

It's always "ten to two" somewhere:  
time in the god of  
small things



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Perception of time plays a peculiar role in *The God of Small Things*, serving both as linear force, dragging the plot along with it, and as a proverbial tar pit, ensnaring and preserving a moment and time. The entire Kochamma family seems stuck in the latter; their ideology of familial superiority no longer matching their present circumstances by the end of the novel. In this way, the Kochamma family's fall from grace can be viewed as a divergence of Time and Perception of Time, with Time carrying India towards the revolution of modernity and Perception holding the Kochamma family firmly in the past, clinging onto the ghosts of former glory in a vain attempt to maintain a reputation of power and means.

The first indicator of the Kochamma family's apprehension of time is the non-linear way in which the novel is written, forcing mention of past success as if to offset the steadily lowering fortune of the family. With reoccurring pseudo-flashbacks, each of the elder Kochammas finds solace from the fear of the present by reminiscing and dwelling in the past. Chacko does so with his days as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, pining for Margaret yet content in his suffering. Baby Kochamma is left yearning for the yesteryears of prosperity while sitting stagnant on her couch, entranced with the superficiality of television. Estha is entrapped in the moment he lost his innocence in the cinema, missing the simplicity of childhood. Even Pappachi, the patriarch of the family, was privately awed by his father the reverend. Rahel was a different matter; actively attempting to flee the history of her family, she came the closest to normalcy. Her boarding school years (however flawed) pushed her further and further away from her family's influence until, after

alighting in Washington D. C., Rahel gave in to the undeniable pull of familial history and returned once more to Ayemenem.

There were, however, exceptions whose contrasting approach strengthens the point, two being Ammu and Velutha. Ammu only evaded the black hole of the Kochamma family history through flight into her own fantasy. Velutha was a force of time in himself. He offered her an escape from tradition, and escape from her societal role, and, most importantly, escape from the past. With Velutha, there were no flashbacks simply because there was no need for Ammu to attempt to obscure the present with the past when she was with him. Together, they made time unnecessary; they had no reason to burden themselves with history since societal norms had already made their relationship publicly impossible. The only viable force left was their emotions: " Somehow, by not mentioning his name, she knew that she had drawn him into the tousled intimacy of that blue cross-stitch afternoon and the song from the tangerine transistor. By not mentioning his name, she sensed that a pact had been forged between her Dream and the World" (210).

The third individual left unhindered by time was Sophie Mol. A visitor to Ayemenem, she had no perception of her role in the Kochamma lineage, and death is the greatest liberator of the soul from Time. Even before her sudden departure, Sophie Mol retained an air of inquisitive aloofness regarding Ayemenem, the Kochamma house, and its inhabitants. By refusing to accept her familial ties, she effectively isolated herself from any influence from the family's past. Her death was the ultimate event which made her immune to the pull of both Time and the Kochamma family's influence. With only the <https://assignbuster.com/its-always-ten-to-two-somewhere-time-in-the-god-of-small-things/>

memory of her existence remaining, her identity could not be altered by time or family in the way the other characters' identities were. A perfect example involves Sophie Mol's funeral: "As they lowered Sophie Mol's coffin into the ground in the little cemetery behind the church, Rahel knew that she still wasn't dead" (8). Her memory never died, but physical death meant that it could never change. From the moment she died, Sophie Mol's identity would remain the same, freeing her from the ravages of both time and familial influence.

This refusal/inability to change can be most aptly represented by the toy watch that Rahel and Estha played with in their youth. It is explained that "The wristwatch had the time painted on it. Ten to two. One of her ambitions was to own a watch on which she could change the time whenever she wanted to (which according to her was what Time was meant for in the first place)" (12). This single object can be used as a metaphor for Time and the Perception of Time throughout the entire novel: a mockery of the real thing, the toy watch merely mimics the passage of time, leaving the wearer oblivious as to his or her current place in time. This simple idea can be projected onto the Kochamma family as a whole, since the family actively uses time and memories to create a false sense of reality mirroring a bygone lifestyle and societal status. Rahel's ultimate return marks an end to the period of limbo for the Kochamma family.

After her return from Washington D. C., Rahel is greeted by a changed Ayemenem; a thriving tourist industry having overtaken the village, the only remnants of its former glory were the ruins of the Paradise Pickles and

Preserves factory and the toy watch: "Something lay buried in the ground.  
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Under grass. Under twenty-three years of June rain. A small forgotten thing. Nothing that the world would miss. A child's plastic wristwatch with the time painted on it" (121). Buried by mud, forgotten by time, and built over by a modern India, the watch is a representation of the family's final descent into history. This begs a further question. How would the events of the novel have been affected if the members of the Kochamma family had adjusted to the changing times by adopting a grounded sense of reality and following a linear time pattern instead of remaining steadfastly lodged in their own personal histories?