JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES – vol. 24 (2026): xx-xx. http://doi.org/10.18172/jes.6670
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FAMILIAL HEGEMONIES AND RESISTANCE IN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

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ABSTRACT. This study investigates the interplay between familial power dynamics and intersections of caste, gender, and class oppressions in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (2002). It argues that family structures serve as microcosms of societal hierarchies, significantly shaping personal development and perpetuating systemic inequalities. Through a qualitative analysis of Roy's novel, the article examines how characters experience multifaceted oppression within intimate family settings, influencing individual psyche and behaviour. Employing Spivak's strategic essentialism concept and Collins' intersectionality and matrix of domination, the study highlights resistance to interpersonal power structures. Using intersectional feminist and postcolonial theories, it demonstrates how familial subjugation reflects and reinforces broader societal oppressions based on caste, gender and class in postcolonial India. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing intimate power structures to understand and counter systematic inequalities while revealing nuanced pathways of agency and transformation.

Keywords: Familial world, intersectionality, interpersonal relationships, matrix of domination, strategic essentialism, societal hierarchies.

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HEGEMONÍAS FAMILIARES Y RESISTENCIA EN *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

RESUMEN. Este estudio examina la interacción entre las dinámicas de poder dentro de la familia y la intersección de casta, género y opresión social en la novela *The God of Small Things* de Arundhati Roy (2002). Defiende la posición de que las estructuras de la familia sirven como microcosmos de las jerarquías sociales, imponiendo de forma personal y significativa desigualdades sistémicas que se van perpetuando en el tiempo. A través de un análisis cualitativo de la novela de Roy, el artículo analiza cómo los personajes experimentan varios tipos de opresión dentro del entorno familiar íntimo, lo que les influye a nivel psicológico y conductual. Utilizando el concepto de Spivak del esencialismo estratégico y también el de la interseccionalidad y la matriz de la dominación de Collins, se hace visible la resistencia a las estructuras interpersonales de poder. A través del marco de teorías feministas y postcoloniales interseccionales, este estudio demuestra cómo el sometimiento familiar refuerza represiones sociales basadas en la casta, el género y la clase social en la India postcolonial. Los resultados del análisis enfatizan la importancia de examinar las estructuras de dominación de carácter privado para poder entender y contrarrestar desigualdades sistémicas a la vez que para revelar caminos de acción y transformación.

Palabras clave: familia, interseccionalidad, relaciones interpersonales, matriz de dominación, esencialismo estratégico, jerarquías sociales.

Received 29/03/2025

Revised version accepted 13/09/2025

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INTRODUCTION

Roy's *The God of Small Things* presents a compelling exploration of interpersonal power dynamics within an upper-caste Kerala Catholic family, where systematic oppression profoundly shapes individual experiences and relationships. Through the narratives of Ammu, Velutha, and twins Estha and Rahel, the novel reveals how intersectional caste, gender, and class systems of oppression deconstruct familial interactions. By examining these interpersonal power relations, this research discloses how such dynamics contribute to individual positioning within power structures. Ultimately, this study reveals that resistance to familial and societal oppression becomes a defining force in character development, showing the deep connection between personal agency and systematic hierarchies. From an intersectional perspective, this interpretation highlights the heterogeneous interplay of social classification that structures the character's oppression within the interpersonal hegemonic power dominations, providing insights into how power is exercised at the micro-level of everyday interactions and relationships.

The microcosm of familial power dynamics within familial contexts offers a critical entry point into a broader societal mechanism of marginalization, resistance, and colonial legacy. While postcolonial literature extensively explores themes like caste, gender, colonialism, and class discrimination, including familial relationships

and power structures, a notable gap persists in the analysis of the intricate relational implications of emerging systematic power structures and familial relationships.

Power dynamics, integral to human societies, manifest across interpersonal relationships and social structures. As Mast argues, "Power is an inherently relational concept that manifests in an interaction or relationship with another person" (2). Hall et al. conceptualize power as an umbrella term encompassing concepts like dominance, status, leadership, and authority; In contrast, these terms have distinct connotations, they all point to hierarchical structures in social interaction (qtd. in Mast 5), all of which converge in the familial interactions depicted in *The God of Small Things*. Bierstedt's seminal assertion that power dynamics are fundamental to all human societies and social interactions offers a foundational perspective for understanding how these systems of oppression are not merely external forces but deeply internalized mechanisms that shape personal experiences (730).

Moreover, power relations permeate numerous societal contexts, including familial structures, educational settings, legal and punitive systems, professional environments, military hierarchies, and economic relationships, attesting to their universal presence in human societies. Demetriou critiques sex role theory for portraying gender roles as balanced and interdependent. He argues that such a framework obscures the actual power dynamics that predominantly favour men, asserting that sex role theory "conceals and legitimizes the power that men exercise over women"(338). Similarly, Sharma conceptualizes power as "both medium and matrix", serving as an instrument of action and a structural foundation within societal institutions (127). Solomon and Michael further emphasize power's relational aspect, with dominance reflecting interaction superiority (241). Foucault illustrates the operation of power through a symbolic act where a whole object, like a ceramic piece, is broken, one part kept by the power-holder and the other given to a messenger. When these pieces are combined, they confirm the authenticity of the message and continuity of power. This act of joining fragments together symbolizes how power is maintained, completed, and made visible (22). Such symbolic performances reveal power's foundational operations, wherein, despite physical separation, the fragments maintain their essential unity as components of a singular totality. Visible and invisible powers exist in society, and visibly, power operates through authority figures in official roles, such as principals, police officers, or any other official position, while invisible powers subtly manifest in personal interactions. The hidden authority is often transmitted through close family, like fathers, uncles, or other close family members, where cultural and social norms and ingrained hierarchies unconsciously lead individuals to submit to control. Millett's influential work "Sexual Politics" displays, through extensive literary works and cultural critique, how patriarchal and societal political power structures systematically dominate women. Millett further confirms that the family serves both as a reflection of and a link to the broader society; it operates as a patriarchal institution embedded within a larger patriarchal system. Acting as an intermediary between the individual and the social order, the family enforces discipline and conformity in areas where political or other forms of authority fall short (45). Thus,

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Millett asserts that power structures rooted in patriarchy are maintained not only through formal institutions but also through personal relationships. Daily interactions between men and women effectively synthesize personal experience with political structures. The family unit thus becomes a microcosm reflecting and reinforcing broader societal power structures.

We argue that Roy's narrative approach reveals the persistence of interpersonal and hegemonic power structures within intimate family settings, where the subjugated maintain close contact with their oppressors. This perspective aligns with Foucault's assertion, highlighted by Sharma, that we should "grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects"(127). The article bridges a scholarly lacuna by investigating interpersonal dynamics, demonstrating how systematic power relations reconfigure familial interactions, individual perceptions, and collective experiences. By transforming personal relationships into sites of resistance, negotiation, and social critique, the research explores power's operation at the micro level within family units. Utilizing Patricia Collins's "Matrix of Domination" and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Strategic Essentialism", the research analyses power dynamics through a postcolonial feminist lens. This integrated methodological framework illuminates multilayered systems of oppression in familial structures while providing an analytical mechanism for understanding individual acts of resistance.

The article is structured into three interconnected sections. The first establishes the theoretical foundation, critically engaging with the matrix of domination, intersectionality, and interpersonal hegemonic power, and it also introduces strategic essentialism as an analytical tool. The second section thoroughly analyses familial oppression and resistance, examining how power structures operate and are subverted within family ecosystems. The concluding section synthesizes these insights, summarizing the research's contribution.

MATRIX OF DOMINATION AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality, coined by Crenshaw, critically examines how overlapping identities, particularly race and gender, shape the structural, political, and representational dimensions of violence experienced by women of color ("Mapping" 1244). Her analysis reveals how these intersecting identities create unique vulnerabilities and experiences that cannot be understood through single-axis frameworks ("Mapping" 1296). Crenshaw states that centring currently marginalized individuals represents the most effective strategy for resisting efforts to compartmentalize experiences and undermine collective action. She advocates for facilitating the inclusion of marginalized groups based on the principle that "When they enter, we all enter", suggesting that their liberation creates pathways for broader social transformation ("Demarginalizing" 167). Intersectionality enables scholars and activists to position marginalized issues at the centre of social justice. Collin's matrix of domination, introduced in "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment"(1999), provides a nuanced framework for

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understanding intersecting systems of discrimination and marginalization. While initially conceptualized to examine Black women's experiences in the U.S., the framework offers broader analytical utility for analyzing systematic subjugation across diverse contexts (Collins 23, 228). Collins argues that social systems like race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and age function interdependently to continuously reinforce and influence one another, creating an interconnected approach where oppression emerges from the convergence of multiple discriminatory forces rather than from a single type (Collins 18, 229).

The matrix of dominations, on the other hand, is conceptualized as the overarching structure of hierarchical power within a society. It is defined by the intersectionality of social identities, wherein individuals are positioned simultaneously across multiple social identities, producing differentiated experiences of both privilege and oppression. Each specific matrix is characterized by: (1) a unique configuration of intersecting systems of oppression such as race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and age and (2) a particular organization of power domains (Collins 246, 299). This framework delineates four interconnected domains of power: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. These domains respectively organize, manage, justify, and instantiate oppression through daily interactions (Collins 276). As Limpangog notes, this theoretical apparatus also encompasses women's self-identity formation through individual and collective activism aimed at achieving social justice (1). The intersection of social locations within these domains generates distinct group histories and experiences of marginalization (Collins 246).

The matrix's theoretical robustness is enhanced by intersectionality theory, which illuminates how multiple identity factors, such as race, gender, and sexuality, interact to shape discriminatory experiences. This integrated approach demonstrates that oppression operates through the simultaneous interaction of various social categories rather than through a single channel (Elias 164; Collins 18). The interpersonal and hegemonic domains prove particularly salient for analyzing how systematic oppression manifests in daily interactions, revealing the complex interplay between institutional power structures and individual acts of resistance.

INTERPERSONAL HEGEMONIES OF POWER

Scholars have applied several theoretical frameworks to investigate interpersonal relationships and clarify the intricacies of human relations. These frameworks span multiple disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and communication studies, each offering insights into the multifaceted nature of these relationships. Sturm and Antonakis (139) define interpersonal power as “Having the discretion and the means to asymmetrically enforce one's will over others”. Power imbalances in everyday interactions often emerge initially rather than being predetermined, and hierarchies develop through social interactions, designing the nature of relationships as individuals communicate with one another (Mast 4). The matrix of domination posits that various forms of oppression intersect and reinforce one another, creating a

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complex web of power relations that cannot be fully understood through traditional, unidimensional analyses (Collins 203). The emphasis on both individual and collective impacts of intersecting oppressions allows for more comprehensive scrutiny of social dynamics. Anand (96) rightly argues that the dominant social groups frequently manipulate interpretations of the natural world to reinforce their authority. These groups aim to present their power structures as inherent and inevitable by attributing social and cultural meanings to natural phenomena to justify power hierarchies. This calculated strategy legitimizes hegemonic systems, allowing the ruling class to maintain their grip on power under the guise of natural order. Interpersonal relations continue through the hegemonies of power within the dominations. Collins asserts that dominant groups maintain power by propagating "common sense" ideologies that permeate cultural norms, values, and everyday practices (Collins 284). This hegemonic process normalizes oppressive structures, making them difficult to identify and challenge for both the oppressed and the oppressors. Internalizing these ideologies within daily routines further complicates efforts to resist or subvert existing power structures.

STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM

Within the framework of intersectionality and the matrix of domination, Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism emerges as a powerful tool for resistance. Essentialism, as defined by Eide, suggests that members of specific groups share inherent characteristics, often applied to categories like race and nationality. However, Eide argues that essentialist notions can be strategically employed in advocacy and liberation movements, with groups deliberately adopting imposed essentialist views to achieve specific goals (66). Ryazanov and Nicholas (2018), in their article "The Strategic Value of Essentialism", further address essentialism as the belief in a fixed essence of individuals or groups, which can yield positive or negative effects. Their findings signify that essentialist thinking amplifies prejudice and intolerance. When individuals conceptualize certain behaviours or traits as biologically unchangeable, they perceive others as fundamentally different or inferior, legitimizing discriminatory attitudes. At the same time, essentialism diminishes the perception of individual agency over actions. When people view behaviours as uncontrollable, they assign less blame and exhibit greater compassion. The authors emphasize that essentializing positive qualities can be beneficial, while essentializing negative traits proves harmful. They note that essentialism is not a rigid cognitive style but a flexible resource strategically applied to reduce blame or foster positive identities.

Spivak coined the idea of strategic essentialism in her essay titled 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' (1998), defining it as a temporary, goal-oriented strategy used by subalterns to achieve collective objectives. Eide explains that minority groups may present a simplified, unified group identity to influence the mainstream, consciously employing essentialist notions despite internal differences (76). As Ilhaam notes, strategic essentialists deliberately separate the

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subaltern identities from their essentialized identity (96), and Morton highlights Spivak's criticism of binary thinking, which aligns with the negative portrayal of oppressed groups, such as women in the working class and subalterns (74). In Roy's narrative, strategic essentialism manifests in the relationships among Ammu, Velutha, and the twins Estha and Rahel, who challenge and reinterpret essentialist notions of caste and social hierarchy. Their relationships reflect acts of resistance that question entrenched power structures and highlight broader societal conflicts. These interactions demonstrate how individual actions can subvert societal norms and reshape power dynamics on a smaller scale. Strategic essentialism counters the hegemonic domain of power, which sustains dominance through cultural, colonial, and ideological means, shaping societal norms and values to benefit dominant groups. By applying this concept, individuals resist systematic oppression, even within the limits of personal circumstances and relationships.

In Roy's work, the matrix of domination and strategic essentialism intersect to offer a nuanced understanding of societal dynamics, personal struggles, and resistance. While the matrix exposes structural oppression in familial interactions, strategic essentialism provides a focused method for undermining these systems. These concepts illuminate how characters navigate social hierarchies, bridging personal experiences with institutionalized discrimination and emphasizing the power structures inherent in familial and societal interactions.

INTERPERSONAL HEGEMONIC RELATIONSHIPS AND FAMILIAL OPPRESSION

The caste system functions as a hierarchical structure of social stratification. It creates a ranked order where an individual's position correlates with their perceived worth and influence. As one ascends this social ladder, one's status, respect, and authority increase. Conversely, lower-level people experience diminished power, dignity, and social standing. (Mandal 5). The novel masterfully illustrates the uncompromising nature of these caste-based relationships through the characters' interactions. Roy lays bare the vast differences between castes, revealing how deeply ingrained social norms dictate the terms of engagement, from fleeting encounters to lifelong bonds; every relationship bears the indelible mark of caste identity.

Influential societal groups often shape cultural perceptions of nature, strategically framing their dominance as natural and justified to maintain control over others (Anand 96). Roy's narrative exposes the relationship between the two classes in the interwoven nature of caste-based discrimination, even in the face of religious conversion. The Paravan community's embrace of Christianity, ostensibly to escape untouchability, fails to dismantle existing social boundaries, and this is evidenced by the segregation of churches and the exclusion of Christian Paravans from post-independence benefits due to their perceived caste-lessness (Roy 74). These practices underline the resilience of social hierarchies in the face of attempted transformation. Roy's work proves that caste still plays a strong role in shaping societal structures and individual experiences. It challenges readers to confront the

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complex realities of a system that continues to define interpersonal dynamics in many communities.

The novel represents various manifestations of caste-based relational oppression, from spatial segregation to economic discrimination. The systematic exclusion of Paravans manifests through rigid restrictions on their movement and appearance: "Paravans were not allowed to walk on public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies, not allowed to carry umbrellas" (Roy 74). This spatial segregation extends to domestic spaces, where, despite Velutha's skills and knowledge, Pappachi refuses to allow Paravans into the house: "Velutha would come with Vellya Paapen to the back entrance…Pappachi would not allow Paravans into the House. Nobody would" (Roy 73). Additionally, the differential treatment of Velutha in the workplace exemplifies the multifaceted nature of social exclusion: "Velutha knew more about the machines in the factory than anyone else (Roy 75), yet, "Mammachi paid Velutha less than she would a Touchable carpenter but more than she would a Paravan" (Roy 77). These instances align with Collins' concept of hegemony, wherein dominant groups maintain power by propagating "common sense" ideas that justify their rule (Collins 286). Particularly striking is the internalization of oppressive structures by the oppressed, as exemplified by Vellya Paapen's attitudes. As an "Old World Paravan", Paapen has witnessed generations of discrimination against his caste "Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprint" (Roy 73-74). Nevertheless, rather than resisting this injustice, he meekly accepts the actions of the upper-caste Ipe family with gratitude, for Paapen views the ongoing discrimination as 'normal' and 'commonsense,' reflecting the firmly established nature of these social hierarchies and hegemonies. This personalization manifests in Paapen's passive acceptance of his lower status, for he does not question or challenge the unfair treatment he receives but instead sees it as an inevitable and acceptable fact of societal life. His disposition signifies how prolonged oppression can lead the oppressed to perpetuate the very systems that subjugate them unconsciously. Paapen's mindset starkly contrasts with more modern perspectives that recognize and resist such discrimination, for he feels uncomfortable with his son Velutha's "lack of hesitation" (Roy 76), which illustrates the deep-seated nature of social norms and the challenges in overcoming them. The dehumanizing attitudes towards the Paravans are exemplified in Baby Kochamma's claim that they possess a "special smell" (Roy 78). These attitudes culminate in her false accusation against Velutha, alleging his rape of Ammu and the murder of Sophie Mol (Roy 259). The ready acceptance of these allegations by law enforcement amplifies the systemic bias against lower castes within the justice system. Velutha's subsequent arrest, beating, and death serve as a stark illustration of the power imbalance between castes and the tragic consequences of entrenched social hierarchies. As insightfully observed by Lutz, Velutha's murder reveals human history as a violent process of domination, while human nature is reflected in the drive for power, exemplified by monopoly capitalism (72).

The narrative skillfully weaves together these various threads of social inequality, demonstrating how external factors such as caste and class intersect with internal

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gender dynamics to create a complex web of relationships within the Ipe family. By doing so, the novel provides a compelling exploration of the mechanisms of societal power structures that influence and shape individual lives and family dynamics. Further, it accentuates the continuation of the intolerable executions despite formal changes in religious structures and identifies the necessity for a complex awareness that focuses on the manner in which social hierarchies and powers are maintained and reproduced through day-to-day communications and cultural practices.

Hegemonic forces use interpersonal dynamics to legitimize oppression through relationship manipulation, hence establishing power systems within the familial world. The Ipe family, a traditional upper-caste Orthodox Syrian community, epitomizes the normalization of patriarchal and gender-based discrimination in everyday communications and interactions. Ojha rightly affirms that patriarchy shapes gender ideology in the Ayemenem House through culture, caste, class, and gender awareness, affecting each household member's life (121-122). Tickell observes that Roy's depiction of the Kathakali performance is a powerful commentary on the persistent normalization of patriarchal domination (84). The portrayal of the Mahabharata drama exposes how oppression permeates the mythological narrative and contemporary reality. As the night-long performance concludes, Tickell notes a deft transition from the stylized violence within the play to the stark reality of domestic abuse. The kathakali actors, who moments before embodied mythical heroes, remove their elaborate costumes only to return home and perpetrate violence against their wives. This juxtaposition, Tickell argues, illustrates the seamless continuity of patriarchal oppression from the realm of cultural performance to everyday life, blurring the boundaries between theatrical representation and lived experience, thus normalizing the exploitive environment (84). Pappachi, the family patriarch, serves as a compelling embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, and the author's portrayal of him as "always been a jealous man" (Roy 47) illuminates how male insecurity often underpins oppressive behaviour. His response to Mammachi's success in pickle-making illustrates the rigid gender roles prevalent in Indian society during this period. Mammachi manages the business remarkably well, while blind, yet Pappachi's refusal to contribute reflects broader societal attitudes that devalue women's labour and achievements. The narrative depicts domestic violence within the Ipe poignantly. Pappachi routinely abuses Mammachi physically, halted only by their son Chacko's intervention, which exemplifies how male violence functions as a tool to maintain gender hierarchies within the family unit "Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase" (Roy 47-48). This portrayal aligns with feminist scholarship on the role of violence in reinforcing patriarchal control (Dobash and Dobash). The novel also explores more subtle forms of oppression, such as Pappachi's decision to end Mammachi's violin lessons upon discovering her talent. This act of suppression reveals the systematic ways in which women's potential is curtailed when it threatens male superiority. Such instances resonate with broader patterns of gender discrimination in educational and professional spheres (Connell).

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The narrative employs Pappachi's reactions to challenges to his authority as a means to critique cultural notions of male supremacy in Indian society. His purchase and parading of a Plymouth car, which he forbids others from using, symbolizes his attempt to reassert dominance after Chacko's intervention (Roy 49-50). Similarly, his public display of sewing his own buttons serves as a manipulative tactic to portray himself as neglected, thereby maintaining his patriarchal status. This manipulation exemplifies how those in power exploit societal expectations and sympathy to preserve their position, even as their authority wanes. The interpersonal dynamics within the Ipe family illuminate how authority becomes concentrated in one segment of society, allowing for the domination of others. Mammachi's self-subjugation of her unequal status, evidenced by her reported feelings of missing Pappachi after his death despite his abuse, "She was used to having him slouching around the pickle factory, and used to being beaten from time to time" (Roy 50), highlights the complex psychological effects of long-term subjugation. This phenomenon resonates with theories of internalized oppression, where marginalized individuals come to accept and perpetuate the very systems that oppress them. Power structures achieve dominance by infiltrating social conventions, organizational practice, and bureaucratic procedures, until society accepts them as common sense. Dominant groups present their interests as universal benefits, leading oppressed groups to internalize these interests and reduce potential resistance (Pyke 556).

The account extends beyond the marital relationship to explore how patriarchal power structures impact parent-child relationships, particularly between Pappachi and his daughter Ammu. It portrays Pappachi as a figure who carefully cultivates a public image of generosity and sophistication while privately subjecting his family to abuse and humiliation. This duality features the multifaceted nature of patriarchal power dynamics within familial units. Pappachi's cruelty manifests in both physical violence and emotional manipulation, as evidenced by his destruction of Ammu's favourite gumboots and his "cold, flat eyes" (Roy 181). These actions serve to reinforce the power imbalance within their relationship and contribute to the emotional trauma experienced by female family members. The novel critically examines how patriarchal norms limit women's educational and professional opportunities. Pappachi's belief that higher education is unnecessary for women reflects instilled gender biases prevalent in the depicted society. This attitude effectively curtails Ammu's academic pursuits and, consequently, her potential for personal and professional growth.

Ammu's desire to escape from Ayemenem is a direct response to the stifling environment created by her "ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother" (Roy 39) and the oppressive environment created by her parents. However, this pursuit of liberation ironically leads her into another form of male dominance through marriage. Further, her marriage is presented as a pragmatic decision rather than an emotional one, as she "calculated the odds and accepted" her husband (Roy 39); this foregrounds the transactional nature of the union, revealing the constrained choices available to women in a society that prioritizes marriage over personal

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fulfilment. The novel explores the intersection of workplace exploitation and marital subjugation through the character of Mr Hollick, who suggests that Baba "send his wife Ammu to him to be 'looked after'" in exchange for job security (Roy 42). This incident catalyzes Ammu's decision to leave her abusive marriage, forcing her to return to the home she had previously sought to escape.

The description of Ammu's return reveals the precarious position of divorced women in traditional Indian societies. It illustrates the pervasive scepticism and lack of support faced by women who leave abusive marriages through Pappachi's disbelief in Ammu's story and Baby Kochamma's assertion that "a divorced daughter from an inter-community marriage has no place anywhere" (Roy 45). This attitude exemplifies the societal stigma attached to divorce, particularly in cases of inter-community marriages. The novel contrasts the treatment of male and female family members, highlighting the gender-based disparities in opportunities and support. While Pappachi sends Chacko abroad for education and Mammachi consistently supports him, Ammu faces rejection and limited prospects. By exposing these entrenched power dynamics, the narrative challenges readers to question the 'common sense' assumptions that underpin patriarchal societies. Her narrative compels readers to recognize how seemingly natural or traditional family structures often mask deeply rooted systems of oppression and control the ways in which interpersonal hegemonies of common sense might be silently shaping their lives and relationships.

The novel delves into the experiences of twins Estha and Rahel, exploring their relationship with their mother Ammu and other family members to reveal complex power structures and societal norms. The Ipe family serves as the primary socializing agent for the twins, transmitting cultural norms and societal expectations that marginalize the twins' status within the family hierarchy. Roy demonstrates this marginalization through Rahel's awareness of her peripheral role: "Rahel looked around her and saw that she was in a play. But she had only a small part to play" (172). Baby Kochamma deliberately engages in exclusionary conversations to reinforce Ammu and her children's peripheral position "Ammu…reluctant to return to the dinner table where the conversation circled around the white child…or Baby Kochamma's conversation that was designed to exclude Ammu and her children, to inform them of their place in the scheme of things" (Roy 329). Mammachi further emphasizes this bias by equating the twins' situation with that of Sophie Mol, suggesting they all suffer from having divorced parents "Mammachi said that what her grandchildren suffered from was far worse than Inbreeding. She meant having parents who were divorced" (Roy 61). The novel highlights the rarity of positive interactions between the twins and other family members. Chacko's occasional praise stands out as an exception (Roy 62), while Rahel's singular moment of camaraderie with Baby Kochamma during a shared washroom experience in Cochin underscores the scarcity of such connections (Roy 95). The narrative contrasts the family's treatment of Estha and Rahel with their preferential attitude towards Sophie Mol, revealing underlying gender-based disparities. Despite both being children of divorced parents, Sophie Mol receives preferential treatment as Chacko's daughter.

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This is illustrated through the family's grand preparations for Sophie Mol's arrival, including a cake (Roy 178) and Mammachi's welcome (Roy 173). Even Kochu Maria, the cook, extends preferential treatment to Sophie Mol, referring to her as "the beautiful girl" (Roy 179) while explicitly telling Estha and Rahel they do not belong "Tell your mother to take you to your father's house, she said. 'There you can break as many beds as you like. These aren't your beds. This isn't your house" (Roy 83).

The novel contrasts the family's general treatment and the mother's relationship with her twins. The author portrays the mother as fiercely protective, drawing a vivid comparison between the twins and "small frogs engrossed in each other, unaware of the highway full of traffic" (Roy 43). Their bond is described in terms of "pure ecstasy" and "genuine love" (Roy 221), allowing for uninhibited expressions of affection. The mother's defence of her children against her aunt's characterizations of them as deceitful and unmanageable reinforces her dual role as both mother and father figure in their lives "Esthappen and Rahel said: 'Because you're our Ammu and our Baba and you love us Double.' 'More than Double,' said Ammu" (Roy 149). This exchange reveals how Ammu assumes both traditional parental roles while intensifying her emotional commitment to compensate for their father's absence. The narrative introduces Velutha as another significant figure in the twins' lives, offering genuine affection and acceptance. His interactions with the children are characterized by ease, comfort, and physical affection (Roy 175-176). His presence allows the twins to experience aspects of childhood otherwise constrained by their family dynamics (Roy 79). The narration establishes a comparison between Velutha's position as an outsider in a caste-based society and the marginalization of Ammu and her twins within their family, creating a natural affinity between them. The interpersonal hegemonic relationships play a significant role in moulding twin's sense of self and comprehension of their place within their family. The narrative upholds how the family's differential treatment, conditioned on gender and societal expectations and rules, impacts the perception and development of the children.

Interpersonal hegemonic powers within the familial world generate both oppression and resistance. Ammu, her twins Estha and Rahel, and Velutha evince this phenomenon, demonstrating resolute resistance to societal pressures for conformity and "normalization", and rather than complying with designated subservient roles within the stratified social structure, they subvert subordination by employing the concept of strategic essentialism as an instrument to question the power dominations.

RESISTANCE AND A STRATEGIC RECONSTRUCTION

The God of Small Things describes the diverse struggles against unfair intersecting oppressive systems as well as the simultaneous pursuit of autonomy, acceptance, and identity formation within a restrictive socio-cultural environment through the interconnected lives of Ammu, Velutha, and the twins Estha and Rahel. We employ Spivak's theory of strategic essentialism as a valuable framework to analyze the ways in which these marginalized people resist their circumstances. We argue that the

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character's actions authentically represent Spivak's theory, showing how oppressed people adopt essentialist identities to confront established power structures.

The union of Ammu and Velutha marks a conscious violation of caste boundaries, with both characters momentarily abandoning their socially predetermined roles to engage in a forbidden relationship, which indicates strategic essentialism in action. Ammu confronts multiple layers of discrimination due to her divorced status and inter-caste relationship, and she finds solace in Velutha, recognizing and identifying their shared bond imposed by their mutual anger against an unjust system. The author depicts Ammu's longing for freedom through her hope that Velutha, like her, had raised his flag in defiance against the "smug" and "ordered world" (Roy 176). Ammu's attraction to Velutha stems from their shared experience of societal rejection and her deprivation of family relationships. The novel presents the decision to "love him in the night, the man her children loved by day" (Roy 202) as a conscious violation of social boundaries. Her romantic forbidden relationship with Velutha, a Paravan, exemplifies a strategic deployment of her identity as a woman, transcending her caste status to challenge the rigid social hierarchy, actively challenging caste-based segregation, and asserting her autonomy. This act of defiance serves as a means for Ammu to reclaim her identity beyond the restrictive confines of her prescribed social role.

Velutha's acceptance of Ammu "as a woman" rather than as a member of a higher caste demonstrates his own strategic navigation of social barriers. Their bilateral understanding facilitates a realization that traditional barriers have been dissolved, eliminating the necessity for him to present gifts in their palm to avoid physical contact. Their union and interaction mirror the reciprocal necessity for consolation in a world lacking freedom, love, and familial connection. To attain acceptance, respect, and economic independence, Velutha uses his exceptional skills as a carpenter to transcend and challenge the limitations inflicted by the caste system. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha exemplifies strategic essentialism in action, as their forbidden bond defies the rigid caste-based notions of purity and pollution. Through their actions, they counter essentialist ideologies that maintain hierarchies, unearthing the constructed nature of these social beliefs. In doing so, they reveal how marginalized individuals can strategically resist dominations.

Strategic essentialism is evident in the lives of the twins, Estha and Rahel, for their childhood bond and unity serve as a coping mechanism, while their adult reunion and physical intimacy represent a complex manifestation of this strategy. The childhood forced traumatic parting deeply influences their personal development and life trajectories. Estha's response to the life-long trauma is particularly visible, for he retreats and withdraws himself into silence and forsakes his formal education, instead submerging himself in domestic errands within his father's household. Roy displays his state: "Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha. It reached out of his head and enfolded him in its swampy arms" (11). His domestic attention and silence advocate a protective retreat, a coping strategy to keep himself from the complexities of the outer world and unresolved agony.

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Rahel's responses to their mutual experience of rejection and trauma differ from that of Estha's retreat into silence. Her life resembles a pattern of unsteadiness, particularly noticeable in her behavioural problems, which indicate difficulty accommodating to regimented environments and maintaining long-lasting connections or relationships. This continues into adulthood, leading to an unsuccessful marriage and disruption in her career, which may be related to the early severance of her twin bond with Estha and disturbances within her immediate family.

The narrative sheds light on the creation of the twin's insular world as a reply to their estranged position within a conservative family structure. Roy personifies the twins Estha and Rahel through the story as possessing "one soul" (Roy 40), stressing their profound bond. The author describes their self-conceptualization as a collective "Me" and individually as "We" or "Us", embodying physically distinct yet interconnected identities (Roy 2). This feature aligns with the concept of strategic essentialism, as the twins forge a sense of belonging and identity separate from their oppressive social environment. The novel foregrounds the twin's intuitive awareness of each other's presence and needs; Roy employs this affiliation through the Cochin hotel incident, where Rahel opens the door for Estha without him knocking when instructed to sleep in Chacko's room (119). By weaving together this shared connection, Estha and Rahel create a barrier against the external forces and traumas they encounter.

Roy depicts the evolution of the twin's strategy over time, culminating in their adult reunion and physical consummation of their relationships. She frames this act as a direct challenge to the "Love Laws" (328), exposing it as a reclamation of their mutual identity in defiance of social norms. The author affirms, "Once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much" (328). In the "quietness" and "emptiness" (327) of their encounter, Estha and Rahel engage in an act that simultaneously represents a rejection of the societal norms that failed to protect them in childhood and a reclamation of their shared identity. At the climax of their union, the twins exhibit resistance, challenging the societal standards and expectations and the very family structures that reject and isolate them. Moreover, this ultimate union serves as a response to regaining their identities and finding themselves in each other as one body. Through the association between Rahel and Estha and that of Ammu and Velutha, the narration highlights how the subjugated and rejected individuals overcome societal constraints, and by comparing these two relationships, the story powerfully conveys that a sincere and genuine emotional bond can emerge from relationships that society considers forbidden. It highlights how meaningful interpersonal connections confront prevailing norms and simultaneously offer emotional and psychological refuge to individuals within complex societal landscapes.

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CONCLUSION

Our study presents the relationship between familial interpersonal hegemonic power dominations and the societal systems of subjugation, rejection, and discrimination in *The God of Small Things,* set in 1960s Kerala. Through the perspective of Roy's characters, this research demonstrates how Ammu, Velutha, Estha and Rahel strategically resist systematic oppression by transgressing deeply entrenched social boundaries. Utilizing Collins's Matrix of Domination and Spivak's Strategic Essentialism, the study unearths how the characters challenge the intersecting power structures of caste, class, and familial expectations through their radical acts of intimacy and connection that are not merely personal, emotional choices but bold, subversive acts that disrupt social taboos. Their relationships cross caste lines, defying familial norms of resistance that expose the complex mechanisms of domination in postcolonial Kerala. Despite experiencing tragic consequences, especially in the case of Ammu and Velutha, the characters' narratives illuminate the transformative potential of individual agency within oppressive systems. Their stories reveal that resistance is not defined by ultimate victory but by the persistent, strategic disruption of hegemonic power structures. By embracing what society rejects, forbidden love, and unconventional familial bonds, these characters show how personal acts of defiance can become profound critiques of power in the face of overwhelming social constraints.

This analysis underscores the relevance of illustrating power structures within the context of persistent global inequalities based on caste, religion, and class. By exploring how societal powers intersect with familial relations to exert domination and discrimination, our study establishes a connection between these robust structures in the marginalization and resistance of the oppressed. However, our study is limited to interpersonal and hegemonic power dynamics for in-depth analysis and refrains from comparative research, which could strengthen the argument for a comprehensive examination of Roy's text; future research might explore this dimension. Despite these limitations, our research yields results that help us comprehend familial relations. Moreover, this study opens avenues for future research into the intricate relationships between personal experiences, familial structures, and societal hierarchies across diverse cultural contexts.

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