Multicultural Book Club
Wednesday, December 4, 2002
5:00-6:30pm

Questions for Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*

1. Who or what is the God of Small Things? What other names and what divine and earthly attributes are associated with this god? What or who are the Small Things over which this god has dominion, and why do they merit their own god?

2. What are the various laws, rules, and regulations—familial, social, cultural, political, and religious—including "the Love Laws," to which Roy makes repeated references?

3. Various dwellings are important to the unfolding of Roy's story. How is each described? To what extent does each embody or reflect the forces and burdens of history, social order, and custom?

4. How does the river that flows through Ayemenem in 1969 differ from the river in 1992? What is its importance in the lives and histories of the two families and in the twins' childhood?

5. To what extent are race, social class, and religion important? What specific elements of each take on predominant importance, and with what consequences? How do the concept and the reality of "the Untouchable" function in the novel?

6. Why does Roy switch back and forth among time present and various times past?

7. Is Time as destroyer the novel's most insistent theme? How are the blue Plymouth, the pickle factory, Rahel's toy wristwatch (which always reads "ten to two"), the children's boat, and other objects related to this theme?

8. "He was called Velutha—which means White in Malayalam—because he was so black;" and at age 11 he "was like a little magician." What is the full extent of Velutha the Untouchable's role in the story?

9. To what extent do even the most fantastical events result from everyday passions? What feelings and passions are predominant, and how do they determine key events? Which emotions are strongest among the children, the adults?

10. How does Roy portray the twins' extraordinary spiritual connection, their "single Siamese soul," the fragile, wonder-filled world of their childhood, their often magical vision, and their differences? Is her re-creation of the child's world convincing?

11. What importance does Roy ascribe to story, storytelling, and playacting, including the Kathakali dances and stories? To what extent is the telling of a story more important than the story itself?
12. In what ways are the Kochamma women subjected to male dominance, indifference, and even cruelty, and in what ways are they decisive in their own lives, the life of their family, and the affairs of their community?

13. Baby Kochamma harbors an "age-old fear of being dispossessed." What kinds of dispossession occur in the novel, and in association with which characters and which events? With what consequences?

14. "Some things come with their own punishments," Roy writes. "They would all learn more about punishments soon. That they came in different sizes." What "sizes" of punishment are specified, and who decides those "sizes"?

15. Rahel reveals to Sophie Mol a list of those she loves; and we learn that this list was an attempt to order chaos. She revised it constantly, torn forever between love and duty. What other attempts are there "to order chaos"?

16. Roy writes that Inspector Mathew and Comrade Pillai "were both men whom childhood had abandoned without a trace. Men without curiosity. Without doubt. Both in their own way truly, terrifyingly adults." Can this be said of others?

17. Is there anything truly shocking about Estha and Rahel's lovemaking in the next-to-final chapter? What does Roy mean when she writes, "There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi's book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings"?

18. Roy has said that her architectural studies determined her novel's structure. In what ways can we view the novel's plan and construction as architectural? In what ways is the novel's "architecture" related to actual buildings in the novel?

19. Does a single moment of true, intense love compensate for centuries of oppression, cruelty, and madness?

20. Why does Roy end the novel with a detailed depiction of Ammu and Velutha's first night of lovemaking and the promise of "Tomorrow"?