CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Today's India is situated on the road between continuity and change. India is undergoing a revolution at all levels of its being. Modernity, democracy, technology, urbanization have done much to transform the daily lives of India's huge and fast-growing population. Nonetheless, the traditional concept and values still exist in contemporary India and considered vital for some social groups.

One of these traditional concepts is caste. Along with 'village communities' and 'joint family', 'caste' has often been viewed as a defining feature of 'traditional social order' of India. Though formally the practice of caste was based on Hinduism, it was organized hierarchically as social relations almost everywhere in the sub continent (Jodhka 1813). Started from 1200 BCE, the Indian caste system divides all people into groups according to birth and occupation. Along with this division, some social caste rules were made to dictate and control the interaction between members of different castes, including the marriage, social attitudes, and even in eating and drinking (Elliot).

Caste ideas and relations are grounded in religious beliefs, amplified in what may called the "*varna* model". It is an Indian reference described in ancient hymn of Rig Veda which ranks or categorizes people into four groups: *Brahmans* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors and rulers), *Vaishyas* (merchant and landowners), *Shudras* (peasant serfs/ day laborers). These four groups are necessary to each

other, but on the other hand, they also reflect differences in purity (Alavi 128-129).

Beneath the four-*varnas* hierarchy, there is another category known as the Untouchables. In Indian society, they are placed at the bottom of the social ladder, performing 'taboo' occupations (according to Hindu's *varnas*) such as toilet cleaning, garbage removal, leatherwork, cremating the dead and even blacksmith work. For this reason, they are considered polluted and not to be touched by the *varnas* people (91).

Arundhati Roy, one of young Indian writers, has brightly portrayed this social condition into her novel, The God of Small Things. Her true experience living in the rural side of Kerala, Southern India—the setting of this novel—had made this novel so vivid, personal, and also rich. Roy has beautifully crafted and ironic and tragic story about what a powerful society can do toward the 'small people', 'small things'.

Despite the international achievements she obtained for this novel (Booker Prize in 1997 and also bestselling in both UK and America), some local groups rejected it. They accused this novel of bias against Communism, lurid sexuality, and a depiction of indecent relations between an Untouchable and a higher caste member. Regardless the controversy, Roy has obviously proved her personal integrity by taking side to the powerless people. She is continued to be known as a critical writer and also political activist who struggles against the unjust Indian government's policy (Adian 102-103).

The center of human tragedy that shadows the whole novel is the forbidden cross-caste love affair between Velutha, a young *Paravan* (one of Untouchables sub-castes), and Ammu, a beautiful daughter of a factory owner from a respected Touchable Syrian Christian family. Though Velutha has been converted to Christian and active as a member of a Communist Party, it does not automatically change social opinion in this caste-oriented society for the stigma of his Untouchable status. Velutha is seen as a real threat for the other members of society with their rigid traditional caste supremacy which not even a Marxist figure with "casteless-ideology" such as Comrade Pillai dares to attack. This social domination also affected both of Ammu's twins children, Estha and Rahel, who were manipulated by Baby Kochamma (Ammu's aunt) to protect the family reputation from this scandal by victimizing the innocent Velutha as the guilty person under the authority of law. The great power of caste tradition in their society has sent these powerless people into different forms of punishment.

This story is set with the background of Kerala, India, in 1960's, among the community of minority Syrian Christian and also the political tension of Communist political parties at that time. With such unique background, it creates an irritating question on how Touchable-Untouchable division is still maintained by most of the society members. In a sense, caste becomes a way of seeing, thinking, and living, which can enter everyone regardless their religious or political belief. Through individuals in the society, caste becomes a dominant ideology. Through their thoughts, their words, their action, individuals turn out to

be social power that can intrude one's life and fate, especially one who refuses to conform to the dominant ideology of its society.

B. Statement of the Problems

Based on the background of study, the writer formulates some problems and would like to seek the answers of these following questions:

1. How do characters in this novel maintain caste as dominant ideology?

2. How far does this domination afflict the characters who violate the rules of caste?

C. Objective of the Study

To provide a satisfactory and scientific result of the mentioned problems, the objectives of the study are formulated as follow:

1. To explain the perpetuation of caste as dominant ideology—especially Touchable- Untouchable division—by characters of this novel as its apparatuses

2. To identify the great impact of these apparatuses towards the society members who violate the rules of caste

D. Scope and Limitation

To keep the discussion in focus, the writer should define the scope and limitation. Since the story involves many characters, the writer will need to discuss some of them in order to give sensible depiction of caste as dominant ideology in Indian society. It will be used to show that many characters are

involved in the tragedy of this story, and in bigger scope, these characters are seen as the apparatuses of dominant ideology. Some characters such as Ammu, Velutha, and Ammu's children are chosen to represent the victims of these apparatuses. The analysis will be supported by the socio-cultural perspective of India, particularly the state of Kerala, to gain more understanding on its complex setting. However, the main analysis will be based on the situation as presented in the novel.

E. Significance of the Study

The study has significant purpose in emerging our interest on the social issues concerning humanity represented in a literary work, which involves the local or traditional values of the setting. In particular, the study will give additional knowledge on India's society, especially the existence of Untouchable as pariah within the society. Although it deals with local culture, the essence of its social discrimination is universal and likely to exist in other places or societies in various degrees. The writer hopes that this study may give helpful contribution for the students of English Department, especially to those who are interested in the literary works of Asian writers.

F. Theoretical Background

To answer the statement of the problems, the writer will apply theory of dominant ideology by Althusser in analysing the novel. In Althusser's opinion, ideology is dominant in the sense that it is shared by the majority of people in the

society and it tends to support the interests of the ruling groups (O'Shaughnessy 213). The person or subject who believes on an ideology is the representation of an apparatus or practice. He acknowledges two major mechanisms of apparatuses in applying an ideology into a certain society, which work through RSAs (Repressive State Apparatuses) and ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses). The first mechanism (RSAs) usually operates through physical or external force of the state such as represented by the police, army, law courts, and prison. The second one (ISAs) operates in a more subtle way through various groupings in the society, also known as internal mechanism that maintains the ideology from within as represented by family, religion and political parties (215).

Based on this theory, the writer intends to identify the way characters of different social backgrounds act as apparatuses of caste system, especially related with the polarization of Touchable- Untouchable. In that frame, the analysis will also be developed through socio-cultural approach, since the story greatly deals with the local setting (Kerala) and traditional values of Indian society.

G. Method of the Study

To make a proper analysis, the writer needs to do a research by collecting and gaining materials and data from various sources. The novel as the primary data will be supported by other secondary data such as books, magazines and online articles in some websites which contain related social studies on Indian caste system and Kerala socio-cultural background as the setting of the novel.

Some reviews on <u>The God of Small Things</u> are also used to enrich the writer's ideas.

After all the qualitative data are collected, the writer will analyze them with descriptive-interpretative method. The descriptive method refers to the activity of gaining comprehensive information about the qualitative data. Furthermore, the method will lead the writer to the interpretation of the analyzed data.

H. Definition of Key Terms

- Apparatus: the complex of instrumentalities and processes by means of which an organization functions or a systematized activity is carried out

- Caste: one of the hereditary classes into which the society in India is divided in accordance with a system fundamental in Hinduism, dictating to every orthodox Hindu the rules and restrictions of all social intercourse and of which each has a name of its own and special customs that restrict the occupation of its members and their intercourse with the members of other castes

- Ideology: a system of representation (images, myths, ideas or concept) endowed with an existence and a historical role at the heart of a given society

- Untouchable : a member of a large hereditary group in India having in traditional Hindu belief and practice the quality of defiling by contact the person, food, or drink of a member of a higher caste and formerly being strictly segregated and restricted to menial work

- Touchable : a term in the novel that refers to the members of four *varnas* based on Hindu religious rule and basically have higher social status than Untouchable (taken from <u>Webster's Third New International Dictionary</u> and <u>Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory</u>).

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK