Chapter – II

Social Realism in *The God of Small Things*

Among the many Indian novelists, who have been concerned with the social problems, Arundhati Roy has reserved a very important place among them. Her novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), which bagged booker prize in 1997 and created a great turmoil in the literary world, is considered as one of the most powerful novels which are very much deep rooted in the ugly social realities of India. The novel reveals oppression of the downtrodden, weaker, and unprivileged by the stronger and more privileged in the society and focuses on “the irrationalities and injustices of domestic and social life” (Jacob 195).

Appreciating its success in minute depiction of the surrounding world, Jason Cowley, one of the five 1997 Booker Prize judges, states:

*The God of Small Things* fulfils the highest demand of the art of fiction: to see the world, not conventionally or habitually, but as if for the first time. Roy’s achievement, and it is considerable, is never to forget about the small things in life: the insects and flowers, wind and water, the outcast and the despised. She deserved to win.
Roy’s novel has kindled a flame among the critics and has been praised variously. The eminent American novelist John Updike describes it as a “Tiger Woodsian debut” in which the author hits the long, socio-cosmic ball but is also exquisite in her short game. Like a devotionally built temple, the novel builds a massive interlocking structure of fine, intensely felt details (159). The novel is concerned with the social consciousness, predicament, and oppression of downtrodden. It also focuses on the oppressive machinery based on caste discrimination and its relation with certain political forces. In addition, while talking about its local fictional world, it also extends into a universal one with portrayal of perennial conflicts. Taking cognisance of all these Indira Nityanandam holds that in the novel past and present are aesthetically interwoven into the story-line to reveal a multi-layered scheme and various kinds and levels of oppression. For her, it is oppression, which is the main theme or central idea which makes everything in the novel converge. It seems to be the unifying factor in the organization of the entire. It is what Flaubert calls “the mother-idea” (86).

*The God of Small Things* is located in the south-western state of Kerala. Along with many symbolic filaments, Roy presents a realistic vision. She
seems to stick to the opinion of D H Lawrence that “all creative art must rise 
out of a specific soil and flicker with a spirit of place” (qtd. in Chandokar 188).
The opening page of the novel presents an example of the clarity of observation 
so evident everywhere:

The river shrinks and black gorge on bright mangoes in still, dust 
bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air . . . . But by early June 
the south-west monsoon breaks and there are three months of 
wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine that 
thrilled children snatch to play with. The courtyard turns an 
immodest green. Boundaries blur as tapioca fins take root and 
bloom. Brick walls turn moss-green. Pepper vines snake up 
electric poles. Wild creepers burst through laterite banks and spill 
across the flooded roads. Boats ply in the bazzars. And small fish 
appear in the puddles that fill the PWD potholes on the highways. 
(Roy 01)

Comparing the realistic portrayal of the background of the novel with other 
prominent novelists Chhote Lal Khatri considers that Arundhati Roy depicts 
the village Ayemenem in the same manner as Thomas Hardy leads us to the 
rural world of Wessex with lush and greens, R.K. Narayan to Malgudi (a 
fictional village of south India), and Phanishwar Nath Renu to Champaran of 
Bihar in his Maila Anchal (290).
On this gloomy canvas of “an area of darkness” the novelist carves the picture of “a wounded civilization” in which oppression on the basis of caste, creed, and gender looms large, in which the social structure is basically oppressive and politics is opportunistic, in which Love Laws lay down who should be loved and how. Like several other novels, such as Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, *The God of Small Things* also revolves around the issue of social deprivation of untouchables in the Indian society. In the novel, there is description of the plight of the lowest cast people in the hierarchical structure of the society. With Mammachi’s words, the novelist brings to the reader’s notice the long practice of untouchablility in the society. She says that in her childhood:

Paravan were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christian would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprints. In Mammachi’s time, Paravans, like other Untouchables, were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas. They had to put their hands over their mouths when spoke, to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. (Roy 73-74)

Velutha, the protagonist, who belongs to an untouchable class i.e. Paravan, suffers a lot because of his low caste. He represents the untouchable
community and inherits its age long-sufferings. He is a skilled carpenter who
performs like a little magician, and can make intricate toys – tiny windmills,
rattles, and minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds, carve perfect boats out
of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts (Roy 74). He crafts very
beautiful, small and playful things for Rahel and Estha and their mother,
Ammu. For his skills he is always in demand and that is why is employed in
the Paradise Pickle factory. For his exceptional talents Mammachi often
mourns: “if only he hadn’t been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer”
(Roy 75). Despite the fact that she is well aware of his talent, she knows that no
one else would hire him as it might resent the other workers, and expects that
he should be grateful to her because she is offering him a salary more than
what an untouchable gets and less than a touchable. However, for this very
favour, he becomes the cause of envy for all the touchable, because it is
unbearable for them to work with a low caste man.

Velutha’s subjugation is manifold. In the novel he explores some very
perennial problems of untouchables in the society as well as some personal
problems which are nothing but due to his position in the hierarchy. He is born
Paravan and most importantly son of Vellya Paapen who is extremely indebted
to Ayemenem House. Although he belongs to lower caste, still Mammachi has favoured him many times by helping him for his eye operation when a wooden chip hit his eye and subsequently he lost one. Along with it, it was Mammachi who had asked Vellya to send Velutha to the untouchable school, founded by her father-in-law. Since he is a Paravan son, so he is sent to ‘school for untouchables’, not in school for touchable; but the good thing is that, at least, he is sent to school because earlier children of his caste were not allowed to go there and get education. After completing his high school, he becomes an accomplished carpenter. He is employed in the pickle factory to take care and mend things. But his tragedy is that he is being paid less than the other workers in the factory because as a Paravan he is not supposed to get salary equal to them. This shows that though people do equal labour, yet they get unequal salary and it is caste not labour which decides the value of work.

Moreover, since Velutha does things that he is convinced to do and does not let people and situations to manipulate and affect his life, his father is not happy with the things happening around him. He warns Velutha not to dare to challenge the established rules. The father-son relationship is affected by the social system and their relationship presents that how such systems influence
even human relations. Both father and son represent old and young generation respectively. Vellya Pappen’s fear suggests his past experiences of the harsh realities regarding their poor position and what would be the consequences if they go against what they are entitled for. Since they belong to two different generations, there is a contrast in their attitude. While Vellya represents the people who follow the tradition of blind imitation of rules set or told by the privileged class in the society, his son represents the young generation that is rational, revolting and intelligent and does what he finds right according to his own belief. While Pappen goes to Ayemenem House regularly to show his loyalty to the family, his son does so due to his childhood practice and also because of his affection for Ammu and her two children. Unlike his father, he does not wish to prove his loyalty, and perhaps this is the reason of his falling in love with Ammu. He denies following the tradition of loyalty that is supposed to be carried forward by him, and his denial of harsh and unjust social obligations, his assertion of equality brings forth the entire panorama of social and political hypocrisies that result into his tragic end.

The novel is very much about the politics that exerts a decisive influence over the lives of the people of Ayemenem. Since the socio-political scenario in
India is not value-based, professional opportunism is taking the society towards a chaos. The novel beautifully presents its sinister nature and how it becomes more dangerous with the alliance of other oppressive forces of society. The character of Mr K N M Pillai is an example of politician’s double standard of behaviour and hypocrisy. He is a Marxist and is supposed to work for the betterment of the poor, but he is more concerned for his personal gains rather than for the upliftment of the unprivileged. His betrayal of duty to the party is very much evident when Velutha, an untouchable and factory worker, arrives at his house for his support. Instead of helping Velutha, Pillai reminds him the Party principles and says:

‘But Comrade, you should know that party was not constituted to support worker’s indiscipline in their private life’ . . . It is not in the Party’s interest to take up such matters. Individual’s interest is subordinate to the organization’s interest. Violating Party discipline means violating party unity.  (Roy 287)

Velutha, who represents the class of downtrodden untouchable used by politicians and the police for political game, is dejected by the party when he needs its support most. Correlating it with the contemporary political practices of the communist party in Kerala R S Sharma and S B Talwar state that here the authorial rhetoric is intrusively exercised for the denigration of the Marxists
in several ways. It is indirectly suggested that Kerala has been turned into hell by the Communist Government (239).

Comrade Pillai, the so-called communist, uses Velutha for his political advantages and in the time when he is in great need, refuses him any help. He is not only denied any favor but also becomes the victim of a deceitful game of exploitation by the joint venture of state police and the politics. Baby Kochmama, the grand aunt of Ammu, a typical sadist, files a false case of abduction and rape against him. Inspector Thomas Mathew, a ‘prudent man’ to detain a helpless Paravan, sends for Comrade Pillai in order to know whether Velutha has any political support or not. The novelist portrays:

The two men had a conversation . . . . As though they had exchanged numbers and not words . . . . They were not friends, Comrade Pillai and Inspector Thomas Mathew, and they didn’t trust each other. But they understood each other perfectly . . . . They looked out at the world and never wondered how it worked, because they knew. They worked it. They were mechanics who serviced different parts of the same machine. (Roy 262)

She further unearths how police joins with the caste-biased state politics and plays a dirty game against the untouchable:
Comrade Pillai told Inspector Thomas Mathew that he was acquainted with Velutha, but omitted to mention that Velutha was a member of the Communist Party or that Velutha had knocked on his door the previous night, which made Comrade Pillai the last person to have seen Velutha before he disappeared. Nor, though he knew it to be untrue, did Comrade Pillai refute the allegation of attempted rape in Baby Kochamma’s FIR. (Roy 262)

After being trapped and nabbed by the police with the help of Baby Kochamma and Pillai, Velutha is sent to the custody where the novel exposes the cruel workings of exploitative forces. The police station scene describes the practice of brutal force being used in the prisons all over the country and especially in lower caste ridden regions of India. Often one reads in the newspaper and watches on television many cases of death in police custody. So the novel just glimpses it through the Ayemenem police. The police use violence to make Velutha assert his so called crime against the Ammu and her niece Sophie Mol. They put all kinds of effort to make it.

Velutha suffers all these problems for nothing else but of being the lowest class. If he would have been from upper class, he would not have experienced such ups and downs in his life. Apart from it, the most disturbing thing is that the state authorities too do not pay much attention to the problems
of weaker sections. There is no remedy against the injustices against the poor people. The government system’s performance is not up to the mark. The system, though established to protect people and maintain law and order, in reality works otherwise. Indian police, particularly in those remote areas where upper class dominates and lower class and caste are in minorities, is devoid of the human elements. To brutalize and victimize people are its common practice, and violence is its normal way of settling the issues. Its portrayal in the novel is one of the most sardonic depictions. The novel gives a succinct picture of typical police station as “the sharp, smoky stink of old urine that permeated the walls and furniture, they [Eastha and Rahel] clamp[s] their nostrils shut well before the smell began” (Roy 07). Apart from the typical description of the place there is Inspector Thomas Mathew who represents the typical characteristics of police. He is introduced to the reader as: “[his] moustaches bustled like the friendly Air India Maharajah’s, but his eyes were sly and greedy” (Roy 7). With this portrayal his outer appearance as well inner thinking suggests that he is not only horrible in his look but in thoughts also. His behaviour with women is very indecent. While Ammu goes to police station to give some statements in favour of Velutha, he talks to her in crude language and makes an ill-concealed lascivious gaze at her breast. He says the
police know all they need to know and that the Kottayam police do not take
statements from [v]eshyas or their illegitimate children. Roy’s intense anger is
clear when she satirizes the police officer and portrays the scene in the office
as:

- Politeness
- Obedience
- Loyalty
- Intelligence
- Courtesy
- Efficiency

The author seems to show the contrast between what is written on the board
about the basic characteristics of police and what the inspector is performing.
He represents the general practice executed by the police. Sonali Das finds her
dialogues an example of “Heteroglossia”. The author is most sarcastic towards
the police and its ways of working. It is the most horrible oppressor of poor and
weak people, and specially one of the worst tormenters of women in India. Its
greed, lechery, and sexiest mentality are openly and disgustingly exposed in the
novel.
The experience of Ammu with the inspector in the police station brings drastic effect on her psyche. The terrible dream she gets before her death shows:

She had woken up at night to escape from a familiar, recurrent dream in which policemen approached her with snickering scissors, wanting to hack off her hair. They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes whom they’d caught. In the bazaars-branded them so that everybody would know them for what they were, [v]eshyas. So that new policemen on the beat would have no trouble identifying whom to harass. (Roy 16)

The police’s brutal intention kills guiltless Velutha without enough evidence against him. The strange thing is that it all happens because of the persuasion of some lawbreakers. Instead of punishing criminals and corrupt people, the police join hands with them to victimize innocent people. In the novel, “the Police Raj at times referred to as goondaraj is because the ways they terrorize and inflict torture on the accused persons on the plea to maintain law and order. It reminds us of the Colonial misrule and tyranny of the past” (Tripathi 218).

The author satirizes the authority for humiliating common people and favouring blameworthy. Along with revealing the brutality in the name of maintaining law and justice, Roy also tries to stir this issue with the cruelty of the society towards women and untouchable. She “shows how the women and
the untouchables are treated as impersonal and subjugative objects in this social structure; how things are decided for both by the patriarchal ideology of an ancient culture which also cultivates the pervasive snobbery and violence of the ‘Touchables’ towards the ‘Untouchables’” (Kundu 172).

The other prominent theme Roy has raised in the novel is the realistic delineation of the plight of the women in society. In the novel, she strives to express her sympathy towards those women who are devoid of everything. Through the character of Ammu she has presented the reality of women’s condition in the society. Ammu is a woman whose condition is full of many ifs and buts. Her life has been an emotional rollercoaster. She cannot take any decision because she has no independent identity, because a woman’s “identity is constituted in different contexts, settings and situations such as her relation to men, family, community, organization and society” and an “Indian women’s identity is one that is usually connected to and defined by societal and cultural norms of a patriarchal familial structure” (Chandra 180). It is obvious that Ammu has always received a step-motherly treatment at her home. She is even devoid of education. Like other traditional families in India Ammu’s father, Pappachi, too believes that higher education spoils a woman so she should not
be allowed to go for higher studies. Despite Ammu’s willingness to study
more, she is denied to go ahead. On the other hand, Chacko, the male child and
brother of Ammu, enjoys his position in the family and in spite of his
reluctance, is sent abroad for higher education. Being an emancipatory element
in a human being’s life, everybody should have equal opportunity to get
education; but, being a girl Ammu is deprived of it.

Moreover, it is not only in the matter of education, but in Indian society
a woman always gets the second position and priority. She does not receive the
same attention as her counterparts do. According to social conventions an act is
welcomed and justified if it is done by a man and if the same action is
performed by a woman then it invites punishment for her. Chacko is favoured
by his mother and Aunt Baby Kochamma at flirting with labour class women
of the factory. His sexual indulgence with them is overlooked as “Men’s
Needs”. On bringing up the subject of Chacko’s illicit relation with labour
women by Baby Kochamma, Mammachi says:

He cannot help having a Man’s Needs’ [Mammachi] said primly. Surprisingly, Baby Kochamma accepted this explanation, and the
enigmatic, secretly thrilling notion of Men’s Needs gained implicit sanction in the Ayemenem House. (Roy 168)
While they support his deed, they are not sympathetic at all towards Ammu, a divorcé and leading a lonely life. They do not want to trouble themselves in thinking about her anxiety about the future of the children. While Chacko’s act is took as a natural thing for a man; on the other hand Ammu-Velutha’s liaison creates an upheaval in the family and their caste hostility doubles their anger and breaks out into expressions of moral outrage. As women Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are supposed to have sympathetic attitude towards Ammu; but, what one sees in the novel is quite opposite to it. While Baby Kochamma not only is in search of things which can harm her niece but she also does little to suppress her deep hatred and dislike and sometimes fans the flames of abhorrence to make the situation worse; Mammachi too shows an unsympathetic attitude towards her. On revelation of Ammu’s relationship the novelist depicts:

[Mammachi] thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie. She imagined it in vivid detail: a Paravan’s coarse black hand on her daughter’s breast . . . . His particular Paravan smell. Like animals, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. Like a dog with a bitch on heat. Her tolerance of “Men’s Needs” as far as her son was concerned, became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter. She had defiled generations of breeding . . . and brought the family to its knee . . . . Mammachi lost control. (Roy 257-58)
These incidents show the typical picture of the double standard of morality prescribed in traditional India. Here men are privileged and free to do whatever they like to do and enjoy complete freedom; while, if a woman takes that liberty, it is assumed that she spoils family’s reputation and her act is considered as a disgrace for the family. The family’s dignity and honour rest on woman’s blemishless moral conduct.

The other example that reveals the social hypocrisy and needs to be discussed here is the marriage of Ammu with a man of different caste. Like other women of Ayemenem Ammu too has been leading a monotonous and traditional life from her childhood. She is not happy at her home, as she has been stopped for any further study after her school. She is also fed up with its suffocating atmosphere:

[T]here is very little for a young girl to do in Ayemanem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she help[s] her mother with the housework. Since her father [does] not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals [come] Ammu’s way. (Roy 38)

Such situations make her desperate and she wants to escape from there and also from “the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long suffering mother” (Roy 39). In these circumstances, she goes to attend her cousin’s wedding
reception in Calcutta and there she meets her future husband. They stay
together for five days and during this time, they develop some likings for each
other. At last he proposes her and though Ammu is not in love with him yet she
realizes that “anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to
Ayemenem” (Roy 39). Her decision to marry a man of other caste makes her
family so furious that they break all relations with her. But for the same
behaviour, marrying a woman of different caste, Chacko is vindicated because
he is a man. He marries an English woman, Margaret Kochamma, and is
welcomed at his home as if he has brought some trophy from England. Thus, it
is very much evident that Ammu’s decisions, regarding his life and love, are
termed as untraditional and even sinful, only because she is a woman. A
traditional Indian family could not assimilate and accept its daughter’s idea of
going against the family’s wishes.

Ammu’s misery does not end here. After sometime of her marriage, she
finds that her husband is a full-blown alcoholic, liar, and wife-beater. She
realizes that she has jumped from a frying pan into fire. Along with this, he is
not even protective towards her and is willing to send his beautiful wife to his
boss Mr Hollick’s bungalow to be “looked after”. All these revelation makes
her distressed and tense, and since now she also has to look after her children’s future, she has no other option but to return to Ayemenem from where she ran away a few years ago. But, it is a great pity that in Indian traditional society a woman has no right in her parents’ home. According to the common codes of society, once a woman gets married to someone, she is no longer a member of family but a guest. Her new home is considered as her real and permanent home and she is prohibited to leave her husband’s home in any situation and condition. Criticizing it Bimaljit Saini considers it “a result of the complex operation of economic, political, social and other factors” (95). Among the characters in the Ayemenem house Baby Kochamma shows this typical mentality:

For a divorced daughter . . . she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma‘s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject. (Roy 46)

As far as Ammu’s economical position is concerned she is not very much independent. She does a job somewhere for a meagre salary as well as offers her help in pickle making. Though she does as much work as other members
do, yet she does not get exactly the same amount of response what she deserves and others get. Ammu helps Mammachi in the pickle factory and does her work wholeheartedly. But since she is a daughter of the family, she has no claim to the property and has to be content whatever she is being offered. On the question of equality and holding equal share in the property Chacko clears the position of Ammu in the family and comically says: “what is yours is mine and what is mine is also mine” (Roy 57). On this Ammu satirically answers: “thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society” (Roy 57). Perhaps he does not say it directly to avoid quarrel with her, but he embodies the patriarchal mentality and he means it. Therefore, it is quite evident that Ammu is a victim of male dominated society and typical example of women who do not hold any right to their parents’ possessions. She is victimized by her father, husband, brother, police and even by her mother and Aunt. She has “no locust stand I.”

Along with Ammu there are other many women characters. Though the other characters have not suffered as much as Ammu suffers yet they have paid the price for being women. After Ammu, Mammachi too is marginalized in her family and suffers in the hands of males of her family. She is a victim of man ego and is subjugated to the male domination. First she suffers in the hands of
his husband and later by her son. She pioneers a pickle factory in Ayemenem after Pappachi’s retirement from government service and returns to his native place. In the beginning she takes very small assignment and has no idea about the quality of her product but gradually she gets surprised by the response of the people for her product. It proves a successful venture. She finds herself unable to cope up with this situation alone. Though, her husband is retired from his service now and she suffers from conical corneas and practically blind, yet Pappachi does not come to help her as he considers it to be a shameful thing for a man like him to help her wife. It is very common with the husbands of working women who not only are uncooperative and unhappy but also jealous of the success of their wives. Besides all this he is unable to tolerate that he is not doing anything while his wife receiving all the appreciations for her enterprise. Since he is not happy with the achievement of her wife he often does things to perturb her: “Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beating weren’t new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place” (Roy 47-8). This is not the end as it does not content his fury and frustration. He also wants to crush her spirit of music and passion for musical instrument. His male revenge and expression of jealously is to blot out all her woman’s aspirations and snuff out the flame of her independent
thinking. This is his way to keep his wife in place and assert his masculine power. When one day he is stopped by his son Chacko while beating Mammachi and is warned not to touch her ever again, it seems him unbearable and this episode transforms their relation:

He never touched Mammachi again. But he never spoke to her either as long as he lived. When he needed anything he used Kochu Maria or Baby Kochamma as intermediaries. (Roy 48)

His anger is not calmed down after doing all these things. It seems that he has decided to torture Mammachi for the whole life. He does not leave any chance to make the notion in the minds of the inhabitants of Ayemenem and passerby of his house that he is being neglected by his family and especially by his wife:

In the evenings, when he knew visitors were expected, he would sit on the veranda and sew buttons that weren’t missing onto his shirts, to create the impression that Mammachi neglected him. To some small degree he did succeed in further corroding Ayemenem’s view of working wives. (Roy 48)

Pappachi’s behaviour is not only to meant to display the careless treatment of him by his wife but to make other people know that what happens if a wife works outside house. In other words, it is like a warning of what can happen in future with people who have working wives. This expression suggests how the
idea of patriarchy works to blot out woman’s aspirations in order to discourage their independent thinking.

Rahel, the daughter of Ammu and granddaughter of Mammachi, is also not free from the nuisance of being a woman and she also suffers and carries the legacy further. Her place in the novel is very significant in many ways. It is Rahel and her brother Eastha through whose eyes we see the saga of *The God of Small Things* from the beginning to the end. From her childhood, Rahel is a stubborn and rebellious. She is used to doing unusual things as she is in habit of reversing things, pressing trail of ants with stone because of its crunching sound that gives her pleasure. She is expelled from her school as she is accused of “hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors” (Roy 16). On making an inquiry by the principal, it is found that she has done it to find out whether breast hurt. Along with the strange behaviour of her, this incident also reveals the teaching of Christian institution that does not acknowledge the existence of breasts. It is an effort by Rahel to know that if breasts are not supposed to exist, how they could hurt. Moreover, it is an attempt to do unconventional things and break the old norms.
Rahel is very attached to her mother. She has seen her suffering as Ammu did see her mother to be beaten up by her father. So the thread of women’s oppression binds them together. This is a common thing between them in particular and among women in general. Since it is only Ammu who loves Rahel and Eastha and weaves a comfortable and friendly atmosphere for them in which they are not humiliated by others and reminded that it is not their home; only in her company, they are at ease. When Eastha is sent to his Baba for further studies and more importantly to work somewhere, Rahel is left alone. After Ammu’s death and Eastha’s absence, she “[grows] up without a brief. . . . Without anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore without an obligatory husband looming on her horizon” (Roy 17). After Ammu there is Velutha outside the home, whom both she and Eastha are very fond of. Sometimes even Ammu is taken aback of their physical ease with him. She is “surprised that her child [seems] to have a sub world that excluded her entirely” (176). But again like Ammu, he too meets with a tragic end and it is Rahel and Eastha whose statements confirm his so-called involvement in the incident designed to trap him, the cause of the death of the person whose love for them is selfless. Their statement works as last nail in the coffin of Velutha and after which he is beaten to death. Velutha, Ammu and the twins fall the
victim of caustic social codes. The twins are deprived of any quantum of solace and their search for love proves nothing but a wild goose chase. All these incidents and development inscribe a deep impression in her soft and innocent mind. Eventually this enforces her to lead an atypical life. “[S]he spends eight years in college without finishing the five year undergraduate course and taking no degree,” Roy writes (Roy 17). She “[drifts] into marriage,” with Larry Mc Caslin, “like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge. With a sitting [d]own sense” (Roy 18). Her marriage with Larry too is not successful and does not last long as she finds it difficult to adjust with the new patterns of her life and especially with Larry’s emotional demands. During their lovemaking Rahel’s eyes hurts him as she looks outside the window and at this he assumes that in a country like India that Rahel comes from “various kinds of despair competed for supremacy” (Roy 19). Thus, with “her deprived childhood, reckless adulthood and drifting woman hood,” as Akshaya Kumar writes, Rahel also “undergoes a stint of rather unstable, uneasy alliance, marital” relationship with her husband and repeats the same story (62).

Apart from main characters of the novel, some other women characters are there who have the same story and carry forward the legacy of the dilemma
of a woman. They are Baby Kochamma, kathakali dancers, women factory
workers, and Sophie Mol. Baby Kochamma’s life gives the glimpse of a lonely
life and the consequences that come out of it. Though she does not suffer
apparently by the male family members, yet the appalling impact of patriarchy
affects her life too. Her behaviour and way of living suggests that she is
dissatisfied with something i.e. her unfulfilled love with Father Mulligan.
Kochamma loved him but this relationship did not reach to a happy ending as
to some extent it was a one sided love and also because he was a Roman
Catholic. Father came to Ayemenem to learn from Baby Kochamma’s father.
Since then she started liking him. On his departure from the village, she
decided to be a Roman Catholic and insisted her father to send her for training
as a novice in a convent in Madras just to be near to Father Mulligan there.
Nevertheless, after sometime she realized the uselessness of this effort and
started writing puzzling letters to her father. She wrote him about her
distressing condition in disguise of her imaginary friend Kohinoor. She wanted
her family to know about her not well-being. Her disappointment in love made
her frustrated and bitter hearted. And since she failed in love, she resents
Ammu because she has kept on fighting with the fate before which Baby
Kochamma has surrendered. She has accepted her destiny and convinced
herself that whatever she has done is right and is in favour of family’s reputation. Her rivalry is not only with Ammu but with her children also. Roy writes:

In the way that the unfortunate sometimes dislike the co-unfortunate, Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs . . . . She was keen for them to realize that they (like herself) lived on sufferance in the Ayemenem House, their maternal grandmother’s house, where they really had no right to be. (Roy 45)

Baby Kochamma was unfortunate in the matter of love. She could not marry and even accompany her love and her failure has caused a kind of fragmentation in her personality that gets pleasure seeing other people unhappy. She is dissatisfied and disappointed with her life. Amar Nath Prasad comment on such attitude seems pertinent where he writes:

[D]isappointment, frustration or repressed sentiments begin to take its toll in the sufferer’s life. The sufferer’s mind is fractured with so much psychological maladies that he begins to develop a sadistic attitude so that his long suppressed desires may be compensated. (76)

The other reason for her hostile attitude towards Ammu is the violation of social codes over her outcaste love, which she has not dared to go against.
The Kathakali dancers’ episode and the poor factory workers sexual exploitation by Chacko too illustrate some more aspects of sordid social realities of Indian society. While an educated and serviceman like Pappachi beats his wife for nothing but to compensate his failure and out of frustration for not getting the desired recognition, these Kathakali dancers also practice in the same manner. However, they are presented as men who play role of mythical female characters from the epic Mahabharata viz. Draupadi and Kunti. They present realistic picture of women’s feelings and portray every subtle emotion very beautifully as they are not men but women itself. Their playing part is so realistic and touching that people often get confused and amazed about their identity. But what the novel later reveals after the outstanding performance is “the Kathkali [m]en [take] off their makeup and [go] home to beat their wives. Even Kunti, the soft one with breasts” (Roy 226). The episode suggests that perhaps it is a common practice among the people of Ayemenem to beat their wives. Moreover, it unfolds a contrast between the loftiness of performance and meanness of their real life. The episode presents a great irony that even people, who have talent to liven the feelings of women, too do not understand and respect women’s emotions and do not have any sympathy with them. Along with, the sexual exploitation of
poor factory workers seems to touch even farthest limits of women exploitation when it becomes evident that poverty and suffering force women labourer into flesh trade. They know that Chacko is preoccupied with his men’s need for which Mammachi is ready to pay them a good amount and at the same time they too are in need so they are forced by prevailing circumstances to, as Savita Tripathi comments, “accept money for their children and old parents out of family compulsion, economic necessity and not for gratification for carnal desire.” (214).

Another aspect on which Arundhati Roy focuses in consistent manner is child-abuse. The ‘Abhilash Talkies’ episode in the novel reveals this scourge and peeps into the mentality of people. This particular chapter describes Baby Kochamma, Ammu and twins’ visit to a movie theatre. There is the notorious scene which takes place after Eastha’s boredom in the hall and later his coming out of it. In the hall, he does not enjoy the show so he decides to come out alone where he meets an “orange drink, lemon drink man” – the child-abuser. After some familiarization with each other, the man offers him orange drink without any cost but he uses Eastha for his masturbatory satisfaction. This experience stays in the mind of the child for very long and perverts his life, and
causes him to live an abnormal life. Later on, when Rahel tries to solve it, they get into an incestuous love. For portraying this love Roy is “strongly criticized for tearing apart traditions and all norms of live-making” (Haldar 64). But, this commonplace Eastha’s experience connotes the pervasiveness of the understated workings of exploitative intentions of adults which often proves too heavy for children who are unable to extricate themselves as chance and selfishness of adults work against them and subjected to such abuses (Wilson 08).

Among the other important issues dealt in the novel is the political hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy of so-called Marxists in our society. However, Marxism promises to work for the welfare of deprived people and to empower them in the society. Here in the novel too it creeps into the state for a classless society, but in reality it hardly does anything that the ideology is known for. Instead, so-called communists try to take advantage from the communal divides and “[offer] a cocktail revolution.” The three characters associated with the ideology are K.N.M. Pillai, Chacko and Velutha. In spite of having the same mission, i.e. to work for the weak and poor people, both, Comrade Pillai and Chacko, use the ideology for their personal gains. They only pretend to be
in the mission and make people believe that they are fighting for them, but in reality they struggle to outwit each other in befooling and using people and to rule the people. At the time of emergency when Chacko convinces workers to have patience for some time regarding increment in their salary, Pillai urges them for revolution. But whatever he does, he never comes openly against Chacko. He never refers to him by name, but always as ‘the Management’. “As though Chacko is many people.” The reason because of which he does not come openly against him is his own private business with Chacko. His contract for printing the Paradise Pickles labels gives him an income that he badly needs. They both do not like each other but they know that both are useful for each other. Thus, due to necessity both pretend to be together but do not trust each other.

Chacko is presented in the novel as self-seeking and self-proclaimed Marxist. His Marxism is simply at fashionable facade. Pappachi calls him ‘Karl Marx’! The novel describes: “Every morning at breakfast the Imperial Entomologist derided his argumentative Marxist son by reading out newspaper reports of the riots, strikes and incidents of police brutality that convulsed Kerala” (Roy 67). His so-called Marxist attitude is very much apparent in his
dealing with the labours of his factory at the time of financial crisis. The irony is that the labours are already paid less than the minimum rates specified by the trade union. And now since the factory is running in loss, Chacko promises them to revise their salary as soon as the crisis gets over. But after assuring them he hands over this issue to Mammachi, the sleeping partner, as he “[is] so busy trying of different costumes that he blurs the battle lines.” Since Mammachi, being older has more experience than Chacko, knows better to handle things and in response to labourers’ demands, she replies:

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. (Roy 121-22)

Though, as an owner of the factory, it is Chacko and Mammachi’s responsibility to take care of the requirements of her factory workers especially in the time of crisis; yet, what one sees is that they are concerned only with the profit of the factory and do not pay any serious attention towards their demands. Instead, They threaten the poor workers to throw them out, and the unfortunate workers have to suffer in this miserable condition without any expectation of aid from owners as well as from so-called Marxist.
Thus, the novelist has endeavoured to cover a number of burning issues of local as well as universal relevance, and on making a thorough study of the characters, situations and themes of the novel *The God of Small Things* it is apparent that Ms Roy has depicted a big panorama of social life, exploitation of poor and weaker section in the society, social and institutional apathy towards marginalized ones. On her limited canvas of village life she has very carefully portrayed the social evils that have been having deep roots in the Indian society for millenniums. For Amar Nath Prasad she is “near to P B Shelley in Romantic poetry and G.B. Shaw in the modern drama. Like P B Shelley, she believes that the poet must be the unacknowledged legislator of mankind. Like G B Shaw she harbours the opinion that the world can become a paradise if some of the evils of society are uprooted” (246).
Works Cited


