Research Article

The Dualistic Dynamics of Plumwoodean Philosophy in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

This article examines Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) through the lens of Val Plumwood's ecofeminism. In her novel, Roy illustrates how Ammu, the focal character of this research, suffers from cultural, ideological, social, and economic exploitation and subjugation. Nature is likewise irresponsibly degraded and deteriorated by humans in the novel. While scholars have analyzed this novel from diverse ecocritical, feminist, ecofeminist, and postcolonial ecofeminist perspectives, it has not been examined through Plumwood's theoretical framework. This study presents an ecofeminist reading of the novel, employing Plumwood's concept of "dualism" and its three key features, namely, "backgrounding (denial)," "radical exclusion (hyperseparation)," as well as "instrumentalism (objectification)." We argue that the dualistic structures associated with gender and caste are dismantled by Ammu, even though she is subjected to backgrounding, radical exclusion, and instrumentalism by both her family and society. Furthermore, nature, which is also vulnerable to exploitation, challenges humanity's anthropocentric dominance. The findings indicate that, despite the oppressive cultural, social, and ideological forces within Indian society, both Ammu and nature display resilience and agency. Although Ammu meets a tragic end, she heroically dies as an active resister of man-made laws rather than as a passive conformist.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, Val Plumwood, Ammu, nature, dualism

Introduction

Ecofeminism, or ecological feminism, primarily focuses on the oppression of both women and nature. According to Greta Gaard, various systems of oppression related to "race," "class," "gender," "sexuality," "physical abilities," and "species" can be critically examined through an ecofeminist lens (1993, 1). Marti Kheel articulates ecofeminism as a framework for examining and criticizing "the devaluation of women and nature with a view to transforming existing forms of exploitation" (2008, 8). Along with the theoretical discussions, ecofeminist writers also analyze how cultural, social, political, and economic structures work together to perpetuate the exploitation of both women and nature. Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Doris Lessing's *The Sweetest Dream* (2001), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Alexis M. Smith's *Marrow Island* (2016) are novels that explore themes of ecofeminism.

The God of Small Things, a non-linear narrative

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set in postcolonial India, revolves around Ammu, Roy's oppressed character, who lives in a patriarchal society and is subject to the legacies of male dominance, both in her father's home and after marriage. Unable to tolerate her husband's debasing abuses, she undergoes a divorce. Afterward, she returns to her parents' home as a divorcée with her twin children, Estha and Rahel, where she is not welcomed. While there, she enters into a forbidden romantic relationship with Velutha, a lower-caste Paravan servant.[1] This forbidden affair ultimately leads to Velutha's death and creates a scandal for Ammu. She faces severe criticism for her relationship and is eventually abandoned by her family, dying in isolation, sickness, and poverty. Alongside Ammu's story, Roy also demonstrates how various elements of nature, including animals and river, are exploited and destroyed by human activity.

Literature Review

Roy's Booker Prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things* has been examined from various critical perspectives, including ecocriticism, feminism, ecofeminism, and postcolonial ecofeminism, among others. Joanne Lipson Freed explores the relationship between tourism and the pollution of nature in both Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Roy's *The God of Small Things* (2011, 234). Archana Bhattacharjee (2012, 2), along with Alka Borade and Atima Singh (2020, 082-083), examine the river and its sources of pollution. Maqbool Elahi and Afzal Khan analyze the devastated environment and the death of the Meenachal river (2023, 3-5). Sofia Cavalcanti scrutinizes the river's power and nature's agency (2021, 56-64). Kuldeep Singh (2019, 2427), together with Vimal Angeline TP and Jyotshna Singh (2024, 287), explore Ammu's oppression, resilience, and her link with nature under patriarchy. Janet Thormann discusses the connection between nature and subjectivity, emphasizing how the author's use of erotic imagery highlights the bodies of the characters and the nature of Ayemenem (2003, 301). She further asserts that through "free feminine jouissance," Ammu challenges social constraints (304). Similarly, Rukhaya M. Kunhi and Zeenath M. Kunhi (2017, 1), along with Ghulam Yasin (2024, 191-194), investigate the marginalization of both women and nature. They analyze how Roy challenges dialectical binaries, emphasize women's resilience, and highlight the connection between "the sufferings of female characters" and "the degradation of their environment" (191-194). Youngsuk Chae investigates development projects such as dam construction and the manipulation of nature "as a justification of progress" (2015, 522-524). Chae further scrutinizes Ammu's character and the ways in which she has been abused due to "patriarchal superiority that justifies suppressions of women and othered beings" (525). Despite the valuable insights provided by previous scholars, the examination of Ammu's plight in the dualistic structure of the society and the nature's exploitation through Val Plumwood's critical perspective have been neglected.[2] Therefore, this article seeks to explore Ammu's predicament along with nature's manipulated state deploying Plumwood's concept of "dualism," which includes key features such as "backgrounding (denial)," "radical exclusion (hyperseparation)," and "instrumentalism (objectification)." We argue that the dualistic structures related to gender and caste are dismantled by Ammu, who is portrayed as a backgrounded, radically excluded, and instrumentalized character. Moreover, nature which is vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation as well, ultimately challenges the dynamics between humans and the non-human world.

The selection of Plumwood's theory as the framework for analyzing *The God of Small Things* clearly demonstrates that both Plumwood and Roy highlight the marginalization of women and nature within society. An examination of Ammu's character in relation to nature provides evidence of how social structures oppress women and harm the environment. Furthermore, these thinkers emphasize that women face oppression not only from men but also from other women who occupy positions of greater social power (Plumwood 1993, 9; Roy 1997, 174). Both Plumwood and Roy assert that every individual, regardless of gender, social category, or race, possesses agency, deserves respect, and should be regarded as an autonomous being entitled to freedom without being subjected to control (Plumwood 1993, 36; Roy 1997, 50-51). While Plumwood emphasizes the role of resistance in the hierarchical context of power imbalances, Roy illustrates how Ammu challenges social and cultural dualistic structures in terms of gender, sexuality as well as caste and attempts to dismantle them. Similarly, Roy shows how nature reclaims its

1. Paravans are the Untouchable lower caste people in India. According to Halimah Mohamed Ali, these people "who do not fall into the four castes in Hinduism: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras" (2018, 81). Those who belong to these groups are called Touchables. Culturally speaking, Paravans are not allowed to socialize with Touchable groups.

2. The "Theoretical Framework" will examine Val Plumwood in more detail.

rights through the dismantling of devouring technology, highlighting the breakdown of the human/nature dualism.

Theoretical Farmwork

Val Plumwood (1939–2008), an influential Australian philosopher, ecofeminist, and environmentalist, was mainly concerned with the ways in which Western philosophy has constructed dualistic dynamics to reinforce hierarchical systems of domination, specifically, in relation to ecological and gender issues. Plumwood examines the concept of dualism as presented in the philosophies of Plato, Kant, and Descartes, among others, and emphasizes its implications for ecofeminism.[1] She defines dualism as "the process by which contrasting concepts (for example, masculine and feminine gender identities) are formed by domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive" (1993, 31). Plumwood argues that dualism stems from "a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other" (41). The state of denied dependency creates a dualistic structure in which men dominate women and humans dominate nature. They consider themselves independent from "biospheric processes," a condition in which humans are apart from and "outside of nature, which is treated as a limitless provider without needs of its own" (21). The denied dependency creates a polar and asymmetrical dualism.

One characteristic feature of dualism is backgrounding, which emerges from "the irresolvable conflicts the relationship of domination creates for the master" (48). On the one hand, the master depends on the subordinate side and benefits from "the other's services," on the other hand, the master denies dependency. This dependent-independency or denied dependency creates the conflict. One way to solve this conflict is to deny "the importance of the other's contribution or even his or her reality" (48). The master can thus exert power over the subordinate. The second aspect of dualism is radical exclusion, where a sense of "distance or separation" is maximized "between the dualized spheres," causing the dominant side to be viewed as distinct and superior (49). Instrumentalism is the third feature, where those on the subordinate side of dualism are forced to prioritize the needs of the master or center, being recognized merely as tools to serve their purposes (53). Being an ecofeminist, Plumwood connects these dualistic structures to nature by stating, "human identity has, as part of its dualistic construction, been conceived of in terms which are exclusive of and in opposition to nature" (35). She argues that individuals should reject "a master identity" that is "defined in terms of multiple exclusions, and in terms of domination not only of the feminine but also … of the animal, and of the natural" (72). By recognizing humanity's inclination to see itself as superior to nature, Plumwood underscores the profound significance of the environment and the philosophical connection between women and nature.

In the following discussion, we will first examine how patriarchal dualistic dynamics, namely, backgrounding, radical exclusion, and instrumentalism, undermine Ammu's basic human rights. Next, we will analyze the ways in which nature and natural elements have been backgrounded and instrumentalized. Finally, we will highlight how both Ammu and nature demonstrate resilience and agency through their actions.

Dynamics of Dualism in Ammu's Life

Plumwood considers backgrounding as one of "the most common forms of denial of women" which happens by "making the other inessential" (1993, 21, 48). Ammu, who is subject to the unfair discriminatory dynamics of backgrounding, is rendered as inessential at home. She has been denied of having higher education since, Pappachi, her father, believes that higher education is "an unnecessary expense for a girl" while he sends his son, Chacko, to study at Oxford (Roy 1997, 46). Backgrounding leads to the perception that women's roles have little impact on society, while men are the source of knowledge and development in the society. Pappachi, thus, establishes the gender-based discrimination in terms of mind/body dualism between his son and daughter. Plumwood likewise asserts that the portrayal of men as rational and "women as tamed and domestic" ultimately serves to reinforce male dominance (1993, 20). Subjected to the public/private dualistic dynamic, Ammu is to submit to cultural roles prescribed for her which confine her to the realm of home, that is, marriage, motherhood, and domestic duties, while Chacko has become the owner and manager of "Paradise Pickles & Preserves," a family pickle factory (Roy 1997, 39). Due to the societal limitations imposed on her, Ammu has no job prospects as a divorced woman so she seeks financial independence by working at the factory, attempting to establish a

1. Plumwood's philosophy is closely related to postcolonial analysis where it sets dualistic constructs such as colonizer/colonized, culture/nature, human/nature among others; however, as this article mainly offers an ecofeminist reading of the novel, the analysis of postcolonial themes falls beyond its scope.

career beyond her traditional role as a mother. However, as Plumwood notes, "women are vulnerable to backgrounding even when they step outside their traditional roles" (1993, 22). In a backgrounded situation, Plumwood further maintains, "the importance of the other's contribution or even his or her reality" is denied (48). Despite her hard work in the factory, Chacko dismisses her contributions and presents himself as the owner when speaking to others:

> Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my factory, my pineapples, my pickles. Legally this was the case, because Ammu, as a daughter, had no claim to the property. Chacko told Rahel and Estha that Ammu had no Locusts Stand I. (Roy 1997, 64) (original emphasis)

Evidently, Chacko's mind is shaped by the ideology of the "male chauvinist society," which leads him to view women hierarchically and see himself as superior to his sister (64). "Locusts Stand I," according to Kunhi and Kunhi, means that Ammu does not have a share "in the inheritance, as she is likened to the gregarious nomadic-like-locust owing to her wild instincts, with references to her migrating from place to place" (3). Benefiting from this belief, Chacko thus undermines Ammu's labor and efforts in the factory.

Ammu's backgrounded state and tragic circumstance are starkly evident in her burial scene as well, where her basic human rights are denied. Following the revelation of her scandalous romantic affair with Velutha, Ammu is cast out by her family and dies alone in a "grimy room" (Roy 1997*,* 167). When the church refuses to provide her with a proper burial, her brother Chacko wraps her body in a dirty bedsheet and takes it to the electric crematory, a facility designated for the bodies of "beggars, derelicts, and the police-custody dead" (168). Speaking in Plumwoodean terms, Ammu's marginalized state renders her unworthy of notice (1993, 48). Consequently, her funeral becomes a moment of neglect rather than mourning for her family. This situation reflects how women like Ammu are systematically erased from social services as well. The treatment of Ammu's body reveals a profound disrespect. She is thus radically excluded from the basic dignity afforded by societal rituals and services to a human being.

"Radical exclusion," as Plumwood contends, "is a key indicator of dualism" (49). In the novel, Ammu experiences discriminatory gender exclusion not only from her father and brother but, unexpectedly, from her own mother as well. In other words, in Roy's patriarchal context, the master is not always a man, an idea which coincides with Plumwood's notions when she asserts, "Women do not necessarily treat other women as sisters … women are capable of conflict, of domination, and even, in the right circumstances, of violence" (9). Ammu's mother, Mammachi, radically excludes her daughter from familial love, care, attention, and affection. Instead of supporting her, Mammachi prioritizes her son, thereby reinforcing a male/female dualism in the family. Plumwood further notes, "Dualism denies continuity, treating its pairs as comprising two worlds" (50). By this gender discrimination, Mammachi disrupts familial bonds and kinship ties within the family. Despite both being her children, she favors her son over her daughter. The primary reason for this unfair discrimination and exclusion is that Mammachi is financially dependent on her son. Indeed, she is an appendage to him and feels the need to secure her position at home by strengthening her relationship with the male head of the household.

Plumwood further explains that radical exclusion occurs when "the other is to be treated as not merely different but inferior, part of … different order of being; differentiation from it demands not merely distinctness but radical exclusion, not merely separation but hyperseparation" (49). This hyperseparation is quite obvious when Mammachi condemns Ammu's emotional and sexual affairs but supports Chako's "libertine relationships" with other women at the factory by building "a separate entrance" for his room and asserting that "He can't help having a Man's Needs" (Roy 1997, 174). Meanwhile, she cannot accept Ammu's sexual relationship with Velutha, believing that it tarnishes "generations of breeding" by involving a lower-caste Untouchable (262). She even rudely asks, "(among other things), *How could she stand the smell? Haven't you noticed, they have a particular smell, these Paravans?*" (original emphasis; 84). In fact, this discrimination is rooted in the patriarchal Indian culture which grants freedom to men while forbids the same activities for women. Although Velutha is an "invaluable" worker and "practically runs the factory," his caste diminishes his social standing and reduces him to the status of an object (283). They need his skill but despise his caste. Together with Velutha, Ammu is similarly objectified.

According to Plumwood, instrumentalism is a

characteristic feature of dualism where "the lower side" is treated merely as a tool to serve "the master's purposes and needs" (1993, 53). She later argues that "instrumentalism is not only a form of transformation of the other. It is one which gives the other's ends no weight, treats it as a mere tool or means for ends that are not its own" (192). In Roy's novel, Baba, Ammu's husband, adopts an instrumental view of her when he shamelessly accepts his manager's suggestion to place his "*extremely* attractive wife" in his care while he is away, to avoid resigning (original emphasis; 1997, 48-49). He believes this is a practical solution that can benefit everyone involved, particularly regarding their children's schooling (49). Baba, who struggles with alcoholism and refuses to work, reduces Ammu to the state of an object in order to secure his job. Although he perceives himself as part of a privileged pair in the gender hierarchy, his survival in the workplace dramatically relies on the role that the inferior pair can play. In other words, Baba depends on her wide while, as Plumwood observes, the dominant male/female dynamic radically denies this "dependency" (1993, 41). Having the dominant voice at home, he never consults Ammu about his humiliating and degrading decision—expecting her complete submission to his employer's exploitative proposal (Roy 1997, 49). As Plumwood notes, "those on the lower side of the dualisms are obliged to set aside their own interests for those of the master or centre" (1993, 53). Baba views Ammu on the lower side of gender roles, as an object of his needs, a perspective which resonates with Plumwood's assertion when she contends, "'Woman's nature' and woman's virtue are defined instrumentally, as being a good wife or mother" (2002, 105). However, Ammu does not submit to his demeaning whim.

Apart from Baba, Chacko also has an instrumental view of his sister and exploits Ammu through her work without paying her properly. When Ammu raises her objections, Chacko responds, "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine"; he then laughs surprisingly loud (Roy 1997, 64). This attitude reflects the way in which Chacko instrumentalizes her sister, an attitude which is rooted in patriarchal ideology. Apart from patriarchy, Yasin relates it to the "colonizers' model where the female characters are marginalized by the factory owner with low wages" (2024, 191). He further asserts that Chacko "even does not offer any share to the other family members like Ammu living hard and aware of her status as a divorced woman existing in the male dominated society" (196). To speak in Plumwoodean terms, a superior/inferior dichotomy is established here, making it apparent that "the lower side serves the upper as a means to his ends" (1993, 53). By viewing her as an object of labor, Chacko perpetuates a gender hierarchy. According to Maria Mies, Ammu functions as "unpaid 'family labor' within cooperatives" (1986, 115). Although the factory operates as a cooperative business, Chacko's dominance allows him to infringe upon Ammu's rights with no remorse. This situation illustrates how the social and cultural context relegates Ammu to an "underside" position, where she is deemed to have "no such intrinsic value," existing merely as a resource rather than an individual (Plumwood 1993, 53). Such a perspective reinforces a male/female dualism in the novel in which women are reduced to instruments for male benefit. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy not only highlights the instrumentalisation and subordination of women by hierarchic cultural, social, and ideological structures, but she also addresses the anthropocentric view that leads to the exploitation of nature. As Plumwood notes, "the backgrounding and instrumentalisation of nature and that of women run closely parallel" (21).

Backgrounding and Instrumentalism of Nature

Regarding the backgrounded state of nature, Plumwood contends, "Systematic devaluation and denial are perceptually ingrained in backgrounding, involving systematic not noticing, not seeing. The way in which we background nature is evident in our treatment of it in a range of areas" (1993, 69-70). In the novel, Roy likewise challenges the ways in which human beings are "ecologically insensitive" toward nature's deterioration (13). In a heart-wrenching scene, Roy describes how a sparrow, searching for a place to build its nest, becomes trapped in a car. "She never found her way out. No one noticed her panicked car-window appeals. She died on the backseat, with her legs in the air. Like a joke" (1997, 298). The upside-down image of a dead sparrow may appear amusing to humans at first glance. However, Roy uses this image to critique the blurred lines between the human realm and the natural world, emphasizing how humans have intruded upon and dominated nature. In her writing, Roy highlights small yet impactful moments in the lives of animals, prompting her readers to consider several important questions. She wants to know who truly cares about the life of a sparrow or even notices when a sparrow is trapped in a car. Additionally, she seeks to understand what significance the life of a sparrow holds for humans. She recognizes that a sparrow may not hold any real significance for people, which is why she views this as a poignant commentary, as a joke.

Plumwood maintains that "the structures of self involved in human domination … are reflected, re-

peated, and confirmed in the reduction of non-human nature to an instrument" (1993, 142). In this view, the local ecosystem—comprising of the land, river, and animals—is seen merely as resources to serve human needs. The Ayemenem people hold an instrumentalized perspective on animals, which leads to the establishment of a human/nature dualism. In Indian culture, elephants play a significant role in religious rituals and cultural festivals. Kochu Thomban is the name of a sacred elephant kept at the temple his entire life, and now he is old. When Rahel visits the temple after twenty-three years, she observes, "his skin was looser than she remembered. He wasn't *Kochu* Thomban anymore. His tusks had grown. He was *Vellya* Thomban now. The Big Tusker" (Roy 1997, 235) (original emphasis). This highlights how this animal has been imprisoned in the temple, reduced to a mere tool for conducting religious ceremonies and entertaining tourists. Consequently, this treatment indicates a violation of the rights of animals; they have the right to live freely in their natural habitats. In another poignant scene, Roy describes "a dead temple elephant, electrocuted by a high-tension wire" on a road (159):

> A giant burning ghat was erected on the highway. The engineers of the concerned municipality sawed off the tusks and shared them unofficially. Unequally. Eighty tins of pure ghee were poured over the elephant to feed the fire. The smoke rose in dense fumes and arranged itself in complex patterns against the sky. People crowded around at a safe distance, read meanings into them. (227-228)

She illustrates how these wretched animals are reduced to objects to fulfill human needs; even after death, the engineers salvage valuable parts of the carcass for profit. Plumwood calls this "the holocaust of animal life" (2002, 15). Regarding elephants' electrocution, Priyanka Maral contends that Roy's novel addresses "harmful effects of modernization on animals" such as electricity that "has become a part of our life but it is harmful for an animal, when by an accident he comes in contact with it" (2013, 42). By exploiting animals and disrespecting their rights, they ignore the essence of nature. Plumwood notes that "instrumental outlooks distort our sensitivity to and knowledge of nature, blocking humility, wonder, and openness in approaching the more-than-human, and producing narrow types of understanding and classification that reduce nature to raw materials for human projects" (2002, 109). The prevailing anthropocentric perspective proposes that nature is limitless, but the truth is that its resources are finite. This reality accentuates the urgent need to use these resources responsibly and to preserve them for the benefit of future generations. This idea is also underscored by Dianoosh Sanei and Jalal Sokhanvar when they argue that "the protection of the environment is an obligation upon human beings" (2017, 216).

Apart from the manipulative perspective toward animals, Roy demonstrates how people and authorities in Ayemenem are indifferent to the pollution of the river. After twenty-three years, Estha returns to Ayemenem and occasionally walks along the riverbanks, which smells "of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans" (1997, 22). However, people often overlook water pollution, an approach which highlights nature's diminished and backgrounded role in their lives. Rather than addressing this serious issue and trying to find ways to deal with water pollution, they proceed to build houses there (22). Plumwood explains that "what is involved in the backgrounding of nature is the denial of dependence on biospheric processes, and a view of humans as apart, outside of nature, which is treated as a limitless provider without needs of its own" (1993, 21). People perceive their lives as independent of nature and its elements. Instead of protecting them, they manipulate natural resources for political, economic, or technological advantage. They see nature merely as an endless backdrop to serve their own needs. Roy shows how the Meenachal River is reduced to backwater due to dam construction; the once clean water is now polluted with pesticides, leading to obvious mass fish deaths (1997, 22). According to Borade and Singh, when the pH level of water quality decreases due to chemical substances, industrial wastewater, and other human waste, it results in the deaths of fish and aquatic creatures that cannot survive in a pH range below 4 (2020, 82-83). Although water pollution is a life-threatening disaster, many people are unaware of its dangers. Roy, a prominent environmental activist, highlights how humanity's misuse—and, more accurately, overuse—of nature is driven by a greed for increased economic gain. In one instance, Roy criticizes anthropocentric perspective for regulating the flow of saltwater, resulting in "two harvests a year instead of one. More rice, for the price of a river" (1997, 130). This highlights the insatiable nature of human beings. Sohrab Tavousi and Shohreh Chavoshian highlight how modern society causes irreparable damage to nature by exploiting its resources (2019, 120). It is essential to use natural resources in a balanced way. In a similar vein, Shokofeh Zorriyeh Habib et al argue that "the

stability and survival of ecosystems depend on establishing a balance between human actions and nature" (2024, 188).

Dismantling Dualistic Structures

Roy's novel portrays various moments of dualism while simultaneously challenging hierarchical dualities such as male/female and human/nature. The dismantling of gender hierarchy is particularly evident in Ammu's portrayal as she violently confronts her husband. Instead of passively submitting to her husband's disgraceful decision to give her to his employee, she grabs the heaviest book she can find and strikes him vigorously on the head, legs, back, and shoulders (Roy 1997, 50). When he finally regains consciousness, "he was puzzled by his bruises" (50). However, this violent reaction does not dissuade her husband from his shameful decision. It is only when his violent episodes begin to affect their children, coupled with the backdrop of the war in Pakistan, that Ammu decides to leave him and return to her parents (50).

As a divorcée, Ammu is expected to conform to the stereotype of a passive femininity associated with her status. However, she subverts these expectations through acts of personal agency. When she hears her favorite songs on the radio, it ignites a quiet yet powerful resistance against imposed gender roles. Her defiance is evident in the following passage:

> On days like this there was something restless and untamed about her. As though she had temporarily set aside the morality of motherhood and divorcée hood. Even her walk changed from a safe mother-walk to another wilder sort of walk. She wore flowers in her hair and carried magic secrets in her eyes. She spoke to no one. She spent hours on the riverbank with her little plastic transistor shaped like a tangerine. She smoked cigarettes and had midnights swims. (51-52)

These actions lead people to become "a little wary of her," as she transcends their controlling power and becomes labeled as "dangerous" (52).

Ammu also challenges caste discrimination through her emotional attraction to Velutha, an audacious act that not only violates caste boundaries, but it also disrupts sexual norms. As Touchables, Ammu's family humiliate and disgrace the Untouchable people, an attitude deeply rooted in the caste system of Indian society. Roy critically portrays unfair social and cultural constraining rules for Paravans. In Mammachi's time, they were expected to sweep away "their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravano footprint" (80). While conversing with Touchables, they were required to cover their mouth in order not to pollute the air the Touchables may happen to breathe (80).

The Untouchables are also prohibited from entering the houses of the Touchables or touching anything that the Touchables have touched (80). In one moment, Roy recounts how, as a child, Velutha makes toys for Ammu but does not give them to her directly. Instead, he holds them in his palm "as he had been taught," ensuring that she does not touch the palm of his hand when taking them (81). When Velutha was young, they were allowed to enter the Ayemenem house, Ammu's family house, from the back door to deliver the plucked coconuts (80). A question arises here; if the Touchables do not touch whatever the Untouchables have touched, so how they touch the coconuts they have brought. It can be inferred that the Touchables transgress these man-made rules whenever they want, but, in other times, they become strict toward these wretched people. Who has constructed these denigrating rules? Why are the people in the same society categorized into two groups? Who is benefitted from this dualism? Plumwood argues that "dualistic distinction aims to maximize the number, scope, or significance of distinguishing characteristics. It does not do this in a random way, but usually by classifying characteristics as belonging exclusively, as far as possible, to one side or the other" (1993, 50). Mammachi's rehiring of Velutha as a carpenter to work in the factory irritates the Touchable workers. To appease their anger, Mammachi decides to pay him less than the other Touchable workers (1997, 83). This is how these categorizations benefit those who endorse them. Labeled and classified as the Untouchables, they are thus easily exploited. Through the character of Velutha, Roy critiques the caste system which ruins the life of many people. Is there any way to challenge these unjust cultural values? It should be acknowledged that confronting such age-old norms is not that easy but it is not infeasible.

Unlike the people in her community, Ammu actively confronts this unfair caste hierarchy. Driven by mutual desire and recognition, she engages in an illicit love affair with Velutha and thus transcends the Touchable-Untouchable discrimination as well as the imposed cultural laws of love which "lay down who

should be loved, and how. And how much" (42). Ammu asserts her autonomous agency by expressing her love and feelings for a Paravan according to her own understanding of the world. Plumwood contends that, "Dismantling a dualism based on difference requires the reconstruction of relationship and identity in terms of a non-hierarchical concept of difference" (1993*,* 60). Ammu is brave enough to define a value system for herself in which the Untouchable Velutha is perceived as an equal fellow human, regardless of his caste and India's discriminatory norms. Chae similarly contends that the disenfranchised Ammu and Velutha do not view the world in terms of hierarchies; they rather see a kind of interrelatedness between humans; "Indeed, Ammu's and Velutha's shared view of the interconnected world and their resistance to social … injustice in postcolonial Indian society become ways of solidifying their inter-caste relationship" (2015, 524). This perspective crumbles the taboo of untouchability, thus allowing Ammu to freely enter into a sexual relationship with Velutha. Plumwood likewise contends, "But both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of *human* identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises human identity" (1993, 36) (original emphasis). Ammu recognizes Velutha as an equal human being and thus allows him to touch her body. Although this emotional intimacy ultimately results in her exclusion from both her family and society, it demonstrates her active role in resisting unjust social constructs in the narrative.

Along with Ammu, nature, that has long been subjugated under industrial, political, and economic systems, asserts itself through its own agency. Plumwood argues that, in a dualistic view which separates humans from non-humans, nature is classified as "the lower separate sphere" (191). This hierarchical perspective empowers humans to dominate and control nature, manipulating its natural processes as they wish. In contrast to this anthropocentric standpoint, biocentric thinkers, who view human beings as "just one of a number of beings on the earth and that all have rights and values," assert that nature possesses its own power and agency (Ezzy 2004, 22), an idea which is highlighted by Plumwood when she argues about nature's "intrinsic value" (1990, 210). This Roy illustrates how nature begins to reclaim the spaces that humans have appropriated, gradually dismantling constructed hierarchies and reemerging as a living and autonomous entity. Industrial and technological advancements intrude upon the natural world, disrupting its regular rhythms. For instance, after Pappachi's death, his car is left unused and gradually swallowed by the ground. As Roy describes, "With every monsoon, the old car settled more firmly into the ground… With no intention of ever getting up. Grass grew around its flat tires" (1997, 297). The growth of grass around the tires symbolizes nature's intent to halt the car's movement, serving as a defense mechanism. Humans must recognize and respect the boundaries of nature; otherwise, nature will find its own means of protection. If humans respect and safeguard nature, that sparrow would not end up trapped and dead in a car. Roy also highlights the abandoned state of ornamental gardens, where the growth of trees and flowers is controlled by human intervention. After more than fifty years, people come to realize that nature should not be subjected to control. She writes, "Recently, after enduring more than half a century of relentless, pernickety attention, the ornamental garden had been abandoned. Left to its own devices, it had grown knotted and wild, like a circus whose animals had forgotten their tricks" (36). Here, Roy critiques how human interference disrupts the natural flow of life in nature and animal behavior for personal pleasure and enjoyment. Animals captivated in circuses lose their instincts, are removed from their natural habitats, and are forced to perform for human entertainment.

Conclusion

Reading Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* through Plumwood's concept of dualism highlights significant issues surrounding the oppression of women, nature, lower castes, and the lower class within the hierarchical structure of India, as well as the means to dismantle these hierarchies. Roy illustrates that, in the context of unequal gender relationships, women must challenge traditional gender roles. In the novel, patriarchal ideology systematically denies Ammu her fundamental rights, including domestic security, access to education, and personal autonomy, among others. Ammu experiences continuous neglect, backgrounding, and instrumentalism; however, she ultimately breaks "the rules" (Roy 1997, 32) and seeks to establish her own identity through "a non-hierarchical concept of difference" (Plumwood 1993, 60). Ammu's resistance against social and cultural norms and her efforts to assert her agency disrupt age-old established hierarchies. Through the figure of Ammu, Roy underscores that passive submission and silent endurance are not virtues; rather, they reflect the weakness of the oppressed, allowing the oppressor to perpetuate their power. As a divorcée, Ammu is expected to remain confined to the domestic sphere; however, she refuses to conform to expectations of passive femininity and undermines these notions through acts of personal agency. Even though she dies tragically, she

does so heroically, dismantling the discriminating hierarchical dualities of Indian culture with her bare hands and without support. In addition to gender dynamics, Roy demonstrates how nature suffers as a result of technological, industrial, economic, and political issues. Human beings recklessly consume natural resources, and ordinary people have become insensitive to ecological disasters; governments often do not take these issues seriously. In this novel, Roy contends that anthropocentric views of nature need to be moderated. Human life depends on nature, which should be respected and protected. Nature possesses its own agency and has the power to dismantle anthropocentric domination. *The God of Small Things* accentuates the vital need for gender equality and the recognition of nature's agency, reminding us that life thrives within a framework of mutual respect, free from constructed dualistic structures.

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