

Arundhati Roy

II.3 Anglophilia, Omelettes, Caste Borders and Other Small Things

With her very first novel, The God of Small Things (1997), Arundhati Roy won the Booker prize, one of the most prestigious British awards, was translated into twenty one languages, reached sales records and became world famous. She was also awarded the French Prize of the Universal Academy of Cultures in November 2001, for her contribution to fight intolerance, racism and sexism.

Reviews to her novel were polemic, both in England¹⁷⁸ and in India (where Roy even got prosecuted by a fundamentalist party on the grounds of “corruption of public morality”¹⁷⁹). Meanwhile, unscathed by all the turmoil¹⁸⁰, Arundhati Roy quietly reduced all the fuss around her to a dismissive “Fuck the Prize!”¹⁸¹, claiming her independence from media and critics as far as her own projects and commitments are concerned. After the huge success of the novel, she has published two “manifestos”¹⁸², confirming her willingness to interfere with political issues and take a stand in public matters. Recently, the German newspaper *Die Zeit*¹⁸³ published an extensive piece on Roy, referring to her fight against globalisation and the construction of dams in the Narmada valley. At the time, Roy was going to court again for having screamed offensive words against the Supreme Court of Delhi and encouraging the masses to demonstrate. She risked six months in prison and she was actually sent to gaol on March 7th 2002 (Tihar prison, New Delhi) for three months. She was given a fine of 2.000 rupees (30 pounds) but she refused to pay it and instead accepted

¹⁷⁸ See for example the review by Stephen Moss, “Prize Concern”, which claims that Arundhati Roy only won because the shortlist was disastrous. Mr. Moss’ justification for his critique is that what he considers “literary heavy-hitters - McEwan, Banville, Shields were ignored” Guardian Weekly October 26th, 1997.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with *El País Semanal*, no. 1, 137, 12th July 1998, Spain: “existe una acusación criminal contra mí por corromper la moral pública” (p. 25). In 1999, in the introduction to the anthology Arundhati Roy, the Novelist Extraordinary, (Prestige Books, New Delhi, 1999) R. K. Dhawan also mentions the impending prosecution for obscenity, in Kerala.

¹⁸⁰ In India, the fact that Arundhati Roy got one million dollars for the manuscript of The God of Small Things both promoted her, and created a wave of discredit, as if it was “not quite moral” to be so lucky. A chorus of voices tried to diminish the value of the book as a financial success but... not quite real literature. Curiously, the jury that awarded her the Booker Prize was unanimous. She is also accused of feeding the Western fascination for the Indian exotic, while others claim she achieved an adequate representation of the reality of Kerala. Definitely, Roy is controversial. For these different reviews see Arundhati Roy, the Novelist Extraordinary (Prestige Books, New Delhi, 1999).

¹⁸¹ “Fuck the Prize!”, interview with Arundhati Roy by Alexandra Lucas Coelho, *Leituras in PUBLICO*, no. 2970, 2nd May, 1998, Portugal.

¹⁸² The End of Imagination (1998), translated to Portuguese by Asa Literatura, 1999. In this manifesto, Roy uses her fame to promote awareness of the dangers of nuclear weapons, refuting the arguments of local politicians to justify the nuclear tests carried out by the governments of India and Pakistan. Roy clearly denounces these nuclear tests as nationalist propaganda to raise popular support for the elites in power, risking peace and other social priorities (like education) in the name of political opportunism.

The Greater Common Good (1999), Portuguese edition by Asa Literatura, 2001. In this second manifesto Roy deals with the displacement of thousands of peasant and tribal people because of the construction of huge dams which will flood the houses, fields and woods where they lived. Roy exposes the lack of any kind of compensation or support from the Indian government to these people. Roy even takes her argument further, questioning the advantages of these dams. This manifesto is the product of an accurate research on the legal process and the business interests behind the project Sardar Sarovar, the great dam on the river Narmada. This manifesto includes technical details and references to documents and reports from the World Bank guiding the reader through corruption and manipulation. Finally, Roy addresses the ecological impact of such dams building an impressive set of arguments against the Sardar Sarovar project.

¹⁸³ *Die Zeit*, number 32, 2nd August 2001, page 43.

to go to prison. This unexpected choice (Tihar is grimly famous for being a tough prison) has certainly worried authorities even more. Would you like to have an intelligent, powerful writer, who has caught the world's media attention, collecting first hand evidence on the less savoury aspects of your own backyard?

Roy has also been giving money to support activism against the dams in the Narmada, and she is building a network of friends and scholars to report against such ecological abuses.

Among the many Indian women writers I could select for this study, I picked texts with a committed hedge, which is only logical if one considers that the theories which, structure my literary analysis (feminism and the postcolonial debate) have a high potential for political activism and social criticism. The wealth of issues addressed by Arundhati Roy, plus the style of her writing (I am one of those under her spell) made of her first novel a clear option.

I think The God of Small Things is a postcolonial novel for the same reasons as Sahgal's Rich Like Us was one. In both of them, the point of view of the writer is self-consciously involved with history and the local redefinition of collective identities. The horizon of this unfinished redefinition (which is always a process anyway) is determined by a corruption of the independence ideals, current social problems, internal tensions and the clash between partial modernisation and traditional mentalities. Self-consolidation is waiting on the way all these elements are managed. But, apart from internal problems, this self-consolidation process has international implications. According to events inside the nation, the still unsettled place of the post-colonies in a new world order will be defined. At stake is to grant a positive outcome in a process that may, or may not, manage a dignifying negotiation between self-assertion, self-preservation and the pressure of globalisation as a form of neo-colonialism.

For better and for worse, history is relevant, and one cannot ignore that involvement in a centuries long process of colonial history makes the relatively recent process of independence an important reference to understand the transitional and provisional contradictions of a society that is living through fundamental changes, consolidating and self-defining itself between what has been and what may become. This means that, for me, one of the things a postcolonial novel does is to deal with a current postcolonial society, reflecting on, among other things, its search for post-independence patterns of collective identity, the exorcism of traumatic memories from a colonial past, and the self-assertive remembering (or recreation) of local cultural references (I am leaving diaspora and migrant writing out of this research). All of these issues are articulated within the frame of local, material circumstances. They are solidly connected to their postcolonial geography and time, and there is no ambiguity about these co-ordinates seen from within a located text, where they are the references to everyday life. At its most optimistic tone, postcolonial literatures still exude a willingness to change, mend, and "move on", licking one's wounds. But, after the post-independence euphoria, there is, in many of these same novels, this feeling that some of the old problems remain, the promised changes did not happen, and something has gone sour in the current political scene...

How does Arundhati Roy address the debate on these issues and what is her contribution? As I have done above, I will look at individual characters to disentangle the set of ideological arguments the writer decided to address in this particular text, taking micro-universes (fictional individual subjectivities) as the centre of a wider network of historical, political and social issues. I will define the function of these characters inside the narrative structure of the text through the discussion of key scenes, which will gradually guide the reader in my analysis of this novel. The discussion of plot and character are the main narrative elements to organise my reading of the text. Whenever relevant, I will refer to time,

space and setting as the co-ordinates to define a located cartography, that is to say, to refer to history, politics or the cultural references which the text invokes, and on to which its ideological and symbolical meanings are to be projected.

From a postcolonial angle, the novel The God of Small Things is relevant for its resistance to Anglophilia, its rejection of Western influences as a “solution” for the problems of India and its caustic analysis of Indian patterns of collective identity, totally embedded in caste segregation and sexism. In this section, I am going to address the novel from each of these angles.

Anglophilia and Anti-colonial Resistance

I have said above that one of the strategies of cultural colonisation by the British Raj was to promote British culture as the standard of civilisation to be emulated by other cultures. To reject the proposed mimicry of British ways implies a self-aware postcolonial stand that can already see beyond the manipulative power of hegemonic colonial discourses. In this way, while deconstructing Anglophilia in her novel, Arundhati Roy is taking part in postcolonial revisionist practices, creating room for another parallel process, which is the self-discovery of India as a modernising society, regardless of Western models.

In the plot of The God of Small Things, the representation of Anglophilia starts during the colonial period, in the last decades of the Raj, although the high status of British culture remains a current social reference in the 60s/70s, when the main events of the plot take place. The whole time frame of the plot encompasses the life of four generations of the same family, in their Ayemenem house by the river, in the state of Kerala, south India. Only the adult life of the fourth generation (the twins Estha and Rahel) escapes an Anglophile environment. In fact, in the nineties, when the twins are thirty-one, America has replaced Britain as the most current foreign influence, although America never becomes a stylish, upper class reference. America means “money”.

Great-grandparents Reverend E. John Ipe and his wife are the oldest generation of the family to be mentioned in the text, but they are quite secondary in the structure of the novel. The plot really develops around the last three generations of the Kochamma family, and the central events take place in 1969. At the time, Estha and Rahel are seven years old, and they are living with their divorced mother (Ammu) and her family.

The events that became a turning point in the life of the twins started with the arrival of their uncle Chacko’s ex-wife (Margaret) and their daughter (Sophie Mol), during Christmas holidays. These new comers are British, and the way their Indian relatives receive them is important to frame one of the dimensions of Anglophilia in the text. Margaret and Sophie are expected to embody a superior civilisation, and thus, receiving them, is regarded as a motive of pride and joy for this Anglophile family. For most of the members of the Ipe clan, there is a strong emotional investment in the British relatives as the means to claim membership in a “superior” and “progressive” community. This is a case of true assimilation of colonial propaganda, and the behaviour of the characters expresses their agreement with colonial views of India.

According to Homi Bhabha (see section 3.3, part I), individuals learn through a series of available pedagogic and performative narrative strategies, which inculcate in the individual dominant codes of collective identity and their corresponding life-styles. In this way, individual subjects create a sense of who they are and with who, or where, they belong. The assimilation of a sense of collective identity provokes, in the individual, a strong emotional identification with the dominant ideologies of the group, shaping one’s subjectivity to consent the perpetuation of existing power structures and adapting one’s projects and hopes to the promoted life-styles. In the case of Anglophilia, the colonised

citizen assimilates British self-promoting colonial discourses, adjusting his/her frame of mind to see colonialism as the civilising mission of a superior culture committed to the improvement and development of a backward one. Hence, the drive to imitate British ways is given free hand, so as to claim one's integration in the most powerful, dominant culture.

The status awarded to the British ex-wife and the half-British child overlap Anglophilia with sexist issues. For the three older women of the Kochamma family, Mammachi (widowed grandmother), Baby Kochamma (single aunt, younger sister of the deceased grandfather) and Kochu Maria (servant), the man of the house (Chacko) is, undeniably, the head of the family. He will provide for their future, as son, nephew and master, and his half-British daughter, Sophie Mol, means the continuity of the family, and its promotion to a more sophisticated class. In any case, the status of the son, Chacko, and his daughter Sophie, would always be much superior to the tolerated daughter, Ammu, and her twin children Estha and Rahel. The fact that both son and daughter are divorced does not mean the same thing. Chacko is a man, and he divorced a British wife. Ammu's divorce is only a source of shame and embarrassment. According to local mentality, women do not divorce: they endure.

I will deal with the sexist dimension of the novel later on, in the next section. At this stage, I am more concerned with Anglophilia as the assimilation of racist/colonial views, leading to consent and agreement with colonial arrangements.

As it fits an Anglophile family, the Ipes invest on Western culture and education as their rightful source of collective references: Estha's hero is Elvis Presley, the children speak English, uncle Chacko was sent to college, in England (Oxford) and the twins are taken to the movies to watch *The Sound of Music* (obviously, they already know its songs by heart). Actually, the way the children react to the film is important to describe the assimilation of colonial stereotypes by colonised people:

“And there was Captain von Clapp-Trapp. (...) A captain with seven children. Clean children, like a packet of peppermints. He pretended not to love them, but he did. He loved them. (...) They all loved each other. They were clean, white children, and their beds were soft with Ei.Der.Downs.

The house they lived in had a lake and gardens, a wide staircase, white doors and windows, and curtains with flowers.

Oh Captain von Trapp, Captain von Trapp, could you love the little fellow with the orange in the smelly auditorium? (...) And his sister?

Captain von Trapp had some questions of his own:

(a) *Are they clean white children?*

No. (*But Sophie Mol is.*)

In order to be up to the level of civilisation of their half-British cousin, the twins Estha and Rahel are forced to practice their English pronunciation, and they are forbidden to speak Malayalam, their mother tongue, even among themselves. They also have to witness the excitement provoked by the arrival of Sophie Mol, a reaction that spells out for the unfortunate twins their lower racial status and “fatherless” situation. These distinctions between the children, imply wider racist schemes of social reference, the stereotypes of colonial propaganda, which become concrete and humiliating in the small things: “(...) *there would be two flasks of water. Boiled water for Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol, tap water for everybody else*”¹⁸⁴.

The combination of the above quotes, sketches a tense social/emotional environment where Estha, Rahel and their mother Ammu are not exactly welcomed, on account of racial

¹⁸⁴ Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, Flamingo, London, 1997: 46.

and sexist prejudice. From an Anglophile point of view, the twins are considered less than their cousin Sophie, and, correspondingly, they are thought to deserve less love and attention.

The Anglophile mania that runs in the family is a legacy of the deceased grandfather (Pappachi) and his converted wife, Mammachi. Grandparents believed that “British is better” and, logically, they wanted to imitate British ways. The problem with this kind of allegiance is that Pappachi invested in the culture of the coloniser as the grounds to develop his sense of collective identity, because it was among the British community that he wanted to claim membership and receive recognition. Yet, he belonged to the colonised race. This contradiction between his race and what he considers to be the superior culture leaves Pappachi with a self-lacerating problem, being Indian and desiring to be British. This unbearable contradiction is nicely represented by a vivid image: Pappachi in his impeccable woollen suits, “*looking outwardly elegant but sweating freely inside*”¹⁸⁵, self-punishing himself in the heat of Kerala to fit British fashion.

Arundhati Roy is very ironical towards Anglophilia and she deconstructs it from several angles. One of her strategies is to expose the difference between the civilisation the British claim, and their concrete, less noble, patterns of behaviour. This non-coincidence between what is said and what is done, frames Anglophile allegiance as a case of naivety, a lack of critical insight. In the case of Pappachi, Roy constructs a cruel example of his self-imposed inability to see through colonial propaganda: when Ammu told her father why she wanted to divorce her husband, she complained of his alcoholism and of his agreement with Mr. Hollick, the English manager of the tea plantation where her husband worked. In the agreement, Mr. Hollick was ready to tolerate his assistant’s alcoholism if he promised to go to a clinic for treatment, while he, Mr. Hollick, looked after his children and his “...*extremely attractive wife*...”¹⁸⁶. There are already several light skinned children in the plantation as evidence of Mr. Hollick’s “tolerance”. In spite of the seriousness of the matter, Pappachi did not believe his own daughter because he could not accept “*an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife*”¹⁸⁷.

According to the definition of “Anglophile” presented in the text, it means to like British culture, but in a state of mind in which one is predisposed to “*adore one’s conquerors*”¹⁸⁸ and forget one’s ancestors and history.

The “history house” is the image created by Chacko to explain to the twins the situation of the Anglophile in the context of British colonialism in India. The Anglophile is locked out of his own Indian history because he is a prisoner of colonial ideologies:

“(...) Our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them.”

“We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows will never be sad enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives never important enough. To matter.”

(1997: 53)

Anglophilia is then connected to racism (despise for everything that does not conform to the British norm) and self-hatred, as far as the Indian citizen is made to reject Indian ways and Indian culture as a deviation from the British model while facing the impossibility of being recognised as “British” (at least, during the colonial period) since

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 1997: 48.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 1997: 42.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 1997: 42.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 1997: 53.

there will always be something missing, namely, the right skin colour. While racism creates the image of the “other” as inferior, self-hatred implies the assimilation of racist discourse, creating a split subject who, in spite of being “the other”, identifies with the discourses of the white colonisers.

Anti-colonial subversion starts when the colonised subject displays enough critical distance to see through colonial propaganda, becoming aware of the amount of ideological manipulation involved in such hegemonic practices. The difference between Pappachi and Chacko is precisely a matter of awareness. The first cannot question the superior status of the English culture while the latter is aware of his predicament as a split subject. However, Chacko does not express an active rejection of Anglophilia, nor does he turn to his Indian identity in a self-assertive gesture. Chacko is only nostalgic for a more rewarding sense of belonging, either by becoming more acceptable to his British family or by finding a connection to his own Indian history and nation. Instead, the anti-colonial critique of Anglophilia offered in the novel is voiced by Ammu, the daughter of the family, whose particular experience as a woman, trapped by codes, rules and prejudice, made her more cynical and critical towards dominant ideologies. She has known, all her life, how it feels to be at the wrong end of power hierarchies and that experience has made her impatient and rebellious (a “*breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against*”¹⁸⁹). She is then, because of her awareness of sexism, the better equipped to deconstruct colonial discourses, overlapping anti-colonialism with feminism in her private fight against prejudice.

Ammu’s rebellion against the mentality that diminishes Hindu children by comparison with their British cousin (and implicitly, that grants a different status to the two cultures) makes her question the grounds for such a different treatment. She rightly sees the obsession with a display of “civilised”, “British” references as a symptom of a national inferiority complex, where Indians see themselves as the “native”, keeping British colonisers in the position of “enlightened saviours”. Hence, the importance of Ammu’s comment on the whole performance to receive Sophie Mol: “*Must we behave like some damn godforsaken tribe that’s just been discovered?*”¹⁹⁰. If Indian families stop acting according to an Anglophile and self-hating frame of mind, the grounds for all these distinctions, based on unreal judgements determined by prejudice and colonial propaganda, would be exposed for what they are: a powerful campaign to alienate those educated elites who could organise rebellion against colonisation.

As an embodiment of resistance, Ammu’s behaviour is subversive because she repeatedly parts with strongly established notions: she dared to divorce her husband, she rejects Anglophilia, she has a love affair with an untouchable and she never accepted her second status as “daughter” (in Indian subcultures, male sons are generally preferred to daughters). All of these attitudes, plus her irony and sharp answers, turn Ammu into the most innovative character in the text, since it is she who tries to find other ways of thinking and living, outside of fossilised myths that only perpetuate unfair caste, race and sex distinctions. In the novel, these three hegemonic practices are presented as the “enemies” of human sensitivity, creating a social order that instead of being balanced, fair or welcoming is emotionally destructive and impossible to handle (there are no happy characters in this social world). In what concerns Anglophilia, Ammu’s irony is very corrosive for the status of British culture because her remarks create a critical space to think outside of colonial discourse, confronting it.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 1997: 176.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 1997: 180.

Although The God of Small Things is a very rich text, dealing with several political and social issues, the anti-colonial critique of Anglophilia is a very clear and quite extensive topic, absolutely seminal for the meaning of the events in 1969. Without the Anglophile obsession of this family, one cannot fully understand the impact of Sophie Mol's death. It is because of all the dreams of social mobility that die with Sophie that Ammu and the twins have to be "punished" for that accident in such a wild way (their separation, the indifference concerning Rahel's education, the refusal to help Ammu, even when she was terminally ill). The drowning of Sophie Mol means the end of all the future projects of the Ipe family, such as Chacko and Mammachi were dreaming them at that stage. Ammu and the twins are mere "guests" who never counted as subjects for the future of the family, and even less as possibilities to claim respectability and improvement.

Roy deals with colonialism as a "psychic experience" that lives on after formal colonialism is over, through memories and dominant mentalities. Her rejection of these after-effects of Anglophilia does not mean that Roy is defending a return to Indian traditions or any other form of fundamental nativism. That would have been the nationalist strategy to fight colonialism, if this novel had been written in the 1930s. In the nineties, a committed writer such as Arundhati Roy is, probably, tired of either nationalist or socialist rhetoric. Not only does she represent political allegiance as a worn out frame of activism, but she also writes a novel whose plot amounts to a stern defence of a set of human rights that have been equally ignored by colonialism, democracy and communism. Within the logic of Roy's arguments, it is individual sensitivity, critical awareness, and one's bonds to other people, across caste distinctions and outside of patriarchal rules, which can bring about an effective change and improvement in Indian society.

On the margins of Arundhati Roy's narrative, there are other secondary themes that are worth mentioning in connection to a critique of Anglophilia. The fact that America has replaced Britain as mythological land of wealth and power suggests that to emigrate to America is the current equivalent to "family connections in London".

Arundhati Roy makes three points on this new fascination. Emigration is not, necessarily, worth trying (Rahel's story is her narrative translation of this argument), "progress" is not necessarily development, and Americanisation is not an improvement on the split identity of the colonised subject.

Rahel's marriage to Larry McCaslin and her emigration to America end up in a grim job as a night clerk in a bullet-proof cabin at a gas station. Back in India, what Rahel recalls from her American experience is drunks vomiting in the money tray, pimps and their job offers, one or two men being shot and stabbed. This negative image of America contrasts with the reaction among Rahel's acquaintances in Ayemenem:

"His daughter's daughter is this. In Amayrica now. (...) *Oower, oower, oower*. In Amayrica now, isn't it.' It wasn't a question. It was sheer admiration."

(1997: 129)

Being an emigrant, Rahel represents someone with better possibilities and wider roads to travel. She is like the "Foreign Returnees", at the Cochin airport, with their dollars that mean security, ability to provide for children's needs, dowries for daughters to be married, medicine for the old. Only Rahel is not "Americanised", while the masses of emigrants arriving for holidays in India cannot think further than the ever increasing gap between those who wait for the returning relatives and those who arrive. Their love for their families starts to have "a lick of shame": "*Look at the way they dressed! Why did Malayalees*

*have such awful teeth? (...) Going to the dogs India is*¹⁹¹. Soon, “*Foreign Returnees would be trapped outside the History House, and have their dreams redreamed*”¹⁹². These comments indicate that Americanisation has the same effect as Anglophilia, making Indian citizens turn their backs on their history and culture, erasing a part of their memories and identity. The gap between the first generation emigrants and their Indian relatives is a symptom of the undecidable contradictions that will fragment this generation’s sense of identity for good, making them endure the same split subjectivity that afflicted colonised Anglophiles. Naturally, this amounts to say that India is, to a certain extent being neo-colonised by America, through the power of the dollar.

The line of thought which makes Arundhati Roy represent emigration in a less positive light is an extension of the argument against Anglophilia. Both themes are addressed to demonstrate that the solution for the internal problems of India was/is never abroad. The future of India depends on the Indian people and the ideas and values they choose to hold on to. Similarly, Western money does not mean internal “progress” for India. In fact, economic growth and modernisation are treated in the novel as ambiguous advantages which, by themselves, do not solve any of the problems: five star hotels and their speedboats bring tourists, but leave a gasoline film over the water; open air sewers are left to exhale an awful smell in hot days, but hotels have got air conditioning; the view over the river is beautiful, but the water is polluted and toxic, so, no baths are allowed. Like Sahgal, Roy is not indifferent to the poverty of the Indian people around her, and both of them refuse to accept the lack of governmental solutions in spite of the amount of capital invested in India. Arundhati Roy’s point is that, in the nineties, government seems to think “progress” is the exchange of environmental pollution for profitable private business. For Roy, industrialisation, with poisoned fishes rotting in the sun, and the same poverty as ever, is not worth the effort. If World Bank loans only mean pesticides, then these loans are not helping India in the right way, and Roy, as a committed and intervening writer, does not welcome this kind of help. Even in cultural terms, Roy denounces tourism as a new form of colonialism, an industry that corrupts Indian culture, selling it as picturesque folklore for example when “*ancient stories were collapsed and amputated. Six-hour classics were slashed to twenty-minute cameos*”¹⁹³.

Politics as Omelettes

In spite of the capitalist references to industrial pollution, pesticides, organised tourism and indifference to poverty, Kerala, where the action of the novel takes place, is a state with a long Marxist tradition, being one of the post-independence bastions of communist power. Accordingly, the narrative flash-back regarding events in 1969 already refers several instances of activism, like the organisation of trade unions, workers demonstrations and the discussion of Communist ideology. A couple of decades later, in the nineties, the “*once Ayemenem office of the Communist Party, where midnight study meetings were held*” is a place grown “*limp and old*” and the red of its flag has “*bled away*”¹⁹⁴. The way Arundhati Roy writes about politics and the communist party echoes Ammu’s irony against Anglophile feelings: both writer and character speak from a critical distance that annihilates the hold of these discourses. In this novel, politics is the old “*omelette and eggs thing*”, and politicians are “*professional omeletteers*”¹⁹⁵. Since one has to break eggs to

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 1997: 140.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 1997: 141.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 1997: 127.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 1997: 13.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 1997: 14.

make omelettes and politicians are responsible for the priorities they define, the implied comment on this less than flattering joke is that politicians always make the wrong set of choices, and it is common people's lives who are "broken".

The representation of Communism in the novel is an example of this dismissive view of political utopias. The main communist activist, Comrade Pillai is moved by private ambition to promote himself through the party. This ambition makes Comrade Pillai resent Velutha, the untouchable, because he is the other "card older" in Mammachi's pickle factory, and he is an inconvenient advert for Communism since, thinks Pillai, touchables will not trust a party that accepts untouchables. The implicit corollary of this reasoning is that the communists are not willing to break with caste¹⁹⁶ distinctions. This is a serious contradiction of communist principles focused on the erasure of class differences, which make a privileged few live off enslaved majorities. I was left wondering what would come out of a communist government that accepts the existence of untouchability. Susan Stanford Friedman actually answered that question: Kerala has got the worse record of land reform to protect the rights of untouchable people¹⁹⁷, which amounts to say that the caste system is such a deeply set cultural heritage that it has remained powerfully established.

The dismissive way Roy mentioned communism has earned her serious resentment from leftist critics. In the paper "Reading Arundhati Roy Politically"¹⁹⁸, Aijaz Ahmad does not spare praise to Roy's depiction of caste issues and her achievement in terms of style. However, in what concerns her representation of communism, Ahmad accuses Roy of incoherence, lack of realism, and "*spite, pure and simple*" in her references to Namboodiripad, "*an actual historical figure and a towering presence in Kerala*"¹⁹⁹ (the Chief Minister of the state of Kerala for many years, since the elections of 1957). I agree with Aijaz Ahmad that Arundhati Roy is not clear about the motives for her resentment against the communist party, replacing real arguments for unsympathetic comments. Still, I take Roy's anti-communist feeling as a strategy to assert the importance of private rebellion, which is a logical conclusion after reading her novel. If Roy wants to make of the rejection of the caste system and untouchability a private, personal battle, starting with individual refusal to accept these rigid social codes, then, she has to inscribe in her text a certain dismissal of available political utopias, which had their opportunity to settle these problems and did not manage to succeed.

As an alternative to party politics, Arundhati Roy offers erotic transgression as a political act, making her main feminine character (Ammu) fall in love with an untouchable Velutha. Falling for an untouchable lover like Velutha implies willingness to break with stern social codes, which determine who can be loved (that is, who fits one's caste and family) and how much (untouchables are not supposed to be desired or loved by high caste women). As Brinda Bose²⁰⁰ notes in her very convincing analysis, the politics of desire in this novel spring from specific cultural histories, and "*the ways in which sexuality has been perceived through generations in a society that coded Love Laws with a total disregard for possible anomalies*". It is because of the unquestionable status of these social codes that breaking any of these laws amounts to more than a particular emotional, erotic issue. The

¹⁹⁶ Mind that *The God of Small Things* is about the Syrian Christian community, which does not have castes since it is out of the Hindu system. However, in practical terms it works as a class system since the Syrian Christians always were a very powerful high class group in Kerala.

¹⁹⁷Susan Stanford Friedman, "Feminism, State Fictions and Violence: Gender, Geopolitics and Transnationalism", *Communal/Plural*, vol. 9, n° 1, 2001.

¹⁹⁸ Aijaz Ahmad, "Reading Arundhati Roy Politically", *Frontline*, August 8, 1997.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 1997.

²⁰⁰ Brinda Bose, "In Desire and in Death: Eroticism as Politics in Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things'", *Ariel*, University of Calgary, Alberta, 29: 2, 1998: 59-72.

issue under cross-examination is the set of caste/class barriers of the represented society²⁰¹, and this is a very central and serious political issue. Arundhati Roy's passionate disavowal of caste prejudice and untouchable status amounts to a strong argument in favour of desire, affection and greater respect between social groups. This sort of change of mentalities and behaviours does not rely on party politics, but rather on political awareness and more individual freedom. That is the direction of change suggested by the novel. Instead of writing the nation through an established political project, as Sahgal does, Arundhati Roy writes the nation by provoking a liberation of individual identities, which will cause, indirectly, a shift in the mentalities that organise such segregation across classes in the Indian society.

The way Arundhati Roy casts a critical eye on the postcolonial society of Kerala, discussing in a minute and insightful way its sources of tension and conflict, materialises one of the most interesting and powerful aspects of postcolonial literatures, which is its facet of social criticism. Indeed, these literatures have moved beyond the initial assertive moment, either nativist or obsessed with "answering back" to colonial discourses. The international dialogue with competing powers stills goes on, in the representation of the damages and after-effects of colonisation and also in what concerns resistance to neo-colonial threats. Yet, for a later generation of post-independence writers, the importance of an internal analysis of the post-independence society around them is becoming more and more central. This is precisely the factor that makes these texts relevant for local audiences on the spot. Through the combination of these two sets of issues and themes, postcolonial literatures keep their appeal for an international readership, feeding cultural exchange between different cultures and peoples, and, at the same time (if not mostly), they provide key ideas, concepts and figurations to think the internal politics and the internal social problems afflicting these developing countries, suddenly stormed by globalisation. Hence, my claim that the social critique directed at a concrete postcolonial location (not only in terms of past history but also as far as current socio-political issues are concerned) is one of the fundamental aspects of these literatures, and one that, in my opinion, has not been properly addressed by mainstream postcolonial criticism produced in Western academies²⁰², always more interested in discussing only the international aspects of the intellectual dialogues invited by these texts.

The God of Small Things

Above, Arundhati Roy's project to "write" the defining discourses for postcolonial India was framed by the creation of exemplary characters, encouraging a fundamental change in patterns of individual identity. This argument underlines the connection between macro and micro universes, assigning to the individual a great amount of responsibility in accommodating to certain aspects of social organisation as a form of co-operation with oppressive power mechanisms. If her dismissal of institutional politics implies a return to the

²⁰¹ Just to give the reader an idea of the extent of these caste barriers, note that, until the XIXth century, slaves could be bought, sold and given away in Kerala, they had to address the higher castes as "sir" (thampuran) or "father" (achan) and call themselves slaves. They could not use the word "I" to refer to themselves. Prefixes meaning "dirty", "rude", "black" and "unrefined" had to be added to their clothes and food when talking about them in the presence of high caste members, their own birth should be referred to as "karangituka", meaning "birth of apes". Currently the Keralese government has instituted a reward of two thousand rupees for "intercaste marriages". For the lower castes this amount of money is more than what they make in a year. Still, intercaste marriages are a rare occurrence. (Marion de Uyl and Aileen Stronge, Invisible Barriers: Gender, Caste and Kinship in a Southern Indian Village, International Books, Utrecht, 1995.)

²⁰² On this topic see Susan Stanford Friedman (*op. cit.*, *Communal/Plural*), vol. 9, n° 1, 2001.

“self”, problematising consent and indifference, then, it is necessary to assess closely the forms of deviant self-definition imagined by Roy.

In the novel, there are two alternatives for the identification of the God in charge of Small Things. The most obvious figure is Velutha, the untouchable, not only on account of his private sensitivity but also because of his ability to carve small wooden figures with which he delights his friends. Beyond this explicit reference to the charms of this particular character, Roy also writes a novel on small things, which have been unprotected and forgotten because they were wrongly deemed unimportant. Some of the “small things” Arundhati Roy writes about are feelings, memories, private desire and affection, a set of invisible internal processes, considered too private and individual to matter.

Small things are crushed in the name of big things. In the novel, the “big”, important matters are caste identity, respectability, the assertion of caste differences and the preservation of the *status quo*. These are the priority references for the majority of the characters, obsessed by claiming membership in a powerful group, be it the British culture, the Syrian Christian community or the Communist party. In order to claim membership in any of the desired communities one has to behave according to specific ideological and moral patterns, thus gaining public approval among the acknowledged members of the coveted group. This means that public morality is determined by a desire for public recognition and will be defined from the point of view of the invested interests of the group. Since public morality is an external code, and desire and feelings are internal drives, only by repressing the latter can one live up to the expectations of the former. The great motivation to endure such repressive codes should be public acceptability and one’s integration in the community. Nevertheless, this social system of self-regulation and social control can be disrupted by its discontents, like Ammu and Velutha. Ammu is a divorced woman. Velutha is an untouchable. They are not promised any rewards by the social order around them. They are outcasts. Hence, they are the ones in a position to ignore the limits of this world order, since the only thing this order has brought to their lives is waste and sheer injustice. They should know. They are the ones suffocating for lack of alternatives, those that simply should not be: an untouchable that is talented and educated and falls in love with a high caste woman, a clever, resentful girl who does not endure a violent marriage neither refuses to stop living at twenty something. They are anomalies, feared, embarrassing, upsetting. For them, erotic transgression is the desperate encounter of brothers in arms who find solace in each other, as a counterpoint to the demands of the represented claustrophobic society. The problem of this couple is that private desire and love collided with caste codes and lineage systems.

I learned from Michel Foucault²⁰³ that social codes are a form of discipline, with clear mechanisms of punishment. They control the citizen by exerting pressure to make the individual fit certain patterns of behaviour and public morality. Prejudice, marginalisation and public exclusion are some of the forms of social punishment that prevent transgressors from getting away with their individualism, and teach potential rebels to obey. Since you cannot legislate affection (“*the Love Laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much.*”²⁰⁴), feelings and sensitivity are highly transgressive areas, which are controlled by being contained within the invisible sphere of privacy. If this inoculation against desire and affection is unable to prevent the unthinkable from happening, then, the available forms of social discipline are prompted into action, and the anomalies corrected...at any price.

If caste (equated with class and community) is defined by lineage, inter-caste/class sex is a political problem. If such a kind of transgression becomes public, it has to be

²⁰³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1977.

²⁰⁴ *Op. cit.* Roy, 1997: 177.

effectively repressed and its punishment exemplary. In the context of the Indian caste system, the love affair between high class Syrian Christian²⁰⁵ Ammu and the untouchable Velutha cannot be tolerated. What is at stake is more serious than public morality or snobbish susceptibilities. If what keeps social groups apart is prejudice and tradition, and being from specific castes or communities implies different rights and duties, then, it is on the interest of the high caste/class groups to keep a narrow-minded sense of borders, with rituals and rules to mark these distinctions, so that differences in treatment are accepted by the exploited and humiliated as differences in value. It is, again, colonial propaganda, only this time the colonised are the lower castes who are led to consent to high caste values.

According to Sucheta Mazumdar, 962²⁰⁶ temples were built in Kerala (the state where the plot of the novel develops) during the eighties and nineties, expressing a return to religious references and orthodox Hinduism. Temples bring with them, tradition, rituals, and the assertion of caste and communal identities. As “recently” as April 1991, the hold of traditional worldviews was strong enough to lead a crowd to lynch a sixteen-year-old Hindu girl and her eighteen-year-old Untouchable lover²⁰⁷. On these grounds, I think any public attitude (like writing a very successful novel) supporting inter-caste affairs will be interpreted as politically dangerous, a threat to hegemonic discourses and the coherence of the whole caste system.

Arundhati Roy’s choice for the representation of an untouchable lover as a person entitled to respect, affection and career opportunities interferes with sensitive areas in the traditional organisation of the Indian society. From a feminist angle, the assertion of Ammu’s female desire and agency, materialised in the attitude of choosing a lover for herself, are equally disturbing for the established patriarchal system. This choice of themes makes of The God of Small Things a rather explosive text, addressing wider issues than the strict family biography at the core of its plot.

Since none of the victims of the social order deserves the violence showered upon them (certainly neither the pacific lovers nor the children), it is social prejudice and the traditional caste system that are to blame for this pain. If pain is a small enough thing to be sacrificed in the name of the described patriarchal oppression and caste prejudice (the big things), who collects the gains? The moral dilemma at the heart of the novel is the sacrifice of children’s innocence, sensitivity and love for the perpetuation of hegemonic ideologies, which are totally dependent on traditional mentalities to keep its grip on power and privilege. In order to invert the logic that makes the caste system and untouchability look acceptable, Roy represents two forbidden loves (Ammu and the untouchable Velutha, and the twins’ incest) as natural and healing, while the social order around them is exposed in such a way that it looks twisted and unnatural. Consequently, the positive alternative to these destructive and unfair social codes (and failed political utopias or self-hating patterns of identity) is dependent on human sensitivity and feelings, as motivating forces (or drives) for subversion. Ammu, Velutha and Rahel are the inspirational, transgressive characters of this text, suggesting directions for social change according to their liberating points of view. Since these characters are heroic characters, the reader is expected to identify with them and agree with their choices and actions, disrespecting caste distinctions and patriarchal social codes. When Ammu and Velutha die, the novel acquires a tragic dimension, and its moral discussion is focused under a sharper light. Since the only direct result of Ammu and Velutha’s transgression is the trauma that haunts the twins (destroying their childhood and

²⁰⁵ “The Syrian Christian community of Kerala amounts to twenty percent of the population of the province” in “Sexual/Textual strategies in The God of Small Things”, Chanda, Tirthankar; *Commonwealth* 20-1.

²⁰⁶ Sucheta Mazumdar, “Moving Away from a Secular Vision? Women, Nation and the Cultural Construction of Hindu India” in *op. cit.* Moghadam (ed.), 1994.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 1994.

reducing Estha and Rahel to *quietness* and *emptiness*), the novel seems to finish without a positive, self-assertive element. In this way, and still following the patterns of classical tragedy, the lovers' defeat (Ammu dies, alone, in miserable conditions, separated from her children, Velutha is beaten to a pulp by the police) stands as an example to caution possible transgressors against disrespecting the prevailing rules. Assessed from this angle the novel looks very patriarchal and orthodox, encouraging the assimilation of traditional patterns of cultural identity. Nevertheless, the novel does not end with this generation, but with the next, the twins. The second couple of transgressive lovers, Estha and Rahel, are alive when the narrative plot ends, and they are, symbolically, as old as Ammu was when she died (thirty one). The circularity of time in the structure of the narrative suggests that the twins are starting off where former rebels left, and their option for trespassing, again, on the laws of love, and family structure, and the unspeakable, clearly leaves the reader with an open end to think about future possibilities (that is why the last word of the text is "tomorrow"). The circularity of time is further underlined by circularity of space. Rahel has returned to the family house, where she lived her childhood until she was seven. This overlapping of chronological and spatial circularities makes the return of Rahel a special event, a conclusive point and a beginning, the closing of a perfect circle.

On another level, "small things" are distant causes, facts or words that seem too removed from concrete current events. Roy repeatedly connects everyday private episodes to (big) historical events and social forces. One of the main arguments in The God of Small Things is the necessity of changing these wider forces so as to allow individuals more room to adjust external circumstances to inner lives. It is on account of this failure to balance external stress and internal damage that I see the twins as traumatised characters, and I interpret them as exemplary cases in Roy's subversive argument. They represent an unforgivable side product of wider mechanisms of power.

The connections between history, prejudice, tradition, social segregation and the Ipe family, in Ayemenem, are not small (actually they are determinant factors). They are just so "natural", so deeply set in the dominant mentality that, to the eyes of less lucid characters, they feature as absent, transparent forces, as if they were hardly interfering and hardly recognisable in current notions of "right", "desirable", "correct" and "normal". However, Roy tried to demonstrate the opposite. In an interview granted to the 1997 Booker prize²⁰⁸, Roy explicitly makes this point on her novel: "*For me, fiction has always been a means of making sense of the world, to connect the smallest things to the biggest things*". Bearing in mind both this statement and the text itself, I think The God of Small Things has to be read on several levels at once, where particular, private events, invite the discussion of wider and more complex topics. These wider histories are, for instance, Indian traditions (concerning the caste system, untouchability and patriarchies) the British colonisation of India, massive emigration to America and current industrial pollution.

Recreating the English Language

Finally, I would like to consider the appropriation of European languages as a significant issue for the assertion of postcolonial literatures. Arundhati Roy is a key case to discuss this point. Style, when applied to Roy and what she does to the English language falls short of witchcraft. Her spectacular abilities concerning her creative use of English were one of the most celebrated aspects of The God of Small Things and one with far reaching implications for the status of postcolonial literatures and the literary usage of a language inherited from colonialism but appropriated by other cultures and places. As it was

²⁰⁸ Official internet site, October 14, 1997.

discussed in section I.2.7, when postcolonial writers change and bend the norms of the standard European usage of the language they are appropriating, they are also making a political point, linked to the self-assertion of the independent community.

Almost single-handed, Roy managed a conclusive statement on the debate about the “authenticity - inauthenticity” of Indian writers writing in English. The extent and the quality of Roy’s appropriation of the English language is her blunt argument. In an interview where she was asked to comment on her own style, she simply said that “*language is a skin on (my) thought*”²⁰⁹ (a poetic enough answer in itself) claiming her relation to English as a natural right, non-mediated by colonial history. This way of looking at the status of the Indian writer writing in English is important to establish the usage of a language such as English away from its colonial roots, asserting the autonomous, and hence mature, world of “literatures in English”.

When Arundhati Roy was awarded the Booker prize, several critics (like Aijaz Ahmad²¹⁰) considered the novel over-written²¹¹ and even repetitive. In terms of plot, I have to agree, considering that it was probably unnecessary “to list” so many childhood memories. Estha and Rahel are captivating enough, with less effort, thanks to their vulnerability, their hunger for affection and their tender fights against “Real Life”, being the innocent children they are. The twins immediately grab the reader, granting the climax of the text (the identification of what is left of Velutha at the police station) its due impact.

In terms of narrative strategies, the option for shifting the narrator’s focalisation between an adult omniscient point of view and a child-like perspective is a powerful mechanism to bring the reader closer to Rahel and Estha, seeing “Real Life” through their confused eyes. Another way of making internal processes take precedence over realist (chronologically linear) patterns of narration is to use memory as the constructive principle to organise the time frame of the text.

Together with the intimacy of the biographical mode, which centres the whole plot on the lives of Ammu, Rahel and their memories, the novel imitates the codes of a detective murder story, in which the reader is told of the event (Sophie Mol’s death, the Terror, the separation of the twins) before one knows why and by who. This “suspense” is, in part, responsible for the strong reading appeal of the text.

Paramount to all these strategies, Arundhati Roy’s use of language is one of the most fascinating aspects of the text.

When dealing with a postcolonial novel, the representation of the process of living in between languages is always charged with ideological issues. For example, the fact that the twins had to pay a fee, deducted from their pocket money, when they were caught speaking their mother tongue, Malayalam, instead of English, is another small detail that constructs, in the sense of identity of the twins, the idea that they belong to an inferior culture. Yet, they could acquire this English language, and experiment with it. The playfulness of the children in learning English is a little material example of the gradual mastering of this other tongue:

²⁰⁹ *The Week*, 26 Oct. 1997: 46.

²¹⁰ *Op. cit. Frontline*, August 8, 1997.

²¹¹ Actually, it is possible to argue that the novel is not over-written if one considers repetition and expansion of sentences a matter of style. This text mixes narrative with poetry. Some passages may look pointless in terms of action, but that is because they are not there to serve the development of narrative. They are, simply, pieces of poetry, in-between narrative developments. On this subject see, Cynthia Vanden Driesen, “When Language Dances: The Subversive Power of Roy’s Text in *The God of Small Things*” (pp: 365–376) and P. Hari Padma Rani, “The Structural Ambiguity of the *God of Small Things*” (pp: 338–341) in *Arundhati Roy, the Novelist Extraordinary*, Prestige Books, New Delhi, 1999.

“He made the twins look up *Despise*. It said: *to look down upon; to view with contempt; to scorn or disdain*”.

(1997:52)

“*Humbling* was a nice word, Rahel thought. *Humbling along without a care in the world.*”

(1997: 55)

“What a funny word *old* was on its own, Rahel thought, and said to herself: *old.*”

(1997: 92)

The sounds and pronunciation patterns of the English language also become an object of experimentation in the novel: “Never.The.Less”, “Ei.Der.Downs”, “Per NUN sea ayshun”. Each syllable is noted, feeling its “flavour”. This playfulness and self-reflexivity mark an itinerary of growing intimacy with the English language, while enjoying it from the distance allowed the bilingual, the one with the frame of mind to juggle between languages. The irony in the representation of this process of experimentation and playfulness with English, constant throughout the novel as the narrator’s voice replicates the children’s appropriation process, is that the Malayalam speaking kids have an awareness of this language that native people may not have, acquiring it naturally, without distance to enjoy and reflect on it. This point is established in the confrontation between the twins and Miss Mitten. She is very upset when they read English aloud backwards²¹², playing with her own mother tongue in a way that Miss Mitten, the native speaker cannot follow. The extra knowledge awarded the bilingual is stated in another way. While adult Miss Mitten did not even know of the language people speak in Kerala (she thought it was “Keralese”), the seven year old twins even read English backwards, displaying a high degree of comfort with a second language.

Another way of marking an intervention in the English language is to create neologisms, and *The God of Small Things* is full of them: “*The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man*”, “*Squashed Miss Mitten-shaped stains in the Universe*”, “*a die-able age*”. Similarly, Arundhati Roy’s use of capitals to mark certain expressions, as if they were the names of particular illusions (“*Everything was for Ever*”) or emotions (“*Moth Shaped Fear*”) or attitudes (“*The Reading Aloud voice*”) are examples of a practice of inventing substantives out of compounds of words or expressions, in a way that is totally foreign to the English language. The use of capital letters emphasises the deliberate unusual adaptation of these words to work together, sometimes replacing other current words like for example the Arcadian “hope and innocence” of childhood for “*Everything was for Ever*”.

Finally, Arundhati Roy’s refrains (“*Little Man. He lived in a cara-van. Dum dum*”) explore the musicality of language, inscribing in the text a miscegenation between prose and poetry:

“He watched the trains come and go. He counted his keys.
He watched governments rise and fall. He counted his keys.
He watched cloudy children at car windows with yearning marshmallow noses.
The homeless, the helpless, the sick, the small and lost, all filed past his window.
Still he counted his keys.”

(1997: 63)

As the above examples prove, Arundhati Roy’s very particular use of the English language helps to create a distinctive frame to review writing in English apart from a

²¹² *Op. cit.*, Roy, 1997: 60.

European norm whose claim to the ownership of a language no longer applies to the reality of mature postcolonial literatures. By confronting readers with a “defamiliarising” usage of language, post-colonial writers can assert the reality of their literary difference, and thus disrupt the supremacy of the European standard in any of the inherited languages.

Arundhati Roy

II.4 “No Locusts Stand I”

In this section, I would like to approach the God of Small Things from a feminist perspective. I will return to the same characters and scenes I have just discussed from a postcolonial point of view, but its ideological content will be given a different *nuance*, according to the different focus determining the perspective from which I am re-reading the novel.

The use of “gender” as an analytical concept allows me to establish the patterns of thought and behaviour determined by patriarchal mentalities, exposing their stressing effect on women. Simultaneously, sexual difference theories enable me to monitor resistance and evaluate self-awareness, as a means to confront the social perpetuation of patriarchal codes, inscribing in the horizon of possible role models alternative ways of being a woman.

Like Sahgal, Arundhati Roy offers a concrete set of directions to change the position of women in Indian society, but Roy puts a lot of energy in encouraging a critical, rebellious perspective to consider current patterns of feminine identity in India. By contrast to the traditionally promoted accommodating and devoted figures, Roy constructs rebellious and dissenting women characters.

While reading a critical anthology on Roy²¹³, there was a paper on anger, as a major feature of the tone of the novel, which stroke a chord with this feminist study of the novel. The God of Small Things is indeed an angry text, echoing other Indian women writers (like Nayantara Sahgal) in their impatience with some aspects of India’s traditions. The expression “No Locusts Stand I” (after “locus standi”, recognised position, acknowledged right or claim) is used²¹⁴ to describe, with a caustic irony, the position of Ammu, the daughter of the Ipe family in relation to inheritance rights. Ammu is a sort of “thesis” on the denial of women’s place inside their own blood families, with far reaching implications in terms of affection, attention and education opportunities. Note that the action of the plot takes place in a village of Kerala, in the sixties²¹⁵, and, at that stage, Ammu still has no claims to family property, no place in the lineage sequence, no entitlement to the same attention and affection reserved to sons. Within the logic of the novel, which reads on multiple levels, taking micro-universes as traces of wider social patterns or issues - the epigraph itself claims that “*Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one*”- I take the single case represented in this fiction as an example of a more generalised habit in the organisation of Indian families²¹⁶. Besides, the comments integrated in the

²¹³ Arundhati Roy, the Novelist Extraordinary, ed. R. K. Dhawan, Prestige Books, New Delhi, 1999.

²¹⁴ *Op. cit.* Roy, 1997: 57.

²¹⁵ The Hindu Succession Act (1956) granted female children equal inheritance claims with male siblings. However, the fact that these laws were passed does not mean they were immediately implemented in practical terms.

²¹⁶ I feel more confident to make this generalisation because of many other texts written by Women in India, either Hindu or Muslim. See especially the anthologies of short stories The Inner Courtyard, Lakshmi Holmström (ed.), Virago Press, London, 1990. See also Ismat Chughtai, The Quilt and Other stories, The Women’s Press, London, 1991, and Susie Tharu, K. Lalita (ed.), Women Writing in India, anthology, (two volumes), Pandora Press, London, 1991, 1993.

narrative always shift between “the big” and “the small” things, linking particular events to wider histories of oppression and segregation.

Although traditions vary from community to community, it is a fact that there is a tendency to award daughters a secondary status in relation to sons, a general feature²¹⁷ directly linked to the caste system, a patriarchal system of lineage organised around the rigorous control of women’s sexuality. According to the mentality of the caste system, marriage will determine the future of daughters since women traditionally take the caste of their husbands the moment they marry, and they are integrated in the husband’s (joint²¹⁸) family. Women tend to be married within the same caste, or above, if possible. In any case, daughters are not their parents’ responsibility beyond childhood, dowry arrangements and the search for a husband (I am leaving aside any personal, affective attachments, focusing only on social codes. Hence, when women get married, it is as if they had changed family. This social system has led to two situations, both of them potentially bad for women: they can be abused by their new in-laws (and we have seen in the above discussion of Nayantara Sahgal’s text that many “accidents” can happen within the private realm of the family household) and, secondly, parents tend to see daughters as a sort of mere passing guests, a continuous source of worry until they are married off and dowries adequately paid, dismissing daughters as future members of the household. Since they are to be given away, daughters have less “locus standi” at the core of their own blood families, which amounts to say that power, continuity, and, eventually, acknowledged membership, are all male privileges in terms of family organisation. What is special in Roy’s text is that she explicitly links this “male child” oriented mentality to a lack of support and care concerning daughters, which diminishes their self-esteem from birth, affecting their own self-image for life.

The traditional preference for sons does not necessarily apply to the whole of the Indian society, and cities tend to be more liberal places than rural areas²¹⁹. Still, many families live by these codes, especially the higher castes or powerful high class communities (like the Syrian Christians of Kerala). In any case, it is a popular, common-sense notion among diverse Indian communities that sons are family assets and daughters family nuisances, to be constantly guarded and expensively married off. This distinction sums up one of the thematic lines of The God of Small Things, where gender segregation among one’s progeny is vehemently denounced and criticised by Arundhati Roy. The example of the tense relationship between Ammu and her family is a clear fictional argument to confront the reader with the *non-place* of daughters inside traditional patriarchal families, as it happens with the Syrian Christian community of Kerala.

The clear policy of affective marginalisation and swift “giving away” of daughters is widely documented in other instances of Indian literature since many women writers have

²¹⁷ “Most social scientists interested in India’s economic development have assumed that richer families would provide better food, clothing, and medical care for their daughters as well as their sons. Not so. In studies of child nutrition in rural areas, it appears that well-off peasant families continue to spend on sons and deprive daughters. In other words, son preference persists even in prosperous families. “Female feticide”, that is, the practice of aborting the female fetus after sex-determination tests, offers another challenge to the view that prosperity will benefit females”. Geraldine Forbes, Women in Modern India Cambridge University Press, 1996: 239, 141.

²¹⁸ Nowadays’ young couples tend to live as nuclear families (parents and children) but until a few decades ago, the joint family, including aunts, uncles and cousins, was the most current form of family organisation.

²¹⁹ Even so, in her sociological study Invisible Barriers, Marion de Uyl concludes that the same applies to untouchable castes, in Kerala. Among the diverse untouchable communities the celebrations for the birth of sons are different than those for daughters, being these last always inferior or even non-existent (Marion de Uyl and Aileen Stronge, Invisible Barriers: Gender, Caste and Kinship in a Southern Indian Village, International Books, Utrecht, 1995.

dealt with this problematic subject. For example, Githa Hariharan²²⁰, Manju Kapur²²¹, Sarat Kumari Chaudrani²²² and Mrinal Pande²²³ are some of the names I could relate to Arundhati Roy in the commitment to change the “second best”/ “object” status of daughters, determined by cultural values. Certainly, this problem is not even limited to India, being a conservative, right wing reference in Europe, which makes of this issue a good example of the importance of creating dialogue and awareness of women’s problems across cultural contexts that divide us.

Since daughters are to be married off, it does not make sense “to waste money” in the education of girls because only the family of the husband would benefit from that and, worse, educated girls are not as “adaptable” as simpler, younger girls, and “to adapt and endure” is what is expected of wives, together with the production of healthy sons. That is why, in this high caste/class²²⁴ family, the son, Chacko, is sent to Oxford to study, while the daughter, Ammu, is expected to remain quietly at home after high school. Pappachi (grandfather, the patriarch of the household) considered “*a college education (...) an unnecessary expense for a girl*”²²⁵, so, after high school, there would be no prospects for Ammu, apart from waiting for marriage. But even that was neglected in this case. Ammu simply did not count, and there was no question of raising a dowry and finding a suitable husband. Not even that. The same procedure was repeated years later with Rahel, the daughter of Ammu.

The fact that the plot includes the lives of three generations of women from the same family is important as a context for all the feminist issues discussed in the novel. It makes one reflect on both the mutability and continuity of certain forms of oppression. Education is a key topic for that matter.

For the women of the older generation, Mammachy and Baby Kochamma, education was regarded as something “damaging” in a bride, or wife. The novel only mentions two details, but they were significant enough to hover through the rest of the plot, as a complement for the wider point, which is the unfair treatment of women as concerns education opportunities within the frame of traditional Indian mentalities. The first of these telling passages refers to Baby Kochamma. Her father only allowed her to study ornamental gardening in America because she had developed a ‘reputation’, “*was unlikely to find a husband*”, and “*since she could not have a husband there was no harm in her having an education*”²²⁶. This passage voices patriarchal prejudice against the education of women, which actually was a commonly held view during the XIXth and beginning of the XXth centuries, and whose final aim would be to grant the superiority of the husband in relation to his wife, keeping the family patriarch in a position of power.

The second passage where access to education is denied to a woman concerns Mammachi, after she has been married to Pappachi (the father/grandfather in the Ipe family).

²²⁰ Githa Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi 1992.

²²¹ Manju Kapur, *Difficult Daughters*, Faber and Faber, London, 1998.

²²² Sarat Kumari Chaudrani, “Beloved or Unbeloved”, 1891, in *Women Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita (eds.), Pandora Press, London, 1991, vol.I.

²²³ Mrinal Pande, “Girls”, 1983, in *The Inner Courtyard. Stories by Indian Women*, Holmström, Lakshami (ed.), Virago Press, London, 1990; Rupa & Co., Calcutta, Allahabad, Bombay, New Delhi, 1990.

²²⁴ The caste system is a Hindu tradition. The Syrian Christian community is out of the Hindu system. Still, for practical matters, the Syrian Christian community has been interpreted by lower castes as a “high caste” group, since the Syrian Christians, together with the matriarchal Nair families, have always been one of the most powerful, high class groups in this state. In relation to untouchability, the barriers separating this high class/caste group from people with a lower social status are as racist and intolerant as in the rigid system separating other castes and communities.

²²⁵ *Op. cit.* Roy, 1997: 38.

²²⁶ *Ibid*, Roy, 1997: 26.

She went to Vienna with her husband, for a six month period (the time of Pappachi's course), and she started to attend violin lessons. "*The lessons were abruptly discontinued when Mammachi's teacher, Launsky-Tieffenthal, made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented and, in his opinion, potentially concert class.*"²²⁷. The fact that Arundhati Roy makes Pappachi particularly resentful of his wife's talent is not very meaningful in itself. Then, I would have grounds to interpret this behaviour as an individual flaw in character and nothing more than that. However, the issue takes a different dimension due to the coherence of all the scenes regarding women's education. Repeatedly, the men around these women prevent them from developing their potentialities to the full. By inviting reflection on these issues (because she wrote about them in this powerful way), Arundhati Roy is stating her belief in the need to break with these traditional views, and she is equally promoting a less misogynous mentality, one which would protect women's legal rights and see to their access to education and other opportunities for individual self-development. To analyse The God of Small Things after my discussion of Nayantara Sahgal's novel, made these demands seem all the more serious and urgent because this other writer, focusing on another Indian community, identified as priorities for change these same problems. Note, nevertheless, that the last generation of the Ipe family, Rahel, does get access to university, and it seems to be the case that, in more general terms, the old prejudice has eroded away. This fact is confirmed by several of the studies I have read²²⁸, which indicate that more and more women are taking up careers and making the transition to professional sectors of society.

Geraldine Forbes²²⁹ who carried out an in depth study of women's movements and women's associations in India, during the XIXth and XXth centuries, confirms the widespread existence of superstitious beliefs asserting that educated women would become widows, connecting in a symbolical way the development of women's intellect to the annihilation of the father/phallus²³⁰. At home, women who wanted to study would be teased, in the best possible scenario, harassed and ostracised if they insisted too much²³¹. The whole study demonstrates that the most conservative and repressive reactions came from the higher castes (like the Kashmir Brahmins of Nayantara Sahgal's novel). Anyway, education is beyond the reach of millions of families in India, and men still are expected to be "the breadwinners"²³², which makes of the education of sons a priority.

The discussion on the position of daughters inside patriarchal families, in southern India, makes the set of feminist arguments put forward in Arundhati Roy's novel a sort of social map, hinting at the construction of masculinity as power figures that one day will reproduce this same model has the heads of their own families. In terms of the definition of Indian feminine role models, the paragraphs above confirm Sahgal's view of Indian traditions has a system of common-sense references that construct an opposition between education and marriage. The fact that women are "meant" for wives and mothers is strongly emphasised by shunning career as an abnormal aim for women (actually, this is just what

²²⁷ *Ibid*, Roy, 1997: 50.

²²⁸ On this subject, see Susan C. Seymour, Women, Family and Child Care in India, a World in Transition, Cambridge University Press, 1999. See also Geraldine Forbes, Women in Modern India, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

²²⁹ *Op. cit.* Forbes, 1996.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, Forbes, 1996: 32, 33.

²³¹ *Ibid*, Forbes, 1996: 61.

²³² Actually, among working class families women became the main breadwinners working for multinational factories. According to Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran this has led to an increase of domestic violence as a means to balance masculine sense of disempowerment. See the paper "The Frying Pan or the Fire?" in Women & Right-Wing Movements, Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (ed.), Zed Books, London and New York, 1995.

happened in the West some generations ago, which testifies to the possibility of reforming dominant mentalities presiding over a patriarchal society, without annihilating its coherence or identity). Beyond echoing Sahgal's concern with education and property rights, Arundhati Roy adds another layer to her critical survey of Indian patriarchies when she addresses the position of divorced wives. Since the traditional system does not provide for that anomaly (wives "endure", they don't "divorce"), these cases do not have room "to exist". Actually, Roy maps a double 'absence of room' for women in such a heavily coded society: as a daughter you are second best, as divorced wife, you do not exist at all. By circumscribing the gaps in the traditional social mantle, Roy is mapping a certain amount of claustrophobia for those who are not totally accommodated to this social universe, and she is also mapping the power of patterns of social discipline. The lack of alternatives is a clear mechanism of social control, repressing possible dissenting voices.

The distinctive treatment between sons and daughters seems to be extensive to their progeny. In the previous section, I discussed this issue from a postcolonial angle, reading the preference for half-British Sophie Mol as a case of Anglophilia. But, the contrast between the status of Sophie Mol and the twins Estha and Rahel combines both sexist and postcolonial questions. The other line of exclusion that distinguishes Sophie Mol from the twins is that she is the daughter of the son (Chacko), and this fact makes of the young half-British girl the future head of the family (in the absence of brothers), and consequently, she is the one the older generation is counting on. On the contrary, the sheer presence of Estha and Rahel at their grandparents' is a continuous source of embarrassment for the family. The only reason they are not at their father's home, their logical, natural place, is that Ammu has dared to divorce, and their presence at their grandparents', in the Ayemenem house, is a living testimony of Ammu's failure to live up to expected patterns of decency and convenience. Within the circular logic of patriarchal prejudice, the adults around the twins (Baby Kochamma, Chacko and Mammachi) think these children are *not their responsibility*, for their presence is an aberration of the social order, which has established that daughters, and their children, belong to the husband/father. This amounts to say that from the point of view of her own relatives, Ammu and the twins are living with the *wrong* family. As evidence on the depth and general hold of these cultural references I will quote Kochu Maria, a servant, who knows very well whom she can bully and whom she has to please:

(Concerning Sophie Mol) "When she grows up, she will be our Kochamma, and she'll raise our salaries, and give us nylon saris for Onam."

(1997: 185)

(Addressing the twins Estha and Rahel) "Tell your mother to take you to your father's house. (...) There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren't your beds. This isn't your house."

(1997: 83)

The fact that Ammu divorced an alcoholic husband who would beat her is considered irrelevant. From a patriarchal/feudal point of view, obsessed with notions of order and perpetuation, good wives and mothers endure, the few that remain single "behave", and thus, the stability of lineage systems is granted.

In Roy's Kerala, which several Indian critics deem a relevant representation of local social realities²³³, prejudice and tradition are fundamental to keep communities apart, marking a hierarchy of different identities. "Power" is the deity that lives off these rigid traditions, but at the expense of considerable social tension and unacceptable human costs. It is in the name of the caste system that women are treated in this way, as non-entities to be exchanged among the right families, and it is this same worldview that prevents bright untouchables (like Velutha) from having the jobs and careers they deserve.

From the angle of sexual difference theories, the strength of patriarchal mechanisms of social control is adequately measured by the itinerary of neglect that runs through the three generations of Indian women in the Ipe family. The way women are treated by their parents or grandparents snatch from them the necessary self-esteem to react and rebel, encouraging the intended accommodation. However, too much pressure can have the opposite effect. The lack of flexibility to reach for a middle ground between tradition and the creation of a more fulfilling position for women inside their blood families is what makes Ammu's rebellion so extreme. Had the pressure to accommodate been less intransigent, the marginalisation and cruelty awarded to this young woman and her twins would certainly look as unnecessary as they are.

Taking into account sexual difference theories and the novel's geology of women's wounded self-esteem as a social pattern produced by local patterns of family organisation, it seemed sensible to turn this critical analysis to the internal life of women characters, assessing emotional stress in their self-definition. Both dissenters and accommodated women characters will be considered, because all of them had to handle the lack of very important "small things" like expressed concern for their sensitivity and emotions, and a clear environment of affection. The feeling of being loved and cherished has got serious consequences for the development of individual self-esteem and self-respect and that is why gender divisions inside families, inculcated from childhood can be so damaging.

Roy structures most scenes of her novel upon the difference in treatment between Ammu (daughter) and Chacko (son). This distinction between the two of them is vividly represented from the beginning of the plot, for instance, in the first chapter, when the family is gathered in the church, at the funeral of Sophie Mol. Chacko stands with the rest of the family around him while Ammu and the twins are made to stand apart, excluded, isolated from the rest of the family. There are reasons for this family division at this particular ceremony as the reader later on finds out, but the important thing in terms of the structure of the novel is that this division is always present, in a more violent or subtle form, throughout the whole text.

A sense of opposition and division also permeates different senses of identity among different generations of women, creating a line of conflict between older and younger women. While the women of the older generation (Mammachi and Baby Kochamma) accepted to play by the rules of the established social order, Rahel and Ammu chose to resist accommodation. In this way, the last two characters become inspirational figures to think processes of liberation and social reform. Ammu and Rahel do not reach solutions, but they provide an account of the pain that simply makes them "walk out" of the established script, even if this implies taking suicidal risks. The movement of these two characters inside the narrative plot is born out of desperation, but it opens a whole new set of hypothesis in terms of forms of living and feeling, the subversive impact of which can only be measured by its

²³³ See R.K. Dhawan's introduction to *Arundhati Roy, the Novelist Extraordinary*, 1999: 12, see also, N. P. Singh's "Women in *The God of Small Things*" (1999: 69), and Nirmala C. Prakash, "Man-Woman Relationship in *The God of Small Things*", (1999:77) in R. K. Dhawan (ed.), Sangam Books, London, 1999.

contrast to the rigidity of the dominant feudal codes of gender division, active in this location.

Ammu and Rahel have a different degree of critical awareness and self-(gender)-perception because, since they are divorcees, they are outsiders to the marriage/caste system. The indifference of Pappachi and Mammachi (the parental figures in this text) has left these two women to find their own answers outside of marriage (the institutional pattern of accommodation, placing women under the authority of a husband), and this is the fact that makes these two characters so special. The lack of an arranged marriage is an expression of utter neglect on the part of the parents/grandparents, but “*oddly, neglect seemed to have resulted in an accidental release of the spirit*”²³⁴. Left to choose their own husbands, both Ammu and Rahel made their attempt at creating their own families, but their marriages did not last. Once they were done with any possibility of accommodation within the traditional system, they had to improvise other, alternative patterns of identity.

Ammu rebelled in two ways. One of them was to opt for a divorce, imposing her presence (together with her twins) to her own blood family, demanding from them the material support her husband was supposed to grant. For a while, she almost succeeded in conquering a sort of “place” for her small family, in this improvised, deviant household.

Her second rebellious attitude, and one for which she paid dearly, was to refuse a sex-less, body-less identity only because she was a divorced mother (she is only twenty-seven in 1969, when the central plot of the text develops²³⁵). Velutha, her untouchable lover, is the assertion of her female desire and her right to live on, passionately, after divorce. However, Ammu is also, to a certain extent, a “failed” model of transgression because she follows the traditional narrative scheme of shame, marginalisation and death, the kind of evolution that the plot of misogynous texts reserves for deviant, “sinful” women. Still, her exemplary punishment does not undo the impact of the previous transgression. It is interesting that the main anti-colonial voice in the text, Ammu, is also the most subversive in specifically feminist terms. Apparently, the resisting frame of mind that entitles her to break with stereotypical views of gender roles provides the same distance from colonial propaganda (see previous section on this matter). Ammu’s affair with Velutha is an explosive issue in feminist terms. As a proud affirmation of feminine desire, in a society where its assertion outside of the sanctioned frame of marriage and wife-hood is problematic (to say the least), this is no small service. To make this desire visible is very important because the existence of desire implies selfhood, that is to say, entitles women with individual subjectivity, beyond the standard endurance and abnegation.

From a socio-political point of view, the affair between high caste Ammu and the untouchable Velutha is an example of transgression because it crosses the borders between touchable and untouchable. If the reader sympathises with the couple (as one is led to), there are cultural codes whose credibility is in jeopardy, affecting not only codes of decency that govern women’s sexuality but also the boundaries that divide castes. This is not a simple issue. The torture of Velutha by touchable policemen is a political act. They are politicians’ hounds “*cracking an egg to make an omelette*”²³⁶ and this has to be done in this cruel way because Velutha represents what touchables fear, the fear of losing privilege, of being dispossessed, of having one’s purity and ascendancy questioned. This exemplary killing, advertised in the newspapers, is a propaganda strategy to contain any revolutionary spirit from untouchables. This is a matter of “*inoculating a community against an outbreak*”²³⁷ and

²³⁴ *Op. cit.* Roy, 1997: 17

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, Roy, 1997: 38.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, Roy, 1997: 308.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, Roy, 1997: 309.

it is an old, hegemonic practice. From a feminist point of view, the relevance of this affair depends on the illustration of the symbolical/political dogmas connected to the control of women's bodies, as potential sources of corruption and contamination for the identity of the community. According to this essentialist mentality, the rape of women is a form of national offence, as, unfortunately, too many women know²³⁸.

In the paper "Understanding Sirasgaon"²³⁹, Anupama Rao discusses a famous court case concerning the abuse of four *dalit* women by high caste men. She concludes that courts were complacent judging this case, as they usually are, and the motives for this generalised complacency are the real subject of her research. She considers that in the context of the caste system, sex and marriage are politics, and desire is a dangerous element because caste is a matter of blood, and women's wombs have to be carefully guarded. If it is the case of low caste men having sex with high caste women there is the risk of social mobility. Thus, high castes try to contain and discipline this possibility in the most violent way. Since upper caste women are not "*permitted*" to choose a partner outside of the convenient caste, the possibility of sexual intercourse with a low caste or untouchable man is perceived as rape, automatically.

I think you can recognise this same "mental habit" in the plot of the novel, especially if one considers how keen the policemen are on "punishing" the rapist. They are too ready to believe Baby Kochamma's rape story. When Ammu tries to say it was otherwise she is bullied out of any complain, as she had to be, to avoid inconvenient investigations concerning the way the police handled the matter. The reason why the policemen immediately believed the rape story is that they could not conceive of Ammu's consent to have sex with an untouchable because, according to common-sensical cultural references, her family is there to grant that she will not be *allowed* to consent. And indeed that is what happened.

In her brave paper, Anupama Rao claims that if a rape case concerns high caste men abusing low caste/untouchable women, then, it is tolerated by the legal system, since it is good to promote high caste privilege: "*the bodies of dalit women are seen collectively as mute, and capable of bearing penetration and other modes of marking upper-caste hegemony (...)*"²⁴⁰. *The God of Small Things* also includes a reference to the sexual privilege of high caste men over servant girls²⁴¹ and Chacko's behaviour towards the girls working in his factory falls within the same pattern. On the contrary, the handling of a rape case in which there is an inversion of the castes of rapist and victim will most certainly be met with horror and stern repression:

"The problem of the circulation of women is tied explicitly to the formation and persistence of caste, and it is this critical fact that 'makes' caste. (...) The nature of caste-specific, gendered violence would seem to point to this logic as well. (...) It is rules of caste alliance that serve as barriers to the possibility that all men might see all women as potentially 'theirs'. Imagining the possibility of expressing desire for upper-caste women is fraught with the possibility of **violent disciplining** for dalit men. It cannot be enacted as anything other than the fantasy of rape, since no other relationship to upper-caste women **can be permitted**. At the same time, the bodies of dalit women are seen collectively as mute, capable of bearing penetration and other modes of marking upper-caste hegemony."

(Anupama Rao, 1997: 127, my emphasis)

²³⁸ See Purshottam Agarwal, "Savarkar, Surat, Draupadi, Legitimising Rape as a Political Weapon", in *Women & Right-Wing Movements, Indian Experiences*, Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (eds.), Zed Books Ltd., London and New York, 1995.

²³⁹ Anupama Rao, "Understanding Sirasgaon" in *Thamyris*, vol.4, n° 1, 1997.

²⁴⁰ Anupama Rao, 1997: 127.

²⁴¹ *Op. cit.* Roy, 1997: 168.

If one is aware of these features of Indian society, I think it is easier to defend that Ammu is a very powerful character, through which Arundhati Roy makes important political and feminist points, specially on account of the fact that women's sexuality is such an important issue for blood hegemonies, being the object of rigorous control by the older generations of each family. That is exactly what happens in the plot of this text, as mother, brother and single, frustrated old aunt, join forces with the police, individual ambition (Comrade Pillai gladly refuses any help to his rival) and the indoctrinated Paravans sense of duty (after all it is Velutha's father who denounces his own son) to make sure Ammu is not allowed to choose a lover, and that the attempted transgression is violently and exemplary punished. The twist in the old story is that the point of view of Roy's narrative has parted ways with high caste patriarchies, and the reader has been led to understand and sympathise with the transgressive lovers, making their punishment look like an unforgivable symptom of an aberrant social order (in fact, to focalise the beating of Velutha through the innocent eyes of children is a master move in narrative technique, totally directing the sympathy of the reader).

Rahel, who lives one generation after Ammu, is not surrounded by such a tough social order as her mother. Symbolically, all the castrating figures, like Baby Kochamma, are old, emigrated or have died. Hence, when the novel finishes, Rahel is left in an "open ended" position, albeit a clearly transgressive one, and I interpret her incest with her brother (Estha) as a healing gesture²⁴² (the gathering of the divided parts of a "Siamese soul") offering the current generation the possibility of living by less demanding ways, if only they dare to assert their emotional needs and risk uncharted ways of living.

Rahel's return to the Ayemenem house is a new beginning, starting from the same place Ammu started her struggle, at exactly the same age (thirty-one). As encouragement, Rahel has the memory of Ammu's words and attitudes, articulating her own genealogy of resistance, by opposition to models of accommodation, like Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. The memory and the example Ammu left behind are precious enough to measure her contribution to a more liberated subjectivity, establishing two alternatives to deviate from patriarchal society: the assertion of women's desire and alliances across class.

A final word on the dutiful patriarchal allies of the text: Baby Kochamma and Mammachi. Baby Kochamma is a single and frustrated old woman who sees in the repression of other lives (like Ammu and the twins) the only solace for her own unhappiness. Since the existing social order prevented her from marrying her beloved Irish monk, this social order has to be preserved at any cost, preferably with punishment for transgressors, otherwise, her accommodation (and corresponding frustration and emptiness) is meaningless. The sole positive view of her life as a "single aunt" is to consider that her love sacrifice was the price to pay for the preservation of collective moral codes. She is led by collective patterns of cultural identity to believe she has chosen to do "the right thing", flattering in this way her bitter, unbalanced ego. Baby Kochamma is important to bring to this critical dialogue (and to the awareness it intends to provoke) the complicit behaviour of some women in relation to the patriarchal system, perpetuating their own losses and limitations as necessary for the survival of the social order.

When this complicity does not make of women agents of patriarchy, it makes them victims, as Mammachi, the silent wife who endures a violent marriage. She does what Ammu was expected to do, and her pitiful existence is considered the moral, correct one. In

²⁴² On this subject see the paper "Sexual/Textual Strategies in *The God of Small Things*", Tirthankar Chanda, *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, Dijon, France, 1997, Autumn, 20:1, 38-44.

the name of this “morality” she accepted the interruption of her violin classes, the beatings with a brass flower vase and the flogging of her daughter, Ammu, with a riding crop.

The violence Pappachi inflicts on his wife and daughter is a theme which combines sexism and colonialism in such a way that it deserves particular discussion, connecting this episode to other similar moments of intersection in the plot of the novel (like the family adoration for Sophie Mol and the indecent proposal of Mr. Hollick to “take care” of Ammu). It is because Pappachi, the mega Anglophile, is totally frustrated with his Indian, colonised identity that he becomes such a despot at home, making of the female bodies at hand (Mammachi and Ammu) the means to compensate for his “effeminate”/powerless position. By beating his women, he is asserting his masculinity in the only way left for him.

According to Ania Loomba, this unfortunate scheme of compensation was neither isolated nor unique:

(...) Colonialism intensified patriarchal relations in colonised lands, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the women as emblems of their culture and nationality.”

(Ania Loomba, 1998: 168)

In this case, tyranny at home is not a form of cultural or nationalist assertion, for Pappachi rejected Indian culture and the only nationality he covets is British, but, as a man, he feels “disenfranchised and excluded” assimilating racial disempowerment as a form of castration. For the colonised subject, the violent subjugation of women becomes perversely important as mimicry of a display of colonial power. As Sara Suleri suggests in her paper “The Rhetoric of English India”²⁴³ the representations of the empire were private, personal, and intimate. Hence, for the individual subject, colonialism was more than politics: it was a form of psychic disempowerment, to be handled in the construction of a sense of identity salvaged from emotional stress and problematic self-images.

²⁴³ Sara Suleri, “The Rethoric of English India”, in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (eds.), Routledge, London and New York, 1995.