

Subaltern Reading: The Making of Powerful Women in *The God of Small Things* “I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will.”

Charlotte Bronte

Abstract

Arundhati Roy, a remarkable novelist and political activist from India, is a leading voice against the injustice encountered by the marginalized in the country. For her, the sidelining of women is one item of a process, in which oppression of different types is forced upon them. Her novel *The God of Small Things* explores the unjust procedures of the caste system and gender inequalities. Roy's role as an activist enabled her to tackle topics that challenge the validity of social rules. The analytic part will rely on a textual reading of the novel within the scope of postcolonialism and ecofeminism by applying the theories of Spivak and Shiva. This paper focuses on the role of women within the constraints of rigid rules and how women characters like Ammu and Mamachi succeeded in bringing new realities of solidarity and empowerment despite their oppression. The paper concludes that women are weak, oppressed, and marginalized; however, they have a chance first to stand against these forms of oppression and second to prove themselves as powerful women.

Keywords: oppression, power, relation, work, home.

1. Theoretical Framework

An exploration of the marginalization and power dynamics of the female characters in *The God of Small Things* necessitates amalgamating concepts from Shiva's ecofeminism and Spivak's postcolonial theory. This framework shows that the challenges faced by women parallel those encountered by the environment. Moreover it reveals the way women exhibit agency out of the grip of patriarchal norm.

1.1 Main Theorists

Shiva argues that nature and women are interconnected, life-sustaining, and creative. This idea parallels with the attachment portrayed between Ammu and the land. From an economic perspective, Shiva argues that the capitalist ideology perceives women as passive individuals subject to exploitation for profit. Moreover, Shiva maintains that the dominant system resists cultural and ecological diversity and seeks to highlight centralization.

Spivak's engagement with subaltern studies places her as an appropriate choice for this framework. She deems the subaltern as individuals unrecognized within the social structure and lacking a voice in and dominant power structures. Velutha is a good example of the subaltern in the novel. Spivak (1988) underscores the necessity for the subaltern groups to express their experience, rather than allowing others to speak on their behalf. This is evident in Velutha's relationship with Ammu as Roy permits' actions to convey their agency. Additionally, epistemic violence is demonstrated in the patriarchal efforts to erase histories, knowledge and identities of the subaltern. The application of this notion is apparent in the delineation of Velutha, Ammu and Mammachi.

1.2 . Merging the Framework

According to Shiva, the caste system along with the remnants of colonialism and Marxism represent the dominant powers within the fundamental social structure, all of which demand conformity. Within

the novel, women are portrayed as appreciating small-scale items, such as the natural world, the local spaces, and individuals' desires. Their power is defined as non-institutional, fluid, subversive, and intrinsically linked to Ayemenem. Spivak (1999) highlights that characters such as Ammu experience double colonization, encountering oppression postcolonial authority models and the patriarchal systems. Within the novel, Ammu has witnessed this dual oppression. Shiva's theoretical framework elucidates the linkage between women and the environment. The filth in the river echoes the emotional and physical suffering endured by the female characters. Both the women and the river are exploited as sources of power and economic gain by dominant social structures. Spivak (1999) addresses the issue of the love laws, which inform whom people may love, the manner of their love, and the extent of that love. Ammu stands against these prescribed norms, leading to opposition from the wider system exemplified by the family and the police, eventually leading to the elimination of her history.

1.3 Application to main characters

Ammu is the incarnation of Shiva's principles, as reflected in her powerful, untamed character. As a divorced woman, with no rights in the factory, she occupies a subaltern position. Her relationship with Velutha is an act of defiance against society's rigid laws. Furthermore, her affinity for the river demarcates an eco-subaltern rebellion that uses nature as a refuge for her attack on the laws of society. Rahel disregards her family status, and instead engages with mud, insects, and river life. Her agency stems from her refusal to social or linguistic domestication. Although Mammachi has been victimized by the social laws, she helps in perpetuating the caste rules against Velutha. Her character elucidates the challenges implied in voicing perspectives out of the dominant system.

2. Introduction

Women working in a community fatigued by patriarchy and Western domination are the central

issue in this chapter. It is generally acknowledged that women play a crucial role in shaping social structures worldwide. Women first attempt to prove themselves within their own families, seeing their husbands as their main rival. Wrestling with their husbands is the first step towards fostering a powerful image of women; however, their success as working women is not basically related to their success at home. The failure at home often motivates them to succeed at work. This article explores the amalgamation of postcolonialism and ecofeminism in *The God of Small Things* (1997) by applying Shiva's ecofeminist theory and Spivak's theory of postcolonialism. By dissecting the text's representations of gender, nature, and colonialism, this article shows that Roy's novel challenges the dominant Western way of thinking, emphasizing the interconnectedness between the problems encountered by women and the environment in India. Bravewater (7) argues that Shiva (1993) believes women have a special link to biodiversity and are the best custodians of Earth's health through their knowledge of life's heterogeneity. (Agarwal 2016) argues that women's bond to the environment is not a spiritual, but rather a reality of materialism coloured by gender-specific division of labor. The rural women are the custodians of resources, such as water, wood, and food as patriarchal rules of the society consign those fatiguing tasks to them, not because of an inborn mystical attributes. Furthermore, Agarwal posits that viewing "women" as a single category neglect the importance caste, class, and ethnicity that largely impact the human linkage to the environment. Moreover, as a compromise between the two critical views, it is essential to pinpoint that the spirituality and the material aspects are crucial features of women in the modern age of science, technology and industry. In her theory, Shiva (1988) highlights the connection between environmental problems and the oppression of women, calling for an equitable and sustainable relationship between the environment and the human. The same idea has been echoed in Benjamin Ferguson (2016:4) in

"The Paradox of Exploitation" demonstrates that patriarchal culture views the women and the environment as passive, and utilizable. On her part, Spivak's work challenges Western mentality and highlights the necessity of recovering the subaltern and marginalized points of view. Despite Spivak's ideas' popularity, Chibber (2013) argues that the marginalized people are not basically different from the Western people in their desire and psychology. Chibber (2013) indicates the possibility of success of the subaltern. In this respect, the subaltern, regardless of their low rank, can play a role in power relations in the novel. In concert with this, *The God of Small Things* has been viewed in terms of power dynamics that steer most of the action. Guha (2009) contends that the "Big Things", such as all-encompassing socio-political network of tradition, caste, and values brutally crush and dictate the "Small Things" like local issues, individual choices, and marginalized agency. This shows the relationship between the subaltern and the elite in the society. For instance, Velutha, from the low-ranking class, is having an illegal relation with Ammu, who belongs to the high-ranking class. This relationship goes beyond the rules of the society, so it is a good yardstick for the power of those engaged in it, particularly Ammu. Roy demonstrates the rigid social structures, like patriarchy and caste and the risk of defying them. The power of such systems has been enhanced by their emergence along with post colonialism, which is an investigation of ethics, which compels us to view the social rules concerning women's sexuality that dates back to the moral codes of the Victorian age. The local set of values combined values from the Victorian era with ancient tradition of patriarchy (Aijaz Ahmad). This represents the colonial mentality, which has been noticed in Pappachi and Baby Kochuma. In this sense, there is a need for a native mentality by dismantling Eurocentric ideas, creating new conditions where the marginalized women can be heard. This notion has been presented by Spivak in her seminal work, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999), in which she raised the idea of epistemic

violence that can be defined as the attempt of the Western mentality to eradicate the non-western reality. As for her personal life, Spivak was born in 1942, when the British Raj was fast losing its grip over the Indians. Morton (2003) exclaims that Spivak's early memories and awareness of the 1943 catastrophe largely formulated her attack against capitalism. Additionally, she witnessed violence in terms of the Bengal famine; because of which, the people were dying in the street, so she experienced real violence, not a metaphorical one. Such violence is part and parcel of her memory. Her interest in the subaltern also underscores the necessity of having a political role for the marginalized people. Such a role has been slightly presented in Ammu and Mammachi, the two main characters in *The God of Small Things*, as they attempt to prove themselves amid a plethora of social structures that do not favour women. Conversely, subaltern thoughts are closely related to hegemony, which is defined as the practice of authority. In this sense, the ruling class attempts to convince the common people that the ruler and the ruled have the same interests. This is a form of spreading authority and domination. Roy tackles the notion of authority in the novel as we witness that at Ammu's family, at work and the police office scenes. Guha (2009) defined the subaltern in direct opposition to the elite. In his *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, he (1999) argues that power in society is basically one of power and subservience. In this respect, subaltern is appositionally related to elite to emphasize that anyone outside the elite's realm is subaltern. Such a notion entails the need for comparison between two levels of people: one with authority and the other without authority, and the two are basically exemplified by Ammu and Mammachi on one side and Velutha and his father on the other. Therefore, subaltern is a negative position in which the individual has no power, no class, and no identity. Roy is aware of the complex power dynamics connecting those characters, and she endeavors to demonstrate female characters, which are defiant, keen and powerful.

3. Women at Home and Work: Different Types of Oppression

The miserable life experienced by Ammu dates back to her period of pregnancy when her husband was trying to prevent her stomach from wobbling in the bus; this refers to the terrible life conditions experienced by women. Her terrible life conditions also echo the symptoms of her life with her father, who was the incarnation of patriarchy. In this respect, Roy attempts to show us that even high-ranking people are destined to face problems imposed by their society. Although Ammu experienced a period of peace with her husband, she faced terrible moments when he belittled her by selling her as a tool of pleasure to his English boss. This event helped formulate her character for years to come, so Roy tries to present a comprehensive point of view about woman, who has been victimized by her society, and has the power to rise as unique and independent woman. Delineating a character, like Ammu is Roy's reaction to, the dire situation women faced, and the novel presents the character to raise awareness of the problems they face. Through her political and literary essay, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*, Roy strongly endeavors to raise awareness about India's caste system, globalization, and misogyny. As a solution, Roy preferred marriage as an opportunity for Ammu to flee living with her father and to escape the rule of patriarchy..

The terrible life of women is also seen outside the borders of the house. For instance, in the relation between Ammu and the policeman, we have two levels of meaning or interpretation, as it shows the relation between a man and a woman, which is a social phenomenon, and it is possible to look at the man in terms of his job as a policeman. This carries a political tone. In this context, Roy presents her female characters as cornered by different problems. In one of the novel's shocking scenes, "Thomas Mathew came around his desk and approached Ammu with his baton." "If I were you," he said, "I'd go home quietly." Then he tapped her breasts with his baton. Gently. Tap tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a

basket" (Roy= 45). This example has two main functions: first, women are tools of joy, second, they have economic value just like mangoes. Additionally, the political tone is indicated by the fact that the police officer pays no attention to his main task, but to his personal preference. Furthermore, Roy shows that the patriarchal mentality that badly treats Mammachi and exiles Ammu is the one that toxins the environment for economic gain. The link between patriarchy and economy is evident. Spivak (1988,25) highlights the concept of 'epistemic violence' that refers to the inability of some groups to have their own ideas because they have been silenced and their experience erased. Ammu is an example of a woman whose voice goes unheard. Moreover, the restrictions imposed against women due to class and genders are very clear in Ammu's confrontation with the policeman. From Ammu's situation with the police officer, it is possible to highlight that finding agency in a dominant discourse is crucial for women. In this connection, abusing women is part of man's domination; therefore, providing a character who challenges such deeds is a step up in defying the norms of the society.

Ammu's affinity to the river stems from the fact that the river stands for power. The water flows where it likes, showing people's freedom away from social norms. Women in areas like Ayemenem are obedient, quiet, and separated inside their own families. Such an image of women is strongly rejected by Ammu, who chooses the river to be her personal arena, swimming in it at night. The fusion of Ammu and the river marks the emergence of a wild, natural force within Ammu that her family cannot understand or control. This indicates that she is so powerful that her social rules are not appropriate for her.

The river symbolizes Ammu's strength and bravery in seeking love beyond social boundaries. Additionally, it serves as a barrier between the immediate, known, and clear world of her family and the hidden, unknown, and illegal world of Velutha. By crossing the water, Ammu draws on

her own strength to defy the “love laws” that dictate who and how to love. In this sense, the river is the place of her uprising. Plunging herself into the river is her own way of prioritizing her own happiness over anything else, emphasizing that she can choose her destiny rather than giving society the chance to do that.

As an activist, Roy attempts to elaborate the contradiction in the policeman's office and how what is written on the board sharply contradicts his true character as a man running after his own physical needs. The noticeboard carries words like politeness and loyalty, which the man knows nothing about as he tries to molest Ammu, whereas his main task is to protect her. Such a contradiction in the officer's character is necessary for the development of female characters in a community that does not really echo their characters. Therefore, the novel offers an opportunity to look at that contradiction. Another example of harassment is on the bus, as the ticket collector “balanced his bony hips against the back of a seat and clicked his ticket-puncher at Ammu. Where to? The click was meant to mean” (Roy, 1997, 57). Such a scene adds to the fact that women are often seen as joy machines, reducing them to their generative role, regardless of their essence of humanity and the novelist wants us to realize this fact and that people have to view women not for the sake of their sex but for their role in the human community, so the main factor in the women's life is their sense of humanity that is quite evident for us once we view her alone or with her kids; moreover, Shiva (1993) believes that empowering women is in terms of positioning them not as active participant in the protection of the environmental biodiversity, and not as merely victims of the degradation of the environment.

Roy's interest in delineating powerful characters stems from her works that integrate both fiction and activism. The text is loaded with examples about this point. For instance, the 1960s Indo-Pak war has been taken from history to serve thematic aspects. Moreover, it has also been employed to show Roy's attempt to use history in magnifying women's dilemma; for instance, when the twins were born,

Ammu was not able to leave with the evacuation process at that time; therefore, her inability to evacuate sheds light on the difficult circumstances Ammu faced. Aijaz Ahmad (15) has confirmed that the use of enormous historical events like the Indo-Pak war gives the impression that the novel is deeply political. Furthermore, the Big-Small binary indicated in the relationship between the war as big, and the life of the people as small. Additionally, the war impacts the life of the people. (bell hooks 2004) highlights that Ammu's inability to evacuate is an example of larger patriarchal constraints, as she has been cornered by her father first, then by her husband. Eagleton (1996) highlights the political aspects of the novel due to the variety of political issues implied there, as the depth of the characters' predicament can be attributed to the war already mentioned. Roy is depicting a woman with her newly born twins amid the fuss outside and inside her family. The fuss inside is exemplified in her unrest with her husband while is seen in the atmosphere of war and anxiety surrounding her.

The lure that the Europeans carry is echoed in the sense that Babykachmma has gone to Madras to be close to Father Mulligan, but realized it would take time to be really close to him. It is important to note that this churchman is an Englishman, underscoring the liberty women often aspire to have. Her attachment to that man is an echo of the colonized desire that largely shows the contrast between liberties and “internalized subjugation”, which takes place when the marginalized people instinctively, believe, accept and apply the mainstream negative stereotypes against themselves. Judith Butler (2006)'s notion can be applied here to shed light on how colonial past impact personal relationship. She also highlights how social structure and dynamics shape people's identity. Therefore, the attempt to escape the grip of patriarchy is seen in Ammu, who planned to leave Ayemenem.

Roy demarcated a character that is different, unique, and independent. That difference is recognized early in the novel, as Ammu does not like the intimacy offered by other women, who

came to comfort her. She dislikes her father's attitude at home and her brother's grip at the factory later on. Her uniqueness stems from fighting her father's power at home and her brother's control in the factory; such deeds make her distinguished in her community. This shows a state of unrest with her surroundings. It is possible to mention that her identity is the product of social activities as her shift from her father's house has been driven by the dislike she feels for the social norms. Her activities help fostering her remarkable identity are similar to those raised by Butler (2006) in *Gender Trouble*, as she posits that identity is not fixed, nor is it biological; it is a constant act created through repetitive, socially accepted attitude. When Ammu defies unbending social rules, she proves that identity can be amended. Her remarkable character is also seen in her asking for divorce; however, it is often perceived as a stigma in society; due to this, Ammu had no chance in her parents' house, and this seems to be one of her problems. This sheds light on the fact that society views divorced women as stigmatized, indicating that such people are not easily integrated into society, but Othered, so Roy suggests that a new perspective of social relations where women are free to fight rules or accept them has to be taken into consideration. Mohanty (1984) emphasizes that women has to be given such sort of liberty. Having the idea that divorce is a stigma in the mind compels us to consider hook (1984)'s ideas that the system of oppression is best understood if gender, class, and colour are viewed together.

4. Patriarchy: the First Step towards Empowering Women

In *The God of Small Things*, the power of women is depicted through strong characters like Mammachi, Ammu, and Rahel. As for Ammu, her defiance of social norms is apparent from the very beginning of the novel in her desire to escape her father's domination. The major events in the novel are taken from Roy's personal life; for instance, her mother Mary Roy, who, just like Ammu, was a divorced mother, having two kids. She famously

took legal action to secure equal inheritance rights for women from the Syrian Christian group, so Ammu is a reproduction of Roy's mother (Roy, 2025, 25). Additionally, Ammu's strong bond with her twins is also an indication of her power. Likewise, Mammachi demonstrates her power through several examples of her role in the family and in running the factory. All such examples are meant to highlight the rigid rules of patriarchy manifested in the unrest between Pappachi and Mammachi. That discontent was the outcome his doing bizarre things like sewing his own buttons that were not missing on his shirt to give the impression that the wife paid no attention to him; therefore, Roy wants to give us an idea about the negative impact patriarchy has on the family life. In this respect, her husband can be seen as the incarnation of hegemonic masculinity. It is argued that masculinity as a hegemonic phenomenon legitimizes the dominant position of man, and the subordination of women. In the novel, Roy also makes it clear that patriarchy threatens women, who achieve success at work. Similarly, women's success is often viewed as a threat to male supremacy. (bell hooks, 1984) shows that oppression is the outcome of the connection of race, gender and caste. In this sense, social justice can be achieved by shedding light on the amalgamation of these points.

To counter that supremacy, Mammachi began making some products commercially, and a religious society asked her to prepare some for an event it hosted. This means that women also play a role in marketing products; therefore, they are active members of society and can break free from the patriarchy's strong grip. The male's strong grip is challenged by the woman's success at work, which is supposed to be devoted entirely to the man. Due to her job at the factory, we notice that the roles assigned by the patriarchal way of thinking are not always cut out for women, as they can thrive in unknown areas that used to belong to men. That work problematizes the patriarchal system as she defies the role of subordination allotted to women. Walby (1990) in *Theorizing*

Patriarchy shows that patriarchy is active via different social structure like paid work, household, violence, and sexuality. She adds that such systems work together to maintain inequalities. Shiva (1988) implies that women are strong because they embody the creative, active, and life-sustaining element of nature. Patriarchy tries to control and subject that element. For instance, Mammachi is a success in building a pickle factory. She has the creativity and power because she utilizes her knowledge of spices, local fruits to obtain economic independence. This transforms her from a passive victim into an active individual in the society.

Women's multiple activities demonstrate the power of women, as Shiva (1993, 166) argues that "women's work and knowledge is central to biodiversity conservation and utilization both because they work between 'sectors' and because they perform multiple tasks". In this respect, the role of women is important for the environment and for fostering a new mindset that defies the established social norms. The comparison between men and women is often central in Roy's works as she shows that Mammachi is more appropriate than Chacko for handling serious matters in the factory. N. P. Singh (34) emphasizes the way characters like Ammu and Mammachi traverse, assume, or strongly stand against male domination. As a leading figure, she knows how to respond, confidently drawing the line between workers and managers. In this regard, Roy suggests that women can function as owners, leaders, and managers. Therefore, the factory is the place in which Mammachi can thrive, defying the deep-rooted thought of man as a leader. The novel shows women's ability to defy patriarchal rules. In line with Roy's notion of empowering women, Butler (2006) embarks on defying the traditional dimensions of identity.

The idea of defying patriarchy is clear; Mammachi has been presented as fond of music that brought her recognition and esteem, qualities her husband lacks, so this seems to be her attempt to challenge a social system that has been deeply rooted in the social texture. Music for her is an emancipatory act

that shows her resistance. Her attachment to the violin in the face of capitalism highlights the strength of her resistance. Homi K. Bhabha (2004) explores the concept of hybridity, which can be applied in Mammachi's resistance through her use of the violin. More importantly, her authority at work is a sign of broader role of women in postcolonial India. Her going back in time to when she was first pickling and how she put the bottles close to her head, but in the morning the oil from those bottles was everywhere due to the fact that her method of pickling was wrong, so early in her life she has understood that success needs work, passion and dedication that Mammachi is willing to demonstrate. Spivak (1988) explored the two-sided oppression encountered by women as women and subalterns, and added that it is important to contextualize women's experience within larger material domains to stand against the domination of the father. Furthermore, Loomba (2015, 67) shows the way women of the global south face a "double oppression"—sandwiched between Western imperialist mindset and native patriarchal notions. Her business flourishes in the domestic space, away from the male-centred atmosphere. She succeeds in maintaining her connection with local resources to guarantee her financial independence, which seems to challenge her husband's patriarchal authority. For instance, her husband refuses to touch the onions she buys, highlighting the colonizer's fear of women's economic independence.

Psychologically speaking, the day Chacko prevented Pappachi from beating Mammachi marks the transference of her womanly feelings from her husband to her son; therefore, this event is a turning point in her wrestling with the patriarchal system and echoes the mechanisms she adopts in safeguarding her position as being independent of the impact of patriarchy. Her shift of emotion is an attempt to construct her role as a powerful woman, and the idea of resistance is the outcome of different acts done by her. In this regard, Butler's ideas can be applied to Mammachi's attempt of transferring emotion as this shows her resistance to the general expectation

of women. Additionally, she encourages Chacko's relations with women in the factory. In such a scene, it is ironic to notice that Chacko, the representative of patriarchal rule, helps in violating it. Gqola (2004) highlights how gender intersects with caste in the novel. This intersection encourages patriarchal norms.

In her battle with patriarchy, Mammachi has viewed immorality as a reward for Chacko's interest in having relations with women. In fact, what she has done is strikingly shocking as she encourages him to have immoral relations by giving money to the women he used to bring to the house. In this sense, Roy creates a character ready to defy the norms to win her battle with patriarchy. Her defiance does not end with giving money to the women, but with providing a separate entrance for his room; therefore, it is possible to say that money produces relations. Hill (1997) explores the way cultural manifestations defy deep-rooted ideologies, including those related to the subaltern. In this sense, the mother violates social norms, as those who come to Chacko are servant women, workers, and even married women for whom Chacko and his mother are supposed to function as guardians; therefore, it is possible to argue that Mammachi's money produces immoral relations. Spivak (1999) has tackled the issue of women's ability to represent themselves when they are wrestling with a stronger, dominant discourse. Although Jose (2021) explores the influence of patriarchal structures on women, Mammachi defies those structures. Despite her defiance, she stands for the weaker side because the society imposes this way of thinking. Although Friedman in *Spatial Poetics* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* highlights how Mammachi actively enforces the very patriarchal rules that restrict her own life, enabling her son Chacko's personal liberties while brutally punishing her daughter Ammu for transgressing caste. Additionally, the notion of caste and gender are essential in the structure of the society and Pappachi is the stronger one; however, this is not the end of the story as she has her own voice and has the power to stand for

herself.

Although she knows where to find successful workers, often her choice entails terrible circumstances. In her task as a working woman, Mammachi has been presented as one who knows how to choose active and successful workers; for instance, she has recognized Velutha's talents and gave him the job of maintaining the machines in Paradise Pickles. However the wages given to him were less than those given to the other touchable workers. Ajita Bhattacharya (2021) argues that the position of the workers is fundamental in the social scenario. Moreover, the difference in wages encouraged other workers to look at him with contempt as they consider him of low social rank. For this reason, choosing him opened the door for further debates about the fact that the wages given to the workers is determined by their social rank.

5. Pappachi's Power and the Eruption of Mammachi

In her outlining of Pappachi, Roy has linked Ammu's finishing school to her father's retirement from his work in Delhi. Such a connection suggests the strong bond between the two, and sets the stage for more interaction between Pappachi and his wife. (bell hooks, 2004), in *The Will to Change*, shows that patriarchy encourages men to control their emotions, highlighting violence and anger. She confirms that patriarchy drives men away from their feelings and motivates them to practice dominance over others. Pappachi went through the same thing after the clash with Chacko. The father's domination over girls is indicated in the reference to school. As a man of learning, he does not believe that education is important for girls. In concert with this, Bhattacharya (2021) argues that for Pappachi, the education of girls is of no value. Because of her father's point of view, she has to leave Delhi and go back to Ayyemeni. This idea is in sharp contrast with some examples from the history of India that emphasized the importance of education; for instance, after independence Shiva's grandfather went on a hunger strike to ask the government a college for girls in the local area.

That strike resulted in the death of the grandfather and establishing a college for girls. The level of exaggeration in the novel is meant to highlight the tension in Ammu, who came back home, and nothing is available there but to help in the work of the house, so she is the victim of the patriarchal system that forces her to wait for marriage.

Tackling the issue of patriarchy is not convincing without throwing some light on marriage as a social phenomenon that leads to women's roles as wives, mothers, and daughters, which are the best places in which men demonstrate their power and domination. Simone de Beauvoir (2015) argues that marriage in the traditional sense enhances women's weakness in their relationships with men; therefore, Mammachi's marriage is a crucial phase in her life, marking her confrontation with her husband as the representative of patriarchy. Likewise, bell hooks (1984) suggests that marriage reinforces patriarchal norms in which we can witness the intersection of oppression of gender and sexism, and it is necessary to look for a relationship in which man and woman are equal to each other (45). Although Mammachi's marriage has its ups and downs, her social background formulates her married life as she belongs to the Christian elite in the area. Similarly, Pappachi is a remarkable entomologist having ties with the colonial elite (Roy. 1997,77). In this sense, the wife and the husband have notable social backgrounds that enhance the husband's commitment within the patriarchal system. Similarly, it encourages the wife to seek success and recognition, creating a barrier for the husband, since he used to achieve that status as a government official.

Mammachi's powerful relationship in the family rests on the destruction of the relationship between Chacko and his father. Hitting her was a crucial point that has a lasting psychological impact on the father, who smashed his chair and never spoke to her again. This shows losing his position as a leading figure in the family. Over time, he used to do things to his clothes to give the impression that Mammchi does not pay attention to him. Consequently, he managed to some degree to formulate the idea that working wives are not good

as they are not good at their domestic duties. Moreover, the main cause of this problem was rather psychological, intertwined with power relations, as losing power for Pappachi, or the transfer of that power to his wife was something he could not tolerate. Chacko's interference put an end to his father's attempt to reclaim power; Elsa says that Roy's purpose is "to write about an unfair, male-dominated society that treats women and low-caste people very badly" (Roy.1997,184)); for this reason, Chacko has been motivated by his love for his mother, this gives the impression that having new power relation should be accompanied by new understanding in which those involved in losing and transferring power have to accept it as something necessary and inevitable. In this respect, it is plausible to refer to the generational role of power as older women endured their lot silently; the young ones are more liberated, independent, and non-traditional.

Another important point in Pappachi's life is the moth he discovered; after months of anxiety, he was told it was not new. In fact, as part of his self-esteem, he wanted the moth to be named after him, nonetheless, that was not possible; interestingly enough, twelve years later, and the scientists settled that the moth was really new. That was too late, as he had retired and the moth is named after an officer he used to dislike. This event has a psychological impact, as Pappachi will be harsher with his family as compensation for the loss he faced at work. The story of the moth plays a crucial role in the demarcation of his character, and has a grave impact on the family dynamics and power relationships at home.

In their attempt to find an appropriate place in their society, women have to provide a role that goes beyond the traditional role in which women are sex tools; therefore, Mammachi plays a fundamental role in the factory. In this connection, she is the translation of Shiva's ideas of the necessity of economic authority for women by single-handedly managing the family business, the factory, as an outcome of her own initiative and recipes. Running the factory in terms of managing the workers, daily activities, and funding made her an economic

power in the family.

This goes beyond her traditional role, and marks her as a powerful woman. In addition, women's success is fueled by the terrible circumstances they encounter; for instance, Ammu's divorce is an appropriate venue where she can provide examples about her success in a male-centred community. To emphasize that pain leads to success Katrojwar (2021) argues that a divorced woman is always blamed for her plight. No man is questioned for his divorce. In this respect, those ideas indicate the heavy burden placed on women. The gap with society is seen when the women came to comfort her after her divorce, but she did not like that. She thought that such a form of sympathy was not appropriate for her. In this sense, her disapproval of their comfort has psychological implications, highlighting the necessity of having a barrier with her society.

Ammu's conflict with her society is not confined to her everyday situations; it extends even to her dreams in which police officers want to cut her hair. Dr. J. Devika (2006) referred to this as a clear element of public humiliation, segregating women by shaving their hair. This sort of marking is often done with the prostitutes. In Kottayam, police officers did that to women who worked as prostitutes, so they would be easily recognized, and it would be easy for police officers to harass them. Furthermore, dreams are generally seen as reflections of what is going on in the human subconscious, so this is a social problem the novel depicts, and it is part of the Indian tradition. Cutting women's hair is a social stigma; in this context, Roy draws on elements of Indian tradition to give her novel a local spirit. By adopting dreams and traditions society stigmatizes women as a social response to the wrongs they commit, and on their part, women in the novel are supposed to dismantle this social stigma. Mohanty (1984) argues that women's predicament can be linked to the Gulabi Gang, a recent movement, which stands against violence, abuse of women and marriage problems. This goes with Ammu as having political resonance. In line with Mohanty's notion, Yichun

(2021) argues that in the process of pursuing the fulfillment of her human needs, Ammu, unfortunately, touches and even destroys the ruling pattern on which the powerful class relies.

Adhering to one's values is an important fact that people often appreciate because they constitute an indispensable factor in fostering what they really are. Mammachi's work in the factory symbolizes the family's attempt to preserve its values; pickling preserves values and tradition; therefore, her work carries two contrasting views: safeguarding the values and, simultaneously, defying patriarchy, making herself an independent woman. Similarly, most women in the family appreciate their values, but Ammu saw that making those values the sole expression of her personality brought her misery in her marriage, and compelled her to find her outlet in a relationship with Velutha, which goes beyond society's norms. Rima Mardiyani, Tatan Tawami (2022) argue that traditional gender roles depicted men as rational, strong, protective, decisive, and women as emotional, weak, nurturing, and submissive. This shows that women are placed in a powerless position.” This powerlessness has been tackled by Spivak, who argues that Western thinkers seek to silence women by speaking for them, rather than giving them a chance to show their agency. Ammu as a powerful character typically exhibits Roy's notion of presenting women, who are able to talk for themselves.

6. Different Types of Women

Roy's world is not only confined to high-ranking women; in her depiction of Kochu Maria and her discussion of TV, Roy seeks to present a different type of woman, touching on several points, such as the economy, education, and the conditions of poor people. Kochu Maria does not trust other people's hearsay about the outside world. She does not know about TV, and thinks it is the central point in her discussion with other people because of her lack of education. Boehmer (2005) shows how literature analyzes the natives' experience. Such an idea goes with analyzing Roy's portrayal of the distrust of modernity we notice in Kochu Maria.

Shiva (1993) argues that a lack of education does not mean lack of knowledge since rural women are historically the main experts in seed-saving, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture.

Ammu's psychological status is best translated in her relationship with the twins. The first time the twins saw her crying made them notice her real side. That is accomplished by using narrative details that depict the shift from naiveté to awareness, which is indicated in the psychological side of the mother-kids relationship and the fact that Ammu's tears symbolize a new reality that they have not comprehended yet. The novelist has gone through the same experience as her childhood was described as an insecure environment in which her mother grieved from a bad marriage before fleeing it. Roy grew up observing how society protected men while punishing the women for the misdeeds that do not suit the social norms. Mohanty (2003) explores the necessity of shaping women's roles in light of their histories and contexts. As a matter of fact, the tears can be taken as a sign of her suffering. The psychological rift in Ammu is paralleled with the places Estha walks past. Those places represent the past and the split in society; for instance, his great-grandfather built a school for the untouchable and a nursery school for the touchable. The division in society is seen in terms of what the great-grandfather did.

As a part of Mammachi's attempt to solve the problem, she consulted books and experts. This means that high-ranking women work and solve their problems. In this case, the novelist gives her readers different types of women. This is at odds with Pappachi's idea that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu has no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them (Roy. 1997,23). Even in her decision to be educated, she stands up to her husband. For instance, she and her mother belong to a high-ranking society, but they differ in character for Ammu finds herself with the untouchable Velutha. Butler (2006) shows that gender is the product of repeated behavior and actions that can disrupt or reenact the patriarchal rules.

Ammu's psychological tension is complicated by

very small things that women experience in different parts of the world. For instance, it is unexpected to find a child discussing people's deaths with them. Terry Eagleton, in *How to Read Literature*, argues that adopting a childlike perspective brings awareness concerning moral judgment. Still, out of spontaneity or lack of good attitude. "Rahel asked Mammachi whether, after Mammachi died, she could inherit the pipette. Ammu took her out of the room and smacked her" (Roy. 1997, 45). Having such a situation in mind, it is possible to argue that the spontaneity of children is appreciated; the role of education in teaching them how to deal with people is crucial. True, it is rather unusual and marks Rahel as a strange girl, and on the part of Ammu, it adds more pain to the one she had already experienced.

Women's endeavor to occupy a recognizable domain in the social structure is also exemplified in Ammu's reaction to her husband's attempt to give her to his boss, as she started hitting him hard with the books he used to read as an indication that those books were not sufficient to teach him how to protect his family. Moreover, education symbolized by books must result in a positive change in people's attitudes. Her attack against her husband stands for her disapproval of the social system in which her husband has the upper hand. Her actions are mainly motivated by her psychology and by her social requirements. Her book-throwing is an act of feminist refusal. Mohanty (2003) highlights the importance of associating individual actions with a larger system. In fact, she was driven by her psychological issue to defy her social norms that claim the husband has a powerful role.

The psychology of women and how they handle complex situations is a crucial factor in exploring their power and their alignment with the social system. In this connection, Roy's investment in history in terms of the war on the borders, juxtaposed with that at home, is an added burden for Ammu. For instance, the husband started hitting the kids when the war with Pakistan began. (Ahmed, 1994), in *Theory, Classes, and Nations*, explores the connection between literature and

culture. More importantly, the battle at the border mirrors the war inside the house. As a result, Ammu decided to return to her parents, marking the beginning of a new phase in her life. Spivak (1988) shows the way the marginalized women are wrongly represented within the larger domain, in particular those surrounding the Indo-Pak war. She confirms that the system erases women's voices. Belonging to a social group is a powerful source of value for Ammu, who needs that to present herself as an autonomous woman, and her inability to guarantee that independence has forced her to flee the negative impact of her father's domination. For instance, after Sophie Mol's death, Ammu and her children attended the funeral, but they were standing alone, marked as different, and nobody would look at them. This suggests that she does not fully belong to the family. Moreover, her psychological state, as she was shivering, highlights her suffering and the necessity of belonging to a group. The dilemma she encountered in choosing between her father's name, and her husband's is a good example of her lost self. The need for belonging suggests that deep inside Ammu, the reader can witness a conflict between a self-fashioned identity and patriarchal domain. Spivak (1999) highlights the complexity of representing the oppressed. In Ammu's case, the point of representation is evident: her decision to marry is empowering yet doomed, marking it as a challenging experience for her. The hypocrisy of her family amplified her suffering. For instance, her brother, Chacko, freely abuses lower-ranking women workers; the family views this as something the male needs. Nevertheless, Ammu's independent expression of female desire is deemed a threat to the family's social status.

7. Marriage and the Making of a Powerful woman

Getting rid of her father's constraints is crucial to Ammu; for this reason, she quickly decides to marry, thinking that anyone is better than living in Ayemenem. Looking back on that time, the marriage was a terrible mistake, motivated by the

circumstances she faced at home; nevertheless, it was a remarkable step taken by a woman to prove herself. Moreover, the point of marriage can be elucidated without referring to the pain she encountered as a result of that marriage. As a sign of her pain, once she looks at the photos of her wedding, she thinks that she is looking at someone else. Harold Bloom (56) highlights the importance of being immersed in the text; this is done by referring to the emotional experience in the picture. It was a devastating experience to find a bride who was decorated to be killed. The reason for this feeling is that her husband was not the right man for her. Although Spivak (1999) views marriage as a tool to enhance women's marginalization, there is always a chance to consider this patriarchal structure a starting point in a long process that will eventually lead to empowering women.

The social structure shapes women's character. For instance, Baby Kachomma dislikes the twin because they are half-Hindu. This indicates the divide in society between Hindus and Christians, which is rather apparent, as no meeting between the two is possible. Mohanty (2003) highlights the significance of linking individual experience to larger systems; in this sense, she links personal struggle to “interlocking oppression” to show systematic patterns rather than merely to emphasize individual struggle. As for Ammu, her marriage away from her family led to this divide. Rege (2006) shows how gender and caste intersect, spotlighting how women's experiences are structured by both. For this reason, defying social norms often brings about terrible outcomes. As a result, women are divided between proving themselves, alternatively adhering to social norms. Saman A. Dizayi (2021, 71) argues that “These structures are generally interlaced and serve as a repressive compound system, particularly for women and untouchable people of the society”.

Although marriage is the solace of her painful life with her father, Ammu's marriage turned her life upside down as she discovered that her husband is totally different from the person she had known before; Shiva (1993) argues that marriage is a

social phenomenon that leads to control and domination on the part of the husband. She confirms that true relation has to lead to a harmonious relation between the man and the woman. The lack of this harmony is evident because the husband was a heavy drinker, a liar over small things, and unable to provide adequate justification for his wrong acts. Such an attitude from the husband made things terrible for Ammu, who and her husband moved to Assam, and there, she was a young woman fond of wearing young-people clothes and smoking. Moi (2002) explores the fact that agency is embodied in some actions. Over time, Ammu realized that her husband is totally different from the person she met years ago, and this definitely adds to her pain; in this sense, the marriage she deems as an outlet for her does not seem workable. Mohanty (1984) emphasizes the importance of recognizing women's roles in some economic and cultural situations. She adds that it is important to empower women to play a crucial role in society. Roy sheds light on that role by focusing on Ammu and how she manages her life with her husband. The difficult situation she encountered with her husband does not end her power, but it urges her to take a new turn that serves her empowerment. For instance, this was exemplified in having a new relationship.

One of the remarkable phases in Ammu's life is her role as a mother, who made good for her daughter and was duty-bound to save for her. Ammu's power is indicated by the signs of a change in her character as she puts flowers in her hair, and used to smoke. Nussbaum (1990) shows the importance of emotions in moral understanding. She adds that identifying emotions like exhilaration and fear can help foster a connection between the reader and the character's moral perspective, highlighting the connection between individual human experience and larger human domains. In this respect, Ammu represents women in general. She was fond of midnight swims, which marks a change from a mother to a wilder one. Her being is divided between two unmixed things; at night she was in love with the man her kids loved during the day. In addition to her role as a mother, we can also see her

as a lover. In this sense, love and domestic responsibility are disproportionately amalgamated in her character. Showalter (1985) explores how cultural expectations shaped the treatment of women's insanity, showing that wild behavior in women is a reaction to the restrictions of society. This gives the impression that such a new role raises a question about the possibility of having a compromise between her two roles; therefore, the chasm one can see between her motherhood and her desire to live as a wild woman, untamed creature is crucial for her psychological implications, generally known as decisional conflict, which refers to making a decision leading to distress.

The relation between Chacko and Ammu is determined by the fact that they live in a male-centred society, which made Chacko too proud of himself and had no desire to pay attention to his sister. He was backed by the patriarchal way of thinking that plays a fundamental role in empowering the male and weakening the female, urging her to find alternative ways other than those set by the patriarchal rules. In the course of defying social norms, Ammu has to manage her life properly; for example, when reading to her twins, she used to imitate characters, which shows her talent for creating an educational atmosphere. Reading and new interactions encourage ongoing dialogue rather than closure. In addition to educating them, she wants them to be obedient. This is strange as it comes from a woman who is not obedient herself. More importantly, when Estha was with his father in Calcutta, Ammu was facing problems, and she made it very clear that she wanted her children to live with her in the same room. Spivak (1988) argues that women's voices are misrepresented or silenced, so it is difficult for them to deal with larger forms of domination. This goes with Ammu's situation and with the limits of her resistance. This is another example of her love for the twins from the early years of their lives. Mohanty (1984) argues that colonization "implies a relation of structural domination" The idea of homogenizing global south women and showing different sorts of oppression is clear in the novel,

so Ammu's attempt to defy and resist the structural power of the father and husband is an attempt to defy a form of colonization that the women encounter in the course of their lives.

Ammu, as a powerful woman, is presented as disapproving of certain behaviours. For instance, in the car scene, she hated blowing bubbles and shivering legs as she thought they were not symptoms of aristocrats. Mullan (2008), in *How Novel Works*, shows the significance of senses in showing emotions and tensions, as these sensory details do not tell, but show the reader what is going on. In this regard, Ammu pays attention to the great gap between classes and that it is important to maintain this gap. Her portrait is not merely of a victimized woman, but one attempts to define her position in the society. This definitely goes with the point of educating the kids. Additionally, the relationship with the kids underscores her power; in Estha's notebook, we find a reference to them buying a present for Ammu's birthday, which clearly shows the great bond between the mother and her kids. Her past with her husband, who turned bad, is crucial for her, as even his photo brings her lots of pain; however, she knows that a father is important for her kids, but the kids know she is doing her best.

The twins were talented readers, who read strangely. This added a burden for the mother. In this sense, her relationship with the twins is one of the phases that mark her as a powerful woman, because, as a divorced woman, handling the twins is a great challenge. As for the family relations, the kids developed a sense of resentment toward their father as they deem the parents responsible for not having a life bus ride. Such small things play a role in the kids' lives. In this sense, the novelist seems to suggest that people's lives are mainly centred on very small things, and it is necessary to comprehend the implications of those small things. Building on the same idea, Reena Ranjith and Dr Manjula K. T. (2024) argue that the deeds of the characters leave them deeply ingrained in readers' memories. The psychology of the twins is largely attributed to a tragic event they faced early in life,

such as the death of Sophie Mol. For the twins, the government did not pay for the funeral because she had not been killed at a zebra crossing. In this sense, the twins' strangeness is mixed with the tragic event. Ammu has to deal with that strangeness as an attribute of the twins without belittling its value, because a zebra crossing is a matter of rules.

The twins used to fight like kids, and their fight could go on forever. Estha called Rahel Refugee Stick, and she called him Elvis the Pelvis. Additionally, even the regular fights between them are part of the issues Ammu faced in proving her power as a woman. Rahel, on her part, thinks about kissing sideways, just like in the movie, and wants to know how to do it and who she can ask, so the twins are trying to explore areas that are not really cut for them. It is human nature to mimic. It is not only kids but even mature people try to imitate, though it is especially evident among kids, who mimic adults' behaviour. In this sense, the movies play a role in shaping kids' personalities. Speaking about what children's likes and dislikes opens the horizon to tackle children's rights in society. Roy considers that children are a central part of society, so shedding light on their problems benefits society as a whole. Having this in mind, Ammu, in her relation with the twins, is serving society. Despite her meager salary and the lack of jobs, she is quite keen on buying presents for her seven-year-old daughter. Her economic problem is mingled with her challenge to the patriarchal system. This goes with Spivak's ideas of “double blind” oppression. In this sense, her role as a mother was fulfilled despite her health problem, as she was carrying the inhaler with her. In this regard, we face a mix of economic conditions and health issues, both of which shed light on the problems kids face. Ammu's success continues even until the end of her life, when she died alone while going to be interviewed for a job. Her solitary death echoes the social implications women face. Mohanty (1984) explains the necessity of the connection between theory and practice, focusing on real issues that arise when raising questions concerning social

practices and problems. In concert with this, Ammu's strength in seeking a job for herself highlights the importance of a job for women.

8. Conclusion

This article has tackled the issue of women as powerful characters in *The God of Small Things*. After the application of Shiva's theory of ecofeminism, and Spivak's theory of postcolonialism, it shows that despite oppression, weakness, and marginalization, women are able to defy social constraints, and to present themselves as powerful characters. From Shiva's point of view, Ammu and Mammachi are fighting a dominant power structure and they both succeeded in their defiance; however, their power cannot be defined as institutional. From Spivak's perspective, women experience double colonization by postcolonial models such as Pappachi, and Ammu's husband. Ammu defies the two and succeeded in that.

The application of Shiva's theory has shown that women and the environment are connected to each other. That connection reveals that the dirty river stands for the physical and psychological pain experienced by the character. Furthermore, the river is the symbol of power for Ammu. The idea of silencing women and epistemic violence has been highlighted by Spivak. In this respect, it has been elucidated that Ammu has the power to resist the laws of society in general and those of love in particular. That is evident in her wrestling with the family, with the police, and with the society. The article has shown that women have gone through different types of oppression: at home and at work. That oppression has motivated them to act. The most important point in the article is that despite patriarchy's strong grip, Ammu and Mammachi are strong. Additionally, the article has shown that discussing Pappachi, along with Mammachi throws light on the threat women represent to the man's power and supremacy.

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