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The Social Realism in Arundhati Roy's

God of Small Things

Madhumita Das, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar

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The aim of literature is to move forward keeping parallel with the progress of a country, society and time. No literature can ever be great unless it reflects the real pictures of society. From time immemorial society has been witnessing its culture, tradition, values and many age-old beliefs. It changes from time to time reflecting all social norms as per the need of the time. It is the social issues that bring a change and thereby set a new base and values in society. In every age, this has been an inevitable concern for the literary artist to reflect these issues as they are. Very often life is uplifted by the current and cross-current of this social change, or is fragmented by the collision with this new change.

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According to Ranga Rao, “In every age, in every society, the contemporary socio-political situation always inspires the novelists to write novels on this social or political issues which afterwards becomes an ultimate instrument of socio-political revolution in the hands of the sensitive readers who read and act according to the need of the hour. That is why the contemporary novels of our time are no more culture – based only, but also cast a new picture of socio-political thought to the modern man”.

Today our society is experiencing tremendous transformation, affecting its complexion and ideas. Over the last four to five decades radical changes have been seen in almost all walks of life, challenging the basic assumptions and beliefs and bringing under merciless scrutiny age-old faiths and theories. The disturbance is much more perceptible in literacy world than in any other field of life. This disturbing picture of life has been the main concern in the writings of many socially committed writers like Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Sashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, V.S. Naipaul and a host of other writers in the post-modern tradition, who have been engaged in reflecting certain social issues and crisis that had remained unquestioned for centuries.

Arundhati Roy is one of the foremost novelists of this socially committed tradition, showing exceptional awareness of the social crisis and sensitivity to the problems. She is one of the few Indian Writers in English who is actively interested in contemporary social-political issues which is amply evidenced in a number of articles, interviews and books she wrote on various topics in recent years. Her books like ‘The threat of Nuclear Weapons’, ‘The Promotion of Equal Rights’, ‘The Narmada Dam Project’, ‘The War on

Terrorism' and 'The Cost of Living' have created great stir and put her in a storm of controversies that has only increased her stature as an intellectual.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* can be seen as one of the most powerful novels that project the social realism of Indian Society in an artistic manner in which she X-rayed certain hard realities of Indian Society that has been the main obstacle on the path of peace prosperity and progress of Indian Society. Through this novel the novelist declares war to fight out these social evils that have caused so much oppression of the downtrodden class. As a social activist who always in war with the government and with the social authority for the oppressed and depressed human beings, here in her novel declares the same war against the oppressing class of the society.

The novel problematizes the oppressive machinery based on caste-discrimination and collusion with it of certain political forces. In the words of Arundhati Roy herself "my mother says that some of the incidents in the book are based upon certain things that happened when I was two years old. I have no recollection of them. But obviously, they were trapped in some part of my brain ... Ayemenem is no longer the old fashioned village of the sixties in which the novel is set. It is now a bustling extension of Kottayam town, with 7100 houses and Mash of disk Antenna Paradise pickles still exists".

As the author says her past real-life experiences and observations have profitably been employed in it, such as, for example, her Syrian -Christian back ground, the

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popularity of English language among them, the Kottayam chochin cost, her mother's estranged marriage, for awareness of being unwelcome at her native place, the ancestral house, politics and caste divide in Kerala, and several other details found place in the novel.

The author shows acute sensitiveness to her surroundings which is reflected in his non-fictional works, books and essays. She has been an impassioned critic of globalization and American influence and felt herself part of the contemporary struggle for social justice in our country.

In all these works it is not difficult to see her splendid ability to balance between the significant social impact of industrialization and more intimate observations. 'The God of Small Things' is set in the South-Western State of Kerala. Although her narrative adopts poetic style weaving numerous symbolic strands, Mrs. Roy maintains a firm grip over the realistic vision. The **Social Realism** as portrayed by the novelist, can be well understood if we analyze the social issues which have been raised in the novel. The following paragraphs discuss those social issues which reflect the **social commitment** of the novelist.

Arundhati Roy uses a compressed language, thrifty style of foreground, the essential predicament of the socially oppressed, such is the extraordinary quality of her narrative art. When in Chapter 1, the Kottayam Police Inspector Thomas Mathew

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addresses Amu, his lecherous gaze express his authority making her wince. Here is the brief, naked truth of his coercive behaviour.

"He started at Ammu's breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from 'Vehsyas' or their illegitimate children.. If I were you he said I'd go home quietly. Then he tapped her breasts with his button Tap, tap.

Arundhati Roy lays bare the way sex is used by those in authority to cow down the defenceless, an age-old device that has little changed even in a democratic rule. There could be nothing more humiliating than to be called Vehsya (Prostitute) for a respectable woman. Thomas Mathew knows his power and is determined to make her feel it by stripping of her dignity, when he calls her children "Illegitimate". 'this brief scene burns a painful spot in the readers' consciousness. Another instance where sex is used to show superior authority is the Estha-Orange drink - Lemon - drinkman episode in Chapter 40. The casual manner in which the stall-keeper-indulges in it indicates the common practice, but it is in its very casualness one can see lurking the dark oppressive powers.

Reference to Chako's indulgences with woman workers over looked by the Ayemenem House Women as 'Man's Needs' is another similar example which expresses the way sex becomes an expression of certain types of social power, ranging from baton-swinging police officer to a communist sympathiser like Chako to an ordinary cold drink seller. It silences the weak in a way no other physical exercise of

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power can do.

The row over Ammu-velutha relation is the key factor in the novel, that brings about catastrophe and misfortune on all. Their sexual attraction and relation is beautifully woven in more than one level. On the personal level it represents a union that openly defies all socially constructed restrictions and leads to a sense of fulfillment and contentment. "Then for what seemed like an eternity but was really no more than five minutes she slept leaning against him, her back against his chest. Seven years of oblivion lifted off her and flew into the shadows on weighty, quaking winds ... Amid the murderous terror of being captured and destroyed for ever, both Ammu and Velutha find momentary release from the life destroying realities, the deathly inevitabilities into a soul-elevating feelin^g of mutual support and protection in the dark night on the banks of the Mcenachal.

On the social arena their meetings for thirteen lights carve a fatality for them in terms of gender and caste hostilities. In their sufferings both are utterly lonely. Both die foul, lonely deaths, chrushed and abandoned by all.

The most bitter attack' is carried in the novel against the Sham lives li^ved out by the Politicians whose double standards of behavior and talk are exposed by the author. Kerala has always been considered a socially aware state, its awareness level being the highest among all the states of India, with a cent percent literacy rate and a tradition of Marxist politics dominating. Curiously it is also a state where the roots of religious orthodoxy and conservatism go deep and spread over greater part of social Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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life. The power of religion was hardly ever destabilized by the coming of Marxism to power for Mrs. Roy herself said in an interview.

"Most interestingly it was the only place in the world where religious coincide, there is Christianity Hinduism, Marxism and Islam and they all live together and rub each other down. When I grew up it was the Marxism that was very strong, it was like the revolution was coming next week. I was aware of different cultures when I was growing up and I am still aware of this now . When you see all the competing beliefs against the same background you realize now they all wear each other down. To me, I couldn't think of a better location for a book about human beings.

The rural environment is a significant element, it builds up the lives of the villagers at different state, Criss — crossing each other and exerting influences that build up the drama with all its stresses and tensions. Arundhati Roy uses the literary devices in a subtle manner to create the rural landscape. Her descriptions are not drawn innocently on pastoral vignettes they add up to basic frame work of value conflict-, that are sharply brought under focus by her.

Apart from the straight forward realistic portrayals there are woven by the author intricate patterns by employing several stylistic devices of remarkable aesthetic beauty but also helps the reader get into the hidden significance of the picture being presented. These passages of unparalleled verbal beauty sharpen the readers vision of essential realities of the lives of village folks.

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On a larger scale 'The God of Small Things' is about politics which through its various agencies exercises decisive influence over the lives of the people of Ayemenem. Unlike writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy presents politics as a very complex force, operative at different levels, beginning with home, and manipulated by different people for different ends. As Reena Kothari says "She introduces the power structure in Society and shows how the more powerful victimize the less powerful as there is gender oppression, oppression of the lower caste, subjugation of children, police extremities and the hypocrite Marxist leader Mr. K.N.M. Pillai who too doesn't leave the opportunity to oppress any one for personal gains. It is ironical that the Church makes distinction between lower caste and upper caste.

It is also ironical to see Mr. Pillai using Marxism for personal gains rather than for poor laborers or the lower caste. The novel portrays the forces of power working in alliance in the novel. It shows how the caste system and hierarchy which is still prevalent in India, operates and is a powerful ally of patriarchy which is another powerful component of Indian Society.

Society in the novel is permeated with the exploitive instincts. Even a common place experience of Estha with orange drink Lemon drink man in Abhilash Talkies connotes the prevalence of the subtle workings of exploitive intentions. Pappachi's deep sense of frustration that eventually led to pathetic disintegration of mind has its source in his being exploited professionally when his entomological findings was hijacked by a lesser researcher. Chako and Pillai the polished communist

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manouverer are shown indulging in outwitting each other. At the bottom of the massive oppressive edifice are Ammu, her Children and Velutha. As Surendran rightly points out :

"The dimension of oppression of Ammu, her twins and Velutha are not one plus one plus but one time two times three times all the people and the forces they encounter. The weight of this power is indeed terrible".'

The author's disgust for party politics is barely concealed in her famous portrait of comrade Pillai, Chako's deceptive stances and the freedom with which the police is allowed to unleash its barbarism. In a tone reminiscent of Jonathan swift for its pointed jibes, Arundhati Roy introduces to us the local political heavy weight comrade K.N.M. Pillai and creates a cruel caricature. Pillai is indeed right from the beginning an epitome of all the unpleasant deceptive aspects of degenerate political tradition which is nothing more than a means of self-promotion maintaining one's hold over the citadel of local power by playing one against the other. The Sham facade so assiduously erected by the local practitioners of local politics and the ill-concealed brute forces of real evil are easily seen in men like Pillai. The cruelest irony is that he represents a party that represents worker's interests and exists on the strength of its pledge to protect them from all kinds of socio-economic exploitation. Their leadership survives on the slogan-raising and noisy marches challenging such a society as is based on all forms of inequality. Such leaders exist on perpetual cycle of social crisis or history dumps them into time's dustbin. As the author writes : "only then when it was too late, and paradise

pickles slumped softly to the floor without SO much LIS a murmur Or even the Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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pretense or resistance – did comrade Pillai realize that what he really needed was the process of war more than the outcome of victory. War could ha^ve been the stallion that he rode, part of it is not all the way to the legislative Assembly, whereas victory left him no better off' then when he started off".'

The sneer and sarcasm in these words are clearly, audible to the readers. Pillai is the triumph of Roy's subtle and complex art of characterization whom she builds up in fragments that automatically drift into their right places. From the simple portrayal of the lecherous oil smearing pot-bellied man of the common family man whose devotion to the Marxist ideology stretches to the extent of christening his son Lenin, he pushes his devilish brains into plotting to trap poor Velutha and finally joining hands with the state police in smashing him. Velutha represents the class of down-trodden untouchable used by the politicians and the police as mere pawns in the political game of chess.

Pillai's dubious games are difficult to understand, even for Chacko. In chapter 14 we read: "Nobody ever learned the precise nature of the role that comrade Pillai played in the events that followed. Even Chacko – who knew that the fervent, high-pitched speeches about rights of untouchables delivered by comrade Pillai during the Marxist party siege of paradise pickles were pharisaic never learned the whole story.

When Velutha arrives at the house of Pillai there is tension ⁱⁿ the air. Pillai has already decided his course of action. There is cold-blooded attitude at the way he prefers to take turn eating his favourite dishes. The scene brings out in sharp

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contrast the essential cruelty of the man: "Comrade Pillai finished his curd unhurriedly. He wagged his fingers over his plate. Kalyani brought water in a little stainless steel container and poured it out for him. The left over Morsels of food in his plate, rose and floated. She brought him a hand-towel. He wiped his hands, belched his appreciation and went to the door."

Once again the manner in which the workers leader disowns Velutha brings out the tragic essence of the untouchables plight who have been pinned down to their age-old position of the lowest of the lowly. Comrade Pillai this time takes recourse to the party principles to remind Velutha "But comrade, you should know that party was not constituted to support workers indiscipline in their private life. Velutha didn't need a long lecture on the subject to understand that he has been abandoned by a party in which he had looked up to for final succour. In what can *only be called the splendid dramatization of inner* mind Arundhati Roy in a small passage brings forth the inherent contradictions of Pillai's position.

"Velutha – watched comrade Pillai's body feed from the door. His disembodied piping voice stayed on and sent out slogans. Pennants fluttering in an empty doorway. It is not in the party's interest to take up such matters. Individuals' interest is subordinate to the organization's interest. Violating party discipline means violating party unity And there it was again another religion turned against itself. Another edifice constructed by the human mind decimated by human nature."

By highlighting human mind with human nature Mrs. Roy seems to focus on the essential human frailty, its inability to get over its weakness. Velutha stands betrayed

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by society by his party which has been seen by millions like him to be substitute for religion in the manner in which Graham Greene's Whisk) priest (in the power and the glory) stand's betrayed by his religion. Green's hero harrowed and hunted down by the state police, and his own religion finally attains martyrdom, Velutha's position is similar.

No wonder the communists felt deeply hurt and expressed their outrage in sharp words. There were reports all over the press that reflected that the Marxists took reference to F.M.S. and CPI (M) rather too seriously. However, a more serious reading of the novel would reveal that it is not a particular part) the author seeks to attack, but the sell'-seeking politicians in general whose principles and ideological commitments act as well-wrought fagade behind which dubious games are played. It is just that in Kerala's politics the communists . happen to have a dominant role and are in a position to influence the course of social events but variations of human temperament and family compulsions transcend the limits of party ideology and these leaders act as any other leader would irrespective of party affiliations. It is the essential debauchery of political people (whatever party ties) and the inherent selfishness that keeps them glued to their seats of power that are caricatured. The author has shown a great deal of artistic insight into human nature in her caricatures of Pillai and Chako. The author critiques not this party or that party. Her anger is directed against the political hypocrisy that is so deeply ingrained in the politicians the unprincipled behavior and the glittering mask they always wear. Transcending even these small frames the author questions the social set up that allows or sanctions inhuman debasement and the cruel caste-ridden structure. In the words of

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Dodiya and Chakraborty.

"Velutha, the skilled Paravan embodies the state of Linlohchable in free India. His plight is not much different from that of Anand's Bakha. In spite of his inborn noble qualities and physique he is not yet empowered to strike back. Though the days of crawling backwards with a broom' sweeping away the foot prints have become a tale of the past, the Paravan's fate has not yet witnessed the change. Velutha a God of Small Things left no foot prints in sand, no ripples in water".

The novel can be read as a potential political story in the sense that politics intervenes in the basic social issues. And one of the major social issues concern centrally the untouchables. Compulsions transcend the limits of party' ideology and these leaders act as any other leader would irrespective of party.

It is an irony of civilization that people who work hardest to produce riches suffer the most and fare the worst. They are looked down upon and treated shabbily by the powerful. We know them as 'working class' a term used all over the world. They are included in the "small things" Arundhati Roy speaks for. But Indian tradition has left as a legacy of the Aryan past a section which is placed worse than ordinary members of the working class. That is known generally as 'untouchable' or 'Pariah'. As it sounds bitter Mahatma Gandhi named them as 'Harijans' (Children of God) while the census authorities during the British rule referred to them as 'exterior classes'. Now-a-days they are popularly known as the 'depressed' or 'dalits'.

The lot of the socially deprived, the untouchables has occupied Indian English writers centrally and remarkable works have been written on the plight of these lowest

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of the lowly. One of the prominent novelist to have focused on it is Mulk Raj Anand whose novel 'The Untouchable' has become one of the strongest works on the subject. Its protagonist Bakha, though portrayed in a different mould, is as strong as Velutha. Arundhati Roy has been targeted by critics for not treating the subject as sharply as it deserved. The criticism loses much of its sting as we take into account the fact that 'The God of Small Things' is about several things at the same time. Questions have been raised about many social institutions assumptions and agencies that affect common man's and woman's life. Besides being a political satire, as we have already discussed it is also more about the treatment of woman in traditional Indian Society and more importantly about the dalits or untouchables.

The novelist's presentation of the dalits is constantly blended with irony. People well-placed in society attempt to be kind and sympathetic to them but their supremacy undermines their professed liberal or revolutionary aims. A gentleman wants to educate the untouchables but dares not to place them in the same school with the untouchables. A leader talks about social revolution but dreads an untouchable who holds the party card. An employer recognizes the merits of her employee but attaches more importance to his caste.

Then, the untouchable character in the novel are presented as types. The device proves useful for the purpose of giving a realistic view of the varying responses to the grim reality of the dalits. The fact cannot be disputed that though the dalits are subjected to a similar treatment by the upper castes their responses are not uniform.

We come across three characters in 'The God of Small Things' which belong to the

category of the downtrodden. They are Vellya Pappen and his two sons Kuttapan and Velutha. They belong to an untouchable caste called Paapen. They are today trappers according to the tradition. Arundhati Roy gives a lot of information about the untouchables of Kerala in this connection. She also lives a generally perfect picture of the dalits with their oaring responses to the caste-oppression through the device of trio. Vellya' Paapen Kuttapan and Velutha constitute the trio Which depicts the three types of the dalits in Indian Society. namely – the docile conformist, the discontented paralytic and the rebel who moves for equality and stakes his life.

The novel mentions only the names of three untouchables castes namely Paravans, Palayas and Pulayas. They were not allowed to enter the house of the higher caste people. "Mammachi told Estha and Rahel that she could remember a time, in her girlhood when Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their foot prints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's foot prints. 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 they spoke to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed.",

Hierarchical structure of power and oppression at various levels in patriarchal societies are explored in the novel. The character of Velutha has been powerfully drawn in terms of his robust physique and in-born talents for making wooden objects. "He was like a little magician. He could make intricate toys-fine wind

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mills, rattles, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds, he could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts" Not only this, he had exceptional talents for many other things. "Velutha had a way with machines. Manlmchl often said that if only he had not been a paravan he might have become an engineer. He mended radios, clocks, water pumps. He looked after the plumbing and all the electrical gadgets in the house." He was indispensable at Ayemenern house. Velutha's skill had impressed all. But his father Vellya Paapen was an old world Paravan, His heart often filled with Terror because He had seen the crawling Backward Days In a fine passage the author describes his Terror thus Vellya Paapen feared for his younger son". He couldn't say that it was that frightened him. It was nothing that he had said or done. It was not what he did, but the way he did it. Vellya Paapen's fears belong to the harsh tragic realities he had seen and experienced. He belonged to the hierarchical system and couldn't imagine transgressing, the limits set by the caste system. I was extremely loyal to the Mammachi family who paid for the artificial dye that was pronounced for him when he lost in an accident. The pitiable scene of utter surrender to the upper caste family in which we see him groveling before the elderly ladies and offering his eye removed on his palm in pouring rain in chapter 13 is symbolic of the status of the Paravan untouchables. The father — son relation shows the strain and a wide dark gap. The son has confidence in himself, harbours different loyalty showing a dangerous tendency to step over the caste barriers, while the father can't comprehend this beyond the fact that all this could be constructed as insolence.

Mammachi is quite clear about how to draw lines and see that both the

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Paravans remain behind them. In the factory Velutha's talents as carpenter could hardly be ignored as he was always in demand, ever wanted by the factory for various jobs which fact was silently resented by the other workers. But here also the caste discrimination is clearly seen. "To keep the others happy and since she knew that nobody else would hire him as a carpenter. Mammachi paid Velutha less than she would a touchable carpenter but more than she would a Paravan. Mammachi did not encourage him to enter the house. She thought that he ought to be grateful that he was allowed on the factory premises at all. and allowed to touch things that touchables touched. 'She said that it was a big step for a Paravan.'" Is Dodiya & Chakraborty observes in this context :

"Velutha's subjugation is multiple. He is born Paravan son of a ParaParavan a Community in Kerala, subjected to extreme ignominy through ages. To escape the inhuman humiliations Velutha's forefathers had embraced Christianity. But the Christians themselves had adopted as a matter of natural form of adoption the strict and unavoidable caste-system thus the Paravans had only received the status of "untouchable Christians with separate church and priest."

However in Velutha Arundhati Roy presents before us a young of new ideas and strength. Nothing can be more contrasting than the mo figures of father and son-Vellya Paapen and Velutha in their different personalities, approaches and thinking. Velutha is deeply and heartfully aware of his caste and the disadvantages this puts him into. Yet there is a spark of defiance in him a tidal wave of rebellion mute and powerful that makes his father fear the future and

Mammachi household resent him. His rebellion is best expressed in being Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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normal as other men are in his doing things that every one does and in his ignoring the fact that he is separated from others by caste barrier. He is the God of Small Things. He possess qualities that are certainly divine especially when they are compared to those of some of the other characters in the novel.

Velutha's relation with Ammu spells his rebellion. In a sense the sexual relationship that Ammu had with Velutha could be described as small things it' properly placed in the Ayemenem context. This is because having illegitimate relations with women was something ordinary for Chako. The position of both of them is that of the out caste who lead lonely lives and are reduced to the condition of creating their own little joys at gravest risks. Ammu's husband was an attractive young man an Assistant Manager of a Tea Estate in Assam. Soon after their marriage she discovers that he was a "full blown alcoholic" and in addition willing to send his extremely attractive wife to the bungalow of his English Manager Mr. Rollick. Their marriage breaks. she leaves her husband and returns unwelcomed to her parents in Ayemenem. She leads a drab and dull life. Ammu quickly learned to recognize and despair the ugly face of sympathy, and so she brought about transformation in her personal ways of lonely life decking herself in flowers listening to songs and music on her radio. She also smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims.

Velutha was also acutely aware of his bitter isolation and hungered for love and belongingness. Three years younger than Ammu. he finds a stable heaven in her, someone in whom he can find response to his strength and confidence and hinds ways to believe in himself. Though Roy depicts the scene of their heights spent

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together on the bank of the river Meenachal with deity of her descriptive art .the latent hunger of the two socially marginalized beings for being set free from all oppressive limits is symbolically depicted. One is constantly aware of the sharp heat of pain and awareness of the final conclusion their acts are shaping in the bodily relations. Even in absolute isolation they were filled with an awful dread because they had no future. This is tellingly described by the author in this way.

"He folded his fear into a perfect rose. He held it out in the palm of his hand. She took it from him and put it in her hair".'

This particular chapter clearly mirrors the horrors of social injustice that hangs over the Velutha — Ammu love relationship from the beginning. Velutha was a sincere Trade Union Worker and that is why ^{he} came to repose such abundant trust in comrade Pillai and in his Marxist party. Vellutha participated in the much organized by the Travancore – Cochin Maxist Labour Union as part of secretariats March to be organized by their colleague in Trivandrum. Among the demands were an hour's lunch break for the paddy workers, increase in women workers wage from Rs. 1.25 to Rs.3 and for men from Rs.2.50 to Rs.4.50 a day. He also demanded that the untouchables be not addressed by their caste names such as - Achoo Paravan or Kelan Paravan or Kuttan Pulliyan but just as Achoo. Kelan or Kuttan.-

This created a flutter of panic among the beer-sipping barons. The preceding section narrates the growth of the Marxist power. its assumption of the government in the state and its dilemmas arising out of this development.

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Obviously Velutha had great hopes from this government. He had also high expectations from Comrade Pillai by whose side he had remained standing loyally all along as a party worker and as a trade unionist. Comrade Pillai failed to give him any support in the hour of Velutha's gravest crisis.

It is a world of double standards where principles and ideals are used as mask to cover the worst kind of social injustices where cruelty and barbaric behaviour are used as tools to perpetuate the age old exploitative system. As N. V. Raveendran says in his essay 'A Horn on the Forehead' she is full of contempt for the envious old wretches she dislikes the fraudulent politicians. But she is full of sympathy for the exploited classes exploited by the rich and cheated by the trade unionists. She is like many of those who are full of feeling for the sufferers but know not the way out". Disservice to the cause she proceeds to serve. Ms. Vinita Bhatnagar has every right to be proud of her pure U.P. Kayasth blood, but is it not a strange marriage between religious linguistic or ethnic groups ?

One of the categories of "small things" Arundhati Roy cares for consists of women. There can be no gain saying that despite all the socio-economic developments during the last two centuries women don't occupy an enviable position in society. It is relevant, therefore, to look into the causes that have kept them in subordination and relegated them to the status of the second sex.

An important development during the last three decades has been the appearance of some women's journals which have departed from the practice of discussing food, fashion and cinema and devoted themselves to the real problems of

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women. Along with them, a number of women's organizations have come into being. Thus an organized movement to raise the consciousness of women has started. Resistance to harassment cruelty and discrimination against women is no longer sporadic or isolated. It is finding an organized expression and emboldening women to assert their rights. Reservation of thirty three percent of seats for women at the Panchayat level is also bringing a change for better in the villages where the majority of our country lives. It will make more and more difficult to ignore hoodwink or surpress women.

According to an eminent critic, "The God of Small Things' is a product of the social reality", which will be described in the following passages. Before that, let us discuss some of the female characters in the novel. It is interesting to note that in this novel there are more women than men, Most of the men are shadowy, while women are sharply portrayed and occupy the center-stage. Mammachi Baby Kochamma Ammu Sophie Mol, Rahel keep in motion the story. As we have earlier seen The God of Small Things is about several things; One of the chief issues it brings into focus is the family and soual mechanism evolved over centuries in traditional Indian Society to suppress women and her independence as a human being. Right at the center is the woeful tale of Ammu, mother of Rafiel and Estha who suffers silently, yet simmers inside in her a deep discontentt.

Now we proceed to discuss the women characters of the novel. Baby Kochamma is the daughter of reverend F. John Ipe, who was a priest of the Mar Thoma Church. Her father was a well-known scholar in Christianity and therefore he was widely respected in the Christian community. So it is not strange for the son

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or daughter of such a man to be attracted to religion. But her family background is not the real reason of her turning to religion in her early life. In fact, she cheats herself and people around her including her family by pretending to be religious. Her adventures in the realm of religion are an outcome of a normal biological impulse which she attempts to promote in a deceptive gap. The attempt fails eventually and the result is she leads in abnormality and perversion.

Her frustration in love and repressed libido provide us with the key to comprehend the cold, calculated and inhuman role she plays in the novel. She has become narcissist and eventually goes to the extent of sadism. Despite her western education and apparent modernization she rears all the reactionary ideas inherited from the feudal past in her heart and misses no opportunity to express them violently in word and deed. She is unkind to children, to the lower castes and classes, to Hindus in general and even to women.

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 fulfillment to her. Thus social oppression that is a phenomenon that seems strange to us at first sight but is not so rare in society. In fact, it is victims turning the tools of oppression that keeps the wheel, moving.

Obviously, she doesn't believe in women's needs or women's rights. That is why she doesn't bother about the smell of the women Chacko brings to his bed room but wonders how Ammu can endure the smell of Paravan. As soon as Annu's relationship with Velutha is revealed she locks Ammu and rushes to the police

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station with a false complaint. Eventually it leads to the death of Velutha and the banishment and dispersal of Ammu and her children. She is responsible for ruining the lives of Ammu, Estha and Rahel.

People who betray others can't trust anyone in life. They are always haunted by the memory of what they have done to others and afraid of being paid back in their own coins. That is true about Baby Kochamma.

Mammachi is the sister-in-law of Baby Kochamma, the wife of her brother Benoon John Ipe. Her real name is Soshamma but she is generally known as Mammachi while her husband is usually called Pappachi in the novel. Though she is much akin to Baby Kochamma in submitting to the traditional notions of male supremacy love and marriage her disposition and differs a lot from that of Baby Kochamma.

Baby Kochamma suffers because she fails to have the man in her choice. Mammachi has got a husband from arranged marriage seventeen years older than herself belonging to her own country and community. Yet the marriage doesn't prove happy as her husband develops some disorder in his personality. The novelist goes deep into the reality of that disorder and demonstrates a sound knowledge of problems that hunt the families of the ambitious elite sometime.

Thus Mammachi is not only a passive sufferer of her husband's beating, she is a victim of his jealousy also. Despite her suffering at the hand of a male chauvinist and sadist husband, loses all our sympathy when we consider her attitude to sex in respect of people younger than herself. Her ideas here betray sex bias as well as class bias to an outrageous extent. Her daughter as well as her son is a

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divorcee but she applies two different norms to their sex-relation. To her son Chacko she permits "Man's Needs" and doesn't mind his flirting with "Pretty women who worked in the factory.

Mammachi appears unkind and unjust to her daughter when she visits Ayemenem fatally ill with asthma and a rattle in her chest. During that last visit, Mammachi who has developed a perverse mind, asks her if she has been drinking and suggests that she visit Rahel as seldom as possible." That is highly unbecoming on the part of a mother who has given so much indulgence to her son.

It is interesting to note how Mammachi and Baby Kochamma fit into the oppressive family system that blatantly victimizes Ammu. They become active oppressors, seeking to corner her and then drive her to her miserable death.

One of the most glaring instances of it is the ambiguous stand adopted by these women with regard to Ammu's relation with Velutha. They express little sympathy for Ammu's lonely life, her tragic marital circumstances and her anxiety about her children. On the other hand, their casteist hostility finds double force in Ammu Velutha liaison and breaks out in to expression of moral outrage while Chako's sexual indulgences with low caste women is overlooked as 'Men's Need's' Ammu's affair with Velutha becomes an unpardonable offence against family's reputation and status.

This is a typical picture of the double standard of morality practiced traditional India. Men enjoy greater laxity and freedom, while the women suffer in the name of 'infinite tenderness of motherhood'. So she proceeds to reclaim her body, tier walk changes,

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she wears flowers in her hair, she spends hours on the river bank listening to a transistor, smokes cigarettes and has midnight swims. Tired of the proprietary handling of her, she examines her body in bath room mirror which shows her worry about her passing youth. Then there are other factors which stir her. The arrival of Margaret Kochemma provokes her desires and finally Velutha's return after many years makes her take a fatal decision to love by night the man her children loved by day. The secret love affair goes on for thirteen days until it is reported to Mammachi by Veluth's father and compounded by the accidental death of Sophie Mol. The briefest comment on the episode seems to be that of the novelist herself : "Biology designed the dance. Terror timed it-.

To what we can only add that Velutha appears like a father figure to her children and his real love for the children builds a bridge for the love she too needs. But earlier she is drawn to him when she sees him holding a red flag at the procession because he seems to be a rebel, housing "a living breathing anger against the smug ordered world", she too resents. So what seems an illicit relationship between a divorcee touchable woman and an untouchable Paravan is actually a union of two rebels protesting against hypocritical laws of society not in word but in deed.

When that relationship is revealed, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma only tolerated but assisted Chacko in his licentious affairs with working women, become highly indignant. Ammu is tricked into her bedroom and locked while Velutha is implicated in false cases of attempted rape, kidnapping of children and murder of Sophie Mol. Velutha is grabbed by the police and killed, while she is allowed to attend

Sophie's funeral standing separately with her children. Soon after the funeral

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she goes to the police station and tries to set the -record straight. But the Police officer dismisses her pleas with the remark that the Kottayam Police doesn't take statement from Veshyas (Prostitutes) and their illegitimate children. He stares at her breasts while speaking, taps them with his baton and asks her to leave quietly. That shows her moral courage on the one hand and the obscene nature of the enforcers of law and order on the other.

The punishment is unjust as it ruins three lives for the supposed offence of one. Ammu is separated froth her children as Estha is returned to her father and Rahel alone is permitted to live at Ayenienem but Ammu is not allowed to visit her frequently. The last time she conies to Avemenern and meets Rahel, she has asthma and rattle in her chest. Desperately wanting to have a job that enables her to bring her children with her, she tries a number of jobs and dies alone in the Bharat Lodge in Aleppy where she has gone for a job interview.

Before her death she is haunted by a recurrent dream which springs from her traumatic experience. In that dream, the policemen approach her with snacking, scissors, wanting to hack off her hair. "They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes whom they had caught in the bazaar - branded them so that everybody would know them for what they were, Veshyas so that new policemen on the beat would have no trouble identifying whom to harass." Obviously that is related to the shock she has received at the Kottayam Police Station. Death does not end the humiliation of the unfortunate Ammu. The Church refused to burry Ammu on several counts. So Chacko hired a van to transport the body to the electric crematorium. He had her wrapped in a dirty bed sheet and laid out on a stretcher. Finally she is

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reduced to aches.

As Mohit Kumar Roy puts it in his book Arundhati Roy, *The Novelist Extraordinary*,

"Thus Ammu is humiliated and cornered by her father, ill-treated and betrayed by her husband insulted by the police and rendered destitute by her brother" . If they are men who concede no rights to a woman as daughter wife, sister and citizen what can we say about the 'long-suffering mother', Mammachi who has left no soft corner for her miserable daughter in her heart and about the wretched "Man-less" baby Kochamma who plays a major role in tormenting Ammu and her dear ones ? The novelist is obviously a realist who refuses to pick up male characters alone to malign and glorify the woman. Ammu is a tragic figure who fights powerful tyrannical forces against her and meets an untimely death at the age of 31. When we compare and contrast her with Chacko, we can't but realize the truth what Emma Goldman wrote in her 'Women and other Essays on Feminism'. "Society considers the sex experiences of man as attributes of his general development while similar experiences in life of a woman are looked upon as a terrible calamity a loss of honour and all that is good and noble in a human being.

What emerges from the above study is that the novel with the three women Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, and Ammu presents a perfect trio of suffering women. Baby Kochamma herself a victim of social prejudices is conditioned by society and identifies herself with the ideas and forces of oppression. Mammachi is

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dehumanized and her mind becomes twisted as a result of suffering in a society dominated by men and money. Ammu, on the other hand, is the rebel who represents the defiance of the present state of society from educated, passionate and thinking women. She stands for those women who are aspiring for freedom and equality. This section of women is challenging traditional ideas and conventions. The hopes for the future lie with this section only.

Thus we see that in this novel Arundhati Roy puts under focus the deliberately constructed agencies of cruelty that work against women's interests. In this all are involved, the so-called progressive politicians, the family members, the police etc. In the traditional Indian society such forces flourish and find encouragement in maintaining their hold over the weaker people. Social structures are so formed as to sanctify women's victimization. Arundhati Roy's depiction of the miserable lives of women in this novel critiques in unmistakable terms the perpetuation of these exploitative forces.

Children are also included in 'the small things' Arundhati Roy cares for. Such a concern is not so unexpected as she is the daughter of a Christian Mother and Christianity is well known for its glorification of childhood.

Political leaders in different countries, while differing in their political convictions and speaking different languages, don't dispute the fact that children represent the future of the society and as such, deserve love and care. We read and hear a lot about their concern for children.

'The God of Small Things' doesn't depict the lot of many children. There are only

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three children in the novel namely - Sophie Mol, Estha and Rahel. The novel presents as we shall see, a contrast between the first one and the last two. All the three have certain similarities. Their parents are divorced and one of them is not Syrian Christian. That is what is common to them all. But they differ in several aspects too. Sophie Mol's mother is a white woman while the father of Estha and Rahel is a non-white man. While Sophie Mol's father is willing to receive her and her mother gladly and his family is equally enthusiastic about it. Estha and Rahel are forsaken by their father. Sophie Mol is elder than her cousins. A major difference lies in the fact that Sophie Mol dies soon after her arrival as she meets an accident. Estha and Rahel face several odds but survive. The novel can be viewed as a tale of 'terror' that destroyed the lives of Velutha and Ammu but also tale of how Estha and Rahel survived.

Estha's parents were not poor. His father was an Assistant Manager in a tea estate in Assam while his mother's parental home had a pickle factory. So Estha had a bourgeois background on both sides. He and his sister are subjected to adversity as their parents get divorced and his mother comes to her parental home with two children whom they are quite unwanted and neglected. Estha had an unhappy childhood because his father's drunken violence followed by post-drunken badgering began when he was barely two. When his bouts of violence began to include the children and the war with Pakistan began, Ammu left her husband and returned unwelcomed to her parents in Ayemenem. At this place the children along with their mother were unwanted a fact the children in their innocence couldn't realize instantly.

However, Estha and his sister soon came to know what people around them thought
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about them. They had a double stigma of mixed parentage attached to them both in religious and ethnic ways. Moreover, they were the children of a divorced daughter who had no locustandi. Their grand son let them know it. Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs. Worse still, they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry.

While Estha is agonized by the (boldness of his relations at Ayemenm, the separation of his parents has created a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty, an identity crisis. His mother hasn't chosen a surname as yet and the result is that on his note book Estha had rubbed out his surname with spit and taken half of the paper with it. Over the whole mess he had written in pencil unknown. The behavior shows not only worry but also resentment for his father.

The unhappy boy had got some comfort as he had discovered a man, Velutha who really loved the twins. Gradually he had become a father figure to him and even the frank, outspoken girl Sophie had be friended the twins. But conditions changed for worse, may worst when Ammu's secret relation with Velutha was revealed. Ammu was tricked into her bed room and locked.

The twins came there and wanted to know the reason. Ammu who was not in a mood to weigh her words, had screamed If it was not for you I would not be here ! None of this would have happened! I would not be here ! I would have been free ! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born ! You' are the milestones round my neck !

Estha who was sensitive enough and knew what milestones 'meant

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concluded from it that both he and Rahel were unwanted Ammu didn't like them any more. So he decided that though it was dark and raining, the time had come for them to run away because Ammu didn't want them anymore. Estha's plan didn't include Sophie but she insisted on joining them and she was able to convince the younger twins to take her with them. Eventually their little boat collided with a floating toy and tipped over. Sophie was drowned as she did not know how to swim but the twins survived. All the children had done was intended to arouse the remorse of the elders and win the recognition of their worth. It was also an adventure they hoped to enjoy. It was merely an accident that turned it otherwise. However Estha was deemed guilty for the death of Sophie. Baby Kochamma took him to the Kottayam Police " Station and tricked him into identifying Velutha as the man responsible for kidnapping and murder. Velutha was so dear to him, a father figure and the accusation was false to the core still Estha had to concede to the demands of Baby Kochamma as he thought 'that there was no other way to save his mother.

The experience left a deep lasting impression on the boy's mind. He carried inside him the memory of a voting man with an old man's mouth. The memory of swollen face and a smashed upside down smile ... of a blood shed eye that had opened wandered and then fixed its Laze on him. And what had Estha done ? He had looked into that beloved face and said 'Yes' the betrayal leaves a sense of guilt deep in his psyche tormenting him like an 'octopus' like a mango hair between molars.

Estha also had the sad memory of how Inspector Thomas Mathew
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misbehaved with his mother and called her 'Vchsy'a' Though he couldn't understand what the word meant at that time the misbehaviour and Arnmu's reaction to it had left him uneasy forever.

Then the most traumatic experience was the one at 'Ablillash Talkies' a case of sexual abuse by soft drink seller - at the refreshment counter. It created a permanent sense of defilement and constant apprehension of his return. He always feared that if his mother came to know she would begin to love him less.

Returned to his father, much against his wishes he finished his school with mediocre results without participating in group activities. Then instead of going, to the College he began to do the house work like sweeping, swabbing, laundry, cooking and shopping for vegetables. It' he needed anything at meal time, he got up and found it himself. Gradually he stopped talking. The development was not sudden and Estha was a quiet child from the very beginning, so nobody could say exactly when the change took place. It was the "psychological equivalent of what lungfish do to get them through the dry season, except that in Estha's case the dry season looked as though it would last for ever. ' He nursed his dog Khubchand well during illness and started walking alone for hours after its death, a habit that stayed with him even when he returned to Avernern after twenty three years.

The story of Estha's life raises naturally the question. Why is it that he lost his speech? The answer lies in the fact that the boy was brutalized by numerous persons like Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria, Inspector Mathews and the Soft drink man. Yet neither his disposition nor his circumstances permitted him to

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protest or to rebel against his tormentors. He had no option but to suffer passively. The voice he couldn't raise against the injustice done to himself and his dear ones seemed to have lost its utility. That is the main reason of his numbness.

Estha was a harmless child and so quiet that he was hardly noticed by people around him. That such an innocent child was subjected to the worst cruelty of the adults and his childhood was destroyed and his life ruined for no fault of his own, constitutes a major tragedy in the novel. Such wanton destruction of childhood is staggering to our imagination and pathetic to our heart. Estha occupied very little space in the world"

Similar was the fate of Estha's sister Rahel who was like a rebel who faces all odds and survives.

Now, we can say that here the novelist describes not only the sad story of her fiction, she also indirectly describes the real sad-story of the children in India. The first thing that strikes us is the insensitivity of Indian adults to the psychology of the children. Even the educated fail miserably in this respect. Sophie Mot's guardians don't care to see that she needs the company of children. Attempts are made to keep her aloof and she befriends Estha and Rahel on her own. The twins are scolded for things which can't be said to be innocent play. Not satisfied with that the elders teach them how to pretend to lie and to betray. Even the best among the adults fail to bridge the gap between themselves and the children. Ammu never conics to know that her son was a victim of child abuse. She does not even Suspect it. Estha doesn't tell it to his mother though he discloses it to his sister. Such communication

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gaps permit the culprits to escape scot free.

Despite all rhetoric the children are fully neglected in our society and hardly any care is taken to understand them and to provide them the attention and security they need. Even when laws are enacted to protect them they are seldom enforced because the guardians are insensitive and very hypocritical for many reasons. This hard reality is revealed in Arundhati Roy's fiction 'The God of Small Things'! By projecting this bitter reality she wants to draw the attention of the sensitive readers to understand the tragic picture of our Childress' world.

Socially aware intellectuals can't disregard the environment in the modern world. Arundhati Roy is deeply concerned about it. Her approach is not confined to writing for the environment, she is deeply involved with the agitations concerned with environmental issues like Narmada Bachao Andolan and the campaign against Nuclear Weapons in India.

The environment is one of the small things neglected for a long time in India. Eco-conscious as the novelists is, her concern for the environment finds an adequate expression in 'The God of Small Things'. Jason Cawley one of the five Booker Judges writes "Roy's achievement is never to forget about 'small things' in life, insects and flowers, wind and water, the outcaste and despised (Cowley Jason "Why we Choose Arundhati" India Today October 27, 1997, 28). We have already discussed her commitment to the "Outcaste and despised" in the previous passages, now we come to the other small things in life namely "insects and flowers wind and water" which stand for the environment. The novel lays bare how

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our environment is being subjected to decay and destruction and point's out the reasons that lie behind it too.

We can begin with the river Meenachal. Estha and Rahel dreamt of the river in their childhood They had reason to do so. : "it was warm, the water, Grey green. Like rippled silk. With fish in it. With the sky and trees in it. And at night the broken yellow moon in it.".'

As an object of beauty, it seemed a joy for ever. When Rahel returned twenty three years later the river greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile with holes where teeth had been and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed. Though it was raining, the river was no more than a swollen drain now. A thin ribbon of thick water that lapped wearily at the mud banks on either side sequined with the occasional silver of a dead fish. It was choked with a succulent weed, whose furred brown roots waved like thin tentacles under water. Bronze-winged lily-trotters walked across it ... cautious." The river was no more than "a slow, slugging green ribbon lawn that ferried garbage to the sea. Now Estha too found that the river "smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loan. Most of the fish had died the ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils.

Shit and pesticides are the two sources of pollution mentioned here. As for the shit, children of the shanty hutments on the other side of the river defecating on the river bed may be responsible for it. The water of the river is used for washing clothes and pots too upstream and receives unadulterated factory effluents as well. Little wonder then that ⁱⁿ summer the shit lifted off the river and hovered over

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Ayemenem like a hot. Such a disaster could have been avoided had people stopped short of- demanding, more from the river than it could give. But the blind pursuit of immediate gain, called the steroid syndrome by Arundhati Roy elsewhere, left no room for some thought. Down river, a salt water barrage had been built in exchange for votes from the influential paddy farmer lobby. The barrage regulated the inflow of salt water from the back waters that opened into the Arabian sea.

The river is the only thing that suffers in the novel. The village Ayemenem once known for freshness, matchless greenery and rural quietness has changed when Rahel returns to it. Its population has swelled to the size of a little town. There is only a fragile facade of greenery left now and only the houses rested under trees and along unmotorable narrow paths that branch off the main road give the village "a semblance of rural quietness. Otherwise people can gather at a moment's notice to beat to death a careless bus driver or to smash the wind screen of a car that dares to venture out on the day of an opposition bandh" Estha finds "the new freshly backed iced, Gulf-money houses built by nurses masons wire binders and bank clerks who worked hard and unhappily in far away places. To give a real Indian touch to the process of urbanization "small fish appear in the puddles that fill PWD potholes on the 'highways."

The estate of Karri Faipu also known as History House, has changed too. It is renovated and painted now a five star hotel called Heritage. The locality is

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describe as 'God's own country in hotel brochures. But what is the reality about it ? The view from the hotel was beautiful, but here too the water was thick and toxic. Thus money is being spent to bring more money in lieu of pleasure and comfort for a few who can afford and not to make the locality hygienic for all.

The Ayemenem House a grand old house which saw the rise and fall of five generations has also -gone to the dogs. Rahel finds it in a miserable condition. Thus, Ayemenem in general and Ayemenem House in particular presents a dismal scene of pollution and decay. The reasons are the same in every case: callousness towards other living beings and inanimate things and senseless pursuit of immediate gain. People want money and more money and that right now. They seek comfort and pleasure for the present and don't care for the future. They hanker after riches but don't bother about consequences. They deprive and cheat others to acquire what they themselves can't keep and maintain. They refuse to share with others what they have to leave at last to rot. That is the most irrational and immoral thing that the civilized people do today by the name of modernization and progress. Arundhati Roy' has rightly caught them in her novel by presenting the reality of our society and environment as it is.

CONCLUSION

Mrs. Arundhati Roy has indeed become the most successful writer with her immortal creation 'The God of Small Things'. This study about the social realism of her novel has attempted to find out, in a sociological perspective how her novel has been

socially conditioned and how there has been a deep and important concern of the novelist for the society.

This novel 'The God of Small Things' is not mere production of things or events, but an expression of the social, cultural, economic and political patterns of Indian society.

Though all her voices seen very vital for the present time, it is not difficult to achieve it. Because what she voices in her novel for the small things in society, she does it practically as a social activist. In what she voices for the small things there lies indeed the peace, prosperity and progress of the mankind and of the world. While describing these hard social realism of our country, the author hopes that many sensitive readers of her novel must listen to her sincere voice and would join their hands with her to take care of the small things which she describes in her novel. May her voice and vision for those 'small things' comes true here, there and everywhere, so that her rebelling soul as a social activist and revolutionary spirit as a progressive writer would be satisfied seeing a new social order free from all discriminations, exploitations and inequalities.

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The Social Realism in Arundhati Roy's God of Small Things

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