

<http://www.chitram.org/mallu/ar.htm>

The first Indian citizen to win the prestigious Booker prize and a million dollar book deal has made Arundhati Roy, a celebrity and a tall literary lioness persona. Now in her late-30s, living in Delhi, Arundhati Roy (One of People Magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People in the World 1998") grew up in Kerala, in which her award winning novel "The God of Small Things" is set. The novel is a poetic tale of Indian boy-and-girl twins, Estha and Rahel, and their family's tragedies; the story's fulcrum is the death of their 9-year-old half British cousin, Sophie Mol, visiting them on holiday.

As a Keralite myself, I had grown up hearing the stories about the mother of Arundhati Roy, Mary Roy who fought against Christian inheritance law, winning a landmark Supreme Court verdict that granted Christian women in Kerala the right to their parent's property. The mother had fought against an archaic law, while the daughter has to fight a nuisance litigation about the obscenity in her novel. Following the footsteps of her mother Ms. Roy is more of an activist now, championing the cause of the displaced tribals in Narmada Valley.

Arundhati Roy about her childhood in Kerala :


"A lot of the atmosphere in "God of Small Things" is based on my experiences of what it was like to grow up in Kerala. Most interestingly, it was the only place in the world where religions coincide, there's Christianity, Hinduism, Marxism and Islam and they all live together and rub each other down. When I grew up it was the Marxism that was very strong, it was like the revolution was coming next week. I was aware of the different cultures when I was growing up and I'm still aware of them now. When you see all the competing beliefs against the same background you realise how they all wear each other down. To me, I



*couldn't think of a better location
for a book about human beings.*

*I think the kind of landscape that
you grew up in, it lives in you. I
don't think it's true of people who've
grown up in cities so much, you
may love building but I don't think
you can love it in the way that you
love a tree or a river or the colour
of the earth, it's a different kind of
love. I'm not a very well read
person but I don't imagine that that
kind of gut love for the earth can be
replaced by the open landscape. It's
a much cleverer person who grows
up in the city, savvy and much
smarter in many ways. If you spent
your very early childhood catching
fish and just learning to be quiet,
the landscape just seeps into you.
Even now I go back to Kerala and it
makes me want to cry if something
happens to that place. I grew up in
very similar circumstances to the
children in the book. My mother
was divorced. I lived on the edge of
the community in a very vulnerable
fashion. Then when I was 16 I left
home and lived on my own, sort of...
you know it wasn't awful, it was just
sort of precarious... living in a
squatter's colony in Delhi"*

What I like most about the "God of Small Things" is the imageries created - the lavish greenery and landscape of Kerala, in a prose which displays the raw gifts for metaphor, rhythm and lyric. An excerpt:

 "May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding

fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. The nights are clear, but suffused with sloth and sullen expectation. But by early June the southwest monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine that thrilled children snatch to play with. The countryside turns an immodest green. Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom. Brick walls turn moss green. Pepper vines snake up electric poles. Wild creepers burst through laterite banks and spill across the flooded roads."

I am happy that an Indian novelist's narrative is described by *New York Times Book Review* as " so morally strenuous and so imaginatively supple -- that the reader remains enthralled all the way through".

Pictures of Kerala : I had spent my last vacation in Kerala and captured the lavish greenery, Keralite people, back waters and more in this site. As you browse through the pictures you may find landscape and people similar to the imageries created in "God of Small Things" !