

Indian Fiction in English
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Lecture- 25
Reading The God of Small Things

Hello everyone welcome to today session we are today looking at this novel which needs no introduction The God of Small Things at the outset let we also remind you that this lecture is about various ways in which this novel the god of small things could be read. This is a novel with multiple interpretative possibilities. And hence it also requires a very different kind of which a fuse away the available material.

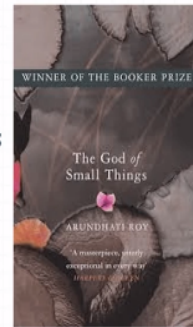
The secondary material the critical material written about the god of small things you realize that this is a novel which is at part the night children by Salman Rushdie. And quite write fully this is also celebrated as the next big thing that happen in the history of Indian fiction and English after Salman Rushdie. This is a brokered event this is also one such novel which change the trajectory of Indian English writing which brought Indian English writing to the International and International attention after Rushdie.

While reading novel like the god of small things it is important to keep in mind that the significance is in the narration more than the story more than the plot structure. The importance needs to be given to the way in which the story is written. The way in which the story gets narrated and told to the reader, for the same reason perhaps Arundhati Roy has epigraphy at the outset of the novel a never again will a single story be told as though it is the only one.

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The epigraph

- "Never again will a single story be told as though it's the only one"



Here we find Roy challenging the idea of a single story and exposing as and a letting is to the possibilities of multiple stories and multiple narratives which are waiting to be told. And this is not the only narration that is possible she is reminding as even before the story telling begins.

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What is it about?

- A book about how small things affect people's behaviour and their lives
- The childhood experiences of Estha and Rahel, fraternal twins - whose lives are destroyed by the 'love laws', "the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much" (Roy 33)
- "On one level, it's about growing up, but it's also about a caste-ridden society and about what it is to be a woman in a male society. . . The history is there, but as natural as the air one breathes. Her achievement is that she's enlarged the imaginative field" (Alok Rai)

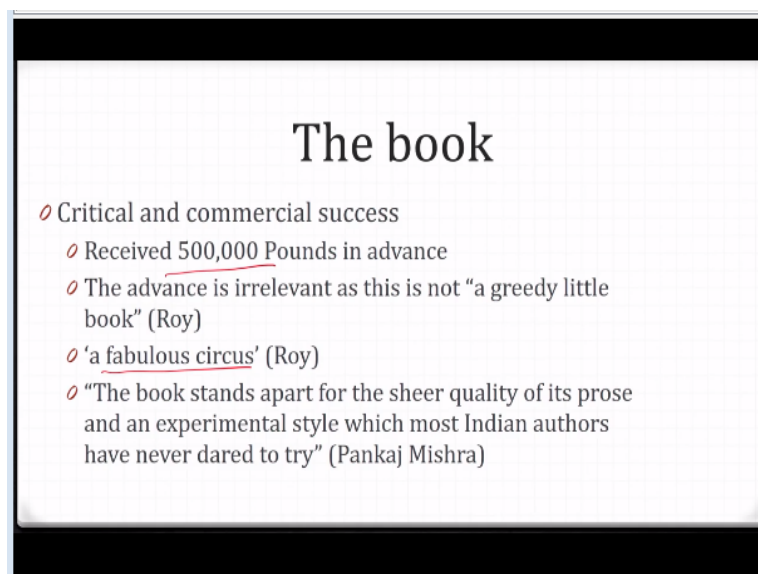
So, what is this novel about the god of small things this is about how small things affect people's behavior and their lives. And this is an account of the childhood experiences of the fraternal twins Estha and Rahel who were also the protagonist and their life are being destroyed by what the novel refers to as the 'love laws'. And this is how Roy talks about the love laws the laws that lay down who should be loved and how, and how much.

We find this statement that appears fairly early in the novel as one that finding aspects of this entire plot structure of this entire narratives scheme. And different people had different things to say about the god of small things according to the critic Alok Rai he points out at one level it is about growing up. But it is also about a caste-ridden society and about what it is to be a woman in a male society the history is there.

But as natural as the air one breathes, her achievement is that she is enlarged the imaginative field look at the different kinds of words which are being used here about growing up. It is about caste it is about gender we find history sweeping in and there is also this pre-quality of imagination at work. So, this is treat which is rolled many things into one which you would also realize when you begin reading the novel.

While talking about the reception of this work this was a critical and commercial success at the same time.

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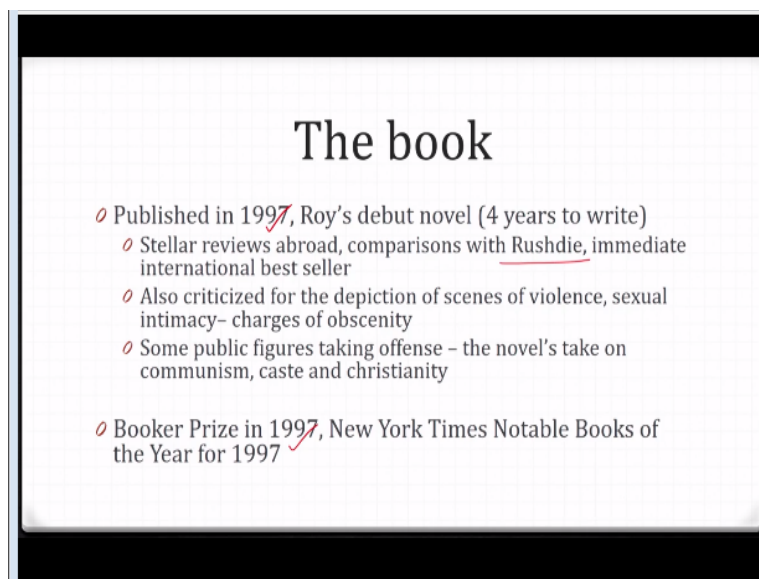
This if one might to believe what we find online this is a work which received 500,000 pounds in advance for different publishers. But Arundati Roy is another comes across is a different sort of a person if different kind of an author among the others in her own lead. She does not seem to care much about the size of the advance or the kind of fame that this work brighter and she spoke

about this advance that it is irrelevant as this is not a greedy little book referring to the god of small things.

And the incidence success that she enjoyed within the national as well as in the International seen was seen as just a fabulous circus by her. This is how she viewed the success of the book and according to Pankaj Mishra also happens to be the former editor of (()) (05:00). And the one whose responsible in bringing this book 12 line of International publishers he remarked even when he had read the manuscript that this book stands apart for the sheer quality of it is prose.

And in an experimental style which most Indian authors said never dared to try, so this certainly has been acknowledged and claimed as the biggest thing that happens after Rushdie. In the post Rushdie moment takes stock of the many literary when that is succeeded Rushdie it is possible to say that this event this literary event of the god of small things which happens 16 years after precious but nights children, this certainly is the next big event this was published in 1997.

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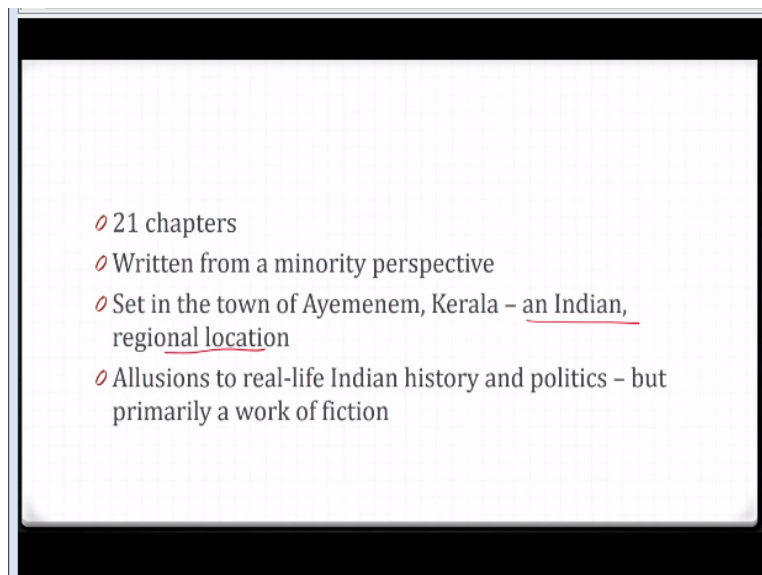


And this was Arundhati Roy debut novel it took a 4 years to write this, this receives Stellar reviews abroad there were many comparisons that the critics sort to make with Rushdie. And also we came an immediate International best seller but she was also crinite more at the home for the depiction of the scenes of violence of the scenes of sexual intimacy which have part of the novel.

She was there was even legal suit filed against stuff for childish of obscenity and some public figures took offence because of the novels take on communism caste in Christianity this definitely ruffled and number of feathers as it was a critical take on many things that we take ran to another day to day basis like the political part to use or the caste system or even Christianity of religion which is apparently which is superficially presented as a religion which is immune to the many difficulties.

So, the many children just of caste coming back to the kind of reception that this book received at one the Booker prize in 97. And it was also listed among the New York Times Notable Books of the year for the year 1997 talking about the structure of this novel.

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This has 21 chapters and the titles of these chapters fascinating the interesting just like a Rushdie's midnights children had interesting titles. The first one is paradise because and preserves which also remains is about the pickles and the chutneys and Rushdie's midnights children. And it has got range of different kinds of narratives structures spread across 21 chapters.

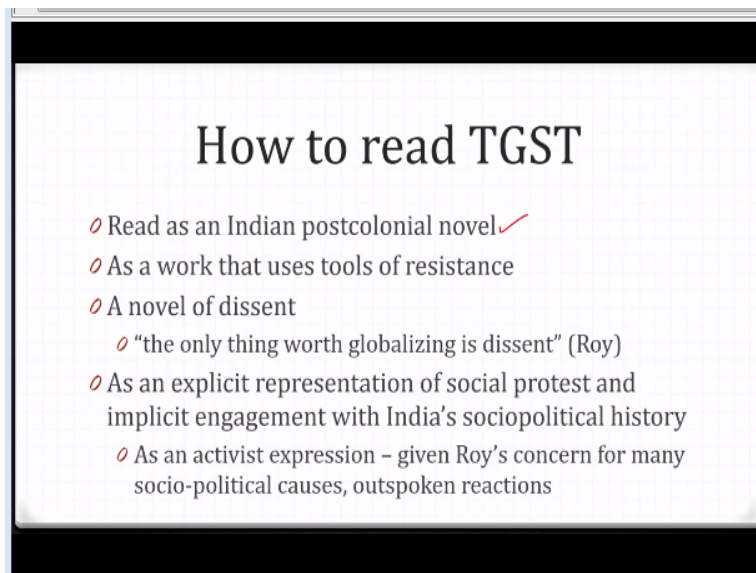
And this Normans essentially written from a minority perspective the point of view is from that of a child there are these two children Estha and Rahel who are narrating this. But from a third person narrative this is certain the town of Ayemenem in Kerala. So, we can say that it is an

Indian and a regional location and this is one those novels which is not set in (()) (08:05) cosmopolitan cities of India not in Madras, Bombay, Calcutta or Bangalore.

But in a very village like setting within Kerala we find a number of illusions to real life in Indian history and politics. And this novel almost throughout but also needs to keep in mind this is primarily a work of fiction. While we are being attentive to the history and the politics that the novel engages with one should not forget that it should also be seen within the frame works of fiction with this book belongs. As pointed out in the beginning this is a novel with multiple interpretative possibilities.

So, the question how to read the god of small things may have varied responses and different kinds of answers.

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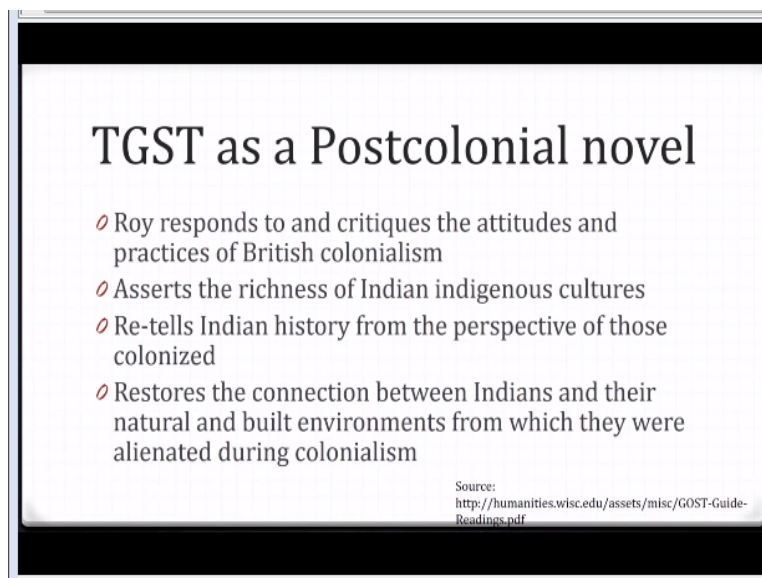


This could be read as an Indian postcolonial novel it can be read as a work that uses tools of resistance many have try to also read the authors life along with that tools of resistance used when this novel. It could be read as a novel of dissent and Arudati Roy herself has said that the only thing worth globalizing is dissent. We can of course find a number of works looking at this novel dissent.

And this can also be read as a narrative representation of social protest and in implicit engagement with India's sociopolitical history. And again this activist expression takes the forefront of a most of the readings about the god of small things. Because Roy has self as a person has always come across sound was got concern for many social political causes and they were outspoken reactions from her part which where critic and which continue to be critiqued for various reasons.

I will reading the god of small things as a postcolonial novel as something that we shall be doing as part of the scores.

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We find that Roy in a typical postcolonial fashion responding to and critiquing the attitudes and practices of British colonialism though this is set in a contemporary period. We find that there are resonances of British colonial period there are certain wastages of colonial practices which continue to dominate the ways in which the society a structure and the ways in which individuals behave judge each other or influence their family lives or their lives outside.

And there is a certain way in which this novel tries to a (()) (10:43) the richness of Indian indigenous cultures making it impossible to break it down into neat comfortable categories like the British used to for convenience of understanding. Roy has trying to shows that this

categorization perhaps is not as easy as one would imagine. You talk about Christianity a talk about communism.

And there this in (()) (11:10) perhaps in understanding it was handed down as a result of the colonial past that there are certain areas which would continue to immune to the evils of caste or the systemic suppression or pressure of caste. We find real challenging role of those aspects through this narratives space. And accordingly we find a retailing of Indian history from the perspective of those colonized.

Whether we are read with that story or not, whether we would like to accepted different version or not that is a different question all together. But the important thing is that Roy mixed possible for these stories to be told from the perspective with the colonized it is not to say that Roy has a one who initiated this telling this mod of telling. We found that emerging from the early 80s onwards with the watershed event that happen in the form of midnights children.

We find Roy's novel further cementing those ideas and further exenterating the possibilities of Indian English writing. And we also find this novel as a post colonial novel restoring the connection between Indians and their natural built in (()) (12:29) from which there were alienated during colonialism. This is an aspect do which we shall not be going into detail but we one can definitely locate a number of works which talk about the landscape and the environmental concerns in the context of this novel. What makes the god of small things extremely interesting.

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Narrative features

- Third person narration – adopts children's thoughts/images/language✓
- Fragmented structure - Narrative time does not correspond with chronological time
- Employs alternating narrative threads, flashbacks and flashforwards
- Form and content are interconnected
- "The structure was the most challenging part of writing the book. It begins at the end and ends in the middle . . . If it had been a straight, linear narrative, it would have meant something altogether different. Each ordinary moment becomes more heightened, more poignant because it is viewed through the complex lens of both past and present" (Roy)

And distinctive is perhaps it is narrative features which were one could say almost unprecedented while Rushdie totally broke away from the colonial straight jacket in terms of language in terms of narrative techniques. We find that in Roy there is a local flavor also which is being induced into this narrative technique into this already liberated already nuanced and already different narratives structure.

This novel is narrated and the third person narrative in the third person voice but at the same time it very skillfully adopts the thoughts emerges a language of children and the form of Estha's and Rahel's speech and thoughts this a fragmented structure to this entire book narrative time does not correspond with chronological time. So, one may have a difficult task trying to figure out the chronological order in which events happened.

It is not a difficult read but the no-linearity does require the reader to engage with it in a more focused way in a more intense way. We also find the novel employing alternating narrative threads there are flashbacks and flash-forwards. There would be certain instances which get referred to in the first chapter but one would get to know what exactly happened in that instance perhaps in a one of the later chapters.

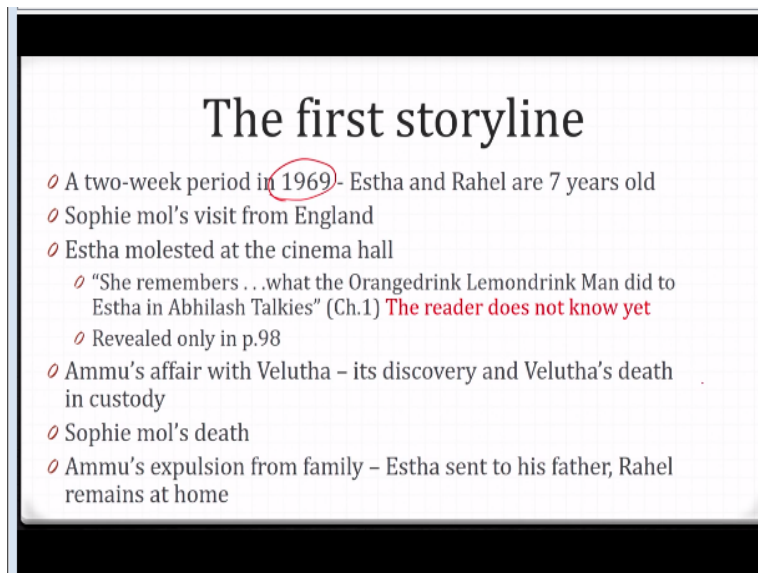
So, it requires this multiple connections to make sense of this novel as a whole you may recall that similar strategies were employed in Amitav Ghosh shadow lines as well, where them itself

played an important role in determining the narrative experience. Roy herself has spoken about the challenging narrative technique that she adopted in her own words the structure was the most challenging part of writing the books.

It begins at the end and ends in the middle if it had been a straight, linear narrative. It would have meant something altogether different each ordinary moment becomes more heightened, more poignant. Because it is viewed through the complex lens of both past and present. And this is being done simultaneously as we would get to know and the complexities which are inherent in this kind of a reading is also taken away is also almost wished away.

Because it is in the form of the thoughts emerges in languages of the children a brief outline of the way the story is structured will be helpful for you to make sense of the novel. There are basically two important story lines and a set of back stories in this work.

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The first storyline

- ◊ A two-week period in 1969- Estha and Rahel are 7 years old
- ◊ Sophie mol's visit from England
- ◊ Estha molested at the cinema hall
 - ◊ "She remembers . . . what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies" (Ch.1) **The reader does not know yet**
 - ◊ Revealed only in p.98
- ◊ Ammu's affair with Velutha – its discovery and Velutha's death in custody
- ◊ Sophie mol's death
- ◊ Ammu's expulsion from family – Estha sent to his father, Rahel remains at home

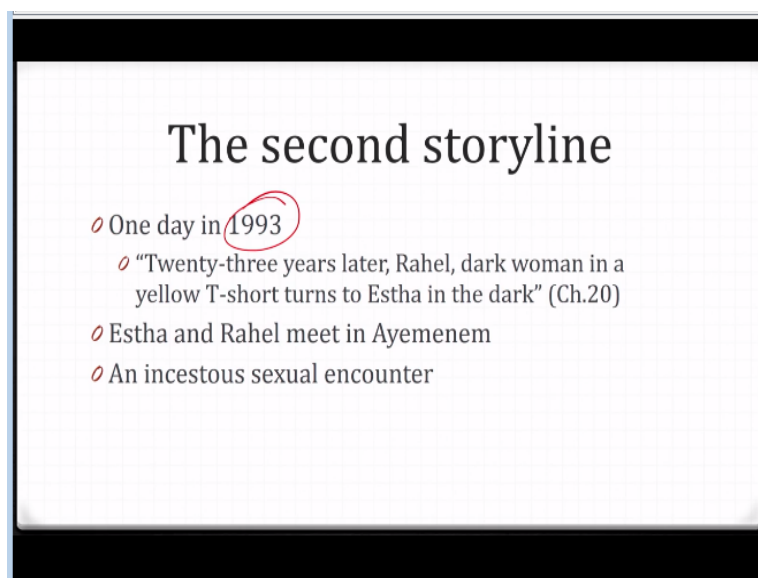
The first story line is a two-week period in the year 1969 during this period Estha and Rahel are 7 years old and this is the period which witnesses Sophie mol's visit from England. And this is the time period during which Estha is molested at the cinema hall there is a reference to this initially in chapter 1 where Rahel remembers she remembers what the Orange drink lemon drink man did to Estha in Abhilash talkies.

The reader does not get to know yet what exactly happened to Estha and Abhilash Talkies in chapter 1. This is revealed only much later and one of the later chapters in page 98 where we get to know that (()) (16:23) actually sexually molested in the cinema hall while the others were watching the movie and in this period in this two-week period in 1969 we also find the narration of Ammu's affair with Velutha.

It is discovery and subsequently Velutha's death in custody, Sophie Mol also dies she gets drowned to death during her visit from England while she was also trying to get away along with that twins from the commotion that had ensued at home. Because Ammu's affair with Velutha had just got discovered and finally in this two week period in 1969. We have this event Ammu's expulsion from family.

Because she was discovered her adult relation with Velutha was discovered and Estha sent to live with his father in Calcutta. And Rahel is post to live at home in the answers through home in Ayemenem, so these are the set set of major events which happen in the first story line which happens in 1969 during this two-week period. But in the novel you may not find them in succession one after the other you would find them scattered in different chapters in different sections it is up to the reader to make sense of the story line by bringing in together different images and different recollections form different narrative spaces.

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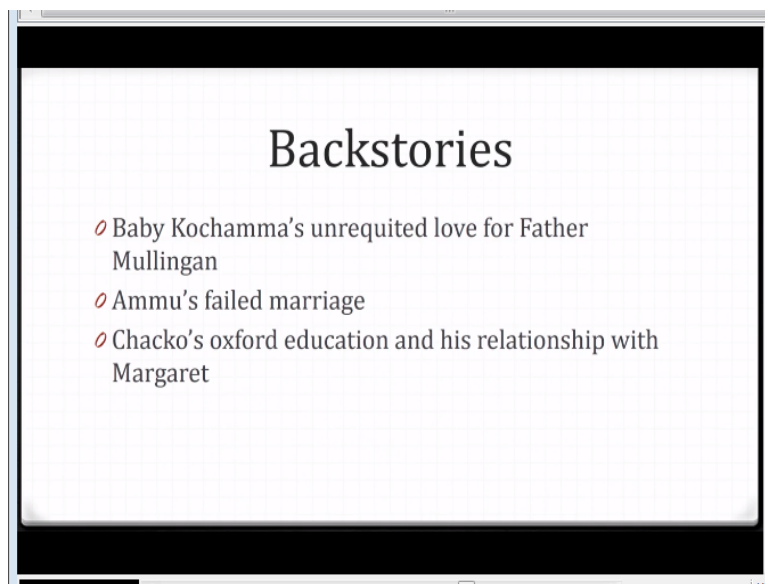
The second storyline

- o One day in 1993
- o "Twenty-three years later, Rahel, dark woman in a yellow T-short turns to Estha in the dark" (Ch.20)
- o Estha and Rahel meet in Ayemenem
- o An incestuous sexual encounter

The second story line happens in one day in 1993 we find this statement and chaptered 20, 23 years later Rahel dark women and a yellow t-shirt turns to Estha in the dark. So, this happens after 1969 the next important story line is 1993 where after being separated for about 23 years. We find Rahel and Estha meeting again Rahel was growing up in Ayemenem in the sister home. And Estha was being brought up by his father in Calcutta.

So, both of them they meet in Ayemenem and it also result because of the trauma that they had in encountered this reunion it had a different emotional appeal to them. They end up having an incestuous sexual encounter which was also critiques heavily the portrayal of which was critiqued heavily end some of the circles at least within this nation. And there are set of back stories yeah for instance baby Kochamma's unrequited love for father Mulligan or Ammu's failed marriage.

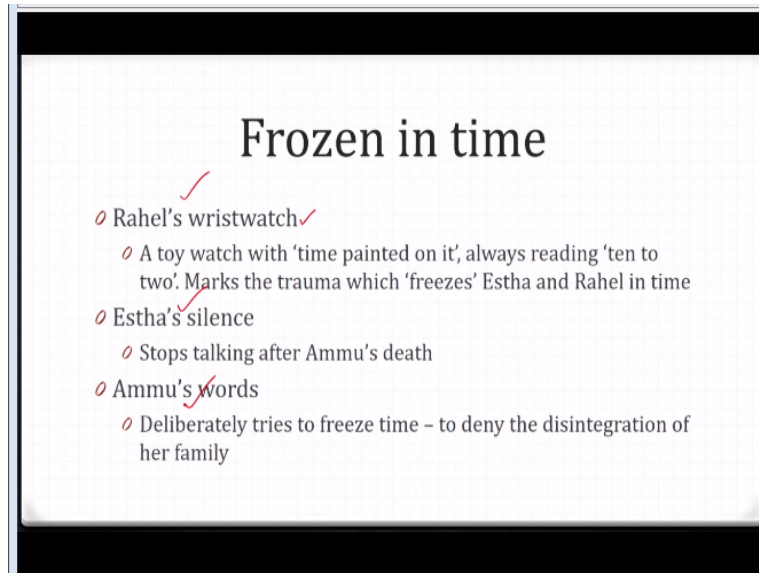
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It is referred to in the past the failed to marriage with Estha's and Rahel's father and Chaco's oxford education and his relationship with Margaret. Chacko also happened to be an adorn communist believe but the kind of things that he does is in contrast with the ideal set he believes and with respect to his latitudes communism. So, he also presented with the intention of **satiric** satirically presenting a communist character.

This contains extremely interesting themes and aspects in this narration again we would find this being scattered across this book that is the idea of being frozen in time which almost continuously explodes in this novel.

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There are certain recreates which is like Rahel's wrist watch which was a plastic toy watch with time painted on it. And it always read ten to two. This watch and its repeated occurrence in the novel, it refers to the trauma which freezes Estha and Rahel in time and we also find Rahel talking about time as something which she could perhaps move freely which she could perhaps bring ahead or take back.

According to her will land according to her fancy but own the country what happens in there is that after Ammu's after the discovery of Ammu's relation with Velutha. And after her death we realize that time freezes time stands frozen for Estha and Rahel. And in the same way Estha responds to these tragedies and trauma in his life by withdrawing to himself. He just **close** silent he stops talking after Ammu's death.

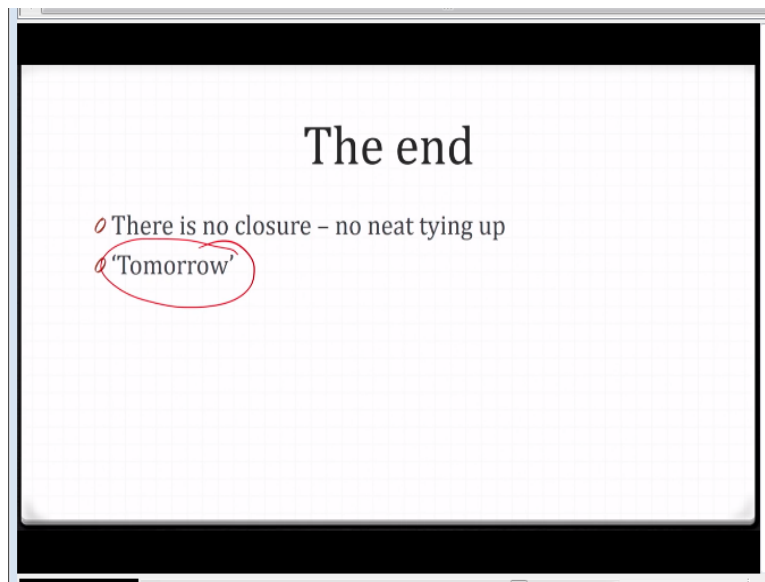
Estha's silence is a way of showing that he just froze in time. He refused to communicate after that he refuses to engage with anything after that because time just stand still for him after that traumatic period. And there are also Ammu's words which desperately and rather miserably try

to freeze words and moments in time when they are trying to betrayal to each other. Ammu it has written.

Ammu is worried that Rahel may ends up same something really grown up, so she tries to stop Rahel from taking. So, that she can freeze that moment in time she deliberately tries to freeze time and she is in denial of the disintegration of her family. Ammu is comes across is that kind of a person who perhaps believes that if she does not talk about it. It is no there at all, so when these 3 Rahel, Estha and Ammu when they are saying favor to each other perhaps for good.

We find that there is a way in which all 3 of them of force to be frozen in time. And we also find them doing it indulging in it rather deliberately. I am taking about the end there is no the end moment to this novel.

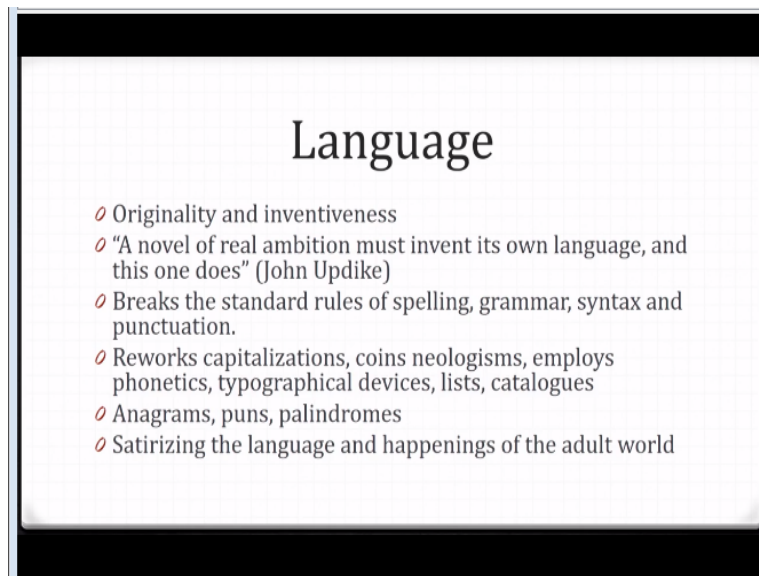
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There is no closure that is no neat tying up that one would expect out of a narrative. In fact on the contrary in very interesting read the novel ends with this word tomorrow. The ending of the novel this is how a treats she turn to say to once again nallai. The term in Malayalam for Tomorrow and then after a full stop Tomorrow and there is a full stop. This is how the novel ends it ends with a word tomorrow indicting that there is no closure.

And this is a deliberate attempt perhaps to show that no attempt is being made to formally close the novel let us still story is waiting in anticipation. Because remember the epigraph at the out set there is no single way in which story can be told. And this is not the end in that sense talking about the aspects of language.

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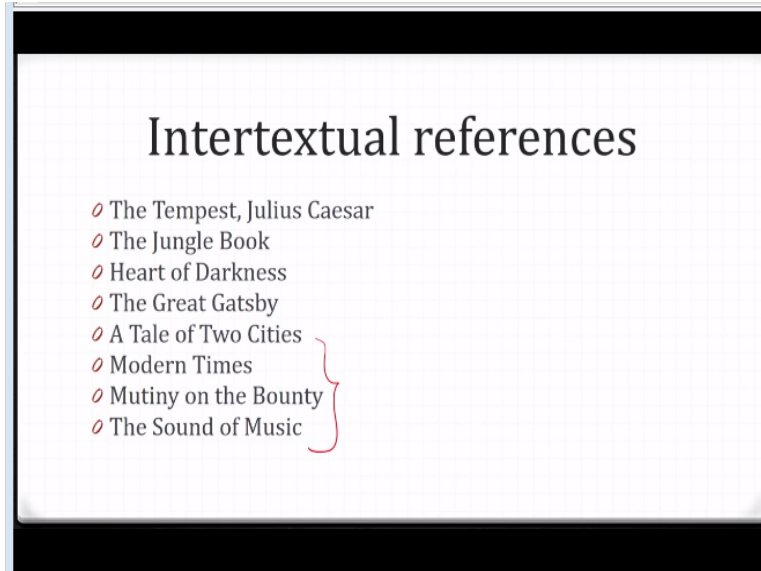
This work has been praised much for it is originality and inventiveness John Updike what are the critics has pointed out that a novel of real ambition must invent it is own language and this one does. And it is very evident when we go through the god of small things that the novel tries to invent and reinvent language and not just a English language. But there is also the bringing in of the regional flavor by using Malayalam words quite generously without when providing a glossary.

So, that is a kind of magic that this work does to the idea of language the aspect of language it breaks the standard rules of spelling Ramas intacts and punctuation. It reworks capitalizations there are neologisms in spaying coined it employs phonetics there are typographical devices, lists, catalogues, Anagrama, puns, palindromes. It plays with language in whichever way possible.

And this is being done through the point of view from the point of view of these children Estha and Rahel and this is a way in which Roy also successfully as a satirizing the language and

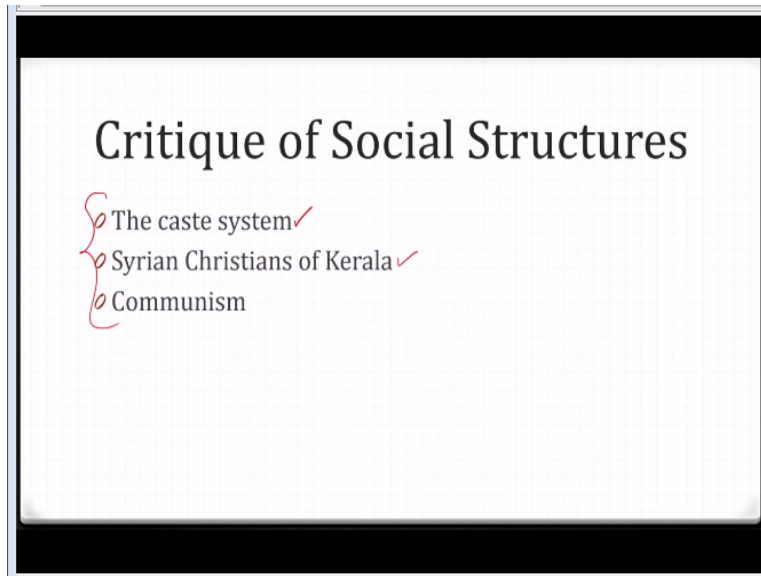
happenings of the adult world. Because it is these kids it is these children who found who get a lot of delight in using this language in such an irrelevant way and in such a playful way. And there are number of intertextual references from range of locations and range of time period just like one would find in the midnights of children.

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There are references to Shakespeare Tempest and Julius Caesar, The Jungle Book, Heart of darkness, The great Gatsby, A Tale of two Cities, Modern Times. These are familiar recent works from popular culture Mutiny on the Bounty, The Sound of Music, so the list could be endless one could perhaps find out many more references to other text from different time periods and even references to the contemporary popular culture.

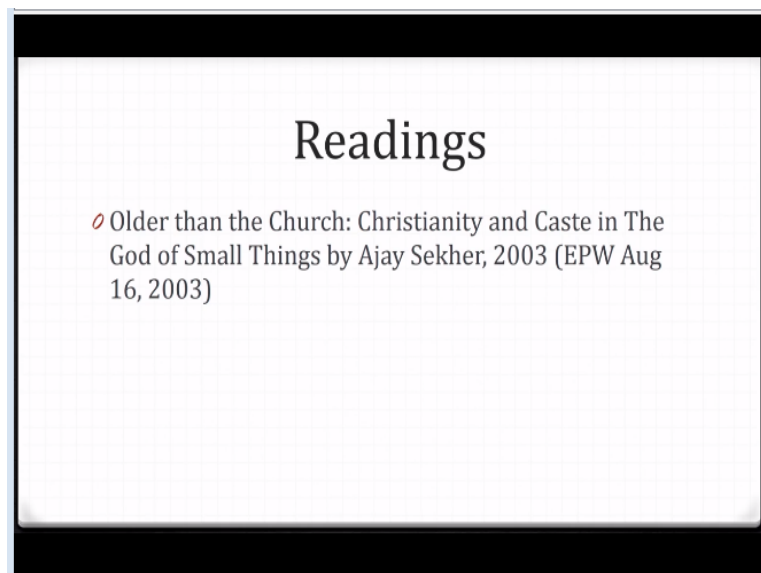
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This is a novel which could be read as a critique of social structures. It could be read as a critique of the caste system or the Syrian Christians of Kerala and a way in which untouchability the practice of untouchability has seeped into their culture. Because it is said that the certain Christians of Kerala or also Brahminical dissidence yeah and this is a critique of communism as well yeah.

And the bringing together of these 3 aspect the caste system Christianity and communism is what makes this novel radically different from other kinds of social historical critiques of these times. So, as you prepare for the next session.

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I let me appeal to you to read the novel and also be familiar with this reading older than the Church Christianity and caste in the God of Small Things which appeared in the EPW in 2003 and authored by Arundhati Roy of familiarity with this essay with this peace would also give you a sense of the critical practices which could be identified within this narrative space of the god of small things.

So, with this we also wrap up today's session I thank you for listening and look forward to seeing you in the next session.