

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12426258

INDIGENOUS COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS AND CULTURAL PSYCHE IN ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*: AN ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Received: 11/12/2025
Accepted: 25/02/2026

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ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates the complicated interplay between environmental memory, gendered oppression, cultural narratives, sustainability and Indigenous cultural psyche in Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things*. It evaluates the dominance of patriarchal and caste structures, illustrating the concepts from environmental humanities, ecofeminism, and postcolonial studies. The paper explores how Kerala's lush landscape and obscure ecosystems reveal the complex relationships and oppression of women, nature, and marginalised communities within the postcolonial Indian Society. Through a close analysis of key characters' interactions with their natural surroundings, as well as the novel's rich interplay of cultural memory, indigenous knowledge, dualism, and capitalism, this paper uncovers how Vandana Shiva's cultural ecofeminism, Val Plumwood's material ecofeminism and Franz Fanon's Postcolonial Psychological dimension examine caste system, gendered oppression, colonial trauma and cultural psyche that are embedded within Kerala's cultural and ecological narratives. The study examines characters in *The God of Small Things* to draw on ancestral memories and cultural traditions to accept sustainable practices and promote environmental sustainability. Additionally, the paper analyses how colonial legacies of environmental exploitation continue to impact Kerala's landscapes and communities. It highlights the impact of materialism and cultural degradation, imposing the power-politics of the patriarchal mindset over nature, landscape, and the female body. Through an interdisciplinary lens, this research aims to argue that nature is not only a milieu but also plays a fundamental role in portraying the symbolic and metaphorical representation of resistance, suffering, psyche and subjugation of female and lower-class characters, offering intimacy and subversion under the umbrella of urbanisation and materialism. By shedding light on the ecofeminist framework and connections between nature and women in *The God of Small Things*, this research contributes to ongoing discussions in environmental studies (umbrella term) and literary scholarship about the role of literature in shaping environmental activism and fostering a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds.

Keywords: Spiritual/ cultural ecofeminism, dualism, Patriarchal subjugation, material ecofeminism, memory and narratives, postcolonial studies, interconnectedness of women and nature, indigenous cultural psyche.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research paper examines the intricate interplay between Environmental memory, gendered oppression, cultural narratives, and sustainability in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, set within the patriarchal mindset. It explores the concept of 'dualism' and the exploitation of women and nature. It is an interdisciplinary agenda that sheds light on the interconnectedness of the dominance of female and nature, epistemologically connecting its roots with shared suppression under the influence of science and technology, which flourished during the Industrial Revolution. Nature is perceived metaphorically to be objectified for subjugation and exploitation like a female. It has been observed that both powers have been exploited through the patriarchal mindset, especially with the development of the 'mechanistic worldview' under the influence of postcolonialism. The Scientific development and Industrial Revolution diverted the worldview to the scientific philosophies and ideologies of Isaac Newton and René Descartes, who emphasised 'dualism' (Plumwood, 67) and introduced the concept of the mind-body distinction. The ideology does not directly flourish with the women's nature relationship. Criticising ecofeminism, Carolyn Merchant derived the idea for her argumentative discourse. She related the 'Descartes Dualism' (Merchant 42) of mind and body to the core concept of ecofeminism, where the mind is represented as logical reasoning and intellectuality, coded with masculinity, hence being perceived as superior. On the other hand, the body is objectified as nature and substance, where the brimming emotion intensified to build it as inferior and controllable, hence veiled with femininity.

Like René Descartes, Isaac Newton, a prominent figure of the scientific movement, put forth his laws of motion and gravity, and considered nature as a machine. The operating system of a machine is governed by probable and predictable laws. After the Scientific Movement, nature is perceived through the lens of the 'mechanistic worldview', which differentiates nature from humans who try to build supremacy with the support of science and technology. The intervention of scientific temperament gave rise to the 'Industrial Revolution'. Industrialisation and urbanisation have changed the attitude towards environmental treatment, and nature has become subject to exploitation. The mechanistic model of Isaac Newton is, however, patriarchal, but it compels us to support the 'dualistic approach', which directly

challenges ecofeminists to consider the shift of paradigm to holistic ecological science, the dualism, diversity, interconnectedness, and care of nature and women, not resistance and domination.

The prominent ecofeminist theorists Vandana Shiva and Carolyn Merchant critique the Newtonian Cartesian ideology of analysing nature through the lens of a masculine mindset, which is governed by the influence of the worldview of Western Modern Science. In *The Death of Nature* (1980), Carolyn Merchant raged against the Industrial Revolution for being responsible for replacing the affectionate image of women and nature with the attributes of nurturing, reforming, soothing, and objectifying to be ruled, dissected, subjugated, and dominated. She further argued, "both the women's movement and ecology movement are sharply critical at the cost of competition, aggression, and domination arising from the market economy *modus operandi* in nature and society" (Merchant xvi). Vandana Shiva rejected the Western ideology of justifying the resistance and domination of "the other" (Beauvoir 45), i.e., women, nature, colonised, marginalised, and subjugated. While rejecting Descartes' inherent ideology of dualism, domination, and objectification, she highlights the interconnected nature of indigenous knowledge and the calming effect of nurturing and caring, which fosters a bond between humans and the environment. However, at the same time, it also discusses the role and significance of culture that influences the indigenous mind, resulting in a psyche knotted to the land and nature. *The God of Small Things* (1997) is a seminal work that connects the theme of ecology through its fundamental narrative to deconstruct the image of women and nature through 'Epistemic Violence' (Spivak 276) by directly attacking the indigenous knowledge system of the oppressed class, thereby reinforcing colonial power.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ecofeminism emerged as an interdisciplinary theory and was practised by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne's seminal work *Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), which focused on the close association of the oppression of women and nature by the powerful beings. It was merely an inception of acknowledging the association between the two; it started to be recognised with the pivotal works of authors, particularly From *New Women New Earth: Sexiest Ideology and Human Liberation* (1975) by Rosemary Redford Ruether, to MaryDaly's

Gyn/Ecology: The mathematics of Radical Feminism (1997) and the revolutionary work of Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature: Women Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1979). These theorists argued about the interconnection of women and the environment to diminish every kind of suppression against them. But Ecofeminism emerged as a literary theory in academia with the efforts of Ariel Salleh's "Why Ecofeminism?" Vol. Plumwood's "Ecofeminism: An Overview and Discussion of Position and Arguments" (1986), respectively.

Ariel Salleh, the Australian Scholar, ecofeminist, and social activist, emphasised the structured life of women, especially premeditated for ecological survival. Focusing on the perspective of 'Global Justice' (Plumwood 125), Salleh believes that ecological crises, such as climate change, deforestation, and water deterioration, disproportionately affect the poor and downtrodden women first. His main concern is 'Gender Justice' and 'Ecological Survival' (Salleh 45) linked with 'Patriarchal Capitalism' (Shiva 78), which consciously objectifies women's bodies and nature as a source of exploitation by relating the term 'Meta Industrial Labour' (Salleh 102), where the capitalist devalues the productivity of women, who are responsible for conserving natural resources through farming and other related activities. Vol Plumwood in his notable work *Feminism and The Mastery of Nature* (1993) highlighted the deconstructed idea of 'binary opposition' (Plumwood 123) to describe Western Patriarchal Philosophy of 'Hierarchal Dualism' (Plumwood 123) she represented the binary relation of reason/emotion, nature /culture, nature /nature, mind /body and male/ female to highlight domination through power politics where 'superior' always dominates 'inferior'. Her idea interprets her rationalistic ideology of a mechanistic and ecocentric worldview.

A contrast in terms of ecofeminism is identified upon comparing past and present, as well as growth and perspective, in the area of study. It starts with the universalised ideology of women's nature. It reaches the degradation and exploitation of the environment and women under the coexisting thoughts of colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial power dynamics. Colonialism has influenced the dynamics of the concept in various ways. It targeted the indigenous knowledge system and transformed it with the fusion of technological representation to wrap it up into 'Eurocentrism', not by force but by 'Ideological Apparatus'. Colonial power muted the voice of women,

especially the 'subaltern'. They are compelled to spend their life in a polluted environment with fewer resources available for them for consumption.

Contemporary literary texts support more exclusive theories and recent developments in the field of ecofeminism. The undercurrent power to subjugate both of the oppressors shifts with the fictional term 'terra nullius', which works on the concept of occupying the uncultivated land. This practice is basically rampant in Australia, America, Africa, and some parts of Asia, where uncultivated or empty land can be owned by powerful forces. The term 'terra nullius' has been derived from the Latin language, justifying its meaning with 'the land belonging to no one', although practices for European and Roman affairs, but represents European colonial power to support the Western ideology of 'Dualism', where empty land and women are to be conquered. Hugo Grotius augmented the concept in relation to unoccupied land and seas, and associated it with the theory of ecofeminism.

Rob Nixon, the South African author, in her prominent work *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) throws light on the conceptual tool of the 'slow violence' to discuss the continuous oppression and destruction of the environment and women, which is unseen yet ongoing in the form of climate change, increase rate of pollution, and toxic environment for the growth and survival of the marginalised community. Donna Haraway, the posthuman ecofeminist, justifies her place with the fifth wave of ecofeminism through the literary masterpiece "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) and *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). She highlighted the concept of 'naturecultures', where the evolving species are not only human but also animals, and technologies have also found a separate room to flourish as subjects to study. She evolved beyond human-centered ideology and related it to indigenous decolonial ecofeminism.

The above theoretical approaches correlate with *The God of Small Things* in the true sense that the framework of the novel is intertwined with postcolonial ideology, which interprets the novel with gender oppression, dualism, caste system, and colonial power that allows patriarchy and power dynamics to silence the voice of the marginalised and subjugated and to degrade natural surroundings and the environment.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study focuses on close textual analysis of *The God of Small Things* by espousing the theoretical framework of 'Ecofeminism' as an umbrella term. The text adopted the heterodiegetic polyphonic narrative by foreshadowing the non-linear events to maintain the suspense and curiosity amongst the readers about the series of events. The paper investigates the symbolic representation of the rich tapestry of Kerala and the degradation of natural resources by putting forth the depiction of various characters. It adopts an interdisciplinary approach to shed light on the socio-economic, political, and cultural issues. The methodology adopted in this paper is qualitative and interpretative to focus on the term 'Ecofeminism' to justify the influence of the Scientific and Industrial Revolution to formulate the 'Western Mechanical Ideology' to develop 'Dualistic Worldview'. The novel has uniquely interpreted the idea of 'Global Justice' and 'Epistemic Violence' to deconstruct the image of the indigenous knowledge system. It reinforces the universalised ideology of the interconnectedness of women and nature and the influence of the 'Ecocentrism', which results in underlining the 'Slow Violence' for environmental degradation. The study develops the rationale to deal with the environmental crisis by bringing about a possible solution.

4. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. *Heterodiegetic polyphonic narrative and Newtonian Descartes' ideology of dualism*

The novel *God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy, employs a third-person heterodiegetic narrative that seems to break away from the Newtonian Cartesian worldview by offering emotional diversions, cultural memory and indigenous psyche, but could not be completely detached from it, which emphasised the 'dualism' of mind and body. The novel exposes the said ideological structure and oppression of the characters by recovering ecofeminist values and the indigenous cultural psyche. Although the heterodiegetic concept adopted in the novel is external, it navigates through coexisting dialogues of the marginalised voices of Dalits, the natural world, women and even children. These rigid ideologies emphasise on the rigid binary division of human versus nature, men versus women, mind versus body, and reason versus emotion and consider the truth that identifies the power of authority (colonial and patriarchal power), and the prevailing system of the society which is based on hierarchy caste creed, gender and environmental exploitation with

in the frame work of social justice. Cartesian binaries, male reason over female emotion, penetrate through the most powerful ecofeminist figure, Ammu, who dominates Western thought and colonial power. The representation of her body, sexuality and emotional balance is treated as a menace by the patriarchal and colonial power, which is directly associated with the concept.

Parallel subjugation of women and the natural world is also visible through Ammu's split body desire, motherhood and the condition of the Meenachal river, its polluted property and its colonial control to flow. Both women and nature became subject to exploitation and punishment by the governing laws and masculine reason, as well as feminine emotion, which was already identified through feminine intuition and the female psyche. Laws and order, as well as equal social justice, justify Newtonian ideology. Ammu is treated as irrational, immoral and dangerous, just as nature is considered chaotic and causes of calamity, hence requires boundaries to control. The deviation from social justice, "No locusts stand I..." (Roy 57) justifies the intelligence and rationality garlanded with familial thought and law, which proves suppression of femininity and challenges indigenous ways of being.

The parallel decay of the Meenachal river and Ammu's life trajectory is mirrored through the transformation and symbolic representation of both figures. In the beginning, the river is deep and clean, and floating with sparkling water, but industrial awakening, urbanization and mechanistic worldview caused "the river shrank and backened...it smelled of shit" (Roy 58) The river site was the witness of the forbidden love, punishment and the death of the Valutha "it was a river stories" (Roy 59) which carries the burden of the moral pollution of the society, Patriarchal capitalism and brutality inflicted on Ammu. The mutual silence of the river and Ammu creates a symbolic link that justifies Descartes' ideology, which is also argued by Carolyn Merchant in her argumentative discourse, grounded in logical reasoning and intellectuality, which is coded as masculine. It represents constant use of the modus operandi of power, which Carolyn Merchant identified in *The Death of Nature* (1980), where both (Meenachal river and Ammu) are suppressed, subjugated, controlled, silenced and punished for defying social boundaries. While Newtonian ideology supports order and justice to bring about harmony in society, Roy also tries to prove that the system of rationality often leads to irrational

cruelty. The killing of innocent Dalit Valutha, the punishment of women Ammu, and the silencing of the child Estha do not support ethical truth and directly criticise enlightenment rationalism, where law and order (Newtonian Ideology), logical argument and intellectuality embedded with masculinity are identified as superior with rights to subjugate inferior or female.

4.2. Patriarchal capitalism and degradation of the indigenous knowledge system

Patriarchal capitalism and colonial worldview have been identified by Vandana Shiva in relation to the dominance of women and the exploitation of nature as portrayed in Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Vandana Shiva has coined this term as 'Maldevelopment' (Shiva 34). Shiva argues that the woman's temperament of bearing the ecological burden due to her intimacy with nature and her soothing care-giving role as mother or nurturer. Ammu's suffering connects with ecological destruction, which justifies that when nature is exploited, the effect on women's lives is obvious. The parallel decay of both characters justifies Shiva's argument of the interconnectedness of ecological and gendered violence.

Vandana Shiva argued on the corporate neoliberal globalisation, where the indigenous knowledge system of the classical and deep-rooted culture is being displaced by a development-driven Western mindset. While it is being considered that women are the sole custodians of the local and traditional commodities and values. But now, with the advent of practices of Eurocentric ideology, the capitalistic attitude has overtaken the traditional knowledge system in branding and promoting the system with "modern western patriarchal economic vision, which was based on the exploitation or exclusion of women of the West and non-West, on the exploitation and degradation of nature and the exploitation and degradation of other cultures." (Shiva 214) The traditional ethical knowledge system, through the exercise of cultural memory, involves the embodied hard labour for the use of local fruits and spices to make pickles. The skills are transferred from generation to generation through the same practice, which is the result of experience rather than the wonder of science and technology. This exercise of making pickles at home was captured by the money-oriented mindset of Eurocentrism to shift into the factory, which justifies Shiva's critique of global capitalism, pruning cultural and ecological values and the indigenous knowledge system. The pickle factory in the novel is the symbolic representation of

'Epistemic violence', where Mammachi's skill (indigenous knowledge) is marginalised and exploited for profitable reasons, that results Ecofeminist conflict between the patriarchal power of money through the capitalist worldview and the sustainability of norms, tradition and cultural values, which need to be stored and not to be exploited. The characters in the novel were exploited because they lost their voices to be heard and their existence to be proved. It is aptly analysed that when things are considered useless, it becomes subject to exploitation. The same occurs in the case of the Meenachal river, Ammu and Valutha, they are socially, morally and physically discarded and declared as social terra nullius, just as deserted land can be controlled by anyone and be labelled as terra nullius.

4.3. Changing power dynamics and influences of ISA and RSA

The suppression of women and nature identified in the novel is not obvious. But it is the result of co-existing colonial and postcolonial thoughts and changing power dynamics. The indirect influence of ideologies amongst the characters of the novel is perceived due to the coordinated functioning of society under the influence of what Althusser calls Ideological and Repressive State Apparatus through identification and acceptance of family, culture, religion, institution, etc., on the other hand, it is governed under the strict rules and regulations of governing laws and order and punishment to accept the societal, cultural and political norms. These ideological rigidities are practised through reinforcement, which Gayatri Spivak argues in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", the subaltern cannot speak. It is defensible through the epistemic violence of the brutal killing of Velutha, where the religious ideology of being Dalit compels him not to speak. His voice was suppressed, and his knowledge was resisted instead of being heard and appreciated. The suppressed voice of Ammu, the vicious killing of Valuth, the polluted water of the river, the endurance of the domestic violence of Mammachi, and Chacko's Marxist ideology epitomise the oppression of women, nature, and culture with the same subaltern subjective frustration under the influence of ISA and RSA.

5. CONCLUSION

The present research effectively represents the novel *The God of Small Things* as a medium to expose the interconnectedness of the suppressed women's nature and subaltern through the lens of ecofeminism. It evidently operates with the

patriarchal and capitalist enforced power to establish a Eurocentric worldview. The novel, through a heterodiegetic polyphonic narrative, challenges Newtonian Descartes' ideology of dualism. The parallel subjugation of the Ammu and Meenachal rivers leads to the direction of ecofeminism and comments on social and Global Justice. The present study supports the critique of Carolyn Merchant on power politics, which aptly describes how natural resources can be victimised under Eurocentrism to control the resources for power and profit. Both women and natural resources are subjugated for personal and political favour. The cultural psyche of the village Ayemenem and the female characters modulated under the influence of ISA, and when the

ideological influence failed to control or normalise caste, gender and ecological hierarchy, the repressive power of law and order was reinforced through violence to silence the voice of women and nature. In this way, resistance comes into power through epistemic Violence. The conversion of the indigenous knowledge system to the mechanistic worldview directly challenges the custodian of tradition, i.e. women and nature, suppressing the indigenous and subaltern voice, ruining the lush green areas of Kerala due to urbanisation and industrialization justify the novel as the true critique of ecofeminism. It raises a voice for identifying alternative ways to overcome subjugation and rigidity for ecological protection, equal rights and social justice.

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