutta” (p. 39) where she meets her future husband at someone else’s wedding reception. Finding no other choice she accepts the proposal from a small but well-built 25 years old assistant manager in a tea garden who had not been to college but being the son of the Chairman of the Railway Board, he happens to be a man of means and as Ammu has to accept the proposal. The novelist draws the hapless position of young Ammu:

Ammu did not pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem. She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision. They did not reply. (p. 39)

Thus Ammu takes the most important decision of her life in a hurry because nobody in Ayemenem is ready to have any kind of sympathy with her. This decision is taken in haste to be repented in leisure which soon followed. Soon after her marriage she finds that her husband whom she loves much proves to be an alcoholic. She realizes that she has jumped into the fire from a frying pan. She finds her shock of life when her husband himself asks her to quench the sexual thirst of his boss Mr. Hollick so as to save his job. This extreme
humiliation jolts the tender heart of a woman who loves her husband dearly and creates a sense of great hatred in Ammu for her husband. She hits her husband with a heavy book on his head and leaves the place for Ayemenem with the twins Estha and Rahel. The poor sensitive woman with twins has to return to her village where she finds herself coldly treated by her kins. Her plight is graphically suggested by the novelist:

Like a pair of small bewildered frogs engrossed in each other's company, lolloping arm in arm down a highway full of hurtling traffic. (p. 43)

Through the character of Ammu the novelist has portrayed that right from the beginning of creation women have been the subject to many insults and abuses. When Ammu tells her father about the incident which happened when she was with her husband he did not believe her and said that an English man could never dishonour the modesty of a woman. Her brother makes a fun of her twins that Estha and Rahel were indecently healthy. Her brother Chacko goes for higher education to Oxford. He marries an English lady Margaret and has a daughter Sophie Mol born at Oxford. This marriage changed into divorce and Chacko returns to his home at Ayemenem and takes the whole charge of house and becomes arrogant by having right over the whole property. Chacko tells her sister Ammu: “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine.”(p. 57)

Thus we see that Ammu is not behaved in proper way at her parental home. Roy has shown the differences which is found in the family between a son and a daughter in the Indian society. A divorced
daughter is tortured and tyrannized in the parental house by a divorced son who becomes all in all in the family. Baby Kochamma is of the opinion that

... a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a divorced daughter—according to Baby Kochamma, she has no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage—Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject. (pp. 45-46)

The tragic stage of Ammu’s life begins when she comes into contact with Velutha, who is socially untouchable. The condition of the untouchables was very miserable in Ayemenem as Roy writes:

Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Parvan’s footprint. (pp.73-74)

Actually Ammu loved Velutha from her early childhood for his fiery spirit of protest. Ammu also shared with him the nature of protest against the conservative views of society. That is why she gets attracted towards Velutha as “She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness, he housed a living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against.” (p. 176) Soon the relation of Ammu and Velutha changed into sexual relationship. But this happy moment is shortlived as she is found by her father with Velutha. On being told Baby Kochamma imprisons Ammu in her room to bar her meetings with Velutha. On the other hand Velutha is given into the
hands of the police who gave a severe beating to him and also implicated him in a case of murder. The episode is used by the novelist to suggest that much of the evils in society are due to the nexus of the political leaders and the police which is used to break the spirit of freedom and virtue among those not having proper status. Velutha, a communist party cadre, is denied any help by the powerful communist leader like Comrade Pillai. Caste dominates over political ideology. Thus the torture is for the simple reason that Velutha has committed a sin against the social order wherein any intimate relationship between an untouchable and caste Syrian Christian is a taboo never to be allowed even by and ardent communist like Mr. Pillai. The novelist wishes to underline that women too are at par with the untouchable, more so if she happens to be a widow or divorcée. The twins of Ammu had seen by their own eyes the police torture on Velutha and also the insults hurled at their mother at the police station. This incident deeply impressed their minds and a feeling against this conservative pattern of society germinates in their mind. Ranga Rao rightly observes:

Roy’s book is the only one I can think of among Indian novels in English which can be comprehensively described as a protest novel. It is all about atrocities against minorities, Small Things: children and youth, women and untouchable.³

At the age of 31 Ammu dies. She did not meet even a single happy day in her life. In childhood she was ill treated by her father and was deprived of higher education, the House in which she passed her
childhood was just like Kurukshetra where there was always terror of her father. In her youth as a wife she could not recognize the original face of her husband and later found him alcoholic. He also suggested adultery to her to save his job. At this she deserted him and returned to her parent's house. There also she did not get consolation and for her relation with an untouchable Velutha, she is harassed and ostracized. The conservative society could not bear it and Velutha was killed by police at the police station and soon the happy moment of the life of Ammu was again darkened. Heartbroken, she at the age of only 31 dies.

Premature death of Ammu ends her miseries but her sufferings only heighten the sufferings of her twins. The novelist has used the story of the mother as a structural device to serve as a prologue to the miseries of the twins which unfold later in the novel. The twins—they were hardly two when their mother came to her native village to lead a life of hushed taunts and eloquent antipathetic indifference without any love from their grandparents and their kins. The story element in *The God of Small Things* being slender, the novelist has to complete her tale of socio-political historical process in which the poor hapless people, be it women or children or even the untouchable, have little chances of redemption from their smug fate. The story, thus centres round the fraternal twins Estha and Rahel and their mother Ammu who is tortured for her audacity first to divorce the alcoholic husband and secondly to love Velutha, the untouchable. These two happenings along with the return of Chacko's English wife and their light skinned
daughter Sophie Mol unleash forces which sends the world of Ammu and her twins topsy turvy. The accidental death of the latter "sets in motion a chain of events that control and haunt the family for the rest of their lives."

Seen from the eyes of the twins, the story gets a special flavour of contemplative broodiness in keeping with its writer's conviction that fiction writing is "a way of seeing, of making sense of the world" and therefore the novel is not "about what happens so much as a brooding over how something affected people's lives." Happenings may be individual and personal but under awesome circumstances seep through the very texture of life and once that happens life is never allowed to run its usual course. It is so, for another reason also. The major part of the novel contains events and episodes which are seen through the children's ken and thus we lose sight of "what happens" and we are submerged by the gripping 'how' as perceived by the imagination of children. Their grasp of reality is more imaginative than real and therefore profounder because it is by childish intuition rather than by adult rationality that they try to understand the world and its ways. Children with their higher capacity for wonder, live in a world of make-believe of imagined melodramatic reality and fears. Roy herself is conscious of this aspect as she tells one of her interviewers that the novel is "about language and the inability of children to understand the language of adults and the power of language to evoke work." The children's inability to understand the language of the adults leave them in a state of
bewilderment and yet they understand that the language is not of sympathy but antipathy. The children are just innocent and therefore vulnerable. They love even their tormentors. Unfortunately they are made to live amidst an atmosphere of psychological violence and their naivety makes them "a pair of small bewildered frogs". Not only Baby Kochamma and later, Chacko but also "vinegar-hearted Kochu Maria remind them of their position in the house. For Baby Kochamma they are "doomed, fatherless waifs" and 'Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry. (p.45)

The novelist has so conceived the characters of the twins that their identity is inextricably tied together. Even though they don't resemble each other yet they "were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities" (p. 2) without "no Each, no Other' (225) and therefore "the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other" (p. 20). Their hopeless plight is aggravated because they are not to be confronted at even if some well-meaning person would say to them: "You are not the Sinners. You're the Sinned Against. You were only children. You had no control. You are the victims, not the perpetrators" (p. 191).

The novelist by according centrality to the twins in the texture of the story achieves her one of the artistic objectives. The novel seems to present the sordid tale crossed by brutality and tyranny in their many ugly forms. She seems to convey the resourcefulness of Evil which can assume different forms and proportions. We seem to
Childhood tiptoed out.
Silence slid in like a bolt. (p. 320)

Even before that we find the miserable condition of Estha in Calcutta at his father’s house. At meal times he himself takes the thing which he wants. He starts to do all the work of house as sweeping, swabbing and laundry work. He cooks and also makes shopping for vegetable vendors in the bazaar, sitting behind pyramids of oiled, shining vegetables grew to recognize him and would attend to him amidst the clamouring of their other customers. They gave him rusting film cans in which to put the vegetables he picked. He never bargains. They never cheat him. When the vegetables are weighed and paid for, they would transfer them to his red plastic shopping basket (onions at the bottom, brinjal and tomatoes on the top) and always a spring of Griander and fistful of green chillies for free, Estha carried them home in the crowded tram. Thus we see that Estha does not get proper affection in the family. He is always forced to do all the work of household and comes to see the conservative pattern of society where women like his mother and children like him and his sister are not understood as human beings but they are needing affectionate tending. Rahel is the other one of the twins who has been a witness to the torture of Ammu, her mother and Velutha. She is badly treated inside and outside Ayemenem house. She is virtually a homeless, hopeless and helpless child, neglected by everybody. She also becomes rebellious like her mother. In the family she gets various mental strokes. When she was reading in the convent school she
collides with the other girls to see whether her breasts hurt or not. Secondly she was caught at the gate of garden decorating a knob of fresh cowdung with flowers. By this she seems to defy the social norms of what is healthy and pure and is acceptable and what is not acceptable and dirty to be left. It is clear by her behaviour that she has courage to challenge the conservative motto of the society. As R.S. Sharma writes:

First of all, she subverts the value system of society by elevating what is considered low and detestable. She decorates a knob of dung with flowers. Her colliding against the other girls in the convent to see whether breasts hurt is an expression of rebellion against the suppression of sexuality in conventional Christian education. Thirdly the burning of the false hair bun of her Housemistress is a protest against vanity and artificiality in human relations.

So far as the life of Rahel in college is concerned it is also very significant. After school she takes the entrance examination for admission to an ordinary College of Architecture at Delhi and luckily happened to get through. She presents to the staff a charcoal still-life sketch. They are deeply impressed by the enormous size of the picture rather than by the skill used in making this picture. “The careless, reckless lines were mistaken for artistic confidence, though in truth, their creator was no artist.” (p. 17)

The troubled childhood makes Rahel listless. She loses her confidence which somehow is shrouded in her surface waywardness which makes her classmates to fear her. She could not complete her five-year undergraduate course in Architecture as she rarely attended
her classes. The situation is depicted by the novelist with a remarkable eloquent brevity: “She occasionally wrote to Chacko and Mammachi, but never returned to Ayemenem. Not when Mammachi died. Not when Chacko emigrated to Canada” (18). In order to avoid the frustration she hurries into marriage with an American scholar collecting matter for his doctoral thesis in Delhi and predictably ends up into divorce to return after many years to her village on learning from Baby Kochamma that Estha “has re-Returned”. On her return to the village Rahel develops a more carefree attitude towards life. She completely becomes a rebel against restrictions imposed by the conservative society. She tells comrade Pillai:

“We’re divorced’, Rahel hoped to shock him into silence.

‘Die-vorced?’ His voice rose to such a high register that it cracked on the question mark. He even pronounced the word as though it were a form of death. (p. 130)

Rahel as a divorced girl reached Ayemenem where her mother Ammu herself got no lift by the family and this is what Rahel also faced. She was badly treated here in her childhood. She became victim of Pappachi’s moth:-

Pappachi’s Moth was held responsible for his black moods and sudden bouts of temper. Its pernicious ghost-grey, furry and with unusually dense dorsal tufts-haunted every house that he ever lived in. It tormented him and his children and his children’s children. (p. 49)

Arundhati Roy portrays an untouchable Velutha in her popular novel *The God of Small Things*. Velutha is tortured by both society and
administration for being a man of low caste. Although he is a man of high spirits and higher ambition so much so that his father Vellya Paapen fears his younger son. He is a talented craftsman. He comes in the way of Ammu. He has a strong sense of uplifting from bottom to top. Ammu meets Velutha and a relationship blossoms between them. But it was a sinful task because Velutha was an untouchable. Soon after this he was taken to police station where he was abused and was beaten cruelly by police and dies at the police station. He suffers only because he is an untouchable. He was taught carpentry by Johann Klein from Bavaria who came to the Christian Mission Society at Kottayam. Every day after school Velutha caught a bus to Kottayam and used to work with Klein till dusk. At the age of sixteen he became an accomplished carpenter. He developed a “German design sensibility”. The author observes:

He had his own set of carpentry tools and a distinctly German design sensibility. He built Mammachi a Bauhaus dining table with twelve dining chairs in rosewood and a traditional Bavarian chair longue in lighter jack. For Baby Kochamma’s annual Nativity plays he made her a stack of wire-framed angels’ wings that fitted onto children’s backs like Knapsacks, card board clouds for the Angel Gabriel to appear between, and a dismantleable manager for Christ to be born in. When her garden cherub’s silver arc dried up inexplicably, it was Dr. Velutha who fixed its bladder for her. (p. 75)

But his conversion to art and his technical expertise and his many other good things did not give him anything above the other untouchables in the callous society of Ayemenem. He daily goes with
his father to pluck the coconut from the trees and always goes to Ayemenem house to deliver it with his father but he is never permitted to touch a thing that touchable touched. Velutha is a silent sufferer. He is a man of sober nature and congenial behaviour. He never behaves like a rough and savage man. He is a man of innocence and ignorance. Unfortunately he becomes a victim of caste tyranny and social torture and more of corrupt police administration. Madhumalati Adhikari holds the view:

In Velutha's case, it is class and caste discrimination that makes him powerless and not his gender. His greatest crime is that while being a Karna he has dreamt of Draupadi.9

Thus we see that Velutha who is physically, socially and politically tortured wants to rise above his status but conservative and callous society does not bear it and he is cruelly cut down to his size. Arundhati Roy has portrayed Ammu, Estha, Rahel and Velutha under the symbolic group called 'Mombatti'. Baby Kochamma has been described as a villain in the life of Ammu, Estha, Rahel and Velutha. In the beginning of her life when she had fallen in love with father Mulligan she had all the qualities of Mombatti, but when she failed in her love she became a 'Laltain'. At the very outset of the novel she is described as: “sitting at the dining table rubbing the thick, frothy bitterness out of an elderly cucumber” (p. 20). This sentence is sufficient to describe the various shades of Baby Kochamma's mind. In her youth she blindly fell in love with a handsome young Irish monk Father Mulligan. Her love was so wild and profound for Father
Mulligan that she continued to write on her diary "I love you I love you" (p. 297). She was madly in love with him. As Arundhati Roy writes in her novel:

Every Thursday, undauntedly by the merciless midday sun, they would stand there by the well. The young girl and the intrepid Jesuit, both quaking with unchristian passion. Using the Bible as a ruse to be with each other. (p. 24)

But soon she realized the futility of love with father Mulligan. She converts to Roman catholic against the wishes of her father to get close of Father Mulligan. It was her last attempt to win his interest in her when all previous attempts had failed. She took her vows and entered into a convent in Madras as a trainee novice with a strong hope that even this act will provide her with legitimate association with Father Mulligan. But all her attempts and desire remained unfulfilled. This made her restless and confused. She started to write puzzling letters to her father. Her father goes to Madras and withdraws her from the convent and is thus brought to the House at Ayemenem. She is absolutely frustrated, isolated and deserted who becomes a sadist and torments all around her and deprives them of those things which she always remained unable to get. It was her principle "If I don’t get, you don’t get any either.” Thus she becomes a ‘Laltain’ although she was a Mombatti before it. It is her inner struggle, torment, torture and frustration which turned her into the condition of Big man, she makes her best to torture the ‘Mombattis’ of the novel.
It is with amused glee that the character of Baby Kochamma is drawn by the novelist whose performance is undoubtedly for the sufferers or the ‘Mombattis’. As a tormentor she receives the satirical phrasal lashes from the novelist. It is with amused delight that Roy describes Baby Kochamma’s fondness for looking fashionable even if she is eightythree:

“she had started wearing make up. Lipstick, Kohl. A sly touch of rouge. And because the house was locked and dark, and because she only believed in 40-watt bulbs, her lipstick mouth had shifted slightly off her real mouth” (p. 21)

Even in this age she is very fond of wearing Jewellery:

She was wearing a lot of jewellery. Rahel’s dead grandmother’s jewellery. All of it. Winking rings, Diamond earrings. Gold bangles and a beautifully crafted flat gold chain that she touched from time to time reassuring herself that it was there and that it was hers. Like a young bride who couldn’t believe her good fortune. (p. 22)

Although she had undergone different kinds of suffering and torture in her young age and if we notice we find that her youth was just like Ammu but she does not have sympathy with Ammu, Rahel, Estha and Velutha. She has become such a distorted personality that she poisons the mind of Chacko and Mammachi against Ammu and twins. Actually she is the main culprit in ruining the life of the twins. Her narcissistic attitude presents when she attends the funeral of Sophie Mol in a very ‘expensive sari’.
Another interesting character portrayed by Roy is that of Chacko. The tyrannical attitude of his father also leaves many bruises on his personality. He seems to have inherited the cold callousness of his father which now he extends to Ammu and her children. The conservative pattern of family was not ready to give Ammu higher education. But so far as Chacko is concerned he was sent to Oxford for higher studies. The difference between a son and a daughter can easily be seen by this behaviour of patriarchal tyranny. Chacko is the only son of Pappachi and Mammachi. Ammu was his sister. He is a hypocrite, eccentric, jealous and lecherous. Although he wants to lead a luxurious life but his misery and desperations do not allow him to do so. He loved and married Margaret Kochamma. A daughter named Sophie Mol was born to them. But soon he was divorced by his beloved wife and returned to Ayemenem house with his daughter. After some days Sophie Mol died and this was second trauma for Chacko. Chacko thus becomes the sole successor to the family estate. He does not want to share the property with his only sister Ammu. The novelist puts forth the point:

Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my factory, my pineapples, my pickles. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property. (p. 57)

Chacko was a great lover of books, so he had good stock of books from floor to ceiling in his room. He is only lover but not a connoisseur of reading. Though he had read all the books, he does not
know how to place them in conversation or in writing. It is his eccentricity that made him claim that he was going to write an autobiography of the family. But Ammu termed it biographical blackmail:

He claimed to be writing a family Biography that the Family would have to pay him not to publish. Ammu said that there was only one person in the family who was a fit candidate for biographical blackmail and that was Chacko himself. (p. 38)

Chacko’s mother Mammachi loves Chacko very much and thinks him to be one of the cleverest men in India. On the other hand Ammu has a very poor opinion about him. She thinks that going to Oxford does not mean that the person is very clever. His divorced wife Margaret Kochamma was unhappy by his indisciplined clumsy and savage life. Although Chacko claims that he is sophisticated gentleman of etiquette and decency, his life is not in proper order. The author narrates the dwelling place of Chacko:

Despite the best efforts of his scout and cleaning lady, his room was always filthy. Books, empty wine bottles, dirty underwear and cigarette butts littered the floor. Cupboards, were dangerous to open because clothes and books and shoes would cascade down and some of his books were heavy enough to inflict real damage. Margaret Kochamma’s tiny, ordered life relinquished itself to this truly baroque bedlam with the quiet gasp of a warm body entering a chilly sea. (pp. 244-245)

He was so mad in the love of Lady Margaret Kochamma that he had forgotten Ayemenem and all the members of his family. Although his
mother Mammachi wrote him to inform her and her husband about every thing which happens to him in Oxford. But he did not reply and had no place in his heart for his parents, and sister Ammu. He hardly ever read a whole letter and some times he never opened them at all. Roy writes about him:

Too much was happening in his life and Ayemenem seemed so far away. The river too small. The fish too few. (p. 246)

Matrimonial life of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma developed in the beginning but later the seed of discontent in the heart of Margaret began to germinate for Chacko who had become a fat man with a baby to match his laugh. His various irregularities were responsible for divorce by his wife. Thus Chacko being a son of such a mother who always is being tortured by her husband becomes a male ego holder. He inherited the mind of his father as Gerda Learner says:

Patriarchy means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power.10

Although Chacko in his childhood saw Pappachi’s male ego and the poor condition of his mother Mammachi and his sister Ammu who was so badly treated in the Ayemenem house that can ring any one’s heart, he does not feel at all the need of being considerate to the other members of his extended family. He goes to Oxford for higher studies only to fall in love with Margaret and marries her and a daughter Sophie Mol is born. Very soon Margaret Kochamma becomes aware
of the careless and disordered life of Chacko and divorces him. He returns to the House of Ayemenem and takes the whole charge of the family affairs. His behaviour with his sister Ammu and her twins is not on the sympathetic ground of humanity but he is full with selfish male ego. He becomes a ‘Laltain’ after the failure of his conjugal life and death of his only daughter Sophie Mol. He also establishes the patriarchal system in the family and announces himself the only heir of the whole property without any share for his sister, Ammu.

The wife of Chacko Margaret Kochamma plays a minor but remarkable role in the fiction The God of Small Things. She suffers and loses her dreams in this male dominated society. After marriage with Chacko her life becomes more frightful and more insecure than it was before. A chain of misfortunes makes her life sad and gloomy resulting finally into divorce. She marries Joe but he also gets an unexpected death. At the accidental death of her daughter Sophie, she becomes a bit disbalanced and expresses her rage and contempt for Estha and Rahel who escaped death by drowning. But very soon she realizes her mistake for her wrong rage for the twins. She even writes a letter of apology to Ammu. Seeing her condition in the novel, we remember the ill-fated heroines of Thomas Hardy who are caught in the web of time and fate. The drowning of the dear daughter of Margaret Kochamma, Sophie Mol proves to be a devastating event in her life. Her feelings seem to echo Elizabeth Jane’s sentiments in The Mayor of Casterbridge:

She had learnt the lesson of renunciation, and was as familiar with the wreck of each day’s wishes as with the
diurnal setting of the sun—Continually it had happened that what she had desired had not been granted her and that what had been granted her she had not desired.11

This imagined action of Arundhati Roy makes her novel perfect and creates pity and compassion in the heart of readers. In her early life Margaret Kochamma was working as a waitress in a café in London. Like Ammu she also left her parents house for no greater reason than a youthful assertion of independence. She wanted to become a good and gentle lady with enough money. Therefore she was bound to face the real world by her own courage and destiny. The author of this fiction writes:

Faced with the Real World, she clung nervously to old remembered rules, and had no one but herself to rebel against. So even up at Oxford, other than playing her gramophone a little louder than she was permitted at home, she continued to lead the same small, tight life that she imagined she had escaped. (p. 241)

Chacko meets her in London café, when he had come to the café. All of a sudden she drew towards him. She was deeply impressed to see his shining happy cheeks and friendly smile. Although Chacko was a complete stranger for her at that time but she shared in his uncontrolled laughter. So far as Chacko is concerned, he was attracted by the ‘self sufficiency’ of Margaret. The novelist explains it:

He loved the fact that Margaret Kochamma didn’t cling to him. That she was uncertain about her feelings for him. That he never knew till the last day whether or not she would marry him…. He was grateful to her for not
wanting to look after him. For not offering to tidy his room. For not being his cloying mother. He grew to depend on Margaret Kochamma for not depending on him. He adored her for not adoring him. (pp. 245-246)

Both of them did not take the consent from their family and were married without their family knowledge. This marriage did not prosper in a fruitful way. Margaret Kochamma grew fed up with the untidy, clumsy and indisciplined life of Chacko. Moreover her father had racial prejudices and disliked Indians and soon this love changed into divorce. She again married Joe, a biologist. The author writes:

Joe was everything that Chacko wasn’t. Steady. Solvent. Thin. Margaret Kochamma found herself drawn towards him like a plant in a dark room towards a wedge of light. (p. 248)

In this way we see that Margaret Kochamma was tortured by her powerful fate and fickle mind. The jerks which she faced were results of her thoughtless actions. She was just like Ammu in her hurry to marry.

Margaret Kochamma and Chacko’s daughter Sophie Mol plays a very short but significant role in the development of the plot of the novel *The God of Small Things*. The novel opens with the death scene of Sophie Mol. She was only nine when she was withdrawn by powerful death. She is the ‘Mombatti’ of the story. Her presence continued to be felt throughout the whole novel. Roy rightly observes:

Sophie Mol put the presents into her go-go bag, and went forth into the world. To drive a hard bargain. To negotiate a friendship.
A friendship that, unfortunately, would be left dangling. Incomplete. Flailing in the air with no foothold. A friendship that never circled around into a story, which is why, far more quickly than ever should have happened, Sophie Mol became a Memory, while The Loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. Like a fruit in season. Every season. (p. 267)

It was a great misfortune of Sophie Mol that her father Chacko was divorced by her mother in her infancy. She was surrounded by indifferent and cruel fate after her birth. She had two fathers—Chacko was her biological father who was divorced when she was an infant. It was her bad luck that Joe was killed in a car accident when she was a child. The author very practically remarks:

But around her, the air was sad, somehow. And behind the smile in her eyes, the Grief was a fresh, shining blue. Because of a calamitous car crash. Because of a Joe-shaped hole in the Universe. (p. 143)

There is a sense of isolation in the heart of Sophie Mol. This is the reason she never developed love for Chacko. When she was asked whom she loved most she always replied that Joe was her real father who never hit her. She came to India after the death of her father Joe. On the day when Sophie Mol was drowned in the river, Ammu was caught red handed for her unlawful relation with Velutha. She lived at Ayemenem house for a very short time and next week she became a thing of memory as she was found dead in the river by the boatsmen.

In this way we find that Sophie Mol lived very short but her heart touching role fulfills the demand of a great novelist to make the ideal plot of the novel. As W.H. Hudson remarks:
The novelist keeps close to common experience or boldly experiments with the fantastic and the abnormal, his men and women shall move through his pages like living beings and like living beings remain in our memory after his book is laid aside and its details perhaps forgotten.\textsuperscript{12}

Apart from the above major characters the novelist presents some minor ones to clench the issue of small gods of small things. Vellya Paapen is a minor character who plays his humble role in the development of the plot. He is father of Velutha. He is a follower of traditional and conservative society. He does not have courage to rebel against the conservative pattern of society. He is accustomed to the age-old norms of society. He is very loyal to the family of the big Ayemenem House. But he is always treated as untouchable by the Ayemenem House. Velutha along with a number of untouchables embraced Christianity to escape the scourge of untouchability. But soon they found out that they had done a blunder. Although they were given separate churches, separate priests, yet after getting freedom they were not allowed any benefit from government as job-reservation or bank loan at low interest because they were Christian.

Vellya Paapen is strongly against education or advance knowledge. He always opposes the skill and craftsmanship of his son as a carpenter. He wants him to do his traditional work. This was the reason which created unpleasantness between the son and the father. Vellya is of conservative opinion unlike his son Velutha who is liberal. Vellya is a conservative untouchable who bears the brunt of brutality passively and submissively. He does not want to push even
an inch from the trodden path of morality. He was compelled to see whatever he was not supposed to see. His son had an illicit relation with a lady like Ammu who belongs to the high caste. This action of his son makes him stand doubtful against his faithful esteem for Ayemenem house. In this way he becomes the main cause of the tragedy of his own son. He himself tells the news of illicit relation between Ammu and Velutha to Baby Kochamma and Mammachi:

He told Mammachi what he had seen. The story of the little boat that crossed the river night after night, and who was in it. The story of a man and woman, standing together in the moonlight. Skin to skin. (p. 255)

Arundhati Roy has portrayed the political condition of Kerala through the character of K.N.M. Pillai. The small wooden placard of his house said “Work is struggle. Struggle is work”. He has hung a framed photograph on the wall. This photograph is of comrade E.M.S. Namboodiripad whose great fan is K.N.M. Pillai. He is a leader of the Marxist Party. But in reality we find that in his principles he has nothing of the Marxist commitment. The drawbacks of this party have been presented by Arundhati Roy. She writes:

Comrade Pillai realize that what he really needed was the process of war more than the outcome of victory. War could have been the stallion that he rode, part of, it not all, the way to the Legislative Assembly, whereas victory left him no better off than when he started out. (p. 281)

Pillai is a man who outwardly talks loudly of Marxism as the solution to the problems of India but internally he is an embodiment of hypocrisy, artificiality and jealousy. He has double face. Although
Velutha is an honest worker of his party but Pillai does not help him in his critical time at the police Station. He remarks just like a corrupt politician: “You should know that Party was not constituted to support workers’ indiscipline in their private life” (p. 287). These words appear ironical in view of the lecherous designs and attitude of Comrade Pillai. While he talks of discipline his own private life is far below the level of desirability. His *libido* very often borders on the vulgar. Roy has drawn our attention to this side of his life in his first meeting with Rahel after she returns from Boston after her divorce. She draws rather graphically the double dealings of the leader whose work is to lead the society in right direction but he himself is breaker of social behaviour and a victim of sexual desires. With the character of Pillai Roy has presented the loopholes of communist party in Kerala. M. Dasan rightly remarks:

Almost all the questions that she (Arundhati Roy) raises in the novel, regarding politics, caste, women, environment etc. are still relevant to Kerala though the official communists would find it damaging... Had the communist recognized the caste reality in Indian society while putting communism into practice and had adopted a realistic position, these anti-secular forces wouldn’t have catapulted to the position of the biggest political party in India claiming support of the majority of the untouchables.¹³

Today it is common for leaders to exploit the opportunities. Pillai is not free from it. When Velutha is appointed as the Chief mechanic of the factory all the touchable workers are fearful that in this way he may become their boss. All the touchable workers of the factory meet
Pillai and request him to discharge Velutha from his position. Pillai does not want to lose a number of votes of the touchable workers. So he does not hesitate in dumping Velutha despite his sincere commitment to the cause of the party. If he had taken some political steps in favour of Velutha his life could have been saved. On the contrary, he gives his implicit support to torture Velutha. He advised Chacko—

But see, Comrade, any benefits that you give him (Velutha), naturally others are resenting it. They see it as a partiality. After all, whatever job he does, carpenter or electrician or whatever it is, for them, he is just a Paravan. It is a conditioning they have from birth. This I myself have told them is wrong. But frankly speaking, Comrade, Change is one thing. Acceptance is another. (p. 279)

The socio-political rot that has set in the socio-political life of Kerala is further aggravated by an equally depraved administrative set up which stands represented by the police set up. The police Inspector Thomas Matthew, instead of upholding justice just distorts it at will. He is a merciless perpetrator of administrative atrocities on Velutha who is inhumanly tortured and killed for a crime he has never committed. He is held responsible for the death of Sophie Mol by drowning while everyone knows that she died an accidental death.

The police station has boards claiming service and devotion to the cause of society but in reality the police is an instrument of torture of the innocents which come handy to the evil political bosses who make or mar the lives of the people for their narrow political ends.
The Inspector not only ignores the ends of justice but acts as an agent of evil who does not pay even little courtesy to even woman. Ammu is ill-treated rather brutalized by the Inspector when she goes to find out the condition of Velutha. The police thus is just the opposite of the motto of Politeness, Obedience, Loyalty, Intelligence, Courtesy and Efficiency for which the six letters making the word police are supposed to signify (p. 8).

The novelist by choosing the life-story of an educated Syrian Christian family in Kerala’s Kottayam district depicts the typical problems faced by Indian villages in general. High literacy rate or the acute political consciousness have done little to change the quality of life. Even the England returned Imperial Entomologist’s family carries the age old taboos regarding caste and class distinctions.

Now is the time to say something about the achievement of Arundhati Roy as a novelist. The novel proved to be an instant success as within a few years more than 350000 copies were sold out. That speaks volumes about the control of the novelist over the story which is told in a gripping style. The haphazard, unconventional style with irregular punctuation marks simply presents the essential purpose of the novelist of telling how small things matter much needing a god of their own to set them right.

Nothing proves the efficient handling of the fictional matter or reality better than the controversies which have grown around the novel. *The God of Small Things* touches the political history of post-Independence Kerala when Communism appeared to the politically
aware people of Kerala as the only means of solving the socio-economic and political problems. In this respect the novel seems to support M.K. Naik’s phrase ‘Midnight’ Children’s children: The Novel’ used for “the new fiction” appearing after Salman Rushdie’s seminal work *Midnight’s Children*. Roy’s work like that of Rushdie deals with recent history on a limited scale by confining itself to only Kerala’s socio-political reality. Her presentation of Kerala politics has created a lot of ruckus by critics with C.P.M. leanings. Equally clamorous is its defense by the writers subscribing to the CPI (ML) thinking. The most vocal of the attacker’s party is Aijaz Ahmad who has made a sustained analysis of the novel in his article “Reading Arundhati Roy Politically” and declares that she has “neither a feel for communist politics nor perhaps rudimentary knowledge of it.” He further feels that Roy has fallen a prey to the contemporary fashion of anti-communism. In the same vein are the articles by E.M.S. Namboodripad and his daughter Malathi. The defense is led by Kalpana Wilson who praises the way in which the novel depicts the causes which disillusioned the followers of the CPM resulting into the rise of Naxalism. Roy explains herself that Marxist slogan of class conflict is a hoax and the “only real conflict seem to me to be between women and men.” Like other ‘new’ novels *The God of Small Things* has its own share of charges about obscenity and vulgarity. But now in 2005 these charges lose their sheen because there are bolder writers than Roy. It is in this way that we can dismiss the objections by Anita Desai and Nayantara Sehgal. One interesting objection is by Shobha
De who dismisses the book rather casually calling it "a freak thing that happened" and as "one-trick pony".

However it is better to go by the Booker Prize citation that the "judges had been engrossed by the novel". We may not agree with the handling of reality but we have to admit the brilliance of executions it tells the tale quite clearly.
References

5. As quoted by Pathak, *ibid*.