



## Twentieth year of *The God of Small Things*: Recalling its impact

**Dr. Madhuri Vishwanath Brahmane**

Asst. Professor, Loyola College, Kunkuri,  
Chhattisgarh

**Dr. A. Chandramouly**

Rashtrapita Mahatma Gandhi College, Saoli,  
Chandrapur, Maharashtra

### ABSTRACT

This year marks the twentieth year of the publication of *The God of Small Things*, a fiction written by Arundhati Roy. When it first came, it had taken the literary world by storm. A number of articles and edited books were written aftermath of it. Some seminars and symposia etc were held as well. What were the issues it had dealt with, if any? After twenty years, does it still inspire someone? The second question may not find a straightforward answer. The first question, however, might be easier to deal with in comparison with the second one. A close reading of the novel will give an impression that it deals with various issues like politics, women's state, untouchability etc to name a few. R. K. Dhawan writes, "A cursory reading of the text gives us the impression that the novel is quite simple, but a close study reveals that it is a well-planned work and has a subtle and complex plot. It is composed of memories treated artistically by the author. Even though the reader knows the story right at the outset, he never loses interest in the long narrative, and finds its events absorbing and interesting"<sup>1</sup>. In this novel the predicament of Indian women is studied in depth along with the plight of dalits (untouchables) and the people of lower class. Roy sees the resistance against gender oppression to be leading towards, if not instigating, resistance against caste, class oppression and spurring on anti-colonial thought and action.

Roy seems to make headway from the basic assumption that the liberation of women necessitates the liberation of all human beings. Though sheer fiction, Roy picks up a living reality of men and women in close

conjunction with the political reality that shapes the day-to-day lives of the people. Aijaz Ahmad is very objective and sincere in his remarks as he observes, "A key strength of Arundhati Roy is that she has written a novel that has learned all that there is to be learned from modernism, magic realism, cinematic cutting and montage and other such developments of narrative technique in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but a novel that nevertheless remains Realist in all its essential features"<sup>2</sup>. Roy is genius enough to assimilate all the ingredients required of a realist fiction: "Love, grief, remembrance, the absolute indispensability of verisimilitude in depiction of time, place and character, so exact that we know it to be fiction can nevertheless read it as the closest possible kin of fact. She succeeds so long as she is telling the tale of private life in the form of what is basically a miniaturized family saga"<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.1 Crux of the point

An English proverb says, "Catch the bull by its horn, not by its tail". So without wasting many lines on periphery, let us hit the bull's eye by posing a question what could be Roy's intent behind writing a fiction that may reflect as though it is her own story? Amitabh Roy seems to have correctly comprehended the intent of Arundhati Roy as he observes, "One of the categories of "small things" Arundhati Roy cares for consists of women. There can be no gainsaying that despite all socio-economic developments during the last two

<sup>1</sup> R. K. Dhawan, *Arundhati Roy: The novelist extraordinary*, New Delhi: Prestige Publications, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, "Reading Arundhati Roy Politically", in Murari Prasad (ed.), *Arundhati Roy, Critical perspectives*. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

centuries, women do not 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"<sup>4</sup>. In this line, like Amitabh Roy, Shirley D'Silva too argues maintaining that debate, study, research, etc on women is not something new although these have not produced desired results. In such case she opines that the matter of concern is the mentality. She writes:

From immemorial times women have been the subject of study, research, debate and discussion. We always consider history to be treasure house of knowledge and information. Our motherland India the vast nation in the continent of Asia has always given the honoured place to her women in history. She motivates, inspires and instructs to her women readers the immense treasures of achievements of the past. Gearing them up to venture into the unknown future. Therefore it is inevitable that we come across the person of 'woman' during our search who has contributed her total potential to the well being of her family, neighbourhood and nation. Yet it is sorry picture many great women from ancient to present times have just sunk into the womb of history without even being understood, honoured and remembered<sup>5</sup>.

Virginia Saldanha believes, "With the universal declaration of human rights, and the recognition that women are equal to men in dignity and rights, women's role in society has begun to change. Laws have changed to accommodate this changing role of women. So in society women have risen to be heads of Nations and commercial Corporations, successful business entrepreneurs, politicians, bureaucrats and other professionals"<sup>6</sup>. Just as Roy, Saldanha advocates that women's contribution to all areas of life is necessary to bring a balance and wholeness. As such, training and empowerment of women must be integral part of the developmental plan on all levels. Virginia goes on to making her claims and convictions clear as she says that a society will not obtain the growth without the equal participation of its women. Her comments bear some truth in it because if Western countries have developed, it is precisely because the women and men have been given equal opportunities in every area. Roy has been abroad on several occasions before and after

her award winning novel came on the scene. She might have keenly observed the women in those countries, their plights and boons, their misfortune and consolation as a result, through her novel, she pledges to propagate that the generations change, the outlooks change. Hence there should be some evolution in the life of Indian women too. There should be some signs of growth in understanding that men and women are inseparably connected and hence mutually and equally dependent for their existence and that both are equally responsible for overall growth. One cannot make a general statement claiming that the men are productive in every area whereas the women are destructive in all that they say, think and do. Is there any proof that men are progressive and women are regressive?

### 1.1.1 Evolving generation

The women in the novel are so delicately intertwined that they need to be unthreaded very carefully. There are six leading ladies recurringly and invariably mentioned: Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, Rahel, Margret Kochamma and Kochu Maria. Of these, three of them (Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel) have been assigned protagonists' role while the other three have 'comparatively secondary' roles to play. At times it becomes rather difficult to argue who could be the main protagonist. Granted, as many consider, that Ammu has been assigned the central role in the novel but Rahel, Baby Kochamma and Mammachi have no insignificant part to play. The first three (for that matter Baby Kochamma as well) hail from the collateral line of the family, the same blood running into their veins. Why does the author propose three generations of women, that too in one and the same family? The issue is very intriguing and hence calls for a greater exploration and apprehension. Could it be as Amitabh Roy recalls, "Women began course of life as a member of an extended family which was a community in itself as it spanned several generations and comprised of the patriarch and his younger brothers with their families, married sons and their families, all the unmarried sons and daughters, and widowed and deserted daughters who returned to their parents home"<sup>7</sup>.

Amitabh Roy opines that Roy's novel further suggests that "There were gradations based on sex, age and degree of relationship with the head of the family. All the males born in the family inherited the ancestral wealth but the daughters were not entitled to a share. They were compensated at marriage with jewellery, clothes and household articles which was originally

<sup>4</sup> Amitabh Roy, *The God of Small Things*, a Novel of social commitment, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors. 2005, p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Shirley D'Silva, "To be or not to be-is a woman's decision", *Vikasini the journal of women's empowerment*, Vol. No. 30, No. 2, April-June, 2015, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Virginia Saldanha, "Role and challenges of women", in *The New Leader*, March 1-15, 2012, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Amitabh Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

intended to be “woman’s wealth” solely under their control”<sup>8</sup>. On earlier days, how crude, raw and partial could be the human mentality towards women! But that was how it was, no comments! As the generations and history undergo transformation, values change. Has there been a Copernicus change? The answer might be no, but the signs are perceptible that humanity has walked a long distance since then. Joel Kuortti maintains that Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* tells the tale about change. For instance, he picks up, “The arrival of Sophie Mol from England changes the life of the twins, Rahel and Estha. On arrival, Sophie asks: Do you know how to sashay? and Estha answers: No. we don’t sashay in India...her visit beginning with this meeting seems to be a decisive moment. The family is, after all described as Anglophile, but the numerous allegiances of the family lead to complications”<sup>9</sup>.

### 1.1.2 Source of evolution

Concerning change, one must begin the enquiry from the beginning. Roy has Reverend E. John Ipe as the starting point when it comes to taking note of the generation. It calls for further scrutiny because he is supposed to be the blessed one. Where does the blessing consist in? Does the blessing consist in the fact that the stock of Rev E. John Ipe will become an epitome for Arundhati Roy to express her feminist slant? What does this Ipe family in the novel stand for? Does it particularly refer to a community, a society, any one of the Indian states or India as a nation? If the author has ‘evolution’ in the mind, then it might primarily refer to a society that is in gradual transition. Evolution here is comprehended in the context of the change of mentality and transition in outlook for better a society. A better society again might variously be expected by various people. In ordinary parlance, it may point to a state where there is harmonious coexistence with dignity, respect, equality, fraternity and justice as standard of equilibrium.

Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, and Rahel all of them seem to present an era, an outlook in that generation in which they have themselves lived. Unwinding the externals, every woman mentioned in the novel, except for Ammu (and Kochu Maria as well) perhaps, had been abroad either on personal or professional ground. The time is rife that one is not confined to four walls, not even to a few square

kilometers within the state or the country but the parameter is the overseas, indeed the entire globe (Arundhati Roy, the author uses the globe very well. She has well blended North India and South India. She includes Europe and America. She has mentioned various professions). These might implicitly allude as though the whole world were a stage in which one could perform any sort of drama. There are various professions to choose and pursue. She shows that there is a case of extroversion; women are bold and daring, courageous and hopeful, creative and innovative, intelligent and imaginative, competent and able, efficient and effective. They are not wholly ‘autonomous’ but can fend for themselves without much ado.

### 1.1.3 Turns of evolution

What turn the evolution takes within proposed sphere? Is it a familial or a societal affair? Are autonomous and dependent compatible? Professionally, in *The God of small Things*, every woman had some or the other profession which is indicative of the fact that a woman is not necessarily dependent on another for her livelihood. She is not that weakling who has to depend on her father, husband, brother or someone else as the ‘law of Manu’ might propose. In truth, women are capable of something more and also deserve much more than the mere physical protection. Durga Dashan maintains, “We got our independence from the Britain long ago, but the Women are still living dependently in this male chauvinistic society. They are facing many untold difficulties in this society. For every human being protection is more crucial than anything. But protection of women is still a question mark (?) in our country”<sup>10</sup>. Without the desired and required protection from within and without, the question of evolution, growth, progress, development is not possible. If a community, society and a nation has to progress, the all round evolution of women is a must. For that education, emancipation and awareness of women is inevitable.

D. S. Prabha has made some significant studies on constitutional and personal laws and hence thinks that “Personal Laws generally aid women. They prevent any exploitation of women in various levels. But in reality the law enforcement lags behind. Knowledge of Law, good education and economic freedom would liberate women from all types of bondage. Women need to empower and unite themselves in order to fight against

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Joel Kuortti, “Interrogating change: Arundhati Roy”, in R. K. Dhawan ed., *Arundhati Roy: The novelist extraordinary*, New Delhi: Prestige Publishers, 1999, p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> Durga Dhasan, “Justice for women”, in *Rally*, July 2016, Vol. 94, No. 2.

every form of violence and abuse”<sup>11</sup>. When said about constitutional laws, people are aware of, or at least one can guess what it pertains but personal laws could be unheard of for someone. Prabha specifies, “Personal Laws are nothing but norms and observances which govern inter-personal relationships of a citizen pertaining to marriage, maintenance, custody of children, adoption, guardianship, inheritance and succession. ‘Personal Law deals with the rights regarding marriage, property, heir of an individual who belongs to a clan or a race’ (S. 3) (20) General Clauses Act)”<sup>12</sup>.

D. S. Prabha further explains saying that personal laws in India differ from one religion to another. “It is because the customs, social usage and religious interpretations as practiced in their personal lives depend hugely on the religion they practice. As Hindus, Muslims and Christians always have their own customary laws since time immemorial, Constitution of India gives them the freedom to follow their religious customary practices. But in the name of customary practices many times oppressions are thrust upon women”<sup>13</sup>. Prabha then lists the personal laws enacted exclusively for women. Such as: Hindu widows re-marriage Act, 1856, The Divorce Act, 1869, Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872, Married women’s property Act, 1874, Property right Act for Women, 1937, Special Marriage Act, 1954, Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, Hindu Succession Act, 1956 Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956, Hindu Minority & Guardianship Act, 1956, Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986<sup>14</sup>.

## 2.1 Portrayal of Women characters

The portrayal of women characters in *The God of Small Things* carries on the discussion begun above in 1.1.1. As is expected, all the women characters have been assigned different roles. What is noteworthy, however, is that all six women have something to do with one family: Ipe family of Ayemenem. Sounds very intriguing as to why all the women should belong to, in one way or another, with the same family! Kochu Maria is an exception but the number of years she spent there is a sign she could be considered part of the family. Roy’s motive behind six women (Mammachi, Baby Kochama, Ammu, Rahel, Margaret and Kochu Maria) might be aimed at putting some kind of

resistance of what occurs on familial, societal, economic, religious and political levels. That might be the sole reason why she mentions, various professions, religions, political parties and other societal systems like caste and untouchability. Sidestepping mere resistance, Roy might have had in mind the propagation of human values such as courage, peace and tolerance which women certainly possess more than men. Roy brilliantly proposes continuity and ‘break’. Mammachi, Baby Kochama and Kochu Maria represent continuation of patrilineal pattern of life but they do not give up without putting resistance. Ammu, Rahel and Margaret represent the progressive and indeed the postmodern type of women.

### 2.1.1 Woman is not an *abla*

Mammachi for example is quintessence of self sufficiency; clad with power and vision. Though fragile eyes towards the latter part of her years, she was never fragile mentally. She could manage the whole pickle factory with all its intricacies of trade and union in a locality where Communist party and its ideals reigned supreme. To run a small scaled business, one needs brilliance, if not super intelligent mind. In this case, the matter on the floor is a factory and the protagonist under discussion is a woman. One can easily fathom what it takes: first and foremost, the idea. Then, one needs the courage to materialize the idea. One must have the capital, both for investment and management and the art to dispense them. In all, manufacturing to marketing, managing to sustaining, Mammachi looks after every small detail efficiently and without much ado. She has the diplomacy, tactics and brain to run the whole show. Towards the twilight of her life, Chacko might have claimed to be the owner of the property but no leaf moves without the consent and knowledge of Mammachi. Whether it is a bigger or relatively smaller problem, Mammachi has the final say.

Baby Kochamma’s role is rather complicated in that she had to change the faith and profession just as one changes the platform to catch trains going in different direction. She is Rev. E. Ipe John’s daughter, Pappachi’s sister and hence Chacko and Ammu’s aunt, and Estha and Rahel’s grandaunt. After her return from the convent, she was sent to USA for her studies, a sign that she was still part of the family and that she still had some ‘right’ to stay on within the family. She wasn’t apparently ‘dependent’ on the family for her sustenance as she was a graduate in ornamental gardening and cultivated an elaborate garden around Ayemenem House. Its utility and income are not mentioned but the

<sup>11</sup> D S Prabha, “Women and personal laws”, in *The New Leader*, March 1-15, 2012, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

very fact that it was an elaborate garden presupposes that she had employees to maintain them. And if it was maintained, except towards her final years, it needed capital and management. One can thus guess that just like Mammachi, she was a 'lady' with a purpose. If Mammachi managed all on her own the pickle factory, Baby Kochamma too was the boss in her department, not requiring external and internal assistance except for labour which she arranged all on her own.

After presenting Mammachi and Baby Kochamma so strongly, portraying Ammu the way she has been stands at a stark difference. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma have better fortunes in some ways in that one had a husband (whatever way they lived is another question) while the other was a spinster. Ammu in herself is not a weakling but the situation has made her run from pillar to post. The secret and the irony, the strength and weakness of being a woman lie there. If Roy is considered a feminist, her slant rests there. This point must be viewed as the crux of her novel insofar as the resistance of women in her novel is concerned. The irony is that Chacko is preferred over Ammu not on the intellectual ground but precisely on the ground of gender inequality. Chacko is sent to Oxford not because he is a merit class student (Mammachi may consider him of Prime Ministerial stuff for whatever reason) but because his gender testifies him to be a male. Ammu, on the other hand, is discouraged; she is not openly and directly asked to discontinue her studies (not for her tantrums in the convent school) but she is discouraged to pursue her studies because she is a female (who will have 'no claim' over family property and familial matters; she will be given in marriage with dowry and hence in some measure 'sold' to boy's family who will have nothing to do with her parents insofar as it concerns looking after them).

#### 4.1.2 Woman with profession

If Mammachi successfully ran the pickle factory, it goes on to vindicate that she was capable of choosing any profession she wanted. The question arises why then she did not pursue any profession as Pappachi her husband? Most probably, though proficient, she surrendered her autonomy to Pappachi, her 'Imperial Entomologist' husband. In religious terms her heroic act should have been called a sacrifice and hailed as martyrdom. What is remarkable (for some it might be pitiable) is her courage to be subservient to her husband. It calls for a virtue of temperance rather than cowardice to tolerate a jealous and temperamental man like Pappachi. For any woman, primitive, modern,

contemporary or postmodern, it would have been easier (and perhaps ideal too) to walk out of the shadows of a man who was selfish and wrongly predominant. For the 'satisfaction' of a habitual woman-beater, to sacrifice one's own career is hilarious and hence a praiseworthy act indeed. She was a fine violinist, she could have shinned (as brightly as Shah Rukh Khan in Mohhabatein) in any theatre, in any part of the globe gathering applauds and accolades. If she had trained, and if she could have played violin in Vienna, it only goes on to show how well equipped and articulate she was in it. After her husband retired from his office of 'Imperial Entomologist' and returned to Ayemenem, she started Paradise Pickles and Preserves. When Pappachi 'the breadwinner' stopped to be the breadwinner (on account of his retirement from his job as 'Imperial Entomologist'), Mammachi took over from where Pappachi had left. It is indicative of the fact that Mammachi is capable and courageous enough to earn her own living and that she was in no way dependent on Pappachi for her daily bread. She ate what she earned. In a way she was in resonance with what (when in power) P. Chidambaram, the former Union Finance Minister in 2013 said, "I am happy that some of the applicants have applied for private banking licenses to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have come up with different models of banking. We need banks that cater to communities... We need banks that cater mainly to farmer families. We need banks that cater to women...."<sup>15</sup> for she was courageous enough and in a way pioneering for women's independence. She was a kind of, paving the way for others.

Concerning Baby Kochamma it has already been noted that she cultivated an elaborate ornamental garden around Ayemenem House which plainly indicates that she did not gather some likeminded women to sit and gossip about the whole day but rather, she had something substantial to do. A person returned from USA with a degree is expected to do something worthwhile. She had to do something concrete not merely to satiate one's own sheer passion but she had a purpose. The rationale behind such endeavour is pursuing and handing over of what she had achieved through her learning in the University of Rochester, USA. The knowledge she acquired was handed her over by some professors who had themselves obtained it through sheer assiduity and creativity. By circulating her learning through her own inventions and innovations she invests something for the future

<sup>15</sup> Vinod Pandey, "Differentiated bank: will it seep through to different women", in *Women's link*, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 28.

generation to follow. The team that engages itself in this task, in return, gets some remuneration for themselves hence they become breadwinners for their own families. They become earners, not beggars, not thieves, not cheats, not swindlers, not defrauds.

Thus, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma become employers who not only earn their own bread but become providers for someone else too. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma can serve as examples who will inspire people to do transactions for the family and the society. Ammu and Rahel do not necessarily become providers of bread for others but themselves earn their own. They may not be employers but aren't dependent either. Rahel worked in a bullet proof cabin in America before returning to Ayemenem while Ammu is made to knock at every door in search of a job in order that she can manage her own household with her twin children. Rahel had her own guaranteed profession which she sacrificed for the sake of 'assisting and accompanying' his 'mute' brother. Ammu does not sit and brood over her (mis)fortune, but keeps on looking for job applications and interviews until death comes to free her from all her ailing once and for all.

#### 4.1.3 Woman who needs to love and be loved

There may not be any dispute that one of the most fundamental basic needs for a human person is love. Sunny Jacob, commenting on Right Education, speaks of the values that are attached with it. He opines that right education aims at personal values, moral values, social values, spiritual values, cultural values and universal values. Among the classification of values, he grades universal values as the most important and urgent factor for human race. He argues, "It is universal values that indicate the essence of human condition. It is through Universal Values that we link ourselves with humanity and the cosmos. Universal Values can be experienced as life, joy, brotherhood, love, compassion, service, bliss, truth and eternity"<sup>16</sup>. Mammachi for example, had every right to be loved by a man who held a high rank among the government circle and that too in the Capital of the country, Delhi. He was not just an ordinary person but the son of a Reverend Pastor. He was well educated. But perhaps the frustration of not being recognized as entomologist who discovered something new might have driven him vent on his wife. Pappachhi was thus guilty of domestic violence or intimate partner violence. On whatever ground he beat

her, it was sheer violence. The reason with which he beat her should not serve as an excuse but rather termed as a criminal act. Rushila Rebello delineates the facts that tantamount to domestic or intimate partner violence in these words, "It is the verbal, emotional, physical and sexual abuse of one's partner. It is one of the most common crimes against women which are inextricably linked to the perpetuation of patriarchy. Domestic violence refers to violence against women not only in matrimonial homes but also in live-in relationship. Domestic violence is considered as the biggest block in the path of empowerment"<sup>17</sup>.

Baby Kochamma remained a spinster exactly for love's own sake. As a teenager she falls in love with a Jesuit priest, that too from a foreign land, and pursues him even to the extent of her conversion to Catholicism, a faith within Christian faith, and joining the convent. The ardency of Baby Kochamma's desire to love and to be loved can therewith be fathomed. There is a saying that Sant Kabear, when forbidden to meet his wife due to some dispute and disagreement, in the wake of night held on to a snake hanging by the window to get into her room thinking that she had lower a rope for him to climb on. Baby Kochamma's act was somewhat similar in that it is not normal for an Orthodox Syrian to easily convert oneself to Catholicism. The tide of Baby Kochamma's love and affection was so gentle that Mulligan, an Irish Jesuit, too could not restrain himself reciprocating the tender love he received from a vibrant heart. However, he may not have imagined, not even in his wildest dream, the extent to which his young lover would go. All was well until she realized that her dream will remain a dream. She had followed a path that was like a railway track, goes parallel but never meets. In the case of these two, the same thing happened as well. Both were bound by the vow of chastity. If not for Catholicism, there was every possibility that the love and longing for each other would end up in holy wedlock. The inexistence and impossibility of matrimony within the consecrated life necessitated re-changing of platform. Sooner than later she realized that she was holding the air into her palm. She inferred how pathetic the reality might have been to pursue further on! She knew that she was hoping against hope for something extremely difficult, if not impossible. She had done everything for the sake of love. And that love had a finality-happiness. Through one way or another, everyone is seeking happiness. Howard Cutler recalls His Holiness the Dalai Lama's opening words to

<sup>16</sup> Sunny Jacob, "New Education Policy, Stress on Value Education in Schools", in *Indian currents*, Vol. XXVIII, Issue No. 12 (21-27 March) 2016, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> Rushila Rebello, "Physical and mental health effects of domestic violence on women", in *Women's link*, Vol. 22, No. 1, January-March 2016, p. 7.

a large crowd in Arizona, “I believe that the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness. That is clear. Whether one believes in religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, we all are seeking something better in life. So, I think, the very motion of our life is towards happiness”<sup>18</sup>.

#### 4.1.4 Woman with a feeling

Mammachi and Baby Kochamma are women full of emotions and sentiments although apparently seem to submit without any hesitation to patriarchal social norms as pointed out by Antonio Navarro-Tejero in her article titled, “Power Relationships in *The God of Small Things*. In it she contests that “The first generation of women in the novel give extreme importance to patriarchal social norms, indeed they succumb to them. When it is publically discovered, that Ammu, a respectable high-class woman, also has ‘women’s needs’, the situation becomes unbearable to the traditional conservative sector of the community”<sup>19</sup>. Mammachi has been made to suffer both physically and psychologically, even economically. She is made to suppress her feelings though. She suppresses her feelings and emotions to such an extent so as to have a preferential option for Chacko. As mother and woman, it could have been expected that she stood by Ammu in some manner and degree but strangely enough, she neglected her daughter leave alone her grand children.

Baby Kochamma followed the path of Mammachi almost in every line. She complicit in the patriarchal, casteist, classist, sexist society of Kerala, manages her relationships with different characters in an apparently ambivalent kind of way. In stark contradiction to her personal subversion and transgression of patriarchy and oppressive structures, Baby Kochamma concurs in the repressive actions against Ammu. Whether for jealousy or whatever reason, she is responsible for poisoning the minds of Mammachi and Chacko, concoction of a false case against Velutha, tricking the children into betraying Velutha, advising Chacko to return Estha to his father and forcing Ammu to leave. She does all of it to secure her feelings. Baby Kochamma hates Estha and Rahel as they are half-Hindus born of a love marriage outside community. She hates Velutha because he is dalit. He, along with Ammu, violates the “Love laws” too. All these conniving isolate Baby Kochamma to a pathetic life where TV (used as the

most successful machine in the spread of globalization) is her only companion<sup>20</sup>.

There are authors who opine that Roy brilliantly brings out the feeling aspect of a person, especially that of a woman. Brinda Bose in her article titled, “Eroticism as Politics in *The God of Small Things*” deals with the transgressive love of Ammu for Velutha and comments that sociological studies have repeatedly proven that the idea that love and desire are elitist indulgences is a myth. “It is, of course, an argument of long-standing that economics determines one’s responses to such indulgences as love-or sexual desire: and that conterminously love and desire are indulgences when pursued by the elite but “political”/radical when sought by poor masses”<sup>21</sup>. Ammu is made to feel for her zygotic twins Estha and Rahel until death who are, in a way, subalterns in the sense of being rootless economically, financially, in terms of family, lineage and culture. Estha and Rahel are deprived of massive feelings right through the womb. In short, no wonder why Estha becomes speechless while Rahel comes back from bullet proof cabin only to provide all-round security to her brother. Being deprived of a “normal” nuclear family, fatherly love and a stable economic base, these two children have to fall back upon each other most of the time even to the extent of Rahel sacrificing her future and happiness in leaving USA and rejoining him after 23 years or so.

Amitabh Roy is right when he writes, “The novel can be viewed as a tale of “terror” that destroyed the lives of Velutha and Ammu, but also as a tale of how Estha and Rahel survived”<sup>22</sup>. Estha and Rahel do not come from poor background. They had a bourgeois background. But when their parents get divorced, they are subject to adversity. They, along with their mother, were unwanted in their grandmother’s place. Despite this, they do acquire a good education. They have a battered childhood, because of their father’s drunken violence followed by post-drunken badgering, when they were barely two. “When his bouts of violence began to include the children, and the war with Pakistan began, Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcome to her parents in Ayemenem”<sup>23</sup>. The two

<sup>18</sup> HH the Dalai Lama & Howard C. Cutler, *The art of happiness, a handbook for living*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Antonia Navarro-Tejero, “Power Relationships in *The God of Small Things*”, in Murari Prasad (ed.), *Arundhati Roy, Critical perspectives*, Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006, p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> Golam Gaus and Muhmmad Saiful, “Complicity and resistance: women in Arundhati Roy’s writings”, in *Journal of postcolonial cultures and societies*, Vol. 2. No. 4, December 2011, pp. 70-71.

<sup>21</sup> Brinda Bose, “In Desire and in Death: Eroticism as Politics in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*”, Murari Prasad, (ed.), in *Arundhati Roy, Critical perspectives*. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006, p. 97.

<sup>22</sup> Amitabh Roy, *The God of small things, op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> Arundhati Roy, *The God of small things*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1997, p. 42.

children and especially Rahel, as a girl, had a double stigma of mixed parentage attached to them, both “religious (because their father was Hindu and mother Syrian Christian) and ethnic (their father being a Bengali and mother, a Keralite)”<sup>24</sup>. Moreover, they were the children of divorced parents. Rahel was disliked by Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria and even Chacko. Deprived of conventional parental love, Ammu is both father and mother to her. She also derives pleasure from the company and intimacy of her brother. Finally, she considers Velutha, to be a father figure on whose back she rides. Being disliked by her elderly relatives, she feels resentment against them. When her mother’s liaison with Velutha is discovered, she is locked in the bedroom. Rahel, along with her twin brother, tries to find out the reason at the tender age of seven and their mother calls them “millstones round my neck”<sup>25</sup>.

#### 4.1.5 Woman indicating transition

Aijaz Ahmad writes, “Ammu had been all through her adult life a woman of great grit, and this grit is what makes it possible for her to take the initiative in breaking the Love laws, even as Velutha hesitates. That she would not be able to face the consequences of her own grit is an odd decision that the author makes on her behalf, more or less arbitrarily”<sup>26</sup>. Dwelling, more or less, on Aijaz Ahmad’s above elaborated point Murari Prasad comments as well as quotes Tirthankar Chanda to support his argument on Ammu’s attempt at manifesting transition. He says:

The text is guided by the dynamics of transgression. The transgressive acts of the rules of religion and morality by an Englishman and by Chacko, the Keralite Rhodes Scholar, are set up against Ammu’s embrace of Velutha, the untouchable. Chacko’s transgression of the norms is “positive and status enhancing” and is supported by her mother, Mammachi, whereas Ammu’s is degrading and shameful. Along with Chacko’s male chauvinism, the imperialist belief in the moral superiority of an Englishman is debunked for good measure. Ammu’s rebellion against maternal and marital conventionality, and finally, her liaison with dark-skinned and untouchable Velutha (ironically meaning white) constitutes a violation against a determinate social order, sponsoring the immutable ‘love laws’. Her rebellion or her “quest for self-identity”, as Tirthankar Chanda points out is “an

attempt at repossessing, renaming, renewing the world”, but it “appears doomed from the very beginning because of the nature of the society where she has had to seek refuge with her twins after her divorce and also because of the incapacity of her kins (mother, great-aunt Kochamma) to provide an adequate model for redefining the Self” (Chanda 1997:40)<sup>27</sup>.

Ammu is a victim of marriage that unfortunately did not work out in her case. On her return home, she found herself an outcast in her own family. It could have been, in some way, a defining moment in her life but she rebels against such social structures and challenges marriage that rather seems to be a disciplinary institution. Michael Foucault would have called it, “Working towards silencing and controlling the one who stands apart, as if a lunatic/non-conformist who needs to be imprisoned/reasoned. Foucault discussed how asylums were being put up, in the pretext to serve medical knowledge, to isolate and incarcerate dissidents in 17th century Europe—a time that saw the rise of the continents imperial ambitions”<sup>28</sup>. He further writes, “They did not introduce science, but a personality, whose powers borrowed from science only their disguise, or at most their justification. These powers, by their nature, were of a moral and social order; they took root in the madman’s minority status, in the insanity of his person, not of his mind”<sup>29</sup>. Ammu, a *personality*, was locked up too. She was later exiled like a martyr where she died in a place away from home. But before her acceptance of such fate, in desperate attempts of self-realization, she becomes a symbolic personification of all subalterns, especially women, who challenge power structures of the social order as is also pointed out by Murari Prasad:

At the heart of Roy’s astounding book is the conflict between the characters excluded from institutional power and their hegemonic counterparts...Bose points out that Ammu’s conscious decision to embrace Velutha is a forbidden cross-caste liaison of radical significance within the novel’s given social imperatives... Bose links these violations to Roy’s robust commitment to the autonomy of the self—the freedom of small things. Thus the feminist reconceptualization of politics in Roy’s novel, as Bose notes, is profoundly subversive<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Murari Prasad, “Introduction”, in Murari Prasad (ed.), *Arundhati Roy, Critical perspectives*, Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006. p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault reader*, London: Penguin Group, 1991, p. 160.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Murari Prasad, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>26</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, “Reading Roy politically”, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

Ammu's roles as a divorced woman, a single mother and as an educated woman denied of her rights of inheritance "She, as a daughter, has no claim to any property, no *locus standi*..."<sup>31</sup>. As a sexually sentient being she is deprived by the pre-colonial "Love laws", the freedom to choose her partner and is penalized for it; she stands on different issues side by side with other subalterns, whether of caste, class or gender. She is emblematic of them all in the scheme of things Arundhati Roy creates, more than Velutha, who is the protagonist or may be the "God" of *The God of Small Things*". Khurshid Alam in his article "Untouchables" in *The God of Small Things*" situates Ammu vis-à-vis Velutha and clarifies the role of Ammu. Golam and Saiful quote Khurshid Alam:

Roy expresses her disillusionment with the social conditions of the postcolonial world in which the untouchables of the past still face a hostile society that does not let them live as free and independent individuals. Velutha, the God of small things, the outcast can never co-exist peacefully with the "touchable" communities for as long as the stigma of untouchability is attached to him and countless others like him. Ammu, another "untouchable" within the "touchable" cannot pursue happiness because doing so threatens the existing order, and the society takes every possible step to stop change<sup>32</sup>.

### Conclusion

*The God of Small Things* is a novel that has for its theme family saga of love, grief, remembrance etc. Roy's novel apparently aims at pointing towards evolving generation in which women have a definitive and decisive role to play. So, it has been discussed that woman is not an *abla*, a weakling, a secondary sex. If need be, woman can fend for herself. She can run her own show just as Mammachi ran a pickle factory in order not to burden Pappachi her retired Imperial Entomologist husband. The point that the woman needs to love and to be loved has ironically been discussed so as to let the reader know that the woman is not a thing to be despised but a person to be loved within the family and the society at large. Just as the men have cravings for name, fame, prestige and honour etc. women too have feelings and sensations to be respected to and cared for. It also shows that the women of this generation are on transition; transition towards equality and justice in every sphere of life: familial, societal, political, cultural, economic and religious. If the

developed countries in Europe and America have achieved what they have achieved, it is because they have given the women their due. It is of course not a fairy tale that in said countries it all came automatically. Women fought for their rights as well as when civilizations grew, men came to realization that women are part and parcel of familial and societal life. Woman's dignity does not depend upon man; it is an intrinsic reality. The same is true of man. Man's dignity is independent of the other in question; it is innate, given at/by birth.

### REFERENCES

1. Ahmad, Aijaz. "Reading Arundhati Roy Politically", in Murari Prasad (ed.), *Arundhati Roy, Critical perspectives*. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006.
2. Al-Quaderi, Golam Gaus and Muhammad Saiful Islam, "Complicity and resistance: women in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*", in *Journal of postcolonial cultures and societies*, Vol. 2., No. 4, December 2011, p. 62.
3. Bose, Brinda. "In Desire and in Death: Eroticism as Politics in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*", Murari Prasad, (ed.), in *Arundhati Roy, Critical perspectives*. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006.
4. Durga Dhasan, "Justice for women", in *Rally*, July 2016, Vol. 94, No. 2.
5. D S Prabha, "Women and personal laws", in *The New Leader*, March 1-15, 2012, p. 27.
6. D'Silva, Shirley. "To be or not to be-is a woman's decision", *Vikasini the journal of women's empowerment*, Vol. No. 30, No. 2, April-June, 2015, p. 1.
7. HH the Dalai Lama & Cutler, Howard C. *The art of happiness, a handbook for living*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999.
8. Jacob, Sunny. "New Education Policy, Stress on Value Education in Schools", in *Indian currents*, Vol. XXVIII, Issue No. 12 (21-27 March) 2016, p. 29.
9. Kuortti, Joel. "Interrogating change: Arundhati Roy", in R. K. Dhawan ed., *Arundhati Roy: The novelist extraordinary*, New Delhi: Prestige Publishers, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Navaro-Tejero, *op. cit.*, p. 104

<sup>32</sup> Golam and Muhammad, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

10. Navarro-Tejero, Antonia. "Power Relationships in *The God of Small Things*", in Murari Prasad (ed.), *Arundhati Roy, Critical perspectives*, Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006.
11. Pandey, Vinod. "Differentiated bank: will it seep through to different women", in *Women's link*, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 28.
12. Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault reader*, London: Penguin Group, 1991.
13. Prasad, Murari. "Introduction", in Murari Prasad (ed.), *Arundhati Roy, Critical perspectives*, Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006.
14. Roy, Amitabh. '*The God of Small Things*', a Novel of social commitment, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors. 2005.
15. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*, New Delhi: Penguin Books. 1997.
16. Saldanha, Virginia. "Role and challenges of women", in *The New Leader*, March 1-15, 2012, p. 11.