CHAPTER-V
ARUNDHATI ROY: THE RADICAL VOICE OF THE SUBDUE...
Not long ago a woman who spoke about herself was considered a loose woman. To voice a pain to divulge a secret, was considered sacrilege a breach of family trust. Today, voices are raised without fear, and are heard outside the walls of homes that once kept a woman protected, also isolated. Some of the woman who speak here have stepped out. Others who have not, are beginning to be aware, eager to find expression. But let them speak for themselves. Their looks have not changed, their manner has. Individually they have gained a name, collectively an identity. Their new power was not imposed upon them but already existed, enclosed within walls. Now that power has stirred out into the open. Their new strength stems from personalities defining their own terms, leading grace to living. (Jung 109)

Accordingly, the Indian female writers have taken up this spirit and moulded their images correspondingly. The women images of these writers very well explain the gradual move from the conventional description of self sacrificing women to the modern self assertive ones. These new women are in earnest quest of their identity and are not shy of depiction of the subtle interpersonal relationships including the intensely personal inner lives of the female protagonists. The assertion of female sexuality and consequent social furore is an obvious part of the thematic design of these writers. Arundhati Roy is one such writer, who has created much flutter by the unconventional portrayal of issues related to women. She has succeeded in creating a niche for herself in the field of English literature by her novel *The God of Small Things*. The present chapter focuses on Roy’s feminist sensitivity as reflected in *The God of Small Things*. The outspoken novelist has given new dimensions to the portrayal of the predicament faced by women in conventional Indian set up.

### 5.2. Portrayal of Women Characters

*The God of Small Things* can very well be taken as a revenge of revolt - a revolt against the shabby treatment of women in the snobbish Indian order. The novel is a poignant expression of women’s revolt against the man made codes of social decency that provides
women a secondary rather despicable position in the society. Roy’s women characters out
rightly reject their engagement by the laws and regulations enforced by an extremely
traditional society. They bypass these rules and try to chart out an independent space for
themselves. However, such endeavours of these rebellious women fail to bulge the rigid
social set up because in this society, “change is one thing, acceptance quite another.”
(279) The society, in turn, takes vengeance on them. They are made to suffer, even
condemned to death. Ammu, the main character, has the guts to defy the familial code of
decency as she marries a Bengali Hindu for love and respect, leaving behind the
respected Syrian Christian household in Kerala. However, her search for a dignified life
ends in a complete failure as she has to bear the brunt of her snobbish husband’s physical
and psychological cruelty.

Ammu’s leaving her husband and unceremonious return to her house at Ayemenem does
not signify her defeat. She is still bubbling with life and striving hard to find a dignified
place for herself and her children. In the absence of any economic support and social
security, she may have opted for her parental house. However, it is just the beginning of
her ordeal. She, and both of her children Rahel and Estha, once again get entrapped in
snobbish mentality of a male chauvinist society. Here, she and her children, are taken to
be living in ‘suffrage’, where they do not have any right to be. It explains the
conventional way of the society that denies any right to a married woman in her parental
home. The Christian household of Ammu is no less regressive in pronouncing restrictions
on her. Very much like her Hindu sisters, Ammu too, is taken as ritually inauspicious and
is expected to give up wearing coloured saris and ornaments and even the idea of
remarriage. Baby Kochamma disparages Ammu for quarrelling with “a fate that she [...] herself felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched man-less woman.” (45)

Ammu’s returning to her parents’ home, after divorcing her husband, isironical in the
sense that it deprives her of any social position or prestige, even of her basic rights. She is
treated as an unwelcome guest in her very own house, where she was born and brought
up. The familial and social apathy and inherent injustice draw her closer to Velutha, the
un submissive and intelligent Parvan (so called outcaste), with whom she finds an affinity.
Similar plight brings them together and subsequently they develop a full fledged intimate emotional and physical affair. Thus she becomes unpardonable and subjected to a lot of humiliation by both the police Inspector and her own family.

It is a paradox that some exogamous marriages are pardoned while others are severely condemned. Baby Kochamma despises Ammu's Bengali-Hindu husband and dislikes her twins who are “Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry”. This still holds true in the Indian scenario. Similarly, Mammachi becomes hysterical at the thought of Ammu in Velutha’s arms whereas Chacko’s going to the outer passage of house for satisfying his sexual needs with low-caste worker women is passed off as “man’s needs”. (168)

Chacko takes advantage of this double standard and takes pride in bringing his ex-wife and child into the house “like a pair of tennis trophies.” (173) Although Mammachi has a great aversion for Margaret, she treats her grandchildren differently. Ammu’s twins, Rahel and Estha, are like a ‘devalued currency’ to her while she appreciates the sterling quality of her “English” granddaughter, whom she “read[s] like a cheque” and “check[s] like a bank note” (174).

The novel brings in many relevant socio-cultural issues highlighting the double standards and pretentions of the Indian society. It strongly affirms the paradox of the Indian mindset - submissively endorsing the supposed sense of superiority and aggressively suppressing the already subdued. The same colonial mindset that is convinced of high cultural standards of the west in comparison to their Indian counterparts is once again reinstated.

Similar shabby treatment of women within the four walls of the house is very well depicted in the portrayal of three generations of women- Mammachi, Ammu, and Rahel. Pappachi, Ammu’s father is presented as a great persecuter who beats his wife (Mammachi) with a ‘brass vase’. Mammachi’s talent gives him a complex and he uses
violence to get rid of that complex. Ammu, too, becomes a victim of his tyranny. Chacko, however succeeds in repressing the brutality of his father.

It is often noticed that the people who themselves are subjugated try to suppress others. Mammachi, being a victim of patriarchy herself, is pretentious when it comes to class question. Her attitude towards Velutha is not much different. He is not allowed to touch Ammu or anyone else while offering gifts to them. He is only a skilled artisan making useful equipment for her household and shop. This quite aptly explains her disgust when she comes to know about her daughter’s affair with the untouchable Velutha. Mammachi strongly discriminates in acknowledging the sexual needs of her son and daughter, although she herself has been a victim of sexual discrimination throughout her life.

Chacko indulges in ‘loveless promiscuity’ and makes utmost use of his feudal rights. He demands the bodies of the female labourers in the factory at night. Mammachi allows him to use the room that has a separate entrance. But his attitude towards Ammu is quite different. On discovering Ammu’s love affair with Velutha, he terrorizes her with dire consequences if she steps out from the room, where the family had confined her.

Rahel has been closely observing her mother’s plights when she herself was a helpless child. She and her twin brother Estha have to bear their mother’s occasional nasty temper resulting from frustration arising out of unfulfilled emotional and sexual needs. Ammu, at times, chides Rahel and even hurts her with her insensitive remarks. Therefore, from the beginning, she observes her mother through an upward glance. Since her mother occupies almost the lowest position in familial and social hierarchy, almost everybody else looks down upon her. But the narrative chooses to adopt Rahel’s point of view, and therefore, rules out the possibility of appropriating her mother’s life for her narrative aim.

Rahel comes back home as a divorced woman as her mother once did, and her age is exactly the same as the age of her mother when she died. Towards the end of the story, she is found making love to her twin brother Estha out of sympathy as her mother made forbidden love to Velutha, feeling themselves united in their sense of alienation and
exclusion from the dominating forces in society. Thus Roy takes Rahel as a conspiratorial focalizer furthering the course of story as well as her own sense of destructive protest against the cruelty and affectation of the society.

Pappachi represents the typical male chauvinist mentality. His treatment of Mammachi highlights how his bestial violence affected Ammu’s psyche. Pappachi is a fanatic, orthodox, jealous husband, who terrorizes his own family. He is a habitual wife beater, who whips his wife pitilessly either with a bras vase or his “Ivory handled riding crop” (181). Though Mammachi suffers a lot of her husband's cruelty, she is a typical ‘Indian Nari’, who does not exhibit any repulsion towards her husband and adapts herself “properly into the conventional scheme of things.” (122) She, in fact, cries at her husband's funeral not because ‘she loved him’ but because “She was used to him” (50). “With her eyes she looked in the direction that her husband looked. With her heart she looked away.” (30)

The life of Ammu's mother is sandwiched between inhuman cruelties of her husband - Pappachi and her responsibilities. That is probably the reason she embarks on a business of pickles. The novel presents endless distress, pain, and anguish that continue to the next generation of Rachel, Estha, and Sophie Mol.

Ammu breaks the boundaries that had confined her and threatened her very existence and walks out of the unbearable circumstances. To escape the dictates of the patriarchy, the new woman comes out in more prominent contours. She resorts to divorce as the only means of retrieving her lost life. At Ayemenem, Ammu felt like a captive lady. She is forced to quit her education because Pappachi felt that college education for a girl was an unnecessary expenditure. She gradually begins to grow desperate. “All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long suffering mother. She hatched several wretched little plans. Eventually, one worked. Pappachi agreed to let her spend the summer with a distant aunt who lived in Calcutta.” (38-39)
Ammu is not a “fallen” woman. She is pained to see the inability of her husband to protect her self respect and therefore, decides to leave him. She returns to the same dark cellar Ayemenem, from which she had wanted to run away. Destiny, once again, brings her to the place of perpetual suffering. This reflects the sensitivity of woman, who tolerates everything merely for her children’s sake.

Gender discrimination by a woman is clearly evidenced in The God of Small Things. Mammachi’s secret pawning of her jewellery to enable Chacko continue education and Ammu’s denial of education on the pretext that she is a girl are indicative of the above fact. Pappachi is quite envious of his wife's pickle factory. He does not like her playing violin with much expertise. Gender preference is also seen in the matter of property. Ammu, being a woman, has no claims on the pickle factory. Chacko believes that women are not fit to own property though the factory earns more profits under the guidance of Mammachi. Chacko says “What's yours is mine and what is mine is also mine.” (57)

Margaret fell for Chacko’s irresponsible, optimistic ways but soon is tired of the same. She rushes into marriage with him, but very soon, divorces him and marries Joie. She loves her daughter Sohpie Mol very much. After the accidental death of Sophie, she becomes a hysteric. Thus the pressures, obligations, bindings, etc. of the women characters can be clearly noticed.

Velutha, the son of Vellyapappen, is a talented young man, who has a spirit of protest. Ammu sees a great personality in him because he articulates everything, which she could not herself express. She feels he is the God of small things. On the basis of this realization and being the victim of the oppressed and marginalized, both Velutha and Ammu seek solace in each other’s company. But, for this very act, Velutha is put to death, and Ammu is separated from her children. At the age of 31, she eventually leaves for her heavenly abode.

Though Ammu is a middle class educated and articulate bourgeois woman and a divorcee with two children, she is not welcome on her return to her father’s house. She is
marginalized by her very own brother Chacko—a kind of an elite leftist. She is also confined by the family structures and inheritance laws typical to the Community of Syrian Christians. Ammu is infatuated with Velutha and goes against the “love laws” which her community imposes. Her transgression of the caste, class, and religious boundaries mounts a revolt that marginalizes her as a woman. She is treated as an outcast not only in her own family but also in the society of which she is an integral part. But, Ammu is a bold woman; she does not succumb to the pressures of the family and the society. She, in fact, rebels against such social structures and challenges the very institution of marriage though she, later on dies exiled. She, thus becomes an epitome of all subalterns, especially women, who challenge the power structures of the social order.

Ammu is faced against a system where her “Marxist” brother Chacko exploits the poor women labourers in his factory, both financially and sexually and goes unchecked. She sees characters like Mammachi, being appropriated by patriarchal domination and be smothered and distorted by it. She sees Velutha being accused of the accidental drowning of Sophie Mol. Ammu’s father is skeptical of the fact that her Bengali-Hindu husband wanted to prostitute her in order to entertain his white boss. Thus Ammu—a subaltern woman, who is economically and socially marginalized, challenges the authority of colonial rulers. Asphyxiated by social injustice, Ammu rebels against the very social norms that constitute the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. This rebellion is an act of resistance against the very foundations of this society. Thus, Ammu as a subaltern/woman, defies oppressive and repressive social and political structures. Though she does not succeed in bringing about any noticeable change, she makes a bold attempt towards the realization of her dreams. Her efforts towards subalterns may not be deliberate but her actions definitely contribute to the liberation of subalterns.

Similarly, Mammachi too exhibits some kind of resistance against patriarchal domination and marginalization. She is also a physically and psychologically abused wife, who undergoes extreme torture and trauma, but never speaks out. She is not only a passive victim, but is also the target of the jealousy of her entomologist husband. When
Mammachi’s music teacher informs her husband that she was “exceptionally talented” and “potentially concert class” (67), her music lessons stop abruptly.

Mammachi’s efforts to practice ‘patriarchal authority’ on her son Chacko prove futile. He takes charge of the pickle factory from her on the pretext that he saved Mammachi from Pappachi’s beatings. By surrendering her factory to Chacko, Mammachi is marginalized. Her submission to patriarchy reflects her defensiveness rather than an ingenious agreement with hegemonic powers and authority.

Baby Kochamma, the daughter of Reverend John Ipe, is in love with Father Mulligan, the Roman Catholic priest. In order to win over him, she converts to the Roman Catholic faith but does not dare to challenge the traditional ideas of love and marriage prevalent in post-colonial India. She does not run away to fulfil her dreams and advocates very reactionary ideas. Thus both Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, very strictly, adhere to patriarchal social norms.

The subaltern status of Estha and Rahel is reflected in their economical as well as financial rootlessness. Their deprivation of fatherly love and a steady economic base, makes them fall back upon each other.

Thus, all the females in the novel interrogate not only the aboriginal norms related to class, caste, patriarchy, and feudal-capitalist economic structures but also the “love laws” through their actions. Ammu’s blunt refusal to serve as a prostitute to her husband’s white boss, Mammachi getting threatened by watching television, Baby Kochamma’s acceptance of Roman Catholicism for the sake of Father Mulligan, etc. are quite significant.

The women in the novel are subalterns, who dare to confront the prevailing social inequalities with a view to bring about a change. The fight of the female characters like Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, Rahel, etc. against gender oppression arouses
anti-colonial thoughts. They challenge the local as well as global disparities prevailing in the society through their personal interests in varied issues.

5.3. Quest for Identity

In India, evils of class and caste along with patriarchal oppressions rely and feed on each other. Roy’s booker prize winning novel *The God of Small Things* deals with the struggle within the self, the dark and melancholic moods of men and women. The novelist fathoms the depths of human psyche against the chaotic social back drop. The novel voices the hidden and suppressed emotions of subalterns and is an encapturing vista of Indian social life depicting the unremitting struggle of women and untouchables for inscribing their identity in this cruel, conservative, and male dominating society. They are vulnerable as well as deserted and so have to suffer at the hands of law makers. Arundhati Roy, being a social activist, raises the existential questions of subalterns and their impassioned quest for identity with a silent voice in this new, democratic and intricate world. An Indian woman is caught in an intricate maze set up for her by the patriarchal society and confronts numerous hurdles at every stage of her life that lead to her fulfilment. However, she proves her worth by breaking all the barriers laid down by the society and comes out strong willed and self determined. The present section focuses on Roy’s female characters in *The God of Small Things*, and reveals their unending journey towards self realization.

Arundhati Roy’s protagonists are hypersensitive, mysterious, and eccentric who neither belong to the common rung of the society nor do their problems deal with food, clothing, and shelter. Instead they are rebels and their rebellion is directed against individuals not so much against society. This section describes how Roy’s women characters are exploited and how they are torn between their individuality and social obligations. An attempt is also made to study the lot of Ammu who sacrifices her life in her quest for identity. The section also discusses the sufferings of Ammu’s mother and her daughter, and exhibits a strong contrast wherein Mammachi accepts domestic violence as her fate while Ammu dares to tread a path where she can have an identity of her own.
The novel presents the constant struggle of women against their persistent exploitation, torture and struggle, which they undergo because of the male dominated conservative society. It talks about the absurdities and injustices of domestic and social life of women. Roy mainly discusses things that every individual aspires for - the nerve to live and the ability to love as well as to be loved. The estranged state of characters such as Ammu, Velutha or even Rahel and Estha propels them from one crisis to another, sucking along several other characters. They are presented mainly as seekers-questers for love and identity. Disturbed emotionally as well as psychically, both Ammu and Velutha are persistently and maniacally driven by undefined hunger and vehement lust, which brings about their doom. Incapable of silent submission and ungrudging suffering, they somehow pull through life. Ammu defies patriarchal domination, class, and caste prejudice in public and pays with her life. Roy’s protagonists suffer from lack of parental love, disturbed infancy, broken homes and are dissatisfied with their existence and often choose to go out of the mainstream of life. This alienation generally manifests in immoral ties and activities. Alienation from their selves leads to a frantic search for their identity through self discovery and self identification. The novel deals with the sufferings of three generations of women - Mammachi, Ammu, and Rahel, who react in their own ways to the situation that they are confronted with.

5.3.1. Mammachi

Mammachi is a true representative of the old generation of women, who gracefully submits herself to the patriarchal order. She is an ‘adarsh bhartiya naari’, who believes that a woman’s primary duty is towards her husband and she should submit herself to her husband at all costs. She has been a victim of her husband’s brutality throughout her life. She is either beaten with a brass vase or an ivory handled riding crop by her husband. Pappachi never allowed Mammachi to continue her interests in violin and poured fervent insults on her. Immense jealousy is reflected in the actions of Pappachi. The climax is reached, when he breaks the bow of the violin one night and throws it into the river. A feeling of jealousy is expressed again, when she started pickle making business; Pappachi refuses to help her because pickle making is not “a suitable job for high-ranking ex-
Government official”. Thus their marriage is devoid of understanding, love, and cooperation. Whatever her husband did, being a righteous woman, she accepted it because it was endorsed by the society. Mammachi’s blind submission to patriarchy is a defensive gesture rather than an honest agreement with hegemonic powers.

The other man, who dominated Mammachi’s life is Chacko, her privileged and Oxford educated son. When he returned home after his divorce from Margaret, he takes over Mammachi’s pickle factory without regarding Mammachi, who had started and developed the factory before Chacko returned home. Mammachi did nothing but accept it passively.

5.3.2. Ammu

Ammu belongs to the second generation of women. She is, in fact, the new woman, who strongly protests against the patriarchal system prevalent in the Indian society. She is doubly marginalized by men as well as women. As a child, she is deprived of the love and care because of her gender. The treatment that she received as a child was the result of the traditional patriarchal family structure, where the birth of a girl child is considered a burden on the family. In contrast to this, her brother Chacko, is privileged in every aspect of family life purely because he is a male. After schooling, Ammu is denied further education while her brother is sent to Oxford for higher education. So Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. Thus her own family becomes an obstacle between her freedom and future progress. When her family shifts from Delhi to Ayemenem, Ammu’s life is engulfed by dullness, seclusion, and waiting for marriage proposals. She feels captivated in her house at Ayemenem, and she desperately yearns for her identity:

There was little for young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework… All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother. (38-39)
One day, her father agrees to let her spend her summer with a distant aunt in Calcutta. There, at some wedding reception, she happens to meet her future husband, whom she marries without any hesitation or sense of guilt, thinking thereby that she would be able to put an end to her unbearable relations with her parents. But unfortunately, to her bad luck, “her husband turns out to be not just a heavy drunkard but a full-blown alcoholic” (40). Here Simone de Beauvoir remarks that:

There is a unanimous agreement that getting a husband—or in some cases a ‘Protector’—is for her (woman) the most important undertaking… She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother’s hold; she will open up her future not only by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, in the hands of a new master. (352)

When Ammu moved to Assam with her husband, she became the centre of attraction of the Planters’ Club. She wore backless blouses with her saris and carried a silver lace purse on a chain. She also smoked long cigarettes in a silver cigarette holder and learned to blow perfect smoke rings, thereby breaking the patriarchal domination prevalent in the Indian system. Ammu, being a new woman, does not yield herself before the clutches of the male chauvinist societal structure. She escapes the asphyxiating home of her parents by her unsuccessful marriage; it ends when her drunkard husband offers her to his English boss for his career prospects. She does not bow before her new master (husband); on the contrary, she divorces him to protect her self respect and identity. Unlike her mother, she cannot accept the bad attitude and actions of her communal mores of India. She returns unwelcomed to Ayemenem “to everything she had fled from only a few years ago, except that now she had two young children and no more dreams.” (42) Marriage for Ammu is a horrible experience; her husband is a reason for her physical and psychological suffering. But she rebels against such social structures and challenges marriage that rather seems to be a ‘disciplinary institution’ (according to Michel Foucault), working towards silencing and controlling the one who stands apart, as if a non-conformist/ lunatic who needs to be reasoned/imprisoned.
Ammu, being a victim of a marriage that does not work out, is treated as an interloper in her own family and this clearly defines her position in the society. It is quite paradoxical that a daughter estranged from the husband is tormented and oppressed in her parent’s house because a divorced woman is considered ‘non-virtuous’. Contrary to this, an estranged son, chacko, not only receives a warm welcome but also remains the rightful inheritor of the family wealth and fortune. When he flirts with a low woman, he is encouraged by Mammachi in the name of ‘man’s needs’ (268) whereas Ammu’s love with Velutha, a paravan, is considered illicit, untraditional and sinful. Irrespective of all this, the new woman in Ammu breaks the four walls of the house, which confined her existence and takes a critical decision to ‘love by night the man her children loved by day.’ Ammu’s infatuation with Velutha and thereby violating the “love laws” which her community has imposed is a transgression of the caste, class, and religious boundaries and it mounts a rebellion against her marginalization as a woman. Ammu’s rebellion against maternal and marital conventionality and finally, her liaison with dark skinned and untouchable Velutha constitutes a violation of a determinate social order.

Her rebellion (quest for identity) is an attempt at repossessing, renaming, reknowing the world”, but it “appears doomed from the very beginning because of the nature of the society where she has had to seek refuge with her twins after her divorce and also because of the incapacity of her kin (mother, great-aunt Kochamma) to provide an adequate model for redefining the self. (Chanda 40)

Though Ammu is well aware that the society in which she dwells is conservative, she dares to establish relations with Velutha. This shows Ammu’s desperate quest for love, which neither her parents nor her husband could provide. Velutha is the best companion of the children, who feel chocked in Ayemenm because of their divorced mother. The few moments the children spent in the company of Velutha could afford them real happiness. But unfortunately, the secret love affair of Ammu and Velutha, is reported by the latter’s father to Mammachi. Mammachi could not bear Ammu’s cross caste affair, as a result, Velutha is grabbed by the police and killed on false case of rape. When Ammu goes to the police station to set the matter right, she is badly insulted:
Kottayam police does not take statement from Veshyas (prostitutes) and their illegitimate children. (58)

In this regard, Debjani Gangulay rightly comments:

Mammachi’s own marital experience has not enabled her to empathize with her daughter’s brutalized married life. Rather, she sees Ammu’s failed marriage as just retribution for her daughter who dared to marry outside her community. Her firm emotional investment in the hierarchies of class, caste and gender is illustrated at several points in the novel. (57)

Thus, Ammu is brutally treated at the hands of police - considered to bring the law breakers on to the right path. She is also cornered by the family structure and inheritance laws customarily prevalent among the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. In the end, Ammu is exiled from her home by her family members. She is separated from her children and not allowed to visit Ayemenem. She desperately tries to seek good job in anonymous places. This shows her quest for true identity but fails in her endeavours. Tired, exhausted, sick, and finally defeated, she is found dead in a grimy room in Bharat Lodge in Aleppy. After death, her humiliation does not end; the church refuses to bury her. Finally, she is cremated in electric crematorium, where only beggars, derelicts, and police custody dead are cremated.

According to Brinda Bose, “Ammu’s conscious decision to embrace Velutha is a forbidden cross-caste liaison of radical significance within the novel’s given social imperatives…” Bose connects these violations to Arundhati Roy’s robust commitment to the autonomy of the self-the freedom of small things. Thus “the feminist reconceptualization of politics in Roy’s novel,” as Bose opines, “is profoundly subversive.” (21)
Before Ammu’s acceptance of such doom, in frantic attempts of self realization, she becomes a symbolic personification of all subalterns, especially women, who challenge power structures of the social order. Thus, Arundhati Roy exhibits her unhappiness at the social conditions of the post colonial world in which the untouchables of the past still face a hostile society that does not let them live as free and independent individuals. Velutha, the outcast, can never co-exist peacefully with the “touchable” communities for as long as the stigma of untouchability is attached to him and countless others like him. Ammu, another “untouchable” within the “touchable” cannot pursue happiness because doing so threatens the existing order and the society takes every possible step to avoid change. Thus, Ammu is severely marginalized by social institutions like family, marriage, religion, and police. Not only men, but women like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma have equal share in her meeting the doom.

5.3.3. Rahel

Rahel belongs to the third generation. She is less marginal character in comparison to Ammu and Mammachi. Unlike them, she never faces domestic violence, yet she remains at the periphery because of being the daughter of neglected Ammu. She too, experienced insult and humiliation in the childhood as her mother witnessed. Her life is totally disturbed and deserted because of the tormenting memories of the past. Everytime, Rahel protests against the adults, they “threaten to send her away” (148) and tell her that it makes “people love her a little less” (112). This scolding contributes to Rahel’s self image as someone, who may not be lovable. Ammu, who has learnt neither to love nor to trust anyone since terror can hide behind the façade, is frightened by her children’s “willingness to love people who didn’t really love them…… and (it) sometimes made her want to hurt them-just as an education, a protection.” (43) Ammu’s distrust of other people teaches Rahel that love is nothing to take for granted, that it is something conditional and limited, thus leaving Rahel with insecurity and anxiety. The fear of not being loved is constantly reflected in Rahel’s character and her eagerness to receive punishments can be seen as a prolongation of this. “Ammu”, Rahel said, ‘shall I miss dinner as my punishment?’ she was keen to exchange punishments. No dinner, in
exchange for Ammu loving her the same as before.” (11) When Ammu doesn’t give her any punishment, Rahel is distressed and does not eat, “hoping that if she could somehow effect her own punishment, Ammu would rescind hers” (115). This shows Rahel’s impassioned quest for love.

Rahel is a woman, who does not find any room either in her family or society. Living in her grandparent’s house, she witnesses the stark injustices met out to her mother. As she grows up unwanted, she becomes a free woman, who unlike her mother, is not restricted by the confines of traditional values. Rahel too, could not lead a successful married life as a result of her obsession with her twin brother Estha. Thus, the novel presents the desiccated souls of women of a particular social set up.

The novel also exhibits severe attempts to break the patriarchal norms. Rahel and Estha’s reading the posters backwards is the breaking of patriarchal conventions. The novel itself persuades the readers that it be read backwards. The characters dare to transgress their boundaries in several ways. Velutha dares to forget his untouchability; Ammu crosses the norm of womanly virtues and also had the guts to forget the very fact that she is a touchable who should not allow an untouchable near her. ‘Locusts Stand I’ (Locus Standi) is forgotten and Ammu dares to feel at home in Ayemenem. The norms of patriarchy are broken and this brings disaster.

Thus, Roy’s protagonists are bold enough to break the laws but not without paying a heavy price. The History House is the lawgiver; it punishes all misdemeanor that takes place in the Ayemenem House. In one sense, Roy defines her feminine aesthetics. Ammu breaks the boundaries of how much and who – she defies all phallocentric discourse only to be a harbinger of a new epoch, when women will make their own choices, even if it involves death in isolation, in a despoiled place.

The authority of the colonial rulers is challenged by Ammu - a subaltern, who is both economically and socially marginalized. Stifled by social injustice, Ammu rebels against the very social norms that constitute the Syrian Christian community in Kerala. This
insurgence is an act of resistance against the very foundations of this society. Her most significant act of becoming sexually involved with the “Untouchable”, lower class Velutha, cannot be taken at its face value as an act of sexual transgression only. In brief, Ammu as a woman and as a subaltern, resists the domineering and exploitive political and social structures. Though she fails in bringing about any substantial change, she puts up a brave fight for realizing her dreams. Ammu’s uniqueness lies in the fact that she may not have deliberately worked for other subalterns but all her actions were directed towards the liberation of different kinds of subalterns.

To sum up, Roy’s protagonists are women with great courage and gumption. They represent the litheness of tradition thereby challenging its imposition as a closed phenomenon. On the one hand, the narrative takes up a cross caste love relationship and its consequences, and on the other, it tackles such issues as the daughter’s right to inheritance in her parental property. The different treatment given to males and females in the novel creates imbalance in the society resulting in much of the unhappiness and discontentment prevailing in the families and the dilapidated lives of children. The outcome is a paralytic society unable and unwilling to grow.

5.4. Feminist Perspectives on Arundhati Roy

Roy’s *The God of Small Things* introduced a great deal of resistance and activism against the global and local inequalities prevalent in India. The novel throws light on the predicament of Indian women along with the condition of dalits (untouchables), racial subalterns, and lower class people, with regard to neo imperialism and global capitalism camouflaged as globalization. In this context, Arundhati Roy reflects the opinion of Ranajit Guha of the Subaltern Studies group fame, and witnesses the conflict against gender oppression to be creating a path if not instigating resistance against class oppression, caste and stimulating anti-colonial actions and thought. These variations of resistant rebellion are beautifully expressed by means of inter-gender and marital relations of Mammachi, Ammu, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma. Their transgression, clearly rebellious or outside the domains of marriage, along with the “love laws” which
predate Western colonialism lead to a scathing examination of the basic structures and values prevalent in the post colonial Indian society. Thus Roy makes an attempt to create a path for the Indian women, so that they can resist not only local but also global equities.

This section discusses the feministic approach to Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. Roy focuses on the meaninglessness and prejudices of both domestic and social life of women and attacks the dual standards prevalent in the society that a female is to be sheltered and kept from power while the other i.e. the male, irrespective of his behaviour, runs the world. Such lopsided values prevalent in the male dominated society are at assault by Arundhati Roy.

*The God of Small Things* highlights the position of Indian women. It is a story of unending suffering representing the continuous exploitation and torture of women in the Indian patriarchal system. The novel takes into account the women of three generations who are born and brought up in different circumstances-Mammachi, Ammu, and Rahel. They all are victims of the marital and family problems.

The first generation woman Mammachi, takes life as it comes her way. She believes in total surrender to the male dominion and accepts all kinds of tortures at the hands of her husband. She got married to Pappachi, who was much older to her and controlled every step of hers. She is constantly beaten and insulted by her husband. She is never allowed to sit in his Plymouth, until after his death. Besides the passive victimization, she is also the target of the jealousy of her entomologist husband. Mammachi, also suffers at the hands of her own privileged and Oxford educated son, Chacko, who returns home after divorcing Margaret. He takes full control of Mammachi’s pickle factory and refers to the factory as “……. my factory, my pineapples, my pickles” (57) without any regard for Mammachi who had established and developed the factory. Chacko becomes her substitute, and regains the role of the patriarch since certain tasks are restricted to men in the Indian society.
Ammu, who belongs to the second generation, also experiences the same pain. Her parents are more inclined towards her brother, Chacko, for being a man than her as a woman. She marries a person of her own choice to escape the clutches of her parents but her marriage to a Bengali-Hindu, after a period of courtship which lasted for five days, proves to be a total failure: “Ammu didn’t pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem.” (39) Later, she divorces him to protect her self respect. She returns to her parents’ house (which is totally controlled by men) along with two children - Eshta and Rahel. This return back to her parent’s home worsens her situation because the society believes that a good woman should live with her husband and accept her husband unconditionally. Though Chacko is also divorced, he leads a cheerful life. Ammu leads a miserable life, acting both a father and a mother to her kids. On one occasion, she tells Rahel and Estha that they do not need a Baba because she acts as both a mother and a father. Here Ammu treats herself equal to men thereby acting against feministic views. Ammu feels deserted and dares to develop an affair with a paravan, Velutha. This untouchable gives her both emotional and physical support. Ammu’s transgression of the caste, class, and religious boundaries mounts a rebellion and leads to her marginalization as a woman. According to Aijaz Ahmad, Ammu “a woman of great grit” (Prasad, 2006: 39) is banished from her home and dies exiled. But her death becomes an embodiment of all subalterns, especially women, who challenge power structures of the social order. In this context, the words of Murari Prasad hold quite valid:

At the heart of Roy’s astounding book is the conflict between the characters excluded from institutional power and their hegemonic counterparts… Her situation could represent the typical problems an Indian woman who is dependent on her husband can face. Her relationship with Velutha is particularly significant in that their affair is considered to be both a sin, as it is extra-marital, and a crime, as it is between the members of two different classes in the caste system. In fact, the untouchables are not even regarded as a part of the caste system. In this respect, we can regard the untouchables as subaltern subjects as well, people
whose voice is lost both in the social class system and also under the colonial rule. (67)

When Chacko’s daughter dies by drowning, Velutha is unjustly punished merely because he was there near the river, at his usual meeting place with Ammu; Ammu as a woman is punished and completely silenced, as Velutha is.

In India a woman’s life is governed by tradition and family customs. A good woman is one who is a good daughter, wife and mother. To be good means sacrificing, self-abnegating, meek, and quiet nature. (Singh 27)

But Ammu is the woman, who tries to rebel against the Indian patriarchal system. She is totally different from her mother and cannot accept the terrible attitude and actions of her husband and therefore, divorces him to protect her self respect. Thus, Ammu exemplifies the ‘new woman’, who breaks the customs and traditions prevalent in India.

Rahel, daughter of Ammu and Estha’s sister, is the third generation woman who is deprived of any place either in her family or society. From her childhood, she stays in her grandparent’s house and witnesses injustices done to her mother. She grows unattended and unwanted and her presence is always unnoticed therefore, she becomes a free woman like her mother, not bound by any kind of traditions and customs: “Rahel drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge with a sitting down sense. She returned with him to Boston.” (18) But her marriage is also a failure. When she returns to Ayemenem, she tells an old man who asked about her marital status “We are divorced” (130) without worrying what the old man will think about her answer.

Estha and Rahel have a battered childhood due to their father’s “drunken violence followed by post-drunken badgering” (42), when they were hardly two years old. “When his bouts of violence began to include the children, and the war with Pakistan began, Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcome to her parents in Ayemenem.” (42) The
two children had a double stigma of mixed parentage attached to them, both religious (since their father was Hindu and mother Syrian Christian) and ethnic (since their father was a Bengali and mother, a Keralite) (91). Being the children of divorced parents, the children were disliked by Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria, and even Chacko and therefore, they feel resentment against them. Rahel derives pleasure from the intimacy and company of her brother. She also considers Velutha, to be a father figure on whose back she rides. When Ammu’s relationship with Velutha is discovered, she is locked in a room. At that time, Rahel, along with Estha, tries to find out the reason for the same and Ammu calls them: “millstones round my neck.” (253)

This incident leads the twins to escape in a boat, along with Sophie Mol, their cousin, who drowns accidently. As a result, Velutha is arrested and the twins are forced to go to the police station to identify Velutha as a criminal. Ammu is made to quit not only the room in which she had locked herself but also Ayemenem House, and she dies soon afterwards. Rahel and Estha are separated; While Rahel remains at Ayemenem, Estha is sent back to his father thus “While other children of their age learned other things, Estha and Rahel learned how history negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws.” (55) Rahel is expelled three times from school. She becomes a subaltern as she is marginalized due to her gender, age, class, and religion and her acts of non-conformity are symbolic of her resistance through which she wants to bring in some change. One of her most significant act is that of accomplishing her incestuous love for Estha. This act, although an act of her own self assertion, is also extremely political that challenges the prevalent inequalities in post-colonial India.

Baby Kochamma, the daughter of Reverend John Ipe, and Pappachi’s sister is also a victim of ill treatment. She deeply loves Father Mulligan, the Roman Catholic priest and to woo him, she even resorts to her conversion to the Roman Catholicism but she does not defy the established ideas of love and marriage prevalent in those times. She upholds very intransigent ideas and does not run away for the fulfilment of her dreams thereby, shattering her dream of marrying father Mulligan. She starts living in seclusion in Ayemenem and accepts the “fate of the wretched Man-less woman.” (45) In this context,
Amitabh Roy remarks: “It is a pity that she submits in the name of decency and honour to the very sexist, casteist and communal prejudices that have stood in her way and denied fulfilment to her.” (62) Thus like Mammachi, Baby Kochamma also surrenders to the patriarchal norms. Antonio Navarro-Tejero rightly comments “The first generation of women in the novel give extreme importance to patriarchal social norms, indeed they succumb to them…” (105) A close examination reveals her putting up couched resistance against the prejudiced socio-political and economic system in the post colonial India. Thus, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, and Rahel - all four question the existing patriarchal norms, traditions, customs, values, laws and structures etc.

5.5. Conclusion

To conclude, Arundhati Roy’s female characters are torn between conventional boundaries and modern free zones. They confront immense grief, knotty marital relationships, non-marital affairs, and brutal punishments for violating social rules laid down by the society. While some of them surrender in front of the dominant masculine voice and accept their fate, others accept the challenges with courage and stand against the social taboos, try to seek their individuality as human beings though they are silenced in various ways. *The God of Small Things* is a radical attempt of Roy to enlighten the Indian Community towards the insensitivity of men in treating women as objects, as soulless beings, as sub-human, and as playthings. This results in an unbalanced society devoid of happiness in the families and the scruffy lives of children, who get exposure to this very biased and unfair view of life.

Thus, Roy’s focus is on the double standards of the society where one sex is protected and kept away from power while the other runs the world, irrespective of its behaviour. These lopsided values of a male chauvinistic society are the hallmark of the novel and Roy skillfully asserts that a woman too, is a living being and not an adjunct to man. She is an autonomous being, endowed with the ability to create her own path.