

## Revisiting Colonial Legacy in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things

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### Abstract

*This article is a survey of Arundhati Roy's (1997) historiographic approach in The God of Small Things. The writers shed light on Roy's complex treatment of the question of postcoloniality. The focus is the analysis of Roy's subtle presentation of the myriad interconnections of class, race, gender and culture in post-independence India and the possibility of a negotiation among them. The novel, it is argued, hinges on a seminal question: If the answer to the pressing problems of the postcolonial condition one in which the colonial power relations seem to be still very much in place, albeit in new guises – seems to be hybridity, what is the modality of this hybridity and how possible is it? The writers suggest that Roy finds the house of history still too clamorously haunted with the colonial legacy in India to house hybridity.*

**Keywords:** *The God of Small Things, Colonialism, Postcoloniality, History, Hybridity*

### 1. Introduction

Disavowing the peripheral subordination to the imperial hegemonic cultural exercises, the internationally acknowledged Indian Anglophone novel proceeds to rewrite the Indian nation and culture after the colonial rule. This postcolonial literature in a particular respect, as deftly reflected in *The God of Small Things*, offers a candid exposure of the failures of Indian independence. A substantial number of Indian Anglophone novelists (e.g. Mulk Raj Anand, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy) reclaim their origin and culture in novels mirroring their cultural heritage rather than mimicking the canonical literature of the Empire, rather than being “more English than the English” (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.3). They investigate culture, as Said (1993) notes in *Culture and Imperialism*, “as a source of identity” to engender presence and voice (xiii).

To interpret the present postcolonial literature invokes the past not only to relate disagreements about “what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past is really past, over, and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps”; this obsession “animates all sorts of discussions about influence, about blame and judgment, about present actualities and future priorities” (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.4). From this perspective, Arundhati Roy, a celebrity in Indian English novel, in her fiction and non-fiction constantly intimates defiance of any discriminatory politics in the past and present which reduce the identity of a nation, an indigenous group, or an individual to a caricature, or a ghost haunted by the past. Given her unwavering nonconformism and her political awareness, Roy represents what Aijaz Ahmad calls “a terrain of struggle rather than a unitary given ... an imaginative possibility and as a ground on which to stake a

claim" (Gopal, 2005, p.4). Roy(1997), on that account, with her subtle intelligence in her essays and her imaginative reconstruction in her fiction, takes the performative position of the 'small' disempowered while revealing the ominous significance behind the 'big' total, and unitary power politics and decisions.

Negating that there is an essential difference between fiction and non-fiction, Roy remarks that there are "simply different kinds of storytelling"; "Good fiction," she continues, "is the truest thing that ever there was. Facts are not necessarily the only truths. Facts can be fiddled with by economists and bankers. There are other kinds of truths" (Tickell, 2005, p. 18). It is this story-telling urge which compels Roy to oppose war, injustice and discrimination. In her article "Come September: Will Things Get Better after They Get Worse?" she announces that "Wars are not fought for altruistic reasons" but "for hegemony, for business" (Roy, 2003, p.8) and to this end the world is divided to good/evil, to the statements of "if you don't love us, you hate us. If you're not good, you're evil. If you're not with us, you're with terrorists" which are the instant manifestations of the "failure of the imagination" (Roy, 2003, p. 6). Roy critiques globalization as "a mutant variety of colonialism, remote controlled and digitally operated" (Barsamian, 2001).

Roy's outlook towards culture, politics, and environment is dexterously transcribed in the body of her debut Booker-prize winner novel *The God of Small Things*. In epic scale, she narrates through the perspective of small twin children, Rahel and Estha, the Indian post-independence society possessed by forces of colonial history, Hindu traditions and globalization. India, shrunk into the southern-Indian state of Kerala between 1960s and 1990s, becomes a society replete with racial and economic discriminations which scapegoats the "untouchable" Velutha, "the god of small things," and kills Sophie Mol, the Indian English cousin of the twins, implying the impossibility of true hybridity due to the contradictory and brutal exercises and self-divisions inside the country. These two pivotal traumatizing events, related in the memory fabric and circular structure of the novel, brings about family tragedies whose momentous effects paralyze the lives of Rahel and Estha.

Tickell (2005) declares that "fifty years after independence, India is still struggling with the legacy of colonialism" (p. 5) which exhibits the failure of independence to liberate its subaltern members from the paws of caste systems, patriarchal traditions, and the mimicry of colonial cultures. However, despite the fact that Roy's characters are haunted by the disturbing shadow of the colonial past, most obvious in the linguistic inheritance of British colonialism and capitalistic enterprises, Roy rewrites and challenges this heritage and breaks religious and social boundaries by interracial marriages, cross-caste affair as well as transgressive sexuality. She asserts that much of her oeuvre portrays "the relationship between power and powerlessness and the endless circular conflict they're engaged in" (as cited in Tickell, 2005, p. 9). To that end, in her delineation of the reciprocal cycle of misery, a genuine attempt to subvert the hierarchy of power positions is displayed. In this respect, Roy's (1997) *The God of Small Things* deals with "class antagonism and class exploitations, exposure of the tyranny and injustice the untouchables have to suffer without any rhyme or reason; the insult and abuse the woman of the society have to tolerate" (p. 190).

Roy's novel is a venture to narrate the turbulent history of the Indian nation, a colonial history written by the colonizers. For, as Frantz Fanon (1963) points out in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the colonizers "make history" and they are "conscious of making it" for the advantage of their mother country, not the country they are exploiting; therefore, the history they write is not "the history of the country" (p. 51). The obsession of *GSTH* with history is clear right from the beginning where it designates a house for it and allots another chapter for the brutal chastisement of its riotous low-caste offender, Velutha, who demands more than history's unjust allocations for his caste; this juxtaposition explicitly embodies a forceful confrontation between Big and Small. In the opening chapters, Chacko talking about colonizing manacles of mind, which can never be unshackled without destruction and loss, likens history to a house from which the dispossessed are excluded:

'But we can't go in,' Chacko explained, "because we've been locked out. And when we look in through the window, all we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost.

They were worst sort of war. A war that captures dream and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves." (Roy, 1997, p.52).

The twins, Rahel and Estha, concretize Chacko's metaphoric description of History by attributing it to Kari Saipu's house, the house of the old colonial Englishman who, as the narrator says, has "gone native," who is "Ayemenem's own Kurtz" and "Ayemenem his private Heart of Darkness" (ibid. 51). According to Chacko, even though Indians have won the independence struggle, they have lost their dreams to the imperial countries which now hands them back by re-dreaming them, by manipulating them with their own neo-colonial standards. In this regard, the history house is "the symbol, first of colonialism, then of neocolonialism" which "impersonates History as a destructive agent" (Célérier-Vitasse, 2008, p. 73). Juxtaposing Kari Saipu's house with heart of darkness and Kurtz enriches Chacko's metaphor, marking colonial exploitation of India in the name of civilization and culture. But what is worse is that ghosts and shadows of the house are still haunting India through its colonial cultural heritage since in the present the history house has turned into a hotel called "Heritage" (120) where tourists dwell to visit the British legacy.

In particular, the fateful heritage in the novel, be it colonial history or Hindu tradition, plays foul with the Ayemenem's house and turns it into a "theater of tragedy,"; it pillages Velutha's, Sophie Mol's and Ammu's lives and haunts Estha after the death of his beloved, Velutha, to decry the violation of order, tradition and history (Célérier-Vitasse, 2008, p. 73). And here lies the significance of the title, as Roy asserts, in the connection between 'big' and 'small': "GSTH is a book where you can connect the very smallest things to the very biggest" (Barsamian, 2001). Therefore, the chain of connections delineates the multi-layered pattern of big and small in the novel, originating from the very title which challenges "the tyranny of big things" and enunciates "creative potential of dissent" (Tickell, 2005, p. 10). Here 'the God of Big things' indicates the God of certainty and authority or, as Jesse T. Airaudi puts it, it manifests "the message of Christian missionaries; the schemes of the Marxist and other political parties; the capitalist makeover of the wonderful pickle (Indian not dill) factory" (p.14) which as official discourses of the novel lurks into configuration of small things and marginalizes the small lives of history; namely, the untouchables. *GSTH* narrates histories which have been silenced by History and erased from the national scene, evidently because of power relations.

## 2. Caste and Class

According to Binayak Roy, "the eponymous phrase" stands for Velutha who as an untouchable carpenter, caught in "the dialectic between Big and Small," repudiates his low-caste stance and embraces "freedom and dignity" of small things (p. 57). In Hindu tradition, caste is associated with "creation myth" of humankind which in the dismemberment of the primeval cosmic man into "four different castes" designates the menial part to servants (Tickell, 2005, p. 22). Thus, as the low-caste, "in the margins of caste system," servants exemplify "outcaste" or "untouchable" communities whose duties entail performing "dirty, spiritually polluting activities such as leather work, street sweeping, rubbish collection and disposing of the dead" (ibid. p. 23). Throughout the novel, the writer intimates the caste-system in the post-independence era is as strongly there as before. Mamachi remembers pre-independence time "when Paravans [untouchables] were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into Paravan's footprints..." (p. 71). In the post-independence period still "Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the house. Nobody would. They were not allowed to touch anything that touchables touched" (p. 71). Even Mamachi, who deems herself an altruist, persuades "Vellya Pappen to send him [Velutha] to the untouchables' school that her father-in-law Punnyan Kunju had founded" since Velutha in her "impenetrable touchable logic" is a talented person who could have been "an engineer" if he were not a Paravan (Roy, 1997, p. 72).

It is against this background that Velutha mutely resists being "the slave of archetypes" (Fanon, 1982, p. 34), by excelling in carpentry, in repairing radios, clocks and even in maintaining the canning machines of the factory, that he acquires the status of the god, the god of small things who later in the novel becomes the god of loss, the god of innocence as a corollary of his belief in his human essence and

his equal right of existence. The first time he perceives his common humanity is when he catches Ammu's gaze at him while he is holding Rahel in his arms and "the wrong-footed history" is off the guard:

In that brief moment, Velutha looked up and saw things that he hadn't seen before: things that had been out of bounds so far, obscured by history's blinkers. Simple things. For instance, he saw that Rahel's mother was a woman. (Roy, 1997, p. 168).

This vision endows Velutha with enough courage to undermine the caste borders by having an affair with Ammu, the mother of the twins. To employ the critical frame of Fanon, Velutha indeed prevails the "double process" of "inferiority complex" which comprises of economic status and internalization of colonizing structures which are fabricated to primitivize, decivilize, and subjugate him (Fanon, 1982, p. 43). However, he is doomed since he is betrayed by one of his own caste, his own father, who as a deputy of history reveals the cross-caste affair of his son: "Vellya Paapen told Mamachi what he had seen. He asked God's forgiveness for having spawned a monster. He offered to kill his son with his own bare hands. To destroy what he had created" (*GSTH* 75). Indoctrinated with the impurity and inferiority of his caste, Vellya Paapen abominates his son for transgressing the borderlines. The exploited person, Fanon holds, with "the atmosphere of submission and of inhibition" (Fanon, 1963, p.40) acts as the agent of the master's established order.

At its best, *GSTH* exhibits that caste discrimination as well as class distinction have not disappeared despite the vows of national leaders in the vast project of independence to destroy the colonial structures and caste boundaries. To investigate the origin, anti-colonial resistance, initiated by the struggles of peasants and indigenous minorities or subaltern groups and sustained by the middle class colonized subjects, promoting terms and mottos of Marxism for liberation, succeeded in overthrowing the British rule. Nevertheless, after the independence, intra-country, the lives and political agencies of subaltern groups were disregarded since "the configuration of the newly-liberated nation" was predicated on the interests of the "elitist bourgeois nationalists" who were "the ruling power or dominant social class" (Morton, 2003, p. 50). As a result, the silencing of the voices, lives, and histories of the lower-class and the indigenous communities were perpetuated in the re-defined politics of class, caste, and gender. Curiously, this, as Spivak has argued, occurs through dominant discourses – masterwords or grand narratives– such as Marxism which totalize the heterogeneous realities beneath the surface and subsequently does not provide any real representation of subaltern groups and the undertakings directed on their behalf (*ibid.* p. 35). Observing the central role of Marxism in postcolonial India, *GSTH* with its subaltern consciousness represents particular disempowered groups who are objectified in the Marxist representations merely in order to control the class systems in disguise since those who promulgate Marxism are the very members of bourgeoisie claiming that they are striving for the advancement of the minorities' rights whereas they are apprehensive of any losing their own advantages. In this regard, it should be noted that the intricate pattern of events, unraveling the Kerala Marxism, is reconstructed around the possessive memories of the twins which signifies a Kaleidoscopic silence at the heart of the novel or, as Diana Gittins (1998) holds, "gaps" which uncover the forgotten or denied narratives, silenced either as "deliberate exclusion or of lost memory" (p. 46). "The living silence" in the texture of the novel, Gopal notes, "prompts the telling of the story" (Gopal, 2009, p. 157).

Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha. It reached out of his head and enfolded him in its swampy arms. It rocked him to the rhythm of an ancient, fetal heartbeat. It sent its stealthy, suckered tentacles inching along the insides of his skull, hovering *the knolls and dells of his memory* [mine], dislodging old sentences, whisking them off the tip of his tongue. (Roy, 1997, p.13).

The traumatic "unspeakable" (Gopal, 2009, p. 13) enveloping Estha, in one reading, narrates the repressed memory of the betrayal of Velutha, the most faithfully loving soul doubly betrayed first by the Big god of history and its practice of caste oppression and second by Estha, the small life in the

novel. Beguiled by the conspiracy of Inspector Mathew and Baby Kochoma, Estha encounters Velutha to incriminate him:

Swollen eyes opened. Wandered. Then focused through a film of blood on a beloved child. Estha imagined that something in him smiled. Not his mouth, but some other unhurt part Of him ... . The Inspector asked his question. Estha's mouth said Yes. Childhood tiptoed out. Silence slid in like a bolt. (Roy, 1997, p. 303).

The disturbing silence of Estha, communicating "the unacceptable side of things" (Gittins, 1998, p. 47) recurs frequently in the back and forth movements of the narrative, assuming diverse hues. Velutha's account, in Estha's silence, puts forward the narrative of larger exclusive silences. As such, Velutha is ominously abandoned by the Marxist party he is alleged to, which had avowed to restore his rights of equality and humanness. When, informed of the malignant events on the run, in desperate need for support, he calls on Comrade Pillai but he is told that "it is not in the party's interests to take up" (Roy, 1997, p. 271) personal matters. Apathetically, Comrade Pillai justifies that "individual's interest is subordinate to the organization's interest," for that reason, "violating Party Disciplines means violating Party Union" (Roy, 1997, p. 271). It is this hypocrisy which entirely makes the grand narrative discourse of Marxism an empty term throughout the novel which takes no notice of the real plight of the disenfranchised's daily battered experiences; the discourse of Marxism is in fact reduced to an asset in the hands of middle class to exploit the lower-class efficiently. The widespread diffusion of Communism, the narrator formulates, may have been the result of "the high level of literacy in the state" (Roy, 1997, p. 64). She asserts

The real secret was that Communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement that never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. The Marxists worked from *within* the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to. (Roy, 1997, p. 64)

The flamboyant ridiculous gestures of Communism, as the passage illuminates, led by theoreticians and their followers solely on the level of theories and strikes, do not provide any true patronage of the subaltern. By and large, the sardonic resonance of Marxism and Communism in the novel is satirized to the point that it candidly caricatures the Marxist characters.

Chacko, one target of Roy's (1997) cutting ironies, exemplifies the middle-class property-owners; ironically he is "a self-proclaimed Marxist" (p. 63). As a factory-owner he calls pretty women working in his factory to his room "on the pretext of lecturing them on labour right and trade union law" to take advantage of them and covers up the affairs by addressing them as "comrade" and demanding to be addressed as "comrade" (Roy, 1997, p. 62). The duplicity involved in Chacko's behavior is best expressed where Ammu regards his Marxist orientation "just a case of a spoiled princeling playing comrade! Comrade! An oxford avatar of the old Zamindar mentality- a landlord forcing his attention on women who depend on him for their livelihood" (Roy, 1997, p. 63). This statement imparts that in its transition from Feudalism to colonial Capitalism and independence, India has failed in removing the borders between property owners and labour groups in the true sense of the word. His landlord mentality prompts the so-called Marxist Chacko to visit Comrade Pillai, when he overhears the unwitting words of Rahel about glimpsing the sight of Velutha in the Communist march, to cross-examine the authenticity of the hearsay. In a significant manner, Comrade Pillai, another target of Roy's derision, not only acknowledges Velutha's presence in the communist demonstration, but suggests that he is "going to cause trouble" for Chacko; hence, it is discreet to "send him off," in as much as he is a Paravan and whatever his gifts or strength, he has Paravan conditioning. In effect, he cannot be accepted by the decent people since "change is one thing. Acceptance is another" (Roy, 1997, p. 263). This is also another example of the disparity between the appearance (Marxist proclamations) and reality (hidden discriminations) which substantiates the connection between knowledge and power. In this case, it conveys that those in possession of "higher education or knowledge of Marxism," instead of revealing the camouflaged prejudices against subverting the infrastructure of class, sustain them by "trying to prevent people from understanding what is really being done to them" (Tickell, 2005, p. xiv). The power politics, ignoring the predicament of the lower-caste, then, bears witness to the "class-based



structure” of national independence which in consequence provides the foundation of advanced neo-colonial capitalism (Morton, 2003, p. 39).

### 3. Neocolonialism

To investigate the subject positions in *GSTH* in terms of capitalism and neocolonialism, Roy’s attitude can be succinctly described in two inclusive respects: one featuring the relationships and events in the childhood of the twins in Ayemenem house and the other revolving around the global marketing and consumerism which establishes a re-constructed relationship of the colonizer and the colonized. Indeed, these two facets, deftly juxtaposed in the circular structure of the novel, pointing to past and present synchronously, cite the traces of capitalist and neocolonialist subject positions.

The Ayemenem family with factory-owner Mamachi and Imperial Entomologist Pappachi is the epitome of an upper-middle class which, owning private property and a position in the ex-British governmental system, takes for granted its superior status to other groups. Their pride is specifically manifest in Mamachi’s manner of presenting her English bride to the strangers.

The bride’s maternal grandfather was my father’s carpenter. Kunjukutty Eapen? His great-grandmother’s sister was just a midwife in Trivandrum. My husband’s family used to own this whole hill. [Italics in the original] (Roy, 1997, p. 160).

The desire for a superior position is additionally projected on the icon of the commercially prosperous pickle-factory the products of which Chacko intends to sell in the overseas markets; however, the sequence of tragic events hampers the dreams of success in the marketplace. This is the panoramic view the novel offers of the roots of capitalism in the past and its global dreams and reach in the present with the same master-slave dialectic.

Elsewhere, when Rahel returns to Ayemenem after several years, she notices Estha’s aberrant walks. Mitchell (2000) in “Mad Men and Medusas” postulates that “trauma victims” lose their “capacity for memory” after the traumatic shock and afterwards what haunts them is not the memory of the event but “the perception, the re-presentation of the experience” in iconic images (p. 281). From this perspective, it can be contended that whatever Estha passes by during his strolls is represented through his unconscious and as he can stand for a haunted person by history, his perceptions picture like a camera the re-establishment of historical capitalist relationships.

He walked for hours on end ... . Someday he walked along the banks of the rivers that smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils. Other days he walked down the road. Past the new, freshly baked, iced, Gulf-money houses built by nurses, masons, wire-benders and bank clerks, who worked hard and unhappily in faraway places. Past the resentful older houses tinged green with envy, cowering their private driveways among their private rubber trees. (Roy, 1997, p. 14).

What is significant in this excerpt is that the large international organizations like World Bank with its loans have contributed to the perpetuation of the long-lasting class borders and the relations of domination here resulting in the vast-scale pollution of the river. The river symbolizes the Indian life as dominated by deeply estranged middle-class people whose main concern is to privatize the holdings, to raise their capital and subsequently to be the market of the imperial countries. Contrary to the past which motivated capitalist colonialism to exploit “the raw materials” of the colonies to manufacture them into “goods” so that they would be distributed on the home markets, in the present, after accumulation of enough capital, colonial countries have modified their “conception of the profit-earning capacity of a commercial enterprise”; now the former colonies have become markets and “the factory-owners and finance magnates” of the industrial countries “expect from their government” not “to decimate the colonial people,” but to “safeguard with the help of economic conventions their own legitimate interests” (Fanon, 1963, p. 65).

In particular, the neo-colonial capitalism, or in other words, global business and cultural

imperialism, positions “United States of America as a global economic super-power” which “has drawn the old colonial maps in the interests of multinational corporate finance” (Morton, 2003, p. 3). In this context, as Mullaney (2002) puts it, *GSTH* renders “Roy’s engagement with the politics of globalization” and also her effort to expose the “certain national governments like the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) are complicit in organization, execution and maintenance of new imperialism” (p. 15). *GSTH*, then, explores “the variety of strategies deployed by the receiving as of the sending culture in its transactions with a global culture” (p. 15). In order to send their products the neo-colonial capitalism requires a space to advertise its products which has been pervasively possible by dish antennas and satellites, promoting imperial countries’ cultures in the economically developing countries. The hegemonic relations of capitalism, in the novel, as Lutz (2009) illustrates, is embodied in the “innocuous trademark images, icons of popular culture, or objects for mass consumption” (p. 57). In the course of the novel, the “backward” (*GSTH* 23) life of the aging Baby Kochamma is interestingly the site of the desire and passion for the other and the other’s culture. Incidentally, apart from the global aspect, in regard to self-estrangement and desire, it should be noted that “positive self-concept,” endowed by the social status of the individual’s group or society produces social identity which hinders social self-alienation (Ratnasingam, 2010, p. 5). Baby Kochamma, as a member of a formerly colonized country, deeming her social identity of low international status cherishes luxurious cultures. Indeed, her deep affection for the colonizers, primarily finds expression in her love for the Orientalist Father Mulligan, who resides in Kerala to study Hindu scriptures. As an instance of assimilation, to fulfill her love, she relinquishes her religion to be a Roman Catholic and then she enters a convent to allure the Father by her devotion. However, disappointed by his lack of genuine interest in her, she quits the convent and leaves the country to study ornamental gardening so as to restrain herself through the relentless taming of nature. After Rahel’s return, aged as she becomes, Rahel discerns a mutation in Baby Kochamma which has led her to embrace the world, the world that she had renounced before:

Under the table she swung her tiny, manicured feet, like a small child on a high chair. They were puffy with edema, like little foot-shape air cushions. Wearing makeup. Wearing a lot of jewelry. (Roy, 1997, p. 21).

The reason for Baby Kochamma’s mutation, her determination to live backward, Rahel detects is her new love which is a dish antenna on the roof of the Ayemenem house. It has magnanimously bestowed on her the world on a satellite TV; thus, day after day, she follows

American NBA league games, one-day cricket and all the Grand Slam tennis tournaments. On weekdays she watched *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*, where brittle blondes with lipstick and hairstyles rigid with spray seduced androids and defended their sexual empires. Baby Kochamma loved their shiny clothes and the smart, witchy repartee. During the day, disconnected snatches of it came back to her and made her chuckle. (Roy, 1997, p. 28).

The passage clarifies how the everyday life of Baby Kochamma is commodified under capitalism (Lutz, 2009, p. 58). As it was mentioned, due to the lack of a positive self-image, she is passively captivated by the lavish American consumer culture which stocks the receiver cultures with “pre-packaged reality” (Lutz, 2009, p. 60) in order to manipulate the complex political, social and economic structures of global capitalism. Accordingly, the social order and the subject position in neo-colonial domination becomes that of the old relation of colonizer and colonized which is controlled by psychologically cryptic means. Yet, Roy, censuring the neo-colonial exercises, does not “reverse the orientalist discourse, to turn the ‘Other’ into the ‘Same’ by proving that India is as ‘enlightened,’ as ‘rational,’ as ‘civilized’ as America” (as cited in Lutz, 2009). Instead, throughout Rahel’s residence in America, she portrays a wild, uncivilized land where people are shot “through their car windows” (Roy, 1997, p. 21). As such, she turns “the ‘Same’ into the ‘Other,’” exhibiting an America which is “as irrational, brutal, undemocratic and male-oriented as India” (as cited in Lutz, 2009, p. 60).

#### 4. Women as the subaltern

Discussing so far the multiple guises of subject positions, centering on the disempowered and disenfranchised, we now dwell on another set of domination and control relations which concerns the women's question in the novel and the fact that women as the subaltern cannot speak. Overall, *GSTH* depicts a double pattern of women's lives since at the one end there are Mammachi's silent toleration of domestic violence and Baby Kochamma's culturally-disempowered position as a female who cannot openly express her love, and at the other end, there are Ammu's insurgent refutation of the patriarchal tradition in Kerala by her uncommon marriage and her cross-caste affair, as well as Rahel's diasporic marriage and transgressive sexuality. As Young (1990) declares, in *White Mythologies*, the notion of "undifferentiated colonial subject or subaltern is problematized because of the factors of class, race, and sex, which negating monolithic dominating power, create a heterogeneous field" (p. 203). In this context, women as subaltern in the novel cannot be examined merely on the grounds of sex and gender roles but the issues of race and class should also be taken into account.

Given the oppressive patriarchal structures the novel shows how a woman's social and economical agency is not welcomed, but condemned and undervalued. As such, Mammachi's thriving pickle and jam business is ignominious to the old Pappachi who resents the attention his wife receives and despises her vigor and productivity. In revenge, he beats her with a brass flower vase every night and when he knows visitors are expected, sitting on the verandah, he sews buttons that are not missing onto his shirt, only to create the impression that Mammachi neglects him in order that he changes Ayemenem view of working wives (47). As Prasad (2000a, 2000b) notes, Pappachi is "a man of Schizophrenia" who behaves like a descent man but demonstrates his male ego and bourgeois mentality when he tyrannizes his wife and child. Pappachi's daughter, Ammu, is also oppressed by his despotism: "Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a *girl*, so Ammu had no choice" other than waiting for "marriage proposal while she helped her mother with the housework" (Roy, 1997, p. 38) (*Italics added*). Nevertheless, developing a grand sense of injustice, inequality, and cruelty, Ammu escapes the suffocating home of her father by a faulty marriage in which the drunken husband offers her to his English boss for his career advantages. Frustrated, widowed, and with two children, she finds no resolution to survive as a woman but to return to her paternal house: "there was only Ayemenem now. A front verandah and a back verandah" (Roy, 1997, p. 42). In this line of self-effacement, suppression and exploitation, Baby Kochamma is also doomed by her sex and race. To a certain extent, her fated love is not heeded or taken seriously since, in the first place, as a woman she is not in the position of a subject to express her love and secondly she belongs to a colonized and 'inferior' race.

In addition to the portrayal of the inferior status of the female subaltern, the novel broaches the possibility of women's possessing a self and freedom of choice. However, it should be noted that this possibility is offered in line with the writer's more or less liberal humanist stance regarding the issue of sexuality (advocating of free love). So we are told that after seven years of self-abnegation and self-devotion to her children, Ammu sexually awakens by a deep desire for Velutha. The unlearning of patriarchal structures, the novel signifies, confers on Ammu an audacious trust in her repressed self to challenge the boundaries of love laws; the laws which lay "who should be loved, and how. And how much" (Roy, 1997, p. 33). To Mamachi (who considers Chacko's libertine relationship with women as "a Man's needs" and has "a separate entrance built" for "the object of his 'needs,'" (Roy, 1997, p. 160)), Ammu's sexual transgression is a stigma which dishonors their family reputation. Already disempowered and dismissed as a woman and then as a widow, because of her caste-breaking affair, Ammu becomes dispossessed of home. Chacko throwing Ammu out of their family house shouts:

"Get out of my house before I break every bone in your body!" *My house. My pineapples. My pickles.* (Roy, 1997, p. 214).

The narrator's ironic repetition of "My" intimates her impatience with the patriarchal possessive language and delicately questions its equity. Katrak (2006) encapsulates the impasse of the third world female protagonists in the following terms: they "are faced with a complicated mesh of power



relationships that they have internalized. As they negotiate these institutionalized prescriptions of sexual behavior, they face no-win situations: obey the dominant code and survive, even if that entails serious self-censorship; or disobey tradition, step outside the boundaries, and pay the ultimate price" (160). In the case of Ammu, she selects the second, even though at the expense of her life. In general, it is evident that "the subject position of female subaltern," as shown in the novel, is "doubly marginalized" "by virtue of relative economic disadvantage and gender subordination" (Morton, 2003, p.61).

Unlike the battered life of Ammu, Rahel's life mirrors her partial self-realization. Inheriting her mother's defiance, Rahel studies architecture and enters into the world, from a little village to a city and then to America, and marries an American. This, as Aijaz Ahmad observes, endows her with an autonomous self in the stifling world of the provincial, caste-bound gentility of her family (p. 116). On her return as a divorced woman, Rahel transgressively re-unites with his brother "to heal his psychic wounds" (p. 116). Considering male and female subject positions, Phoca (2006) argues that essentialist thinking assumes that woman is an "other" (p. 48) but Rahel challenges this by adopting both male and female subject positions and resisting fixed and stable identity which makes her the most resilient character in the novel.

In a larger context, the novel's preoccupation with the women's question stems from highly autobiographical elements. Ammu's widowhood reminds one of the divorce of Roy's parents and also her mother's (Mary Roy) forced return with the children "to her family home in the small town of Ayemenem (Tickell, 2005, p. 12). Thus, *GSTH* can be the lived experiences of Roy as a child who innocently observes how her mother "was never fully accepted back into the conservative world of rural Kerala" (Tickell, 2005, p. 12). This texture of relentless patriarchy subsequently provides the fuel for Roy's feminist portrayal of women's subalternity in *GSTH*, a novel which, as Spivak maintains, is "deeply in shadow" (as cited in Morton, 2003, p. 59), and narrates the silencing and censoring of women in the context of Postcolonial India. Significantly, here, literature becomes an arena to articulate the lives and agency of subaltern women.

The discussed subject positions, imposed historically and traditionally, signal the failures and problems of postcoloniality. Central to the thematic of the novel is the illustration of the failure to eliminate the rigid class system and patriarchal traditions as well as the fact that by their sustenance the nation has been offered to neocolonial capitalism which sets the old relations of the colonizer and the colonized. This narrative is unfolded through the tragedy of Velutha and Ammu which terminates in their miserable deaths.

## 5. Culture and Colonialism

Furthermore, the interrelated plot recounts the narrative of mimic people who as a corollary of colonial heritage and clash of cultures adopt English language and manners. In this frame of reference, Roy proposes the possibility of the fusion of races which is transcribed in the figure of Sophie Mol, Chacko's Indian-English daughter. To this end, Roy conscientiously delineates the ambivalence and contradiction of affirming and negating the culture of the other. Indeed, at every point in the novel, the desire for the other culminates in the identification with the culture of the other, which begets a space of splitting. Fanon (1982) contends that colonized people or those who have indoctrinated inferiority complex, in their encounter with the language and culture of the 'civilizing' nation, think that they are assumed civilized and elevated if they appropriate the cultural standards of the other's culture (Fanon, 1982, p. 18). Regarding this, *GSTH* presents two approaches to the English language and culture: the first is characterized by Chacko's and Baby Kochamma's manner of treating English culture and the second marks the twin's dealings with English language. Graduated from Oxford and married to an English woman, Chacko nurtures a high self-esteem supposing that he is more English than Indian: "Chacko's room was stacked from floor to ceiling with books. He had read them all and quoted long passages from them for no apparent reason... For instance, that morning as they drove out ... Chacko suddenly said, '*Gatsby turned out all right*'" (Roy, 1997, p. 38). Using Fanon, this scene represents assuming of another's culture which is an instance of a dislocation, a separation between the self and the native

culture. The narrator makes explicit Chacko's self-estrangement: "Chacko told the twins that, though he hated to admit it, they were all Anglophiles. They were a family of Anglophile" (Roy, 1997, p. 51). There is more gratification in this acknowledgement than disavowal, more affection than disinterest. Due to this passion for English language, the twins are urged by every member of the family to learn and acquire English language and literature. Quite often, they are consigned to look up "Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary" (Roy, 1997, p. 50) to learn the exact meaning of the words. Interestingly, to educate, or, to phrase it differently, to condition the twins, Baby Kochamma and Ammu obligate them to read the classics of English Literature (namely, Shakespeare's plays), not those of Indian literature. To punish the twins for breaking the 'rule' of always speaking English, Baby Kochamma coerces the twins to write a hundred times, "I will always speak in English. I will always speak in English" (Roy, 1997, p. 36).

The climax of the desire to be assimilated in the culture of the other finds resonance when Baby Kochamma, welcoming Sophie Mol, likens her to Ariel in *The Tempest*, a work which Sophie Mol, ironically, does not know of. The narrator immediately comments: "all this was of course primarily to announce her credentials to Margaret Kochamma, to set herself apart from the sweeper class" (Roy, 1997, p. 138). In this and other instances the inferiority complex diminishes the self-esteem of the Indian characters adding theatricality to their 'English' ways. In contrast to the static, mechanical, and regulatory approach to English language which the narrator tacitly criticizes, the twins' method of facing their colonial heritage is novel and dynamic. Rather than memorizing the patches of language and being dominated by them, they touch and feel the language at the level of words. For instance, Rahel examining the word boot, imaginatively thinks that it is "a lovely word. A much better word, at any rate, than sturdy. Sturdy was a terrible word. Like a dwarf's name" (p. 163). According to Anna Clarke, "Roy's choice of child protagonists and focalizers" is "a highly effective strategy" in representing "the uninhibited, playful and creative attitude" (p. 135) to deal with the language of the other which instead of colonizing rigidly, offers a dynamic linguistic power. In effect, "they enjoy making up words and breaking the rules of Grammar, and they cherish the sound of the words without even knowing their meaning" (Clarke, 2005, p. 135). By juxtaposing the adults and the twins' manner of employing the alien language Roy undertakes a regenerating cultural mission which examines and critiques filiations and affiliations so that she gives voice to her own culture. Nonetheless, her cultural enterprise is not similar to Postcolonial nationalist cultural enterprises which are contradictory because "they are both imitative and hostile to the models" they imitate (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 2). Rather, Roy by undermining the value of standards, established by the colonizer's culture, undermines the discourses of the colonial power and mimicry and hence, rejects the "fixed and immobile imitation by performatively reconstructing the language structures which blurs the borders of the native and alien languages" (p.2). This is analogous to Bhabha's (1984) theory of subversion of authority through hybridization which is a way of negotiating the borders and transcending the differences. But despite Roy's attempt to reformulate and re-define the colonial discourse, the novel shows that colonial patterns are inculcated in the unconscious of the characters, both the ex-colonized and the ex-colonizers. The best manifestation of this colonial structure is embedded in the welcoming scene in Ayemenem house when Margaret Kochamma is amazed watching Kochu Maria, the cook, taking Sophie Mol's hands in hers and raising them to her face so as to inhale deeply.

"Who's she and why's she smelling my hands?"

"She's the cook," Chacko said. "That's her way of kissing you.

"Kissing?" Sophie Mol was unconvinced, but interested.

"How marvelous!" Margaret Kochamma said. "It's a sort of sniffing! Do the men and women do it to each other too?"

She hadn't meant it to sound quite like that, and she blushed. An embarrassed schoolteacher-shaped Hole in the universe.

"Oh, all the time!" Ammu said, and it came out a little louder than the sarcastic mumble that she had intended.

"That's how we make babies" (Roy, 1997, p. 170).

Here, “the scenario of colonial difference, cultural or racial” haunts the scene to return it “to some prior, archaic image or identity” (Bhabha, 1985, p. 144). Yet, as Bhabha further explains, it is neither original due to the act of repetition that it underwrites (every repetition is a re-iteration, that is, repetition with surplus which does not allow it to correspond with original) nor identical because of the difference it inscribes between the imagined and the real. The ambivalence, therefore, interrupts the colonial positionality of the colonizer and the colonized and challenges its possibility. Under Margaret Kochamma’s gaze, the identity of Kochu Maria and mainly the Indian is fragmented in the cultural symbolism of the other which projects legends and stories onto the object of the gaze. Thus, for Ammu the scene turns into a colonial scene which provokes her psychic defense: “must we behave like some godforsaken tribe that’s just been discovered?” (Roy, 1997, p. 171)

Generally, the operation of orientalist discourse as exposed in this scene can be thoroughly summed up in Sardar’s (1999) statement: “for the western gaze, the orient offers exotic, sinful, sexual delight all wrapped in an ancient, mystical and mysterious tradition” (p. 6). As such, by imagining men and women’s encounter through sniffing, Margaret Kochamma fantasizes that she is in an exotic land where it is likely to observe different varieties of mystical sexual delights. The scene instances Said’s (1978) definition of orientalism as a discourse limning patently distinctive differences between races, civilizations, and languages as ineradicable, a discourse which “sets the real boundaries between human beings, on which races, nations, and civilizations were constructed” (p. 233). However, these constructions are predicated on an ambivalence which makes the colonial subject concurrently the same as the colonizers and also different or, in Bhabha’s words, “almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha, 1984, p. 126).

## 6. Conclusion

In the cauldron of inherent discriminatory and paradoxical practices within India and the mimicry of the culture of the other, infused with orientalism, Roy tests the possibility of a true negotiation of cultures, races and sexes, a genuine hybridity. However, the novel apparently is not overtly optimistic about this possibility. Sophie Mol, of Indian and English stock, accidentally dies and by the end of the novel the pickle factory of “Paradise Pickles and Preserves,” which metaphorically signifies “the preservation and mingling of diverse histories and memories” (Innes, 2007, p. 115), is abandoned. Revisiting the house of history – the colonial legacy – Arundhati Roy seems to have found it still too haunted to house genuine hybridity.

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