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An Ecofeminist Reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997)

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Abstract

In postcolonial India, those in power claimed that development projects were meant to bring progress and prosperity to the Indian people; however, these projects caused ecological damage and consolidated the oppression of women, children, and lower-caste groups. The main purpose of this article is to read Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things (1997) through a postcolonial ecofeminist lens, examining the way environmental degradation and social and economic injustice are deeply interconnected. This study explains the ways hierarchical dualisms and capitalist patriarchy legitimize the exploitation of nature by humans, of women by men, and of the oppressed by the powerful. This article suggests that people in the Global South context have a profound relationship with the natural environment, thanks to their sustainable way of life. Therefore, countries like India need a distinct perspective of ecofeminism that can liberate nature, women, children, and other powerless groups from an oppression nurtured by dualism, patriarchy, and capitalism. Postcolonial ecofeminism is relevant to the Indian context because it seeks to subvert oppressive social and economic systems through environmental activism and other forms of resistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Humans' lives cannot exist in isolation from the natural environment they depend on. Arundhati Roy is a prominent Indian novelist whose works of fiction and essays deal with environmental issues in postcolonial India. In *The God of Small Things* (1997), she presents environmental problems as small things that have been ignored in Indian society for decades. She claims that Indian women's silence against patriarchal oppression goes in parallel with environmental destruction. In her novel, Roy portrays the ecological exploitation of nature by human beings in the name of progress and modernization. Roy's story describes the physical environment in both the past and the present.

This study contends that mainstream ecofeminism—inherent in Western thought—is inadequate for examining literary works dealing with women and nature in the Global South. For these women, their interconnectedness with nature enables them to challenge both capitalist and patriarchal hierarchical structures. In *The God of Small Things* (1997), Roy questions the binary structure that legalizes the oppression of nature by humans, of women by men, and of the oppressed by the powerful. The novel interrogates how such hierarchies operate through mechanisms such as patriarchal ideology and Western capitalist development. Such exploitation of the human and the nonhuman in India as a third-world context demands an ecofeminist reading of the novel from a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective.

Different research papers have examined Roy's novel from an ecofeminist viewpoint. In her article "Inhabiting the space of literature: An ecocritical study of Arundhati Roy's God of Small Things and O.V. Vijayan's The Legends of Khasak," Divya Anand (2005) points out that different social groups inhabit the banks of the river: the wealthy on one bank, while the oppressed — namely the untouchables, like Velutha — are on the other bank. The Meenachal River marks the division between two social caste groups: the touchables and the untouchables get in touch thanks to the same river. In other words, the river represents a mediator space where the relationship between upper and lower classes is not dominated by the logic of oppression (p. 102).

Similarly, in their article "An ecocritical perspective of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things," Rukhaya M. Kunhi and Zeenath Mohamed Kunhi (2017) maintain that concerns about ecofeminism are highlighted in the novel, as the subjugation of women and the degradation of nature function on a parallel plane (p. 1). Generally, the theory highlights the significance of the interconnections between humans and the natural environment (animals, plants, and the earth), and it serves as a movement that resists the interrelated oppressions of gender, race, class, and nature. The river in the novel stands as a metaphor for Ammu. Even though the word river is neuter in English, it has always been attributed with feminine qualities in India, owing to its features of sustenance, creativity, and fertility (p. 1). According to Roy, the relation between humans and nature is reciprocal. She illustrates this fact using metaphor and metonymy. Rukhaya M. K. and Zeenath M. K. suggest that ecofeminist practice is undoubtedly anti-hierarchical. In Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), the relationship between the female and the river is harmonious. The river is usually associated with feminine features; Roy compares Ammu to the river, during her intercourse with the untouchable Velutha, asserting that "She was as wide and deep as a river in spate. He sailed on her waters" (p. 337). These depictions obviously portray nature as a source of joy and protection. Additionally, the novelist plainly portrays the children's acquaintance with the river and their proximity to it. When Estha was sexually abused, he sought the Meenachal River for protection, as if the river were his mother. Rahel and Estha see in their dreams "Their river" (p. 122) as they fall asleep. This dream adventure reminds them of their swimming in "their mother's cunt" (p. 93) throughout their fatal journey. Therefore, the river, on another level, serves as a substitute mother to the twins, nourishing them and educating them (Rukhaya M. K. and Zeenath M. K., 2017, p. 2).

Likewise, in her article "Ecofeminism in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things and Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide and Gun Island," Sarita Rani (2025) investigates ecofeminism by looking at works of Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh, underlining the connection between the oppression of women and environmental concerns. According to Rani, Roy's *The God of Small* Things (1997) demonstrates a correlation between the domination of nature and oppressed groups, like women and children, by capitalist and patriarchal ideologies. The novel stresses the strong relationship between caste and gender oppressions and ecological damage through the two main characters, Ammu and Velutha.

In "Discourses of ecofeminism in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things," Bharatender Sheoran (2016) reads Roy's novel from an ecofeminist perspective. This article suggests that Roy questions the influence of development on marginalized groups and highlights dualistic structures that oppress Ammu, her children, and lower-class groups. Furthermore, Roy explains that modernization has damaging effects on people and the environment in Ayemenem, demonstrating the symbolic association of the Meenachal River with the environmental damage caused by patriarchal capitalism and developmental projects. Roy's narrative critiques the government's development that destroys both the environment and marginalized groups. In the same way, in her paper "An ecofeminist reading of Arundhathi Roy's The God of Small Things," Aneeta Sebastian stresses a strong correlation between women and nature. Sebastian contends that the novel depicts women as symbolic victims of the patriarchal mindset in India, which goes in parallel with ecological damage embodied in the destruction of the Meenachal River by developmental projects. The natural environment and human everyday experiences

interweave in the Kerala landscape, mirroring the link between the oppression of disenfranchised groups — as women, children, and lower-class groups — and the degradation of the environment.

In his paper "Postcolonial ecofeminism in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things," Youngsuk Chae (2015) investigates how Roy questions development in postcolonial India. Development projects funded by the government engender ecological damage and oppression of the powerless. This paper examines the combination of postcolonial and ecofeminist standpoints, showing how Roy critiques capitalist patriarchy that exacerbates environmental destruction. Chae (2015) maintains that the narrative highlights associations between the oppression of the marginalized and ecological degradation. This research paper employs a postcolonial ecofeminist approach to read Roy's novel. It suggests that this perspective is relevant to analyze literary works by writers who tackle social and environmental issues, especially in Global South contexts like India. It explores the representation of nature and marginalized groups in *The God of Small Things* (1997) and questions the dualistic frameworks that permit the subordination of nature, women, and the oppressed. This hierarchy functions through a patriarchal capitalist mindset and the Western ideologies of development. Because postcolonial ecofeminism aims to dismantle systems that oppress human and nonhuman worlds, this study demonstrates how Roy describes some aspects of environmental damage and social injustice. Therefore, this piece of research investigates the novelist's presumed attitude, making her readership aware of the interconnectedness of natural and social environments and conscious of the dangerous impact of ecological damage on oppressed social groups. This study is significant because women, nature, and the oppressed groups in Global South countries such as India are in urgent need of a different version of ecofeminism that can defend oppressed groups and their environment by considering militancy one of its main features. By advocating environmental activism, postcolonial ecofeminism rejects all forms of oppression, subverting dualistic structures that hinder social and economic justice.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) depicts the miserable life of the oppressed groups in postcolonial India. Both Ammu and Velutha challenge the dominant patriarchal capitalist system that controls people's minds in Ayemenem. As a result, these two main characters paid the price for their opposition to the dualistic, oppressive mindset adopted mainly by the wealthy in this community. Ammu and Velutha have a sense of militancy in facing the powerful economic and political system in Ayemenem since they choose to sacrifice their lives for the sake of defending the oppressed, namely, women, children, untouchables, and all those who were not happy to live within this world of injustice.

This oppression of social groups does not come out of nowhere; this system of thought, characterized by oppression, reflects the main aim of the Western ideologies of development in Global South countries. In *Ecofeminism*, Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva (1993) maintains that governments, intergovernmental agencies, and power elites see that the oppressed, such as women and children, are a burden on the planet's resources (p. 86). In fact, the increase in world population is not the cause of environmental disasters, but rather it is the patriarchal capitalist greedy mentality that brings about this damage. In *The God of Small Things* (1997), environmental degradation and the suffering of Ammu, her children, Velutha, and lower-caste groups raise the following questions: What are the causes of ecological deterioration? Why does Arundhati Roy question the Western model of development? To what extent does postcolonial ecofeminism demonstrate the interconnectedness of environmental degradation and social injustice in Roy's narrative?

The first part of this paper is devoted to a theoretical framework that begins with defining the flourishing field of ecofeminism. Then, postcolonial ecofeminism is defined through the Western myth of development and dualism as fundamental concepts. The second part provides a postcolonial ecofeminist reading of *The God of Small Things* (1997), discussing hierarchical dualisms and clarifying the correlation between environmental degradation and social injustice. Subsequently, the symbolism of the Meenachal River in the novel shows nature's agency when

it turns into a shelter for the untouchable Velutha, Ammu, and her children, Estha and Rahel. The conclusion foregrounds the implications of The God of Small Things in raising ecological consciousness towards the correlation between environmental issues and social and economic injustice.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF ECOFEMINISM

In *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*, Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) defines ecofeminism as "a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of women and the domination of nature" (xxiv). Ecofeminism stresses that the oppression of women and nature is ingrained in Western thought; it functions by the mechanism of dualism that regards reason over emotion, mind over body, and man over woman. These dualisms place what is related to women and nature in a lower position. Ecofeminist environmental ethics aims to reveal and question these dualisms, rejecting these divisions and acknowledging the interconnectedness of all life forms. Many ecofeminists and ecological feminist philosophers have documented empirical evidence linking feminism and the environment. For example, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, and Karen Warren provide data showing that Global North development policies reinforce practices regarding food, forests, and water that affect women directly and contribute to their inability to sustain themselves and their families. Such policies engender unequal distribution of power and resources. They maintain domination over both women and nature. In protest against the harmful Western scientific approach, Shiva promotes a holistic approach that recognizes nature as a creative force. For Shiva, this creative force is intrinsically feminine, inherent in the Hindu concept of Prakriti, the fundamental life force. Shiva sees the promise of ecological stewardship in the daily practices of women, such as those in the Chipko movement.

Ecofeminism advocates for establishing a reciprocal attachment to the natural world. For instance, Chipko women felt accountable for the protection of forests from being cleared by agents of the myth of development because these women's way of life is interconnected with their environment, and therefore, their way of life is sustainable; that is, they did not see the forest as a resource but rather as a living entity that deserves to be preserved. Chipko activists' way of seeing nature explains why they sacrificed their lives, hugging trees that were going to be cut by capitalist companies, which regard the forest as a natural space to be conquered and exploited. Likewise, in Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Velutha adopts a symbiotic relationship with nature. Velutha's sustainable way of life emphasizes his affinity for the environment. For example, Velutha's harmonious kinship with nature is manifested in his carpentry abilities; Roy states that "Velutha was eleven then, about three years younger than Ammu. He was like a little magician. He could make intricate toys — tiny windmills, rattles, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds; he could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts" (p. 74). Velutha's relational connection to nature is embodied in his knowledge of the natural world and his interrelation with the Meenachal River:

> His feet touched the muddy riverbed. As he rose from the dark river and walked up the stone steps, she saw that the world they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars. He moved so easily through it. As she watched him, she understood the quality of his beauty. How his labour had shaped him. How the wood he fashioned had fashioned him. Each plank he planed, each nail he drove, each thing he made, had moulded him. Had left its stamp on him. Had given him his strength, his supple grace. (Roy, 1997, pp. 333–334)

Furthermore, Velutha lives in a hut made of natural materials like wood. Roy mentions that "Velutha, Vellya Paapen and Kuttappen lived in a little laterite hut, downriver from the Ayemenem house, nestled close to the ground, as though it was listening to a whispered subterranean secret" (p. 78).

3. POSTCOLONIAL ECOFEMINISM

Postcolonial ecofeminism criticizes anthropocentric Western environmentalism and traditional feminism, which neglects ecological concerns. Ecofeminist Karen Warren argues that women are strongly attached to nature due to their role of providing water, food, and fuel. Ecofeminism relates the oppression of women and nature to patriarchy and colonialism. In her book Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development, Vandana Shiva (1988) argues that development is not simply capital accumulation and the commercialization of the economy, but it leads to poverty and dispossession (p. 1). Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies contend that the Western model of development brought about "maldevelopment." This patriarchal model separates women from their sustainable way of life and leads to environmental damage. Shiva maintains that international financial institutions, namely the World Bank and multinational companies, work for the benefit of the Global North. Western agendas of development displace rural women, children, and subsistence communities, stealing their lands and resources.

In her work *Feminism and the mastery of nature*, Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood (2002) points out that dualism privileges reason over emotion, man over woman, and culture over nature. This dualistic structure is deeply rooted in Western thought and sustains aspects of oppression, such as colonialism and patriarchy. Plumwood demonstrates that dualism derives from "a denied dependency on a subordinated other" (p. 42); this denial consolidates the fact that the superior side inferiorizes others by excluding them. This dualism structures a hierarchy of inferior and superior in Western culture, reinforcing a dualistic mindset (p. 46).

Val Plumwood (2002) stresses that Western thought is shaped by a chain of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms such as culture/nature, male/female, mind/body, and human/nature. These dichotomies are not separate but constitute a structure of dualism where each reinforces the other. The reason/nature binary opposition is the main dualism in this structure, which associates the dominant category (culture, reason, male, human) with superiority and the dominated category (nature, emotion, female, non-human) with inferiority. These dichotomies have structured the history of Western thought and mirror the main types of oppression, such as classism, racism, patriarchy, and the exploitation of nature (p. 45).

According to Plumwood (2002), dualism goes beyond mere divergence or ranking; it is an ingrained cultural structure that depicts one category as naturally inferior to the other. While dualisms are established through identity and values formation and seen as natural and unchangeable, hierarchies are open to development and alteration. Those categorized in the inferior group are expected to embrace and support the values of the superior group, regarding them as the social and cultural norm and model to follow. Shiva points out that Albert Memmi argues that 'colonisation creates the colonised just as it… creates the coloniser' (p. 47). Therefore, dualism is a fixed structure of segregation and domination that renders egalitarianism, mutual acknowledgment, and respect unthinkable. It is characterized by total exclusion and positions the two groups as primarily divergent sorts of beings; dualism reinforces the fact that the inferior group is inherently subaltern and beyond alteration (p. 48).

4. HIERARCHICAL DUALISMS AND CAPITALIST PATRIARCHY

One of the central concepts that reveals the intention of Western development ideologies, which the Global North uses as a pretext to justify its domination of Global South countries, is dualism. In her essay "Ecofeminism, women, environment, animals," Lisa Kemmerer (2013) affirms that dualistic thinking is foundational in the Western world, as in many other civilizations. Through dualism, men, human beings, civilization, culture, mind, and rational thought are categorized as superior, relegating females, nonhuman animals, untamed wildness, bodies, the material world, emotions, and intuition to a separate and lesser category (p. 71). This type of thinking is manifest in Roy's novel. For instance, the untouchable Velutha is

allowed to work in a factory which belongs to the upper class thanks to his expertise in dealing with modern machines, though the salary he receives is less than the salary of touchable workers; however, other untouchables are not permitted to have jobs in this factory because of their caste. Additionally, Ammu is maltreated by her husband and family, especially after her divorce, which is seen as inappropriate in a patriarchal society that holds a sexist view of women. Roy explains that Ammu's husband, who was responsible for their separation, asked her to sleep with his boss at work to keep his job. Instead of supporting Ammu in overcoming this bitter experience, her family forced her to work in the factory for free; this clearly demonstrates the oppression of women in India by the capitalist patriarchy. Roy interrogates the Western hierarchical divisions that license the exploitation of nature by humans, of women by men, and of the oppressed by the powerful.

In his article "Postcolonial Ecofeminism in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things," Youngsuk Chae (2015) asserts that "Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997), regards this dualism between men and women, development and underdevelopment as an ideological pretext for domination" (p. 520). In her book *Environmental culture,* Val Plumwood (2002) claims that this dichotomy has authorized the oppression of women and the destruction of nature (p. 4). Roy highlights the devastation of nature and the oppression of subdued human beings as an inescapable process in the so-called development of postcolonial India. Such oppression is well described through the narration of the love story of the main characters of Roy's novel: Ammu, a divorced Syrian Christian, and Velutha, an untouchable. The novel's setting is Ayemenem in Kerala. It intertwines events of 1969 with the present day of 1992: Rahel, Ammu's daughter, returns to Ayemenem from America after hearing of her twin brother Estha's return 23 years after the deaths of their half-English cousin Sophie and Velutha, and soon after their mother's death. Estha and Rahel have drifted apart over the years due to the traumatic events of 1969, in which they witnessed the police violently beating Velutha and were then forced to falsely denounce him as Sophie's kidnapper and the cause of her death; even so, they (and the reader) know that she had drowned by accident. Highlighting India's rigid social structure and society's collective violence against 'othered' human beings, Roy's novel reveals the injustice underlying the hierarchical dualism and instrumental reasoning that are used to justify violence against the inferior others (Chae, 2015, p. 521).

Chae (2015) maintains that Roy's sense of anger at the violence against subjugated women and lower-caste groups who are cast as inferior beings by the dominant power group in postcolonial India indicates an ecofeminist consciousness. The novelist's criticism of patriarchal violence, domination of subdued people, and the exploitation of the natural environment are extended to the national and global levels. By questioning these issues, Roy reveals the violence caused by rationalizations of economic logic and optimistic narratives of national development. The perspective of postcolonial ecofeminism exposed by Roy reconsiders the agendas of postcolonial globalization that have caused environmental damage and violent exploitation of nature. Her depiction of the devastating impact of global capital on postcolonial Indian society entails social, economic, and environmental justice for oppressed women, marginalized human beings, and nature (p. 521).

Roy (1997) ironically names the hotel a "smelly paradise" (p. 120). This entails that state-supported hotel development and development projects backed by patriarchal capitalism increase the gap between the impoverished underclass and the wealthy elite. While projects such as new hotels emerged to develop tourism, the same development plans destroyed the natural environment and the river. After more than two decades of development projects supported by dominant power groups, Estha finds a river that "smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils" (p. 14). Roy (1997) refers to environmental degradation and reveals the rationalized economic logic that ideologically justifies the sacrifice of "small" people. Rahel also notices that "downriver, a saltwater barrage had been built, in exchange for votes from the influential paddy-farmer lobby" (p. 118). Chae notes that the barrage was built

by the state government to regulate the inflow of saltwater from the backwaters, allowing farmers to have two rice crops a year instead of one. However, what Estha finds are dead fish scattered on the mud banks, even though it is the rainy season.

Dualisms between men and women, Self and the Other, have contributed to the authorization of patriarchal violence towards women and the domination of marginalized 'others.' In her book *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale*, Maria Mies (2014) contends that the concept of capitalist patriarchy denotes the system that maintains women's exploitation and oppression (p. 37), and maintains that capitalism constitutes the contemporary manifestation of this system, while patriarchy constitutes the mostly invisible underground of the visible capitalist system (p. 38). In *The God of Small Things* (1997), patriarchal violence and the unequal treatment of women are portrayed by the acts of Ammu's father, Shri Benaan John Ipe (Pappachi). Pappachi's beatings of his wife, Soshamma (Mammachi), escalate when his sense of superiority decreases after he retires from government service and he discovers the success of his wife's pickling business, which she manages from her kitchen. In fact, Pappachi's misuse of patriarchal power is related to his decreased economic power. He frequently abuses Mammachi and Ammu. He drives them out of their home on cold winter nights, yet Mammachi endures her husband's violent beatings, as if naturally accepting the powerless status of Indian women. Nevertheless, Ammu understands her father's inhumanity and patriarchal violence: "As a child, she had learned very quickly to disregard the Father Bear Mother Bear stories she was given to read. In her version, Father Bear beat Mother Bear with brass vases. Mother Bear suffered those beatings with mute resignation" (p. 171).

Her brother Chacko Ipe receives an Oxford education; however, Ammu isn't allowed to continue her education because her father believes "a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl" (Roy, 1997, p. 38). Her abusive father and her sense of hopelessness at home push her to marry a Hindu man who works on the tea estates in Calcutta. Still, despite great efforts to escape her miserable life with her family, Ammu confronts patriarchal violence again in her marriage. Her husband turns out to be an alcoholic; when he is about to be fired, his English manager, Mr. Hollick, suggests that "Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be looked after" (p. 41). Her husband's negotiated deal with Mr. Hollick shows that he perceives her body as a sexual object. This patriarchal perception of Ammu's body angers her and makes her refuse his suggestion. Her husband, furious at her silent resistance, "suddenly lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her" (p. 42). His patriarchal desire to dominate her is unveiled through his irrational violence. Pappachi's pitiless stance toward Ammu and Mammachi is analogous to Ammu's husband's violent conduct, which embodies his belief in patriarchal superiority that legitimizes the suppression of women and othered beings. As Ammu's husband starts to beat her children, she returns to her parents in Ayemenem, "to everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams" (p. 42).

Patriarchal violence is demonstrated through Ammu's brother, Chacko, who becomes the man of the house after the death of Pappachi. Ammu works in the family factory, Paradise Pickles and Preserves, upon returning to her parents' house. Chacko names and expands this factory after he returns from London, and divorces an English woman named Margaret. Chacko registers it as a partnership and informs Mammachi that she is his "sleeping partner" (Roy, 1997, p. 55), indicating that she has no day-to-day control over the factory. He always refers to the business as "my Factory, my pineapples, my pickles" (p. 56). Although Ammu contributes as much work to the factory as she is able, Chacko reminds her that "a daughter has no claim to the property" (p. 56). His vision of women reveals his patriarchal capitalist perspective and the hierarchical dualism justifying male superiority over women that India's patriarchal society supports. Chacko's patriarchal domination is described by Ammu as an ideological belief in "male chauvinist society" (p. 56), showing her opposition to inequality and the injustice imposed on women in patriarchal society.

Ammu's sense of injustice increases because of the older generation's traditional patriarchal views of male privilege, as Mammachi's differing attitudes towards Chacko and Ammu reveal. Although Mammachi has been mistreated by her husband, she supports this patriarchal ideology and exploits Ammu's labor in the pickling factory by Mammachi and Chacko; in Gayatri Spivak's words (1994), "the structure of exploitation is compounded by patriarchal social relations" (p. 84). Mammachi endorses patriarchal values because of her own need for financial security and material necessities, and she justifies Chacko's sexual relationships with the women in the factory as "Man's Needs" (Roy, 1997, p. 160). Mammachi had an independent entrance built for Chacko's room at the eastern side of the house, making sure the females he used to please his 'Needs' could visit him without entering the main areas of the family home (pp. 160–161).

While Mammachi allows Chacko's "libertine relationships" (Roy, 1997, p. 160) with the women in the factory, she regards Ammu's relationship with the untouchable Velutha, who works in the factory, as "reckless" (p. 44) and irrational: "[Mammachi] thought of her naked, coupling in the mud with a man who was nothing but a filthy coolie. She imagined it in vivid detail: a Paravan's coarse black hand on her daughter's breast. […] Like animals" (p. 244). Mammachi disdains Ammu and abhors her as if she were beneath human status. In contrast to Chacko's and Mammachi's judgment of Ammu as irrational, Ammu's view of Velutha is based on her own reasonable judgment, which goes beyond society's rigid hierarchy. After feeling a sense of solidarity with the subjugated others who are treated as inferior members of society, and after her family discriminates against her children, whom they consider illegitimate, Ammu begins her two-week relationship with the untouchable Velutha.

Ammu senses Velutha's outrage against social oppression and directs her anger at the rigid social hierarchies that have led to her own subjugation as well as that of othered people. She shares with Velutha an opposition to the latent violence in the hierarchical dualism that justifies the oppression of women and untouchable groups. As Ammu views Velutha as "The God of Loss, The God of Small Things" (Roy, 1997, p. 210), their solidarity becomes possible because they have both experienced systematic oppression at the intersection of gender, class, and caste. Yet, Ammu's and Velutha's disobedience, displayed through their inter-caste sexual relationship, is regarded as subversive. Velutha is fired from the factory, and Ammu is locked in her bedroom "like the family lunatic in a medieval household" (Roy, 1997, p. 239) after Velutha's father, Vellya Paapen, reports the relationship to Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. Soon after, Baby Kochamma goes to Police Inspector Thomas Mathew, accusing Velutha of being a rapist; she justifies her action as an effort to save the family's reputation from disgrace. Upon receiving this false report, the inspector dispatches the police to arrest Velutha, and Estha and Rahel witness the policemen brutally beating him to death in their "attempt to instil order into a world gone wrong" (p. 246). Twenty years later, the twins recognize that the police's practice of brutal violence, which indicated the state's fear of losing control or of having its abusive and oppressive power challenged, reflected "civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness. Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor defy "Men's Needs" (p. 292). Men's need to dominate women and oppress the powerless corresponds to the ideology of authoritarian patriarchy, which Roy extends to the disenfranchised of India's caste system. The local police brutally treated Ammu and Velutha; however, the maltreated characters succeeded in showing social inequalities sustained by dualistic structures.

5. THE MEENACHAL RIVER AND THE SUBVERSION OF RIGID SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HIERARCHIES

The patriarchal capitalist vision of development and the exploitation of nature as a marker of progress is reductionist. However, the untouchable Velutha, who is a carpenter and engineer who knows more about the machines in the factory than anyone else, does not have a

reductionist scientific view: his outlook does not exclude what Indian scientist and feminist Vandana Shiva (1988) terms "ecological and holistic ways of knowing which understand and respect nature's processes and interconnectedness as science" (pp. 14–15). Velutha does not employ his scientific knowledge to manipulate or dominate nature; he finds that his world belongs to nature, which is interconnected with small living things. He swims across the river to meet Ammu, waiting for him on the other side:

> His feet touched the muddy riverbed. As he rose from the dark river and walked up the stone steps, she [Ammu] saw that the world they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars. (Roy, 1997, pp. 315–316)

For Ammu and Velutha, small insects, the river, and natural environments serve as essential elements connecting human beings and nature. Ammu's and Velutha's shared view of the interconnected world and their resistance to social and economic injustice in postcolonial Indian society solidify their inter-caste relationship. Notwithstanding, the deaths of Velutha and Ammu signify that marginalized and dispossessed people and small things in society and nature have been "bullied all their lives by Someone Big" (Roy, 1997, p. 173), and the demolition of nature has been justified as an inescapable sacrifice in the process of development in postcolonial India. In his article, Chae (2015) explains that "Velutha's and Ammu's resistance to the oppressive Big system through their inter-caste relationship may be understood as a challenge to dualistic hierarchies that justify the subjugation of nature and subordinated people" (p. 524). Additionally, their challenge to capitalist patriarchy and conscious opposition to such dualisms reflect an ecofeminist consciousness that surpasses gender divides. In her book *Ecofeminism as politics: Nature, Marx and the postmodern*, Ariel Salleh (2017) claims that ecofeminism "builds bridges with progressive elements in the men's movement" (p. 11), as it takes a stand against patriarchal capitalism.

Roy's critiques of the destruction of the natural environment, patriarchal violence, and the domination of marginalized women and low-caste groups are extended to the economic sphere. In *Science and nature: Past, present, and future*, Carolyn Merchant (2018) explains that "capitalist patriarchy" and "male-dominated power structure" are root causes of the oppression of women and destruction of non-human nature (p. 252). In *The God of Small Things* (1997), capitalist patriarchy is the ideological justification for the exploitation of subjugated women and lower castes, such as the untouchables. Postcolonial Indian society's systematic violence toward the powerless groups is displayed through Velutha's death. Baby Kochamma believes that in getting rid of Velutha after hearing about his relationship with Ammu, by pressuring Mammachi to fire him from the factory, she has saved the family name and Ammu; however, she is motivated mainly by her personal desire for revenge on the Naxalites and her "fear of being dispossessed" (Roy, 1997, p. 67). Velutha is known to be a member of the Marxist Party of India and a Naxalite. Baby Kochamma's act reflects a need to take revenge for her humiliation by a man in the labor union march, and she redirects her anger towards Velutha, who was only present at the march. On the family's trip to Cochin airport to receive Sophie and Margaret, their car gets stuck in the middle of the march, which consists of party workers, students, and touchable and untouchable laborers. While the car is moving slowly along with the crowds, Rahel sees Velutha "marching with a red flag. In a white shirt and mundu with angry veins in his neck" (p. 68). He disappears from view after he hears Rahel calling his name. Then a man in the march approaches the car, calling Baby Kochamma "Modalali Mariakutty" (landlord) and forcing her to wave his red flag. Feeling humiliated, Baby Kochamma later directs her personal anger at Velutha and begins to hate him, since "in her mind he grew to represent the march" (p. 78). Baby Kochamma tells other family members: "We should keep an eye on him. […] If he starts this Union business in the factory … I've noticed some signs, some rudeness, some ingratitude" (p. 78). Baby Kochamma, whose well-being is maintained by the family patriarchs, upholds capitalist patriarchy and directs her fear of being dispossessed towards Velutha.

While his father, Vellya Paapen, regards the ancient caste system as the natural social order, Velutha, educated in the Christian Mission Society, considers social hierarchies tools of oppression. In her essay "The Ladies Have Feelings, So… Shall We Leave It to the Experts," Arundhati Roy (2001) explains that "social inequality has been institutionalized in the caste system for centuries" (p. 199). Despite the independent Indian government's announcement of the abolition of the ancient caste system, it is still common in the community, which views untouchables as outcasts. Vellya Paapen is scared because of his son's "lack of hesitation" and "unwanted assurance" (Roy, 1997, p. 73), worrying that the touchables might misinterpret him as being insolent or disrespectful. However, Velutha fights against the oppressive caste system, joins the labor union, and participates in the march because he is struggling for economic survival. In addition to Velutha, other people on the march are untouchable and touchable low-wage workers, struggling for a decent livelihood and better working conditions. Their demands mirror the economic struggles of socially marginalized and economically exploited groups and their subaltern condition. In her essay "Can the subaltern speak?" Gayatri Spivak (1994) contends that it is necessary to transform "the consciousness of the subaltern" (p. 82) and to give "the subject of exploitation" (p. 84) a chance to speak. The subalterns in the labor union march, who come together to voice their livelihood concerns and social and economic justice for the exploited, reflect Spivak's image of the subaltern.

Throughout the novel, whereas other characters such as Pappachi, Chacko, and Baby Kochamma see themselves separate from nature, Velutha reveals a kinship with the natural world. Velutha has a River Sense, which he communicates to the twins. He inhabits a low hut, close to the earth, where he listens to the secret calls. The river is a source of income and refuge for him. He is 'The God of small things,' the things that are ignored by authorities, whether it is Ammu and her twins or the natural surroundings. He is a man of the natural world who can make small things from wood and other materials gained from nature without destroying its ecological value. Velutha's death symbolizes the death of nature in Ayemenem. Roy's narrative portrays a devastated natural environment through the eyes of Ammu's twins, who returned after 23 years to witness the degradation of their Meenachal River. In her essay "The Greater Common Good," Arundhati Roy (2001) questions development projects such as dam construction in India and explains that such projects displace marginalized people to serve the interests of colonial institutions (p. 136).

The river was the source of life, especially for Velutha and the twins. When Rahel and Estha, along with their family members, went to receive Margaret, Chacko's former wife, and Sophie Mol, his daughter, they stayed at a hotel, and that night, they dreamt of "their river" (Roy, 1997, p. 122). The author describes how the river once was: River Meenachal "was warm, grey-green. With fish in it. With the sky and trees in it. And at night, the broken yellow moon in it" (p. 122). The river was rich with fish and so pristine that the sky and the trees were reflected in it. However, the present condition of the river is presented by the author with great remorse, as she says that even the rains cannot bring back the original depth and width of the river. She writes:

> Despite the fact that it was June and raining, the river was no more than a swollen drain now. A thin ribbon of thick water that lapped wearily at the mud banks on either side, sequinned with the occasional silver slant of a dead fish. It was choked with a succulent weed, whose furred brown roots waved like thin tentacles under water. Bronze-winged lily-trotters walked across it. Splay-footed, cautious. (Roy, 1997, p. 124)

The river, which "had the power to evoke fear," is now "a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea." She adds, "Bright plastic bags blew across its viscous, weedy surface like subtropical flying-flowers" (Roy, 1997, p. 124), and this is the condition of most of the rivers in the country. The Western development projects, supported by the World Bank and the IMF, destroyed rivers in Global South countries like India. These projects are carried out under the supervision of local authorities in these countries, who appear indifferent

to their ecology. Ironically, these projects brought about environmental damage and social and economic inequality.

6. CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper has been to examine postcolonial India's maldevelopment, which brought about ecological destruction and social and economic injustice, in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) through a postcolonial ecofeminist lens. The central concern of postcolonial ecofeminism is the subversion of systems responsible for environmental harm and social and economic injustice. This perspective of ecofeminism claims that any social or economic structure that oppresses 'othered' human and non-human beings must be rejected. The damage that Western ideologies of development have caused in this novel does not apply only to India as a Global South postcolonial nation. Furthermore, this paper underlines the interconnectedness of male dominance, discrimination against low-caste groups, and environmental exploitation. Kemmerer concludes her essay "Ecofeminism, women, environment, animals" (2013) by stating that:

> Insightful ecofeminists simultaneously recognized that any attempt to liberate only those who look like ourselves, who are our species, for example, is not only selfish and narrow, but cannot succeed: women will not and cannot be freed from oppression and exploitation until overarching systems of oppression and exploitation are dismantled, systems that undergird all forms of oppression, including but not limited to sexism, anthropocentrism, and speciesism. (p. 73)

I agree with Kemmerer's attitude, and I believe that Roy shares the same perspective since she strongly criticizes forms of oppression associated with nature, gender, and class. To begin with, Roy refers to the Western myth of development, asserting that: "The view from the hotel was beautiful, but here too the water was thick and toxic. No swimming signs had been put up in stylish calligraphy …There wasn't much they could do about the smell" (p. 125). She clearly demonstrates that the main goal of developmental projects, such as tourism, is to make money at the expense of the Meenachal River and the well-being of human and non-human organisms. Further, Roy relates the oppression of women to that of nature, articulating that:

> Over lunch, she belched like a truck driver and said, 'Excuse me,' in a deep, unnatural voice. Rahel noticed that she had new, thick hairs in her eyebrows, long—like palps. Ammu smiled at the silence around the table as she picked fried emperor fish off the bone. She said that she felt like a road sign with birds shitting on her. (p. 161)

Since Ammu has been separated from her husband, she decides to go back to her family's home, and thus she loses her legacy rights according to the dominant patriarchal system. Furthermore, she is seen as an insignificant person, and describing her as "a road sign with birds shitting on her" emphasizes her deep isolation and objectification. In addition, Roy portrays class oppression, affirming that:

> As he rose from the dark river and walked up the stone steps, she saw that the world they stood in was his. That he belonged to it. That it belonged to him. The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars. He moved so easily through it. As she watched him, she understood the quality of his beauty… How the wood he fashioned had fashioned him … Ammu, naked now, crouched over Velutha, her mouth on his … She sipped the last of the river from the hollow of his navel. (pp. 333, 336)

Roy stresses that oppressed people feel safe in untouched environmental settings that serve as 'home' in their lives. Velutha challenges the ruling social system, but still, he establishes a symbiotic relationship with the natural world. Likewise, marginalized in her family's house after her divorce, she chooses to fall in love with the untouchable Paravan, Velutha. Ironically, both oppressed characters decide to make love inside the Meenachal River because it is the

only secure space where they can express their refusal of the dominant patriarchal structures that control and oppress their minds and feelings. Building on Roy's ecofeminist vision, I argue that shared oppression necessitates a shared liberation (Kemmerer, 2013, p. 73) for all human and nonhuman beings.

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