

## THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS AND THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

**Kirtika Singh**

Research Scholar  
Department of English & MEL  
University of Allahabad  
Allahabad (U.P.)

Literature may also be studied comparatively; the comparison at times helps in bringing out some important aspects of the compared writers into sharp focus. Similarly, in order to know the artistic quality of novelists, it becomes worthwhile to compare not only their narrative quality, but also their delineation of various themes and characters. In the case of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, a comparative study is relevant because it is common in them to face various challenges in an alien culture in order to know their strategies of survival and existential awareness amid hostile conditions. This paper will deal with similarities between them and certain differences too, as regards the delineation of cultural and social conflicts in their works. This will enable us to make a comparative analysis of the theme of conflict of class and culture to reach the objective with which the present study was undertaken. A comparative study of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai on the point of class and cultural conflict is quite challenging and intellectually piquant. The characters of both Roy and Desai, apart from their class to which they belong, seem to face the onslaughts of a diasporic world where rootlessness, alienation, sense of belonging, maladjustment and maltreatment of the host at the hands of home cause conflicts of all kinds.

Both Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai inherit a multi-cultural home atmosphere which provides them with a profound knowledge of Indian culture. Kiran had a mentor in her mother, an eminent and established novelist who had been nominated for the Booker several times. While reading the entire corpus of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai one comes across an obvious difference that while most of the characters of Arundhati Roy belong to the elite class like the Ipes. On the other hand Desai's characters are a mixed lot, with more emphasis on characters with poor background. Kiran Desai also has her characters of all types but generally they belong to middle class or the underprivileged except the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss*. In *The Inheritance of Loss* we find that characters are poor but they are polished, forward looking and of modern thinking who consider money as important more than anything else. Her characters in *The Inheritance of Loss* suffer from identity crisis. Except Jemubhai, the retired judge, most of the characters are poor but they try hard to change their lives. The judge, who considers himself to have made an identity of his own, has become a migrant in his own country where no one seems to respect him except because of fear. An Anglophile, he loved life with all sorts of comforts but

distanced himself from hubbub of life lived by others. The novelist correctly described him: “He retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow. (IOL 39)

A comparative analysis of the characters of Desai and Roy allows us to keep into consideration the cultural clash and class conflicts. The characters in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* fail to show their maturity as regards their responses to the complexities and cultural awareness in a new world. In this respect even the educated and highly intellectual characters also tumble miserably when it comes to show their reactions to the conflict of culture and class. The most elevated and highly qualified judge Jemubhai is not an exception to this lapse. Jemubhai, who had seen two cultures and has a foreign degree, has a very shoddy appearance, supercilious by temper and egoistic by nature; his double standard shows the prejudice that he had for people. He considers himself to be an Anglophile and his words as law. He is a contradiction to himself, his education, his dignity and his lofty position. He forgets the obligations of in-laws and abuses his wife, who never shows her emotions and remains neutral. The only pleasant memory the couple has, is of a bicycle ride. It is significant to see that Jemubhai changed his wife Bela’s name to Nimi. Moreover the judge does not pay much heed to his wife on returning from England while the latter waited for him with a garland, Desai records the non-existent love between the couple in the following lines:

What would he do with her?

He had forgotten he had a wife.

Jemubhai knew, of course, but she had drifted away like everything in his past, a series of facts that no longer had relevance. This one, though, it would follow him as wives in those days followed their husbands (IOL166). It is quite inexplicable that a man of Jemubhai’s stature thrashes his wife because she had gone to attend a procession. He questioned her as in a court and showered on her violent blows. In addition, he also sent her to her parent’s house. It is reported cryptically that Nimi later dies and leaves behind her daughter to face the rough and tumble of life. The judge proud of his high status also maltreats his servants and keeps them underpaid. The descriptions of his treatment that he meted out to the cook and his granddaughter, Sai, speak volumes of his disdainfulness. He is indifferent to Sai and displays his insensibility coupled with his lack of responsibility. The judge is a traditional patriarch who believes women as objects of gratification. He never shows any concern either for his cook or for his granddaughter. Though exposed to new realities all over the world, he fails to understand the reasons of the GNLG agitations. His pretentious lifestyle had blocked his conscience and he has no humanity at all. He seems to derive a pleasure in being obeyed even by his pet dog, Mutt. He receives a vigorous jerk when a group of young protesters make him pronounce Jai Gorkha and forces him to offer them tea. The disappearance of his dog is taken lightly by the police officials and Jemubhai seems to have been cut down to size. The novelist rightly shows the judge’s anger against system for which he had never compromised even with his family responsibilities. One can see Jemubhai’s remorse in the following lines:

Now Jemubhai wondered if he had killed his wife for the sake of false ideals. Stolen her dignity, shamed his family, shamed hers, turned her into the embodiment of their humiliation. Even they couldn’t accept her then, and her life could be useless after that, and his daughter could be useless and absurd. He had condemned the girl to convent boarding schools,

relieved when she reached a new height of uselessness and absurdity by eloping with a man who had grown up in an orphanage (*IOL* 308).

Biju, the cook's son in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* immigrates to America for livelihood. The lack of opportunities in the native land forced the cook to send his son to U.S., a land of new possibilities. The cook was torn between poverty of his own country and the progress of U.S. Biju's father sent his son to the U.S under the impression of bonanza or a treasure trove but Biju faces there lots of hardship and the indifference of his own countrymen hurt him. Biju hides his difficulties and his letters to his father make the cook live in a utopia. Biju feels to his great sorrow that while his father revelled in the hope of a promising future for everyone. Biju rebuffed at the treatment shell out to him by his Indian acquaintances. He keeps changing his jobs and is at a loss to see the class-consciousness of some Indians who considered themselves superior as they came easily to U.S. Biju's illiteracy and lack of exposure had ruined his chances in America. An observation of their anguish will make things clear. Biju at times thought, 'Shouldn't he return to a life where he might slice his own importance? To Where he might relinquish this overrated control over his own destiny and perhaps he subtracted from its determination altogether?' (*IOL* 268).

Harish Harry, the owner of Gandhi Cafe in Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* fiddled from his responsibility and instead of showing sympathy merely gives a harsh chiding when Biju falls over rotten eggs. Biju feels that in an alien world the native acquaintances also toe the alien line. Biju's alienation cost him dearly and blocked his future vision of accommodating in a world divided by time and place. His Indian upbringing couldn't tolerate the callousness of Indians towards Indians in an alien world. He realizes to his great surprise that caste and class distinction existed everywhere whether it was India or U.S. But Biju stands firm to face the realities of post-colonial, global and postmodern world. He seems to have realized the conflicts where Biju retreats to his crooked fate and emotional faith. Kiran Desai sympathizes with Biju's emotional reasoning: "Year by year, his life was not amounting to anything at all; in a space that should have included family, friends, he was the only one displacing the air. And yet another part of him had expanded; his self consciousness, his self pity -oh the tediousness of it" (*IOL* 268).

Biju feels a new strength being near his father and the utterance of the word Pitaji, melts the father and son whose filial bonding seems to move heaven and earth. The novelist mentions the union in the following lines: "The five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth is apparent." (*IOL* 324). Shaleen Kumar Singh considers Biju's longing as his pining for the love of motherland. He considers Biju as a perfect example of alienation. He rightly says:

Kiran Desai's portrayal of Biju reflects the loveliness of such persons, who runs to and fro in his struggles for existence on account of undocumented immigrant and stumbles from one low paid job to another. His fantasies about the life full of facilities, luxuries that each man aspires to have (51).

The judge in *The Inheritance of Loss* abandons his daughter because she has married a Zoroastrian. Earlier too, Jemubhai had put her in the hostel and had never bothered to know about her. Jemubhai brought Sai, his granddaughter to Cho Oyu but felt his responsibility to be over simply by hiring a tutor for her. Jemubhai never felt grateful, either to his father or to his father-in-law, whose efforts had made him a proud anglophile. Nimi's father spent extravagantly

in marrying her to Jemubhai. Love and marriage also reflects the conflict of class and culture. Jemubhai's marriage with Belawas celebrated in the grandest manner possible. The celebration of Bela and Jemubhai's marriage has been described by Desai in the following lines:

The bride was a polished light-reflecting hillock of jewels, barely able to walk under the gems and metal weight she carried. The dowry included cash, gold, emeralds from Venezuela, rubies from Burma, uncut kundandiamonds, a watch on a watch chain, lengths of woolen cloth for her new husband to make into suits in which travel to England, and in a crisp envelop, a ticket for passage on the SS Strathnaver from Bombay to Liverpool (IOL91).

In Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Sai, the teenaged and orphaned granddaughter whom the judge had never seen before, arrived at his door-step for shelter. Initially the judge was disturbed by her presence and was "worried that she would incite a dormant hatred in his nature that he would wish to rid himself of her or treat her as he had her mother, her grandmother" (210). But ultimately the judge accepted her because he felt that the girl, in whom something of his past had survived, might be able to redeem his life. Sai turned out to be, "more his kin than he had thought imaginable. He found something familiar about her. The granddaughter continued the journey, which had been started by him so long ago. She was like him, "a westernized Indian brought by English nuns, an estranged Indian living in India. She had the similar accent and manners as well as preference for English food. She had the same brooding habit and introspective nature as her reclusive grandfather had. Again, unlike Jemubhai, Sai speaks pidgin Hindi and evinces a marked dislike for the perversities of the convent education that smacks of colonial prejudice and is obsessed with the concepts of purity and sin. The meeting between the retired judge and his granddaughter suggests, historically, the encounter between the past and the present.

The arrival of Sai from Dehradun to Kalimpong also implies the quest of an individual for identity and familial root, which takes place in the backdrop of a disturbed cultural milieu. Sai doesn't have the freedom like a normal family girl. She lives a sheltered life in the company of her grandfather, his cook, and a group of Anglophile neighbours mostly old aged people living for old world charms.

Her immediate neighbour, uncle Potty, a gentleman farmer mostly drunk, had come from a famous family in Lucknow and studied languages in Oxford. There is Potty's friend, a thoroughly Indianized Swiss priest named Uncle Booty, who runs a dairy and dreams of teaching Indians how to make cheese. Apart from these two unusually friendly, old but nimble spirited men who spend each evening drinking wine and reminiscing about bygone days, one finds garrulous Mrs. Sen whose daughter MunMun has gone to America and is now working with CNN; her rival Lola (Lolita) whose daughter Pixie (Piyali) has settled into high profile assignment with BBC, and Lola's sister Noni (Nonita). The rivalry between neighbors is not just over their daughters but surprisingly between England and America. The aged Bengali sisters – one widow and the other spinster – hold the story together with a chatter born of security that comes from living on the fruits of happy retirement. They sip tea and read Jane Austen and Trollope; safe within the boundaries of a rose covered estate they call Mon Ami.

However, Sai's life in Kalimpong, in the presence of her maternal grandfather who remains aloof and his bandy legged chatty cook who loved Sai like her own daughter and calls

her Sai Baby or Babiji although his heart remains with his son in America. It is from the cook, that Sai learns the history of her family; the story of Jemubhai, his neglected wife and estranged daughter. The judge however, employs Noni, the younger of the two Bengali sisters, as a tutor for Sai, to teach her mathematics and science. Over the years both Noni and her sister loved Sai very much. The piece of advice Noni, the spinster whom life has passed by and who has never experienced love at all, gives to Sai is: “if you get chance in life, take it” (IOL69). It is she who boosts Sai’s urge for something beyond the ordinary. But before long Noni feels that she has exhausted her abilities in science and mathematics and requests the judge to find a tutor more qualified in these areas. The judge becomes worried with the irresponsible woman (70). But he writes to the principal of the local college to send someone who can teach these subjects to his granddaughter. The principal recommends Gyan, a poor but promising Nepali youth who has just passed out the college and is looking for a job. Gyan the descendant of a Gorkha mercenary arrives at Cho Oyu to replace Noni as Sai’s tutor.

The home atmosphere in the case of Sai has always been callous. Sai could neither get love of her parents nor of her grandfather. The lack of parental love and loosening of her cultural ardour caused by her utter disinterest in other activities had made her an introvert. She is a victim of enforced book of rules both in her hostel as well as in her home. Her personal growth is discomfited because of the lack of systematic upbringings. Her only channel of communication with the outside world is the cook who also prides being in the service of the judge. Sai’s conflict begins when she interacts with Gyan, though, painful encounters, where she is always made to feel low because of her inheriting colonized psyche. Gyan often charges her to be a slave of the West. Gyan’s baits offend Sai, no doubt, yet it creates in her a curiosity and a desire to know the goings of the outside world. Sai’s parents had different cultural identities and that had perhaps given her no identity at all. She had no choices of her own and as a result could find Ferdinand in the form of Gyan who could titillate her dreams. Sai’s conflict with Gyan was conflict between the alien cultures often blocks the discreet of the native one. This results because of the colonial aftermath which prompts “to elaborate their current problems by freely associating apparently inconsequential details with past situations...allowing them to uncover hidden meanings in their lives and their behaviors” (Lyotard 93).

It is Sai’s helplessness to negate the present. She cannot be considered negating her present like her grandfather because of numberless restrictions, which had sealed her eyes and uplifted her conscience though we often find Sai oozing in comparison at times to see the empty and banned life of the cook in her own house. We can find Sai’s compassion for the cook in the following lines:

It pained Sai’s heart to see how little he had: a few clothes hung over a String, a single razor blade and a silver of cheap brown soap, a Kulu Blanket that had once been hers, a cardboard case with metal clasps That had belonged to the judge and now contained the cook’s papers, the recommendations that had helped him procure his job with the judge, Biju’s letters, papers from a court case fought in a village all the way in Uttar Pradesh. Over the matter of five mango trees that he had lost to his brother (IOL13).

Sai had no one to cling to for support and for succour. She often felt jealous of Biju who received the cook’s love and whose letters made the cook proud and possessive. Sai is an



innocent trapped in the tapestry of borrowed culture and feigned owner. The novelist in a way symbolizes with Sai saying: “she who could speak no language but English and pidgin Hindi, she who could not converse with anyone outside her tiny social stratum” (*IOL176*) There is no denying the fact that Sai plunges herself in a sea of troubles while wildly in love with Gyan. Sai and Gyan are poles apart not only in their upbringing and education but also in terms of problems and penchants. Sai continues to remain colonized because the colonizer never provided her freedom she wanted. Both in life as well as in love she remains colonized where her in-breathings of post-colonial and post-modern realities mock at her. It is quite relevant to quote AshisNandy:

This colonialism colonizes mind in addition to bodies and releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process it helps to generalize the concept of the modern west from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The west is now everywhere, within the west outside, in structures and minds (Qtd by Nityanandam 60).

The love story between Sai and Gyan, which builds the core of the Indian part of the narrative, is unfolded in the backdrop of turbulent socio-political surroundings of India. Their love affair also presents a conflict of class and culture. The time is mid 1980 and various separatist forces are attempting to attack and break down the idea of India as a nation. Things are falling apart under the impact of decentralizing forces and the centre cannot hold the nation together. Different ethnic groups started giving outlet to their feeling of deprivation and sense of injustice in terms of militancy and bloodshed. It was the Indian Nepalese this time, fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. “They want their own country, or at least their own estate, in which to manage their own affairs” (*IOL9*).

The entire Darjeeling district converted into an anarchic insurgency leading to the portioning of people and their intermingled history, displacement, migration and loss. Sai and her lover are helplessly drawn, like many thousand ordinary people, into the convolution of larger politics. The insurgents threaten their lives to descend into chaos until they too are forced to face their colliding interests. Both Gyan and Sai are conscious of the strong attraction from both sides. Sai finds Gyan attractive with his intelligence, serious eyes and curly hair. Gyan on the other hand, runs away at the end of his tuition without looking at Sai who has produced a powerful effect on him. Although the judge warns his granddaughter against any involvement with Gyan( ‘I hope that tutor of yours doesn’t get any funny ideas’), she eagerly and restlessly waits for him. Gyan finds himself torn between two conflicts-the one is Sai’s love and other that of his love for a separate identity for the Nepalese. Finding himself unsuitable for Sai, he tries to sever all his romantic ties and gravitates to the first available political cause in his search for a genuine identity and a better life. He joins the ethnic nationalist movement largely an opportunity to express his long suppressed fury and frustration: “He told the story of his great grandfather, his great uncles. And do you think they got the same pension as the English of equal rank? They fought to death, but did they earn the same salary? All the other anger in the canteen greeted his, clapped his anger on the back” (*IOL 160*).Gyan realizes that there existed a wide gap between his station and that of Sai. He feels ashamed of his irresponsible romance with Sai, and is under the impression that his romance is an impediment to gain adulthood. Gyan wears a nationalistic

posture and condemns Sai for her colonial mannerism and mental slavery of the west. His abomination and his disillusionment with Sai, becomes clear when he speaks:

Why do you celebrate Christmas? You are Hindus and you don't celebrate Id or Guru Nanak's birthday even Durga Puja or Tibetan new-year...you are like slaves, that's why you are, running after the West, embarrassing yourself. It's because of people like you we never get anywhere (*IOL163*).

Sai becomes an innocent sufferer of Gyan's hatred against high class and their cultures. Sai inherited cultural difference from her parents who had a runaway marriage. The father, a Zoroastrian and the mother a Hindu, Sai was a product of a post-colonial world, yet he hated the convent. Sai's endeavor to prove her action goes unheard. Gyan is overwhelmed by his anti-establishment conflict and becomes blind to the tender feelings of his beloved. Instead he abuses his beloved for the lack of self-respect and condemns her for the slavish imitation of the West: "it's clear all you want to do is copy" (164) Gyan manipulates Sai's innocence but later realized his mistake. A few months later after Gyan quickly breaks his romantic bond with Sai to join the movement of Gorkhaland whole-heartedly, Sai finds him at a GNLFF rally near Darjeeling Gymkhana where she goes with her neighbours to exchange library books. But to her surprise, Gyan refuses to acknowledge her:

She opened her mouth to shout to him, but the moment he caught sight of her, too, and the dismay on his face was followed by a slight ferocious gesture of his head and a cold narrow look in his eye that was a warning not to approach (*IOL215*).

Sai continues to tolerate the humiliation caused by Gyan's refusal to recognize her in Darjeeling. She feels embarrassed of his disgraceful behavior with her in the presence of her friends. Sai tries to solace herself and accept the loss of love gracefully. But her effort fails and she can't either forget Gyan or fight her impatience. So, as curfew is lifted, Sai starts out searching for Gyan. But the mission proves to be disastrous. She is shocked by the utter penury in Bong Basti where Gyan lives with his family:

There were houses like everywhere...common to those who had struggled to the far edge of the middle class just the edge, only just, holding on desperately- but where at every moment being undone, the house slipping back, not into the picturesque poverty that tourists like to photograph but into something truly dismal modernity proffered in its meanest form, brand new one day, in ruin the next (*IOL256*).

She feels ashamed of herself for having been attached inadvertently with this poor enterprise and is full of remorse for such hypocrisy and pretension. Love is consumed by ferocity and hatred and their inter-communal romance is hindered by big reasons beyond their understanding and control. Sai returns home slowly, wriggling in the pain of insult and unanswered love, and feels amazed to find how the history of her family repeats itself in her own life. After the terrible row over the issue of father Booty, Gyan is locked up by his family in order to prevent him from mixing with Sai and participate in the violent movement. His disenchantment with the GNLFF movement is followed by an irresistible sense of guilt. Gyan realizes that he will never be happy and innocent again after what he has done to Sai and her family.

If Gyan is a victim of ethnic conflict, Biju is a victim of imbalance in global economy, where poor people are fascinated to illegally migrate to U.S. In the novel *TheInheritanceofLoss*, Biju tried desperately to stay afloat in the underground economy of New York City, bobbing from one ill-paid job to another. The novel records the multicultural reverberation of the globalized world in the new millennium. Living an oppressed and abused life in the restaurant kitchens of New York, the power centre of global economy and the destination of worldwide fortune seekers, Biju came into the multicultural ambience of new world: “Above the restaurant was French, but below in the kitchen it was Mexican and Indian. And when a Paki was hired, it was Mexican, Indian, Pakistani” (*IOL* 21). Always dogged by fear that he would be identified as an illegal worker, he hopped from one restaurant to another and was acquainted with the glaring inequality among of economic globalization and the sharp divide between the first world and the third, the colonial and the native, the rich and the poor. Kiran Desai brilliantly charts the map of Indian Diaspora in her novel but her focus shifts mainly between the sleepy Himalayas of Kalimpong with its colonial heritage and New York. Biju in *TheInheritanceofLoss* suffered conflicts not only of culture but also of class. An impoverished and struggling immigrant in New York, he was always on the run, to simply to fill out a scanty existence. Desai explores the pain of the unregistered immigrant in America and depicts their deep sorrow through the ramblings of Biju whose dreams of an elegant and exciting life turned into a nightmare while he, lonely and forlorn, led a miserable existence in the unstable anonymity of New York. Desai’s description of Biju’s life in America is interspersed with moments of tender and lyrical nostalgic reflections of home back in the mountains of Kalimpong. Lying in his basement bed Biju dreams of home, of his village, of his father, of his grandmother, of the sound that the grass made as the breeze wafted through them, of the way the stream meandered, of the buffaloes in the river. When talking to his father over the telephone, Biju feels the atmosphere of his home.

The atmosphere of Kalimpong reached Biju all the way in New York; it swelled densely on the line ... he could hear the croak trrrrwhonk, wee wee butt ock of frogs in the spinach, the rising note welding imperceptibly with the evening. (*IOL* 230)

Biju symbolizes the predicament of the illegal immigrant who has no future in his own country and who must tolerate deplorable conditions if he is to work illegally in the United States. Always in fear and often betrayed by employees, Biju suffers furthermore because his father was so proud that his son was doing well in America, and writes to him constantly asking him to help the children of his equally poor friends to find work in the United States. Biju’s friend Saeed Saeed, from Zanzibar, faces similar pressures from his family. Bill Ashcroft admits that the crisis of cultural identity in the world view is created by the “cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model” (9) besides, a cultural conflict, the reconstruction of the past and the nostalgia of the homeland hinders their perceptions. Biju in the moments of solitude feels nervous because in New York, innocence never prevails. However, the atrocious sound of ambulance, fire engine and subway cause convulsions in his heart. Cultural trading often emerges as a tool for another mode of marginalization. In America they have no choices of their own, neither of assimilation nor of retreat. They are treated as the burden of third world countries. They are absorbed in the progressive society of America not as an extension of their ‘self’. Kiran Desai writes in the novel: “Then, of course, there were those who lived and died



illegal in America and never saw their families, not for ten years, twenty, thirty, never again” (IOL 99).

Both the novels *TheInheritanceofLoss* and *TheGodofSmallThings* depict the social realities of India as caste, class, conflicts, exploitation and the proverbial poverty. Roy’s *TheGodofSmallThings* has strengthened the tradition set up by highlighting Indian values, Indian culture and Indian society with its beauty and ugliness. Roy is deeply rooted in her native and national culture is evident from her themes, style, landscape, and images. First and foremost the Indian landscape has led the novelist to set her locale in Ayemenam, a small village in Kerala. The locale is comprehensively described with its climate, culture, customs, caste, conventions, flora, fauna, food habits, religious affiliations, occupations and professions people are engaged in. The novel begins with the description of geographical climatic conditions of this place in the month of May:

May in Ayemenam is hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks....dust green trees. Red bananas ripen the nights are clear but suffused with sloth and sullen expectation (1).

The regular phenomenon of the onset of south west monsoon, which provides much needed reprieve to the local people, is described meticulously. “Brick walls turn moss green. Pepper vines snake up electric poles. Wild creeper burst through laterite banks and spill across the flooded roads. Boats ply in the bazaars. And small fish appear in the puddles that fill the PWD potholes on the highways. The river and fishing is an integral part of the life of people living in the coastal areas. This is how the novelists describe the scene:

The first third of the river was their (twins) friend. Beforethe Really Deep began. They knew the slippery stone steps (thirteen) before the slimy mud began. They knew the afternoon weed that flowed in words from the backwaters of Komarakom. They knew the smaller fish. the flat, foolish pallathi, the silver Paral, the wily, whiskered Koori, the sometimes Karimeen. Here Chacko had taught them to swim. (203)

Like R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi, the locale with its people and culture comes alive in front of the reader. Unity in diversity –the national ethos of Indian culture and tradition is the salient feature of this place also. The people belonging to different religions and ethnicity are living together. The setting of the novel which is Kerala different religious groups are living together like the Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The upper caste Hindus, the Syrian Christians who figure centrally in the novel are caste conscious and practice untouchability. Though they are part of the national culture yet at the same time they maintain their cultural identity and ethos. Pappachi’s family is a case in point. They are Indians but they never allow their cultural identity to get submerged. Roy, herself a Syrian Christian through her first hand experience with place and people creates successfully a true Indian locale in her novel. She also gives a true picture of the dalits with their changing responses to the caste subjugation through the depiction of VellyaPappen and his two sons Kuttapen and Velutha, the three types of dalits in Indian society viz., the docile conformist, the dissatisfied paralytic and rebel who moves for equality and stakes his life.

In *Annihilation of Caste*, B.R. Ambedkar vehemently criticizes the degrading practice of untouchability: “I do not believe that we can build up a free society in India so long as there is a trace of this ill treatment and suppression of one class by another” (Ambedkar30). This

misconception is deeply rooted in the mind set of Indian people. Velutha commits another heinous guilt perhaps unpardonable in Indian society, an untouchable son falling in love with a woman of an upper caste family. He spontaneously drawn towards Ammu, an estranged and unloved daughter of Pappachi and they surpassed the love laws by establishing physical relationship with each other. His father VellyaPappen is shocked to hear about this relationship and brings the disturbing matter to the notice of Mammachi. She is shocked and spits venom on him. Velutha and VellyaPappen are representative characters who present the debasing and discriminated life being lived by the people belonging to the lower caste of the Indian society. The novelist objurgates the society which denies dignified and decent life to certain people because they are born in a 'low caste'. Velutha tried to live a composed life but becomes a victim of collective hatred of his own class (his father for instance), workers belonging to upper caste, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, and police which only protects those who are protected by unprincipled politicians. The case of police savagery and custodial deaths of innocent are rising. It is a perturbing development which is shaming for Indian society. Velutha's custodial death exhibits the unjustifiable link between police and politicians. In a welfare state, the police are meant to preserve the innocent and law abiding people but police only follow the instructions of the politicians particularly those who are in power. It is a harsh reality of Indian society. Instances like this reflecting the Indian society with its dehumanizing institutions dwarfing the human beings are scattered all throughout the novel.

Other distressful and disquieting feature of Indian society which Roy has foregrounded in the traditional hierarchical set up hindering the development of a personal, individual concept of autonomy is the Indian woman. Even though equal rights for women have been given by the Indian Constitution, actual version of equal rights to everyday life has been slow. The society as Roy showcases in *The God of Small Things* is very stern to those women who defy the established codes of social morality. If a woman tries to marry outside her community, religion or marries within her community without her parent's consent she is considered a maverick and her act brings disgrace and dishonor to the family. These women lose their respect and recognition first in the family and then in the society. Ammu, Pappachi's daughter is not allowed to continue her studies because her father thought that educating of a daughter was an unnecessary expense for him. And his brother Chacko has been sent to Oxford for studies. This shows the patriarchal bias in the society against women.

Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenam other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework. Since her father did not have enough money to raise a suitable dowry, no proposals came Ammu's way. Two years went by. Her eighteenth birthday came and went. Unnoticed, or at least unremarked upon by her parents. Ammu grew desperate (38).

Society does not give equal rights and space to women. Ammu is a representative character who shows the predicament of women in a patriarchal society. She resisted the male dominated conventions so she has no 'Locus Standi' in the society. Like any other woman in Indian society Ammu, an estranged wife, lives a pathetic life in her parents' house constantly subjected to abuse and harshness. The society with its hypocrisy and double standard of morality

punishes the woman but on the other hand it is justified in the name of man's need. Chacko, who is separated from his wife Margaret, has secret sexual relationships with female factory workers with the tacit approval of Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. In society the character and conduct of a woman is judged from the different and partial codes of morality. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* depicts the caste and gender subalternity from a historical perspective. In the Indian cultural context, subalternity occurs in the name of caste, class and gender. Arundhati Roy established herself as a postcolonial writer with the publication of *The God of Small Things* in 1997. She, like other post-colonial writers, tries to throw light on the cultural colonialism that prevails even after the colonial period. After a long period of imperialism, Britishers left India but the cultural imperialism still exists. The minds of the Indian people are colonized in a most perilous way and the decolonization of minds is one of the aims of post-colonial writers. The first step for colonized people in searching a voice and identity is to reclaim their own past. For centuries, the European colonizing power will have devalued the nations, past, seeing its pre-colonial era as a pre-civilized limbo, or even as a historical void.

Roy points out the blind trust in the minds of Indians towards the colonizer. Over-devotion to the colonizer's culture is one such symptom of the post-colonialism. In India, even today, a large number of people place the British culture and language on a high pedestal and the vernacular languages and culture get only a second rate consideration. The mind of Baby Kochamma, the ex-nun in *The God of Small Things*, is colonized to an extreme level. She gives undue significance to learning English language, even eavesdrops relentlessly on the twins' private conversations, and whenever she catches them speaking in Malayalam, she levies a small fine which is deducted at source, from their pocket money. She makes them write impositions a hundred times each that they would speak only in English. The term post-colonialism has been rapidly undergoing changes since the Second World War. The term refers to the post-independent period but in the late 1970's the term was used by a few literary critics to characterize the several cultural effects of colonization. The period embarks on a mission to reproduce the colonial experiences of the subalterns in literary works. In her novel *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy has given importance to ecology and subalternity as major themes. Arundhati Roy established herself as a post-colonial writer with the publication of *The God of Small Things* in 1997. She, like other post-colonial writers, tries to highlight the cultural colonialism that prevails even after the colonial period. After a long period of imperialism, Britishers left India but the cultural imperialism prevails. The minds of the Indian people are colonized in the most dangerous way and the decolonization of minds is one of the aims of post-colonial writers:

The first step for colonized people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past for centuries the European colonizing power will have devalued the nation's past, seeing its pre-colonial era as a pre-civilized limbo, or even as a historical void (Barry 192).

Roy points out the blind admiration in the minds of the Indian people towards the colonizer. Most of the Indians acknowledge the notion of the superiority of the British culture and language. The mind of Baby Kochamma, the ex-nun is colonized to the highest level.

Baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twins' private conversations, and whenever she caught them speaking in Malayalam, she levied a small fine which was deducted at source. From their pocket money.

She made them write lines- ‘impositions’ she called them-I will always speak in English, I will always speak in English. A hundred times each. When they were done, she scored them out with her red pen to make sure that old lines were not recycled for new punishments (36).

Over devotion to the colonizer’s culture is the one symptom of post-colonialism. In India, even today, a large number of people place the English language in a high pedestal and vernacular language and culture get only a second rate consideration. As Roy says:

The foreign returnees, in wash’n’ wear suits and rainbow sunglasses....With love and a lick of shame that their families who had come to meet them were so...gawkish.Look at the way they dressed! Surelythey had more suitable airport wear! Why did Malayaliees have such awful teeth? And the airport itself! More like a local bus depot! The birdshit on thebuilding! Oh the spitstains on the kangaroos! Oho! Going to the dogs India is (140).

Arundhati Roy mocks at Baby Kochamma’s colonized mind which can stand only the smell of Irish- Jesuit. When Chacko along with his family goes to the airport to welcome Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol, Baby Kochamma tries to impress her sister-in-law like an apprentice tries to impress his boss by exhibiting her knowledge in Shakespeare. Baby Kochamma greets them:

Hello Margaret,’ and Hello, Sophie Mol.’ She said Sophie Mol was so beautiful that she reminded her of a wood-sprite. Of Ariel. ‘D’ you know who Ariel was? Baby Kochamma asked Sophie Mol. Ariel in *The Tempest*? Sophie Mol said that she didn’t ...All this was of course primarily to announce her credentials to Margaret Kochamma.To set herself apart from the sweeper class (144).

In postcolonialism, there would be a conquering of the culture of the colonial country by that of the colonizer. There may not be any external pressure from the part of the colonizer to accept their culture. But instead the people in the earlier colonies try to accept the colonizer’s culture. Their colonized minds set the standards and those standards will be in favour of the superiority of the colonizer’s culture. Ammu and her family go to watch the film ‘The Sound of Music’ three times. Pappachi who had all the devotion to English people can’t believe that “an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (42). He, like Chacko, tries to imitate English people even in the dress code “Until the day he died, even in the stifling Ayemenam heat, every single day, Pappachi wore a well pressed three piece suit and his gold pocket watch” (49).Chacko uses the word ‘Anglophile’ to refer to Pappachi and he is aware that he belongs to a family of anglophiles (52). Colonization enters even the minds of younger generation. The children, Estha and Rahel, are familiar with many English works for instance, *Jungle Book*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Tempest*.The OrangedrinkLemondrink Man looks astonished at the boy who sings English songs and talks about pocket money. He expresses his respect towards the family which has some British connections when Ammu reveals the arrival of Sophie Mol from London. “Their cousin is coming tomorrow...added casually, ‘From London.’ ‘From London?’ A new respect gleamed from Uncle’s eyes. For a family with London connections” (110). When Rahel comes back from America, Comrade Pillai expresses the same admiration. He introduces Rahel to his son:



‘PunyanKunju’sson?Benaan John Ipe? Who used to be in Delhi? Comrade Pillai said... ‘his daughter’s daughter is this. In America now, isn’t it. It wasn’t a question. It was sheer admiration (129).

A postcolonial writer has a mind which is not free from the colonization. He is a true representative of the people living in a country which once was a colony. A post-colonial writer has

...double identity as both colonizer and colonized, and it is the recognition of such double identities which is one of the strengths of the post-colonialist view. Thus the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, publishing his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, in 1958, was criticized by an early reviewer for affecting to identify with African villagers when actually his university education and his broadcasting job in the capital city of Lagos should make him identify, it was implied, with the values of ‘civilization’, supposedly brought to Africa by Europeans” (Barry 194).

Similarly, Arundhati Roy also exposed to a hybrid culture just like any other Indian who lives in the post-colonial India. Her masterly use of English language shows the influence of the colonizer’s language on the writer. In *The Tempest*, Caliban, the representative of the colonized, uses his colonizer’s language against colonization or at least to curse him. Though Arundhati Roy is also the owner of a colonized mind, she develops “a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big” (181-182). Subaltern themes have been depicted in the fullest by prominent writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Toni Morrison and Arundhati Roy. These writers had an inner thirst within them to celebrate the fragments of subaltern identity. The conditions of the subalterns vary in each sub-continent and these writers have catered to the immediate needs of the people. The individual attentions to the problems of the subalterns by the writers have resulted in a progressive change in the society. Subalternity of gender and castes dominate in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. Women and the untouchables are subordinated to the dominant culture of the male world. They are rendered as destitute even in this modern world. As Prasad says:

In the *Manusmriti*, the law book of Hindu social code and domestic life, we see the pathetic plight of the untouchable, who are deprived of gaining knowledge particularly the Vedic knowledge. An untouchable, this book says, has no right to go to the temples; no liberty to listen to the incantations of the Vedas or the other great scriptures. They are also deprived of the right of reading and studying the language (5).

To fight the menace of untouchability, one should decolonize the mind to accept the fact that all are equal. Arundhati Roy in her novel *The God of Small Things* celebrates Velutha as the God of small things and the God of loss. He is the Christ like figure in the novel, and he is forced to carry the burden for the good of other people. Arundhati Roy as a post-colonial writer takes up the small things in the society, such as the problems of women and the dalits. She immortalizes them as Gods in the society and celebrates their angelic existence.



### Works Cited

- Ambedkar, B.R., *Annihilation of Caste*, Dalit Classic Series—I, New Delhi: Bluemoon Books.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffen. Ed. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practices in Post Colonial Literature*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., reprint. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Chennai: T.R. Publications, 1999. Print.
- Desai, Kiran, *The Inheritance of Loss*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006. Print.
- Liotard, Jean Francois. *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985*. Pefanis, Julian and Thomas, Morgan (eds.). Sydney: PowerPublication, 1991. Print.
- Nityandam, Indira. *JhumpaLahiri's Quest for Identity through Interpreter of Maladies*. "JhumpaLahiri: The Master Story Teller. A Critical Response to Interpreter of Maladies". New Delhi: Khosla Publishing House. 2002. Print.
- Prasad, Amar Nath. "Arundhati Roy: A Novelist of New Style." *The Critical Studies Of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*. Ed. JaydipsinhDodiya and JoyaChakravarty. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1999. Print.
- Roy, Arundhati, *The God of Small Things*, New Delhi: Penguin Books Ltd., 2002. Print.
- Singh, Shaleen Kumar. "Reflective Moods in *The Inheritance of Loss*". Shine, Pattukkottai: Victory Press, 2008. 50-54.