



Ideological Solidification And Hypostatization In Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things*: An Ecofeminist Study.

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Abstract: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* portrays the connection between human and nature through the exploitation of women and nature justified by economic logic and hierarchical dualisms such as men vs women, touchables vs untouchables and big things vs small things that are created by the oppressive, patriarchal, capitalist society. The nonlinear narrative helps Roy depict the multi-dimensionality of oppression that had been hardcoded in the mundane affairs of human life, which escapes attention leading to misplaced faith in the established societal constructs of different domains.

The narrative highlights the exploitation of women under the themes of forbidden love and social injustice and the exploitation of the environment under a careful observation of the changes in the Meenachal River which has become a carrier of 'shit' and 'pesticides', which once was a source of water and food.

The paper details the ecofeminist principles in line with Anthropocene atrocities which can be mapped to the patriarchal oppression of women through the 'earth/woman' master trope, both of which are simple commodity fetishism. The act of commodification of women by the established patriarchal structures and of nature by the imperialized capitalist structures bears witness to the ideological solidification leading to hypostatization has been identified and brought out in this study.

Index Terms - Ecofeminism, dualism, capitalism, patriarchy, commodification, commodity fetishism.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* explores family, memory, and social rules in Ayemenem, Kerala. The story looks at the complex relationships between people and the strict "Love Laws" that tell us who can love whom and how. It uses a non-linear style to show the deep effects of trauma, social biases, and betrayal. Rahel returns to Ayemenem, which evokes poignant memories of her childhood, including the tragic death of her cousin Sophie Mol, her separation from her twin brother Estha, and the subsequent fragmentation of their family. The storyline centers around Baby Kochamma, an elderly family member, and Estha, who has become reserved and withdrawn. The narrative skillfully alternates between present events and past recollections, gradually illuminating the traumatic experiences that have shaped their lives. The family had previously traveled to Cochin to attend a performance of *The Sound of Music* and to greet Sophie Mol and her mother, Margaret Kochamma, at the airport. An interrupted car ride reveals the intricate familial connections and Velutha's role within this dynamic. Velutha, considered an outcast, emerges as a vital character through his clandestine affair with Ammu. This relationship, perceived as inappropriate due to societal "Love Laws," initiates a series of events that culminate in a tragic resolution. Sophie Mol's arrival signifies a crucial turning point in the family structure. Despite their attempts to maintain a veneer of normalcy, underlying tensions begin to surface. The narrative also examines Velutha's contributions to the family business and the deepening bond he shares with the twins, Estha and Rahel. The plot intensifies when Sophie Mol drowns in the river during a secret excursion with the twins, propelling the narrative forward. Baby Kochamma manipulates this

tragedy by falsely accusing Velutha of kidnapping and assault, seeking to protect the family's reputation. Consequently, Velutha suffers a brutal beating at the hands of the police, and the twins are compelled to uphold the fabricated story. Ammu's helplessness further exacerbates the family's disintegration, and this betrayal deepens the emotional scars. During their shared grief and remorse, Rahel and Estha find comfort in one another as they navigate the weight of their collective trauma.

Elaine Showalter articulates a framework for feminist criticism that unfolds across three distinct yet interrelated stages. The first phase, known as the *Representation Stage*, delves into the ways women are depicted within literary works. This phase actively challenges and seeks to dismantle prevailing stereotypes that have historically marginalized women, thereby raising consciousness regarding the complexities of gender roles and identities. In a parallel manner, ecocriticism during this stage investigates how nature is represented in literature, particularly focusing on genres such as nature writing. Henry Thoreau, Rachel Carson, and Annie Dillard serve as pivotal examples, offering rich insights into humanity's relationship with the natural world. Moving into the second phase, referred to as the *Rediscovery Stage*, feminist criticism embarks on a journey of uncovering and reevaluating the literary traditions that women have contributed over time. This stage seeks to highlight voices that have been overlooked or forgotten within the literary canon. Ecocriticism mirrors this effort by revisiting neglected works of nature writing and exploring how various environmental conditions and specific locales shape and inspire the imaginations of authors. The rediscovery of these texts allows for a deeper understanding of the interplay between nature and narrative. The final phase, identified as the *Theoretical Phase*, engages in a rigorous analysis of the symbolic constructions related to gender and sexuality. This stage invites a critical examination of how these constructs influence literature and societal perceptions. In tandem, ecocriticism investigates the symbolic representations of humanity's relationship with nature, revealing deeper philosophical implications. This phase also explores the connections between the systemic oppression of women and the broader domination of nature, a theme that is central to eco-feminism. Furthermore, it engages with ecological philosophies such as deep ecology, which emphasize the interconnectedness of all living beings and the flow of energy within ecosystems, using these ideas as profound metaphors for literary analysis and interpretation. Through these stages, both feminist criticism and ecocriticism offer valuable frameworks for understanding the intricate relationships between gender, nature, and literature.

The Oxford Dictionary defines the word Ecofeminism thus “a philosophical and political theory and movement which combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male domination of society”. Ecofeminism primarily emerged in North America during the 1970s, with the term first introduced by French writer Françoise Eaubonne in her 1974 essay titled *Feminism or Death: How the Woman's Movement Can Save the Planet (Le Féminisme Ou la Mort)*, which was later translated into English by Ruth A. Hottell. This movement critiques the male-centered values prevalent in society, rejects the binary distinctions between genders, and challenges hierarchical structures. Ecofeminism draws parallels between the oppression faced by women and the exploitation of nature, highlighting the interconnected systems of control that underlie both radical ecological movements and feminist thought. Radical ecofeminism seeks to confront the hierarchies shaped by culture, aiming to restore the dignity of both women and nature, often seen as emotional, nurturing, and physical compared to the perceived rationality and detachment associated with masculinity. Sharon Doubiago links ecological awareness with traditional female consciousness, stressing the importance of understanding interconnected ecosystems, akin to Aldo Leopold's idea "*Thinking like a Mountain*." This branch of ecofeminism frequently critiques science and rationality, viewing them as reflections of male-dominated perspectives. Influential thinkers like Mary Daly, in her work *Gyn/Ecology*, challenge the binary separations of humans from nature, advocating for a holistic understanding that encompasses women, indigenous peoples, and non-human entities. Val Plumwood examines the entrenched dualisms of gender, particularly the reason/nature separation, illustrating how these divisions distance humans from the natural world and promote excessive separation. While she does not completely dismiss science, Plumwood advocates for a revised viewpoint that harmonizes both commonalities and distinctions, steering clear of the divide between reason and nature. Social ecofeminism broadens this critique to include the intersections of race, class, species, and gender, pushing for both environmental justice and equality. It opposes global systems of dominance, including globalization, free trade, and development policies, and aligns itself with progressive movements such as social ecology and eco-Marxism.

Ideological solidification refers to the process of making a set of beliefs or ideologies rigid and firmly established. The term 'ideology' signifies a system of beliefs, while 'solidification' can be understood as the transformation of a fluid state into a solid one. Thus, ideological solidification can be interpreted as the process by which certain concepts, values, thoughts, and ideologies, shaped and constrained by societal structures, become firmly ingrained in the mindset, compelling individuals to adhere to them.

In *The God of Small Things*, specific rules and values enforce an understanding of the caste system's ideology, which is effectively portrayed throughout the novel. This ideology is reflected in the characters' lives, demonstrating how it shapes beliefs, systematically reinforces both positive and negative behaviors, and leads to significant consequences. The recurring theme of the division between the "Big" and the "Small" among individuals underscores the impact of these rigid hierarchies. Baby Kochamma, for instance, strictly adheres to caste norms, as evident in her treatment of Velutha and other lower-caste (Paravan) individuals. She enforces rigid boundaries, forbidding them from entering houses or being physically touched by those of higher caste. This discriminatory behavior illustrates how deeply ingrained caste ideology influences attitudes and actions. While this oppressive treatment disheartens the marginalized, they often adapt to these norms, reshaping their mindset to align with the codes imposed by the upper classes. Their diminished resistance, in turn, reinforces the dominant caste's confidence in maintaining these fixed beliefs. This cyclical dynamic perpetuates a hierarchical system designed to secure the future of the upper caste by oppressing others.

In addition to caste-based oppression, stereotyping and domination are employed to suppress women and marginalized groups. Men, seeking to assert authority over women, construct and propagate these ideologies. Some women internalize and perpetuate these stereotypes, reinforcing systems of oppression. For example, Pappachi, Ammu's father, exerts dominance over his wife, Mammachi, through regular physical abuse. His inability to accept Mammachi's success with the profitable pickle factory highlights his insecurity and intolerance of her achievements. Velutha's situation further exemplifies this systemic injustice. As an easy target, he is blamed for a crime he did not commit. The primary reason behind his punishment lies in the entrenched prejudice and favoritism toward the upper class.

Hypostatization is the process of attributing abstract ideas into concrete real entities. In the phrase "*A Foolish Jeweled Bride*," Ammu's portrayal reflects her husband's perspective. Foolishness is categorized under the stereotype of fixed beliefs imposed on women. The caste system enforces rules and sets boundaries in the novel, with "love laws" constructed to dictate whom one can love and marry. These love laws are framed by the upper-class system, serving to maintain societal hierarchies. Love acts as a transformative force. Ammu defies these love laws by having an affair with Velutha, a man from a lower caste, thereby violating societal norms. On the other hand, love also creates a sibling bond between the twins, Rahel and Estha, symbolizing a connection that transcends trauma and societal constraints. Additionally, women like Baby Kochamma act as catalysts in perpetuating and reinforcing the caste system, ensuring its success and continued implementation.

The river is heavily polluted of pesticides, a consequence of capitalist attitudes and policies, such as World Bank loans, that prioritize industrial and agricultural expansion over ecological sustainability. This pollution profoundly affects marine life, leading to ecological imbalance. Human exploitation of nature for profit is mirrored during times of war and famine, when natural resources become commodified. For instance, genocides and ethnic cleansing are driven by power struggles, but individuals like Baby Kochamma remain unconcerned about their environment. Instead, her anxieties focus on material possessions, such as furniture, which symbolize the commodification of nature.

The geographical location of the pickle factory situated between the family house and the river symbolizes the interplay among nature, politics, and religion. Natural products, such as pickles, are commodified under the guise of cultural and religious significance. Chacko, for instance, uses the Kathakali image as a branding strategy to evoke a sense of "authentic flavor" in the pickles, transforming the factory into a capitalist enterprise. In contrast, Mammachi initially ran the factory as a small-scale business for personal satisfaction. After Chacko's return, however, the factory's focus shifts, reflecting his dominance. His decision to label Mammachi a "*sleeping partner*" underscores how the personal and familial intersect with political and economic systems.

Government policies and political interests also play a critical role in altering natural landscapes. Land reforms are often tools of power and dominance. In Chapter 5, the description of "*God's Own Country*" vividly portrays the transformation of the river ecosystem. The construction of a saltwater barrage, intended to boost agricultural yield, disrupts the natural ecology. This human intervention results in pollution and the discharge of toxic effluents into the river, causing widespread fish deaths. Women and children, often directly exposed to the contaminated water, face significant health risks.

Natural disasters such as fierce storms and cyclonic disturbances wreak havoc, further traumatizing lives already burdened by adversity. These events disrupt the fragile balance of existence, leaving behind a trail of destruction and despair. The tragic drowning of Sophie Mol in the river serves as a haunting reminder of the real-life consequences of climate change, illustrating how the effects of environmental shifts can seep into the very fabric of daily life, claiming lives and shattering families. Nature in the novel acts as a witness to human suffering. The river, with its unpredictable and life-threatening flow, symbolizes uncertainty and fear of the unknown. The landscape of Ayemenem, marked by continuous floods, disrupts human existence, particularly affecting marginalized communities who struggle to cope with and adapt to such unpredictable circumstances. Roy uses nature to foreshadow and predict tragic events in the characters' lives. For instance, Sophie Mol's death in the river becomes a traumatic event that leaves a lasting impact on the twins, Rahel and Estha.

The symbolism of Pappachi's Moth and his Plymouth car represents the dynamics of masculine power and patriarchal dominance. Pappachi's refusal to allow Mammachi to sit in or utilize the car illustrates his need to exert control over her. Similarly, Ammu's return to Ayemenem after leaving her abusive husband reflects the pervasive influence of male dominance. Her recollections of her doll's wedding—where she perceives herself as a *"foolish jeweled bride"* illustrate her disillusionment. In a moment of defiance, Ammu transforms her wedding ring into a bangle, a potent symbol of her resistance.

Furthermore, nature's response to human oppression often culminates in catastrophic disasters, underscoring the parallels between personal and environmental upheaval. Baby Kochamma's treatment of the twin children, whom she derogatorily refers to as "fatherless waifs" and "half-Hindu hybrids," highlights societal attitudes that marginalize the vulnerable. Her contempt for Ammu, who is a divorced daughter, reflects society's rejection of women who challenge traditional roles. This rejection is emblematic of nature's struggle following deforestation—just as trees require space to flourish, so too do marginalized women like Ammu require a place within society. Pappachi's inability to acknowledge Mammachi's success in managing the pickle factory serves as a testament to his fragile ego. In a display of frustration, he resorts to violence against her, expressing resentment toward her independence. Prior to Chacko's involvement, Mammachi's factory did not have a formal name; however, upon his arrival, he named it and referred to it as *"my factory, my pineapples, my pickles,"* thereby diminishing Mammachi's agency. Chacko's dominance further manifests in his exclusion of Ammu from any entitlements to property or profits, a reality that is poignantly captured in Ammu's sardonic remark: *"Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society."*

Although Chacko identifies as a Marxist, his hiring of young women for the factory reveals a pattern of exploiting them both professionally and personally. He objectifies these women for his own satisfaction and economic gain, paralleling the exploitation of nature for commercial purposes. Ammu recognizes that landlords and men often manipulate both nature and women for their benefit, disguising their actions as camaraderie. This dynamic illustrates how patriarchal systems marginalize both groups to perpetuate capitalist and societal interests. House and River are the Symbolic representation of Commodification. The Ayemenem house, once a repository of memories and familial connections, has been repurposed into a luxury hotel. This commodification reflects a broader trend, paralleling the regulation and exploitation of rivers, which were once vital resources. The "No Swimming" sign positioned along the riverbank symbolizes humanity's disconnection from nature, reducing it from a life-sustaining force to a mere backdrop for commercial activities. Likewise, women frequently experience a loss of autonomy, relegated to fulfilling societal or economic roles.

The transformation of the house into a hotel epitomizes a societal tendency that prioritizes utility over intrinsic value, impacting both women and nature. Ammu discovers the character of Pathil Ammayi, who finds solace through her defiance of societal norms by walking naked near the river—this behavior symbolizes a reconnecting with nature as a source of healing and liberation. However, much like Pathil Ammayi, women and nature frequently face silencing or criticism when resisting societal constraints. This dynamic underscores Ammu's apprehension regarding rejection and highlights the intrinsic relationship between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Additionally, rubber trees serve as a metaphor for colonial and patriarchal exploitation. Pappachi oversees the rubber estate, exerting control over both the business and his family, particularly Mammachi. Subsequently, Chacko takes over, leaving no opportunity for Ammu to participate, thereby reinforcing masculine dominance. This dual exploitation of women and nature accentuates their marginalized status within a patriarchal framework. The pickle factory further illustrates a site of caste-based oppression, as Comrade Pillai cautions Chacko against employing Velutha, a Paravan, asserting that his presence could adversely affect "the touchables." This scenario reflects societal hierarchies that marginalize various communities while perpetuating the systemic exploitation of both nature and women.

Baby Kochamma's father once bestowed upon her the responsibility of the front garden, a vibrant expanse that she lovingly nurtured into a lush maze filled with multicolored blooms and verdant greenery. She spent countless hours wandering its serpentine paths, reveling in the heady scent of flowers and the soft rustle of leaves. However, as time wore on, the garden—like a cherished memory—fell into neglect, overtaken by stubborn weeds that choked the life out of the once-thriving space, much like a political party that loses its voice and purpose.

Whenever Ammu found herself grappling with the weight of motherhood and the scars of her divorce, she sought solace by the tranquil banks of the Meenchal River. The cool, flowing water wrapped around her like a comforting embrace, providing a much-needed respite and allowing nature to soothe her troubled spirit.

Chacko often shared with his sister Ammu's children Rahel and Estha, the twins his conviction that the earth embodies femininity, personified as a woman.

The Earth Woman was eleven years old, Chacko said, when the first single-celled organisms appeared. The first animals, creatures like worms and jellyfish, appeared only when she was forty. She was over forty-five - just eight months ago when dinosaurs roamed the earth. The whole of human civilization as we know it, Chacko told the twins, 'Began only two hours ago in the Earth Woman's life. (Roy 54)

This idea reinforced the profound and elemental connection that exists between women and the natural world, highlighting how both can nurture, endure, and heal.

The complex interplay between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature, as explored in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, remains highly relevant in today's environmental discourse. Just as the novel portrays women and nature as intertwined victims of patriarchal and capitalist structures, contemporary global environmental efforts increasingly recognize the critical role of women in climate action and sustainability. Today, the intersection of climate change and gender equality is evident in the leadership roles women take in addressing environmental crises. For instance, in China, women are at the forefront of water resource management, while in Bangladesh, women lead efforts in disaster management, demonstrating the essential connection between gender and environmental resilience. In the European Union, women are spearheading climate education programs, and in Sweden, climate finance actively promotes gender equality. The gendered impacts of climate change have prompted policies such as gender-sensitive transport reforms by the International Transport Forum, which advocates for equitable travel durations and access. These advancements reflect the growing realization that the fight for gender equality is intrinsically linked to the fight for environmental justice. Thus, ecofeminism, which challenges both gender and ecological oppression, is more relevant than ever in shaping sustainable and just futures for all.

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