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Women and Nature through Vedic Paradigm: A Comparative Ecofeminist
Reading of *Roots and Shadows* and *The God of Small Things*

Aviharsha Singh¹, Prakhar Medhavi²

¹Ph.D Scholar, Department of English and Other Foreign Languages, MGKVP, Varanasi

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3155-325X>

²Research Scholar, PG Department of English & Research Centre, M.U, Bodhgaya

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8604-7288>

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Aviharsha Singh



Prakhar Medhavi

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ABSTRACT

This research endeavor discusses the multidimensional connections between ecology, Vedic philosophy, and women's marginalization in contemporary India, as reflected in the writings of Arundhati Roy and Shashi Deshpande. Scrutinizing how these prolific writers use and reinterpret Vedic ideas, the research attempts to reveal the intersectional oppressions that Indian women encounter. According to some research, Vedic thinking, which is frequently distorted and subjected to patriarchal interpretations, has the capacity to provide a narrative that challenges established discourse power structure. Roy and Deshpande have successfully challenged patriarchal conventions and ecological degradation with Vedic ideals through their literary works. Using the theoretical notions from the works of Vandana Shiva and Uma Chakraborty, this research work develops a theoretical framework to examine, how these stories of Roy and Deshpande provide insights into the lives of oppressed and subjugated women and how caste, class, rural-urban inequalities and even environmental concerns are all interrelated. This research enhanced the understanding of the complex relationships between gender, modernization, and tradition that have shaped contemporary India by establishing the women's subaltern perspective. The ultimate objective of this study is to show how Vedic philosophy may continue to be relevant in promoting a more just and sustainable future for women and the environment.

Keywords: - Ecofeminism, Patriarchy, Gender Role, Ecology, Vedic Philosophy, Intersectionality, Marginalization, Environmental Justice, Subaltern Perspective, Modernity and Tradition, Sustainable Future.

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy are renowned contemporary Indian women authors whose work has had a tremendous effect on the literary world. Deshpande, known for her works such as *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*, and many other fictional works and continues to add today, and Roy celebrated for *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, which deals with modern subjects such as women's empowerment and environmental crisis. Despite belonging to different generations, they have tackled comparable problems in the same socio-cultural context, reflecting the greater discourse of the contemporary period.

The current era of neoliberal morality is distinguished by a growing awareness of women's rights and environmental sustainability as Kongre (2021, p.38) writes "Many Indian female writers depicted the ecofeminism approach in their novels to bring awareness about loss of ecosystem and injustice on women". During this period, there has been a global campaign to recognize and confront the structural oppressions that women experience, as well as a rising concern for our planet's well-being. In this scenario, Ecofeminism comes, from a theoretical perspective, revealing the interconnected oppressions of women and nature. It highlights how patriarchal systems subjugate women and exploit the environment as significantly Mies (2014, xxiii) rightly confessed "The destruction of nature, the new weapons, genetic engineering, modern agriculture, and other modern inventions are all 'brainchildren' of this supposedly value-free, reductionist science" viewing both as resources to be controlled and dominated. Shiva & Mies argue further that these same patriarchal mechanisms contribute to ecological degradation,

"This capitalist-patriarchal perspective interprets difference as hierarchical and uniformity as a prerequisite for equality. Our aim is to go beyond this narrow perspective and to express our diversity and, in different ways, address the inherent inequalities in world structures which permit the North to dominate the South, men to dominate women, and frenetic plunder of ever more resources for ever more unequally distributed economic gain to dominate nature" (2014 p.2).

Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy can be seen as authors of ecofeminism, who challenge contemporary patriarchal norms by integrating Vedic ideas to a certain level that respects nature. Their fiction emphasizes the need for a more equitable and harmonious relationship between humans and the environment.

India, acclaimed for its rich cultural past, is a place bestowed with ancient literature, traditions, and values, evidently Since Stanley (1997, 39) remarks "Because of this 'glorious past' Indian women did not need a 'narrow' suffragist movement to establish women's rights anew,". The Vedic literature and ancient traditions of India include a wealth of wisdom and ethical instruction. However, like other civilizations, India has experienced periods of decline and degeneration. This deterioration, whether due to foreign invasions or domestic malpractices (Maybe a subject of debate), has resulted in profound cultural and social changes. The infusion of foreign influences and the degradation of traditional norms have contributed to a number of societal issues, including women's disenfranchisement and ecological devastation in some or many ways, "Male 'structural' position within social and religious hierarchies profoundly affected the way women were viewed" (40).

Over the past centuries, the position of women in Indian society has deteriorated significantly; unfortunately, this tendency is still present in many ways now. The role of women in Indian traditions has been weakened throughout time, despite their historical reverence – they were often revered and held in great regard. Kongre (2021) argued that the prehistoric connection between human beings and nature has been turned into a destructive element, "dividing human and nonhuman, male and female, culture and nature, body and mind" (36). Gender prejudices and patriarchal systems have eclipsed the cultural norms and practices that formerly honored women's responsibilities and achievements.

However, some practices and traditions still hold onto the core of this regard, providing a glimpse of hope and a basis for women to retake their proper place in society.

Literary giants like Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy use these cultural symbols and customs in this context to fight against the marginalization of women and the destruction of the environment. They use the strength of conventional Indian ideals and the ancient Vedic philosophy to take on modern problems. Nevertheless, Kaur's (2017) statement must be noted here, "although cultural ecofeminism's strength lies in that it is seen to be a deeply woman-identified and women-centric movement that celebrates distinctive characteristics about women, it is steeped in biological essentialism" (25) but evolution of power structure othered women and she further formulated "This then limits women to a notion of biological essentialism and the notion of womanhood to be necessarily caring, nurturing and compassionate" (p.179). By reinterpreting and revitalizing these elements, Roy and Deshpande use them as weapons against the forces that seek to oppress women and exploit the environment. Their writings are replete with allusions to Vedic ideals, showing how these traditional concepts may be used even in contemporary battles for sustainability and social justice.

Theoretical Framework

As our study investigates the multidimensional oppressions that women in modern India experience, it highlights how Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy employ Vedic ideas to question ecological degradation and patriarchal norms, illuminating the connections between caste, class, gender, and environmental challenges. The original foundations of Vedic philosophy of attainment of salvation (moksha), "The goal of moksha (spiritual liberation from the material flow of existence) has stood as the highest form of spiritual aspiration for Brahmanical religion from Vedic times to the present" (Stanley 1997, p.42) – which has historically been perverted by patriarchal systems – as well as how it has been used to uphold patriarchal frameworks are discussed. Naidu (2008) argued "The reflexively positioned Second Wave feminism can be seen as having rebelled against essentialized and 'othered' categories such as women, and essentialized and othered groups of religions and religious communities of people" (p.144). The research clarifies how Roy and Deshpande promote the values of second-wave feminism for a more just and sustainable society by drawing on Vedic ideas.

Ecofeminism, specifically Vandana Shiva's theories, is utilized to investigate how Roy and Deshpande emphasize the links between women's exploitation and nature, stating that the same patriarchal mechanisms that oppress women also contribute to environmental degradation. Shiva writes:

I have repeatedly stressed that the rape of the Earth and rape of women are intimately linked - both metaphorically, in shaping world-views, and materially, in shaping women's everyday lives. The deepening economic vulnerability of women makes them more vulnerable to all forms of violence, including sexual assault, as we found out during a series of public hearings on the impact of economic reforms on women organized by the National Commission on Women and the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology. (2014, xvi)

The intersectional approach to ecofeminism analyses interlinked types of oppression, such as caste, class, and rural-urban inequalities, to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's marginalization.

Parallely, Uma Chakraborty's ideas on the historical and social circumstances of women's oppression in India's history in are utilized to better understand contemporary discourse. The subaltern perspectives are also used partly to examine how Roy and Deshpande, through their narratives, give voice to marginalized women, exposing the complex relationship of gender, and tradition in constructing contemporary India. Post-Vedic literature shifts the perspective, revealing that Arya

women are no longer privileged as sacrifices, as their reliance on agriculture led to the removal of enslaved people, including Dasis, resulting in low labor participation. Chakraborty (1993) asserts,

“The post-Vedic literature reflects a twofold development of ideology. While Arya women were being marginalised in terms of their original roles in the sacrifice their roles in the productive system were also changing. The increasing dependence on agriculture as the major source of food shifted the scene of food production outside the households to the fields; the labour of the subjugated peoples including dasis was extracted to work the land and this enabled the Aryan woman's labour to be restricted to the household. Thereafter the participation of a certain class of women in 'production' that was valued ceased”(p.581)

The research aims to demonstrate the enduring relevance of Vedic philosophy in promoting gender and environmental justice, offering insights into how these ancient ideas can inform contemporary movements for a more just and sustainable future.

Methodology

This study employs a multi-faceted methodology to analyze the works of Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, focusing on their use of Vedic philosophy and ecofeminist ideas. The core of this methodology involves a close textual analysis of Arundhati Roy's debut novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* (1983). The selection of these two novels by Deshpande and Roy is particularly justified because Medhavi & Sahay (2024, p.185) established that “Arundhati Roy very deftly deals with women's concerns and cultural contradictions in her novel.” while Khanam (2020, p.88) confirms “Shashi Deshpande's novels portray an existentialist crisis faced by women and their quest for ultimate autonomous selfhood which coerces them to challenge the traditional constraints of patriarchy imposed on them.” Additionally, they were published in consecutive decades and are relevant from an ecofeminist perspective. They help sketch the rural and urban spaces of the evolving third world, allowing for a more coherent comparison of the socio-political and ecological context in which these two authors were writing. This approach examines how these authors integrate Vedic concepts and ecofeminist ideas reflected in their narratives, focusing on thematic elements, character arcs, and the portrayal of women's experiences and environmental concerns.

The study employs a comparative approach to compare the thematic and narrative strategies of the authors, examining how they use Vedic concepts to address contemporary issues of gender and ecology. The intersectional lens is applied to explore the varied oppressions faced by women, considering how gender intersects with other social categories such as caste, class, and geographic location, since “Caste as a social category is the stigmatic experience of generations of people in India, having existential dimensions” (Priya 2021, p27). This perspective helps capture the complexity of women's experiences and how these intersecting forms of oppression are represented in the works of Roy and Deshpande. Contextual analysis is also included to examine the historical, social, and cultural backgrounds of Vedic philosophy and contemporary India.

The research considers the original contexts of Vedic texts and how they have been interpreted over time, particularly in patriarchal societies because “India is, and has been, a patriarchal society as far as can be established historically” (Stanley 1997, p.38). It also considers the contemporary socio-political landscape of India, including issues related to modernization, development, and environmental degradation. Theoretical integration is also employed to deepen the analysis and enhance the understanding of the authors' literary contributions to feminist and ecological discourses. Shiva's theories on the links between women's exploitation and nature provide a foundational framework for analyzing how Roy and Deshpande highlight these connections. Chakraborty's perspectives on the historical and social contexts of women's oppression in India offer critical insights into the contemporary challenges depicted in the authors' works.

Objective

The primary objective of this study is to examine how Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy reinterpret and employ Vedic philosophy in their literary works. This exploration seeks to highlight the relevance of Vedic principles in critiquing and offering alternatives to modern societal issues. Another crucial aim is to analyze the interconnectedness of caste, class, gender, and environmental issues as depicted in the works of Deshpande and Roy. Their narratives often reveal the multifaceted oppressions that Indian women face, illustrating how these factors intersect to create complex layers of marginalization. The research also seeks to explore ecofeminist themes within the works of Deshpande and Roy, utilizing Vandana Shiva's theories. Shiva's ecofeminism posits that the same patriarchal mechanisms that exploit women also harm the environment. Since, the study also uses Uma Chakraborty's insights, thus, historical and social contexts of women's oppression in India have to be examined from subaltern perspectives in Deshpande and Roy's works. Moreover, the research highlights the way they use old concepts to guide new movements, highlighting the Vedic philosophy's ongoing importance in advancing gender and environmental justice. This demonstrates how these principles are ageless and relevant to today's issues. Finally, the study explores how Deshpande and Roy utilize India's rich cultural heritage and traditional values to address modern challenges. Their works often reflect a deep engagement with cultural icons and traditions, using these elements as tools to combat women's marginalization and ecological issues.

Literature Review

Kaur (2017) in her thesis explored the connection between postcolonial ecofeminism, Indian women writing fiction, and environmental activism, arguing against cultural/nature dualism and advocating for multiple positions for women. She employs two theoretical frameworks: representation of women and nature in postcolonial theories, and gender and environment issues in fiction.

Shiva (2008) posited that corporate globalization involves the transfer of knowledge and natural resources held by women to global corporations, devaluing their role as creators of value and providers of basic needs. As biodiversity and water become commodities, women's rights to these resources are eroded, making them a dispensable sex.

Naidu (2008) highlighted the subtle issues surrounding the modern 'Hindu' eco-ethic, focusing on the 'golden eco-age' in Vedic, Upanisadic, and Puranic verses. She examines the opinions of experts and the connection between Hinduism and eco-sensitivity, a subdiscipline of religion studies. The paper also delves into the emergence of ecofeminism, a non-dual Hinduism school of thought.

Chakravarti (1993) addresses the gender structure in early Indian society, focusing on the subordination of women. She highlights the religious traditions that shape social practices, with Hindu society sanctioning extreme social stratification. Her study reveals that the "subordination has been conditioned by the social and cultural environment the extent and form of that in which women have been placed," (p.579) mostly of upper-caste women is primarily due to the need for effective sexual control to maintain patrilineal succession and caste purity. She has also highlighted the power of non-conformist women to challenge Hindu orthodoxy, as caste blood is always bilateral.

Khanam (2020) sketched the silence prevalent in society, particularly in the environment, as a significant issue that needs to be addressed. Khanam asserted that Shashi Deshpande's work defies categorization, presenting a diverse approach to understanding women's oppression and the complex relationship between women and the environment. Her characters, bifurcated within the same psychological frame, challenge the notion that women are content with domestic tasks and strive to regain their identity.

Kongre (2021) analyzed that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated environmental issues, leading to pollution and reduced oxygen levels, "Eco-feminism is term emerged out from ecocriticism

to represent women's potential to instigate an ecological revolution" (p.36) and established that Arundhati Roy, a postcolonial writer, emphasizes the interrelation between women and nature, highlighting the impact of industrialization, deforestation, and resource exploitation on ecological concerns.

Siddiqui (2022) asserted that, in theory, all individuals are equal. Still, in practice, barriers like skin color, community, religion, gender, age, and employment exist. He asserted that the "way to end casteism is to acknowledge the fact that beneath the flashy masks and the show we put on" (p.53). These divisions can cause problems, such as casteism, slavery, and torture of low-caste, African Americans, Jews, and women. And lastly formulated that Indian novelist Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* examines these divisions.

The exploration of the intersections between ecofeminism, Vedic philosophy, and women's marginalization in contemporary Indian literature offers a profound understanding of how ancient ideas can inform modern movements for gender and environmental justice. This literature review examines key scholarly works that illuminate these intersections, focusing on how Indian women writers like Arundhati Roy and Shashi Deshpande utilize literary narratives to challenge patriarchal norms and ecological degradation. Through diverse theoretical paradigms, including postcolonial ecofeminism, the modern Hindu eco-ethic, and historical gender structures, this review synthesizes critical insights into the ways these authors advocate for a more just and sustainable future for both women and the environment.

Research Gap and Problem Statement

Although Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy's writings have been the subject of much scholarly analysis for their contributions to environmental issues and women's empowerment, there is a noteworthy vacuum in the literature concerning the incorporation of Vedic philosophy into their creative frameworks. The literature that has already been written about these authors' ecofeminist viewpoints and critiques of patriarchal systems often looks at these aspects without thoroughly examining how these writers apply old Vedic knowledge to address modern problems with gender inequality and environmental degradation. Furthermore, nothing or quite little is known about how caste, class, and rural-urban differences connect with Vedic ideals in their works. By providing a detailed examination of how Deshpande and Roy, at a certain optimum level, apply Vedic philosophy to question and scrutinize various forms of oppression in contemporary India, this study seeks to bridge this gap.

Analytical Study and Discussion

Roots and Shadows: The Interconnectedness of Patriarchy, Ecology, and Women's Autonomy

In *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande discusses the subtle interaction of patriarchal systems, ecological knowledge, and Vedic philosophy. In line with the Vedic worldview, which emphasizes harmony between people, nature, and the divine, the story presents women as protectors of the natural environment. *Roots and Shadows* is the story of Indu, a middle-class girl raised in an orthodox Brahmin family led by Akka, a widow who controls everything. Khanam (2020, p.88) remarked "Shashi Deshpande's novels portray an existentialist crisis faced by women and their quest for ultimate autonomous selfhood which coerces them to challenge the traditional constraints of patriarchy imposed on them." Because of their responsibilities in agriculture, domestic duties, and spiritual activities that reflect the cyclical rhythms of the natural world, women are historically viewed as the keepers of this equilibrium. This is traceably visible when Indu reacts upon Akka, "There was only one thing she wanted and that was to dominate, and for her "it is a declaration of Independence"" (Deshpande, 68) This Vedic ideal is embodied by Deshpande's character of Indu, who shows a profound appreciation for ecological processes and reverence for the natural world. The destructive power of patriarchy,

which perverts Vedic values and encourages the exploitation of women and the environment, is contrasted with this peaceful cohabitation in the story.

Stanley (1997, p.43) ascertained that 'Brahmanical values had contrasting attitudes towards female sexuality, viewing self-sacrificing, faithful females as auspicious and bringing prosperity to their families, while high-caste widows, unmarried mothers, and low-class women were seen as threatening or dangerous, encouraging submissive behavior'. The destruction of the natural environment is best exemplified by the diminution of women's autonomy and exclusion from decision-making processes as potentially reflected in Indu's words "It is a trap. That's what marriage is. A trap? Or a cage? Maybe the comic strip version of marriage" (Deshpande, 63). Deshpande highlights the necessity of going back to the fundamental ideas of Vedic philosophy and reevaluating patriarchal systems. This suggests a comprehensive approach that values women at the heart of this revolutionary process and tackles social, economic, and ecological challenges.

According to Rig Veda 'Pururavas, a mortal king in Vedic literature, falls in love with Urvashi, a celestial nymph. Their relationship is marked by passion, separation, and longing. The verse reflects Pururavas's emotional conflict and cultural context, showcasing the intricate dynamics of human relationships in ancient Vedic society. This narrative, with the passage of time, built a pejorative image of women in Vedic society as illustrated in the following verse of Rig Veda

Nay, do not die, Pururavas, nor vanish: let not the evil-omened wolves devour thee. With women there can be no lasting friendship: the hearts of hyenas are the hearts of women. (10.95.15)

Deshpande's text, through a modern lens, addresses the internal struggles faced by individuals in a society that imposes unrealistic and often damaging expectations. Kaur (2017, p130) put it rightly the notion that women are naturally connected to wilderness or rural nature. It shows that some women characters in the novels consider the city as home, while others flee from the city for various reasons, "the interactions with the city and its environment(s) are complex" including a desire to escape monotonous town life.

Kongre (2021) evaluated that the prehistoric connection between humans and nature has been turned into a destructive force, and "creates a clear line between human and nonhuman, male and female, culture and nature and body and mind." (36) Ecofeminism critiques these same societal structures that impose such expectations on women and nature alike. Indu expresses a deep desire for love and happiness but has reached a point where these desires feel futile. This reflects a profound sense of disillusionment as reflected here,

"I want to be loved. I want to be happy. The cries are now stilled. Not because I am satisfied, or yet hopeless, but because such demands now seem to me to be an exercise in futility" (Deshpande, 23)

The Rigveda verse and Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* can be viewed through the lens of ecofeminism. Both texts reflect the struggles faced by women in societal norms, highlighting the need for respect and sustainability in relationships. Ecofeminism critiques patriarchal systems, emphasizing the impact of these systems on personal fulfillment and women's perception, advocating for more equitable relationships.

Roots and Shadows is a novel that critiques patriarchal structures that oppress women and exploit the environment. This supports the ecofeminist theory of Vandana Shiva by emphasizing the common source of patriarchal power. The novel's protagonist Indu is a perfect example of the submissive positions that patriarchal traditions impose on women. The story also highlights the destruction of the environment brought about by patriarchal development theories, which frequently serve as justifications for resource exploitation. Nature and women are viewed as disposable and

essential components of the prevailing patriarchal system, "Women have so far been able to appropriate, that is, make their own, the social changes to which they have been subjected passively in the course of history" (Shiva & Mies 2014, p.42). Deshpande's narrative emphasizes the complex fabric of interrelated oppressions and the significance of opposing and overthrowing these systems. The novel puts rural women's stories at the center, highlighting the value of women's voices in building just and sustainable futures.

This ecofeminist reading deepens our comprehension of the book and advances the conversation about social justice, the environment, and gender. *Roots and Shadows* of Deshpande is a fascinating assessment of the prolonged impact of societal and historical institutions on Indian women's lives. The novel adeptly places itself within the wider context of women's subjugation in India connecting to its historical past. As argued by Chakraborty (1993) "The safeguarding of the caste structure is achieved through the highly restricted movement of women or even through female seclusion. Women are regarded as gateways – literally points of entrance into the caste system" (p.579). Through the narrative's setting in rural India, Deshpande offers a microcosm of the more significant socioeconomic challenges faced by women that are structurally linked to socio-religious background and history and that is effectively portrayed in these words of Indu:

"As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive." (Deshpande, 158)

The tale illuminates the historical causes of patriarchal rule, showing how long-standing traditions and conventions still influence gender roles and power structures in modern-day India. Even Akka, at the age of twelve, got married, and at thirteen, her husband took her to live with him. Her mother-in-law starved and beat her when she tried to flee. Narmada Atya describes Akka's frantic struggle to flee the violent actions of her mother-in-law and husband.

"But I heard that twice she tried to run away...a girl of thirteen. Her mother-in-law I heard, whipped her for that and locked her up for three days. Starved her as well. And then, sent her back to her husband's room". (70)

These experiences of the characters throw light on the complex interactions that exist between modernity and tradition as well as the ways that repressive systems endure in the face of social and economic transformation. Thus, *Roots and Shadows* advances our knowledge of the social and historical contexts that support women's subjugation. It shows how historical and even prehistoric mythical legacies continue to influence the present and how resolving them is essential to attaining social justice and gender equality.

The God of Small Things: Challenging Established Power Structure

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* presents a criticism of patriarchal systems and how they affect both the environment and women. The book is in line with the ecofeminist paradigm developed by Vandana Shiva, which emphasizes the analogy between the exploitation of the environment and the subjugation of women. Ammu, the protagonist, stands for social exclusion, persistent domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, and female enslavement under patriarchal standards. As the daughters of well-educated, rich Syrian Catholic parents in Ayemenem, Ammu, pitiful characters in the fiction, is victims of patriarchy and the three generations of women portrayed in the story and her predicament resonates with Meenachal River. Just as Meenachal lost its charm and beauty, Ammu found herself withered and lost;

"They dreamed of their river.

Of the coconut trees that bent into it and watched, with coconut eyes, the boats slide by. Upstream in the mornings. Downstream in the evenings. And the dull, sullen sound of the boatmen's bamboo poles as they thudded against the dark, oiled boatwood. It was warm, the water. Greygreen. Like rippled silk.

With fish in it.

With the sky and trees in it.

And at night, the broken yellow moon in it." (Roy, p.122-123)

Kaur (2017, p154-155) outlined that Poverty and water privatization by multinational corporations create a fragile environment, especially for women, who face risks from flooding, landslides, physical strain, spinal deformities, injuries, and wild animal rape when fetching clean water.

Shiva & Mies (2014) posited that the symbiosis between humans and nature was disrupted, allowing a new man to rule over both, leading to a one-sided master-and-slave relationship between humans and nature.

"Without turning a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship between humans and nature into a one-sided, master-and-servant relationship, the bourgeois revolutions would not have been possible. Without turning foreign peoples and their lands into colonies for the White Man, the capitalist economy could not have evolved. Without violently destroying the symbiosis between man and woman, without calling woman mere animal nature, the new man could not have risen as master and lord over nature and women" (p.48)

The story also shows how development, based on a patriarchal system directly contributes to environmental deterioration, especially in Kerala's ecosystems. This ecological disaster has a significant influence on the lives of the characters, demonstrating the connection between environmental health and human well-being. *The God of Small Things* examines the sensitive relationships that exist between gender, caste, and class. It does so by providing a potent criticism of the power structures that are now in place. Further, Roy uses many symbols to resonate with patriarchal criticism as one event described, Ammu and Mammachi spent frigid winter nights in Delhi hiding in a mehndi hedge as a result of Pappachi's unpredictable return from work and their forced exile. This illustration sparks a sense of anti-eco-feminine sensibility in even elite domestic household

"Ammu had endured cold winter nights in Delhi hiding in the mehndi hedge around their house (in case people from Good Families saw them) because Pappachi had come back from work out of sorts, and beaten her and Mammachi and driven them out of their home" (Roy, p. 180-181)

Roy describes the undercurrent interactions between gender, class, and caste that mold the lives of those on the margins. The difficulties that women from lower castes confront—whose marginalization is made worse by their gender—are highlighted in the novel. It additionally emphasizes how patriarchal systems and caste/class privilege interact to maintain established power dynamics. Disenfranchised populations are disproportionately impacted by the degradation of Kerala's natural surroundings, illustrating the complex relationship between environmental problems and social and economic inequality and this fact that women of this novel are elite class not of any marginalized section of society as Medhavi & Sahay (2024) remarked "The predicaments of Mamachi, Ammu, and even of baby Kochamma are the pictures of women that address the upper layer Therefore, it can be asserted that the feminism portrayed in this novel is more akin to liberal or bourgeois feminism" (p.188-189). A criticism of the established social order, *The God of Small Things* offers insightful observations on the workings of tyranny and motivates readers to question the contemporary order. Through emphasizing the perspectives of under-represented groups, the novel presents a potent critique of the prevailing social order.

We may observe how *The God of Small Things* provides insights into the historical foundations of women's subjugation by drawing from the notions proposed by Uma Chakraborty. Caste, class, and gender stratification established India's social order, which took a long period to evolve into its complex structure. The establishment of the Brahmanical patriarchy in India was a complicated process, as evidenced by the lack of unambiguous evidence for these stratification features in archaeology studies, which are difficult to trace but reflected frequently throughout the Indian socio-cultural landscape as Chakraborty (1993) illustrates;

“The social order in India, shaped by caste, class, and gender stratification, took a long time to develop into its complex structure. Archaeological studies, which are not easily traceable, do not provide clear evidence for these stratification elements, indicating that the formation of brahmanical patriarchy in India was a complex process.” (p.580)

Roy emphasizes the subtle relationship between tradition and modernity by placing the story in postcolonial Kerala, demonstrating how the past still shapes the present.

Though the novel's undercurrents don't directly reference Vedic philosophy, *The God of Small Things* has certain resonances with the old Indian way of thinking and challenges many notions of conservative religious culturalism. Siddiqui (2022, p.42) pointed out that the caste system, as outlined in holy books like Manusmriti and Rig Veda, determined the professions of each caste based on their creation. The Vaishyas were traders, the Shudras submissive servants, the Kshatriyas warriors and kings, and the Brahmins priests and religious leaders. This assertion was portrayed potentially by Priya (2021, p.28) that “Caste-Discrimination has a religious backing. The celebration of “Purusa-Sukta” myth dictates the origin of the lingering, millennia-long Indian Caste System.” The untouchables, or Dalits, were considered outcasts. This sort of hierarchy appears throughout Roy's novel;

“Mammachi rehired Velutha as the factory carpenter and put him in charge of general maintenance. It caused a great deal of resentment among the other Touchable factory workers because, according to them, Paravans were not meant to be carpenters. And certainly, prodigal Paravans were not meant to be rehired” (Roy, p.76)

Now from the perspective of our ecofeminist lens, Roy depicts Ammu as a versatile individual who goes against social norms. She is both a victim of her circumstances and a survivor, exhibiting courage and resilience. Vedic beliefs from a feminist point of view are challenged at many levels, especially of gender and sexual notions of Vedic ideology. The Manusmriti, a Hindu legal text, is often criticized for its discriminatory stance towards women. This particular verse is a prime example of the text's negative portrayal of women. It attributes inherent negative qualities to women, such as passion, temper, and heartlessness, and blames them for potential infidelity.

Through their passion for men, through their natural temper, through natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they are guarded in this world. (Manusmriti, 9.15)

Throughout the novel, we witness Ammu's strength and resilience. Despite facing societal pressures and a restrictive marriage, she makes bold choices, such as leaving her abusive husband. This act challenges the traditional expectation of female submissiveness.

“When his bouts of violence began to include the children, and the war with Pakistan began, Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem. To everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children” (Roy, p.42)

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy, “Arundhati Roy, an author – turned activist, has passionately championed the cause of ecology” (Kongre 2021, p.37) emphasizes the subtle relationship between tradition and modernity, challenging established power structures and advocating for ecological

balance and gender equality. By providing insights into the historical and socio-cultural landscape of India, the novel encourages readers to question accepted notions of progress and development, advocating for a more equitable and environmentally conscious society. Remarkably Medhavi (2024) describes Arundhati Roy's towering personality, "Roy's writing career is but one aspect of her complex life, which is marked by political involvement, activism, and vocal support of environmental and social justice issues" (p.216) thus, the breakdown of conventional social systems coincides with the collapse of this ecological equilibrium. Roy's story subtly implies that a return to these fundamental ideas can provide a path forward for a more just and sustainable future.

Comparative Analysis and Findings

Patriarchal Critique:

Deshpande is "distracted with the position of women and society and used literature as a means of women emancipation" (Khanam 2020, p.94) penned *Roots and Shadows* to attack the patriarchal systems within a Brahmin family and sharply criticizes, revealing how these oppressive structures exploit women and dominate their lives. Indu's struggle against Akka's (though a woman), control exemplifies the destructive power of patriarchy. Similarly, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* critiques patriarchy by depicting the social exclusion, domestic abuse, and sexual exploitation faced by Ammu. Roy, "deeply committed to addressing issues of marginalization and oppression within Indian society" (Medhavi 2024, p.216) connects these personal struggles to broader societal norms and expectations, emphasizing the pervasive nature of patriarchal oppression.

Historical and Cultural Context:

In *Roots and Shadows*, Deshpande explores the historical roots of patriarchal oppression through references to Vedic philosophy and traditional gender roles, reflecting on how ancient beliefs continue to influence modern societal norms since, "the women-nature connections that hold particular importance for cultural ecofeminists are related to celebrating pre-patriarchal practices, religious and spiritual" (Kaur 2021, p.25). Similarly, Roy's *The God of Small Things* draws from the historical foundations of caste, class, and gender stratification in India, challenging conservative religious and cultural norms and highlighting the persistent influence of historical legacies on contemporary social structures.

Women's Resilience and Resistance:

certainly," Indian women as a site of resistance to hegemonic practices and attitudes that not only denigrate women in particular but also men and nonhuman entities," (p.272) Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* focuses on Indu's internal struggles and her quest for autonomy within a patriarchal family. Indu's story represents a call to return to fundamental Vedic values and reevaluate oppressive systems. In contrast, Roy's *The God of Small Things* depicts Ammu as a multifaceted individual who resists societal norms. Despite facing severe oppression, Ammu's bold choices, such as leaving her abusive husband, exemplify her resilience and challenge traditional gender roles.

Ecofeminist Perspective:

"Eco-feminist writers have tried to make environmental issues widespread through different genres like film, media, and writing preserving ecology with the help of common people." (Kongre 2021, p.38) Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* embodies ecofeminist theory by linking the exploitation of women to the exploitation of the environment, advocating for the reevaluation of conventional systems to address both social and ecological challenges. Similarly, Roy's *The God of Small Things* aligns with ecofeminist principles by drawing parallels between environmental degradation and the subjugation of women, critiquing the disruption of symbiotic human-nature relationships and advocating for a return to ecological and gender balance.

Conclusion

The comparison of Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* shows important insights into the complex links between patriarchy, ecological consciousness, with gender dynamics in Indian culture. Both works are powerful criticisms of patriarchal structures, exposing how they exploit and oppress women while also damaging the natural environment. Since "Male 'structural' position within social and religious hierarchies profoundly affected the way women were viewed" (Stanley 1997, p.40) Deshpande's story uses Vedic philosophy to illustrate the historical and cultural roots of these difficulties, depicting women as vital guardians of ecological balance whose responsibilities have been distorted by patriarchal control as rightly postulated by Naidu (2008) "It is dialogue, rather than an essentialist conflation or superficial extraction from Hindu ritual or philosophical sources that holds the hope of transformative change" (p.154). In contrast, Roy's work focuses on the junction of caste, class, and gender, utilizing the destruction of Kerala's natural environment as a metaphor for women's societal marginalization.

Medhavi & Sahay (2024, p.192) stated "Women are not only important but quite an essential part of human civilization and society. That society or community is undoubtedly sick and rotting, where women are oppressed," The heroines, Indu and Ammu, are resilient and resistant, highlighting the novel's motifs for social and environmental justice. Indu's battle inside her Brahmin family is a call to return to fundamental Vedic ideals and reconsider oppressive institutions, "She [Indu] rebels vehemently against the parameters of society and develops an extramarital affair to derive psychological satisfaction." (Khanam 2020, p.93). Conversely, Ammu's rejection of society's standards exemplifies the fortitude to question traditional gender roles. Both storylines are consistent with ecofeminist viewpoints, which relate women's exploitation to environmental degradation and advocate for a more egalitarian and sustainable future.

Finally, these two novels not only broaden our awareness of the historical and cultural conditions that sustain women's oppression, but they also encourage reconsidering existing societal standards as in line with the famous Vedic quote, "Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards" (Manu Smriti, 3.56). Deshpande and Roy's works encourage readers to envision a world in which humans and nature can coexist, and where marginalized women's voices and experiences are central to creating just and sustainable futures.

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