

## **The Politics of Feminism in the Eyes of Postcolonial Studies**

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### **Abstract**

*Women struggle to find themselves in postcolonial societies. They release their voices in the face of patriarchal systems, oppression, and gender discrimination. Women's empowerment leads to more modern, equal, and well-governed societies. Numerous researchers have addressed this issue in depth. However, comparing Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is never done before. The current paper investigates double oppression and hybridity in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Postcolonial and feminist criticism are applied. In addition, this paper shows how women in postcolonial society fight their battles in different fields of life against patriarchal systems, systematic oppression, and even their own families. In *Nervous Conditions*, the writer depicts the dilemma of African women like Tambu and Nyasha under the impact of patriarchal society and family traditions as well as the colonialism represented by the British authorities in the state of Zimbabwe. While in *God of Small Things*, women also face different kinds of abuse by family and the patriarchal society. Many characters are oppressed by their fathers, brothers, and patriarchal society, such as Ammu and Mammachi.*

**Keywords:** *Feminism, Postcolonialism, Double oppression, Hybridity*

### **1. Introduction**

A middle ground can be seen between feminism and post-colonialism when it comes to showing the voice of the oppressed. Imperialism and patriarchy include control of their subjects. The imperialist system imposes control and submission on the colonised; the same applies to the patriarchal system as it imposes control and submission over women. Feminism refuses the patriarchal system's control over women in form and substance; the same is valid for post-colonial proportions, where it refuses the domination of one group at the expense of another (Ashcroft, el, .2007, p.93).

*Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga describes the hardship colonised Rhodesia women suffered. The patriarchal system has prohibited women from achieving emancipation and being more than just submissive, industrious spouses. Women who depart from this cultural standard in these societies are often ostracised. An illustration of this is how

the community regards the various genders. Due to their impending marriage, women guide to learn how to do homework as early as possible. In contrast to women, males do not have this responsibility since they are expected to be educated and provide for their families.

Arundhati Roy significantly impacts the evolution of feminist works by including new subjects and emphasising concerns affecting women. She was born in 1961 in Meghalaya, India. She got awarded the Booker Prize for the same novel in 1997. In a male-dominated culture, *The God of Small Things* accurately depicts the predicament of Indian women, their enormous suffering, persecution, and unfair humiliation. It depicts the women's continuous quest for a sense of self-worth in a community that is entirely hostile. Several trials and tribulations characterise a typical Indian woman's social structure. It is evident in many female characters, including Ammu, Mammachi, and Rahel.

## **2. Double oppression**

The colonial system in the novel *nervous conditions* leads the male characters to deal with women terribly. At the beginning of the novel, the patriarchal background can note since Tambu begins to justify her situation because of the demise of Nhamo "I was not sorry when my brother died. Nor am I apologising for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling" (Dangarembga, 1988, p.1). The main reason for Tambo continuing her education is the death of Nhamo, as the opportunity appears to leave the patriarchal community and get the education she desires. Tambu has been physically and verbally abused by other male characters, especially her brother Nhamo and her father, John. Nhamo, being the only son in the family, receives many benefits, unlike the rest of his sisters, due to their gender. This leads to Nhamo's sense of superiority, as he distinguishes himself from his sisters to create an oppressive mentality towards Tambo. Frantz Fanon states, "[i]f this suppressed fury fails to find an outlet, it turns in a vacuum and devastates the oppressed creatures themselves" (1961, p.17). Tambu recognises that education is her departure from the patriarchal system that has dominated her for a long time.

There are significant differences between the rights of women and men in the novel; for example, Nahmo can keep the family name because he has an education, but Tambu has to wait for a groom according to tradition, which deprives her of many opportunities, the most important of which is to get an education. Husbands take advantage of their wives by taking their monthly dues, as shown in this quote "[t]hat they surrender their salaries at the end of each month" (Dangarembga, 1988, p.5). Husbands obsess over controlling their wives for fear of liberating them even though they live in the modern era. Tambo feels sorry for Maiguru when she learns that she is not getting her dues as a result of her husband's exploitation of her, as this quote explains, "I felt sorry for Maiguru because she could not use the money she earned for her own purposes and had been prevented by marriage from doing the things she wanted to do" (Dangarembga, 1988, p.103). Tambus' uncle Babamukuru is the dominant and the head of the family. He is considered to adhere to parental authority, where dominance is the most essential factor in the failure of women to obtain their independence. In addition, Tambu's mother, Mainini, as it seems, has been influenced by the patriarchal

community, as she says: “[t]his business of womanhood is a heavy burden” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.16).

According to Ann Smith women attempt to combat the oppression to which they are exposed in various ways and to varying degrees of success. (2000, p.246) The extent to which women are affected and accustomed to the social criteria dominated by the male community, especially mature ladies, as is the case with Mainini. Therefore, women could not fight against the patriarchy; they could not do much but rather surrender. They are abandoning themselves as it seems routine for them to endure the oppression of the male community, unlike the younger generation of women, who are always suspicious of patriarchy, like Nyasha and Tambu. Jeremiah Tambo’s father is fiercely opposed to studying his daughter, as he supports the idea of not educating her because she will marry, and this does not help him, saying: “Have you ever heard of a woman that remains in her father’s house? ... She will meet a young man and I will have lost everything” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.30). If Tambo succeeds in her studies and earns money from that in the future, it will not be in the father's interest but rather in the interest of the husband and his family. The great contradiction can be seen in patriarchal societies, as Jeremiah sends his son for education. Still, at the same time, he does not accept the education of his daughters, but they must wait for their future husbands. “The victimisation, I saw, was universal. It did not depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition” (Dangarembga, 1988, p.118). In the previous quote, Tambu realises that what is happening is not only with her but that the matter is global too, where males desire to control women and their choice. In addition, there is no relation between a person's economic or educational standing with what the male society does or wants. In their pursuit of self-actualisation and fulfilment, women were hindered by the British colonial regime's oppressions and ideals as well as by Shona culture, which according to Searle, is what Dangarembga's attempt depicts in her novel. (2007, p.56)

In *The God of Small Things*, the abuse started at the novel's beginning is women's subjugation. Ladies are depicted in the novel as pre-condemns for abuse by a patriarchal society, even though they are innocent. Women are oppressed by their fathers, husbands, and society, including women who follow norms. The oppression practices by the patriarchal society due to custom are passed on from generation to generation. Due to inherited customs, women tend to obey to avoid trouble. Pappachi maintains guy is superior to a woman because he remains without extending a helping hand to his wife, as shown in this quote: “Though Mammachi had conical corneas and was already practically blind, Pappachi would not help her with the pickle-making, because he did not consider pickle-making a suitable job for a high-ranking ex-Government official” (Roy, 1997, p.47). Although Mammachi’s eyes do not enable her to see well, Pappachi, with his masculine mentality, does not even think of helping her. Pappachi thinks his value comes from his job; thus, his wife's job is unsuitable as he thinks. Pappachi has a state of denial where he does not recognise the success of his wife Mammachi in her work. On the contrary, he considers her factory to be poorly ranked. His pride prevents him from admitting her wonderful work and determination to his wife. Pappachi, despite his retirement, does nothing but sit at home; his actions reflect the patriarchal society that glitters the man's image and blurs the woman's identity and position.

In Vienna, Mammachi trains to play the violin, which made Pappachi prevent her from doing that because he hears the praise of the trainer to her during training: “[t]he lessons were abruptly discontinued when Mammachi’s teacher, Launsky-Tieffenthal, made the mistake of telling Pappachi that his wife was exceptionally talented...” (Roy, 1997, p.50) Although Mammachi is successful and talented, she is well aware that she is oppressed, as her life path depends on the male community and what it determines. Therefore, it can be evident why Mammachi does not fight against patriarchal society. She realises the difficulty of changing standards or the impossibility of change within her. Her position remains summed up in submission.

Another character is the victim of the patriarchal community, Ammu, where her mistake is to be a female. Ammu’s persecution begins with her father, who does not let the girl attend university: “Pappachi insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl” (Roy, 1997, p.38). Pappachi believes not allowing his daughter to go to university was in her best interest, killing her ambition. It is possible to know why Pappachi did not agree to let his daughter join the university, which is miserliness, as he thinks the girl will marry one day and leave the house. He does not see an interest in teaching her, which will not benefit him. Ammu understands patriarchy when she realises the caring difference between her and her brother Chako. Ammu suffers from neglect, as she does not feel she is present or important to her family. “Her eighteenth birthday came and went. Unnoticed, or at least unremarked upon by her parents”, once she reached eighteen, no one noticed that, as it is the most important age stage for a girl when she becomes an adult (Roy, 1997, p.38). Ammu’s life has been doomed since birth due to society's male domination. Ammu lives a completely undesired life where she is forced to obey men. As a result of her family's mistreatment of her, Ammu searches for a window of freedom in hopes of changing her bitter reality, where she marries but soon divorces: “she thought that anything, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem” (Roy, 1997, p.39). This woman ran away from her family, but also, upon her marriage, she was not free of abuse, as the patriarchal society was still the cause of her misery. Ammu married a Hindu man who constantly ordered her to obey him even though her religion is Christianity. Her husband is beating her because she refuses to stay with her husband's employer. After all, he believes he has the right to treat her as he wants, reflecting the true face of male society. Although she lives in a patriarchal society, Ammu refuses to obey, refusing to obey her father and her husband. Her brother Chacko says, “what is yours is mine and what is mine is also mine” (Roy, 1997, p.57). One gender that controls the community, for example, is the pickle factory. The different treatment and fulfilment of the desires of Ammu and her brother by the father summarise the persecution that women are subjected to. “[he] can’t help having a Man’s Needs” men are given more freedom to empty their sexual energy, as Chacko has many relationships with the female workers in the factory (Roy, 1997, p.168). Despite this, the matter is completely different for a woman, who is not entitled to have relationships. Ammu is punished because of her relationship with one of the workers, which is considered a sin. Ammu fights against patriarchy and against history to change the fate of women. She does not believe that societal norms should determine a man's fate, as she strives for equality between women and men. Ammu wants equality with her

brother and recognition as an independent woman. Despite her hardships, she wishes for her people to adopt a more egalitarian mindset.

### **3. Hybridity**

Bhabha considers that “in-between space allows for much diversity and flexibility in identity” (1994, p.211). He argues that individuals with several identities are distinguishable by possessing more features than those with a single identity. Women in post-colonial societies face two cultures where they have to construct their identities in light of these two cultures. In *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha believes that attendance from European colonists is regular for the indigenous population and a justification that will facilitate this light-skin to raid the nations and change the population's identity without any challenges. Nyasha is determined to evolve, as her mother advises her never to stop at a certain point, but it is not the same with others:

People like me [Tambudzai] thought she was odd and rather superior in intangible ways. Peripheral adults like her teachers thought she was a genius and encouraged this aspect of her.

But her mother and father were worried about her development (Dangarembga,1988, p.98).

Nyasha faces an internal struggle because of the criteria she must follow from both societies, making her feel somewhat inconsistent. As for her father and Tambo, they do not think her development will benefit her. Nyasha's life in England has repercussions on her conflict with her identity, as cultural crossbreeding has affected her since she was young. Tambo cannot understand hybridity, as she believes Nyasha is African and not half British. As a result of the English and their language followers, the African identity becomes threatened and polluted as the Europeans dominate it. Nyasha's ability to learn about her African heritage comes through her known Tambu. Nyasha sees Tambo as the portal that helps her find herself. At the same time, Nyasha tries to clarify the complex obstacles she faces in England to change Tambu's view of things. Nyasha is thinking here about her current situation and the inevitable adaptation after leaving England: “It's not England anymore and I ought to adjust. But when you've seen different things you want to be sure you're adjusting to the right thing” (Dangarembga,1988, p.119). The mixture identity is a vital process in her life, as it has become an essential feature of her personality. A new culture has emerged mixed with the European and African cultures, as Nyasha feels that she does not belong to both cultures: “I'm not one of them but I'm not one of you” (Dangarembga,1988, p.205). This woman realises that there is no way she can be fully accepted by one of the two cultures. Nyasha sends a message to Tambo informing her that Africans are unhappy with her English and African languages as well: “They do not like my language, my English, because it is authentic and my Shona, because it is not!” (Dangarembga,1988, p.200). She feels not belong anywhere, which causes her frustration and sadness over her identity.



The concept of hybridity in *The God of Small Things* clarifies this novel extraordinarily. Both Estha and Rahel are affected by the other external culture. These children are affected by a foreign culture. Their identity blends into two cultures: affiliated with the indigenous population and foreign. Mol's tragic death portray in the novel clearly with the funeral. Estha and Rahel feel remorse for allowing Mol to come with them on their insecure journey that caused her death.

Nevertheless, Mol's death is unimportant to the government, and her family has not been compensated because she did not die at the "zebra crossing." "zebra crossing" can show the hybridity in most of the novel (Roy, 1997, p.6). Velutha and Ammu come from various castes. Therefore, they relate to hybrid cultures. Both Ammu and Velutha are guilty of loving each other, as they do not care about both cultures' norms. Each of them blends with the other as they represent a charming harmony: "He folded his fear into a perfect rose. He held it out in the palm of his hand. She took it from him and put it in her hair . . . It was a little cold. A little wet. A little quiet" (Roy, 1997, p.10). Identity crisis is revealed through the imaginary atmosphere in the novel, which shows the chaos in India, specifically in identity. Hybridity occurs in India on specific grounds, such as religion, sect, region, etc. The Indian government is the beneficiary of these divisions for political ambitions, as all that is dispersed identity allows for manipulating individuals more quickly. Parents prefer that their children learn English and insist on this. Indigenous people in India view Mol as an English white girl, not a hybrid: "It was about nine in the morning when Mammachi and Baby Kochamma got news of a white child's body ..." (Roy, 1997, p.115). Mol is constantly related to light skin; her original side is never from the Indian people mentioned. Although she does not feel welcome, she exchanges a goodwill greetings, communicates with others, and distributes gifts to get to know them.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The patriarchal society and colonists have repressed women in both novels. Women's oppression is a form of maltreatment that starts with them early on and continues for their whole life. Both novels portray women as pre-condemned for patriarchal society's maltreatment, even if they are innocent. Those, particularly women who adhere to social norms, are subjugated by their families, spouses, and society. Because of tradition, patriarchal society's oppressive actions are passed down from generation to generation. In both novels, whether *The God of Small Things* or *Nervous Conditions*, persecution of women is evident by the community and the occupier. Tambu and Ammu are banned from education due to the ignorance of the patriarchal society. Women's dreams in both novels are simple, centred on education and autonomy forbidden by the patriarchal society. The other thing that Tambu and Ammu have in common is that they do not accept bowing to oppressive societal habits despite their enormous suffering psychologically and physically due to their unlimited courage.

In postcolonial societies, women must develop their identities based on the two cultures they must navigate. In *Nervous Conditions*, British colonisers use every method to impose their identity on the indigenous people, whether by permission or coercion. The

colonialists' standard justification is that they want to improve the indigenous population's cultural and social status, but the reality is quite different. As a result of their lack of acceptance, the formation of hybrid tribes rejects both cultures. For instance, in the case of Nyasha, when the local people do not acknowledge her other British half identity. Individuals struggled to fit in with others. Even though some explored multiple paths, the majority's mentality is dominated by the single dominant culture. While in *The God of Small Things* novel, people who carry hybrid identities have struggled due to the lack of acceptance of the other from both parties. Individuals suffered in integrating into other societies. Although some of them sought many ways, the mentality of the prevailing single culture remains that dominates the majority. For Example, the locals always describe Mol as having light skin, although she is of Indian origin due to her living in Britain.

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