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Colonialism, Race and Gender: An Intersectional Analysis of Women's Marginalization in Roy's The God of Small Things

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ABSTRACT

This study explores *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy through the lens of intersectionality, focusing on the interconnected systems of colonialism, race and gender that shape the experiences of marginalised woman characters. The existing literature written from the standpoint of feminist analysis of the novel could be divided into four broader categories: first, the woman has been conceptualised as subaltern who are denied to speak for themselves; Second, the oppression against woman and their strategies for reclaiming their agencies have been discussed; Third, the discrimination against woman through the framework of liberalism has been discussed; Fourth, the concept of intersectionality has been used in which the intersection of caste and class in marginalisation of woman has been discussed. This study aims to expand and contribute to the fourth category of literature. The existing literature written from the standpoint of intersectionality only discusses class and caste and does not incorporate the intersection of race. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring and analysing the intersection of race, and gender in the marginalisation of women in the novel *The God of Small Things.* This study employed Kimberlé Crenshaw's and Chandra Mohanty framework of intersectionality, to investigate how the intersection of colonialism, race and gender within the novel, particularly in the lives of female characters Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and Rahel.

Introduction

Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, published in 1997, brings the role of the societal structures of colonialism, race and gender into sharp focus by depicting the lives of women caught at the intersection of these oppressive structures (Tickell, 2007). The novel has been widely analysed for the representation of discrimination against women (Kaur, 2015; Ganguly, 2018; Subramaniam et.al 2021; Hoque, 2021; Singh & Sharma, 2020) and agency of woman in Indian society (Pati, 2021; Niyaz, 2022; Islam, 2022). However, its nuanced critique of intersection of colonialism, race and gender in furthering the marginalisation of woman remain unexplored.

Most of the literature discussing the novel from the lens of intersectionality primarily focuses on the intersection of gender with caste and class; the dimensions of the intersection of race, and gender is yet to be explored (Sharma, 2020; Quaderi, 2022). Therefore, this study is intended to explore the marginalisation of women through intersection of race, and gender in Roy's The God of Small Things. This study employed Kimberle Crenshaw and Chandra Tapade Mohanty's framework of intersectionality to analyse how race, and gender intersect to create unique forms of women's marginalisation.

The God of Small Things is an autobiographical account by Arundhati Roy, in which she recounts the life story of her mother and herself (Sharma, 2020). Suzanna Arundhathi Roy was born in Shillong, Assam (presently Meghalaya) on 24th November, 1961 (Library of Congress, 2016). Her mother, Mary Roy, was a prominent Syrian Christian rights activist from Kerala. Her father, Rajib Roy, a Bengali Christian, was a Tea plantation manager in Kolkata, Bengal. When Arundhati Roy was two years old, her mother returned to Kerala with her and her brother from Kolkata (Dey, 2020). Arundhati Roy herself is also a political activist working in the domain of human rights and environmental causes which reflects why she has a critical gaze for understanding the lived reality of woman in India (Dhanusha, 2012).

The God of Small Things revolves around the story of a wealthy Syrian Christian Family belonging to Ayemenem, Kerala, located in Southern India. The story begins with Ammu's story, whose father, Pappachi, was an Imperial Entomologist during the British period and later became the Director of Entomology in post-colonial India. When Pappachi retired and moved from Delhi to Ayemenem, Mammachi, the wife of Pappachi and mother of Ammu, started a business making pickles and jam. Pappachi and Mammachi also had a son, Chacko. Pappachi was characterised as a violent man who used to beat Mammachi and Ammu.

When Ammu grew up, her father neither sponsored her education nor arranged a dowry for her marriage. Ammu got one opportunity to escape the violence of her father when she went to Calcutta to visit her aunt. Ammu met a man at a wedding, married him, who was Hindu and worked at an Englishman's tea estate. Even after marriage, Ammu did not escape violence because her husband used to beat her. Ultimately, she took a divorce and returned to Aynemen. Ammu had twin children out of wedlock: a son, Esthappen, and a daughter, Rahel.

When Ammu returned to her natal home, neither she nor her children were welcomed because on the one hand she married a Hindu man and on the other hand she took a divorce. The aunt of Ammu, Baby Kochamma, who was unmarried, always said that she did not have a place in the home. Baby Kochamma fell in love with Father Mulligan, a priest, at a young age, but she was unable to marry him and remained unmarried throughout her life. Ammu's brother Chacko went to Oxford for higher education. He married an English woman, Margaret Kochamma, there and had a daughter, Sophie Mol. However, Margaret Kochamma also took a divorce from Chacko, and Chacko returned to Ayemenem. When Chacko returned to Ayemenem, he expanded his mother's business and established a pickle and Jam factory, in which he never gave Ammu any share.

Alongside the story of the Syrian Christian family, the narrative also mentions the story of the lower-caste Christians who used to serve the Syrian Christians. Ammu established a relationship with Velutha, who belonged to a Christian family, which was disapproved of by her family when they found out. Margaret Kochamma's husband, Joe, died in an accident, due to which she came to India to visit her ex-husband Chacko along with her daughter, Sophie Mol. While Sophie Mol was staying in Ayemenem's house, Rahel and Estha, who were estranged by her mother's behaviour towards them, decided to run away from home. They found a boat near the river and got it fixed by Velutha, and decided to run away from home on it to an abandoned house on the other side of the river. Sophie Mol also joined them; however, the boat went upside down, due to which Sophie Mol, who did not know how to swim, drowned and died, while Estha and Rahel survived.

On the other hand, when Velutha's father Vellaya Papen informed Baby Kochamma about the affair of his son and Ammu, she went to the police station to file charges of rape against Velutha. When police apprehended Velutha, they beat him to the extent that he came close to death. Velutha belonged to the Communist Party, which was in power at that time. Inspector Thomas Mathews decided that he would talk to the Communist Party leader, comrade K.N.M. Pillai, about Velutha, who had disowned Velutha. The police apprehended Velutha and beat him to the point of death. At that Ammu and her children also reached to inform Inspector Thomas Mathews that Velutha was innocent due to which Inspector Thomas became weary that he could not file charges of rape on him and he is about to die. Then, Inspector Thomas came to know that Sophie Mol is missing, and he decided to put charges of abduction on Velutha, who died in police custody.

The novel also narrates the story of Ammu and Rahel as they grow up and face the consequences of their mother's death. Rahel remained with Chacko while Estha was sent to his father after the death of Sophie Mol. When Rahel grew up, she was admitted to an architecture program at a university. She started living in the hostel for more years than her degree was long because she was able to earn enough money for her survival, and the hostel and food were cheaper. There she met an American man, Larry McClasin, who came to collect data for his PhD dissertation. She married him and went with him to America. However, they soon got divorced, and Rahel returned to her home (Roy, 1997).

This study is intended to discuss the research questions that how does *The God of Small Things* depict the operation of patriarchy and marginalisation through the intersecting systems of race, and gender? This study is significant because it offers a comprehensive intersectional analysis of The God of Small Things, examining how race, and gender intersect to shape the experiences of marginalised characters. The study contributes to feminist literary criticism by offering a nuanced, multi-dimensional reading of the novel, providing fresh insights into the complex dynamics of power, identity, and marginalisation in postcolonial literature. Additionally, it adds to the ongoing discourse on race, and gender in contemporary Indian society, making it relevant to both literary scholarship and socio-political discussions. This study is limited to a close reading of *The God of Small Things* and does not extend to other works by Arundhati Roy or to broader literary trends in South Asian literature. The study is confined to literary analysis, primarily examining the text itself. While it offers a contextual understanding of postcolonial India and the historical backdrop of colonialism, race and gender issues, it does not engage with primary sources, such as historical documents, social movements, or real-world case studies. Although *The God of Small Things* is initially written in English, it is influenced by the Malayalam language and Kerala's cultural context. Certain idiomatic expressions, cultural references, or nuances in the text may be lost or altered in translation, which can limit the depth of analysis and hinder the author's full intent. The study's analysis of *The God of Small Things* is based on a specific reading of the text that

differs from other scholarly interpretations. Scholars may offer alternative interpretations of the novel's portrayal of patriarchy, caste, and resistance, leading to varied conclusions.

Literature Review

The existing literature has been divided into four categories according to the analytical framework adopted by scholars for analysing *The God of Small Things*. The first category of literature has conceptualised women as subaltern by using the analytical framework of Gayatri Spivak. This category of literature primarily discusses the impacts of Colonialism and patriarchy in relegating women to a subordinate position (Rafiee & Dedari, 2015; Yadav & Bhatt, 2022; Dang, 2021; Ilyas, 2019). The second category of literature discusses the agency of the women in *The God of Small Things*. This category of literature primarily discusses the generational gap in women's assertion of agency (Kaur, 2015; Hoque, 2021; Ganguly, 2018; Pati, 2021), as well as the assertion of women's agency in decision-making despite the prevalence of patriarchal structures (Islam, 2022). The third category of literature examines the role of legislators and law enforcement agencies in perpetuating the discrimination and oppression of women, despite the presence of constitutional guarantees and democratic institutions (Singh & Sharma, 2022; Subramaniam, Rajkumar, & Dhanalakshmi, 2021). The fourth category of literature examines the roles of class, caste, and gender in the marginalisation of women in *The God of Small Things* (Sharma, 2020; Quaderi, 2022; Niyaz, 2022).

Women as Subalterns

Italian Marxist Philosopher Antonio Gramsci first introduced the concept of subaltern in the 1930s. According to him, the concept of subaltern refers to those people who belong to a subordinate group in society (Green, 2011). Giyatri Spivak has used the term to represent the subordinate position of women in post-colonial India. In her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" she argues that women have been silenced in the existing literature produced during the colonial and post-colonial periods before the 1970s, due to which they have not been able to speak for themselves (Spivak, 2006).

In the 1970s, various feminist authors began to write about women who belonged to the subaltern group. Arundhati Roy also belonged to this group of feminist authors who started writing about subaltern women. Behnaz Rafiee and Raza Dedari (2015) conducted a comparative analysis of the representation of the subaltern women in Louise Erdrich's Track and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. Although the novels were written in different cultural contexts — those of Native Americans and India — the authors focused on finding similarities in the women's experiences. The authors argue that although the status of women is often signified as subaltern, they were still able to engage in their struggle. However, the female characters were unable to achieve what they were striving for due to their subaltern position in society. Although they did not achieve liberation, simply by representing subaltern women in their writing, Roy and Erdrich's works have given these women a voice in literature, from which they have been hitherto marginalised.

Although the women were able to get their voices heard by the people when they were represented in the novel, they did not overcome their subaltern position. Giyatri Spivak used the term “double colonization” for the subaltern women, by which she means that the woman is subordinated firstly due to colonialism and secondly due to the patriarchal structure (Spivak, 2006). Anita Yadav and Vinod Bhatt (2022) discusses marginalisation due to gender and caste in The God of Small Things. The authors argue that even after six decades of independence from British rule, centuries-old caste discrimination and gender bias exist. The authors argue that if the woman is from the lower caste group, then she faces double marginalisation. First, it is based on gender, and second, it is based on caste. Therefore, the authors argue that it is necessary to analyses the power relationship not only between men

and women, but also between women, and woman because some women are more marginalised than others.

Similarly, to Yadav and Bhatt (2022), Niraj Dang (2021) also discusses women's subaltern position employing the concept of double colonisation, through a comparative analysis of the novels That Long Silence and The God of Small Things. The author argues that previously, the struggle of the people was against foreign colonisers, which shifted in the postcolonial period to a battle against local oppression. In Indian society, the patriarchy is deeply entrenched, subjecting women to a secondary status. Hence, previously, women struggled alongside men to achieve independence for India. Still, later on, the women were confronted with the issue of liberating themselves from male dominance. Therefore, the women were characterised as doubly colonised in both novels.

Sobia Ilyas (2019) discusses the subaltern characters in the novel The God of Small Things. The author focuses on the characters of Ammu and Velutha, who are considered marginalised in Indian society. The author employed the concepts of double colonisation, hybridisation, and colonial desires proposed by post-colonial thinkers such as Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, and Robert C. Young. The female character of Ammu has been characterised as being doubly colonised, first due to the history of colonisation and secondly due to the patriarchy. Similarly, the concept of hybridisation means that the colonial experience brought together the different marginalised groups. For instance, Ammu, being marginalised based on her gender, forms a bond with Velutha, who is a person from the lower caste community of India. Although the concept of subalternism explains the subordinate position of women in The God of Small Things, but it has been criticized by the literature on the basis of ignoring the agency of the woman as it is represented in the novel the God of Small Things. The next section discusses those set of literature that discusses the agency of the woman in The God of Small Things.

Women's struggle for reclaiming agency

The literature has explored the theme of women's agency as it is embodied in The God of Small Things, Narinder Kaur (2015) discusses the oppression that women faced in India's patriarchal society and the struggle of women to assert their identity and gain social and economic freedom in the novel The God of Small Things. The author substantiates this claim from citing the example of Ammu from the novel who escape her father’s violence and married a man. However, when her husband also beat her, she took divorce from him. Riazul Hoque (2021) discusses the marginalisation, discrimination, and the struggle of women in India through a study of The God of Small Things. Although, he reiterated the examples of Ammu that Kaur has cited of Ammu, but he also makes some additions by citing the examples from the post-divorce life of Ammu. For instance, Ammu established relationship with a lower caste man Velutha and exercised her agency.

Poulami Ganguly (2018) and Dabasisha Pati (2021) both argues that there is a generation gap play a significant role in determining the agency of the woman. The women who belonged to the older generation in The God of Small Things do not assert their agency, while the women who belonged to the younger generation did assert their agency. For example, the characters of Mammachi and Baby Kochamma who belonged to the older generation, accepted the patriarchal structure while women from the younger generation, such as Ammu and Rahel, have taken stringent action against the patriarchy.

However, not every scholar writing about women's agency agrees that older women lacked agency while younger females asserted their agency in the novel The God of Small Things. The mother of Ammu, Mamachi, has also been identified by Jahirul Islam (2022) as exercising her own will in her decision-making. Jahirul Islam (2022) discusses the journey of the female characteristics from submissiveness to emancipation in The God of Small Things. For instance, Mammachi, started her own business, making banana jam and tender mango

pickle, after her husband, Papachi's retirement. The business achieved success, and all of her products were sold. Finally, the daughter of Ammu, Rahel, is also characterised as rebellious in the novel. The author argues that when Rahel was suspected of killing Sophie Mol, she refused to accept the allegation. The author also characterised the rebellion of Rahel, through her expulsion from school due to her behaviour.

Finally, it is not always the men who are reproducing the patriarchal structure; instead, the women also play a significant role in reproducing the patriarchal structure. Darakshan Niyaz (2022) argues that women are not only the victims in every context, but women can also act against each other. Similarly, the female characters in The God of Small Things are also working against each other, as a result of which the patriarchy prevails in Indian society. For example, the author argues that the female character of Baby Kochama is characterised as one who is working against the other females. Although Baby Kochama was educated, she still adopted the traditional methods against other women. The debate about the agency of female characters in The God of Small Things again reduces a complex issue to a simple one: which women can challenge the patriarchal structure and which women cannot. The woman experiences are shaped not just due to their gender but there are other factors such as class, and caste that have an impact as well.

Intersectionality and marginalisation of women

The concept of intersectionality has not been utilised widely in the existing literature for the analysis of the marginalisation of women in The God of Small Things. Under the concept of intersectionality, the impact of class, caste and gender on the marginalisation of women has been analysed (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013). Urvi Sharma (2020) conducted a comparative analysis of Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things and The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. The author analysed both Novels using the theoretical framework of intersectionality. According to the concept of intersectionality, the role of different overlapping systems in perpetuating inequality and discrimination is analysed. It shows how Roy's stories connect various kinds of disparities, like those based on caste, gender, class, and religion, to highlight how they overlap and reinforce each other in the context of India.

It also demonstrates how her work gives a voice to marginalised groups and critiques unfair social and political systems. In this manner, this article demonstrates how Roy's novels explore overlooked aspects of society and advocate for change. This article is significant for the present research because it has analysed Arundhati Roy's story through the lens of intersectionality. The article has analysed Arundhati Roy's two novels; however, the present study is analysing only one of Arundhati Roy's novels, The God of Small Things. However, the article focused on the role of class, caste and gender in the marginalisation of the people in general in India and does not focus specifically on women. This study aims to focus solely on the roles of class, caste, and gender in the marginalisation of women.

Golam Ghaus Al-Qauderi (2022) discusses gender and subalternity in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. Quaderi (2022) argues that women in India were depicted as docile and submissive in several works of Indian literature; however, Roy has described women as capable of expressing their desires vis-à-vis men. Quaderi (2022) then moves on to criticise the representation framework adopted by Western authors to represent Indian women. He argues that Western authors mention the external factors responsible for the marginalisation of women; they do not consider the economic, social and political context and the identity formation of women in the case of India.

Arundhati Roy's story, The God of Small Things, Quaderi argues, incorporates the different exclusionary frames of caste, class, and gender in the marginalisation of women that Western authors have ignored. In this manner, women who were previously excluded from Indian literature also gained a space in the literary sphere. This article is significant for the

present because it highlights the differences based on caste, class, and gender in the marginalisation of women in India.

The representation of women's marginalisation is much more nuanced in the novel The God of Small Things. Therefore, the concept of subaltern, double marginalisation, generational gap in women agency, liberal criticism of women discrimination does not adequately consider the complexity in the marginalisation of women in The God of Small Things. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the impact of intersection of identities in marginalisation of women in The God of small things. This study would fill this gap by employing the concept of intersection of colonialism, race and gender for the analysis of marginalisation of woman.

Theoretical Framework

In this research paper, the theory of intersectionality as formulated by feminist analysis has been used. Kimberly Crenshaw (2013) introduced the concept of intersectionality, examining how overlapping social identities—such as race, gender, and sexuality—interact to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. Crenshaw (2013) argued that traditional feminist frameworks often adopt a "single-axis" approach, focusing on one dimension of identity that is gender while ignoring how multiple identities combine to produce specific forms of oppression. For instance, Black women in America face challenges that cannot be fully understood by looking at race or gender in isolation, as the intersection of both shapes their experiences. She illustrated this point through legal cases where Black women were excluded from remedies available to either Black men or white women, revealing the limitations of anti-discrimination laws. Crenshaw (2013) referred to a case, "DeGraffenreid v. General Motors", in which a group of African American women argued before the court that they were eligible to work in the offices. However, the companies are giving employment to white women, and black women are not being offered employment. In this manner, the marginalisation of the black woman was based on gender and race, not just on race (Crenshaw, 2013).

The court, on the other hand, argued that the Black men are being offered employment, which means that it cannot be said that black people are not given employment. On the other hand, the white woman has been given employment by the company, which demonstrates that there is also no gender discrimination in the job market. In this manner, the court ignored the intersection of gender and race in the marginalisation of the woman, which Crenshaw was highlighting about the limitations of the anti-discrimination laws in America (Stienmetz, 2020). Although Crenshaw initial focus was on Black women, intersectionality has since become a widely used framework to understand how systems of oppression like racism, sexism, ableism, and classism overlap. It has also emerged as a practical tool for creating inclusive policies and addressing systemic inequalities in various fields, such as law, healthcare, education, and social justice movements (Atewologun, 2018).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's framework significantly supplements the concept of intersectionality by highlighting how colonialism, global capitalism, and cultural imperialism intersect with race, gender, and class to shape the lived experiences of women, particularly in postcolonial and transnational contexts. Mohanty (2020) had argued that Western women, when writing about third-world women, presuppose a binary of man and woman. In this presupposition, they create a hierarchy in which men dominate women. The man becomes the subject, and the woman becomes the object. To put it in another way, the man is inherently violent, and the woman is dependent on the man. In depicting third-world women in this manner, a hierarchy is also established between Western women and those from the third world. Western women are liberal, secular, and have control over their sexuality, but third-world women are family-oriented, veiled, lack mobility, and have no control over their

sexuality. In this way, the third world women are characterised as those who need to follow the western women to liberate themselves from the wrath of men.

Mohanty argued that there is no uniformity in the universal patriarchal structure. This lack of uniformity makes it impossible to generalise the man-woman relations. There exist differences among women in the Third World. To study the third-world woman, it is necessary to consider the differences that prevail among women based on class, ethnicity, and race. Moreover, the differences also exist due to differences in the historical context of the woman. For instance, the meaning of taking the veil was different for the Iranian woman during the onset of the revolution. The middle-class Iranian woman had veiled herself consensually to celebrate the Iranian revolution. However, in the post-revolution period, woman was compelled to veil. Hence, temporal differences in veiling existed in Iran (Mohanty, 2020).

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology, focusing on textual analysis, to explore the instances of patriarchy and marginalisation in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things. The data for this study has been collected from the novel itself, focusing on the marginalised women characters whose experiences highlight the interplay of colonialism, race and gender. In addition to the novel data has also been collected from collected from different books, journal articles, and book chapters for understanding different perspectives on the feminist perspective on the novel. This study aims to interpret and analyse the underlying meanings, gist's, and structures within the novel. The analysis is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, as conceptualised by Kimberlé Crenshaw. A close reading approach is employed to examine how Roy's narrative highlights the women's marginalisation on the basis of race, and gender.

Colonialism and gender

This section discusses the intersection of colonialism and gender in the novel, *The God of Small Things.* The character of Baby Kochamma depicts the intersection of colonialism and gender due to her love for the Irish Missionary Father Mulligan during the British rule in India. During the early phase of British colonial expansion in India, a large number of Christian missionaries were dispatched with the aim of converting the local population. The British believed that spreading Christianity would help solidify and legitimize their rule. However, this aggressive missionary policy ultimately proved to be a significant miscalculation on their part.

The Indian population disapproved of the British intervention in their religious matters, and they launched the War of Independence, also known as the Mutiny, against British rule in 1857. The British considered that if they did not change their policy towards the Christian missionaries in India, they could lose their grip over India and ultimately their rule might wither away. Consequently, the British discontinued converting the Indian population into Christianity and made religion the personal matter of the Indian population (Copeland, 2006).

The ancestors of Baby Kochamma were also converted to Christianity when they encountered Christian missionaries. Baby Kochamma's father was Reverend Ipe, whom the Patriarch blessed. Father Mulligan, on the other hand, was a Christian Missionary who came to study Hindu Scriptures in Madras on a deputation from his seminary. When Father Mulligan came to Ayemenem in Kerala, he used to have meetings with Reverend Ipe, despite the differences in age and religious denomination. Baby Kochamma fell in love with Father Mulligan, and she tried to attract his attention. However, Father Mulligan never shared the same emotion towards Baby Kochamma as she had for Father Mulligan. Father Mulligan used to visit their house every Thursday, so Baby Kochamma performed welfare activities in front of him.

Baby Kochamma used to forcefully give a bath to a poor village child to demonstrate to Father Mulligan that she is doing charity.

Upon Father Mulligan's arrival, he and Baby Kochamma exchanged polite greetings, and she used religion as a means to initiate and sustain conversations with him. Their weekly interactions continued every Thursday for a year, often centered around charitable acts, such as bathing a poor child. However, despite her intentions, Baby Kochamma was unsuccessful in gaining the affection she had hoped for through these efforts. Eventually, Father Mulligan left the village and returned to Madras.

Baby Kochamma did not lose hope, and she thought that she would continue to strive to become closer to Father Mulligan. She took admission in his convent in Madras, despite the denominational differences between them, because Father Mulligan belonged to the Roman Catholic group, and Baby Kochamma belonged to the Syrian Christian community. Baby Kochamma had thought that she would become closer to him by taking admission in his convent. However, she was wrong because other senior sisters excelled more than she did in discussing their queries with the priests and bishops. Hence, Baby Kochamma was unable to come closer to Father, and she wrote a letter to his father, asking him to take her back from the covenant. After returning from the Covent she did not leave Roman Catholicism; instead, she became a nun (Roy, 1997).

The intersection of gender and colonialism could be understood from the abovementioned story of Baby Kochamma and Father Mulligan, although Baby Kochamma was a Christian. She put forward her inquiries regarding the bible. She also used the tactics of attracting Father Mulligan's attention by bathing a poor village child, but Father Mulligan ignored her. When she took admission at the convent of Father Mulligan, he ignored her there as well. The behavior of Father Mulligan was not due to the denominational differences between Baby Kochamma and him, because if this were the case, he would have never considered having regular meetings with Reverend Ipe.

Father Mulligan held weekly meetings with Reverend Ipe, as the villagers highly respected the latter due to his spiritual blessings, which increased the chances of him converting more people to his denomination. In this manner, it could also be seen that the main aim of Father Mulligan was to comprehend the Hindu scriptures so that he could reject them vis-à-vis Christianity. Therefore, he needed to focus on his project rather than getting distracted by Baby Kochamma. Moreover, it could also be seen that at the covenant, other senior sisters were more proficient in asking questions, due to which Father Mulligan was not in a similar position as Baby Kochamma; instead, he had many options at his disposal.

Frantz Fanon (2023) in his book, "Black Skin White Masks", argues that the black woman always wants to have an intimate relationship with a white man, who is living in the palace near their village. However, the white man never considers the woman to be his intimate partner. A black woman, on the other hand, could even become a concubine of the white man if he asks her to do so. On the other hand, if the black man wants to marry the black woman or wants to enter into intimate relationship with black woman then she does not consider that the option is good for her and she could prefer to become concubine of the white man instead of marrying the black man (Fanon, 2023).

Similarly, in the novel, it can be seen that Baby Kochamma first gave a charity bath to a poor village child. Then she even converted to Roman Catholicism and was admitted into the covenant, where Father Mulligan was present, to get closer to Father Mulligan. However, she was unable to get closer to Father Mulligan due to the dominance of the senior sisters; if she had had the chance, she would have accepted any arrangement to get closer to him.

It is significant to note that Baby Kochamma did not consider having a relationship with an Indian Christian after failing to get closer to Father Mulligan; instead, she became a nun. Baby Kochamma preferred to spend her life alone, without any relationship with a man,

because she was unable to find the love of Father Mulligan. It is also important to note that Baby Kochamma spent her entire life in the same manner and never considered any Indian man to whom she would get closer. Instead, she continued to exchange letters with Father Mulligan, who had later converted to Hinduism and was living in India (Roy, 1997).

The narrative of Baby Kochamma's longing for Father Mulligan reflects how colonial ideologies inscribe themselves not only through governance and religion, but also through personal desire and emotional life. Within a critical postcolonial feminist framework, such experiences illustrate how colonial structures construct hierarchies of value that persist long after direct political control has ended. Baby Kochamma's internalisation of colonial authority is evident in her preference for a European missionary over any potential Indian partner—a choice that is not merely romantic, but ideologically shaped by inherited notions of racial, religious, and cultural superiority. Her emotional and spiritual investment in Father Mulligan—and later in Roman Catholicism—suggests a deeply rooted belief in Western norms as more desirable, authoritative, and elevated. Rather than positioning her desire as a personal failure or individual delusion, this framework reads it as symptomatic of broader colonial legacies that define what is respectable, modern, or aspirational for women in postcolonial societies.

Furthermore, her performance of charity and alignment with religious institutions reveals how colonial systems reconfigure gendered subjectivities through moral scripts of civility, devotion, and submissive femininity. This dynamic challenge any universal understanding of women's agency by showing how it is locally shaped by intersecting histories of gender, religion, caste, and colonial encounter. Baby Kochamma's story thus exemplifies how colonialism continues to structure the emotional and ideological choices of women within postcolonial cultural memory and reinforces the need for situated, historically specific feminist analysis.

Race and gender

This section discusses the intersection of race and gender in the novel, The God of Small Things. Roy has narrated the intersection of race and gender at considerable length in the novel through the racial differences between European and Indian Women. The characters of Margaret Kochamma, ex-wife of Chacko, who was an Englishwoman, and her daughter, Sophie Mol, have been portrayed by Roy as superior to Ammu and her children, namely Estha and Rahel. A binary of civilized and uncivilized beings has been constructed between the English Woman and the Indian woman based on the racial differences.

When Rahel visited Comrade Pillai as an adult, he showed her an old photograph featuring Rahel, Estha, Sophie Mol, Margaret Kochamma, and his own son. In describing the image, Roy employs an analogy comparing Lenin, Rahel, and Estha to startled animals caught in the glare of car headlights, capturing the fearful and frozen expressions on their faces at the moment the photo was taken. On the other hand, Sophie Mol knew how to smile and pose for the photograph because she belonged to a first-world country, England. Additionally, Sophie Mol also held a candle in each hand and pulled up her bell-bottoms slightly to expose her legs.

Chacko took great pride in being married to Margaret Kochamma, a white woman whose presence in the narrative reflects the perceived racial superiority of whiteness over women of colour. He invited Margaret and her daughter to spend Christmas with him in India. Upon their arrival at the airport, Chacko, accompanied by Ammu, her children, and Baby Kochamma, was visibly proud to introduce Margaret to his family—emphasizing his association with a white woman as a symbol of prestige and status

As Chacko was flaunting his white wife in front of his aunt and sister. They also started to prove to Margaret Kochamma that they were not someone who were lesser being than her. They began to prove that they were aware of Western culture, and they could

demonstrate this in their practice as well. Hence, they sought to equal themselves with white people. When Chacko had finished introducing his wife and child, Baby Kochamma began reading lines from Shakespeare's poetry in front of them and asked Sophie Mol whether she recognized the lines. Sophie Mol was unaware of the lines that Baby Kochamma was reading. Baby Kochamma did this to prove that she is as aware of English literature as the English people are.

Baby Kochamma was not alone in proving herself aware of Western culture; Ammu also began to prove her credentials to Margaret Kochamma, showing that she was aware of English culture. When Margaret Kochamma asked Estha how he was, he replied that he was fine and added 'Thank you' along with it. Ammu found this a deviation from how the English people greet each other. Ammu told Estha that he could not say he was fine and add 'thank you'; instead, he should have asked Margaret Kochamma how she was.

However, Estha did not correct himself and remained silent, which infuriated Ammu, who started to put pressure on Estha to ask Margaret Kochama how she was, but Estha did not say a word. As a result of which Ammu started to feel humiliated in front of everyone due to the stubbornness of Estha. Ammu aspired for her children to excel and demonstrate that they were just as refined and well-mannered as the English

The arrival of Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol made Ammu and her children invisible as if they did not exist. When Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol reached home from the airport, Mammachi and her servants were waiting for them outside the home. Mammachi did not ask for anyone; instead, she asked for Sophie Mol, where she was, because she wanted to see her. Similarly, the servants were also waiting to see what Sophie Mol looks like. Rahel became invisible and no one greeted her when she came out of the car.

Although Mammachi was almost blind because she could only see if things were brought closer to her eyes, she was still convinced that Sophie Mol must be beautiful. Mammachi was able to see only Sophie Mol's blue-gray eyes, red-brown hair, and fat, freckled cheeks through her eyes when Sophie Mol was brought close to her. Mammachi understood the rest of Sophie Mol's features through conversation with her. Mammachi asked her whether she is pretty, to which Sophie Mol said that she is. Similarly, Mammachi asked her whether she is tall, to which Baby Kochamma said that she is taller than Estha. Ammu did not like the comparison of her son and Sophie Mol, so she retorted that she was much older. However, for Mammachi, it was enough that she was much taller. However, Mammachi insisted that Sophie Mol's nose was similar to Pappachi's.

However, the admiration for Sophie Mol's beauty was not just restricted to Mammachi and Baby Kochamma; even the housemaid, Kochu Maria, praised her beauty. Kochu Maria was bringing cake when Mammachi asked her whether she had seen Sophie Mol or not. When Kochu Maria saw Sophie Mol, she first focused on Sophie Mol's color and said that her colour is white, just like Sophie Mol's mother's. Kochu Maria even ignored Mammachi's suggestion that her nose resembles Pappachi's, and suggested that she does not know whether Sophie Mol’s nose resembles Pappachi's or not, but she is like an angel to her.

In this manner, Arundhati Roy then signified the racial differences between Sophie Mol and Rahel by creating a binary of little angel and little demon. She created this binary by taking the differences between the clothing of the children and their skin colour. For instance, Roy wrote that the little angel’s colour is white and wears bell-bottoms, while the little demons are brown and wear an airport fairy frock. Additionally, Roy created a more sinister look for Rahel vis-à-vis Sophie Mol by suggesting that the bumps on Rahel's forehead resemble the horns of evil. If someone looks into Rahel's eyes, Roy wrote, they would get the feeling that they are watching the eyes of evil. Roy also differentiated Rahel's lack of reading English because Rahel used to read English words backwards, “Littleangels were beach-colored and wore bell-bottoms. Littledemons were mudbrown in Airport-Fairy frocks with

forehead bumps that might turn into horns. With Fountains in Love-in-Tokyos. And backwards-reading habits…. And if you cared to look, you could see Satan in their eyes" (Roy, 1997, p. 85)

The civilizational differences were also becoming prominent when Kochu Maria took Sophie Mol's hand to her face and inhaled deeply to smell it. This behaviour was incomprehensible to either Sophie Mol or her mother. Therefore, both of them became curious and started to ask who the lady was in front of her and why she was smelling her hand. Chacko replied to her that she is their cook and she is kissing her hand. Margaret Kochamma also became curious and wanted to understand more about this cultural practice, which men and women also observe by bringing their hands closer together.

Arundhati Roy referred here the concept of Orientalism, in which the Western academic came to understand the cultural practices of the people of the Orient. They understood the cultural practice of the people and then created the binary of civilised and uncivilized. The people belonging to the Orient were signified in their writings as those who are barbaric, uncivilised, and do not have manners, while the white people are more civilised and have manners (Said, 1977). Similarly, Roy also shows Margaret Kochamma judging the practice of smelling the hands as prevalent among all the people in India, and they do this occasionally. Chandra Mohanty (2003) also suggested that Western women, when they write about Eastern women, create a category of third-world women who are characterized as submissive, obedient, and docile, compared to Western women who are more assertive of their individuality (Mohanty, 2003). Margaret Kochamma also tried to construct the category of the third world woman by asking the question that do the man and woman do this act to each other also?

Nevertheless, Margaret Kochamma was convinced that the Indian people are uncivilised and she constructed the category of the third world woman due to the response of Ammu. When Margaret Kochamma asked about the practice of smelling the hands, Ammu became infuriated and she suggested that the practice is quite prevalent and she went to the extent of suggesting that it is a way that they make babies. Margaret Kochamma tried to explain to herself that she did not mean to ask any awkward questions.

Although Chacko supported Margaret Kochamma's question and asked Ammu to apologize, Ammu said that they should behave like a tribe about to be discovered by the white people. After saying this, Ammu proved that she is the uncivilized one compared to Margaret Kochama because she left the place, took her suitcase out of the car, and shut the door, hardly showing that she is not educated enough or has not read many books, and that she is just an animal.

As Ammu left in anger after having an argument with Chacko, Sophie Mol continued to ask questions regarding the civilizational differences. She asked that whether in India it is permitted to use the word damn as Ammu has used earlier. Mammachi tried to let go of the topic and suggested to cut the cake but Sophie Mol continued that in England they are not permitted to use the word damn as it is some abuse. Chacko was not paying attention to Sophie Mol so he asked her again what is not permitted she repeated the word damn. Mammachi again intervened and asked whether everyone was there for the cake cutting. In this manner, it could be seen that the civilizational differences are reproduced by the question of Sophie Mol because Ammu has used a word that respectable people do not use in England, but in India, it could be used.

Arundhati Roy also highlighted the civilizational differences in Chacko's remarks to Margaret Kochamma as they drew closer to each other. Chacko liked the self-reliance of Margaret Kochamma, which he considered noteworthy. Chacko thought in this manner because in India, women are not typically self-reliant and often depend on males. However, Chacko did not realize that for the English woman, it is normal that she is self-reliant, and it

is not something that is noteworthy or an outstanding achievement of a woman. Chacko also liked how Margaret Kochamma did not stick to him, went on a bicycle to work, and was not sure about her feelings towards Chacko.

All of these were something that was not found among the women of India. Here, the concept of the Third World Woman becomes relevant in explaining the binary between the Western woman, Margaret Kochamma, and the Third World woman. Although Roy does not explicitly write about the difference, it can be inferred from Chacko's perspective that he was interpreting the independence of white women as noteworthy, which suggests that in India, women are not considered independent.

The civilizational differences were not just evident between Margaret Kochamma, Sophie Mol, Ammu, her children, and Kochu Maria; instead, they were also evident between Rahel and her husband. When Rahel grew up, she came across an American, Larry McCaslin, who was collecting data for his doctoral dissertation. Rahel married Larry and went to Boston with him. The civilizational differences surfaced between Rahel and Larry whenever they made love, because Rahel was not accustomed to establishing an intimate relationship in the manner that Western women are accustomed to.

Rahel used to watch outside the window whenever they made love, but she could not express her feelings during the intimate moments. Larry was offended by Rahel's behavior and conceptualized it as lying between hopelessness and meaninglessness towards him. However, Larry was unaware that the country Rahel belonged had a great deal of hopelessness among its people, “But when they made love he was offended by her eyes. They behaved as though they belonged to someone else. Someone watching. Looking out of the window at the sea. At a boat in the river. Or a passerby in the mist in a hat…. He was exasperated because he didn’t know what that look meant. He put it somewhere between indifference and despair. He didn’t know that in some places, like the country that Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy. And that personal despair could never be desperate enough. That something happened when personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation” (Roy, 1997, p. 10).

In this manner, it could be seen that whether it is Chacko or it is Larry McCaslin, both did not like the Indian woman because they did not consider them equivalent to the Western woman. Chacko admired the individuality of Margaret Kochamma, who did not become clingy to him. She earns her livelihood, has no feelings for Chacko, makes her own decisions, and uses a bicycle for her work. On the other hand, Indian women are not independent; instead, they are dependent on men.

Similarly, Larry McCaslin was unsatisfied in making love with an Indian woman. Whenever Larry McCaslin and Rahel make love, Larry sees hopelessness and meaninglessness in Rahel's eyes, which he finds offensive because she is not sharing the exact emotions during their love making that he is showing to her. Hence, Larry McCaslin and Rahel's marriage did not last long, and he divorced her. In this manner, the intersection of race and gender was responsible for the marginalisation of the Indian woman because both Chacko and Larry McCaslin preferred Western women as their partners (Roy, 1997). Race and gender were responsible for the marginalisation of the Indian woman because both Chacko and Larry McCaslin preferred Western women

The experiences of Ammu, Rahel, and other Indian women in The God of Small Things demonstrate how race and gender function not as discrete categories of oppression, but as interlocking systems that collectively shape lived experience—a conceptual insight central to intersectional theory. Crenshaw’s (2013) framework reveals how women of colour occupy a unique and often invisible position in dominant power structures, where their subordination is produced by both racialised and gendered expectations. In the novel, Indian

women are not simply excluded due to being women; rather, their worth is systematically diminished when placed in contrast to white femininity, which is socially constructed as modern, independent, and desirable.

Ammu's erasure in the presence of Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol exemplifies how racial hierarchies elevate white women as symbols of civility and progress, while simultaneously relegating Indian women to backwardness and inferiority. This dynamic is reinforced not only by colonial legacies but also by Indian male characters like Chacko and Larry McCaslin, who internalise these hierarchies and devalue Indian women in both romantic and familial contexts. The refusal to view Ammu and Rahel as equal partners—emotionally, sexually, or socially—is not simply a function of patriarchy or racism in isolation, but of the specific way these systems converge to render women of colour both hyper visible and disposable. Crenshaw's (2013) lens exposes how dominant narratives flatten women's experiences by privileging whiteness and maleness as the normative standards of value, and how women situated at the intersection of racial and gendered difference are structurally denied recognition, belonging, and relational reciprocity across cultural contexts (Crenshaw, 2013).

Conclusion

In The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy masterfully interweaves the themes of colonialism, gender, and race, revealing the deep, often painful intersections between these forces. Through the characters of Baby Kochamma, Ammu, and Margaret Kochamma, Roy critiques how colonial ideologies permeate not only political and social spheres but also personal desires, family dynamics, and emotional lives. The experiences of these women highlight how colonial structures shape identity, societal values, and even intimate relationships in postcolonial India.

Baby Kochamma's infatuation with Father Mulligan reveals the emotional toll of colonialism on gendered subjectivities. Her longing for the Irish missionary, despite her repeated failures to gain his affection, underscores the internalization of colonial authority, where Western ideals are perceived as superior. Her actions, such as performing charity to win his attention, reflect how colonialism redefined femininity, positioning European norms as the standard to which Indian women, even those within the Christian community, aspired. Baby Kochamma's failure to connect with Father Mulligan mirrors the broader frustration of women in postcolonial societies, who, conditioned by colonial narratives, seek validation in foreign ideals, yet find themselves excluded from them.

Moreover, Roy uses the intersection of race and gender to further illuminate colonial hierarchies. The contrast between the English Margaret Kochamma and the Indian Ammu highlights the racialized dynamics of superiority and inferiority that colonialism constructed. Chacko's pride in his white wife and his attempts to prove his family's Western cultural fluency illustrate the internalized racial hierarchy. The family's need to perform their 'civilized' status before Margaret Kochamma, including the awkward demonstration of knowledge about English literature and etiquette, exposes how colonialism reinforced racial binaries that continue to define self-worth and belonging in the postcolonial world.

Race and gender in Roy's narrative are not simply individual or isolated struggles; they are deeply embedded in historical and social structures that shape the way characters view themselves and others. Sophie Mol, as the 'angelic' figure of European descent, is juxtaposed with Rahel, whom Roy describes as a 'little demon,' thus creating a visual and moral dichotomy between the white child and the brown child. This binary extends to adult characters, as Margaret Kochamma embodies the Western ideal, while Ammu, representing the Indian woman, is positioned as a figure of emotional and social instability. Through these

portrayals, Roy critiques the ways in which colonialism perpetuates divisions, not just between nations but within individuals, families, and communities.

The concept of 'civilization' versus 'barbarism' further underpins the racialized discourse in the novel, as seen in the interactions between the characters and the subtle critiques of colonial practices. The practice of smelling hands, for example, becomes a metaphor for the exoticized and 'uncivilized' traditions of the Indian people, viewed with curiosity, disdain, or amusement by the English characters. This cultural misunderstanding reflects the broader Orientalist framework, where Western perceptions of the East are often shaped by preconceived notions of savagery, ignorance, and backwardness.

To sum up the discussion, The God of Small Things offers a powerful exploration of how colonialism continues to influence the lives of women in postcolonial societies, shaping their desires, their social interactions, and their emotional landscapes. Through Baby Kochamma's unrequited love for Father Mulligan and the racial tensions between Ammu and Margaret Kochamma, Roy paints a vivid picture of how colonial ideologies infiltrate the most intimate aspects of life, leaving lasting scars that transcend political power. The novel reveals the complex legacies of colonialism, where gender, race, and power intersect in ways that continue to affect the personal, the familial, and the collective in postcolonial India. In doing so, it calls for a deeper understanding of the historical forces that shape identity and relationships in the aftermath of colonial rule, urging a reconsideration of what it means to belong, to love, and to be human in a world still haunted by colonial legacies.

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