



The Architecture of Patriarchy and the Strategies of Subaltern Resistance in Indian English Literature

S.Sasi Bhushan

Lecturer in English
Government Degree College for Men, Srikakulam
Mail id: sampathiraosasibhushan@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the difference and the complementariness of the strategies adopted by the modern Indian English novelists – Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale – when they challenge the pervasive power structures of patriarchy. Roy's novels, especially *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, reveal through the postcolonial and systemic perspective the catastrophic consequences of exclusion, violence and discrimination of the state and caste of subaltern groups like Dalits, women and transgendered people. Roy employs a transgressive and darkly satirical style of language to reveal the vast historical oppression that is suffocating the voices of the marginalized. Namita Gokhale on the other hand has her narratives rooted in liberal feminist principle – that is the emancipation of the individual, the autonomy in existence and the psychological strength of the woman. Gokhale challenges the notion of the ideal, submissive Indian female through the voices of assertive protagonists, whose stories appear in novels such as *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, *Things to Leave Behind*, and *The Book of Shadows*, each of which promotes equal rights, education, and female agency. Moreover, both authors use ecofeminist approaches that connect the oppression of nature with the oppression of women and subaltern classes. Together, Roy and Gokhale chart a wide range of feminist and subaltern resistance through such devices as the carnivalesque, dark humour and subversive historical memory. Ultimately, their literary frameworks demonstrate that the margins of society are not merely places of suffering, but vital epicenters of survival, defiance, and enduring human dignity.

Keywords: submissive Indian female. The postcolonial. Catastrophic consequences, subversive historical memory

Introduction

To really understand what Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale are doing in their writings, one needs to examine their works even more closely and understand the mechanisms of trauma, state violence and the radical reclaiming of the female body in their writings. Both authors are



passionate about revealing the hypocrisy of a male dominated society, but their literary turf battles are still separate. Roy fights a huge socio-political battle against the alliance of domestic patriarchy and the state. Gokhale's war, however, is a psychological one, an intimate one, one that shows how women can break the magical spell of expectation to possess absolute autonomy in their life.

Arundhati Roy: Internalized Patriarchy and the Brutality of the State In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy has shown that there's not just one person at the top holding power and exercising it, but that it exists in a network, a meshwork, where people are the means of oppression and the ones being oppressed. This is particularly revealed by the way women are applying patriarchal law to other women. This conditioning makes Mammachi a tragic victim. Although she is a hugely successful entrepreneur whose home-based skills have taken her into a flourishing pickle business, she is beaten brutally and regularly, by her extremely jealous husband, Pappachi with a brass flower vase. Instead of breaking this cycle of abuse, Mammachi enforces a ruthless and strict double standard between herself and her son, and her daughter. Mammachi is able to be accommodating when her son Chacko returns from Oxford and sets up a separate entrance to his room so the factory women she exploits do not have to walk through the main house to get to his room. On the other hand, she hates her daughter Ammu's lusts with a passion. Ammu's connection with the untouchable Velutha is revealed and Mammachi confines Ammu in her room like a lunatic and compares her to a dog in heat.

Another fearsome enforcer of this systemic power is Baby Kochamma. Ammu's presence is a threat to Baby Kochamma's comfortable place in the house and she becomes Ammu's sworn enemy. The innocent twins Estha and Rahel, whom she plays on a string, are convinced to incriminate Velutha for the sake of her family's honour. These disturbing family dynamics reveal how the "Big God" of systematic and historical oppression can work so effectively through the intimate betrayals of the "Small God."

Roy continues to expand this domestic oppression into the public arena by means of the state. The police is a force that enforces the strict caste and gender division and norms in society, the "Love Laws", which prescribe who should be loved and how. Ammu visits the police station to clear the name of Velutha and ends up getting degraded by Inspector Thomas Mathew. He beats her breasts with his stick, like inspecting mangoes in a basket, and is quite clear that she is no "veshya" (prostitute) and that her word is worthless. The marginalized woman's body has been made public property, and can be demeaned and used at any time by the state. There is a



violence that is as bad as it gets and it is given to Velutha. It was, Roy says, a clinical exhibition of “the nature of Man... running to ascendancy,” that left him “deathly beaten.”

To challenge this huge structural power, Roy uses subversive linguistic tactics, playing with the rules of grammar and syntax, intentionally confusing male-dominated, colonial narratives. The novel's use of English as a weighty symbol of colonial and upper-caste authority. The novel's use of the English language as a heavy symbol of colonial and upper-caste authority. The patriarch Chacko is an Anglophile and is trying to instill a cultural war where the family is taught to love their colonizers and hate their own native land. The children are even made to swear to use only English as a punishment for speaking their mother tongue.

But the twins Estha and Rahel are linguistic transgressors, however. They play with the rigid structures of the English language, as they read it backward, string words together and create their own made-up phrases, removing the threatening force of the language in the process, .They also take shelter in Malayalam jibberish rhymes, a subversive discourse not at all controlled by the Anglophile grown-ups, Roy is breaking the stifling conventions of language in order to give a powerful voice to the "Small God" of the tumultuous personal life in opposition to the "Big God".

As Roy shows the tragic downfall of those who transgress, Namita Gokhale gives her female characters permission to defy the mythological boundaries of the "ideal Indian woman" and live. Traditional Indian literature, especially the sacred writings of the Vedas, is filled with the perfect representations of women: Sita, Savitri, and Parvati, who is always subservient, chaste, and selfless. In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Gokhale upends it all with her bang-on-point performance of passion and violence. Gokhale's characteristically transgressive, gin-fuelled, unapologetically sexy protagonist, Paro, takes a swipe at the conventional notion of female purity right from the get-go in the very title of this work. Paro is an avaricious woman who has plenty of scandalous affairs with powerful men such as B.R., cricketer Bucky Bhandpur, and the politician Lenin, It is not her body and the undeniability of her charm that serve as a weapon of surrender, but also as a weapon of sheer power and self-gratification.

The comparison between Gokhale and the narrator, Priya, who is equally spiraling with a lot of inner tension with her own middle-class dreams and hypocrisies is made. Priya has an attraction to Paro and is jealous of her absolute freedom, and puts her own repressed sexual urges into Paro's audacious lifestyle. Priya is the contemporary woman torn between her strictures of a conventional arranged marriage with her husband Suresh and the seductive and



perilous vision of complete sexual freedom. But Priya is also propelled by her deep emptiness and terrible loneliness when her husband neglects her, and she also transgresses moral boundaries by rekindling an affair with her former boss B.R.,. These extraordinarily flawed characters are a way to demonstrate that women are not just passive victims; they are active, powerful, strong future-masters who have a right to pursue their wishes, to follow their desires, to pursue them with a passion, .

In *A Himalayan Love Story*, Gokhale goes even deeper in exploring how female sexuality is not just oppressed, but tragically oppressed, in a patriarchal world. The main character Parvati has a quick whirl around affair with her handsome Muslim teacher, Salman. In a very conservative society, Parvati defies the religious and social taboos to embrace her own sexual awakening. But such pure freedom must not be tolerated in a patriarchy society. Eventually she is confined to an arranged marriage with Lalit who has an ancient sexual attraction to men yet offers nothing of emotional or physical intimacy,,.

The intense frustration of Parvati's marriage is a result of how her body is used as a mere commodity to be exchanged to adhere to cultural norms, and of being marginalized twice as a woman in a marriage that is sexually deprived and extremely lonely. Tragically, Lalit contracts tuberculosis and dies, leaving Parvati totally rejected by her in-laws and eventually falling into serious mental illness, ending her life in a mental asylum, . . . In Parvati's anguished devastation, Gokhale forcefully condemns a society that condemns women for their natural passions, and coldly dismisses them when they no longer have a useful domestic function.

Yet amidst these devastating stories, Gokhale doesn't lack in incredible blueprints for female resilience, economic independence, and psychological healing. In *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, she builds an intriguing matriarchal paradise in which women flourish without any male protection. The character Ammi goes from being virtually destitute and disgraced, to creating a prosperous religious movement based on the stolen marble slab and a few stones in the river, inspired by her enormous charisma and ability to lead an army of loyal followers. Soon she gets company from Phoolwati, another woman who singlehandedly blows up the male-dominating system by kicking and slapping her abusive, drunk husband. After her husband's murder, Phoolwati shows no signs of the traditional mourning but instead asserts full control of her fate and grows their business.

Granddaughter Gudiya is also a crucial lesson that Ammi gives, to drop illusory men. As their family grows, her very beautiful and lazy husband Kalki starts to provide for himself and she



gives him her own gold jewellery and actively encourages him to leave for Bombay. In this way she can take her independence back and obtain her own peace of mind. This is a radical turnaround of the conventional Indian story of the wife being thrown out of the house by the husband. Rather than this, Gokhale reveals women who are going out of their way to eliminate men from their lives that are cumbersome in order to keep their economic and emotional independence.

In addition, Gokhale will show you how powerful nature can be as a healing force in *The Book of Shadows*. Because of a vicious acid attack by the enraged sister of her ex-fiancé,,. Rachita, the protagonist, is left with severe disfigurement and a trauma that leaves her upset. She leaves the city's suffocating pity to a house in the pristine Kumaon hills in a century old remoteness. Rachita slowly pieces together her broken soul, amidst the majestic and silent Himalayas. She faces off with the literal and metaphorical ghosts that lurk within the house, and ultimately learns that sanity will be a constant battle and one that must be fought hard. She discovers that the courageous thing to do is to go forward into the future with her broken body, unafraid of trauma, scars or the men who betrayed her.

The two writers Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale use humour, Satire and the Carnavalesque to mock and dismantle the authority of the patriarchy and society rather than confronting them directly. The "carnavalesque" is a literary theory that refers to a reversal of the social order; the marginalized are made the center, the physical body is ridiculed, and the powerful are made into the joke.

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, the writer Gokhale has parodied the traditional Indian love story, as well as the myth of the pure Indian woman who will never stop suffering. She plays a tongue-in-cheek game with the old, devotional script of *Devdas*, but instead of a pining male protagonist and a self-giving, chaste female, Gokhale makes her heroine out to be a noisy drinker of gin with a fat body who enjoys her sexuality above all else. *Paro* is a carnivalesque figure par excellence. She physically intrudes upon the limits of proper feminine conduct in her ability to do a "shirshasana," a yoga stance of head-down, legs-up, at the middle of a high-society dinner party, displaying her in a spectacular, farcical way while ignoring all rules of domestic decorum. The narrator, Priya, also indulges in a great deal of self-deprecation, a kind of self-mockery, which is used by Gokhale. Rather than glorifying beauty, Priya hilariously chronicles the agonies, commercialism and oftentimes botched attempts to achieve it, from having her eyebrows yanked off-center at the beauty parlor to a pink rash on her lip caused by



overuse of the hair color. This self-deprecating humour is a 'kamikaze manoeuvre' that lets Gokhale attack the superficial, upper-class, male-gaze-hungry society and still get away with the attack in a humorous way. Besides, Gokhale lampoons the melodramatic cliches of Hindi film. The moment Priya's mother loudly shouts "Kitni sundar dulhan banegi" (What a beautiful bride she will make!) is a direct lampoon at the culture's obsession with marriage being the one ultimate hurdle to overcome in life for a female.

There is also a use of humour, but in *The God of Small Things* it is a "cold carnival" which makes the reader feel angry and bitter at the oppressive laws of society. Roy lampoons the "Anglophilia" of the Indian elite. The nature of Chacko's character is that their family believes they are at war with a people that they love and a people who hate them. Roy plays with this post-colonial hangover by using characters such as Baby Kochamma, who insists that the children speak English, and who seems to try to impress her half-English grand-niece by quoting Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which the child cannot understand. The humor in this work exposes the folly of native Indians using English literature as a cultural weapon for cultural domination.

However, Roy's humour takes a very dark turn when aimed at the state. The police inspector Thomas Mathew is first described comically, with moustaches "bustling like the friendliest Air India Maharajah, but his actions are terrifyingly predatory. He hits Ammu's breasts with his baton "as though he were picking mangoes out of a basket". Roy sets this grotesque, objectifying action in what appears to be a casual interaction to emphasize the unchecked and horrific power that men in authority wield over women who are weak and marginalized.

Ecofeminism contends that the exploitation and subjugation of the natural environment is inextricably bound up in the exploitation and subjugation of women and subaltern classes by the patriarchy. The themes of ecofeminism are used extensively by both writers to foster a connection between the earth and the oppressed, and to provide a place of sanctuary and resistance from the male dominated society of toxic environments.

The God of Small Things by author Roy's Velutha, the untouchable Paravan, has a deep connection to nature. He is said to be "supple grace" and is specifically associated with the elements: "The water. The mud. The trees. The fish. The stars". Roy compares him to the feminine aspect of nature, and represents him as a "Monsoon-bringer" working entirely beyond the corrupt and rigid caste obsessed adult society. As Ammu crosses the river to meet with him, she crosses a literal and metaphorical barrier and returns to a wild and untamed nature that is



on the "unsafe Edge". The murder of Velutha by the state police is not only the destruction of a marginal man, but the symbolic death of a natural and innocent world by clinical and artificial shape of the structures of systemic power.

The healing properties of the Himalayas is a clear reflection of Gokhale's position in the context of ecofeminism. The *Book of Shadows* was set in a remote house in the mountains, where Rachita hides from the world after her face is burned off in acid. Rachita is scarred by the violence of the patriarchy and the betrayal of her lover, and she becomes one with the silent, ancient landscape. She finds that the "frost has an elegant and structured spirit, it cleanses and soothes the stale emotions". During a snowstorm, when relatives of Himalayan black bears seek refuge on her veranda, she experiences an overwhelmingly gentle feeling of kinship with the wild. The environment isn't passive, it is an actor in her healing. She knows people aren't in a "sorrowful mess" of a world, but the mountains provide an always there, no judgment embrace. Likewise, in *Things to Leave Behind*, the scene of great social change under British colonialism comes to the women, like Tilottama, who are shaped by the majesty of the Kumaon hills in their birthplace, and are like a lion in disguise when it comes to action.

The mystification of Motherhood is one of the most important means of patriarchal oppression in India. Traditionally, women are supposed to be asexual, self-sacrificing, and to exist solely for the nurturing of children and families. Roy and Gokhale are both committed to dismantling this oppressive pedestal, demonstrating the ways the responsibility for the "maternal instinct" can be turned against women.

Gokhale takes up the challenge of these norms in *Small Remedies*, by pairing two extreme mother figures together. Madhu, the narrator, is so consumed by her obsession and almost neuroticism for her son Adit that she suffocates. Her son is the only proof of her life, which, as Simone de Beauvoir pointed out, is a feminist observation, is the way mothers in a patriarchal society often desperately look for salvation and god-like fulfilment in their son. Adit's death in a bombing brings Madhu's whole identity to a crumbling end since she had constructed her life solely on the basis of extreme maternal sacrifice as expected of her. Savitribai, a very ambitious classical singer, on the other hand, completely denies the role of a mother. Savitribai jettisons her husband and treats her daughter Munni coldly, and solely because of her own career and her rise to artistic heights. As Madhu constantly accuses Savitribai as a "cruel mother" and "tyrannical creature" for choosing to prioritise her art over her domestic duties as a wife and mother, Gokhale has the reader look at her own evolution and understand that Savitribai's



struggle to make art her first priority is a rebellion against the erasure of the female. Gokhale does not condemn Savitribai for her failure to be a mother, and thus rewrites the definition of woman so that her value is not limited to the one thing. Gokhale doesn't condemn Savitribai for not being a mother, and thus rewrites the definition of woman so that her value is not limited to one thing.

Roy also cuts into the claustrophobia of motherhood. Ammu is deeply in love with her twin boys Estha and Rahel, but hates the way they consume her even physically and emotionally. In a clever and subversive moment, Ammu gazes in the mirror and demands the return of her body from her children, telling them that she has "had enough" the children's way of life, like "a bitch shrugs off her pups when she's had enough. She does a "toothbrush test" under her breasts to restore her body to herself; her body, which isn't her crib, or her breast, but her toothbrush! Moreover, Roy shows how those who don't fit the "good mother" mold are harshly shamed. Ammu is divorced and single, so people think of her as a reckless liability for society. Her own family is actively involved in her destruction; it is the institution of the "family" that is the most common source of violence against women who step out of line.

Language is an arena of marginalization and both authors engage in linguistic rebellion to break the rigid rules of the colonizer and the patriarch. Post colonist feminist theory suggests that the English language represents the power of the western and male dominated world.

Roy attempts to do this by physically smashing and deforming the English language on the page. She uses compound words, scrambled capitalization and single word sentences in *The God of Small Things* to represent the raw and unprocessed psychology of the outcast children. The twins, Estha and Rahel, are "linguistic transgressors" who deliberately read English backwards (e.g., "Satan" as "nataS") so as to remove the intimidating power of the language of the colonizer. The strict born again Christian teacher Miss Mitten punishes them for this but Roy points out the role of institutional education in suppressing indigenous rebellion. Moreover, Malayalam, the native language is intruded in the text at a strategic position. The twins and the lower-caste characters engage in Malayalam nonsense rhymes filled with scatological references that produce a subterranean discourse which is secret and subversive for the English-obsessed, upper-caste adults who are incapable of infiltrating or controlling it. This bilingual polyphony provides the subaltern with a space of power, and challenges the monologic world of the Anglophile.



Gokhale's linguistic subversion is the use of narrative forms that had been considered "women's trivialities" and included diaries, gossips and personal memoirs. In novels built around such personal, personal narratives, she moves the female experience to the status of high literature. The voice of the narrative in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* alternates as fluidly as the shift from the harsh, gritty reality of poverty to the spiritual uplift the makeshift temple brings, with raw, unvarnished slang that captures the unvarnished truth of life on the streets. *The Book of Shadows* is a multi-leveled palimpsest, where the diaries of long dead British colonialists collide with the contemporary psychological self-examination of a wounded Indian woman. While the marginalized woman is the presumed target of this book, Gokhale demonstrates that the "master's" language is available to her, and that she can assertively rewrite the trajectory of her own life.

Finally, it is both authors' aim to show that a subjugation of women and subalterns is not solely an issue of the present, but rather a historical trauma that must be taken up and faced.

The term "History House" is both literal and metaphoric, an environment in which brutal and ancient laws of caste and gender reign supreme, unchecked. She believes that the "Love Laws" that condemned Velutha and Ammu to tragedy were made ages ago; demonstrating how history and systemic prejudice always overcome the individual. The past is not past, and always comes back to you.

Informed by the existential feminist philosophy of her own, Gokhale inflicts her characters into a historical memory to create radical new identities. She has completely reinvented the ancient Sanskrit myth of Kalidasa in *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*. Not a passive victim of fate is her heroine, Shakuntala. Desperate to escape her constricting home and the constraints of her gender, she enthusiastically leaves her safe haven and joins a Greek horse merchant on his voyage. She is ready to take on the role of an outcast and a "fallen woman" willingly, for it provides her with the freedom to roam, the freedom to question and the freedom to seek out knowledge to the extent that she is extremely interested in it. If a man can have this freedom to wander, she argues, why should a woman not have it, as well? "You should get rid of the notion of husbands always being faithful, it should not be assumed."

Likewise, in *A Himalayan Love Story*, Parvati's life is a haunting yet deeply serious examination of "feminine existentialism in the presence of utter despair. Parvati has endured trauma from being orphaned at an early age, poverty, and being married to a man who has denied his own sexuality and desires. Her husband is killed of tuberculosis and abandoned by



her in-laws, and eventually she goes mad, and is sent to a mental asylum. But Gokhale doesn't want to portray her as just a helpless victim. Previously, Parvati has found her own moments of intense passionate agency in her youthful romance with Salman, the Muslim teacher, who she sees as a fiery alternative to her own longing for modesty, actively choosing to cross the rigid lines of religion and societal modesty to experience unabashed physical ecstasy. The ultimate psychological annihilation by Parvati, is Gokhale's strong condemnation of a society that does not offer women a safety net and simultaneously, punishes her for her nature.

Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale's literary sties remain a powerful and complex form of opposition to marginalization. Through linguistic rebellion, the glaring historical tragedy and witty, biting, dark satire, Roy is the fierce critic of the "Big God" of state, caste and institutional power, exposing their violence towards Dalits, women and the transgender community. In the understandings of Gokhale, which unfold in the intimate, psychological sphere of the "Small God", existential philosophy, liberal feminist ideals, and the healing powers of the natural world all come into play to demonstrate that women can dismantle patriarchy from the inside out. Their fictions, in sum, are a radical and unapologetic celebration of the power of the subaltern and the female spirit, and a reminder that the margins are not only sites of the suffering but the epic centers of rebellion, survival, and eventual emancipation.

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