CHAPTER - 3

Feminist Voices

3.1. Feminism

Feminism is difficult to define because of the many different kinds of feminisms which exist today. This current “-ism” is not a unitary theory. But the main focus of all feminist writers is to reflect concern with the silencing and marginalization of women in a patriarchal culture. Feminists generally believe that our society is essentially structured to meet the male mastery. It is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, linguistic and artistic. Degradation and oppression of women still persist in all societies in different forms and varying degrees.

Feminism is not only a fight for equality and rights of a woman but it is more about compassion, respect and understanding from the male counterparts. There are those who fight for equitable societies while others work for the toppling of male hegemonies. Some feminists encompass all those who are marginalized in their plea for justice. Thus Feminism is in fact a theory that is dialogic in nature and draws on multiple voices. All these voices, with their different value systems, need to be set against one another and the voices of patriarchy, dialogically – “one point of view opposed to another, one evaluation opposed to another, one accent opposed to another” (Bakhtin, DI 314) to get a clearer understanding of women’s exploitation and dissent. In The God of Small Things, feminist ideologies are reflected from the various attitudes of the characters and the subversive elements used in the novel, rather than a monologic say by
the author. The novel is a proof for the fact that feminism is not a unitary theory. In the novel we encounter different voices of feminism, each voicing protest in different modes against established mores.

3.2. Voice of Mammachi – The Pickle Maker and the Violinist

The women in *The God of Small Things* belong to three different generations. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma belong to the first generation, Ammu to the second and Rahel to the third. Mammachi, a talented violinist and an efficient entrepreneur had been a victim to the patriarchal blows of her husband. But her male chauvinist husband forces her to discontinue her violin classes after being informed about his wife’s exceptional talents. She is victimized for her abilities and subjected to constant beatings. In the beginning we find Mammachi suffering this ignominy passively. The role of a docile, submissive and unrelenting housewife assigned to her by the patriarchal society is accepted by her without any objection. The social conditioning of the age has rendered her voiceless.

None the less we find the feminist streak in Mammachi awaken when she moves forward with her pickle business. She ventures into this business after Pappachi retires from Government service. “The Kottayam Bible Society was having a fair and asked Mammachi to make some of her famous banana jam and tender mango pickle. It sold quickly, and Mammachi found that she had more orders than she could cope with. Thrilled with her success, she decides to persist with the pickles and jam and soon finds herself busy all year round” (47). The pickle business is a way in which she avenges her dominating husband who turns mute after her success. When Mammachi becomes successful in her venture, Pappachi finds it intolerable because “he did not consider
pickle-making a suitable job for a high-ranking ex-Government official” (47). His resentment of the same and the mounting pressure makes him weave “sullen circles around mounds of red chillies … watching Mammachi supervise the buying, the weighing, the salting and drying, of limes and tender mangoes. Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase” (47). But this did not stop Mammachi from the pursuit of her business.

When Chacko comes home from Oxford for the summer, he warns his father against beating Mammachi. When physical abuse is curbed, Pappachi resorts to mental torture. As retribution Pappachi stops talking to his wife altogether and buys the Plymouth to spite her. Shazia Sadaf in her essay states that the red of the chillies is an obvious disturbance to the rule of the colour blue of the Plymouth. She says that Pappachi, Baby Kochamma and Margaret Kochamma are the main representatives of the old social order that is under the threat of losing its grip on the local community. Everything about them is blue, symbolized by the skyblue Plymouth. “Ammu, Rahel & Estha, Velutha, and Comrade Pillai represent rebellion and change, with “red flags” (64; 65;71;79;80;81;205) as their predominant insignia” (Sadaf 47). Mammachi shuttles between blue and red. Sadaf states that “Mammachi’s “mounds of red chillies” for pickle-making show the first sparks of a rebellion against Pappachi’s ‘skyblue’ rule” (Sadaf 47).

Mammachi’s red chillies are the objective correlative of her voice of dissent. The economic independence achieved as a result of her pickle making empowers her. Whenever the factory workers demand more incentives, Mammachi handles them with the skill of a true leader. “Tell them to read the papers. There’s a famine on. There are
no jobs. People are starving to death. They should be grateful they have any work at all” (121-22). All important matters related to the factory are brought to the notice of Mammachi and not Chacko even though she is said to have become the “sleeping partner” after Chacko’s arrival. But Mammachi “was the Modalali. She played her part. Her responses, however, harsh, were straightforward and predictable” (122). In spite of all the social limitations of the period and an authoritarian husband Mammachi establishes financial stability with the skill of a true entrepreneur and is addressed as the “Modalali” (boss). Simone de Beauvoir says “To show your true ability is always, in a sense, to surpass the limits of your ability, to go a little beyond them: to dare, to seek, to invent; it is at such a moment that new talents are revealed, discovered, and realized” (Femita). Mammachi’s social milieu forces her to be tied to an exploitative male counterpart, even if she is capable of making an independent living. The Indian tradition demands that a woman needs protection, not just financial support, at all stages of her life. During her childhood, she is protected by her parents; after marriage by her husband and in old age by her sons. Colette Dowling affirms: “It has to do with dependency, the need to lean on someone. Those needs stay with us into adulthood…. Any woman who looks within knows that she was never trained to feel comfortable with the idea of taking care of herself, standing up for herself, asserting herself” (Dowling 13). But Aïda Balvannanadhan feels conversely when she reiterates that in the novel it is the male characters that at various levels are more dependent on the female characters. She feels that with the exception of Velutha all the other main characters have “more needs, demands and requests than they have things to offer” (Balvannanadhan 43).
All the same, Mammachi is able to rise above the patriarchal restrictions and create a space of her own, but Mammachi’s feminist traits are limited to her entrepreneurial skills and pickle making. Her patriarchal instincts, too, are obvious and outshine her feminist voice as mentioned earlier by Shaziya Sadaf who feels that Mammachi oscillates between the colour zones of blue and red. She is a patriarch and a feminist at the same time. She imposes double-standards in her treatment of her children. Mammachi treats Ammu as an outcaste for her liaison with Velutha where as she looks up to Chacko, he being the only male support after her husband’s death, and tolerates his “libertine relationships” with the factory women and justifies it as “men’s needs”. She has a separate entrance built for Chacko’s room “so that the objects of his ‘Needs’ wouldn’t have to go traipsing through the house” (169). The discrimination accorded is even extended to the way she cared for her grand children. Chacko’s daughter, Sophie Mol is always privileged over Ammu’s twins.

3.3. Voice of Ammu –The Suicide Bomber and the Tender Mother

Ammu is another victim of the patriarchal society. Her predicament is worse than Mammachi’s. She is subjected to patriarchal blows right from childhood. She grows up under the shadow of a male chauvinist father who shows no mercy in his tyrannical attitude towards his wife and daughter. She faces gender bias at every stage of her life. Ammu’s plight unmask the double standards of morality in the society accorded to men and women. While her brother Chacko is sent to be educated at Oxford, educating Ammu is considered an unnecessary expense. Ammu’s marriage too is deemed a burden because of the dowry system prevalent in her society. To escape from the clutches of her father’s oppression, she accepts the proposal of a Bengali clerk
while she was holidaying at an Aunt’s place in Calcutta. This is Ammu’s first step towards transgression of established conventions. Her indulgence in an inter-caste marriage is an act of dissidence, especially so in the sixties. But tragically her act of defiance is like jumping from the frying pan into the fire and she is caught in the stranglehold of domestic violence. Her husband turns out to be a drunkard, wife-beater and a liar who wants to trade his wife to his English boss in order to secure his job. He tries to convince his wife by saying that “in the long run it was a proposition that would benefit both of them …. In fact all of them, if they considered the children’s education” (41).

Not succumbing to the indecent proposal, Ammu walks out on her husband and returns to Ayemenem, with her twins Estha and Rahel “to everything that she had fled from only a few years ago, except that now she had two young children and no more dreams” (42). Unlike Mammachi we do not find Ammu suffering her husband’s abuse passively. She is seen to hit him back and question his atrocities. Ammu would take “the heaviest book she could find in the book shelf - The Reader’s Digest World Atlas – and hit him with it as hard as she could. On his head. His legs. His back and shoulders” (42) whereas Mammachi’s passivity is apparent when Ammu remarks on Pappachi’s death that “Mammachi was crying more because she was used to him than because she loved him … was used to being beaten from time to time” (50).

After her return to Ayemenem, her unwelcome homecoming can be best described in Baby Kochamma’s words who believed that “a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a divorced daughter…she had no position anywhere at all. 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” (45).

Baby Kochamma, in fact, echoes the sentiments of the whole rule-bound patriarchal society of the times. Ammu is alienated amongst her own family members. She has no choice except endless suffering. She is a divorcee from a love marriage and has to bear the brunt of it. While Ammu has no “Locusts Stand I” (locus standi) (33), her brother, also a divorcee from a love marriage enjoys all the benefits of the family property and full sexual freedom. Her brother Chacko’s words “what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine” (57) reverberate clearly the patriarchal atrocities that prevail in the society. His patriarchal voice is a pointer to the existing dominant social voice of the time. When we deal with gender issues, the relevant culture should also be taken into account because gender itself is a cultural construct. This kind of stigmatization of a divorcee may not be found in western societies and therefore the kind of protest displayed by Ammu is also alien to the western minds. Life does not ‘end’ for a woman from the first word after divorce. The case of Margaret Kochamma, Ammu’s divorced sister-in-law is proof of this. Thus woman’s subjugation in a plural country as India is to be analyzed in the context of gender politics of the particular religion or region.

Societal seclusion and discrimination force Ammu to turn a rebel in her chosen way and she is drawn to the lower caste Paravan, Velutha, breaking all norms and customs. She breaks the love-laws set by the society “who should be loved, and how.
And how much” (33). The feminist streak in her motivates her impulses and she enters into a sexual relationship with Velutha unmindful of the consequences.

By crossing the dictates of her caste and class to embrace Velutha, Ammu dares to break the shackles imposed on her by the male-dominated society. Brinda Bose is very emphatic and to the point when she states that “In asserting her own ‘biological’ desire for a man who inhabits a space beyond the permissible boundaries of ‘touchablilty’, 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 the sexual act” (Bose 164). It can be ironically noted that the very name Velutha is a probably a deliberate choice by Roy and not merely coincidental. Velutha means white in Malayalam and in this context, can be attributed to the “white male” whom the First World feminists claim to be the torch-bearers of patriarchy. In this background Ammu’s initiation can be seen as an attempt to overpower or subvert the “white male” leading to reversal of role and rule.

Her decision to cross the boundaries of established norms and mores is but natural. She develops a sense of injustice and a reckless streak that develops in “Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big” (181-182). The shift from the singular to the plural “their” indicates the movement from the particular to the general. Ammu’s torturous life through childhood into adulthood has left bitter marks on her psyche and this is precisely what gives Ammu that “Unsafe Edge”. Usha Jesudasan rightly says: “A person who is suppressed feels humiliation at being treated in a demeaning way. They experience deep pain and anger towards the perpetrator and at
some point, will revolt, usually with twice as much of violence than the one who
suppressed them.”

Long years of torture and injustice have left Ammu with a rebellious streak, but
this is also coupled with the power of love that a woman imbibes after the birth of her
children. These conflicting voices are “what she had battling inside her. As an
unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide
bomber. It was this that grew inside her, to love by night the man her children loved by
day” (44). Ammu’s affection for Velutha is not driven merely by her eroticism but rather
the ‘common anger’ they shared. Ammu hoped and knew that Velutha “housed a living,
breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against” (176). Ammu
was aware of the anti-caste sentiments that Velutha fostered. She found it analogous to
her own politics against the world of Big Things. It is not merely physical desire that
propels Ammu towards Velutha but rather the commonality of their subjugated status.

Ammu’s vengeance is directed not just against her father and husband but the
whole nexus of patriarchal oppression, her father who stifles her childhood; her husband
who subjects her to physical and mental torture, Mr.Hollick who questions her sense of
morality; Inspector Thomas Mathew who calls her a veshya (prostitute) for speaking out
the truth; her own brother who snatches away her locus standi; her own mother who
renders her a step motherly treatment and Baby Kochamma who deems her fit for total
social ostracism.

Aijaz Ahmed, the famous Marxist critic while acknowledging that “The
intermeshing of caste and sexuality is indeed the ideological centre of the book,” has
condemned Ammu’s defiance as a mere personal act of transgression impelled by her
libidinal drive (Ahmed 35) while he does not comment much on the same offence committed by Velutha, implying it to be a more politically committed act. It is of great relevance to note that the perpetrators of injustice in the case of Velutha are totally external where as in Ammu’s case the agents of torment are both internal and external. Patriarchy operates at diverse levels. Ammu’s act of defiance is thus against all these centripetal forces that has suppressed her physical and mental being, unlike Velutha’s who is only a victim of the caste conscious society. Ammu’s struggle is not just personal but can be extended to the oppression faced by women folk at different levels, different periods and different time zones. Moreover, Hélène Cixous, the world renowned French critic states that a woman’s “libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think” (882). In the same page Cixous articulates that “In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history.”

The above statement negates Aijaz Ahmed’s comment that “If Ammu were to live on, she would have to face the fact that the erotic is very rarely a sufficient mode for overcoming real social oppressions; one has to make some other, more complex choices in which the erotic may be an element but hardly the only one” (39). Moreover, in Ammu’s case, what the critic fails to note is that Ammu belonged to an era and milieu that totally subjugated the woman. Women who received education were only a few. Ammu is denied education and wealth, the two key factors that would have helped her empowerment. Moreover, she is left with no roof over head. Arundhati Roy’s own mother Mary Roy who belonged to the same period could mark a social change of sorts because she was backed by her education. She too is a Syrian Christian and a divorcee
like Ammu. She is known in Kerala for challenging and subverting the Syrian-Christian succession laws that limited the amount a daughter could inherit to a quarter of the amount a son could inherit. Mary Roy won the legal battle in 1986 but Ammu who belongs to the same era is a victim of similar patriarchal laws and consequently has to face poor legal status or *locus standi* as a Syrian Christian due to her lack of education.

The only choice Ammu is left with is her own body. Dishonour and disgrace is something that her family fears and despises and Ammu strikes at the root of this dread by making her own body the site of protest. Through her act Ammu has “defiled generations of breeding (The Little Blessed One, blessed personally by the Patriarch of Antioch, an Imperial Entomologist, a Rhodes Scholar from Oxford) and brought the family to its knees” (258). The vengeance is directed not only at her family but also towards all the forces of patriarchy. In one of her interviews Roy makes a sarcastic dig at the Syrian Christian community when she says that they consider themselves as “the salt of the earth. Even within the Church, there are sub-sects. They don’t even marry between themselves” (qtd. In Ch’ien 161). So Ammu’s transgression is definitely an attempt to break these social barriers and is not just driven out of eroticism. The negative social ripples aroused by Roy’s representation of the sexual act can be gauged from the reaction of a lawyer, Sabu Thomas, who even filed a public interest petition against Arundhati Roy for the very description of the sexual acts in the novel which he felt would corrupt the minds of the readers.

When Mr. Hollick desires Ammu’s body, her body turns out to be a gendered sign of desire and disgrace. Had Ammu been guided by eroticism she could have succumbed to Hollick’s advances and could have aspired for a financially stable life.
Rather, she uses the very body as a weapon to transgress the laws laid down by the lop-sided society. In spite of her limitations, Ammu does dare to question the pseudo values prevalent in her society. Unfortunately her attempts are thwarted. She may have been destroyed by the organized patriarchal society, but not defeated in any psychological sense and is successful in bringing to focus the problem of discrimination. When Ammu makes a bold attempt to prove Velutha’s innocence at the police station, Inspector Thomas Mathew foils her courage by calling her a prostitute and refuses to take her statement. Baby Kochamma, too, never anticipates that Ammu would publicly admit before the police her relationship with Velutha. This results in Ammu’s final banishment from her house and is thrust into the outside world without money, without education.

Velutha on the other hand considers Ammu as “Just another one of them” (214) where ‘them’ refers to the enemies of his red politics, the bourgeois and is least interested in an upward mobile relationship. We find that his heart wins over his head and is irresistibly drawn towards Ammu. It is Velutha’s love and attraction towards Ammu that should be taken as a personal act and definitely does not fall into the natural ‘scheme of things’ as Aijaz Ahmed claims (39).

However, Ammu’s act courts antagonism. She is locked in a room for thwarting the dictates of her tradition and culture. We find Ammu incoherent with rage and disbelief at the turn of events in her life, - “at being locked away like the family lunatic in a medieval household” (252). This kind of claustrophobic seclusion provokes her sanity to the extent that she even reprimands her vulnerable kids by calling them the ‘millstones around her neck’ (253). The image of the confined Ammu reminds us of the prototype of the “mad woman in the attic” introduced by Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre.
and adopted by feminists Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as the title of their book. She is confined not only within the four walls of her room but also within social constructs that restrict the mobility of the Indian woman. Ammu’s enclosure thus, suggests a double-voiced discourse hinting at both first world feminism and the third world feminism.

Thus, Ammu, who is cast out for transgressing the love laws has to embrace death at the “viable-die able age” of thirty three. Chacko’s patriarchal voice “‘Get out of my house before I break every bone in your, body!’ ‘My house, my pineapples my pickle’” (225) emphasises Ammu’s crushed “Locusts Stand I”. It is interesting to note how the imperative voice of Chacko is within quotations while the utterance that follows is devoid of quotations. The italicizations of the possessive pronouns mark emphasis and Chacko’s chauvinistic stance. The avoidance of quotation marks indicates a refracted voice entering into a dialogue and making a scathing mimicry of male dominance. The absence of quotations blurs the distinctions between narrator and character situations; and fictive world and real world situations. In the alternation between these orientations, one voice comments on the other.

Ammu’s act of transgression cautions the patriarchal society that marginalizes women to be wary of the fact that women when subjected to humiliation and suffering have the power to transgress and break laws, destroying the hypocrisy and void in the cultural taboos. Though Ammu’s action is suicidal it is more like that of a suicide bomber, in addition to self destruction, it also shatters the cultural mores established by the patriarchal families. This is evident in the mental agony experienced by Chacko and Baby Kochamma who have “grown soft with sorrow, slumped in their bereavement like
a pair of drunks in toddy bar” (15) after their family reputation is tarnished by Ammu’s potentially taboo-breaking force. Alex Tickell in his book *Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things* states that the “taboo-breaking force of Ammu’s sexuality is reminiscent of powerful Hindu goddesses, such as the destroyer goddess like Kali, incarnation of divine energy or *shakti*, who were mobilized as political symbols in the early nationalist movement and who have since been reappropriated by Hindu feminists” (Tickell 39).

Ammu, a representative of the 1960s has seen the dawn of the emancipation of women in India. It was an age of chaos and confusion for the Indian women as she wanted to break free from the shackles that bound her from asserting her individuality and the society that scorned at those who did. Ammu’s feminist voice is more akin to liberal feminism. She realizes the need for education in empowering a woman. When she gives Estha the false hope of bringing him back from his father after taking up a job at the Embassy, Ammu at the back of her head knows that her lack of education will stand in her way of getting a good job.

### 3.4. Voice of Rahel

Ammu’s daughter Rahel is also seen to exhibit the rebellious streak of impulsiveness. At the young age of eleven, she is blacklisted at Nazreth Convent where she studied. This trend continues into her other schools. Once she is even caught outside her House Mistress’s garden gate decorating a knob of fresh cowdung with small flowers. She is punished the next day and is made to look up the meaning of “*depravity*” and read it aloud in assembly in front of sniggering school girls and stern-mouthed nuns (16). Once she is expelled for six months for colliding with her seniors to find out if breasts hurt. She is expelled from school on two other occasions as well, once for
smoking and the other for setting her Housemistress’s artificial hair-bun on fire. This kind of defiance is exhibited by her, probably, because of her dysfunctional family background and the unjust social set up in which she is brought up. A witness to the injustices meted out to Velutha and her mother, Rahel exhibits her ire by her unruliness. Moreover the discrimination meted out to her by her own grandmother and uncle worsens her tolerance levels.

The grown up Rahel is an icon of the post-modern era where the urban women have achieved liberation to an extent but are still in search of a cultural identity. She does her higher education in a mediocre college of architecture in Delhi from where she moves to America. Rahel being the main focalizer, in a way is the refracted voice of the author. Even the physical appearance bears semblance to Roy - the jeans and T-shirt, her wild hair, the tiny diamond on her nose and her ‘absurdly beautiful collarbones’ (18). Roy too is said to have had a bohemian lifestyle. Thus it can be said that her concept of feminism seems to reflect that of the author. Roy, in one of her interviews talks about the modern women who fight a dual war – “one against their community’s traditions” and another “against the kind of modernity that is being imposed by the global economy…. They decide what they want from their own tradition and what they will take from modernity” (The Chequebook 125-126).

Rahel’s marriage and divorce to a foreigner, Larry McCaslin is rendered in a very casual manner. Even though her way of dressing and outlook is that of modernity, she is not totally divorced from tradition as is indicated by her interest in Kathakali. Her antipathy towards the effects of globalization is neatly elicited in the novel. The cultural insurgence brought in by satellite TV in the form of blondes, wars, football, sex, music,
The Bold and the Beautiful and Santa Barbara and WWF Wrestling Mania (27-28) into the lives of Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria are neatly enlisted by her. Paul Jay, the author of *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* says that the worst fears of globalization’s critics are telescoped into the above passage (100). These two ladies who had been once actively engaged in domestic chores and gardening are now obsessed with the electronic world of global television. The satire directed at the renovation of the History House and its conversion to a five-star hotel to attract foreigners is another example. Moreover, the references to the “truncated Kathakali” dances, effects of urbanization and gulf-money are also a pointer to Rahel’s cultural ethos. Of the twins, Rahel is the one who has a voice as compared to the muted Estha who occupies “very little space in the world” (11).

3.5. Marriage and Divorce

Roy also highlights the differences among these three generations of women in their attitudes towards marriage and divorce. Mammachi and her husband, Pappachi were far from compatible, but the idea of divorce was alien to their lives. Ammu frees herself from her spineless husband, but realizes that she has to lead a man-less life and bear the taunts of the society for the rest of her life. When she is separated from her husband, she is twenty-seven, and in the pit of her stomach she carries “the cold knowledge that for her, life had been lived. She had one chance. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man” (38). Rahel who belongs to the third generation is divorced from her husband for no ostensible reason and she is least embarrassed talking about it. When Comrade Pillai enquires her about her marital status, she dispassionately replies, “We’re divorced.’ ” (130). Comrade Pillai who belongs to the earlier
generation, with obvious shock responds with the question “‘Die-vorced?’”(130), as if it was a form of death, reminding one of Ammu’s predicament. Rahel’s marriage too is discussed in a very detached tone. She states that “Rahel drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge” (18). There is no sense of holiness or halo attached to the traditional conventions of marriages reflected here. Rahel is thus a radical feminist with western ethos.

All these women are sufferers in the drama of life and are victims of oppression in their own right. Rahel has seen her mother being subjected to injustice. She herself had been deprived of a wholesome childhood and never received the love that she expected from her Uncle Chacko whom she looked up to as a father figure. The incompatibility in the marriages and the problems with male aggression, in fact, can be traced to the time of Rahel’s great-grandmother. This fact is satirically evoked in the pictures that emphasize the theme of feminist polyphony. Rahel and Estha’s great-grandparents’ oil portraits hung on either side of the stuffed, mounted bison-head are suggestive of female subjectivity. While Reverend Ipe smiles confidently, Aleyoootty Ammachi looks hesitant, “As though she would have liked to turn around but couldn’t….Her eyes looked in the direction that her husband looked. With her heart she looked away” (30). The portrait serves as a Janus like figure reflecting the inherent voices of patriarchy and feminism. Another photograph of the twins’ grandparents, Pappachi and Mammachi, is seen to lend “an underlying chill to the warm room” in which it is hung. Pappachi’s maleficent eyes betray his intentions and reflect how “he was making an effort to be civil to the photographer while plotting to murder his wife” (51). The social structure of an Indian woman is full of ups and downs, ifs and buts. But
each one raises a banner of revolt against the male-dominated, patriarchal society in her own possible ways.

3.6. Music as a Feminist Voice

A common metaphor of empowerment that binds Mammachi and Ammu is their affinity for music, Mammachi with her violin and Ammu by listening to the music on her tangerine radio. Music is a source of strength and freedom for these women. It is said that “when Ammu listened to songs that she loved on the radio, something stirred inside her. A liquid ache spread under her skin, and she walked out to the world like a witch to a better, happier place…. there was something restless and untamed about her. As though she had temporarily set aside the morality of motherhood and divorceehood” (44). Others were wary of Ammu on the days the radio played Ammu’s songs and sensed that she strode the “penumbral shadows between the two worlds, just beyond the grasp of their power” (44). Ammu’s entry into the male dominated world of rule-making and rule breaking is feared by the others. Ammu embodies both the “angel” and the “mad woman”. The dichotomy which marks the patriarchal classification of women is unified in Ammu. This again is a rejection of the male writers’ “tendencies to categorize female characters as either pure, angelic women, or rebellious, unkempt madwomen” as claimed by Gubar and Gilbert (Wikipedia).

Patriarchal culture stereotyped women’s roles and conditioned their behavioural patterns and any attempt to cross the paradigm was branded as mad or whorish. Virginia Woolf in her famous essay Professions of Women talks about how patriarchy tries to stereotype women as immensely charming, intensely sympathetic and utterly unselfish. It is to be noted that it is this ‘phantom,’ the pressures thrust on women by the male
dominated society that push them to the borders of insanity. Ammu too fears this polarization. She realizes her advancement towards lunacy in a private moment in the bathroom where she laughs at the thought of herself walking naked around Ayemenem with an array of toothbrushes sticking out from either cheek of her bottom. She sees “a wisp of madness escape from its bottle and caper triumphantly around the bathroom” (223). Ammu who worries about madness, is compelled to maintain a balance between her motherly tenderness and her ‘reckless streak’ by listening to the dictates of her mind and body. She does so by getting closer to Velutha. She loves him passionately and at the same time breaks the taboos imposed on her by the caste conscious, patriarchal society. Her impulses are motivated by the “cheap coincidence” of the song she hears on the transistor, “Lose your dreams and you / Will lose your mind” (331). The songs incorporated in the novel, in fact effects a polyphony of the theme of transgression. The Malayalam song from the movie Chemmeen, “Pandoru mukkuvan muthinu poyi” (219-220) which Ammu enjoys during her wild moods also augments this idea. The song reminds one of the tragic end met by the main characters of the movie, Parikutty and Karuthamma. This also functions as a premonition to the fateful deaths of Ammu and Velutha.

Music, in a way, is shown to be a source of empowerment and emancipation for both these women and the breaking of the violin and the piano keys by the members of the ‘First sex’ is emblematic of their respective suppression. Mammachi’s violin is smashed by Pappachi and Rahel has recurrent dreams of her Uncle Chacko snapping piano keys, a metaphoric image of Ammu’s bones being broken - “A pianist killing the
piano” (225). This kind of “spiteful destruction of female creativity” is looked upon as an outcome of “male unproductivity” by Aïda Balvannanadhan (43).

The origin of the word “music” can be traced back to the “muses”. “Muses” in Greek mythology, poetry, and literature refer to the goddesses who inspire the creation of literature and the arts” (Muse). “The word music comes from the Greek mousikē (tekhnē) by way of the Latin musica. It is ultimately derived from mousa, the Greek word for muse” (Definition of music). In ancient Greece, the word mousike was used to mean any of the arts or sciences governed by the Muses. So the connection to music and women is obvious and the stifling of their creative faculties sets forth a kind of discord in their lives. Even Rahel is described as a “jazz tune” (18) by Larry McCaslin. It is, thus, evident that music is one of the forces that guide the dynamics of Roy’s text. The poetic and rhythmic quality of her text is an outcome of her essential feminine sensibility. Music permeates Roy’s text throughout and there is no doubt that The God of Small Things is “alive with the sound of music.”

Music plays a great relevance in the novel in highlighting the theme of polyphony. The novel is replete with songs of all genres – English songs (from The Sound of Music and some other examples already cited); Malayalam songs (from Chemmeen); folk songs (Paraparaparaparaperakka); boat songs: Enda da Kurangacha, chandi itra thenjathu, Theyome/Thitome/Tarkak/Thithotme/(196-197)); rhymes both Malayalam and English Kooku kooku teevandi (285); lines form Lochinvar, Rumplestiltskin (182), Scarlet Pimpernel (182) cartoon songs - Popeye, the Sailor Man Dum Dum (98), funeral songs, prayer songs (Rej-Oi-ce in the Lo-Ord) echo loud and clear from the pages of The God of Small Things. The oscillation is not only between
two languages, but different music genres that include the sublime and the grotesque. The voices of the so-called high and low are levelled through the power of music. The multiplicity of voices exhibited by way of music only highlights the theme of the thesis and emphasizes the connection of the word ‘polyphony’ to music.

It is no wonder that Roy says that fiction dances out of her. She states: “writing fiction-shard or otherwise-is a delight. Like dancing…” (Outlook). It is obvious that dance is present only where there is music. Thus, it is evident that her thoughts and emotions are nothing but music and when translated into words, the outcome is the novel. Regarding Velutha and Ammu’s sexual liaison Roy states, “Biology designed the dance” (335). No choreography can be designed without music. Therefore music can be equated to the natural urges and emotions that show physical manifestation in man’s actions. The words are thus arranged in an ambiance of music and the narrative itself dances to the tune of the language and the musical bits present. Music is thus seen as a source of empowerment and solace for the author as well and it forms an integral part of the text.

3.7. Écriture féminine

3.7.1 The subversive text

Music, words and the body combine to produce Roy’s unique text. “Unique” because this text in itself enables multiple voices as it incorporates various styles and genres. This voice is dissident and is facilitated by her iconoclastic language which is subversive and aspires to transcend the barriers of communication by deconstructing the very concept of communication. The established patterns of using signifiers and signified are distorted to imbue new meanings. Roy says: “Little events, ordinary things,
smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story” (33). The language is re-structured to accommodate more feelings, depth and content into the novel.

Roy’s subversive and musical text forms the next voice of feminism. This kind of feminist writing practice can be classified under what French feminists term écriture féminine. French feminists like Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray feel that the present language is inadequate to record a woman’s experience and thus need constant modifying. Moreover they believe that in order to resist intrinsic male dominance of culture and literature, women have to find their own linguistic space.

This type of writing is seen by Cixous in an entirely positive light, as being revolutionary. Cixous believes that in place of the repressive past, women will, through their writing, “foresee the unforeseeable” (875), uncover the feminine future, for which her work “The Laugh of the Medusa” serves as both a model and an invocation. However, Cixous does not impose any specific guidelines for this kind of writing as it becomes akin to the restricting rules of the male rule-bound language. In “The Laugh of the Medusa” she articulates the impossibility of pinning down a definition of a feminine practice of writing. She states: “this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded - which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; … It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatism, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate” (883).

It thus follows that écriture féminine is any form of writing that dares to experiment and break away from traditions. It is also to be noted that nowhere does
Cixous prescribe this kind of writing only for women. It is accessible to both men and
women alike. In fact the writings of modernists like James Joyce and Lawrence are
considered to follow this trend that uses a flexible and free-flowing language. Thus it is
not the “empirical sex of the author that matters but the kind of writing at stake” (Moi
106).

Since écriture féminine escapes any conclusive definition, we can also assume
that any kind of experimental writing that offers a flexible linguistic space falls into this
sphere. In contrast to the phallocentric, rule-bound language, écriture féminine is any
language that is fluidly organized and freely associative. Thus, it has the capacity to both
reflect and create human experience beyond the control of patriarchy (Tyson 92).

Viewed from these angles, there is no doubt that Roy’s transgressive text is what Cixous
speaks of. To borrow Lisa Gasbarrone’s words it is “rousing, irreverent, joyous,
disturbing, and willfully inconsistent” like “The Laugh of the Medusa” (Gasbarrone 3).
Throughout Roy’s novel, we find that there is an inimitable experimentation with words,
images and syntax that defies definitions and limitations.

It is interesting to note that the Feminist project of écriture féminine and the
literary practices of Bakhtin find a common foundation in that both seek to topple male
hegemonic practices. The parallel is also evident in the reluctance to subscribe to a
single monologic exercise. The phallogocentric order, the ‘millennial arid ground’
(Cixous 875) which Cixous seeks to break, is akin to Bakthin’s world of the epic. Both
are types of what Bakhtin would call monologic discourse, grounded in patriarchal
myth, deaf to other voices and discourses, and overturned only through transgression of
the linguistic and literary laws that govern them as illustrated by Roy’s subversive text.
Roy’s text reflects flexibility at all levels. Her experimentation with the language is evident at phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic levels. The defiance of the rules of grammar is only an extension of the disruptive acts by Velutha and Ammu. She also effects modifications in spellings and makes use of emphatic capitalizations and italicizations to enhance the meanings of the text. Roy is also generous in her use of ‘incomplete sentences’. Sometimes it is only noun phrases without the compulsory ‘verb’. She attempts to shatter completely the grammaticalised monotonous masculine language and asserts her essence through a more volatile, fluid and disjointed language. Women’s fragmented existence as exemplified by the lives of Ammu and Mammachi is reflected in her absolutely fragmented language which does not always pursue an ordered flow of thought and enriches itself by multiple meanings in innumerable expressions, reflecting the survival of the many within one single physical entity, a true offshoot of polyphony. This is supplemented by the multiple genres that she employs.

The fragmented sentences lend a distinctive poetic quality to her text. Alliterations, rhyme, rhythm and refrains are all signs of the musical quality of her text. Alex Tickell rightly asserts that “Roy’s novel often tests the limits of prose; it frequently resembles blank verse, lingering, like an imagist poem or haiku, an isolated detail or emotional state” (7). The text abounds in such semi-sentences as illustrated by the many examples that follow:

A tail, a tank, a wing.

A wounded Machine.

Melted Chocolates. Cigarette Sweets.

Orangedrinks.
Lemondrinks.

CocaColaFantaicecreamrosemilk.


Hollow plastic parakeets full of sweets with heads you could unscrew.

Yellow-rimmed red sunglasses.

Toy watches with the time painted on them.

A cartful of defective toothbrushes.

The Cochin Harbour Terminus. (301)

The above snippet is a description of the worldly possessions of the children and it reads like poetry. Roy is able to unreel an array of images by these short sentences. She has done away with the traditional system of punctuations and each line functions as a sentence and by doing so the images become magnified and foregrounded. By the avoidance of the conventional commas, Roy is able to accentuate the world of the twins, a world isolated from the world of guilt-ridden realities. But this world is not very far from past reality. Here, in the seemingly playful sentences Roy juxtaposes the world of innocence with that of experience. The deliberate reference to Orangedrinks and Lemondrinks along with the list of children’s toys evokes in the minds of the readers the gory incident at Abhilash Talkies where Estha is abused by the paedophile, soft drink seller. The text abounds in such “conventionally incomplete” and one word sentences or to borrow Roy’s words, we find ‘the words reluctant to be in sentences” (196). To cite another example:

With the long iron stirrer, Estha stirred the thick, fresh Jam.

The dying froth made dying frothly shapes.
A crow with a crushed wing.

A clenched chicken’s claw.

A Nowl (not Ousa) mired in sickly jam.

A sadly swirl.

And nobody to help. (194)

These isolated sentences emphasize Estha’s loneliness and alienation from the adult world. Estha’s confusion and helplessness is highlighted by the syntactic aberrations which can be again compared to the distorted bird-images of the child’s fancy. The word “frothly” is a new coinage. Such usages help her make succinct statements- a mark of ‘écriture féminine. The linguistic units in Roy’s text defy the traditional definitions of a sentence, as the only medium that conveys complete sense. It is more akin to ‘utterances’. Roger Fowler explains; “‘Sentence’ encourages a syntactic perspective; ‘utterance’ treats a section of speech or writing as a mere piece of language-any stretch of language between pauses; it carries no implications of structure” (Fowler 98). It is freer, more comprehensive and emphatic.

Such usages also mark ‘ellipses’ which mean the omission of a word or phrase necessary for a complete syntactical construction but not necessary for understanding. Ellipses are an artistic and arresting means of securing economy of expression. The above examples mark ellipses of various kinds and such ellipses are used to bring the conversational fluency in the written language. This enables a better communication of meanings as it also affects the tone. Moreover, the omitted words can be supplemented by the readers and this gives scope for multiple interpretations and thus multiple voices.
Roy’s sentences are unspooled as her thoughts are decoded and thus lack a specific pattern. The fragmented narrative also voices the fragmented childhood of the twins. Her use of short sentences, use of metaphors alluding to smallness and her emphasis on solitary, pregnant words are all the devices she uses to highlight her vision and the theme of the novel. For Roy, language is that device that shapes the flow of her thoughts in a kind of stream of consciousness mode. One thinks in non-sentences and Roy claims her language to be “the skin of her thought” (Abraham 91).

In fact Bakhtin considered language, and especially the language of the novel as inherently dialogic as it is constantly characterized by the constant play of different discourses. Poetry and prose invariably interact in Roy’s fiction to enhance the multiplicity of voices. This kind of oscillation can also be taken as a mark of écriture féminine as well. Thus it can be said that écriture féminine is very much a polyphonic exercise enabled by the dialogism between various styles and genres. The idea of fragmentation itself incorporates various voices as illustrated.

Another hallmark of Roy’s text is that she uses single-word sentences and paragraphs to emphasize a point. By doing so she breaks established patterns to imbue more meaning. Roy lashes out at “human nature’s pursuit of ascendancy .Structure .Order. Complete monopoly” (309). Stylistically these short sentences which are limited to single words demonstrate Roy’s ire for the existing social order which need to be broken and reordered. Her stylistic somersaults vary:

On Rahel’s heart Pappachi’s moth snapped open its sombre wings.

Out.

In.

And lifted its legs.
The above passage is a fine example of visual imagery and explains Rahel’s dread and panic at the dawn of the realization of Sophie Mol’s drowning. The moth as an image of fear and torment is recurrently used in the novel. Here the one-word sentences are able to evoke the image of the fluttering moth, flapping its wings and acting as an apt metaphor for the torturously pulsating heart of Rahel.

Similarly Velutha, after being spit on the face by Mammachi on the discovery of her daughter’s liaison with him, moves away from the Ayemenem house in a state of shock. His sense of bewilderment makes him robotic and moves forward as if guided by some instruction manual. His thoughts are fixed to mere images. Roy is successful in projecting his tied up mind that is reluctant to escape the shock by using one-word sentences:

“Gate, he thought as he walked out of the gate. Gate. Road. Stones. Sky.
Rain.
Gate.
Road.
Stones.
Sky.
Rain. (284-285)

The words first presented horizontally suddenly take a downward turn changing their status from sentences to paragraphs. Each object he comes across is magnified to the extent that his mind just floats out of his body to hover “high above him in the air,” from where it jabbers useless warnings. The transition from the state of shock to the
state of anagnorisis of the doom that awaits him is succinctly drawn by the author by her stylistic innovations. Chomsky perceived a close relation between the use of language and the innate “properties of the mind and features of linguistic structure; for language, after all, has no existence apart from its mental representation” (Chomsky 81). Sometimes we find Roy’s text breaking into parodies of songs: “Oh Esthapappyhcachen Kuttappen Peter Mon, / Where, oh where have you gon?” (182) and

We seek him here, we seek him there,

Those Frenchies seek him everywhere.

Is he in heaven? Is he in hell?

That demmedel-usive Estha –Pen? (182-183)

Estha takes refuge in the pickle factory to escape from the harsh realities and inequities of the adult world. And paradoxically it is through the child-like innocence of the songs sung by the child focalizers that Roy is able to reduce the gravity of the heart rending incidents. She also makes use of certain refrains as a ploy to lessen the intensity of the highly tragic events. The references to Estha’s hideous encounter with the Orangedrink man is mostly tagged with the refrain “Little Man. He lived in a Cara-van. Dum dum.” (99), (119), (163), (294) and (325). Similarly associations to Sophie Mol’s death follows the refrain “Thimble-drinker./Coffin-carwheeler”(135,141,251). Roy states in one of her interviews that she uses repetitions because they have a rocking feeling, like a lullaby and it helps “reduce the shock of the plot” (Salon). Sometimes the repetitions invoke a kind of eeriness and disgust rather than a lulling effect as seen in the example above. These refrains are also used to keep track of the cyclic narrative structure of the novel and keep the dialogic tension between the various incidents in the novel connected.
and in motion. At times the poetic quality is maintained by the repetition of the first words in the subsequent lines:

Past glass casks of vinegar with corks.
Past shelves of pectin and preservatives.
Past trays of bitter gourd, with knives and coloured finger guards.
Past gunny bags bulging with garlic and small onions.
Past mounds of fresh green peppercorns.
Past a heap of banana peels on the floor (preserved for the pigs’ dinner).
Past the label cupboard full of labels.
Past the glue. …
And back. (193-194)

Such repetitions are found mostly in places where the characters involved are in a state of shock, alienation or dispossession. The passage reflects Estha’s psychological state after the incidence with the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. At times repetitions emphasize the author’s vision:

They lay under the mangosteen tree, where only recently a grey old boat plant with boat flowers and boat fruit had been uprooted by a Mobile Republic. A wasp. A flag. A surprised puff. A Fountain in Love-in Tokyo. The scurrying, hurrying, boatworld was already gone.
The White termites on their way to work.
The White ladybirds on their way home.
The White beetles burrowing away from the light.
The White grasshoppers with white wood violins.
The sad white music.

All gone. (335-336)

The array of insects that had sought shelter in the cozy bed below the boat finds their world suddenly capsized by Rahel and Estha. The relative smallness of their existence is highlighted here. This small habitat that once pulsated with the scurry lives of little insects suddenly dazzle with the whiteness of light. They make way for beings of higher order and thus the “sad white music.” Such expressions are successful in highlighting the predicament of even the smallest creatures as also in the example, “The ants made a crunchy sound as life left them like an elf eating toast or a crisp biscuit” (185). Evelyn Ch’ien deems it as Roy’s ‘moral capacity’ and states that the form of writing allows the smallest and visually dismissed entities to enter our field of vision (156). The recurrence of the word ‘white’ points to the lack of colour associated with the lives of the small, subjugated beings, including ‘Velutha.’

But Roy’s écriture is not without meaning. When Ammu is asked to leave the house and her children, she momentarily loses sense of the world. She finds everything incoherent, fragmented and disconnected, as though “the intelligence that decodes life’s hidden patterns - that connects reflections to images, glints to light, weaves to fabrics, needles to thread, walls to rooms, love to fear to anger to remorse” is suddenly lost” (226). But Roy’s ‘isolated’ sentences and disconnected images are not pointless. They also reflect her attempt to represent the imbalance resulting from man’s ascendancy. The deviations in Roy’s text can be read as a radical literary strategy that defies the society’s ‘monologic’ tendency to control narrative meaning, and the structure of our perception through forms of linguistic order. Sometimes she drifts into elegantly
conceived poetic lines: “Behind them the river pulsed through the darkness, shimmering like wild silk. Yellow bamboos wept./ Night’s elbows rested on the water and watched them” (335), “Coconut trees bent into the river and watched him float by” (333) and “The sun shone with a shuddering sigh” (70).

Roy very poetically describes the twins’ guilt: “There was nowhere to lay it down. It wasn’t theirs to give away. It would have to be held. Carefully and forever” (191). Margaret Kochamma’s unbearable shock on the death of her only daughter Sophie Mol is explained in just one terse expression, “She shattered like glass” (263). Nights with elbows, coconut trees with eyes, the sun that could sigh and guilt that is tactile could only be materialized by the dexterity of a creative writer. By collocating inanimate subjects with animate counterparts, abstract lexical items with concrete ones Roy undoubtedly tries to blur the boundary between prose and poetry. It is the depth of her sensitivity and emotions that generates a new pattern of language. This kind of deviance, arising from a violation of selection restriction rules or collocation rules, is, quite common in poetry and is thus another evidence of the poetic texture of Roy’s fiction.

In yet another example: “Estha saw how Baby Kochamma’s neckmole licked its chops and throbbed with delicious anticipation. *Der-dhoom, Der-dhoom.* It changed colour like a chameleon. Der-green, der-blueblac, der-mustardyellow” (141). Her neckmole is animated and acts as a lizard waiting for its prey. Here sound and sight join together in a synaesthetic projection of the child’s awareness of the adult sadistic pursuits. Like the neckmole, for Bakhtin, a word itself is animated because for him many voices coexist in it in a state of constant play and productive tension. “The word,
directed towards its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value-judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group” (Bakhtin 276). This skill of infusing life into a word is a hallmark of Roy’s writing.

Roy’s *écriture féminine* is exhibited not only in the use short, fragmented sentences, strange collocations and highly evocative metaphors but also the way she brings about morphological deviations, topples words and imposes graphic designs on them as illustrated earlier. Similarly, Sophie Mol’s discovery of the twins escape and her eagerness to join them is accentuated by the fusion of certain words and the sudden splitting of some other lexical items.

Bluegreyblue eyes snapped open.

A Wake

A Live

A Lert (238)

Here we find that the semantic unity, rather than being broken is accentuated and is still maintained even though Roy severs the relationship between the signified and the signifier with the help of the child focalizers. But here the children are mere instruments. It is through their teasing and taunting that Roy materializes her dissent. The refracted voice of the writer is evident. She operates on the so-called man-made language with the ease of a skilled plastic surgeon, providing a new face to the language, more radiant and expressive. Such fragmented words, syntax and associated word play can again be taken as the marks of *écriture féminine*. In this she also resembles Ammu
who is described as having infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber. Hélène Cixous reasons such nuances to the fact that “Women take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down” (887).

A careful study of Roy’s use of words clearly shows that in the novel the words break free from the recognized meanings and try to convey fresh ideas with multiple meanings. The liberty that Roy takes with spellings and sentence patterns also reflects a feminine sensibility that characterizes and at the same time authenticates the discourse. This is what Cixous calls “Flying in language and making it fly” (887). The breaking of form and the consistent breaking of sentences and words are also made to serve in the novel as objective correlative for the fractured sensibility and fragmented world of women as mentioned earlier. In the text, word plays, syntactic experiments and new arrangements become the modes of feminine writing that breaks the strangle hold of masculine rigidified and rule bound language.

In spite of Roy’s ground-breaking language, some reviewers have criticized the novel for ‘the self-indulgence of its style’ (Deveson 1997). Roy’s liberties with language are not nonsensical but there is indeed a method in her madness and this can be again attributed to her poetic license. The text is not the fancy of a whimsical writer toying with words but is a genuine attempt to lend new meanings by restructuring the ‘unbendable’ rules of the traditionalists. Altenbernd and Leslie L.Lewis write: “Ultimately, language is the medium through which literature expresses itself, so that every aspect of fiction … depends upon the author’s word and his way of shaping them
into sentences and paragraphs (73)” They further explain: “The author’s word choice (whether formal or informal. Literal or metaphorical), the sonority or flatness of sentence form and the allusiveness of his diction are all elements of language that help to shape the significance of the story (ibid.).

The meaning of an unfamiliar or incomprehensible word can always be decoded by understanding its essence from the context in which it occurs and by discerning the relevant signification of the other lexical items. The ability of a writer to give new values to words in actual discourse is, of course, one of the principal factors in linguistic change. The marked linguistic oddities are a pointer to a newer, fresher approach to language as opposed to the rigid rules of the traditional grammarians. Roy’s text is definitely her voice. It is interesting to note that she even feminizes the English language when she refers to it as “she” in the preface to the screen play In Which Annie Gives it Those Ones. When Bakhtin allows freedom to the characters in the novel, he never once rejects the author. The author’s voice is only one of the many polyphonic voices and she “acts as an organizer and participant in the dialogue without retaining for himself (herself) the final word” on plot” (Bakhtin, PDP 72). Nor is there a final word on the kind of language used, no prescriptions nor proscriptions.

3.7.2. Voice of the Post-Modern Feminist

Whether it is the short sentences or paragraphs; fragmentation is definitely the main feature of Roy’s écriture. Peter Barry states that “Both the modernist and postmodernist give great prominence to ‘fragmentation’ as a feature of the 20th century art and culture,” (Barry 83-84). In this sense we can claim Roy to be a postmodern feminist. One of the features of postmodern feminism is that it critiques the male/female binary and argues against this binary as the organizing force of society. It also advocates
deconstructionist techniques of blurring boundaries, eliminating dichotomies, and accepting multiple realities rather than searching for a singular “truth.” Roy also speaks about blurring boundaries: “Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons. Short creatures with long shadows, patrolling the Blurry End.”(3) Roy seeks to make these brinks blurry and diminish the binaries that mark patriarchy. It is the “short” creatures that cast “long” shadows in an attempt to blur the boundaries. In Roy’s politics shortness alludes to smallness that seeks to grow and eliminate distances and level altitudes.

In the feminist context Roy advocates a balance between the sexes. She affirms: “In those early amorphous years when memory had just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was For Ever, Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me and separately, individually, as We or Us as though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate but with joint identities” (2). In yet another passage Roy talks of the twins: “On the next bed, his niece and nephew slept with their arms around each other. A hot twin and a cold one. He and She. We and Us” (122). This idea is repeated: “They walked home together. He and She. We and Us” (237). The above examples are hybrid utterances which include the voices of the twins, the society and the author. It reflects how the society views the twins as opposed to how they view themselves. The twins consider themselves as “We and Us while Chacko and Comrade Pillai, respectively, look upon them as separate entities, as “He and She.” Roy’s voice is evinced in the capitalization of the pronouns. The third person singular pronouns “he” and “she” are linguistic elements used usually for general reference and are gender specific pronouns. These are highlighted by Roy through capitalization.
Usually the capitalized pronoun “He” refers to God. But here both “He” and “She” are given equal importance by Roy and they inhabit the earth without the distinctions of binaries. In many places the pronouns He and She and We and Us are seen to augment Roy’s vision of equality and balance between the sexes. The He and She is seen to merge into Us and We. Roy has deliberately chosen the twins Estha and Rahel to be fraternal, one male and the other female.

Binary oppositions need not always be pitted against each other; rather they inherently support the stance of each other by making the one essential without the other. This echoes Cixous’ concept of bisexuality. Cixous dreams of an all encompassing sexuality where the difference as well as similarities should exist simultaneously rather than being monosexual as the case of the angelic mad Ammu. Monosexuality, Cixous feels is a limitation—a limitation which has narrowed down the perspective of men and thereby rendered their knowledge of women incomplete. This is analogous to Bakhtin’s monologism which denies the existence of another consciousness.

Roy considers man and woman as joint identities separated only by physical barriers. The twins serve as a symbol for this equilibrium and equality that supplement and complement each other. Both man and woman are found in an identical condition in the pre-natal state. The fact that Rahel and Estha are fraternal twins signifies that in the womb of time man and woman are one and that the difference between the sexes and its consciousness is purely a patriarchal idea. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman…. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature… which is described as feminine.”
The double endings in the novel mark great significance in the light of de Beauvoir’s famous statement. At one point the novel ends on the alleviating, ‘incestuous’ union of the fraternal twins which is never described explicitly but only suggested. The union of the siblings is compared to “stacked spoons” (328). The image is that of the fusion of the souls because no two human bodies can have such a physical fusion. The relationship between the twins can be traced back to their pre-natal period. “They had known each other before Life Began” (327), in their mother’s womb where there was no discrimination of any sort. The second ending culminates in the sexual union of Velutha and Ammu which is elaborately described. But the author is quick to indicate that in this case the union does not lead to a fusion of the two as he is “stopped only by the shape of her” and she by the “shape of him” (337). Biological barriers set them apart. In the external world, biological differences lead to gender difference, but in the mother’s womb oneness and equality of the two genders are implicit in the image of the stacked spoons.

This oneness is seen to extend into their childhood as well. This is evident when Rahel states the difficulty in writing letters to Estha, “There are things that you can’t do – like writing letters to a part of yourself” (164). There is another instance where we find Rahel, intuitively opening the door for Estha who was waiting outside the hotel room without any indication or knocking from his side. Chacko who is a witness to this incident is used to such strangeness on the twins’ part (119). It is only later, after a separation of twenty three years that we find Rahel thinking of themselves as “them” instead of “we” and “us” “because separately, the two of them are no longer what They were or ever thought They’d be” (3). The society they lived in had dismembered them
and ‘edges, borders and boundaries’ had crept in between the two. Thus the so called incestuous union of Rahel and Estha is an attempt on their part to diminish distances and enter the Golden Age of the womb. It is an attempt to reconstruct and recreate from the memory of the pre-natal past, a kind of re-membering. The yearning for the life of the womb is also apparent when the thirty-three year old Rahel imagines herself cuddling with her twin inside the dish antenna which she visualizes as a womb: “…she and Estha, curled together like foetuses in a shallow steel womb” (188). The desire to be thrust into the womb to be born again is a characteristic feature of Bakhtinian carnivalism as well.

3.7.3. Carnival Voice and Grotesque Realism

Roy’s writing practice, i.e., her écriture féminine produces multiple voices—one it questions gender issues by toying with the rules of man-made grammar, second it seeks an equitable society by blurring boundaries, and third it elicits a kind of carnivalism that questions hegemonies of all sorts. Novelistic discourse for Bakhtin, like féminine écriture for Cixous, attempts to subvert the monologic world of patriarchy thorough various forms of transgression. Clair Wills observes “an analogy between Bakhtinian carnival, hysteria and women’s texts in terms of their capacity to disrupt and remake official public norms” (qtd. in Gasbarrone 4). When viewed from this angle, Roy’s novel, a feminine text that overthrows hierarchies, is definitely inclusive of carnivalism. Like the voices Bakhtin hears in the novel’s carnival, the female voice laughs in the face of authority (Hendl 11). The God of Small Things, thus, proffers a platform for multiplicity of voices which enter into a dialogue sometimes enforcing an idea and sometimes opposing another. This kind of polyphony is seen not only at the level of utterances and genres but also in the employment of various means of
subversion that go under the titles *écriture féminine* and carnivalism. The playful use of language by the child focalizer and the protest against the King’s English is also a characteristic of Bakhtin’s carnivalism. By extension, all elements of carnivalism that work against official culture can be taken to be a mark of *écriture féminine* as well.

Lisa Gasbarrone states about Cixous that, “Playing on the metaphor of womb and text, she invites women to engage in a type of writing —a *féminine écriture* — that would cultivate this ‘locus,’ that would defy the monologue of patriarchy and express, through language, a relationship between self and other that might be called dialogic” (27). Carnivalism or grotesque literature, too, believes in the creative powers of the lower bodily stratum which also includes the womb. The idea that *écriture féminine* springs from the lower body relates it to the field of grotesque literature. There are critics, who believe that comparing *écriture féminine* to a male model of dialogism, again circumscribe it to the limits of a male theory. Roy may not wholly subscribe to this view because her idea of a balanced world invites a kind of dialogue of mutual understanding and balance as stated by the voice of the postmodern feminism. Likewise, her *écriture* includes both the male and female. As Bakhtin would argue, no voice is exclusive and one voice is always influenced by the other, either in agreement or negation. Though Bakhtin never explicitly advocates a gender-oriented language, he certainly supports a subversive one. Thus, Carnivalism provides a platform for the ensuing of a lively dialogue between Bakhtin’s theories and feminist ideologies.

The connection to the womb make the grotesque elements of carnivalism found in *The God of Small Things* one of the tangential voices of feminism. Carnival is an upside down world where rules are transgressed and hierarchies razed. The main
principle of the carnival is to parody official culture. *The God of Small Things* acts as a
carnival square where people of all classes, ages and languages are ridiculed in an
atmosphere of a carnivalized language because carnival is not only the signifier but also
the signified. It can be the subject or the means of representation of the text. The fact
that Roy’s iconoclastic language is carnivalized has already been illustrated. In addition
to this kind of a dissenting language, the grotesque elements too function against official
culture.

To Bakhtin, the grotesque, is the expression in literature of the carnival spirit and
incorporates all those gross realities of non-canonicalism that “jolts us out of our normal
expectations and epistemological complacency” (Clark & Holoquist 312). It is worth
noting that in the introduction of *Rabelais and His World*, the terms carnivalism and
grotesque realism are used interchangeably. Carnivalism or grotesque realism is integral
to *The God of Small Things* because of the presence of that critical voice that mocks and
degrades all forms of authority and control. Carnivalism is mostly voiced through Rahel.
This voice revels in the explicit descriptions of the excremental and the representation of
the lower bodily stratum. Of all the grotesque images, the “grotesque body,” especially
“the very material bodily lower stratum,” illustrates most fully the qualities of grotesque
realism (Bakhtin, *RHW* 62). Roy foregrounds all those entities that have been hitherto
marginalized in classical literature. All those crudities considered indecent and lacking
in official decorum have been brought to the fore in an attempt to subvert hierarchies in
a spirit of carnivalism.

Canonical literature has always sought to conceal grotesque elements like
copulation, pregnancy, birth, death, defecation, vomit, urination, etc. in their material
aspects, in spite of the fact that these are essential elements of human existence. By incorporating all the reek of the human, Roy inverts the classical and the canonical. High and low discourses enter into a dialogue and level hierarchies by “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract” (Bakhtin, *RHW* 19). This is the essential principle of grotesque realism that forms the basis of the voice of carnivalism in Roy’s novel.

In the novel we find the carnival voice blatantly ridiculing the spiritual by deliberately picking on the relationship of the young Baby Kochamma and the intrepid Jesuit, Father Mulligan who are said to be “quaking with unchristian passion. Using the Bible as ruse to be with each other.”(24). Carnival *mesalliances* allow for the unusual combinations like the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low and the great with the insignificant. The very title of the novel is a juxtaposition of the high and the low. The idea of ‘God’ as something larger than life is juxtaposed with the ‘small things’. The word ‘God’ also seems to possess animate qualities as opposed to the inanimate ‘Things’. According to popular Semitic religions God is immaterial (in form) while the image of things is very much material and possesses form. Again, the idea that ‘The God of Small Things’ exists, and the positioning of the definite article “The” points to the fact that ‘The God of Big Things’ also exists. Such blasphemy is suggested elsewhere when Roy highlights the clash between the “Big God who “howled like a hot wind, and demanded obeisance” and the “Small God (cosy and contained, private and limited) that came away cauterized, laughing at his own temerity” (19). It is to be noted that this theory of polytheism goes against the tenets of Christianity; and produces a hybrid brand of religion verging on traditional Christianity and polytheism.
The attempt to subvert religion is not limited here. The priests’ prayers on Sophie Mol’s funeral, “And we commit her body to the ground, /Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust” is deconstructed by Roy through the voice of the child Rahel and becomes “Dus to dus to dus to dus to dus” (7). Moreover this refrain produces the audio resonances of a person’s heart beats, probably Rahel’s visualization of Sophie Mol’s resuscitation and resurrection from the underground. All forms of grotesque realism degrade and bring down to earth the ideal, the respected. Here by deconstructing the priests’ prayer Rahel literally brings to dust, the notions of the heavenly and institutes the profanation of the holy. Rahel’s iteration of ‘dus(t)’ may suggest the futility of existence itself and no hope for salvation.

Roy also revels in the physical and the corporeal, another feature of grotesque realism, in contrast to the Catholic dogma that would suppress the body. The carnival voice of the novel too, ridicules such suppression. This is evident in Rahel’s colliding with senior girls to find out whether breasts hurt. Her logic is “that in Christian institution, breasts were not acknowledged” (16) and if they weren’t supposed to exist, they couldn’t hurt. Roy’s text celebrates the human body with all its crudities and unpleasantness. Breasts, buttocks, genital organs, etc. are represented without any inhibition. Ammu is shown to study her breasts and buttocks to look for signs of aging. She experiments by placing toothbrushes below her breasts and buttocks to check if they could hold them (223). Such digressions to the grotesque, deconstruct the limited view of life projected in canonical literature, and thus betray life itself. Life is beyond any individual perception.
Grotesque humour is also evoked in Roy’s description of Baby Kochamma’s worn down body and her “eccentricity.” Eccentricity according to Bakhtin is “the violation of the usual and the generally accepted, life drawn out of its usual rut” (PDP, 126). Baby Kochamma who had vowed to live the life of a nun is seen to adopt a life of self-indulgence as she ages. Her body is disfigured due to age and is described as “conical.” In spite of her infirmity she is infatuated with wearing makeup and is obsessed with “living her life backwards” (20). Rahel watches her “peel her cucumber. Yellow slivers of cucumber skin flecked her bosom. Her hair, dyed jetblack, was arranged across her scalp like unspooled thread. The dye has stained the skin of her forehead a pale grey, giving her a shadowy second hairline … she had started wearing makeup. Lipstick. Kohl” (21). She is also decked in gold ornaments like a young bride. The false promise of austerity vowed by Baby Kochamma is inverted by her display of a grotesque act.

The caricature-like representation of Baby Kochamma results in her uncrowning, a principle that lies at the base of carnival festivities. Similarly Pappachi’s uncrowning is effected by a mere moth which renders him stifled till his death. Comrade Pillai is uncrowned when his hypocrisy and pseudo values are inverted by his comical representation of his lower bodily stratum – “Comrade Pillai himself came out in the mornings in a greying Aertex vest, his balls silhouetted against his soft white mundu”(14). The Communist flag that fluttered over his printing press too is shown to have grown limp and old with its red bled away, thus augmenting his uncrowned state. The grotesque caricatures of these figures of authority, who normally seek respect in social spheres, are essential to bring about their degradation. Roy feels no inhibition in
representing what is considered unfeminine for a woman. The body with all its crudities, without the slightest romanticism is represented by her.

It is not only the body but bodily matters are also glorified in the novel Grotesque images, however revolting or disgusting, are essential to human beings. All the repulsive essentials of the grotesque body, kept at a safe distance in canonical literature are presented in *The God of Small Things* without any reserve. Classicists kept these to the margins as they believed these basic human necessities lacked aestheticism. But Roy’s text reflects no inhibition in representing the images of bodily essentials like urinating, spitting, coughing, defecating, farting, ejaculating, etc. Vomit, Phlegm, urine, faeces, and semen permeate the novel along with the grand and the sublime.

We find Rahel, sitting inside the Plymouth reflecting on the “row of bald heads at the bus window, above evenly spaced vomit streaks” (60). These streaks of vomit are only a premonition of what is going to happen to Estha at the Abhilash Talkies. In one of the most grotesque passages Roy describes how the seven year old Estha is sexually abused by the Orange drink man. “…Then the gristly-bristly face contorted, and Estha’s hand was wet and hot and sticky. It had egg white on it…The lemon drink was cold and sweet. The penis was soft and shrivelled like an empty leather change purse. With his dirtcoloured rag, he wiped Estha’s other hand” (104).

This incident proves a traumatic experience for the little boy and we find him in a total state of nausea. “His stomach heaved. He had “a greenwavy, thick-watery, lumpy, seaweedey, floaty, bottomless-bottomful feelings” (107) and he feels “the shaming churning heaving turning sickness in his stomach” (113). Even long after the incident, we find Estha holding his “sticky other hand” away from the rest of the body as if
holding an imaginary orange. This episode continues to hover over him and taunt him for many more years and the shock of the event renders him mute. The kind of words that Roy coins and the liberties she takes with punctuations to depict this grotesque act is only a carnival extension of her *écriture féminine*. Nishi Chawla argues that the “grotesque body is not a rigid “langue” but a “parole” in constant semiosis: it is given to excess, and thus to the giganticism and hyperbole of its artistic forms” (345).

Roy’s merit lies in the fact that the grotesque description of the act proves a nauseating experience not only for Estha but also for the readers as well. Many critics have criticized her for the description of ‘Orangedrink Lemondrink Man Episode’ as obscene. Issues related to the sexual abuse of minors are on the increase and is definitely a hideous threat to the healthy fabric of the society. Roy uses grotesque realism as a means of exposing such revolting truths. Truth has two voices for Roy - the beautiful and the ugly.

The abusive and alcoholic husband of Ammu makes a spectacle of himself the night after his routine throw ups. She is repelled by the medicinal smell of stale alcohol that emanates from him and “the dry, caked vomit encrusted his mouth like a pie every morning (42). The masculine vigour he displays during the drunken nights is inverted by his grotesque spectacle in the mornings.

The chapter “Abhilash Talkies” is in fact an assortment of the grotesque. It is not only vomit that marks a grotesque feature here but also the process of micturating, the representation of which was never encouraged in canonical literature. The illustration of urination especially by women is considered least acceptable in conventional literature. In the novel, we find Rahel watching with wonder the act of Baby Kochamma pissing,
balancing a like a huge bird over the pot. “Baby Kochamma waited for half a moment. Head thrust forward. Silly smile. Bosom swinging low. Melons in a blouse. Bottom up and out. When the gurgling, bubbling sound came. She listened with her eyes. A yellow brook burbled through a mountain pass” (95). At the same time Ammu does “hers in a whisper” (96). Rahel on the other hand is raised above the pot by Ammu and Baby Kochamma on either side to have her ‘Soo-soo’ done. The act of the three women urinating is represented in three different ways. The comical and detailed presentation of Baby Kochamma results once again in her uncrowning. While she uses the word ‘pissing’ explicitly to describe the aunt’s act, Ammu’s is only implied. So the caricature of the authoritative Baby Kochamma who never skipped a chance to deride Ammu and her twins is a deliberate attempt to degrade her on Rahel’s part. The grand aunt is shorn of all her prudishness and made up etiquette in this scene. Moreover, Rahel finds the whole act of pissing levelling all hegemonies. “Everyone pissing in front of everyone. Like friends” (95). Through grotesque realism, a carnival is created here where “free and familiar contact” is between people who are usually distanced based on hierarchy. The act of policemen pissing in a line is also lampooned by Roy: “They positioned themselves strategically….Quick Piss” (307).

Scatological references do not end here. Baby Kochamma is further derided when Rahel listens “to the rude sounds of Baby Kochamma’s relief dribbling down the sides of the Inspector’s pot in his attached toilet” (319). We find the twins finding joy in using the language of the grotesque as well:

“Young voices, underlining with delight the scatology”. 

*Hey Mr Monkey Man*
Why’s your BUM so RED?

I went for SHIT to Madras

And scraped it till it BLED!  (211-212)

Such coarse songs, as well as hymns and prayers like “Rej-Oice in the Lo-Ord Or-
Orlways” (36) appear in the carnival square of the novel, without any differential or
differential treatment, exhibiting polyphony of voices.

Profanities and abusive language which were excluded from official culture and
canonical literature is also possible in grotesque literature. Such swearing works in two
ways. A member of the lower class may degrade anyone from the upper class by hurling
abuses at him/her in an atmosphere of carnival where hierarchies are temporarily
suspended. When someone from higher social strata uses swear words as opposed to
accepted norms of their social decorum, a kind of self-degradation is instituted.
Mammachi who belongs to the upper caste, throws an array of expletives at Velutha and
his father. She breaks free of her mask of civility and exposes the crudity inherent in all
human beings. When she learns of her daughter’s liaison with Velutha from Vellya
Paapen, she literally pushes him and spits at him. She calls him “‘Drunken dog!
Drunken Paravan liar!’” (256). By pushing the Paravan, Mammachi actually touches the
untouchable and thus, she subverts herself. The same treatment is also meted out to
Velutha. She spits into his face and the thick spit spatters across his skin, mouth and
eyes. She screams at him saying, “‘if I find you on my property tomorrow I’ll have you
castrated like the pariah dog that you are!’” Mammachi in fact, belittles herself with this
kind of language. “Just where an old lady like her - who wore crisp ironed saris and
played the Nutcracker Suite on the violin in the evenings – had learned the foul language
that Mammachi used that day was a mystery to everybody … ” (284). Mammachi with all her external dignity cannot stop herself when she unleashes her tirade against Velutha. Her coat of civility is unmasked by her unsophisticated portrayal. The same Mammachi who plays sublime music on her violin stoops low to be subverted.

When it comes to the description of birth and babies, authors tend to present them in the most sublime and delicate manner. But Roy presents a grotesque representation of the new born Sophie Mol seen through Chacko’s flashback. Sophie Mol’s belly button is said to protrude from her satiated satin stomach like a domed monument on a hill, with rumblings from the viscera. These rumblings are again stated to be “Messages being sent from here to there. New organs getting used to each other. A new government setting up its systems. Organizing the division of labour, deciding who would do what” (117). Clark and Holoquist treat the body as emblematic of the state. “The body is a common metaphor for the state and xenophobic societies which are trying to control the behaviour of their citizens and keep them from outside contacts often stress the idea of keeping the body pure” (311). Here, Sophie Mol’s body symbolic of Eurocentricism can be viewed as aspiring for a homogenous culture. But the baby is far from ‘purity’ as she smelled of urine. Racially, too she is impure as she is born of mixed blood- an Indian father and a European mother. Thus, the mention of urine, a product of the lower bodily stratum subverts the idea of a pure state itself. Moreover this description also contradicts Mammachi’s privileging of Sophie Mol over the twins for her “whiteness.”

Just as birth and death; eating and elimination are two essential processes of human life, equally important. While eatables are revered and loved, the eliminated
whether in the form of vomit, spit, urine or faeces is always repulsed and marginalized.

We find Roy drawing parallels between the edible and the excretory. This is evident when the ousted Ammu, puffed up with cortisone, informs Rahel how to identify the degree of infection from the colour of phlegm. “Phlegm is like fruit. Ripe or raw” (161). Similarly, the soft drink seller’s semen is compared to egg white, Ammu’s alcoholic ex-husband’s dry vomit is compared to a pie and the faeces of children are described as “dribbling streaks of mustard.” The repulsively sticky hand of Estha is described to be holding an imaginary orange. By levelling the ingested and the egested Roy again razes hierarchies and this is possible only in an atmosphere of carnivalism.

We have seen that the various grotesque images portray the repulsive and the revolting; the unofficial and the earthly, but these are also significant for the power of regeneration intrinsic to them. The aesthetic images represented in classic literature are only superficial and very limited in the real world context in contrast to the grotesque images which represent the truth of the majority. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth: it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one.

Depiction of death in the most insolent manner is another aspect of the grotesque, contrary to the euphemistic representation of the same in classical literature. In fact all the deaths represented in the novel escape any kind of deference. It works counter to the canonical norm of ‘decorum’ by recording or representing that which shocks the sensibility of the audience. The very first chapter “Paradise Pickles & Preserves” introduces us to the sad demise of the little girl Sophie Mol. Amidst the display of sorrow and grief; we find the comical attitude of Rahel towards “Real Life” (5). Rahel’s awe at how Sophie Mol is in a better position to enjoy the beautifully
painted dome above her, lying in the coffin diverts the readers’ emotions or sense of catharsis. Moreover, she loves to believe that Sophie Mol, rather died of suffocation from the burial, rather than the fact that she was already dead from drowning. In a grotesque language, she describes, “Inside the earth Sophie Mol screamed, and shredded satin with her teeth. But you can’t hear screams through earth and stone” (7).

The portrayal of Ammu’s death, too, is not accorded any sort of aesthetic treatment. When Ammu’s body, wrapped in a “dirty bed sheet” is transported to the crematorium, it is shown to jiggle and slide off the stretcher where her head hits an iron bolt on the floor. The crematorium, too is described as a rotten and a run-down place where only beggars, derelicts and the police-custody dead are cremated. Ammu is fed to the electric crematorium which is portrayed as a fire breathing iron dragon:

The steel door of the incinerator went up and the muted hum of the eternal fire became a red roaring. The heat lunged out at them like a famished beast. Then Rahel’s Ammu was fed to it. Her hair, her skin, her smile. Her voice. The way she used Kipling to love her children before putting them to bed: We be of one blood, ye and I. Her Goodnight kiss. The way she held their faces steady with one hand (squashed-cheeked, fish-mouthed) while she parted and combed their hair with the other, The way she held knickers out for Rahel to climb into. Left leg, right leg.(163)

Ammu is later reduced to a mere Receipt No.Q498673. This passage simultaneously elicits two voices, both the grotesque and the aesthetic. Ammu’s dead body is accorded a very low and undignified treatment. The denial of a conventional Christian burial to Ammu is explained in grotesque terms. Though her body is fed to the beast part by part, the memory of Ammu the mother lives on. Each part burned gives
birth to fresh memories. This passage is also one of the most beautiful and evocative passages in the novel, emphasizing the splendour of motherhood. The crude treatment meted out to her is suddenly inverted by the subversive power of language. Once again there is the intermixing of the high and the low which is typical of a multi-voiced carnival text.

The third elaborately discussed death that we come across is that of Velutha, the Paravan who is murdered by the “posse of Touchable Policemen” for entering the realm of touchables (309). The description of Velutha’s death is one of the most grotesque descriptions in the novel witnessed by the twins. They hear “the thud of wood on flesh. Boot on bone. On teeth. The muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in. The muted crunch of skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on man’s breath when his lung is torn by the jagged end of a broken rib” (308). Roy further remarks sarcastically that the policemen acted with economy and not frenzy because “They didn’t hack of his genitals and stuff them in his mouth. They didn’t rape him. Or behead him” (309). The mutilated and smashed body is again a trait of the grotesque. By presenting such a monstrous murder, Roy wishes to represent a truth that the reader’s do not wish to see. It is not only the upper body that is smashed up but damage done on the lower bodily stratum is explained in detail as well. Roy grotesquely describes how his lower intestine is ruptured and haemorrhaged and blood is collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine is also said to have been damaged and the concussion results in the loss of control over his bladder and rectum. As if the damage done is not enough, one of the policemen flicks at Velutha’s penis with his stick (311). These unofficial acts of the policemen represented through grotesque realism subvert the official values of “politeness, obedience, loyalty,
intelligence, courtesy and efficiency” attributed to them, thus the inversion of these by the twins, as illustrated earlier.

The scenes may appear to be overstated, but the depiction is definitely unexaggerated and it only reflects the extent to which power can be misused. Such portrayal is very important to nudge the readers from their sense of smug complacency. Through a grotesque representation Roy tries to communicate a sense of pain, suffering and evil as displayed in The Theatre of Cruelty, a genre advanced by Antonin Artaud, whose aim was to shock his audiences into an awareness of basic human nature by releasing feelings usually repressed in conventional society. By generating disgust in the readers, the author seeks to purge them of such cruelties in an attempt to revive certain moral values. Velutha’s death, thus, generates feelings of compassion and tolerance.

The flesh of Sophie Mol, the blood of Velutha and the ashes of Ammu permeate the lower earthly stratum to make it fertile both literally and metaphorically. The thrusting of these innocent souls into the womb of the earth shall lead to the rebirth of a better world devoid of injustices. Death and birth are a part of the essential principle of “degradation.” This phenomenon is illustrated in abundance in the first chapter of The God of Small Things where death and birth are shown to crisscross. The chapter opens on a note of re-birth with the breaking of monsoon and walls turning green. Pepper vines snaking up poles and creepers bursting through laterite banks. At the same time we find the shrunken river and the suicidal bluebottles. Then there is a flashback reference to Rahel and Estha’s prenatal condition. “They were two-egg twins.” Dizygotic’ doctors called. Born from separate but simultaneously fertilised eggs” (2). This is followed by a description of the hugely pregnant Ammu travelling in a bus, “... Estha and Rahel’s
father had to hold their mother’s stomach (with them in it) to prevent it from wobbling” (3). The image of birth is immediately replaced by the children’s idea of “Free funerals” if one gets killed on a zebra crossing (4). At this point the readers are suddenly introduced to the death of Sophie Mol. At her funeral we perceive Rahel imagining the painter of the church dome, someone like Velutha, dropping like a “dark star out of the sky that he had made. Lying broken on the hot church floor, dark blood-spilling from his skull like a secret” (7). This presentiment is soon established with Ammu’s declaration on page eight that “He’s dead.” Velutha’s blood which seeps into the womb of the earth could have made it fertile, for, the next image we find is that of fertility where rains revive the “reluctant old well” and happy earth worms frolick(ed) purple in the slush” (10). Very soon we are also informed about Ammu’s death, which is described as “swollen with cortisone” (15). This swelling leads to her death where as the earlier mentioned grotesque image of Ammu’s swelled up and wobbling tummy leads to the birth of the twins. The protruding and disfigured body is also an essential characteristic of the grotesque.

Thus death and birth, the two inevitable extremities of life is seen to zigzag in the first chapter of the novel. The last chapter is also highly evocative of the images of death and re-birth. Velutha and Ammu succumb to their fatal attraction well aware of the consequences. The result of their tabooed relationship is death. The metaphysical poets in fact, used the expression “to die” as a synonym to the act of lovemaking. John Donne in his famous poem Canonization states: “We die and rise the same, and prove/Mysterious by this love.” If Velutha and Ammu’s love-making can be equated to the act of dying, their promise of a “Tomorrow” (340) is the birth of a “new ensemble” (339)
which has discarded “an outmoded world-view” (339), aspiring for the birth of an equitable society. Moreover, this is an act of degradation in the sense that it is carried out in close proximity to the naked earth. Degradation in this context can be taken as “coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time” (Bakhtin, RHW 21). This ambivalence which involves the birth inherent in death and the resurgence implicit in being inverted is a distinguishing feature of the carnival. The novel also ends on an ambivalent note. The single word sentence “Tomorrow” is Janus-faced. It prompts the readers to reflect on what they already know about the lovers’ deaths and at the same time look forward to the birth of an egalitarian world-view.

There is no doubt that there exists a dialogue of affirmation between the feminine practice of writing called écriture féminine and the male formulated ideas of carnivalism. Feminists, like Elaine Showalter, do not approve of any dependency on andocentric models. Those feminists, who doubt the comparison of a feminine practice of writing to Bakhtin’s carnivalism just because it is a male propounded theory, should note that both the practices are open ended and hence does not bracket the other but rather supplements and complements the other. In fact Mary Jacobus proposes that we need a feminine practice of writing “that works within a male discourse and works ceaselessly to deconstruct it: to write what cannot be written” (12-13). Thus Roy employs carnivalism to deconstruct the notions of a rule bound, hegemonic narrative and allows for the entry of all those that are marginalized.

When Roy states in one of her interviews that The God of Small Things is “not about history but biology and transgression” (CISLit.), perhaps it refers to the excessive
allusions to the grotesque body and its essential functions. But, this statement is later revised by her when she claims that both her fiction and non-fiction are about “the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless circular conflict they’re engaged in” (Roy, *AOPGE* 13). Two distinct voices of the author are evident on these separate accounts. The second statement is rather more inclusive and comprehensive as it includes all those who are suppressed. Biology is also not restricted to the *Homo sapien*, but includes all the little insects, animals and plants that are an integral part of the natural environment.

3.8. Muted Voice of Nature

Ammu and Velutha, the two marginalized beings, unite in the lap of another exploited entity, that is, Nature. This union is a call for a new world order. The courting could have been within the walls of any concrete room, but the site chosen is the very lap of Nature as it can never discriminate her children on the basis of a culturally constructed bias. It is precisely this love for the natural environment that prompts the twins to seek the security of the mother’s womb. The natural environment plays a very significant role in the novel. When we talk of the various feminist voices and feminism, nature can never be separated from the same because of the obvious connection between women and nature. In her work “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism,” Karen J. Warren concludes that any feminism, environmentalism or environmental philosophy that fails to recognize important women-nature connections is simply inadequate.” The women-nature connections and their shared subjugation by the patriarchal society lets loose another voice with an equal footing, that of the ecofeminist. The muted voice of nature is made audible through Roy the ecofeminist.
“Eco-feminism is a recent development in feminist thought which argues that the current global environmental crisis is a predictable outcome of patriarchal culture” (Salleh 138). This means that there exists a relationship between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature. On a broader scale its advocates often emphasize the importance of interrelationships between humans, non-human others (e.g., animals and insects), and the earth. Consequently it is now better understood as a movement working against the interconnected oppressions of gender, race, class and nature.

Since ancient times dualities like culture/nature, man/woman, reason/emotion, mind/body, God/man has been emphasized. In these dualities, the first term is privileged and the second one is always undermined. This also leaves nature and women in a secondary position. It is also true that throughout our history nature is portrayed as feminine and women are often thought of as closer to nature than men. Women’s physiological connections with birth and child care have partly led to this close association with nature. Ecofeminists focus on these interconnections, and analyze the oppression of both ‘women’ and ‘nature’.

In *The God of Small Things* the river Meenachal is an inevitable part of its natural landscape. It had been a source of life and rejuvenation for the twins in their childhood. “It was warm, the water. Grey green. Like rippled silk. With fish in it. With the sky and trees in it. And at night, the broken yellow moon in it.”(123,203) but twenty three years later, when Rahel returns to the river, it greets her “with a ghastly skull’s smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed” (124).
The river is personified as an incapacitated person, a victim of some calamity. The river which had once reflected the whole of Nature in its immaculate beauty is now a dismal picture. It is now merely a thin ribbon of thick water that laps wearily with the mud banks on either side, sequinned with the occasional silver slant of a dead fish. The river is said to have its spirit spent and teeth drawn and is “now no longer than “a slow sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea. Bright plastic bags blew across its viscous, weedy surface like sub-tropical flying flowers” (124). Man’s callousness in dumping waste and non-biodegradable refuse into the heart of nature is poetically wrought by the writer in the above lines. Elsewhere the river is described to have “smelled of shit, and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The one that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils” (13).

The river is emblematic of the whole of the natural environment because it is an ecosystem in itself. Moreover it contains not only the fish but also reflects other components of the natural environment - the moon, the skies and the trees (203). This concern for the river and the dispossessed is later seen to mark her works of non-fiction where her commitment to the river Narmada and its people are discussed in detail. Prof.I.Shanmugha Das, a noted Indian critic states that Arundhati Roy started her march towards the Narmada mission from the banks of another river in Kerala, the Chaliyar which is also subjected to pollution by the effluents from Gwalior Ryons. (24). He further goes on to say that her clarion call to save Narmada is perhaps her plea to save the Meenachal of her childhood from succumbing to the venomous pollution spewed out by the developmental process (29).
Though the word river is of neutral gender in the English language, river has always been attributed with feminine qualities. In India, especially it can be noted that all the prominent rivers have feminine names probably because of the sustaining qualities and powers of creativity and fertility associated with rivers. The river is not only a source of sustenance for the hungry stomach but also the wounded heart. All the main characters who suffer at the hands of the patriarchal society are seen to seek solace in the river during their times of distress. Thus, the river is endowed with motherly qualities. After Estha is abused by the soft drink seller, the one thing he longs for is the river because he believes that “water always helps” (113). Estha’s fears are always absorbed by the deep waters as he always finds happiness there (212). When Rahel is tense, she also yearns for the river: “Inside the curtain, Rahel closed her eyes and thought of the green river, of the quiet deep-swimming fish, and gossamer wings of the dragon flies …” (148).

In fact, the river is so close to the twins’ hearts that they simultaneously dream of “their river” (122) while they sleep cuddled together at Hotel Sea Queen. Perhaps it is a nostalgic reminiscence of their swimming together through “their mother’s cunt.” The children’s familiarity with the river and closeness to it is clearly evinced by Roy- “They knew the afternoon weed that flowed inwards from the backwaters of Komarakom. They knew the smaller fish” and it is here that they study “Silence (like the children of the Fisher Peoples), and learn (ed) the bright language of dragonflies” (203). Thus, the river becomes a surrogate mother to the twins, feeding them and teaching them.

Ammu, too, during her wild moods is seen to go to a “better, happier place,” the banks of the Meenachal where she spends hours on the riverbank listening to her little
plastic transistor and enjoys midnight swims (44). Ammu experiences a kind of solace in the waters of the Meenachal, a kindred spirit who could comprehend her loneliness unlike the orthodox society that isolated her. Perhaps, it is because of this understanding that the Meenachal arranges for Ammu a courting ground on her banks. It is the site where Velutha and Ammu spend the fourteen nights together. It is here that they unite as man and woman and listen to the dictates of their biology transgressing all man-made barriers of caste and class. The river blesses them in the guise of a cool breeze – “A breeze lifted off the river and cooled their warm bodies” (338).

For Velutha, who had lost his mother Chella, the river is his nurturer and sustainer. Velutha could easily swim across the second “Really Deep” part of the river with ease, which Chacko and the others feared to even venture (289). When Velutha swims across to meet Ammu on the banks of the river, she notes that “the world they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars” (334). Velutha’s irrefutable connection and proximity to the natural environment is established in these lines.

Ecofeminists also posit that it is not only women who are closer to nature but oppressed races and social classes are also closely associated with nature. So it is to be noted that Roy articulates her concern not only for women and nature but also the downtrodden like Velutha. The novel reveals that in all walks of life Velutha suffers scorn and segregation at the hands of the upper caste people. In Ammu’s dreams he appears as “a cheerful man with one arm” (215) who leaves “no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors” (216). In fact, this has been the fate of the Untouchables in the dark alleys of history. Arundhati Roy successfully evokes the image
of such ‘footprintless’ men in her novel through the characters of Velutha, Kuttappen, Vellya Paapen and Kelan. Velutha is a representative of the dispossessed and downtrodden, but being a self-respecting man, more or less aware of his rights, he does not sweep off his footprints with a broom, though his grandfather and father had willingly gone through such dehumanizing rituals. But the culturally constructed caste laws show no mercy on Velutha and he becomes a victim to this deep-rooted social evil. ‘Touchables” like Comrade Pillai, Policeman Thomas and Baby Kochamma see to it that the likes of him do not climb up the social ladder and ‘touch’ their ‘untouchable’ heights. He is finally eliminated and his ‘footprints’ are totally wiped out. Velutha is portrayed to be closer to Nature than those who are higher up in the social ladder. His proximity to the earth is also evident even in the house that Velutha lives in, which is described as “a low hut with walls of orange laterite plastered with mud and a thatched roof nestled close to the ground”(205) in contrast to the gulf-houses built with concrete and the Ayemenem house housing the patriarchs.

Ammu and Velutha share a common ground as they both have no locus standi - Ammu in the Ayemenem house and Velutha in the class-conscious society. They both are thrown on a parallel plain. At this point we can recall that even Virginia Woolf found a parallel between women and any downtrodden, persecuted group. She, “frequently compared women to persecuted minorities, she could not, it would seem name any downtrodden group, and underdog without pointing out the parallel with women” (Marder 34-35). Arundhati Roy’s portrayal of the sad plight of Ammu and Velutha is only an extension of her concern for the dispossessed elaborately discussed in her works of non-fiction. In “The Greater Common Good” Roy says that Narmada Valley
Development Project which involves mainly the construction of Big Dams will alter the ecology of the entire river basin and will also affect the lives of twenty-five million people who live in the valley (75). It is to be remembered that the statistics are based on a thorough research by Roy and reveals her dedication to the cause.

The fact that the river Meenachal also shares the brunt of man’s abuse has already been illustrated. The river which was once pictured as the sustainer of lives has now succumbed to the irrevocable consequences of modernization. Men overcome by the ‘steroid syndrome’ or the blind pursuit of immediate gain end up choking an ecological asset, unmindful of its tragic results. Man’s exploitation of nature in the name of industrialization is also clearly elicited in the lines: “The barrage regulated the inflow of saltwater from the backwaters that opened into the Arabian Sea. So now they had two harvests a year instead of one. More rice, for the price of a river” (124). In another notable passage, using grotesque language Roy describes the callous attitude of man in maligning the purity of the river. Children defecating into the river, women washing clothes and effluents from factories are all received by the river unwearyingly: “Eventually, by evening, the river would rouse itself to accept the day’s offerings and sludge off to the sea, leaving wavy lines of thick white scum in its wake” (125).

Nature which was once held sacred in the Indian ethos is now subjected to utter humiliation. The spiritual imagery of the river ‘accepting the day’s offerings’ is deliberately chosen by the author to heighten the antithesis evoked as a result of the modernization process. The awful outcome is not limited to the river but is spread to the neighbourhood. The stench emanating from river is spread across Ayemenem on warmer days- “the shit lifted off the river and hovered over Ayemenem like a hat” (125).
Roy makes it clear that the destruction of nature is never localized; its effects always have wider consequences.

The environmental crisis that challenges Mother Earth and makes it fragile and endangered has acquired an existential dimension and this existential problem has been the subject of writers, especially women writers because for centuries women have been identified with nature and the more formidable voices of protest have emanated from their writings. Roy foregrounds this crisis through the image of the emaciated river. The river which was once in full spate is later seen to be defenseless and weak like Ammu who succumbs to bronchitis. The river-women connection is also evident in the way Roy likens Ammu to a river during the Velutha- Ammu union. Roy says “She was as wide and deep as a river in spate. He sailed on her waters” (337). Velutha is literally described to have drowned in her. In another instance, Estha is said to have led Rahel “(swimming) through their lovely mother’s cunt” during their prenatal existence. Nature as a pleasure-giver as well as a nurturer is clearly brought about in these images.

In the novel we find yet another instance of women-nature identification when Chacko makes a reference to the “Earth Woman” to give a “sense of historic perspective” of the world to Rahel and Estha: “He made them imagine that the earth – four thousand six hundred million years old – was a forty-six-year-old woman-as old, say, as Aleyamma Teacher, who gave them Malayalam lessons” (53-54). Since it is Chacko, a male voice who uses the phrase “Earth Woman,” it is all the more relevant. It projects an impersonal attitude on the part of the speaker as opposed to the personal and subjective ‘Mother Earth’ or ‘Mother Nature’. The address is objective, without the slightest trace of emotion for the Mother (Earth). Here Chacko fails not only to use a
euphemism equivalent to “Mother Earth” but also presents a dispassionate depiction of the earth. His detached usage -Earth Woman only augments his attitude towards women. His insensitivity is manifest in the fact that he doesn’t bother whether his audience listens to him or not. The description is only a show of his pedantry which is displayed during his “Oxford Moods” (54). He does endow the earth with human qualities; but does not deem it to be eligible for a humane consideration and is akin to the indifferent treatment meted out to his sister Ammu. Carolyn Merchant, a noted ecofeminist says that in olden days “The image of the earth as a living organism and nurturing mother had served as a cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings and she stresses that “As long as the earth was considered to be alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behaviour to carry out destructive acts against it” (Merchant 276).

As in the case of Chacko, the modernization process has lessened man’s reverence for Mother Nature and ecological destruction is as rampant as the subordination of women. To quote Roy it is due to “Man’s subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify” (308). Injustice and discrimination of this kind is not always endured by the natural environment. Just as Ammu retaliates by breaking the laws set by her society, nature too has always shown her vengeance indiscriminately in the form of earth quakes, floods, tsunamis and avalanches when exploited. In essay “The Greater Common Good” Roy talks about the harm caused by Big Dams on rivers, “Ecologically, they're in the doghouse. They lay the earth to waste. They cause floods, water-logging, salinity, they spread disease. There is mounting evidence that links Big Dams to earthquakes” (TAIJ 57-58). The poetic justice for the harm inflicted on the river
may be meted out by another entity of nature exhibiting the underlying kinship among the various components of nature. But these kinds of retributions and devastations are loud and aggressive just as the tone of Roy’s essays. There is also the silent and slow kind of ruin that nature inflicts on its perpetrators. The ‘smaller” ways of Nature usually go unnoticed like the small things.

The Imperial House, once a mark of patriarchy is now a sad sight, yielding to the slow destructive power of nature. The house has been devastated not by the ‘Big Things’ in Nature but by the ‘small things”. The walls, streaked with moss, have grown soft, and bulge a little with dampness that seeped up from the ground. The wild overgrown garden is full of the whisper and scurry of small lives (1-2). Baby Kochamma’s artificial and well groomed garden, once adorned with imported anthuriums is now dominated by native plants and weeds. It has become an abode for insects and other smaller animals. The decline and decay of the Ayemenem house and the reign of the ‘small things’ is elicited in yet another relevant passage: “Filth had laid siege to the Ayemenem House like a medieval army advancing on an enemy castle. It clotted every crevice and clung to the windowpanes.... Infrequently used plug points were clogged with grime .... The only things that shone were the giant cockroaches...” (88).

The Blue Plymouth, another symbol of Patriarchy and Imperialism also succumbs to the ways of Nature. Pappachi had never allowed his wife to touch it when he was alive. After his death Chacko takes possession of it and after his departure to Canada the machine is left to the mercy of Time and Nature. It is made to rot, “With every monsoon, the old car settled more firmly into the ground .... The Paradise Pickles and Preserves signboard rotted and fell inwards like a collapsed crown” (295). Its
immobility and decay can be contrasted to the creative power of Nature which is never once stagnant or sterile, however spent it is.

Throughout the novel we find that it is these small and not very powerful forces of nature that have brought about the gradual turmoil. Man usually takes his environment for granted and is less aware of the consequences it can bring. Like Ammu, who brought shame and dishonour to her family by her suicidal relationship with Velutha, the retribution of the exploited nature too is inevitable and unexpected. Man tries to subjugate nature forgetting that he is a part of this great force and that Nature is not a part of him. The female carries the male in her womb but never the other way around. The creative process and the powers of procreation are always associated with women and this likens them to nature.

The river too has its “Unsafe” Edge,” just like Ammu. The Meenachal of Rahel’s childhood was wilder and more dangerous unlike the present one. Kuttapen, Velutha’s bedridden brother warns them that “‘she isn’t always what she pretends to be, … ‘a little old church-going ammooma, quiet and clean…”” (210). Here Kuttapen is also seen to endow the river with feminine attributes. He makes it clear that the river is not always sluggish like an old lady but also dynamic and wilder at times, like Ammu, whose ‘reckless rage’ is capable of destruction in spite of her deceptive simplicity.

Man forgets that modernization can never insulate itself to the effects of Nature. Mortensen in his essay “Civilization’s Fear of Nature” argues that _The God of Small Things_ voices more than just emphasize the consequences of exploiting nature in the name of progress. He states, “Nature, is not so much absent as simply repressed, and the brilliance of Roy’s approach consists precisely in showing that the postmodern denial of
nature produces a threatening return of the repressed” (188). This is in tune with what Usha Jesudasan states earlier regarding the retaliation of the suppressed.

“The return of the repressed” is a term coined by Sigmund Freud. Jean-François Rabain states that it is the process whereby “repressed elements, preserved in the unconscious, tend to reappear, in consciousness or in behaviour, in the shape of secondary and more or less unrecognizable ‘derivatives of the unconscious’.” This kind of environmental return of the repressed is a subversive act on the part of nature is augmented by yet another example from the novel: “The countryside turns an immodest green. Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn mossgreen. Pepper vines snake up electric poles. Wild creepers burst through laterite banks and spill across the flooded roads…” (1).

In spite of the upsurge in concrete buildings and the resulting deforestation, greenery has its toll and makes its presence felt everywhere. The blurring of boundaries by tapioca fences reminds us of Robert Frost’s famous lines, “There is something in nature that doesn’t love a wall.” On the same page the narrator states: “The walls, streaked with moss, had grown soft, and bulged a little with dampness that seeped up from the ground. The wild, overgrown garden was full of the whisper and scurry of small lives” (1). Even though nature reciprocates in various ways, it does not suggest the victory of nature over man just as Ammu does not gain anything for herself by her action. It only leads to mutual destruction one way or the other and retards or even thwarts the establishment of a healthy society and a livable environment. It is the resourceful part of the environment that becomes depleted.
Some ecofeminists also insist on a gender-sensitive language, theory, and practice that do not further the exploitative experiences and habits of dissociated, male-gender identified culture toward women and nature. Susan Griffin, a distinguished ecocritic calls for a “nurturing femaleness to speak, chant and sing so that people might live” (qtd. in Elliott 1067). Roy’s language can be said to fall into this category because her language “guides us to those who are often excluded from our vision. Her use of short sentences, use of metaphors alluding to smallness and her emphasis on solitary, pregnant words are all the devices she uses to highlight her vision” (Ch’ien 156). The imagery of insects and small creatures run throughout the novel. Ants, blue bottles, beetles, spiders, rat snakes, praying mantis, little fishes scummy toads, wasps, etc. crawl and creep all over the novel to accentuate the theme of the meek and the marginalized category whose voice is often lost in whispers. Velutha and Ammu are also a part of this universal paradigm of the suppressed.

Velutha’s predicament in the novel is only a prototype for the condition of the dispossessed in the country. Roy states in *The God of Small Things*: “… in some places, like the country that Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy. And that personal despair could never be desperate enough. That something happened when personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation”(19).

The personal despair of Velutha in the novel is extended to the state of the dispossessed tribals and the displaced farmers affected by the ‘Big Dams’ which she claims in her essay “The Greater Common Good”, are a “brazen means of taking water, land and irrigation away from the poor and gifting it to the rich. Their reservoirs displace
huge populations of people, leaving them homeless and destitute” (52). This ‘public turmoil of the nation’ is further extended to the earth as a whole when Roy voices her concern over the amassing of nuclear weapons: “If there is a nuclear war, our foes willn’t be China or America or even each other. Our foe will be the earth herself. The very elements – sky, the air, the land, the wind and water – will all turn against us (TEI 6). Roy’s eco-consciousness embraces women, the dispossessed and the natural environment. It is no wonder that Jason Cowley, the Booker judge claims that Roy’s achievement lies in the fact that she never forgets about the small things in life – “insects and flowers, wind and water, the outcaste and despised,” (India Today).

The various voices, thus, form a polyphony of feminist voices which, far from being a cacophony, supplement and complement each other. The multiple voices include the voices of Mammachi, Ammu, Rahel, the refracted voice of the author as a postmodernist; subversive voices through écriture féminine and the carnivalesque; and the muted voice of nature through the ecofeminist. All these voices chain together to form a feminist solidarity beyond the bounds of time and space. To borrow Cixous’ words, it is “a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another” (882).