

Introduction

Arundhati Roy was born in 1960 to a Syrian Christian mother and a Bengali father. The marriage of her parents was a failure and they separated. This left Arundhati Roy's mother, Mary Roy, overburdened with the responsibility of two children. Mary Roy returned to her village Ayemenem in the district of Kottayam in Kerala, where she lived with her children at her brother's pickle factory. The experiences at the village seem to have left a lasting impression on Arundhati:

There was much trauma for me in 1960s as Kottayam did not accept me as I was a woman separated from my husband...It is only when I read her book that I realized that even at five she was conscious that we were unwelcome in the native home and that I expected her to be able to stand on her own feet, so that she would never be in such a weak position as I was. (5-6)

Arundhati spent her formative years in an informal school called Corpus Christi at Ayamanam and acquired her literary and intellectual abilities. That she discovered the joy of reading there seemed to have contributed a lot to the development of her personality. Quite remarkable is her mother's observation about her education "She joined a formal school only at eleven. I believe one learns much more in the absence of a vigorous syllabus" (14).

Arundhati's abilities became evident early in her life. Her mother remarks "Arundhati is a born talker and a born writer. While she was studying at our school it was a problem to find a teacher who could cope with her voracious appetite for reading and writing"(5). She left Kerala at the age of eighteen and studied architecture in Delhi. She

got a scholarship and went to Italy. Later she worked at the National Institute of urban Affairs at the time. She wrote scripts for Pradip Kishen's films 'In which Annie gives It Those Ones' and 'Electric Moon' She also wrote screenplay for the TV serial 'The Banyan Tree'. The contact and collaboration with Pradip Krishen culminated in her marriage with this film director.

Meanwhile, she has written her first novel *The God of Small Things*, which took four years to complete it. She told Vir Sanghvi, the editor of Sunday: "I just started putting down what was going on my head...It was all just coming out of me, like smoke I suppose, and I kept putting it down." She has become tremendously successful in her writing career and she is one of the world's celebrated novelists now. Jaydipsingh Dodiya has some words to say about her successes:

Arundhati Roy is the first Indian to win the prestigious Booker Prize. She is perhaps the first Indian Women novelist who has opened such a big global market for Indian writing in English. The novel *The God of Small Things* became so immensely popular among lovers of fiction that the total sale of the book, six months after release is a heart stopping 3.5 lakhs copies. For all this, the book almost never got written. (1)

Arundhati Roy claims that she was not sure of the title till she finished the booking one of the interview granted to the press, she is reported to have said: "...it is about trying to make the connections between the very smallest things and the very biggest things and to see how those fit together" (18).

Roy has become now an active politician and involved in a protest movement called Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). The government of India has planned to build a

series of dams in the central and western states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. This is called the Normada projects. It has threatened the lives of homes around forty million people living in and around the area. Roy has given her Booker Prize money to this project group and she has been involved physically in the protest rally and has been arrested. Sheobhusan Sukla also gives his attention to Roy's rising public life. "The vision expressed creatively in the novel has found its vent in her widespread active support of 'Narmada Bachao Andolan'. She has recently jumped in to the movement on behalf of people who are opposing Sardar Sarovar Project" (114)

Moreover, Shukla quotes Janak Singh's interview of Roy where she has defended her involvement in the protesting movement against the *Narmada dam* project which is going to devastate peoples' lives over there:

Five millions copy of my novel have already been sold. I have everything all that I want. Had I wanted I could have shut up, lived in the Bahamas, carried on my writing and forgotten about it all. But as a writer I can not close my eyes. The plight of people uprooted to make way for the construction of dams, the devastation these projects are causing have made me jump in to the fray. (114)

Her commitment issues from her worldview and we have to consider her novel in the light of her literary and social activities. She argues in an interview:

As far as I am concerned, whether the protest is about Nuclear Weapons or Big dams on the Normada, what one is fighting for is nothing less than a worldview, a way of seeing. Why, even *The God of Small Things* is a

worldview. What all of these works have in common is that they attempt to analyze power and powerlessness. (20)

Arundhati Roy is a non-conformist who can not be identified with one or other trend without certain reservation. She does not subscribe to the conventional views. She has a worldview of her own, she wants a saner world based on reason which permits individual freedom, takes due regard of natural instincts, and shuns violence. No ruthless pursuits of money and power, but the concern for peace, happiness and equality shall be the guiding factors in the better world she seeks:

I grew up with people like Velutha. They were my closest, dearest friends. They were much more than my family: they were who I fished with, swam with, dug up earthworms with. I had a sense of what would come down on someone's head. Syrian Christians think they're the salt of the earth. Even within the Church, there are sub-sects. They don't even marry between themselves, so with a Paravan ... (7).

Rana Behl, a historian at Delhi University who knows Roy, has said: "She is not an academic. The people she knew and grew up with were underdogs. She did not come through the normal patterns of social politeness and the caution public figures here are used to. "

Arundhati has said that caste is:

The defining consideration in all Indian politics, (and) in all Indian marriages, (but) the lines are blurring. India exists in several centuries simultaneously. So there are those of us like me, or people that I know for

instance, to whom it means nothing... It's a very strange situation where there's sort of a gap between... sometimes it's urban and rural, but it's really a time warp. But there's no question of it having gone away. (8)

Although caste is still an emotional issue for many Indians, discrimination on the basis of caste was outlawed in India over four decades ago. However, joining a different caste or marrying outside your caste is still rare. She remarks:

I don't believe in these artificial divisions... I just do what I do you know. I don't believe that just because I've written a book I have to write another ten books, or just because I've written a screenplay I have to carry on doing that. Sometimes something is a book; and sometimes a screenplay or... something else. I think that sometimes we are just sort of put into these categories, and we don't think about it, we just keep running on those tracks. (8)

Novels devoid of serious view of life are generally ephemeral. Arundhati Roy's novel has admitted all the six elements-plot, characterization, dialogue, time and place of actions, style and philosophy of life, demonstrating a sound knowledge of human nature, a keen insight into motives and passions. Arundhati Roy has read several western novels and she is undoubtedly influenced by them. But so far as her commitment is concerned, it is rooted in the Indian soil. Her novel is not an initiation of some western model in the respect. She has behind her a long and rich tradition of socially committed writing in Indo-Anglian novels. It is relevant here, therefore, to have a look at this tradition and discover her roots. Indian English witnessed an unprecedented growth of socially

committed writings by the 1930s. There were several developments during 1920s that left their mark in Indian history.

That our choice of the 1930s is not arbitrary. It is borne out by the fact that William Walsh marks it as the age of “genuine novelists”. Walsh names three of these genuine novelists-Mulk Raj Ananda, RK Narayan and Raja Rao and strangely enough, the first one of them turns out to be socially committed novelists. Ananda shows a deep social awareness and exposes a system that enables the powerful and the rich to oppress the weak and the poor.

Arundhati Roy follows Ananda’s concern for the victims of caste and class oppression. Velutha is an untouchable and belongs to the working class. Like the hero of Ananda, Velutha also finds himself helpless before a system based on inequality and exploitation. A tea garden in Asam and a pickle factory in Kerala provide the background of casteist and sexual exploitation of the powerless by the powerful in her novel.

We can connect Arundhati Roy’s novel with social themes in Bhattacharya’s work. In *So Many Hungers*, human beings are shown starving to death. The hunger in *The God of Small Things* is more deep-rooted and therefore more palpable. Baby Kochamma starves of love and as she can not marry the man of her choice. Mammachi gets married to a wife-beater finds little solace in life and her son who saves her from that brutality proves no better than a usurper. Margaret, who comes to Ayemenem in search of relief, loses her only daughter. Ammu’s quest for love destroys her own life as well as that of her lover. Children in the novel are also deprived of parental love and the company they need. Thus her novel depicts a sort of famine which leaves people starving emotionally.

Arundhati Roy's novel like, *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, demonstrates the truth that human relations need not be limited by the barriers imposed by society. Singh's Jugga loves a Muslim woman and lays down his life to save Muslims. Heroines of Roy marry beyond their religious and ethnic group (Ammu and Rahel) and do not disapprove of such marriages. Baby Kochamma loves an Irish Jesuit and Ammu falls in love with a Hindu Paravan. Women in Roy's novel liberate themselves from external restrictions imposed by society, culture or nature and internal inhibitions-their own fear and guilt feelings and establish themselves autonomous being. They also come to realize the fundamental truths that a person has to discover oneself.

The intention here is to point out a rich tradition of socially committed writings in India and that Arundhati Roy deserves a place within this tradition. Her novel is concerned about the inhuman behaviours that spring from caste prejudices but the atrocities committed and the sufferings caused one no less palpable.

Thus, we find that Roy's commitment has not come into being from nowhere. She has not projected some western model in to Indian background. Rather, she owes a lot to her predecessors and shares many of their worries. She belongs to a tradition and tries to promote and enriches it whatever her strengths and weaknesses.

Though *The God of Small Things* remains Arundhati Roy's only contribution to literature to date, her bio-data will remain incomplete if we fail to mention her other literary works. Roy has written a fictional work entitled, *The God of Small Things*, and much other non-fictional prose. Her non-fictional proeses are mainly the socio-political essays which condemn the war and violence.

In *The God of Small Things* (1997), Arundhati Roy creates a microcosm that encompasses wife battering, infidelity, molestation, pornography, emotional insecurity, pride and death in one family in the southern Indian State of Kerala. Through this microcosm, Roy explores the class prejudices and misogyny and often chaotic social and political history of India. Written in a style verging on magical realism, the novel features nonlinear chronology and fragmented flashbacks so that the reader must unravel the story from its conclusion to its source. Roy herself grew up in Kerala, where she witnessed the disarray of Indian politics and the quiet violence of the Indian upper classes against the untouchables-the lowest stratum in the strict Indian caste system.

The novel recounts the unrelenting situation of women, children and dalit and their representation in the society which is studied in association with the identity of these people. The novel shows characters belonging to three generations. So, it has become the record of improvement of the social status of women through these generations. The novel with the three women characters including 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 of forces of suppression. Mammachi is 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.

The novel tells the story of the broken lives of small things that have undergone the domestic as well as socio-political and cultural violence. Urbashi Barat said:

The God of Small Things can at least bring about resilience and indifference to suffering, but big god is manifested in the evil of Pappachi and Baby Kochamma, the hypocrisy of Mamachi and Comrade Pillai, the anger of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma, the sense of superiority in Sophie Mol, the sodomizing Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. (16)

Arundhati Roy has put emphasis on the second part of the title, that is, 'small things,' the small things that combine to make up the textures of our lives. Shashibala Talwar and R.S Sharma further clarified the title that *The God of Small Things* stands for the life of the weak and the helpless...It represents all those people who are victimized by the forces of history, dead convention, the tyranny of the state and the politics of opportunism and andro-centric order." (43) All that leads to power, prestige and wealth is widely held as 'big' while the rest is relegated to the position of 'small things' But small things need not refer to inanimate objects only.

The subaltern people are always reduced to the objects which can be broken, thrown away and destroyed at the sweet will of the powerful. To this effect, Arundhati Roy raises her strong protest against age-long agonies and sufferings of the suppressed class of women-all women characters including Ammu, the female protagonist of the novel, who is depicted undergone severe domestic and the socio-political and cultural violence.

The novel delves in to the issue of dismantling historical truths and subversion of orthodoxy that always impedes them in the pace of their betterment and in shaping their concrete identity. Hence the idea of subverting the pre-established social norms and values, religion and culture- a deconstruction which advocates the need of reshaping the

role, space and responsibility of male and female, high caste and low caste, conformists and non-conformists. In this light Rajyashree Khusu Lahiri views *The God of Small Things* as “a taboo- breaking protest novel,” find in it an effective shock to people “out of a sense of complacency at having rid the society of discrimination based on caste and gender.” The incestuous relationship carries a message to the orthodox: if you penalize people for marrying beyond caste, religion and ethnic group your activities may lead to the breaking of the greatest taboo, incest, which is but an extreme form of inbreeding.

Through the characters, imageries and various instances, Arundhati Roy attempts to demolish the boundary set forth by cultural and social legacy manifested in the perverted and decadent treatment of orthodox. Her concern is vociferously raised for those people who are unable to raise their voice against injustice. Presenting taboos as weapons to brush aside the structural and ideological set-ups immanent in the society, she wants to create a new history with new socio-cultural and political institutions where all the subaltern people can have a respected and harmonious life based on peace, happiness, love, equality not the world substantiated by ruthless pursuit of power, privilege and position.

Subaltern Representation and Feminist Subjectivity

Subaltern, meaning of 'inferior rank', is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups in society who are subjected to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to 'hegemonic power'. Since the history of the ruling classes is realized in the state, history being the history of states and dominant groups.

"Subaltern Studies" started at the end of 1970s but it formally appeared in 1982 under the banner "Subaltern Studies: Writing South Asian History and Society". Until the first six volumes, it was edited by Ranjit Guha. Now it not only consists of eleven volumes but it has also undergone several transformations.

The word "Subaltern" in late medieval English, referred to vassals and peasants. It was Gramsci who introduced the term in social theory, using it to denote the people in the margin as opposed to those in the centre. Subaltern Studies group aims to provide a systematic discussion of oppressed groups of society through a new historiography that rewrites history from the below. They describe their project as an attempt to study:

...the general attribute of subordination in South Asian Society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in other way...Subaltern Studies group sketched out in wide ranging concern both with visible 'history, politics, economics, and sociology of subalternity' and with the occluded attitude, ideologies and belief system-in short, the culture informing that condition."(Guha vii)

Gramsci was interested in the historiography of the subaltern classes. In 'Notes on Italian History' (1934-35) he outlined a six point plan for studying the history of the subaltern

classes which included (1) their objective formation; (2) their active or passive affiliation to the dominant political formations; (3) the birth of new parties and dominant groups; (4) the formations that the subaltern groups produce to press their claims; (5) new formation within the old framework that assert the autonomy of the subaltern classes: and other points referring to trade unions and political parties. (Gramsci 1971)

Gramsci claims that the history of the subaltern classes was just as complex as the history of the dominant classes (52), although the history of the latter is usually that which is accepted as 'official' history. For him, the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic (54), since they are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel. Clearly they have less access to the means and by which they may control their own representation, and less access to cultural and social institutions. Only 'permanent' victory can break that pattern of subordination, and even that does not occur immediately.

The term has been adapted to post-colonial studies from the work of the Subaltern Studies group of historians, who aimed to promote a systematic discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian Studies. It is used in *Subaltern Studies* 'as a name for the general attribute of subordination in south Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way' (Guha 1982 vii). The group formed by Ranjit Guha, and initially including Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, and Gyan Pandey has produced five volumes of *Subaltern Studies*: essays relating to the history, politics, economics and sociology of subalternity 'as well as the attitudes, ideologies, and belief systems-in short, the culture informing that condition' (vii).

Guha contrasts “politics of the people” with elite politics and the privileges the former over the later. He thinks that politics of the people “was an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics, nor did its existence depend on the latter” (4). It, in spite of the end of colonialism, continues in different forms. The development of nationalist consciousness, in accordance with elitist historiography, has been an achievement either of colonialist administrators, policy, and culture of elite Indian personalities or ideas. Obviously such historiography, claims Guha, fails to “acknowledge or interpret the contribution made by people on their own, i.e. independently of the elite” (3). It, of course, ignores the people’s politics, an autonomous domain, which outlives elite politics. Of course, the subaltern politics is different from elite politics.

The elite group mobilizes their politics through an adaptation to parliamentary institutions whereas subaltern classes do so through traditional organization of kinship and territoriality or class association. Even the strategy of political mobilization demonstrates the link between British colonialism and bourgeoisie nationalism. The bourgeoisie nationals have adopted the legacies of colonialism. In a way, they are successors to colonialism. The elite historiography equally claims “that Indian nationalism was primarily an idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led the people from subjugation to freedom” (2). It illustrates how the elite historiography ignores the roles the subaltern classes have played independent of elite command during the anti-imperialists movements. Likewise, the national narratives fail to speak on behalf of the people as the post colonialist’s nationalist’s project imposes an indigenous form of elitism.

The importance of the subaltern reworking of colonial Indian history derives its importance from the fact that it presents the viewpoints of mammoth subaltern population of India—a point of view of the voice consistently gagged both in the imperialists and nationalists construction of colonial Indian history. The Indian National Movement of the first half of the twentieth century challenged the imperialist notion of India in so far as it conceived of India and Indians as active and sovereign whereas imperialism saw passivity, otherness, and dependency. But the Movement which was dominated by the upper-and-middle class people also imbibed the premises on which the imperialists' notion of India was built. The result was that the voice of majority of the Indians—the subalterns—remained under erasure in both the imperialists and nationalists discourses. The Subaltern Studies historians seek to recover this “erase” history.

The purpose of the Subaltern Studies project is to redress the imbalance created in academic work by a tendency to focus on elites and elite culture in South Asian historiography. Recognizing that subordination can not be understood except in a binary relationship with dominance, the group aimed to examine the subaltern ‘as an objective assessment of the role of the elite and a critique of elitist interpretations of that role’ (vii). The goals of the group stemmed from the belief that the historiography of Indian nationalism, for instance, had long been dominated by elitism—colonialists elitism and bourgeoisie-nationalists elitism—both the consequences of British colonialism.. Such historiography suggested that the development of a nationalist consciousness was an exclusively elite achievement either of colonial administrators, policy or culture, or of elite Indian personalities, institutions or ideas. Consequently, asserts Guha, such writings cannot acknowledge or interpret the contribution made by people on their own, that is,

independently of the elite. What is clearly left out by the class outlook of such historiography is a 'politics of the people' (4), he claims, is an autonomous domain that continues to operate when the elite politics became outmoded.

Despite the great diversity of subaltern groups, the one invariant feature was a notion of resistance to elite domination. The failure of the bourgeoisie to speak for the nation meant that the nation of India failed to 'come into its own', and for Guha 'it is the study of this failure which constitutes the central problematic to Indian historiography' (7). Clearly the concept of the subaltern is meant to cut across the several kinds of political and cultural binaries, such as colonialism vs. nationalism, or imperialism vs. indigenous cultural expression, in favour of a more general distinction between subaltern and elite, because suggests Guha, this subaltern group is invariably overlooked in studies of political and cultural change.

A history that recounts only the story of the Indian bourgeoisie, however, can not ultimately explain nationalism in India, Guha insists in his article entitled "On Some Aspects of Historiography of Colonial India," because it excludes what he calls "the politics of people," and by people he means the subaltern groups (4). Therefore, the Subaltern group of historians offers alternative histories of nationalism in India, histories which reveal the workings of subaltern resistance as well as the efforts on part of the nationalists' leaders and writers to suppress its emancipatory potential.

In 1995 Gopal Guru, Professor of Political Science at Pune University, wrote a piece in the Economic and Political weekly "Dalit Women talk Differently", drawing attention to the formation of a pan-Indian group known as the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW). The NFDW was explicitly framed around what Guru described

as a "politics of difference" was essential for understanding the specificity of dalit women's subjugation, characterized by their experience of two distinct patriarchal structures/situations: a brahminical form of patriarchy that deeply stigmatized dalit women because of their caste status, as well as the more intimate forms of control by dalit men over the sexual and economic labour of "their" women.

In that same year, an edited anthology *Dalit Women Issues and Perspectives* was published as the proceedings of a two-day seminar held in 1993 at Pune University. One of the contributors to that volume, Vidyut Bhagawat, noted that "By using the term 'pp.women' we are creating an imagined category. This imaging is necessary because we hope that dalit women in the near future will give new critical dimensions to Indian feminist movement as well as to Dalit Movement.'⁽³⁾ Bhagawat's receptivity to a specifically dalit feminist position signaled an awareness among feminists of emerging critiques by dalit and lower- caste women, who had begun to take Indian feminists to task for the seeming invisibility of caste to mainstream Indian feminism. They argued that this had led to an exclusive and partial construction of Indian feminist politics.

The political empowerment of dalit and other lower-caste women has posed a strong challenge to Indian feminism. ⁽⁴⁾ In his essay, Guru applauds the feminism of the NFDW as an implicit critique of brahminical feminism, a questioning of Indian feminism's hegemonic impulse to speak for, or in the name of, "Indian" women. Guru argues also that dalit women's autonomous organizations challenge, at the same time, the reproduction of patriarchal norms within dalit communities.⁽⁵⁾ In brief, dalitbahujan feminists critique both anti-caste and feminist movements for their particular forms of exclusion. Guru tries to give a map the challenges that groups such as the NFDW have

posed to mainstream Indian feminism, and inquire into the implications of such critique in remaking feminist practice.

Struggles for equality, rights, and recognition by anti-caste activities have complemented similar struggles by feminists. From the compartmentalization of struggles against caste hegemony as separate from the project of social reform during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the persistence of a political sociological analysis of caste relations as unchanging "traditional" practices, scholars and activities have tended to examine struggles against caste inequality and the critique of gender relations in isolation from each other. The new political agenda being articulated by dalitbahujan feminists demands the exploration of their shared and entangled histories. Dalitbahujan feminists have gone further than merely arguing that Indian feminism is incomplete and exclusive. The question of how representative Indian feminism has been evokes both senses of the term representation: as a set of political claims from within the discourse of parliamentary democracy, as well as the impossible demand for the "authentic" reproduction of presence. Exposing the limits of feminism's capacity to represent women as somehow unmarked or disembodied from their caste of religious identity stands to throw feminism (and its conceptions of gender identity) into crisis. This introduction explores the perils and potential of this moment, when the categories of woman, gender, and feminism must be rethought.

Situated in that boarder socio-political context, the emergence of autonomous dalit and lower-caste women's' organizations asks how we can reconstitute feminism's futures in order to more faithfully represent the divergent stakes of women's relationship to feminism. Dalitbahujan feminism poses anew the question of how we might

understand caste's complex history as a form of identification and as a structure of disenfranchisement and exploitation; how we can revisit the forgotten and repressed histories that illuminate the criticism of feminism by its most vulnerable and exploited constituency. The demand for histories of hurt and humiliation animates the contemporary claims for including caste as a significant category of social life, an intimate and embodied form of sociality.

Sharmila Rege "A Dalit Feminist Standpoint" agrees with Guru's analysis of the potential contributions of dalit feminism to rethinking feminist practice. At the same time, she goes beyond Guru's focus on authentically and dalit women's voice, and suggests - in the spirit of critiques by women of color in the United States about the relationship[between race and gender - that dalit feminism carries the potential, more generally, to transform upper-caste feminists' understanding of gender and feminism. (8)

There have been equally strong critiques of this position: Chaya Datar, writing from her position as a well-known feminist from Maharashtra, has argued that the focus on "difference" and identity ignores the centrality of economic exploitation and market fundamentalism in disenfranchising women. Datar has also suggested that revisiting the history of the Indian feminist movement would illustrate the various moments when critiques of patriarchy had folded within their struggles against caste dominance as well (e.g., the Mathura rape case, or feminist alliances with the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra).

(9) Broadly speaking, Datar's critique might be characterized as a plea for rooting dalit women's oppression in the domain of the economy rather than in identity politics, and as a demand for maintaining the analysis and criticism of patriarchal relations as the most

significant task of dalit feminism rather than, perhaps, the focus on caste oppression and caste mobility. (10)

By drawing attention to the relationship between caste ideology, gender relations, and boarder struggles for democracy and social justice, dalitbahujan feminists are demanding a changed politics of feminism. The demands by dalit and other lower-caste women are not merely for inclusion, but for an analysis of gender relations as they are inflected by the multiple and overlapping patriarchies of caste communities that produce forms of voluntary that require analysis.

The challenge to disarticulate a unified and monopolistic account of patriarchy-in-action also suggests the need to revisit issues of labor and surplus from the perspective of caste and its sexual economics, and provides an opportunity to rethink the relationship between ideologies of gender and their material consequences such as the reproduction of gender and their material consequences such as the reproduction of gender inequality. Recent dalitbahujan mobilization around issues of identity, representation, and reorganization has focused most of their attention, and reexamination discourses of democracy. (11) The symbolic economics of gender and sexuality and the material reality of the economic dispossession of dalit women therefore need to be viewed together. Caste ideological metaphors of stigma and defilement to enable differentiated conceptions of personhood, and to render the body a culturally legible surface. Taboos regarding touch - ritual sanctioning of practices such as spatial segregation and taboos about physical contact - operate along the axes of purity and pollution that manage bodies and physical; space. This is because caste distinctions legitimate forms of socio-political control through the regulation of kinship. Caste is a religio-ritual form of personhood, a

social organization of the concept of stigma from the facility of biological bodies to metaphorical collectives such as the body politic, and most importunately, it is an apparatus that regulates sexuality. Such ideologies are embedded in material forms of dispossession that are also always forms of symbolic dispossession, and they are mediated by the regulation of sexuality and gender identity through the rules of kinship and caste purity.

The 1980's saw an unprecedented assault on key intuitions and ideologies of the modernizing Nehruvian state: constitutional secularism; the civil rights model of "compensatory discrimination" drawing on a rhetorical commitment to equality; a discourse of industrial development and alleviation of poverty, and gendered discourses of population control and female empowerment that targeted women through the regulation of their bodies. (14) In the main, the transformations in political culture over the past two decades have involved a shift in the relationship between the Indian state and its minorities. While discourses of secularism have their relationship to the state, the constitutional commitment to the abolition of untouchability and to the removal of the civic and political disabilities of caste has been enabled by reservations policies. The maintenance of religious tolerance from without and the reform of caste Hindus from within were complementary projects embarked upon by the postcolonial state. Studies of caste have begun to engage with issues of rights, resources, and recognition/representation, illustrating the extent to which caste must be recognized as central to the narrative of India's political modernity. For example, scholars are becoming increasingly aware of the extent to which radical thinkers such as Ambedkar, Periyar, and Phule demanded the reorganization of histories of histories of exploitation,

ritual stigmatization, and political disenfranchisement as constituting the lives of the lower-castes, even as such histories also formed the burdened past from which escape was sought. (15)

The demand for reservations for women (and for further reservations for dalit women and women from the Backward Class and Other Backward Communities) can also be seen as an outgrowth of a renewed attempt to address caste and gender issues from within the terrain of politics. It might also indicate the insufficiency of focusing solely on gender in mobilizing a Statistical "solution" to the political problem of visibility and representation. Emerging one of the 33 per cent reservations for women in local panchayat, and clearly at odds with the Mandal protests that equate reservations with notions of inferiority, the recent demands re reservations is a marked shift away from the historical mistrust u reservations for women. As Mary John has argued, women's vulnerability must be viewed in the context of the political displacements that mark the emergence of minorities before the state. The question of political representation and the formulation of gendered vulnerability are connected issues. In this context, Anupama Rao, Editor of "Issues in Contemporary Indian Feminism" argued that such vulnerability is the mark of the gendered subject's singularity. It is that form of injured existence that brings her within the frame of political legibility as different-yet eligible-for universal forms of redress. As such, it is critical to political discourses of rights and recognition.

Political demands for reservations for women-and for lower caste women-complement scholarly attempts to understand the deep cleavages between women of different castes that contemporary events such as Mandal or the Hindutva movement have exposed. In exploring the challenge? posed by Mandal to reigning conceptions of

secular selfhood, Vivek Dhareshwar pointed to confluences between reading for and recovering the presence of caste as a silenced public discourse in contemporary India, and similar practices by feminists who had explored the unacknowledged burden of gendered identity. Dhareshwar suggested that theorists of caste and theorists of gender might think of elective affinities in their methods of analysis, and strategically embrace their stigmatized identities (caste, gender) in order to draw public attention to them as political identities. Dhareshwar argued that this would show the extent to which secularism had been maintained as another form of upper-caste privilege, the luxury of forgetting about caste, as opposed to the demands for social Justice by dalitbahujans who were demanding a public acknowledgement of such privilege.

While this suggests a provocative discursive strategy, there are also groups such as the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) who argue that dalit women's subjugation is materially embedded, that dalit women are thrice-subjugated as women, as dalit women, and as dalit women who perform stigmatized labour. Bela Malik argues in "Unsociability and Dalit Women's Oppression," that "It remains a matter of reflection that those who have been actively involved with organizing women encounter difficulties that are nowhere addressed in a theoretical literature whose foundational principles are derived from a smattering of normative theories of rights, liberal political theory, an ill-informed left policies and more recently, occasionally, even a well-intentioned doctrine of 'entitlements.'" (323) Malik in effect asks how we are to understand dalit women's vulnerability. Caste relations are embedded in dalit women's profoundly unequal access to resources of basic survival such as water and sanitation facilities, as well as to educational institutions, public places, and sites of religious

worship. On the other hand, the material impoverishment of dalits and their political disenfranchisement perpetuate the symbolic structures of untouchability, which legitimates upper-caste sexual access to dalit women.

Caste relations are also changing, and new forms of violence in independent India that target symbols of dalit liberation such as the desecration of the statues of dalit leaders, attempt to prevent dalits' socio-political advancement by expropriating land, or deprive dalits of their political rights are aimed at dalits' perceived social mobility. These newer forms of violence are often complemented by the sexual harassment and molestation of dalit women, pointing to the caste and gendered forms of vulnerability that dalit women experience. As Gabriele Dietrich notes in her essay "Dalit Movements and Women's Movements," dalit women have been targets of upper-caste violence. At the same time, dalit women have also functioned as the "property" of dalit men. Lower-caste men are also engaged in a complex set of fantasies of retribution that involve the sexual violation of upper-caste women in retaliation for their emasculation by caste society. The problematic agency of dalit women as sexual property in both instances over-determines dalit women's identity in terms solely of their sexual availability.

The Indian government recognizes caste atrocities and the sustained conditions of everyday violence as an abuse of human rights. This has revealed an important transnational aspect to dalit demands for rights and restitution. The language of extraordinary violation is the register in which such demands are made. The Human Rights Watch Report *Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's Untouchables* (1999) connects these spectacular instances of violence with the structural, ordinary forms of violence and violation that shape dalit subjectivity. The report is a strong

indictment of the Indian state, especially the police, and positions dalit human rights as a matter of global concern: a variant of forms of State-sponsored and socially sanctioned oppression of vulnerable peoples across the world.

The stakes of defining dalit identity in terms of human rights were also displayed when human rights activists demanded that the Government of India acknowledge caste discrimination as a form of racism at the recently held U.N. World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance [hereafter, WCAR] in Durban, South Africa from August 31-September 7, 2001. This conflict indicates that the discourse of human rights has become a critical vehicle for drawing international and public attention to state practice. The internationalization of the problem of untouchability has been enabled by critical forms of mass-mediated publicity and a globally-available discourse of historic hurt and suffering.

‘While the Government of India argued that focusing on caste discrimination "diluted" the aims of the conference, dalit representatives, such as those belonging to the NFDW, insisted that caste discrimination approximates the practices of racism. Indicting the Indian state and its reliance on the ideology of Hindutva as. enabling a specific set of discriminatory practice; against casts and religious minorities, the NGO Declaration on Gender and Racism asserts.

We declare that Dalit women are victims of caste and gender violence, used by landlord, middlemen and contractors on construction sites and policemen to 'inflict political lesson' and crush protest, struggle and dissent against centuries' old discrimination being inflicted on their whole community. Dalit women are raped and mutilated before being massacred and used as hostages to 'punish absconding relatives.’

At very young age they are forced into prostitution under the devadasi (maid servant of god) system.

This declaration is a form of publicity that makes dalit women visible as a community of suffering in the very resistance to the continuation of such practices. In the form of a declaration, this statement might be said to inaugurate precisely that imagined subject, "dalit women," mentioned earlier. As an evidentiary document it testifies to the structural conditions that shape dalit women's subjectivities, materializing their dispossession through recourse to statistics that quantify dalit women's disenfranchisement in comparison to other women. It is also important to note the significance of testimony as a form of witnessing and evidence making in recent attempts to raise awareness about the perpetuation of untouchability and its pernicious effects. In "Dalit Women's Cry for Liberation", Pranjali Bandhu mentions the Public Hearing on Atrocities Against Dalits with Specific reference to Dait Women organized in March, 1994 by Women's Voice and the Asian Women's Human Rights Council. She indicates this public hearing as well as attempts to address gender inequality in the context of the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women (i.e., the "Beijing conference") as an important backdrop to the formation of the NFDW. The National Public Hearing on Atrocities against Dalits in India held in Madurai, Tamil Nadu in 1999 also sought to bypass legal bureaucracy and bring dalit concerns directly before a larger public, mobilizing testimonial forms of witnessing. The National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights was also established with aim of using critical publicity that might be more effective than judicial mechanisms in making dalit hurt and suffering visible.

In a similar attempt to make connections between seemingly disparate sets of historical experiences, Andre Beteille (1992) examined studies of caste and race as both reproducing forms of inequality, and did so by focusing on the most striking similarity between racial and caste discrimination, i.e., their reliance on gendered forms of control. "There is, firstly, the sexual use and abuse of women, which is an aspect of the inequality of power seen in its most extreme form in the treatment of women of the lowest rank by men of the highest; this is the aspect of the problem that has received the most attention. There is, in addition, the unremitting concern with the purity of women at the top, associated with ideas regarding bodily substance..."Beteille's comparative perspective focused on the prevalence of illicit sexual unions between men with caste or racial privilege and women who were materially dispossessed, hence sexually available to them, throwing into relief the relations of sexual power that sustained caste and racial hegemony. The co-existence of prohibitions against marriage and the persistence of illicit sexual union is an important paradox in understanding the profound anxieties about sexuality and caste purity that issue of caste and gender raise, and clearly, there are resonances between structures of caste and race here. However, while dalits, African-Americans, and women might experience similar forms of dispossession, there are important historical reasons why we might not wish to collapse one into the other.

The essays included in the section *Dalit Women. Difference and Dalit Women's Movement* trace the emergence of dalitbahun women as a recognizable political collectivity. These essays note lower-caste (especially dalit) women's vulnerability to sexual violence and harassment, i.e., the notion of dalit women as sexual property whose enjoyment falls into an economy of desire and violation at odds with the licit economies

that maintain caste purity through marriage; their stigmatization by upper-caste women; and the economic exploitation of their labour. At the same time, the growing visibility of issues of caste, identity, and personhood in Indian political society, as well as the availability of global discourses of human rights violation and access to mass-mediated critical publics has highlighted the specific forms of gendered violence that dalit women experience. Anupama Rao suggested two broad movements are visible in the recent writing on the political strategies and forms of redress that dalit women have sought: the repeated insistence on the forms of triple-subjugation and vulnerability that lower-caste (especially dalit) women suffer, and the appeal to transnational fora for representing dalit issues. She also argued that testimonial forms of representation and autonomous political organizations provide dalit women with an important vehicle for fighting caste-based gender injustice, while allowing them to point to the limits of feminist organizing around caste issues.

Important work by feminist historians has shown that caste was consistently occluded from the agenda of "social reform" in India. Throughout the course of the nineteenth-century gender reform seemed to address solely upper-caste women, thereby rendering their experiences normative. Beginning with the debates about the abolition of sati in 1829, the reform movements' attention to practices such as the maintenance of widows as domestic drudges, child marriage, and the education of women, focused solely on upper-caste women and their lives. Scholars have focused on the colonial state as a crucial arbiter in the politicization of caste and the interest in social reform. Instead of taking at face value colonial discourses about non-interference in the "personal" realm, historians of gender have drawn a great deal on the law as a particularly salient symbolic

site where patriarchy was reconstituted. In opposition to the reigning bourgeois conceptions of the private as the realm of freedom and interiority, the colonial state in India understood the private sphere in the colony as the space of a "barbaric" tradition that required redemption. This produced the structure of the "scandal" or the "crisis" as the mode through which the private sphere was made available to public scrutiny.

Colonial law's significance lay in its uneven and ambivalent effects. For instance legal reform over the course of the nineteenth century reinforced caste distinctions that were in fact more fluid than Anglo-Indian law understood them to be. Moreover, law occupied the public sphere by invoking the disciplinary structures of the state. Colonial law's intervention in matters of sexual propriety and caste morality strengthened the sovereignty the colonial state claimed for itself. The colonial state used the categories of "culture" and "tradition" to buttress its own claims to being an improving, modernizing force, as well as to disable or dispense natives from claiming parity with their colonizers. Gendered conceptions of tradition were used to reconfirm earlier forms of patriarchal control. Yet at the same time, traditional forms of social life were themselves being changed due to modern conceptions of agency, consent and individuality.

Mahatma Jotirao Phule's critiques of caste relations too drew on the political strength of Brahmins in the Peshwai, and the perverted forms of colonial modernity, they had further strengthened the power of the upper-castes, the shetji-bhatji (or priest-moneylender) combine. Phule's awareness of the debilitating codes of conduct that disciplined upper-caste women was integral to his critique of caste relations in colonial society, and his school for untouchable girls in 1848 and home for upper-caste widows must be viewed from that perspective. His challenge to the upper-caste men through a

critique of how they treated their women, as well as his empathetic identification with oppressed Brahmin and upper-caste women are important. In fact Phule, along with the radical Tarabai Shinde, though they articulated caste oppression as something experienced by both lower and upper-caste women, focused on the far greater burdens of chastity and caste purity that regulated upper-caste women. The "softer" forms engendered domination that upper-caste women faced were no less oppressive than the expropriation of manual and sexual labour experienced by lower-caste women.

Rosalind O'Hanlon has argued that an emergent colonial public sphere produced new kinds of caste domination during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. In their quest for upward mobility, non-Brahmin communities sought to emulate upper caste Hindu ideologies of purity and respectability for women and tropes of strength and military valour for men. O'Hanlon argues that these communities were "torn between emulating Brahmanism religious values and rejecting them, emphasizing the Kshatriya and twice-born status of a backward-class community brought into new forms of unity and solidarity." (71) The consolidation of new caste identities as well as the decline of older forms of political society produced in them an ambivalent investment in gender reform. Ideologies of caste purity and middle-class domesticity might have in fact grown stronger, and attracted men (and women) of all castes. At the same time, lower-caste women who were materially dispossessed by casteist and "colonial modern" paradigms of gender regulation might have also found a new language in which to contest their growing marginalization. Briefly put, we might argue that though colonial governance might have rendered certain spheres of Indian society more free by bringing them into the

domain of Western progress and improvement, it did so erratically, without great awareness of the contradictory processes it had initiated in indigenous society.

It is no coincidence that descriptions of upper-caste restrictions on widow remarriage and the ensuing torment of widows within families inaugurate Shinde's account of the effects of caste and gender ideologies. The enforcement of widowhood showed how caste morality was regulated through gender. Widows became the object of upper and lower-caste reformers' concern over the course of the nineteenth century. Historians of gender have explored the suffocating effects of enforced widowhood on young girls, and analyzed such coercion as a means of regulating women's sexuality. However it is the centrality of widowhood to conceptions of caste purity that is really at issue. Widows were at once the target of lower-castes' satire against the upper-caste family sphere; visible symbols of the necessity of social reform for upper-caste reformers; and proof of the correctness of religious strictures against remarriage for conservatives.

It is important to recognize that the maintenance of caste boundaries was the crucial factor in the ideology of widowhood. Within the upper-caste family, however, the widowed woman was thoroughly dependent and vulnerable. (35) Chakravarti argues that labour was extracted from widows by rendering them dependent on the protection of their families. In other words, the "social death" that the widow was threatened with enabled the exploitation of her labour. Therefore the sexual regulation and material expropriation of widowed women came together to render austere widowhood a powerful symbol of upper-caste patriarchy. Though the widow might be socially "dead," her presence as a once-married, sexually knowledgeable woman generated anxiety. Such anxiety supported

attempts to restrict the freedom of widows within the joint-family household, and sanctioned the drudgery of widows whose work, though it was essential to households, was consistently marginalized. Chakravarti writes "The widow's institutionalized marginality a liminal state between being physically alive and being socially dead, was the ultimate cultural outcome of the deprivation of her sexuality as well as her personhood." (2248) As Chakravarti argues, though widows were outside the ideologies of marriage and domesticity, they served as a reminder that coercive conceptions of protection and affection were only ever episodically available to women- that these were contingent on the husband's physical presence.

Partha Chatterjee, in his influential essay, "The National-Resolution of the Woman's Question," argued that the issue of social reform came to an abrupt end in the early twenty century precisely at that moment when Indian nationalism came to political maturity; that gender issues ceased to be publicly debated. Now this would seem to suggest that both gender and social issues were deemed unimportant; that Indian nationalism's focus had to be trained on the state rather than on questions of identity or subjectivity. However, it is impossible to think about Indian nationalism without understanding the constitution of its "others"—Muslims, women, lower castes. These could not properly represent the nation in themselves since they were overburdened by their identities. But this ingenious "resolution" of nationalism's dilemmas of what to do with its minorities, deemed to be too embedded in their particular identities to be truly "representative", ought not to be taken at face value if—mode of explanation, as Chatterjee does. In fact the precise period of social reform's disappearance from the upper-caste agenda is that of its appearance on other agendas—in the emerging political activism of women

themselves (whether we wish recall it feminist or not), as well as the debates over the "woman's question" in anti-caste movements.

In an important analysis of the development of a Gandhian agenda of caste reform as it increasingly came into conflict with autonomous dalit struggles to define a more properly political agenda for dalit freedom, Eleanor Zelliot argued that the Congress resolution of 1917 to remove "all the disabilities imposed by religion and custom upon the Depressed Classes" constituted a new receptivity to the claim that caste fractured national (also read) Hindu unity, facilitating the understanding of untouchability as a national problem and a Gandhi an obsession. The growing significance of campaigns against "untouchability" for the moral discourse of Hindu unity enunciated by the Congress, and Gandhi's campaigns of bodily discipline and his empathetic "participation" in the dalits experience of defilement have been dated to 1920. There were two effects of Gandhian focus on untouchability: 1) It posed the question of Hindu inclusion as a caste issue and a moral problem for the upper-castes, and 2) The public embrace of caste reform by the Congress succeeded in convincing a significant group of dalits that the political question of representation was a more powerful response than the reformist focus on Hindu inclusion.

For instance, B. R. Ambedkar, one of the primary spokespeople for the Depressed Classes, claimed that they had separate political interests, that discrimination against them was experienced as a civic disability that made them less equal. In the famous debate over separate electorates with Gandhi, as well as in his later writings, *The Annihilation of Caste, or What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*.

Ambedkar argued that the political recognition of the dalit, rather than religious inclusion in the Hindu community, was the more forceful challenge to caste Hindu society.

Zelliot's piece "Dr. Ambedkar and the Empowerment of Women" focuses on the importance of an Ambedkarite vision of empowerment and visibility for dalit women. Zelliot, as well as Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, in their "We Made History Too: Women in the Early Untouchable Liberation Movement," examine the significance of education, and the public participation of dalit women in collective struggles during Ambedkar's time. Pawar and Moon note the early struggles for devadasi reform, since the devadasi system had made use of "religious" explanations for the sexual abuse of women from dalit communities. There was also Ambedkar's keen support for the organization of women's conferences alongside meetings for men from 1930. The emergence of dalit women leaders such as Shantabai Dani, Sulochana Dongre, and Radhabai Kamble during the 1920s and 1930s was important. It allowed dalit women to actively identify with the larger dalit community when it came to the issue of separate electorates, and their important labours in reforming dalit communities from within. The excerpts from "Pan on Fire" note the significance of Buddhism in changing women's religious subjectivity after Ambedkar's conversion in 1956, as do Pawar and Moon, though the excerpts also indicate the contradictory ways in which dalit women in Maharashtra perform their Buddhism. In a recent essay, Uma Chakravarti (2000) argues that historically existing Buddhism, while providing an important critique of social arrangements and inequality, is better viewed as an imaginative horizon for contemporary dalit Buddhist practice than as a script for social transformation.

In the heyday of dalit mobilization, Ambedkar wrote that inter-marriage was the most important way of annihilating caste, since it alone acknowledged the relationship between the maintenance of caste purity and the control of women's sexuality. He noted.

There are many Castes which allow inter-dining. But it is a common experience that inter-dining has not succeeded in killing the spirit of Caste and the consciousness of Caste. I am convinced that the real remedy is inter-marriage. Fusion of blood alone can create the feeling of being kith and kin and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount the separatist feeling—the feeling of being aliens—created by Caste will not vanish. Among the Hindus inter-marriage must necessarily be a factor of greater force in social life than it need be in the life of the non-Hindus. Where society is already well-knit by other ties, marriage is an ordinary incident of life. But where society is cut asunder, marriage as a binding force becomes a matter of urgent necessity. The real remedy for breaking caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste. (Moon, 1967-79)

This emphasis on the sexual underpinnings of caste society is important, but what is more significant is Ambedkar's acknowledgment of desire between castes. For him breaking the caste rules of kinship alone would undo untouchability. If inter-caste marriages were to take place as acts of choice—which they would have to, since caste ideologies did not permit them (there was almost the suggestion that such unions went against nature). Such choice raised the possibility that men and women of different castes might desire each other. For Ambedkar, inter-caste marriage was to be differentiated from the prevalent

forms of illicit union that dalit activists had virulently campaigned against. Ambedkar included inter-caste marriage in the Hindu Code Bill as Hindu marriages rather than as civil marriages registered under the Special Marriages Act.

While Zelliott cautions us against reading Ambedkar as a theorist of the relationship between caste and patriarchy, Pratima Parciyesi argues in her "Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Question of Women's Liberation in India," that the woman's question was critical to Ambedkar. I would argue that the political language of rights and representation that had come to dominate dalit struggles at this point rendered the language of law. For instance Ambedkar, Hindu Code Bill was both revolutionary and reformist in attempts to deal with women's status in society. It was revolutionary because it sought to conjoin different aspects of woman oppression under the rubric of a reformed Hindu personal law, as our prior examination of attempts to homogenize question-rights illustrates, this might have had the effect of dispossessing certain women of rights, real and virtual. In fact the piecemeal passage of the Hindu Code Bill "in spirit" after Ambedkar's re-nation as Law Minister rendered the Hindu community the most "progressive" in its treatment of women, a fact that came to haunt debates about the Uniform Civil Code during the 1990s.

Textual Analysis

The novel "*The God of Small Things*" is an anecdote of solid social reality in the context of socio-political and cultural violence against subaltern people such as women, children and dalits in Kerala. It unveils the victimization of these people by state, society and sheer will of the unthinking powerful and traumatic experience of subalterns aggravated by orthodoxy manifested in social, political and cultural forms. Urbashi Bharat said, "*The God of Small Things*" can at best bring about resilience and indifference to suffering, but God is manifested in the evil of Pappachi and Baby Kochamma, the hypocrisy of Mammachi and Comrade Pillai, the anger of Chacko and Margaret Kochamma, the sense of superiority in Sophie Mol, the sodomizing orange-drink Lemon-drink Man" (73).

The novel represents several kinds of violence that has long persisted in Indian society. It is about Indian social structure that marginalizes women and the lower caste people and crushes their identity to relegated beings. A critic of the novel, Rama Kundu writes, "In India the focus naturally falls on women and backward classes who represent the case of the underdog [---] among whom, again, the untouchable epitomizes the worst form of marginalization" (96). Kochu further points out that the novel; *The God of Small Things* represents the animalistic behaviours of the patriarchal male dominated society towards women and the lower caste. Her words go as:

Roy tries to sensitize this society to the cruelty of some of its tradition by artistically challenging certain common age old complacently held but dehumanizing social taboos. She also shows how women and the

untouchables are both treated as impersonal and subjugative objects [---].

(96)

Roy has represented such social problems to raise her voice of protest against them.

Mallikarjun Patill can be quoted in order to strengthen this opinion which goes as, “[---] Arundhati Roy’s fresh perspectives on an age-old tradition created waves as a rebellion against the social injustice meted out both to the down trodden and to women” (58).

Roy has vociferously presented the indecencies and perversion of patriarchal Syrian Christian family so as to unveil the truth that has long been persisted in Kerala. The novelist is supposed to have distorted the historical truth by going deep into the roots of social relationships and presents the tensions and prejudices that remain in Kerala even now. All female characters in the novel including the protagonist Ammu have to endure sufferings and miseries.

The female protagonist Ammu has come across untold sufferings from her family members and society as a whole. Ammu is the daughter of Benaan John Ipe, the entomologist and represents a new generation which is exposed to new ideas against the former one. Her father is a male chauvinist who makes a lot of distinction between the son and daughter. He sends his son Chacko to Oxford but deems college education “an unnecessary expense for a girl.” So she has no choice but to move to Ayemenem from Delhi as her father retired (38). All she can do next is to wait for marriage according to her father since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry; no proposal came Ammu’s way. At the same time, she finds living with her parents simply unbearable because her father is an ill-tempered bully who pretends to be an ideal husband and ideal father before outsiders but makes the life of his family miserable. So

Ammu seeks an escape from “the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long suffering mother” (39). The escape is an attempt to assert own identity by averting the injustices meted out to her in own house. This is why she goes to Calcutta to spend her the summer with a distant aunt and ends marrying a Bengali Hindu there.

Her marriage is not based on love, even though the choice is hers. She marries because she does not want to return to Ayemenem. The marriage shows her courage as well as the orthodoxy of her parents. She is daring as she goes against the custom by marrying a person who is neither Christian nor belongs to Kerala. Her parents dislike such inter-community marriage and when she informs them of her decision, they do not reply. Obviously she transgresses a law according to them by marrying such unconventional manner.

Ammu dismantles the historical truths and subverts the orthodoxy. By placing Ammu in the central narrative, Roy here expresses her marked rage against the parochial socio-cultural set-ups and advocates the need of restructuring indecent institutions immanent in the society. Ammu shows her strength of mind not only in marrying the man of her choice but also in divorcing him when the choice proves wrong eventually, “when his boots of violence began to include the children, and the war began with Pakistan began, Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcome to her parents in Ayemenem” (36-37). The conjugal relation became tensed she could not tolerate the cruelty meted out to her and her children due to alcoholism. The narrator states, “Her husband turned out to be not just a heavy drinker but a full-blown alcoholic with all of an alcoholic’s deviousness and tragic charm” (40). He became more violent to his wife and children, and more careless to his duty. He was threatened with dismissal from the job by his

manager, Mr. Hollick and acquiesces in to his proposal to go away for a while and send his wife to his Bungalow to be 'looked after' .When the unworthy fellow resorts to violence, she does not take it meekly as her mother, Mammachi. She takes the heaviest book from the shelf and hits him with it on head and on legs. She is far from the traditional idea of an ideal woman who worships her husband like a god and obeys him blindly despite all his blemishes.

She is equally defiant in her assessment of her brother and dares express her views courageously. She challenges her mother's obsession with her son and refuses to admit that Chacko is "brilliant", "made of prime ministerial material" or "one of the cleverest men of India". Ammu said that "there was only one person in the family who was a fit candidate for biographical blackmail and that was Chacko himself" (38). While her mother and aunt subscribe to the male chauvinist notions of "Men's Needs", she takes a correct view of the self-proclaimed Marxist Chacko and his relationship with women workers in factory. She is quite accurate in calling it "all hogwash" and characterizing him as an "oxford avatar of the old Zamindar mentality a landlord forcing his attentions on women who depended on him for livelihood" (65). The novelist significantly brought out the contrast between the Marxist mind and feudal libido.

Ammu challenges the andocentric notions of society when she avoids surname after divorce. Estha and Rahel have no surname because Ammu is considering reverting to her maiden name though she feels that choosing between her husband's name and her father's name does not "give a woman much of a choice" (36-37). Law does not give a daughter any claim to property. Though she does as much work as Chacko, the latter feels free to declare the factory as his own. He tells her children that they have no locus

standing and tells her. “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine.” Ammu views this all as a product of “our wonderful male chauvinistic society” (41).

She is bitterly aware of the hypocrisy around her and she has learned “to recognize and despise the ugly face of sympathy.” During the first few months of her stay at the parental home, old female relatives pay overnight trips to Ayemenem pretending to show their sympathy for her about her divorce. Actually it is their way of getting devilish pleasure by subjecting her to mental torture. She restrains her dislike and anger with a lot of effort. (42)

As a mother, she loves her children. She is concerned about their innocence which makes them willing to love people who do not love them. That exasperates her. They appear to her like “small bewildered frogs ...lolloping arm in arm down a high way full of hurtling traffic”. She is “quick to reprimand her children, but even quicker to take offence on their behalf” (43). She wants to impart not only the bookish knowledge to them but cares to teach them correct manners too. That is why she says to Rahel on a certain occasion, “I never want to hear you discussing people’s death with them again” (50). On the other occasion, she makes Rahel realize that careless words hurt people (112). Her children love her no less. Rahel’s list of her dear ones places Ammu at the top. (151)

The rebel in Ammu does not permit her to remain contented with motherhood and divorce hood. There is an ‘unsafe edge,’ an ‘unmixable mix’, ‘the rage of suicide bomber’ along with the ‘infinite tenderness of motherhood’ in her. So she proceeds to reclaim her body. The narrator says:

As though she had temporally set aside the morality of motherhood and divorce hood. Even her walk changed from a safe mother walk to another wider sort of walk. She wore flowers in her hair and carried magic series in her eyes. She spoke to no one. She spent hours on the riverbank with her little plastic transistor shaped like a tangerine. She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims. (44)

Tied of the propriety handling of her, she examines her body in bathroom mirror which shows her worry about her passing youth (221). The dream of the one armed man suggests her that it is no use seeking perfection in life the small and powerless people like her can but satisfy themselves with the little time provides her (217). The arrival of Margaret Kochamma provokes her desire (340). 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" (44).

The secret love affair goes on for thirteen days until it is reported to Mammachi by Velutha's father and compounded by the accidental death of Sophie Mal. 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. 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" (176). She too resents. So what seems an illicit relationship between a divorce touchable woman and untouchable Paravan is actually a union of two rebels protesting against hypocritical laws of society no in word but in deed.

Her status within her high-caste Christian parents in Kerala had become less significant because of her inter-caste marital status. It is an irony because Christ never

discriminated people on the basis of caste and religion, but the Syrian Christian of Kerala discriminated. Roy vehemently opposes and satirizes against such discrimination by means of her novel.

It seemed that Ammu was born as a human being to suffer, and for the rest of her life she suffered in Ayemenem. She was not given proper education, but she was not dependant on others. She did much work in her mother's pickle factory, but she had no right over her parent's property. The narrator says, "Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my factory, my pineapples, and my pickles. Legally this was the case because Ammu As a daughter had no claim to the Property".(57).

It shows the perverted structural set ups immanent in the society that boost up the parochial male chauvinism, there by reeling women under the identity crisis. The narrator states Ammu's reaction to this situation, "thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society," Ammu said" (57). This reflects pitiable condition of women in India.

Comrade Pillai agrees that Ammu represents the Christian women of Kerala as a whole. He comments, "The degenerate social system in Kerala that denied property rights to Christian women and prevented them from enjoying equal rights with man has undone Ammu" (90).

Ammu had been tortured by her aunt Baby Kochamma with her words and actions. She had a kind of jealousy towards Ammu, and hated her inter caste marriage. Baby Kochamma subscribes to the commonly held view that a married daughter has no position in her parents' home and a divorced one, no position anywhere at all. The narrator states about Baby Kochamma's attitudes as "As for a divorced daughter –

according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all... silent on the subject” (45-46).

In fact she is jealous of Ammu for daring to exercise her rights to choose the man she marries and to discard him when found unworthy. As the novelist puts it, “Baby Kochamma resented Ammu because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman. The sad father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma” (45).

This is why and how Baby Kochamma hated and tormented Ammu. Ammu felt loneliness and longed for the company of a man. In her extreme loneliness, she not only fell in love with Velutha, an untouchable man but also had sex with him which was considered a violation of the love laws established by their forefather. The narrator says, “Only that once again they broke the love laws” (328). Velutha’s father knew about their affair and revealed it to Ammu’s mother Mammachi. 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. The loneliness she felt at this moment seemed terrific because it is stated “Ammu was incoherent with rage and disbelief at what was happening to her at being locked away like the family lunatic in a medieval household” (252).

She had no right to move outside the house as the human being. The narrator recounts, “She was just that sort of animal” (80). Her relation with Velutha was taken as a seriously dangerous matter by her conservative higher-caste Christian parents and family members. Baby Kochamma thought that Sophie Mol was drowned because Ammu had committed sin of adultery with an untouchable. As a conservative superstitious woman,

she believed that the drowning of Sophie Moll was the consequence of Ammu's sin. But that was "completely mistaken connection" and Ammu was tortured as a result of this mistaken connection.

Soon after the funeral, Baby Kochamma goes to police station and tries to set the record straight. But the police officer dismisses her plea with the remark that the Kottayam police don't take statement from prostitutes and their illegitimate children. He stares at her breasts while speaking, taps them with his baton and ask her to leave quietly (8). This shows the obscene nature of the enforces of law and order. The novelist has lucidly shown the state orthodox manifested in the obscenity of police administration.

Ammu was expelled from her parental house by her brother Chacko we said, "Get out of my house before I break every bone in your body. My house, my pineapples, my pickle" (225). Critic Neelam Tikha comments on Chacko's emotional state at this moment as "Chacko becomes very violent and with the chronic handle in his hand screams and asks Ammu to return the twins and forces her to leave the house" (113). Chacko demonstrated his strength, his megalomania against his sister Ammu. This is how she suffered excruciating pain in her parent's house. The irony lies here in the sense wherein she has to be protected and loved there she came across a very painstaking moments and neglected. She became a victim of the male dominated patriarchal social structure. A critic K.V. Surendran writes about her in following words,

Ammu is more than a tragedy. She is made to suffer quite early in her life and continues to suffer throughout her life. She is humiliated at the hands of the police, her near and dear ones and also he public at large. Even at her deathbed she was left to

herself. In short, Ammu without her knowledge becomes instrumental in precipitating the tragedy which confronts two generations of Ayemenem house. (65)

Ammu is separated from her children as Estha is returned to his father and Rahel alone is permitted to live at Ayemenem but Ammu is not allowed to visit her frequently. The last time she comes to Ayemenem and meets Rahel. She has asthma and a rattle in her chest. Desperately wanting to have a good job that enables her to bring her children with her, she tries a number of jobs and dies alone in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey where she has gone for a job interview. The narrator says; “Ammu died in a grimy room in the Bharat Lodge in Alleppey where had gone for job interview as someone’s secretary. She died alone” (161).

In this way a daughter of an aristocratic household died a tragic death of a beggar. Before her death, she is haunted by a recurrent dream which springs from her traumatic experience. In that dream, the policeman approaches her with snacking scissors, wanting to hack off her hair. “They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes whom they’d caught in the bazaar-branded them so that everybody would know them for what they were *Veshyas*. So that new policeman on the beat would have no trouble identifying whom to harass” (161). Obviously, that is related to shock she has received at the Kottayam police station.

Death does not end the humiliation of the unfortunate Ammu:”The church refused to bury Ammu on several counts. So Chacko hired a van to transport he body to the electric crematorium. He had wrapped in a dirty bed sheet and laid out on a stretcher, Receipt No. Q498673”.(162-163).

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” as Mohit

Kumar Roy puts it (64). To sum up her life Mallikarjun Patil says “Ammu the protagonist undergoes an untold misery and pain [...] (56). She suffered from socio-political violence, however, transgressed the historical truths by subverting the barriers and boundaries set forth by family, society, unthinkable powerful and the state as well.

If they are men who concede no rights to a woman as daughter, wife, sister, citizen, what can we say about “the long suffering mother” Mammachi who has not left a self 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 thirty one. When we compare and contrast her with Chacko, we cannot but realize the truth of 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”.

Ammu’s mother Mammachi also experienced the domestic violence through out her life from her husband Pappachi. During the six month Diploma course at Vienna that makes him qualified for the post of Imperial Entomologist, Mammachi takes her first lessons on the violin. Her teacher makes the mistake of telling her husband that she is “exceptionally talented” and “potentially concert class.” That leads to an abrupt end of her lessons (50). Later at Kottayam he breaks the bow of the violin one night and throws

it in the river (48). The same jealousy is expressed again when the pickle making business of Mammachi brings attention to her. Though she is “practically blind”, he refuses to help her because pickle-making is not “a suitable job for a high-thinking ex-government official” (47). Thus, her married life is devoid of love, understanding and cooperation. It means nothing but domination by a bully husband who lives a bored life himself and bores others too.

Pappachi appeared to have suffered from the male superiority complex. He disliked his wife’s progress and achievement. “He had always been a jealous man. So he greatly resented the attention his wife was suddenly getting” (47). Mammachi spent her life with this kind of husband who harassed her with persistent interruption, destruction, disturbance, beating discontinuity, devastation and criticism. The narrator states the consequences of his beatings, “on her scalp, carefully hidden by her scanty hair, Mammachi had raised, crescent-shaped ridges. Scars of old-beating from an old marriage. Her brass vase scars” (166). Her skull was permanently damaged and deeply marked by physical injury from her husbands beatings.

Pappachi demonstrated his hatred towards his wife by not speaking with her for the rest of his life. The narrator says, “He never touched Mammachi again. But he never spoke to her either as long as he lived” (48). He can be considered as a misogynist in its demonstration of hatred to his wife. “In the evening, when he knew visitors were expected, he would sit on the verandah, and sew buttons that were not missing into his shirts to create the impression that Mammachi neglected him”(48).

Mammachi is hard working deserves to be called better at business. She is the founder of the pickle factory and it remains “a small but profitable enterprise Her son

Chacko, who comes in the garb of a saviour and stops beating, replaces his father's domination with his own in the family. So he usurps Mammachi's factory, has registered as a partnership and informs her that she is the sleeping partner. Thus despite his professed Marxism Chacko follows the tradition in asserting the son's domination over mother in old age. But she could not be as rebellious as Ammu to defend male chauvinism to assert her space and identity.

C. Gopinatha Pillai's comment about Pappachi seems more connectable to the above given references which go as. "In him, patriarchal authoritarianism coincides with misogynist misdemeanours manifest in his violence towards his wife Mammachi and daughter Ammu" (48). His misogynist attitude can be explicitly seen in the beatings of his daughter and wife. Critic M. Dason opines that Roy strongly criticizes misbehaviors against women in Kerala's society. He presents his criticism of the character of Pappachi as; "*The God of Small Things* also makes a scathing attack on the patriarchal notions of Kerala's touchable society; the high caste Hindus and the high caste Syrian Christian. The oldest character in the novel Pappachi is male chauvinist and wife beater who has trouble in coping with the ignoring of retirement" (32).

The narrator records the cruelties and brutalities of the patriarchal society manifested in the merciless behaviours of Pappachi. The novelist has used the terms "monstrous" and "bully" (180) to characterize the unkind and treacherous characteristics of Pappachi. Mammachi, despite her sufferings at the hand of male chauvinists and sadist husband, is sex biased and class biased to an outrageous extent. Her daughter and son both are divorcees but she applies two different norms to the sex relation. To her son Chacko, she permits "Men's Needs" and does not mind his flirting with pretty women who worked in

the factory (168). In a way Mammachi seemed to have internalized patriarchal values by showing crystal clear partiality shown to her son and daughter. The narrator says, “Mammachi had a separate entrance built for Chacko’s room which was at the eastern end of the house, so that the objects of his “Needs” would not have to go traipsing through the house. She secretly slipped them money to keep them happy” (169).

Her daughter Ammu, on the other hand, loves a single man but Mammachi resents her “women’s needs”. Her tolerance of “Mens’ Needs” as far as her son was concerned, becomes “the fuel for her manageable fury at her daughter” (258). Ammu was not only locked up in her bedroom, insulted and banished from Ayemenem but also accused of having “defiled generations of breeding. It does not occur to her what Chacko has done.

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 visits Rahel as seldom as possible. That is highly unbecoming on the part of a mother who has given so much indulgence to her son.

Her attitude towards Margaret shows the same unhealthy bent of her mind. Even before she has seen her, she despises her. There seems to be no reason for her resentment in fact. It was not just her working class background Mammachi resented. She hated Margaret Kochamma for being Chacko’s wife. She hated her for leaving him. But would have hated her even more had she stayed (168). Obviously, she is jealous, a misanthrope and cannot find pleasure in seeing other women happy.

Her experiences in a world dominated called marriage with a brutal husband have dehumanized her and perverted her mind. That is why, she has got a pervert reasoning and perverts ethics. She slips money secretly to keep the women who satisfy Chacko's "needs". She cannot imagine that Margaret has come to her former husband for any other purpose than sex. Margaret is "just another whore" to her and she slips money secretly into the pockets of the dresses she leaves in laundry bin. Here, the novelist is trying to unveil parochial and perverted mentality grown up in Syrian Christian women, which she says sprang from religious hypocrisy immanent in Kerala.

Ammu's secret relationship with Velutha is not less natural and justifiable on biological grounds than all the relationships Chacko has with numerous women. Yet Mammachi behaves brutally with Velutha due to Cast and class bias.

Mammachi spat into Velutha's face. It splattered across his skin, his mouth and eyes (284). Mammachi cannot flee her share of responsibility for Velutha's murder by the police as the care against Velutha was not lodged without her consent. Thus Mammachi is not as crafty as Baby Kochamma but her mind hardly less pervert than that of Baby Kochamma. She subscribes to the logic and ethics of the male chauvinism. "She undergoes on unrelenting experience and represents violence against women of character in the novel destined to lead the lost life" (61).

Baby Kochamma is another important character in the novel who challenged the traditional ideas about love and marriage. At the age of eighteen, she falls in love with an Irish monk father Mulligan who comes to her father's house frequently. Baby Kochamma tries to seduce Mulligan with "weekly exhibition of staged charity." They used bible as a ruse "to be with each other" as both of them are "quaking with unchristian passion".

As father Mulligan has to return to Madras after a year, separation seems inevitable. So, Baby Kochamma resolves to become a Roman Catholic because she thinks it will enable her in close contact with him. So, much against the wishes of her father, she converts to Roman Catholic. In a way she subverted the religious orthodoxy that makes her “restless and unhappy” and later she leaves the convent soon.

Baby Kochamma shows the courage of the rebel when she converts to Roman Catholic faith but she dares not to challenge the traditional ideas about love and marriage she makes a rotten, dishonest compromise with the conventions and pays heavily for it- the real happiness eludes her all her life and she remains a spinster. Her frustration in love and repressed libido provide us with the key to comprehend the old, calculated and inhuman rate she pays 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 and in general and even to women.

She submits in name of decency and honour to the very sexist, casteist and communal prejudices and has stood in her way. Even at the age of eighty-three, she asks her grand niece, Rahel, “How do you like my bob?” This goes to such an extent that she becomes herself a tool of social oppression. In fact, it is victims turning the tools of oppression that keeps the wheel moving.

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 dehumanized and her mind becomes twisted as a result of suffering in a society dominated by men and money.

Ammu on the other hand, hand is the rebel who represents the defiance of the present state of society from educated, passionate and thinking woman. She stands for those women who are longing for freedom, equality and there by identity in the society. She is the protagonist of novel who is equipped with the sense of own assertion of identity and projected as a rebel character to wrestle with indecencies, orthodoxy and perversion of the society, patriarchy and the state. This section of women is challenging traditional ideas and conventions. The hope for the future lies with this section only.

The other section consists of decadence and perverted elements like Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria. They are satisfied with their present and they become consumerists who care little about fellow beings. They are television addicts, caring for nothing but life styles. To use the words of Arundhati Roy, they are living their lives backward.

Children are also included in the “small things” Arundhati Roy cares for. The novel depicts an unrelenting condition of domestic violence in the characters of he children Estha and Rahel and, indeed, highlights this general attitude of callousness, insensitivity and indifference. They had suffered violence from their father in Assam and had an unhappy childhood because his father’s “drunken violence followed by post-drunken badgering” began 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” (42). The novel is narrated as the

flash back of their memory when they were reunited in Ayemenem after twenty-three years of separation from each other.

They had a double stigma of mixed percentage 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). Moreover they were the children of a divorced daughter who had no locus standi. “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 (45). Their maternal uncle Chacko too does not hesitate to tell the children “that human Ammu had no Locus Stand I” (57).

There is another occasion when Chacko tell Ammu that the children are not his responsibilities but “millstone around his neck”. A sensitive bog Estha could not dismiss that lightly. “Estha knew about the millstone. In muting on the Bounty, when people died on sea, they were wrapped in white sheets and thrown overboard with millstone around their neck so that the corpses decided how many millstones to take with them before they set off on their voyage.” (85-86).

Kochu Maria (the maid servant of the house) too finds an opportunity to remind Estha of his position in the house. At night, Estha would stand on his bed with his sheet wrapped around him and say, “Et tu? Brute? Then fall Caesar!?” And crash into bed with out bending his knees, like a stabbed corpse. Kochu Maria, who slept on the floor on a mat, said that she would complain to Mammachi. “Tell your mother to take you to your father’s house”, she said, “There you can break as many beds as you like. They are your beds. This is not your house” (83).

While Estha is agonized by the coldness of his relations as Ayemenem, the separation of his parents has created a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty, an identity crisis. His mother has not chosen a surname as yet (36), and the result is that on his note book “Estha had robbed out his surname with spit, and taken half of the paper with it. Over the whole mess, he had written in pencil un-known” (157). The behaviors show not only worry but also resentment for his father.

At Ayemenem, Baby Kochamma grudges his “moments of high happiness” and the comfort the twins “drew from each other.” Baby Kochamma’s Australian missionary friend Miss Mitten too complains about his rudeness and his habit of reading backwards. “She told Baby Kochamma that she had seen Satan in his eyes” (60). Even Ammu who loves him so much fears he may become a ‘male chauvinist pig’ one day, an apprehension based on the evolution of her own brother Chacko. (151)

The twins came across acute sense of domestic violence which disrupted their innocence in every step. Their mother Ammu behaved them as though she had not been prohibited her children to have friendship with the untouchable man Velutha. The narrator states, “They were forbidden from visiting his house but they did” (78). In the town, Rahel saw Velutha and she was excited. But her mother disliked that. So the narrator states he words as, “you are a stupid silly little girl.” Ammu said (71). For her, Rahel should avoid Velutha because he is belonged to a lower caste man. Moreover, she did not allow her children to play like children and she did not allow them to talk to the *Paravans* (I). She had been too much brutal to her children. It can be understood by the reaction of her brother Chacko. He spoke against her as, “its fascist, the way you deal

with them,” Chacko said. “Even children have some rights, for God’s sake!”(85). Estha and Rahel were accustomed to life under the shadow of their elders.

K.V. Surendran says, “Barring a few golden moments like the ones they spent with Velutha, they were failing, failing miserably to live like their fellow children. In this sense, the whole novel tells about their tragedy, the tragedy of Estha and Rahel” (68).

Estha could no longer express himself. So he has been characterized as “quietness”.

Rahel failed. She left empty inside. So she has been characterized as “emptiness”.

Estha who was sensitive enough and knew that both he and Rahel were unwanted and Ammu did not like them anymore. So he decided “that though it was dark and raining, the Time Had come for them to run away, because Ammu did not want them any more” (264). Estha’s plan did not include Sophie but she insisted on joining them and she was able to convince the younger twins to make her with them. She had gone in her own conscious choice, and her death had been an accident. It can be understood by the words like, “But now the children said that they had gone of their own volition. Their boat had been capsized and the English child had drowned by accident” (314). Sophie Mol’s mother Margaret thought that the twins killed her daughter. Her action is reflected as, “She told nothing, but slapped Estha whenever she could in the days she was there before she returned to England” (31).

Estha, his sister and his mother were allowed to attend the funeral of Sophie Mol but “they were made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family. Nobody would look at them” (31).

Estha had to pass through other ordeals before he was returned to his father. Baby Kochamma took him to 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” (318). He was emotionally cheated by Baby Kochamma. She threatened them with the terrible punishment that they would be imprisoned. “So now you’ll have to go to jail’. Baby Kochamma said kindly. ‘And mother will go to jail because of you. Would you like that frightened eyes and a fountain looked back at her. ‘There of you in three different jails. Do you know what jails in India are like?’”(317).

Their innocent friend Velutha was killed by the police, and they were blamed as murderers even though they were utterly innocent. Then the most traumatic of Estha’s experiences was the one of sexual abuse by soft drink seller at the refreshment counter. It created a permanent sense of defilement and a constant apprehension of the return of the man. He always feared that if his mother came to know of it she would begin to love him less.

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 Kochamma, Kochu Maria, Inspector Mathew and the soft drink man. He had no option but to suffer passively. The sexual abuse at the refreshment counter, the death of Sophie Mol for which he was accused, the betrayal of Velutha and his end are the contributing factors. An acute feeling of loss, irreparable loss accompanies that sense of shame and guilt and turns his thoughts unspeakable. The boy who had lost all his dear ones and could not find any solace, far less warmth in the company of his father and step mother, had little to express. Discarded by human beings around him, the only comfort he could

have was in his pet dog Khubchand. Naturally, he withdrew himself from the world after the death of Khubchand.

Estha was a harmless child and so quiet that he was hardly noticed by people around him. “He was the keeper of records. The natural custodian of bus tickets bank receipts cash memos, cheque book stubs” (163). Even Baby Kochamma who maligned him so much found him ‘practical’, ‘tractable’, ‘far sighted’ and ‘responsible’ (319). 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 as major tragedy in the novel. “Estha occupied very little space in the world” (11) and he is also referred to as a “little man” (319). Indeed he was but a “small thing” thrown back and forth like a ball by elders and their brutality doomed him totally.

The two children share certain common traits as well as they reveal astounding dissimilarities. Physically they do not ‘look much like each other’. But they differ more profoundly in their mental set up. While Estha is a timid, polite and quite boy, a passive sufferer, Rahel is mentally strong, independent and rebellious. She seems to believe the myth that a woman is born weak physically and mentally and can not but submit to powers that be.

Rahel too has a sad childhood as she to witness the ill-temper of the alcoholic father to her infancy and had to leave his house for ever when the parents got divorced. She, along with her brother Estha and mother Ammu, had no option but to live at her maternal uncle’s house. Soon she came to know that they were unwanted there because Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria and even Chacko did not hesitate to let them know it. Starved of love as she is even casual handshake of her mother and maternal uncle is a

moment to the twins “treasured and threaded like precious beads on a necklace” (62). For the same reason she asks Chacko if it is possible that Ammu can love Sophie Mol more than her daughter and Estha and Chacko love her more than Sophie Mol.(118)

Deprived of parental love, her mother is both father and mother to her. Then Rahel derives comfort in the company of her brother Estha and together they indulge in plays like reading backwards. That too is a pleasure that Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria feel jealous for.

At the tender age of seven, Rahel witnesses and bears the brunt of several tragedies. First when her mother Ammu’s secret relation with Velutha is revealed and she is locked in her bedroom, the twins approach to find out reasons. Baby Kochamma, Chacko and others do not permit Ammu and her children to stand together with them, they have to stand separately. Thus the children are punished for the supposed crime of their mother. Four days after the funeral, Chacko batters down the door of the bedroom where Ammu has locked in herself and shouts. “Get out of my house before I break every bone in your body!” It is so traumatic, so shocking to Rahel that for years she dreams a recurrent dream: “a fat man, faceless, kneeling beside a woman’s corpse. Hacking its hair off. Breaking every bone in its body...” (225). Ammu has to leave Ayemenem and dies shortly in a cheap lodge. For the rest of her childhood Rahel is denied the privilege of even seeing her brother as he is returned again to Ayemenem after no less than twenty three years. As the novelist reflects the woeful of Rahel’s childhood with these words: “While other children at their age learned other things, Estha and Rahel learned how history negotiates its terms and collects its dues from those who break its laws” (55).

We have also to take note of her experience at school to complete the picture of her childhood. She drifts from school to school after the death of her mother and spends her holidays in Ayemenem. She is largely ignored by Chacko, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. They provide her care (food, clothes, and fees) but they have withdrawn concern. Strangely enough, the neglect in her case results in an “accidental release of the spirit” (15-17).

The teachers of the schools she attends find her “extremely polite” but having “no friends”. However, the heads of the institutions are not satisfied with her behaviour. The incidents in the novel unveil the problems of adolescence as well as the senseless and hypocritical attitude of the heads of the institutions.

She is accused of hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors. Cajoled, caned and staved, she admits having “done it to find out whether breasts hurt”. She is expelled from school for her indecent manners including smoking, setting fire to her headmistress. Thus, Rahel shows a strong personality. Though circumstances are hardly favourable to her, they fail to break her will and spirit. She is a rebel who faces all unrelenting traumas and survives to help her brother Estha.

She seemed to have suffered from dowry system which is one of the common types of problem in Kerala. She intends to oppose such problems by means of her representation. The narrator says, “Rahel grew up without a brief. Without anybody who would pay her a dowry and therefore without an obligatory husband looming on her horizon” (17).

With the use of meticulous flashback technique to reveal the pains and plights of the children characters, the novelist poignantly shows the insensitivity of Indian adults to

the psychology of the children. Despite all the rhetoric, children are neglected in our society and little care is taken to understand them and provide them the attention and security they need.

Roy's "*The God of Small Things*" represents socio-political violence of the Indian society. By means of such representation, she strongly opposes those who continue to promote such detestable violence. According to M. Dasan, the intention of Roy's socio-political representation is to protest against the evil practices of the society such as the caste, the gender discrimination etc. According to him, all the protest movements of the untouchable people of Kerala have been the results of the continual practices of the caste system;"Contemporary political polarization in Kerala and India – the assertion of Dalit identity and consolidation of Dalit political power, the emergence of Dalit Bahujan forces as the fourth national party – makes it difficult to dismiss Arundhati's observation" (27).

Roy has strongly raised questions with regards to the caste violence in Kerala. In other words, she protests against the discrimination meted out on the basis of caste issues. Amar Nath Prasad, an influential critic of Indian English Literature, is quite accurate and detail:

In theme, the book peeps into the life of Keralite society and their rites and customs, tradition and patriarchal domination; a caste-ridden mentality of some certain sections of people: the fatal consequences arising out of divorce: the child psychology; the naked exposure of the malpractices of Marxism and police demonstration; the prosecution of the untouchable without any rhyme and reason [...]. (135)

In short, the novel unravels the prevalent socio-political cultural system for its exercises of power that, by creating injustice and oppression, crushes the identity of the weaker section of community. Each and every instance in the novel is illustrated in a way to disrupt and discontinue social anomalies and aberrations to draw up new system which can establish the identity of people at the margin.

Arundhati shows a deep social awareness and exposes a system that enables the powerful and the rich to oppress the weak and the poor. The Syrian Christian –Brahmin society becomes a powerful symbol for racial, social, religious harassment and oppression are comprehensively reflected in the novel. Velutha is an untouchable and belongs to the working class. Velutha finds himself helpless before a system based on inequality and exploitation. A tea garden in Assam and a pickle factory in Kerala provide the background of casteist and sexual exploitation of the powerless by the powerful in the novel.

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 deep-rooted prejudices and the fear of losing their supremacy undermine their professed, liberal or revolutionary aims. Arundhati Roy gives a perfect picture of the dalits with their varying responses to the caste oppression through the device of trio, Vellya Paapen, Kuttapen 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 quality and stakes his life.

The narrator states about the caste discrimination and violence of the Brahmin Christian of Pappachi's days as, "Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house.

Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that touchables touched. Caste Hindus and Caste Christians” (73). The extreme form of the exploitation, discrimination, domination and underestimation of the lower caste people can be observed in

Mammachi’s narration:

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 footprints so that Bramhins or Syrian Christian would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan’s footprints.

(73-74)

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.

Velutha is the male protagonist of the novel. He proved himself as an essential one for each one’s existence. He met the need of the husband to Ammu and the need of the father to the twins. He is referred by the title of the novel *The God of Small Things* (330). A.N. Duivedi says, “Thus, ‘the small things’ in the title is a pointer to the unrequited love of Ammu and Velutha. It is Velutha who is “*the God of Small Things*’ for Ammu” (9). J.P. Tripathi also opines the similar idea about him as, “Velutha is the giver, the god of these small things to the children of Ammu. He is the alter-ego of a husband to Ammu and that of a father to her children without formalization of relations” (29).

Velutha was an accomplished carpenter. His carpentry profession caused a great deal of resentment among the other touchable factory workers because they thought Paravans were not meant to be carpenters. The touchable factory workers became jealous

of Velutha and considered him as a prodigal man because he took the profession that was traditionally assigned only to the touchable people. So they requested their party leader KNM pillai to motivate the factory owner Chacko so that Velutha would be terminated from his job. Chacko as a factory owner wants to prevent the growth of real trade union led by Velutha in the factory. Pillai finds a threat to his ambitions in Velutha the latter's working class background seems a plus point in the race for party and trade union leadership.

Pillai played negative role that is detrimental to the protagonist Velutha. He said to Chacko, "That Paravan is going to trouble you" he said. Take it from me... get him a job somewhere else. Send him off" (278). Pillai plotted against an honest man because he belongs to untouchable –a subaltern group. The caste prejudices that deeply rooted inside him caused hams to Velutha. Ironically, a Brahmin communist Kerala comrade Pillai said, "he may be very well okay as a person. But other workers are not happy with him. Already they are coming to me with complaints... you see, comrade, from local stand point, these caste issues are deeply-rooted" (278). He further illustrated the example of the caste prejudices of his household painting to his wife Kalyani, "See her, for example, Mistress of this house. Even she will never allow Paravans and all that into her house. Never. Even I cannot persuade her. My own wife" (278). M. Dasan has commented on Pillai's character. "He not only panders to deep-rooted caste prejudice existing in Kerala society, but also takes pride in his wife Kalyani for not allowing a Paravan-any low caste for that matter to enter their house" (29).

Christianity and the communist party did not prove a boon to Velutha: Christianity has not removed the prejudice and arrogance of the converts from the upper

castes, nor ameliorated the lot of the converts from the untouchable communities. It has kept the social hierarchy inherited from the past intact. She seems to imply that conversion is no remedy for people subjected to social discrimination. Thus, she exposes the ideological and religious degradation and indicts the pervasion immanent into politics, culture and religion in Kerala. The irony lies in the indecent discriminated people on the basis of caste, colour, religion, ethnicity etc.

Velutha, the younger son of Vellya Paapen is not conformist like his father and his elder brother. M. Dasan has some words to spell out the differences:

In fact, Vellya Paapen and Velutha represent two generations of Untouchables/Dalits in Kerala. Vellya paapen who conforms to the existing norms of society, represent two old generations and Velutha represents, the self-confident, experiences assertive young generation who have problems with accepting the image imposed upon them. (31)

By devising Velutha as the protagonist Arundhati Roy advocates for the space and identity of untouchables by dismantling the historical legacy and sense of submission and dedication to upper caste Syrian Christian. “Velutha stands out as a very tall figure in the novel. It was his desire to ‘relieve’ as a touchable which resulted in the tragedy... His place is certainly nearer to Shakespearian tragic hero” (129), concludes Twinkle B. Manavar. K.V. Surendran finds a rebel in Velutha and says: “Velutha, the brave is one of the very well drawn out characters in the novel” (70). Only Vinita Bhatnagar finds faults with Velutha. Always he is acted upon. Never does he act or question the status quo... The portrayal of Velutha in Roy’s novel is a good example of what happens when an

“upper caste Christian” of mixed Bengali Brahmin descent attempts to capture a Dalit life story in literature. (98)

Ranjana Harish contrasts Vellya Paapen with his younger son Velutha in terms of symbols of ‘mombatti’ and ‘mirror’. Mombatti (candles) stands for “smallness as well as of illumination. All small men are not ‘Mombattis’; most of them usually are pieces of mirrors. While Velutha is a Mombatti whose life is ‘guided by inner light and not by the laws of the society.’ Vellya Paapen is a mirror reflecting the light of Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. Velutha is not a mirror which reflects the image of the dominating section of society. He is not and can not become “*Laltain*” needing oil from outside as he does not belong to the class of exploiters. He is a “*mombatti*” burning by himself. He is self-enlightened and confident and has got the self-esteem-the qualities which make a man with distinct identity.

Velutha was crushed for opting to redeem the identity of untouchables. The narrator says, “Feeling of contempt had born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear-civilization’s fear of nature, men’s fear of women, and power’s fear of powerlessness” (308). In the back verandah of the History House, as the man they loved was “smashed and broken” (309). Roy uses certain terms to present the intensity of the violence against Velutha at this moment. For example, “brutality”, “urge to destroy” (308), “complete monopoly” and “damaged him” (309). The brutal beating of the policemen is more apparent in the following lines:

Four of his ribs were splinted, one had pierced his left lung, which was what made him bleed from his mouth. The blood on his breath bright red. Fresh frothy. His lower intestine was ruptured and hemorrhaged, the blood

collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine was damaged in two places, the conclusion had paralyzed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control over his bladder and rectum. Both his knee caps were shattered. (310)

It is the extreme extent of barbarism and cruelty of the policemen. Besides the policemen, his father, caste-ridden society, his employer, his party leader and his community betrayed him. He became a representative of his community. Sheobhushan Shukla clarifies this in following lines.

Velutha [...] represents an entire community of untouchables, the unprivileged, dispossessed and unprotected suffering people of India. His father, the religious community to which he belongs, Christian, his employer, his party and even the state degraded his right to self-actualization. (118)

Conclusion

Arundhati Roy delineates domestic, socio-political and cultural violence meted out against the subaltern people, including women, children and downtrodden in the novel “*The God of Small Things*” and indicts the decadent and perverted institutions which impede the assertion of identity of the people at the margin. Roy has represented a gamut of socio-cultural and religious problems that has long been persisted in Keralite society to raise her voice of protest against them.

Roy suggests that traditional social and cultural structural set-ups in India as a whole plays the antagonist role to destroy the lives of the weak and innocent human beings. This can be understood explicitly by means of her presentation of a situation in the novel where a higher-caste woman Ammu and lower-caste man Velutha have fallen in love. Ammu challenges the conventional social structure by marrying man of her choice and then transgressing the love laws. This is the breaking of the social taboo. It is against the deep-ingrained narrow orthodoxy of the caste system of India that prohibits the higher caste people to have relation with the lower caste. Thus, the novel demonstrates the truth that human relations need not be limited by the barriers imposed by the society. The male and female protagonists of the novel, Velutha and Ammu, cut through the conventional institutional set ups to draw up a new history.

Arundhati Roy advocates the need of restructuring the indecent institutions to redeem the identity of people at the margin by going deep into the roots of social relationships and presenting the tensions and prejudices that exists in Kerala of India. Thus the novel is an anecdote of sordid familial and social reality that does not subscribe to the intentional views in an attempt to assert the identity and space of subaltern people.

The novelist has raised the voice of those small things which are victimized by the forces of history and dead conventions, false pride and the tyranny of the state and the politics of opportunism. Roy voices her concern to the women who are placed in a subordinate position by society and are left defenseless by the state. Baby Kochamma, Mammachi and Ammu come across an unrelenting trauma from domestic and social orthodoxy. Through the character of Ammu, the novelist questions the parochial and indecent practices in the society and dismantles the boundaries that decline them into inanimate beings.

Arundhati Roy exposes the female sentiments and feminists sensitivities as to express her marked rage against the socio-cultural and political malpractices that curtailed female identity. The novelist gave spotlight to the issues pertaining to the female identity, representation and subjectivity that colors her politico-artistic vision in the novel. All in all, the novel is an artifact of her political consciousness shaped by the sense of seeking female identity and forward looking thoughts to place women in a dignified position.

Ammu is not accepted by the people of Ayemenem nor is allowed to take part in the public ceremony with other. Even in Sophie Mol's funeral ceremony, she is separated from the rest of her Syrian Christian community members for her non-conformist attitude and breaking the social structure. Besides this, the novel has poignantly reflected the sufferings of Ammu in the hands of police inspector, English Manager of the tea estate Mr. Hollick, her father, her husband Baba and in general the intrigue of male patriarchy. Her twin children, Estha and Rahel also undergo untold sufferings. Ammu's innocent lover Velutha is beaten ruthlessly by the policeman on the belief of the false charges

made by baby Kochamma. With the presentation of the string of sufferings of the characters, she vociferously satirizes upon the hypocrisy and wicked manners of the so-called high class people and stood Ammu as the rebel who represents the defiance of the present state of society.

The novelist shows concerns to the children who are unable to defend themselves and suffer enough to exist. The novel unveils the jeopardized condition of the children characters, Estha and Rahel, who suffer incessant torture from family members, adults and school administrations. The children who are to propel and prosper their future are always oppressed and tormented to the extent that led them to a chaos and uncertainty everywhere. It also shows the insensitivity and indifference of adults to children's psychology. Another social taboo put forth by the novelists is incestuous relationship between Estha and Rahel. The relation carries a message to the orthodox that if you penalize people for marrying beyond caste, religion and ethnic group, your activities may lead to the breaking of the greatest taboos like incest. The novelist has admitted that the sex relations are purely personal matters which need not be interfered with as long as they are based on equality and consent.

The novel transcends the boundaries of conventional views and practices of the society and culture to restructure every tantamount of the social structural set up in term of love, sex, marital relation, human treatment, customs, value system and dynamism that cost much in redeeming the identity of people who are always prone to identity crisis.

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