

Entwined Oppressions: An Ecofeminist Reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*



Mithy Saha

241055019

Department of English and Humanities

Fall 2024

Entwined Oppressions: An Ecofeminist Reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of English and Humanities
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
MA in English

Mithy Saha

241055019

Thesis Supervisor: Nusrat Tajkia

December 31, 2024 (Fall 2024)

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nusrat Tajkia', is written over a horizontal line.

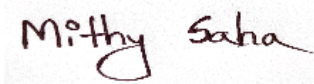
Nusrat Tajkia

Lecturer

Department of English and Humanities

DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mithy Saha". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'M' and 'S'.

Mithy Saha

241055019

Department of English and Humanities

Dedication

To my beloved parents and sister who taught me patience and perseverance. Without their support and encouragement, I would not be able to come this far to pursue a Master of Arts degree.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, praises and thanks to the God, the Almighty, for His showers of blessings throughout my research work to complete the research successfully.

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my research supervisor, Nusrat Tajkia, Lecturer at the Department of English and Humanities (DEH), University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), for giving the opportunity to do research and providing invaluable guidance throughout this research. Her continuous support and inspiration throughout the journey of my thesis has motivated me to complete the research. I would like to thank her for igniting my interest in ecocritical and ecofeminist studies as well and inspiring me to think critically without submitting to biases. Also, it would be an injustice to not mention all my esteemed teachers who constantly encouraged me to push beyond boundaries and be a lifelong learner to pursue knowledge. My gratitude towards Prof. Kaiser Haq, Prof. Shamsad Mortuza, Prof. Azfar Hussain, Oliur Rahman Sun, and Nadia Rahman for their thought-provoking discussions in the classroom.

Finally, my thanks go to all the people who have supported me to complete the research work directly or indirectly.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	2
1.1 Background of the Study	3
1.2 Statement of the Problem	4
1.3 Research Objectives	4
1.4 Research Questions	5
1.5 Rationale of the Study	5
1.6 Research Methodology	7
1.7 Scopes and Limitations	7
Chapter 2: Foundations of Analysis	9
2.1 Literature Review	9
2.2 Theoretical Framework	16
2.3 Operational Definitions	19
Chapter 3: Ecofeminist Analysis of Anita Desai's <i>Fire on the Mountain</i>	21
Chapter 4: Ecofeminist Analysis of Arundhati Roy's <i>The God of Small Things</i>	30
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	39
Works Cited	40

Abstract

Ecofeminism is a multifaceted movement that converges social, cultural, philosophical, political, and environmental perspectives to highlight the parallel forms of oppression faced by women and the natural world within a societal framework dominated by patriarchal values. This thesis explores the interconnectedness of patriarchal oppression and environmental exploitation in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* through an ecofeminist lens. Situated within the intersection of ecofeminism and postcolonial literature, this study argues that the subjugation of women and the degradation of the natural world are not isolated phenomena but rather interconnected manifestations of dominant power structures rooted in patriarchal ideologies and capitalist practices. Drawing primarily on the theoretical framework of Vandana Shiva, supplemented by Shiva and Maria Mies's *Ecofeminism*, this research analyzes how these two novels portray the complex relationship between gender, nature, and power within the specific socio-cultural context of India.

Keywords: Oppression, Ecofeminism, Women, Nature, Patriarchy, Feminization of nature.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The term oppression can be described as a state of being destitute, enslaved, exploited, tyrannized, or burdened. It refers to the tactics used by dominant groups to maintain their privileged status, often at the expense of others. These groups wield their power and authority in an unjust and burdensome way, subjecting marginalized individuals to harsh and authoritarian treatment. The exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are one of the main focuses of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is a term that connects feminism with ecology. The term is believed to be introduced by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 work, *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. It actively talks about the oppression faced by women and nature, emphasizing how both are often treated as commodities controlled by men. This dynamic positions men as guardians of culture and women as caretakers of nature, thereby examining the interconnected patterns of male dominance over women and human exploitation of nature (Mishra 9). Thus, the main emphasis of ecofeminism is the liberation of both women and nature from oppressive forces, advocating the need to honor their autonomy and inherent rights.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* are the two significant works of Indian literature that explore the intricate intersections of gender, ecology, and power dynamics. This study adopts an ecofeminist perspective to unravel how the authors portray the entanglement of ecological and patriarchal exploitations, thereby exposing the systemic oppression faced by both women and nature in postcolonial India.

1.1 Background of the Study

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* are seminal works in Indian English literature that portray complex female characters navigating systems of power and oppression. Arundhati Roy, a celebrated Indian author writing in English, gained international recognition by winning the Booker Prize in 1997 for her novel *The God of Small Things*. In the novel, Roy throws light on the naked realities of Indian society, highlighting the social injustices and struggles endured by marginalized and oppressed communities. The lush landscapes of Kerala, with its rivers and backwaters, are depicted as sites of both beauty and exploitation, mirroring the silenced struggles of women like Ammu. Other characters like the twins- Rahel and Estha, Chacko, Baby Kochamma, and Velutha also struggle with society rules and expectations, and eventually experience personal tragedies as a result of the domination of male-centered culture.

Similarly, Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain*, which earned the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978, presents the darker aspects of nature, drawing a parallel with the struggles and oppression faced by its female characters. The novel focuses on the lives of three women—Nanda Kaul, Raka, and Ila Das, and illustrates how their fates are deeply connected to nature, reflecting the patterns of their systemic oppression.

Both novels delve into the lives of women who exist on the fringes of societal structures, reflecting the socio-cultural and ecological challenges of postcolonial India. The narratives are deeply intertwined with the natural environment, which not only serves as a backdrop but also reflects the characters' struggles and resilience. There have been numerous research papers on Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*. Most existing research on these novels focus on feminist or postcolonial issues like caste,

patriarchy, or identity, and the sociopolitical and historical contexts of the narratives. However, there remains space for an ecofeminist lens, especially with a focus on the interconnected exploitation of nature and women. The characters and their experiences along with ecological degradation in both novels offer a fertile ground for an ecofeminist interpretation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The dual exploitation of women and nature under patriarchal and colonial systems has long been a central concern of ecofeminist discourse. Despite the growing recognition of this intersection, the interconnected oppressions of gender and ecology remain mostly underexplored in Indian literature, particularly in the works of Arundhati Roy and Anita Desai. *The God of Small Things* and *Fire on the Mountain* are rich with ecological and feminist themes, yet much of the existing scholarship tends to analyze them through singular lenses, such as ecocriticism, feminism, postcolonialism, or socio-political critique. This fragmented approach risks overlooking the deeper entanglement of ecological degradation and gendered oppression, which is critical to understanding the narratives' broader implications. It is important to discuss this interplay and its impact.

1.3 Research Objectives

The paper aims to examine the role of ecological settings in reflecting and shaping the experiences of female protagonists in the text, showing the interconnectedness of patriarchal oppression and environmental exploitation. Additionally, it also tries to look into the impact and resistance to these entwined forms of oppression faced by the protagonists of the novels, focusing on their agency in challenging patriarchal and ecologically destructive forces.

1.4 Research Questions

1. In what ways do the ecological settings in these novels reflect the emotional, social, and political realities of the female protagonists, and how do they respond to these intersecting forces?
2. How do the novels reflect Vandana Shiva's arguments regarding the "feminization of nature" and the impact of patriarchal structures on both women and the environment in India?

1.5 Rationale of the Study

The exploitation of nature and the marginalization of women are deeply interconnected phenomena rooted in patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist systems. Existing scholarship has increasingly recognized the importance of examining how colonial history and patriarchal structures have contributed to both the exploitation of natural resources and the oppression of women, particularly in postcolonial contexts like India. While studies have explored gender dynamics and environmental concerns in Indian literature, a comprehensive ecofeminist analysis that explicitly connects these themes through the lens of Vandana Shiva's theoretical framework, and which comparatively analyzes Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*, remains largely absent.

Existing critical work on *The God of Small Things* has predominantly focused on themes of caste, class, family dynamics, and the lingering effects of colonialism. While some ecocritical readings have emerged, such as Ghulam Yasin's work on the "othering" of nature, these often lack a specific engagement with ecofeminist theory and the crucial link between

the oppression of women and the degradation of the environment. Similarly, studies of *Fire on the Mountain* have often centered on themes of isolation, memory, and female subjectivity. While Jaswinder Kaur and Dr. Jameerpal Kaur's ecofeminist analysis provides a valuable starting point, a deeper exploration through Shiva's theoretical framework, particularly her concepts of the "feminization of nature" and the critique of capitalist patriarchy, is needed to fully understand the socio-cultural implications of the intertwined oppressions depicted in the novel.

The decision to use Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* as the primary theoretical framework stems from its emphasis on the Indian context, where ecological degradation and gendered exploitation are intricately linked. Shiva's work, which critiques the patriarchal and capitalist commodification of nature and women, aligns with the themes explored in the selected novels. Additionally, her collaboration with Maria Mies in *Ecofeminism* further expands the theoretical lens, connecting local struggles with global systems of oppression. By examining how these two novels portray the interconnectedness of patriarchal control, environmental exploitation, and the marginalization of women within the specific socio-cultural context of India, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between gender, nature, and power in postcolonial literature. This approach will illuminate the distinct ways in which Roy and Desai engage with ecofeminist themes, revealing both similarities and differences in their portrayal of resistance and the potential for social and ecological change. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing dialogues surrounding environmental justice, gender equality, and the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of all forms of oppression.

1.6 Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in textual analysis to explore the entwined oppressions of women and nature in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*. The study is grounded in the theoretical framework of ecofeminism, using Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* serving as the primary theoretical lens. Additionally, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva's *Ecofeminism* supplements the analysis by connecting localized struggles with broader global systems of oppression. This framework provides a critical lens for examining the ways in which patriarchal ideologies and practices contribute to both the subjugation of women and the degradation of the natural world.

The primary data for this research consists of the two novels: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*. These texts have been chosen for their thematic relevance to ecofeminism and their exploration of women's roles in relation to the environment. These texts provide complementary perspectives like the commodification of nature and marginalized individuals in a postcolonial setting, or, the alienation of women and their silent resilience in the face of ecological and societal decline. Shiva's framework critiques the patriarchal-capitalist exploitation of women and nature, particularly in the Indian context, which is central to the textual analysis.

1.7 Scopes and Limitations

This research focuses specifically on the interconnectedness of patriarchal oppression and environmental exploitation as depicted in two selected novels of Indian literature: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*. The study employs an ecofeminist lens, primarily drawing upon the theoretical framework

established by Vandana Shiva in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* and further developed in Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva's *Ecofeminism*. The analysis will specifically examine how these novels portray the impact of patriarchal structures on both women and the environment, and the potential for resistance against these intertwined forms of oppression. The geographical and cultural context of the study is limited to India, focusing on the specific socio-cultural settings depicted in the novels: Kerala in *The God of Small Things* and the Himalayan region in *Fire on the Mountain*.

This research is limited in several respects. First, the analysis is confined to two literary texts. While these novels offer valuable insights into the intersection of ecofeminism and postcolonialism within the Indian context, the findings cannot be generalized to all works of Indian literature or to other postcolonial contexts. A broader study encompassing a larger corpus of texts could potentially reveal additional perspectives and nuances. Second, the study adopts a specific theoretical perspective—ecofeminism, primarily based on the work of Shiva. While this framework provides a powerful lens for analyzing the chosen texts, other theoretical approaches, such as postcolonial ecocriticism or deep ecology, could offer alternative interpretations. Third, the research relies solely on textual analysis of the novels themselves. No external data, such as interviews with the authors, historical documents, or sociological studies, has been incorporated. While such data could potentially enrich the analysis, the focus of this study remains firmly on the literary texts and their internal dynamics. Finally, as with any literary interpretation, the analysis presented here is subject to the inherent limitations of subjective interpretation. Different readers may arrive at different conclusions based on their own experiences and perspectives. However, by grounding the analysis in a clearly defined theoretical framework and employing rigorous textual analysis, this research aims to provide a well-supported and insightful contribution to the field.

Chapter 2: Foundations of Analysis

2.1 Literature Review

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* explores the symbolic and literal connection between ecological degradation and female oppression in Indian literature. The novels deal with themes like gender, identity, social stratification, ecocritical and postcolonial critique, etc. There are different research papers, journal articles as well as a few essays explaining the novels from different angles. Some of the elements which existing research focuses on are: ecocritical viewpoint, masculinity, postcolonial discourse, the woman and the non-human, feminist approach, etc. While these works are lauded for their complex narratives and rich symbolism, the intersection of ecological degradation and gender oppression—central to ecofeminist thought—has received comparatively less scholarly attention.

Ecofeminism, as a social movement and practice, fundamentally challenges the entrenched links between environmental degradation and androcentrism, arguing that the liberation of women and the natural world are inextricably linked. Jaswinder Kaur & Dr. Jameerpal Kaur explicitly applies an ecofeminist lens to Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain*, arguing that Desai connects the marginalization of women with the exploitation and degradation of the natural world. They explore how the stark and barren landscape of the Himalayas reflects the emotional and social barrenness experienced by the female characters, particularly Nanda Kaul. According to them, —The loneliness of Nanda Kaul's life is similar to the barren hills of Kasanlil (64). Kaur and Kaul also explore how the novel shows similarities between natural animals, birds, and women. The crying of birds is very similar to the crying of Raka's mother, who was abused by her husband. Their study states that —both Nanda and Raka are attracted towards Carignano because it is a destroyed and barren place,

where they can't listen to the sounds of human terror (67). While Kaur and Kaur's work provides a valuable foundation for understanding the ecofeminist dimensions of Desai's novel, it does not specifically incorporate Vandana Shiva's theories on the exploitation of women and nature under patriarchal-capitalist systems.

The natural world is deeply intertwined with human society and is a recurring theme in influential literary works. Gaining a deeper understanding of our ecological surroundings offer a multitude of fresh perspectives. Bordoloi examines the 'dual aspect' of nature, both as a healer and as a destroyer, in Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain*. Within the specific geographical setting of the Himalayan foothills, her paper examines how Desai portrays the relationship between humans and their environment. The natural landscape is not merely a backdrop but an active force that shapes the characters' experiences and reflects their inner states. Bordoloi presents how Kasauli has reunited the three individuals, each with their own distinct journey of self-discovery. Nanda's retreat to nature is not merely an escape from her obligations, but a profound introspection into her own existence. Raka, who has long suffered from illness, has finally found a path to break free from the shackles that bound her. Meanwhile, Ila, who was plunged into poverty after her brother's reckless squandering of their family's wealth, has secured a position as a social worker in Kasauli, marking a pivotal turning point in her life (35). Through their individual journeys, Nanda, Raka, and Ila exemplify how retreats to nature can catalyze profound self-discovery, empowerment, and transformation, ultimately liberating them from their respective struggles and limitations. Bordoloi also explores how the fire on the mountain serves as a potent symbol of both destruction and potential renewal, reflecting the complex and often destructive relationship between humanity and nature. She argues that the violent act of ripping away natural resources is often attributed to nature itself, however, it is a stark reflection of humanity's

own destructive tendencies, highlighting the irony that the very forces we seek to control are, in reality, being ravaged by our own exploitative actions (37). While Bordoloi's analysis provides a valuable ecocritical perspective, it does not explicitly explore the gendered dynamics of this relationship. This thesis seeks to address this gap by examining how the exploitation of the environment in *Fire on the Mountain* is intrinsically linked to the marginalization and oppression of women, particularly within the context of Indian patriarchy.

Humanity's relentless pursuit of a higher standard of living has inadvertently precipitated catastrophic and irreversible environmental degradation, underscoring the need for a paradigm shift in our relationship with the natural world. Francis and Thangaraj highlight the concerns raised in Roy's *The God of Small Things* regarding the devastating consequences of humanity's relentless pursuit of progress, which has led to the systematic degradation of the natural world. Through her work, Roy sheds light on how the unchecked exploitation of nature, driven by the imperatives of civilization, urbanization, and modernization, has resulted in severe repercussions for the human experience, imperiling the very fabric of our existence and the spaces we inhabit (75). The study emphasizes the symbolic use of nature in *The God of Small Things*. Natural spaces such as the Meenachal River become witnesses to the injustices perpetrated by caste, class, and gender hierarchies. Francis and Thangaraj note how the river, which initially represents freedom and playfulness for the characters, eventually becomes a site of tragedy, reflecting the destructive impact of societal oppression. According to them, —The river's pollution is not a natural phenomenon, but rather a consequence of the reckless behavior and actions of the local population, particularly those residing in close proximity to the river.‖ (79). Their study further highlights Roy's critique of modernity and development. As people become increasingly obsessed with

technology and its creations, they often neglect and overlook the natural world. Francis and Thangaraj present the example of how Baby Kochamma lost interest in gardening when she installed a dish antenna on her house roof (80). While Francis and Thangaraj provide a valuable ecocritical reading, their analysis primarily focuses on the human-environment relationship in a general sense.

Strong expectations have always been placed on women in society, which frequently revolves around the concept of gender roles. Sonia Chahal explores the themes of isolation, alienation, and the search for self-discovery among the women in Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain*. Chahal's analysis focuses on the constraints placed upon women by patriarchal societal structures, particularly within the context of traditional Indian society. Desai's literary works challenge traditional gender stereotypes by portraying multidimensional female characters that defy societal expectations, instead embracing their complexities and imperfections (1955). Chahal examines how the characters, such as Nanda Kaul and Raka, attempt to escape these constraints, often through withdrawal and retreat into their own inner worlds. Nanda Kaul's sufferings, caused by a loveless marriage that was thrust on her by the patriarchal society, forced her to disconnect herself from the outside world. Similarly, Raka's unusual behavior may be attributed to the fact that she comes from a broken family (1956). The paper also highlights the hope and courage displayed by the female characters despite their difficult circumstances. Chahal's work is valuable in identifying the patriarchal pressures faced by the female characters and their attempts to navigate these pressures. However, while Chahal's feminist reading provides valuable insights into the gender dynamics at play in *Fire on the Mountain*, it does not explicitly address the interconnectedness of these dynamics with the natural environment. The barren landscape of Kasauli in the novel, can be read not only as a reflection of the characters' inner states, but

also as a manifestation of a damaged and exploited environment, paralleling the limited agency afforded to women within patriarchal structures.

Gender inequality, rooted in a socially constructed patriarchy, perpetuates a power imbalance in relationships, where men dominate and women are marginalized, reinforcing a systemic oppression that must be dismantled. Despite the pervasive gender inequalities and patriarchal structures that permeate society, the feminist movement emerges as a powerful force, advocating for the fundamental recognition of equality and challenging the status quo to create a more just and equitable world for all. Mardiyani and Tawami provide a valuable analysis of gender inequality in *The God of Small Things*, highlighting the restrictive roles imposed on women within the family and society. Using gender theory, the paper analyses the character of Ammu, and demonstrates how women are still being marginalized in society. Ammu was not permitted to pursue higher studies, unlike her brother Chacko, because their father —believed that attending college for a girl is a waste of money as the girl will eventually marry (171). The different treatment of Ammu and Chacko demonstrates how gender inequality occurs in a family. Mardiyani and Tawami also focus on the violence inflicted upon the character of Mamachi and Ammu, by their husbands. Their study encourages the minimization of the social privileges where men have —significant control over the family, while women are viewed as weak and subordinated (173). Their work highlights the pervasive nature of patriarchy in the novel, which serves as a crucial foundation for understanding the broader ecofeminist concerns of this thesis. However, while Mardiyani and Tawami provide valuable insights into gender inequality, their analysis does not explicitly address the crucial link between this gendered oppression and the exploitation of the natural environment.

As a consequence of colonial marginalization, indigenous populations, who initially developed a profound connection with their natural environments, ultimately came to perceive the land as an 'other', perpetuating the very exploitation and disconnection they had initially sought to resist. Ghulam Yasin examines how Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* offers innovative insights into the interconnectedness of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism. By referring to Huggan and Tiffin (2010) on postcolonial ecocriticism, his paper explores how the anthropocentric attitude of human beings ruins their natural environment. Yasin argues that Roy's novel exposes the ways in which nature is 'othered' within a postcolonial context, mirroring the marginalization of certain social groups. According to him, —human beings are involved in 'other' natural environments for their economic gains in the name of development, and it is the way of justifying their colonizing attitudes and manipulation of nature (188). Yasin argues that the pursuit of economic growth has led humans to abandon traditional agricultural practices, instead opting for large-scale infrastructure projects such as dam constructions and deforestation. This shift towards modernization has devastating consequences, as it disrupts the delicate balance of ecosystems, ultimately threatening the very foundations of our planet's biodiversity (194). The exploitation and degradation of the environment alongside the oppression of the 'Untouchables' and other marginalized communities, highlights the interconnectedness of social and ecological injustices. However, while Yasin's study provides a crucial postcolonial ecocritical reading, it does not explicitly engage with ecofeminist theory in the same way this study aims to.

In patriarchal societies, the systemic silencing of women's voices and devaluation of their contributions perpetuate a flawed narrative of inferiority, obscuring the crucial role women play in national development and reinforcing a pernicious gender hierarchy that

denies them equal recognition and agency. Mohammad Shafiqul Islam and Rama Islam provide a valuable analysis of Nanda Kaul's character, situating her within the broader context of postcolonial Indian women's experiences. The silent sufferings of women and their search for freedom is the main focus of their study. According to them, Desai's characters like Nanda from *Fire on the Mountain* —represents postcolonial women from India, where women are perceived as inferior¹ (2). Their study examine how Nanda's retreat to the isolated setting of Carignano reflects a desire to escape the constraints of patriarchal society and the burdens of familial expectations. In societies still grappling with the legacy of colonialism, women are systematically excluded from holding positions of power and influence. Islam's analysis highlights how Desai's bleak worldview posits that the blameless are often the ones who bear the brunt of suffering, and Nanda, an innocent and devoted wife, is a poignant example of this phenomenon, as she endures immense pain despite her unwavering dedication to her family and marriage (12). This resonates with ecofeminist concerns about the ways in which women are often relegated to the domestic sphere and denied agency in the public realm. However, while Islam and Islam offer insightful observations about Nanda's character and her struggles, their analysis does not explicitly connect her experiences to the exploitation of the natural environment.

It can be concluded that most of these papers have enlightened various concepts and ideas for understanding in-depth how various theoretical lenses can be interconnected with each other. While looking at the papers which link Ecocriticism with Postcolonialism with Feminism, it can be seen how two distinct and different theories are interrelated together. Thus, there are many papers which interconnect various theories and give multiple perspectives on Roy and Desai's novels *The God of Small Things* and *Fire on the Mountain*. However, there is less research regarding the interconnected oppression of women and nature

in the novels. Furthermore, the application of Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist framework to these texts is largely absent, leaving a critical gap in their literary analyses.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Ecology is the study of the environment, including how it changes and how to preserve it. It is concerned with the relationship between the living things and their natural surroundings. As a distinct branch of literary criticism, ecocriticism examines how literature portrays human interactions with the environment or the relationship between literature and the environment (R 171). The main proponents of ecocriticism nowadays are found in feminist and gender studies. This gave rise to ecofeminism or ecological feminism.

Ecofeminism emerged as a reaction to Enlightenment's anthropocentric culture/nature dichotomy which further suppressed women through their relegation to the inferior domain of nature, and in preparing to reinforce a patriarchal system that imputes women to the role of passiveness in the domestic sphere and men to the role of power and rationality. Greta Gaard defines it as a movement that calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature' (1). Ecofeminism's origin can be traced to the 1970s and 80s. The term was coined by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to describe the large-scale violence inflicted on women and nature as a result of male domination (Rangarajan 104). The 1970s marked a significant period in the development of ecofeminist thought, with the publication of several influential books that explored the intersection of gender and environmental issues. These works served as foundational texts for the ecofeminist movement that flourished in the 1980s and 1990s.

Ecofeminism also had a huge impact on Third World countries. Writers and thinkers like Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandya, and many others emphasized the unique experiences of women in the Global South, highlighting how their struggles are shaped by colonialism, imperialism, and global capitalism in their writings. Their writings focus on how environmental exploitation in postcolonial nations disproportionately affects marginalized communities, especially women. Women in the Global South are often frontline activists in environmental movements (e.g., Chipko Movement in India). So the writers of the Global South challenge Western feminist perspectives that may overlook the intersection of gender, environment, and colonial histories. This gives birth to a new branch of ecofeminism, called Postcolonial Ecofeminism. Postcolonial Ecofeminism merges the insights of postcolonial theory, ecofeminism, and third-world feminism. It examines how colonial histories, gender oppression, and environmental exploitation are interconnected, and investigates how colonialism disrupted indigenous and sustainable ecological practices. It also explores the narratives of marginalized communities to highlight their ecological wisdom and resistance strategies.

In *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India*, Shiva refers, —Development is a continuation of the process of colonisation by modern western patriarchy's economic vision, which was based on the exploitation or exclusion of women, and on the exploitation and degradation of nature (1). Shiva implies how the capitalist-patriarchy uses ‘development’ as a tool to entail destruction for women, nature and subjugated cultures throughout the Third World countries like India. Women, nature, or animals are considered unproductive unless they are ‘developed’ into productive resources (3). Shiva argues that Western development models, driven by capitalist and patriarchal values, have led to the destruction of both the environment and women’s traditional roles as caretakers and

providers. She further discusses that —In the symbolic realm, nature is represented as both the embodiment of the feminine principle and the recipient of feminine nurturing, highlighting the complex and multifaceted relationship between the natural world and feminine energy^l (37). This is why the violation of nature is linked to the violation and marginalisation of women, especially in Third World countries like India. It emphasizes the —feminization of nature,^l a process by which patriarchal societies associate women with nature, viewing both as passive resources to be exploited for economic gain. Shiva also argues that while the traditional association of women with nature has historically perpetuated oppression, the experiences of rural Third World women reveal a more empowering narrative, where women and nature are intertwined through creative and life-sustaining relationships that challenge dominant patriarchal norms. This refers to the resistance of women and marginalized communities against the destructive forces, emphasizing women's resilience and connection to the land.

Maria Mies, collaborating with Shiva in *Ecofeminism*, further develops these ideas by critiquing capitalist patriarchy as the root cause of both ecological and social crises. Mies emphasizes the —subsistence perspective,^l which prioritizes meeting basic human needs and living in harmony with nature, as opposed to the profit-driven logic of capitalism. She connects colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy as interconnected systems of domination, arguing that these systems have historically exploited both women and nature for the benefit of dominant groups.

This study applies these key concepts to analyze *The God of Small Things* and *Fire on the Mountain*. The concept of the —feminization of nature^l will be used to examine how the novels portray the relationship between female characters and the natural world, exploring

whether they are depicted as being closer to nature or as being subjected to similar forms of domination as the environment. The critique of capitalist patriarchy highlights the impact and response to the intersecting forces of patriarchal control and ecological damage. Thus this theoretical framework provides the necessary tools to analyze the complex interplay between gender, nature, and power in these two significant works of Indian literature.

2.3 Operational Definitions

Key terms used in this study to ensure clarity and consistencies are operationally defined as follows:

Ecofeminism refers to the philosophical and political movement that connects the exploitation and domination of women with that of the environment, arguing that both stem from patriarchal ideologies and power structures (Warren 3). Shiva defines ecofeminism as a movement that —sees the connection between the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of women as rooted in the ideologies of domination and control (45). This study uses ecofeminism to analyze how the selected texts depict the shared subjugation of women and nature, as well as the potential for resistance and agency.

Patriarchy is the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general (Lerner 238). In this thesis, patriarchy encompasses the ideologies and practices that perpetuate male control over women, resources, and institutions, contributing to both gender inequality and environmental exploitation.

Oppression refers to the social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual, a group or an institution [which] occurs at all levels and is reinforced by social norms,

institutional biases, interpersonal relationships and personal beliefs (David & Derthick 3). Different forms of oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, environmental exploitation) are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. They share common roots in ideologies of domination and control.

Feminization of Nature is the association of women with nature and the subsequent exploitation of both by patriarchal societies (Merchant 1). This study refers to the process by which patriarchal ideologies construct women and nature as passive, subordinate, and exploitable resources, as the ‘feminization of nature’.

Subsistence Perspective is An economic and social perspective that prioritizes meeting basic human needs and living in harmony with nature, rather than focusing on profit maximization and economic growth (Mies and Shiva 12). In this thesis, the —subsistence perspective refers to the alternative economic and social model proposed by Mies and Shiva, emphasizing sustainable living, local economies, and the importance of women’s traditional roles in providing for their communities.

Chapter 3: Ecofeminist Analysis of Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*

Fire on the Mountain revolves around three women characters Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das, their interconnectedness with nature, their victimization and the equal oppression of nature. The novel tells the story of Nanda Kaul, who, following the loss of her husband, seeks solace in a secluded cottage atop a mountain in Kasauli's Carignano. There, she crafts a solitary existence, reveling in the quietude, seclusion, and confinement that the remote location affords. With only Ram Lal, her cook, by her side, Nanda finds solace in the rugged beauty of Carignano, embracing its harsh terrain, precipitous cliffs, and foreboding valleys. As she becomes one with the desolate landscape, she finds a sense of liberation in her isolation. Desai describes Nanda's impression of Carignano as such:

Everything she wanted was here, at Carignano, in Kasauli. Here, on the ridge of the mountain, in this quiet house. It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life - as she realized on her first day at Carignano, with a great, cool flowering of relief and at last she had it. She wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction. (3)

The desolate landscape of Kasauli and the surrounding Himalayan foothills plays a crucial role in reflecting the emotional and social barrenness experienced by Nanda. Nanda loves Carignano for its barrenness and isolation, its steep heights, scary ravines and slopes and becomes one with this desolate landscape (4). This sense of isolation reveals Nanda's withdrawal from the world and her attempts to create a space of solitude. Her retreat to Carignano symbolizes her withdrawal from the patriarchal expectations of her past. As a wife

and mother, Nanda was burdened with societal roles that demanded her self-sacrifice, leaving her emotionally drained. Kaur and Kaur (2014) also highlight this connection, arguing that the barren landscape symbolizes Nanda's emotional and social barrenness, reflecting the limitations imposed upon women within patriarchal structures.

Nanda in her old age, living in isolation in a Himalayan town of Kasauli away from her previous world as a wife and mother, not because of any religious or social responsibilities but —out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation (30). As Desai describes:

...that period of her life when she was the Vice-Chancellor's wife and at the hub of a small but intense and busy world, had not pleased her. Its crowding had stifled her. There had been too many servants in the long low row of whitewashed huts behind the kitchen. There had been too many guests coming and going, tongas and rickshaws piled up under the eucalyptus trees and the bougainvilleas. Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband's study, to her mother-in-law's bedroom, to the veranda that was the gathering-place for all, at all times of the day. Too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after. They had so many children. (29)

In Desai's narrative, Nanda is like any other average Indian woman who is always expected to be devoted, submissive, responsible, and traditional. Nanda's duties as a wife and mother, roles enforced by patriarchal society, made her “suffer from the nimietty, the disorder, the fluctuating and the unpredictable excess” (Desai 30). The struggles Nanda faces resonate with those experienced by women globally, living in societies dominated by men, where gendered power dynamics shape women's lives and limit their agency. Shiva also

implies that the dualism created by gender ideology positions women in a passive role, and men in a dominant position (49). In this passive role, women are expected to take care of the children and household chores, just like Nanda's position throughout her marriage. When Raka, Nanda's great-granddaughter, is about to arrive in Carignano, Nanda is filled with anxiety. She expresses, —Would Rakha's coming mean the opening of that old, troublesome ledger again? ...Discharge me. I've discharged all my duties. Discharge! (Desai 30). This highlights Nanda's fear of going back to the duties she had finally discharged. She fears that her peaceful life of solitude in Carignano will be disturbed by Raka's arrival. After hearing the news of Raka's arrival, even the music of Cuckoo bird reminds her of her past life, the days which were full of duties and responsibilities. She viewed Raka as —a particularly dark and irksome spot on the hazy landscape - a mosquito, a cricket, or a grain of sand in the eye! (Desai 35).

Nanda's retreat to the solitude of nature reflects her resistance to the oppressive social structures. According to Vandana Shiva, such alienation is a product of patriarchal systems that devalue women's labor and emotional contributions (12). Thus her preference for the barren, rugged landscape of Kasauli over the bustling domesticity of her past life represents her rejection of the roles imposed upon her. The barrenness of the land becomes a metaphor for her emotional desolation, while her gradual connection to the surroundings symbolizes her reclamation of agency. However, it also reveals the limitations placed upon women's agency. Her withdrawal from social interaction reflects a rejection of traditional female roles, but it also signifies a lack of alternative spaces or opportunities for self-expression. This resonates with Shiva's critique of development models that marginalize women and restrict their access to resources and decision-making power. Shiva claims that —Development was reduced to a continuation of the process of colonisation, which was based on the exploitation

or exclusion of women, and on the exploitation and degradation of nature¹ (3). Thus Nanda's retreat to nature, to the Himalayan hills away from the developed capitalist patriarchal society, symbolises —the struggle for liberation of the Third World women² (2) that Shiva highlights.

Nanda's great-granddaughter Raka's arrival at Carignano is unwelcomed by Nanda who sees her arrival as an unwanted disruption of her peaceful retirement. Raka's childhood is marked by parental neglect, which greatly affects her personality development. Raka's mother, Tara, is the victim of an abusive marriage, and witnessing such abuse in front of her, Raka grew up a disturbed child. Desai narrates,

...her father, have from party stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with haneers and lists of abuse harsh filthy, abuse that made Raka cover under her bed clothes and wet the matter in fright, feeling the stream of mine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept. Under her feet, in the dark. Raka felt that flat, wet jelly of her mother's being squelching and quivering so that she did not know where to put her feet and wept as she tried to get free of it. Ahead of her, no longer on the ground but at some distance now, her mother was crying. Then it was a jackal crying (71-72).

Desai relates the crying of Raka's mother to the crying of a jackal that shows the interconnectedness between the sufferings of animals and women. However, despite her mother's sufferings, the patriarchal society forces her to continue this abusive relationship. Raka's grandmother Asha persuades her daughter to go with her husband and give him

another chance. She implies that Raka's mother —doesn't understand men, and she really is the wrong type of wife for a man like him...‖ (Desai 15). Desai shows the influence of patriarchal mindset where a mother pushes her own daughter to continue and adjust in an abusive marriage, and thinks that it will bring her daughter's happiness.

Raka's disturbed mental and emotional state represents a younger generation's complex relationship with nature. Unlike Nanda, who seeks solace in nature as a retreat from societal expectations, Raka forms an intrinsic bond with the environment. She spends her days exploring the wilderness, unrestrained by societal norms. Raka is inexplicably drawn to the pine tree that has been ravaged by the forest fire, its blackened remains evoking a profound sense of connection within her. In contrast, the vibrant, sun-kissed leaves of the unscathed pine tree leave her unmoved. The charred tree's twisted limbs seem to mirror the deep emotional scars that Raka harbors, forging an unshakeable bond between her and the ravaged tree. Her fascination with fire—a destructive yet transformative force—serve as a metaphor for ecological and personal resilience.

Nanda's friend, Ila Das, is another central female character of Desai's novel who directly encounters the impact of patriarchal structures on women. Ila Das faces immense challenges in her daily life as she strives to make ends meet. Later, she takes on a role as a welfare officer, not for personal gain, but to assert her identity. Driven by a sense of purpose, she courageously battles against the deeply ingrained practice of child marriage by educating the masses about its devastating consequences. However, her efforts are consistently thwarted by a societal framework deeply entrenched in patriarchal values, which refuses to acknowledge the urgency of this issue. While talking to her friend Nanda about this issue, Ila says,

It's so much harder to teach a man anything, Nanda - the women are willing, poor dears, to try and change their dreadful lives by an effort, but do you think their men will let them? Nooo, not one bit. ...In the end, the women listen to them - if not to the priest, then definitely to their husbands.¶ (Desai 129)

Tragedy befalls Ila Das when she becomes the victim of a brutal attack, including rape and murder, at the hands of Preet Singh, a villager she had previously intervened to stop from forcing his seven-year-old daughter into a marriage with an elderly widower who already had six children, in exchange for a small plot of land and two goats. The savage and cruel Preet Singh leaves Ila Das in a miserable condition: —Crushed back, crushed down into the earth, she lay raped, broken, still and finished¶ (Desai 143). Desai further narrates the extremity of Preet Singh's violence and rage towards Ila as such:

...(he) tear at the cotton scarf that hung about his neck, only to wrap that about her throat, tighter, tighter, tighter, so that the last gasp rattled inside her, choked and rattled and was still. ...tore at her clothes, tore them off her, in long, screeching rips, till he came to her, to the dry, shrivelled, starved stick inside the wrappings, and raped her, pinned her down into the dust and the goat droppings, and raped her (143).

The story of Ila Das serves as a stark reminder that, in a society governed by patriarchal norms, a woman who dares to challenge these traditions is inevitably met with a dire fate, either facing dehumanizing sexual humiliation or ultimately, death. Shiva adds in her preface to *Ecofeminism* that violence against women is as old as patriarchy. For centuries,

traditional patriarchal systems have shaped our collective perspectives and societal norms, perpetuating a culture of oppression that marginalizes women and denies them their fundamental rights and dignity. This entrenched power dynamic has systematically suppressed women's autonomy, agency, and equality, reinforcing a worldview that is fundamentally unjust and discriminatory. Eventually it has taken more brutal forms like murder, rape, and suicide. She further adds that “Violence against women has taken on new and more vicious forms as traditional patriarchal structures have hybridized with the structures of capitalist patriarchy” (Mies & Shiva, p. xiv). Shiva implies that the rape of the Earth and rape of women are intimately linked, both metaphorically and materially.

The Pasteur Institute serves as a stark illustration of the subjugation and brutality inflicted upon non-human species, highlighting the darker aspects of human interaction with the natural world. When Raka inquires about the Pasteur Institute from Ram Lal, he tells her:

It is where doctors make serum for injections. ...Once a dog had gone mad and bitten everyone in the village. The dog had to be killed. Its head was cut off and sent to the Institute. The doctors cut them open and look into them. They have rabbits and guinea pigs there, too, many animals. They use them for tests. ...See those chutes? They empty the bones and ashes of dead animals down into the ravine. It's a bad place. Don't go there (Desai 44).

The violence against non-human species here parallels the violence inflicted upon the female characters. When Raka looks at the Institute —she shaded her eyes to look up at the towers of the Pasteur Institute chimneys... lashed about with black whips of smoke. Raka...smelt serum boiling chloroform and spirit, smelt dog's brains boiled in vats” (Desai

49). This represents the exploitation of nature in the name of development as discussed by Shiva.

Shiva implies that women and nature have an intrinsic relationship. Desai also portrays this relationship as the female characters of her novel frowns upon seeing the destruction and exploitation of nature in front of them. She narrates, —Up on the hill the Pasteur Institute flung writhing snakes of smoke into the sky. Nanda Kaul pursed her lips at the ugly sight - it did so spoil the view|| (73).

The spectacle of violence enacted in the costume-party dances in the Kasauli Club is another example of the violence inflicted upon non-human beings that terrifies Raka:

Raka saw the skull and crossbones in white upon his chest. He had a scythe tucked under his arm and it glinted and shot off bolts of lights when he raised it and chopped off the woman's bucket head. Under her disheveled hair her pink throat opened wide and she laughed in bubbles of blood... (Desai 71).

In this setting, Raka is confronted with a disturbing spectacle that glorifies masculinity through aggression. The intense, almost primal energy of the dancers in the club serves as a catalyst, forcing Raka to relive the painful memories of the brutal treatment she and her mother, Tara, endured at the hands of her father.

The atrocities suffered by the women in the novel find their culmination in Raka who sets the forest on fire in the end of the novel. When the illusory world of Nanda shatters at the news of Ila Das' rape and murder, the utterance of Raka, —Look Nani, I have set the forest on

fire (Desai 145) symbolises a great significance. This reflects Raka's determination to destroy a society where women are forced to sacrifice their authenticity in order to find happiness. This destruction can be seen as a consequence of the disconnection between humans and nature. As Mies and Shiva argue, capitalist patriarchy has created a rift between humans and the natural world, leading to its exploitation and destruction.

Throughout the novel, Desai subtly connects the oppression of women with the exploitation and degradation of the natural world. The barren landscape, the characters' isolation and sufferings, and the destructive fire all contribute to a sense of interconnectedness between social and ecological injustices. The novel's stark setting, complex characters, and evocative imagery reveals the devastating consequences of denying women's agency and disconnecting from the natural world.

Chapter 4: Ecofeminist Analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy critiques the interconnected systems of oppression that marginalize women and nature, exposing how the pursuit of progress and development perpetuates a destructive cycle of exploitation that ultimately harms both women and environmental ecosystems. Through her novel, Roy skillfully highlights the striking similarities between the oppression of women and the degradation of the environment in a society governed by patriarchal values. *The God of Small Things* opens with a vivid portrayal of the picturesque landscape and the sweltering summer atmosphere in the fictional village of Ayemenem, a setting that serves as the central backdrop for the story that unfolds:

May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still dust green trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. (Roy 1-2)

The author's deliberate choice of a rural setting for the story enables a profound exploration of environmental concerns. In the past, Ayemenem was a pristine haven, boasting a crystal-clear river Meenachal and a lush, thriving ecosystem. However, as the area underwent rapid urbanization, its natural beauty and vitality gradually eroded. This decline serves as a poignant allegory for the downfall of the Ipe family, whose internal struggles between personal desires and societal expectations ultimately led to their downfall, much like the desecration of the once-unspoiled environment.

Roy highlights the intricate connection between literature and the natural environment by illustrating how ecological degradation is a direct consequence of unchecked development. The capitalist patriarchal system is responsible for exploiting Ayemenem's river, as evidenced by the construction of the barrage and the luxurious Heritage hotel, which embodies a blend of colonial and postcolonial, Western and Indian influences. This unchecked development has devastating ecological consequences, including pollution and degradation of the environment in Ayemenem. The use of pesticides, financed by World Bank loans, has obstructed the natural flow of the Meenachal river, underscoring the destructive impact of human activities on the natural world. The narrator in the story says: "*Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils*" (Roy 13). This aligns with Shiva's critique of eco-imperialism, where global economic systems devastate local ecosystems and displace indigenous practices of ecological stewardship (20).

Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies state in their book *Ecofeminism* that the World Bank's ostensible commitment to global well-being is merely a façade. In reality, the institution is beholden to the interests of its economically and politically dominant contributors. As a result, the voices of the marginalized and vulnerable communities, who bear the brunt of the Bank's policies, are consistently silenced. Under the guise of development and poverty alleviation, the World Bank perpetuates a form of neo-colonialism, ensnaring countries in a cycle of debt and financial dependence. This self-serving agenda ultimately serves to entrench the very underdevelopment and poverty it claims to eradicate. Mies states:

With increasing ecological destruction in recent decades, however, it becomes obvious that this subsistence or life production was and is not only a kind of hidden underground of the capitalist market economy, it can also show the way out of the many impasses of this destructive system called industrial society, market economy or capitalist patriarchy (296).

The encroachment of modernization and capitalist development on the traditional way of life in Ayemenem contributes to both environmental degradation and social disruption. The increasing pollution of the river and the changes in land use reflect the dominance of profit-driven interests over ecological concerns and the well-being of the local community.

Throughout the novel, numerous examples illustrate the complex and deeply interconnected bond between femininity and the natural world. A notable instance of this can be seen when Chacko imparts historical knowledge to the twins, highlighting the intricate relationship between women and nature:

...(he) told them about the Earth Woman. He made them imagine that the earth four thousand six hundred million years old- was a forty-six year old woman... it had taken the whole of Earth Woman's life for the earth to become what it was. For the oceans to part. For the mountains to rise. The Earth Woman was eleven years old, Chacko said, when the first single-celled organisms appeared. The first animals, creatures like worms and jelly-fish, appeared only when she was forty. She was over forty-five- just eight months about when dinosaurs roamed the earth (Roy 54).

Nature has been perceived as the mother figure in many cultures around the world. According to Shiva, nature on one hand is personified as the epitome of femininity, while on the other hand, it is nurtured and sustained by the feminine energy, which in turn fosters life and provides nourishment (37). Shiva also argues that this feminization of nature is not anything revolutionary, as it was this very assumption that allowed the domination of both women and nature (45).

Rivers have played a pivotal role in the development of human civilization, often being revered as life-givers, much like the nurturing role traditionally associated with women. The Meenachal River, which flows through Ayemenem, holds a profound connection with Ammu, the mother of the twins. For the village fishermen, the river has been a maternal figure, providing them with a daily means of sustenance. However, during torrential rains, the river's demeanor changes, transforming it into a destructive force that claims lives and destroys everything in its path, earning it a reputation as a merciless terminator of lives. Ammu's serene exterior belied a tumultuous interior, akin to a dormant volcano poised to erupt at any moment. Behind her tranquil facade, a cauldron of emotions churned, threatening to overflow at the slightest provocation. In a bid to find solace, Ammu would often retreat to the riverbanks, where she would spend hours lost in thought, accompanied only by the gentle hum of her transistor. She pretend to be in peace, enjoying the beauty of the Meenachal but inside her was like a —suicide bomber (Roy 44).

Occasionally, when Amau listens to songs that she loved on the radio, something stirred inside her. A hiquid ache spread under her skin and she walked out of the world like a witch, to a better happier place. On days like this, there was something restless and untamed about her. As though she had temporarily set aside her morality of motherhood and divorcee hood. Even her walk changed from a safe mother-walk to

another wider 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 river bank with her little plastic transistor shaped like a tangerine. She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims (Roy 44).

Both Ammu and Meenachal River are the two tragic figures in the fiction who struggled to survive. Ammu, a victim of patriarchal oppression, hails from a wealthy and educated Syrian Catholic family in Ayemenem. Her etymologist father's anger and frustration were often directed at her, and she was denied the opportunity to attend college, deemed a frivolous expense for a girl. When Ammai sought solace in marriage and motherhood, her husband betrayed her, forcing her to cater to his English boss's sexual desires. Eventually, she fled her marriage with her twins, only to face further hardship and rejection from her family, who treated her like an unwanted burden. In contrast, her brother Chacko, a divorcee, was afforded privileges and indulgences by their family. Ammu's relationship with Velutha was met with severe disapproval, and her family conspired to silence her, ultimately leading to Velutha's tragic death in police custody. Ammu's subsequent departure from her family home and her own untimely demise in Bharath Lodge serve as a stark testament to the crushing effects of patriarchal dominance. Through Ammu's story, Roy poignantly illustrates the devastating consequences of a society that condones and perpetuates patriarchal oppression, mirroring the destructive impact of modernization on the Meenachal River.

Flowing through the locality of Ayemenem, Meenachal River had been an epitome of horror and beauty. Once the river was —Grey green with fish in it. The sky and trees in it. And at night, the broken moon in it! (Roy 203). The river was unpredictable, destructive, and most powerful twenty three years ago, but now it had turned into be a mere shrunken ribbon.

The describes the river as such: —it greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bedll (Roy 124). The insatiable pursuit of higher agricultural productivity has ultimately led to the demise of this once-thriving river, a tragic consequence of humanity's self-centered pursuits. The once-pristine riverside, formerly shaded by trees, has been overrun by human settlements. The riverbanks, now sullied by the waste of children, have become equally contaminated and reprehensible. Similarly, the river, like Ammu, a woman who tragically lost her life and her sense of self to the oppressive forces of societal expectations and patriarchal norms, struggles to bear the weight of its pollution, ultimately merging with the sea. This represents Shiva's argument that the dominant model of development, rooted in patriarchal ideologies that value homogeneity, domination, and centralization, is fundamentally flawed and inherently violent, perpetuating harm and exploitation against women and the natural world globally (44).

Through the suffocating constraints of patriarchal society, the female characters in the novel are figuratively pinned down, their identities and aspirations crushed, as they struggle to break free and assert their individuality, ultimately revealing the devastating consequences of a world governed by male dominance. Pappachi, the patriarch, wielded absolute authority over his submissive wife, Mammachi, exerting a dominating influence that left her with little autonomy. Their marriage was marked by turmoil and unrest, with Mammachi relegated to a mere puppet under her husband's control. The significant age gap of seventeen years between them fueled Pappachi's possessiveness and jealousy, manifesting in his tyrannical behavior towards his wife and daughter. He would stop at nothing to assert his physical power, as evidenced by his cruel act of destroying Mammachi's violin and ending her lessons when her tutor praised her talent. In a bid to escape her abusive husband, Mammachi found solace in starting her own business, Paradise Pickles and Preserves. Just as Ammu sought comfort in

the river, Mammachi discovered a new lease on life through her factory, which allowed her to connect with nature by preserving its bounty.

Baby Kochamma is another female character who finds refuge and comfort in the natural world. Although she escapes physical oppression at the hands of male characters, she is emotionally tormented by her unrequited love for Father Mulligan. Desperate to be with him, Baby Kochamma takes drastic measures, adopting Catholicism and even entering a convent in the hopes of gaining proximity to her beloved. However, her efforts are met with disappointment, and she eventually leaves the convent. Seeking a fresh start, she travels to the United States to study Ornamental Gardening. Upon her return, Baby Kochamma is revitalized, and her newfound energy is palpable. She transforms the neglected front yard of Ayemenem House into a breathtaking garden, attracting visitors from far and wide. Roy narrates,

Baby Kochamma turned it into a lush maze of dwarf hedges, rocks, and gargoyles. The flower she loved most was the anthurium Their single succulent spathes ranged from shades of mottled black to blood red. In the centre of Baby Kochamma's garden, surrounded by beds of canna and phlox, a marble cherub peered an endless silver arc into a shallow pool in which a single blue lotus bloomed. At each corner of the pool lolled a pink plaster-of-Paris gnome with rosy cheeks and a peaked red cap. Like a lion-tamer she tamed twisting vines and nurtured bristling cacti. She limited bonsai plants and pampered rare orchids. She waged war on the weather. She tried to grow edelweiss and chinese guava (Roy 26-27).

Roy tries to connect all the female characters to elements of the natural world or specific creatures when they are experiencing emotional turmoil. Right from her birth, Rahel has been the sufferer of undeserved despair and desolation and has been a victim of "Pappachi's moth" (Roy 49). Roy skillfully employs the image of moth to implement Rahel's insecurity. The moth's inherent susceptibility to predators, driven by its fixation on light, serves as a poignant metaphor for Rahel's own feelings of vulnerability. Whenever she is confronted with threats or uncertainty, Rahel is reminded of the moth's precarious situation, and her own sense of exposure and fragility is laid bare. Roy describes Rahel's fear as —A cold moth with unusually dense dorsal tufts landed on Rahel's heart, where its icy legs touched her, she got goose bumps on her careless heart (Roy 112).

Amidst the oppression faced by the women and nature in the novel, Roy also puts emphasis on the resistance and the reclaiming of agency of the characters. In *The God of Small Things*, resistance emerges through Ammu's defiance of patriarchal norms and her intimate connection to nature. Her illicit relationship with Velutha, while ultimately tragic, challenges the oppressive boundaries imposed by caste and gender. This act of resistance, though punished by societal forces, highlights the novel's ecofeminist ethos, as it symbolizes an attempt to reclaim agency in the face of systemic oppression. Moreover, the twins, Estha and Rahel, represent a potential for ecological and social renewal. Their bond with the river and the natural world highlights the enduring resilience of marginalized identities and their capacity for reimagining relationships with nature. Vandana Shiva's notion of ecological resilience—where marginalized communities serve as stewards of sustainable ecological practices—finds resonance in the twins' connection to the Meenachal river (Roy 38).

In her novel *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy masterfully weaves an intricate web of oppressive relationships, exposing the multifaceted nature of exploitation within the narrative. By employing the principles of ecofeminism, Roy skillfully illustrates how domination permeates various spheres, including the natural world, social class, gender, age, and race. Notably, she inverts the traditional hierarchical structure, situating both human and non-human victims at the bottom rung, thereby highlighting the entrenched dualistic thinking characteristic of Western patriarchal societies. Through her work, Roy sheds light on the pervasive and interconnected nature of oppression, underscoring the urgent need for a more nuanced understanding of the complex power dynamics at play.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Arundhati Roy and Anita Desai's works masterfully expose the intrinsic connections between the subjugation of women and the degradation of the natural environment. Through an ecofeminist lens, drawing primarily on the theoretical framework of Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, *The God of Small Things* and *Fire on the Mountain*, respectively, lay bare the underlying power structures and ideologies that perpetuate the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. These literary masterpieces demonstrate how the patriarchal and dualistic worldview, coupled with an unjust economic system, has led to the marginalization of women and the exploitation of the environment. By highlighting the interconnectedness between nature and humanity, particularly women, these novels reveal the mechanisms of power that operate within societies, thereby perpetuating the dominance of those in control. Both novels also reveal the limitations and consequences of resistance in oppressive systems. While the characters' acts of defiance are often tragic, they highlight the possibility of reimagining relationships between humans and nature, advocating for a harmonious coexistence free from domination. The resilience of these characters resonates with Shiva's vision of sustainable, community-driven practices that challenge the dualistic logic of patriarchal-capitalist systems. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the relevance of ecofeminism in understanding literary representations of intertwined oppressions. By highlighting the enduring connections between women and nature in Indian literature, this study contributes to the growing body of ecofeminist scholarship and underscores the necessity of addressing ecological and social injustices in tandem. In a world grappling with climate crises and systemic inequalities, the insights drawn from these texts remain profoundly relevant, urging readers to rethink the boundaries between the human and non-human, the personal and the political.

Works Cited

- Bordoloi, J. "Representation of man and nature: An ecocritical reading of Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*." *Literary Herald*, vol. 6, no. 2, August 2020, pp. 32-38, <https://doi.org/2454-3365>. Accessed 17 Dec. 2024.
- Chahal, Sonia. —A Feminist Approach to Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*.|| *IJRAR- International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, vol. 5, no. 2, June 2018, pp. 1955–1957, <https://doi.org/2348-1269>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2024.
- David, E. J. R., & Derthick, A. O. What is internalized oppression, and so what? In E. J. R. David (Ed.), *Internalized oppression: The psychology of marginalized groups*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing, pp. 1–30, 2014. ISBN 9780826199256. Accessed 23 Dec. 2024.
- Desai, Anita. *Fire on the Mountain*. New York: Penguin Books. 1981. Print.
- Francis , D. M., and M. Thangaraj. —Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* From An Ecocritical Viewpoint .|| *Impact Journals: IJRHAL*, vol. 4, no. 8, 8 Aug. 2016, pp. 75–82, <https://doi.org/2321-8878>. Accessed 17 Dec. 2024.
- Gaard, Greta. _Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature.‘ *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Ed. Greta Gaard. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993, pp. 1–12. Print.
- Islam, M. S., and Rama Islam. "Representation of Postcolonial Indian Women: Bimla and Nanda Kaul in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and *Fire on the Mountain*." *South Asian Review*, vol. 40, no. 1-2, April 2019, pp. 51-64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2019.1593754>. Accessed 17 Dec. 2024.

- Kaur, J., and Dr. Zameerpal Kaur. —Women and Nature in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*: An Ecofeminist Analysis. *Smart Moves Journal IJELLH*, vol. 6, no. 3, Mar. 2018, pp. 62–73, <https://ijellh.com/index.php/OJS/article/view/3337>. Accessed 14 Dec. 2024.
- Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy. Women and History*. New York: Oxford University Press. Vol. 1, pp. 238–239, 1986. ISBN 978-0-19-503996-2. Accessed 23 Dec. 2024.
- Mardiyani, Rima, and Tatan Tawami. "Gender Inequality And Feminism In Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things*." *Mahadaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Budaya*, vol. 2, no. 2, October 2022, pp. 165-174, <https://doi.org/10.34010/MHD.V2I2.7598>. Accessed 17 Dec. 2024
- Mies, Maria, and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books, 2014. ISBN 9781780329789. Accessed Nov. & Dec. 2024.
- Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India*. Kali for Women, 1988. ISBN 9788185107073. Accessed Nov. & Dec. 2024.
- Rangarajan, Swarnalatha, and Scott Slovic. *Eco Criticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies*. Orient BlackSwan, 2018, <https://9789352872039>, Accessed Dec. 2024.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1998. Print.
- R, Reshma. —Discourse of the Oppressed: An Ecofeministic Reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* and Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape*. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, vol. 8, no. VIII, July 2017, pp. 170–180, <https://doi.org/2278-9529>. Accessed 14 Dec. 2024
- Warren, Karen J. *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. ISBN 978-0-8476-9299-6. Accessed 23 Dec. 2024.

Yasin, Ghulam. "Othering Nature in Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things': A Postcolonial Ecocritical Study." *Interlitteraria*, vol. 29, no. 1, January 2024, pp. 188-199, <https://doi.org/10.12697/IL.2024.29.1.13>. Accessed 17 Dec. 2024.