

Exploring The Interrelationship Between Nature And Woman In Arundhati Roy's The God Of Small Things

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Abstract— The current paper is an endeavour to interpret Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) from an ecofeminist perspective. Arundhati Roy, who is perceived as a famous political and ecological campaigner, condemns as well as features the provisos of current Indian hybrid culture. Roy isn't against any sort of development, however she criticises the social order which lacks transparency and equilibrium. She is against the misuse of Nature and natural resources by human beings in the name of progress of civilization, the prevalence of male centric approach and the enslavement of women in the society, and the supremacy and dominion of the powerful over the weak and unprivileged. In *The God of Small Things*, the writer censures this faulty hierarchical framework, which blindly follows the jurisdiction of patriarchal society, and believes that this should be taken care of with appropriate economic planning. Roy even discovers similarities between ecological divergence and social disharmony. This paper attempts to inspect each one of these issues from an eco-feminist point of view. Nature's rebel against man's unusual activities has been enquired with quieted with muted group theory and backchannel communication motifs. The flora and the fauna were permitted to vent out their stifled sentiments and desires, and they emblematically speak for the deprived weaker sections of the society. How ecology turns into a significant mechanism of correspondence is also investigated in the paper.

Keywords: Agony; Consciousness; Patriarchy; Society; Suffering.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings' inhuman acts of exploiting the natural environment and resources paved the way for environmental movements. Experts in this field have identified several factors responsible for ecological degradation which Laura Pulido refers to as 'structural forces'. The experts, in this field, opine that social and economic inequalities are the root causes of it. A critic like Rama Chandra Guha argues that the peasant revolt of post-colonial India is a significant event, and the state government's 'development plans' are inadequate steps and lacks proper vision. He not only highlights the reasons for environmental concerns but also defines the connection between postcolonialism and environmentalism. The arguments of Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin are also the same. They opine that the government's real

motive behind the implementation of the development plans at the cost of environmental exploitation serves economic interests and it serves no good to save the real interests of the ecosystem. Tiffin states: “*the top-down forms of economic management are bound to the neo-colonialist imperatives of global corporate commerce and the post-independence state*” (52). Ecocritical movements, particularly after postcolonialism, appear to be an ideal platform that openly contests the rapid globalization occurring due to the acknowledgment and implementation of several sponsored development projects. Gayatri Spivak pointed out that the future will experience a synthesis of globalization and neo-colonialism.

2. MALDEVELOPMENT AND ITS IMPACT

The projects which were implemented led to not only ecological imbalance but also showed adverse effects to the marginalized women class and the society at large, for it paved the way for the development of patriarchal capitalist society. It also urges to analyze the turn of events from an ecofeminist perspective. *The God of Small Things*, after its publication in 1997, received numerous critical comments from renowned personalities across the globe. Pablo Mukherjee considers Roy as a perfect environmentalist who analyzes political and cultural aspects from an environmental perspective and this book is a case in point. Divya Anand studies the book that depicts the struggle of the marginalized Dalit communities, caste issues along environmental concerns. Ecofeminist critics, after studying this novel, try to highlight the important connection between the subjugated and dominated women class and the unjust environmental exploitation. Roy, too, finds a connection between these two processes and her novel emerges as a protest against such oppressions. Set in Ayemenem in Kerala, the novel presents the forbidden inter-caste relationship of Ammu and Velutha, an untouchable on the one hand, and the unacceptable relationship of two twins, Estha and Rahel. It also projects the inhuman torture and well organized political violence which resulted in innocent Velutha's death in police custody, and questions the inequality prevalent in the existing socio-political system of post-colonial India. Roy's ecofeminist consciousness is depicted in the novel, for she equates exploitation of the natural environment and dominating the women class considering them as 'weaker sex'. Her protest has reached global levels, and she has shown the negative impact of globalization upon Nature in postcolonial India.

Roy is against any kind of social development which is executed at the cost of environmental degradation. In her novel, she has highlighted that the unplanned execution of governmental projects, in the name of social development, harmed the river in Ayemenem and its climate due to the construction of river dams, deterioration in the intrinsic quality of the water, slow and gradual destruction of the ecosystem underwater making it more polluted. The History House has been converted to a modern luxurious hotel welcoming tourists across the globe. Roy is cynical about this new change and taunts it as a 'smelly paradise', for it is sacrificing the interest of the inhabitants settled there, but only beneficial to the merchant class. Roy questions such economic development and rejects such kinds of projects undertaken by state-government or the capitalist class, for it serves no good to the people and forces them to migrate some other place. She further argues that these projects only serve the interest of the upper-class people and they control it by power. Graham Huggan terms this as “tyrannies of the modern state” (Huggan, 705). As an environmentalist, Roy questions the steps taken by the World Bank and holds them responsible for the massive displacement of people, degradation in their standard of living, making their conditions more miserable and environmental degradation in the name of 'development'. This development, in a real sense, is maldevelopment and it hampers India's independent growth.

Rapid globalization lacks economic justice. Velutha's hut situated at the banks of the river symbolically represents the subaltern status and those people who could not take the benefit of globalization. Velutha belongs to the lower class and is consequently looked down upon by the economically advanced upper class. They remain neglected, dominated by the upper class, and are also economically marginalized. They are devoid of modern amenities and unaware of technological advancement. Roy questions these types of ideologies and opines that it only creates divisions at the socio-economic levels. Despite all the challenges and hardships, Velutha never shows an extremist attitude towards Nature, rather associates his world with Nature. Ammu and Velutha's inter-caste relationship, in this novel, is a sign of protest against the socio-economic injustice in postcolonial India. Ammu and Velutha's unacknowledged love and Velutha's death thereafter and the exploitation of Nature can be seen as a sacrifice which paved the way to globalization and the development of postcolonial India. Velutha represented the oppressed and subjugated lower class people while their relationship posed a challenge to the faulty patriarchal capitalist system of India which backs the misuse of Nature in the name of social progress and economic development. Ammu and Velutha unite breaking the stereotype and cross the boundaries of caste and class.

That man and Nature are interconnected can be understood by analyzing the relationship between Ammu and the river in Ayemenem. The language of Nature depicts the plight of the marginalized women in the novel. The river and Ammu are analogous and also inseparable. In the later part of the novel, Ammu's bonding with the twins is described from Nature's viewpoint: Ammu becomes the river and the twins appear to be two frogs, inseparable from each other. After Ammu's death, the river symbolically 'disappears.' The river, on the other hand, is so closely associated with the twins that their relationship reaches to the level of a surrogate mother and child. The river not only nurtures them but also teaches the lessons for life.

3. PATRIARCHAL VIOLENCE

Roy tries to foreground the conflicting binaries which play an instrumental role in human society. In this group, she includes the supremacy of men over women, differences between touchable and untouchable, Self and Other—all these dualism firmly establishes patriarchal domination and power remains confined to a group of economically privileged people. Ecofeminists condemn the notion of hierarchy and argue that life progresses through an interconnected web, not hierarchy. The concept of 'hierarchy' is a social construct, and it only serves the purpose of controlling the subjects. Vance argues that ecofeminism rejects all kinds of dualism and domination. It celebrates only diversity. In this novel, Pappachi, Ammu's father, is seen dominating the family members, and he uses 'violence' as a means to control his wife, Mammachi. He feels insecure after watching the success of his wife's pickle business and financial stability. Ammu, his daughter, too, has also become the victim of patriarchy. Mammachi and Ammu represent the marginalized women class who endures all the sufferings. Only the male member gets all the benefits. Ammu's brother pursues higher education from Oxford, while her career stopped after the completion of mere formal education. Her marital life did not provide respite from the clutches of patriarchy, and she experienced the same torture after her marriage. Women are generally considered as 'Other', and men try to control them through violence. Furthermore, the character of Ammu is shown as a foil to the male characters: Ammu tries to free herself by running away from her home and marrying the man of her choice and also leaves her husband's home protesting his irrational behavior.

The same notion of “patriarchal violence” is also exposed through the character of Chacko. He, like his father, tries to dominate others. He takes ownership of the family business and regulates its daily activities and ignores the interests of her mother and sister. According to Mines, Chacko is a replica of the capitalist patriarch who follows the set track of subordinating and exploiting the women class, patriarchal domination, and capitalist mentality. Ammu opposes this social inequality and acts as a resistance to this entire social system. The injustice towards women is even more prominent when Mammachi, overlooking all the faults of her son and supporting the traditional patriarchal views, provides room for Chacko’s illegitimate sexual relationship and regards Ammu’s relationship with the untouchable Velutha as ‘reckless’ and ‘irrational’. She even considers their relationship illegitimate. Ammu and her children are unwelcomed in their own paternal home while Sophie, Chacko’s daughter, receives special care and attention. Both Ammu and Velutha became the victim of social oppression, and this unites them. They face inhuman tortures and became the victim of patriarchy. Although they were restrained by the dominant institutions of the society, they were able to highlight the injustice, inequality, and the dual nature of power structure.

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

Roy argues that a society's economy plays a vital role in the destruction of the natural environment and the marginalization of women. Carolyn Merchant opines that capitalist patriarchy and the influence of patriarchy are the root cause for the marginalization of women and degradation of the natural environment. The novel depicts that behind the organized killing of Velutha lies political vendetta, for he was representing a particular political party. The inhuman killing of Velutha has been done by the dominant capitalist class as he was gaining importance as an able leader of the future, a leader of the untouchable and outcasts. His struggle exemplifies the earnest need to revive the economic system too as he represents the lower section of the society who are economically exploited, those who are forced to work at low wages and are striving for a better livelihood. Time and again he has been subjected to utter humiliation and despite all his efforts, he has never received recognition for his work as a carpenter. Throughout his life, he has craved equilibrium in the socio-economic sphere and has dedicated his life to fighting for this noble cause. Ammu also, like her partner, Velutha, faces the consequences of revolting against society. Discarded by her own family and failing to seek justice from society, she dies pathetically, and she is even devoid of proper cremation. Both of them were a threat to the existing power structure and paid a heavy price for their defiance.

5. MUTED GROUP THEORY AND BACKCHANNEL COMMUNICATION MOTIF

The 'muted group' theory, as the name implies, gives voice to the marginalized or 'muted' group. This group is silenced who are devoid of the basic right—speaking. This group intends to communicate by special means—'back channel' communication. According to Robin Lackoff, the marginalized class, irrespective of men and women, communicates using this method. Supporting this theory, Roy argues that original ideas are silenced because man submits himself to a particular political ideology and generally the idea gets lost. Even 'ideas' were segregated into two different parts—native and non-native. Native ideas, which showcased individualism, were relegated. Non-native or English or western ideas and artificial culture were promoted. Patriarchy, in this case, plays a significant role and tries to suppress and dominate the marginalized group. Famous eco-critic Salleh holds the dominant

patriarchal culture responsible for the ongoing environmental crisis across the globe. He emphasizes the interconnectedness between human beings and ecological balance, and at global levels, this is a movement against social oppressions—gender, caste, class, race, and also Nature.

The functions and activities of the backchannel communication motif are seen in the bonding of the twins. Although they united from their birth inseparable from each other, their union seems unnatural and unconventional to society. Mortensen interprets *The God of Small Things* as a novel that depicts the ramifications of misutilising nature in the name of progress. Suppression of Nature does not mean that it is absent; rather it creates an adverse effect later by retaliation. Just like the twins are inseparable, man and nature, too, are inseparable. The real development is only possible by the co-existence of each other and taking care of each other.

Human beings' survival instincts also can be described from the backchannel communication motif. Estha makes use of a defense mechanism to handle odd situations of life; a similar adaptive method is used by lungfish to survive during extreme conditions. His character changes (like a chameleon) to find respite from the situations. Estha's emotional conflict is linked with the octopus's physical structure containing three hearts.

6. CONCLUSION

The God of Small Things celebrates the hidden relationship between Nature and Human Beings and touched our human psyche. It criticizes the dominant power structure which only serves the economically strong elite class and pays no heed neither towards the plea of marginalized weaker section nor does it take adequate measures for the protection of Nature and natural resources. Roy's ecofeminist consciousness is depicted in this literary creation, for she has highlighted how society encourages the superior power to dominate the inferior or the weaker. Through her novel, she urges us to bring equilibrium into the society, bring socio-economic justice and preservation of Nature.

7. REFERENCES

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