

**Lacanian Transference in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini
and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy**

Zeliha IŞIK¹

Abstract

*This article explores the intersection of Lacanian psychoanalysis and subaltern theory in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, focusing on the female protagonists Mariam and Rahel. It examines how each woman internalizes the figure of the Other which is mediated through their respective mothers, Nana and Ammu, within both familial and socio-political contexts. The transmission of subaltern identity and maternal trauma positions Mariam and Rahel as silenced, marginalized subjects shaped by patriarchal and colonial power structures. Nana and Ammu, cast out and silenced for their transgressive relationships with Jalil and Velutha, respectively, become emblematic of the abject maternal Other. Their social exclusion prefigures the daughters' own descent into silence and passivity. This article argues that the Lacanian mechanism of transference offers a crucial model for understanding the reproduction of subaltern consciousness, demonstrating how the maternal Other becomes the primary site where macro-political oppression is psychically internalized and transmitted across generations. Nana and Ammu's marginalization, resulting from their socially transgressive relationships with Jalil and Velutha, becomes a formative force in shaping their daughters' inward, subdued identities. The emotional and social consequences of these maternal experiences are transmitted to Mariam and Rahel, who come to embody the silence, shame, and dispossession inherited through maternal bonds. Transference, in both novels, emerges as a process through which the structures of domination reproduce themselves within the psyche, binding the personal to the political. Therefore, the fusion of Lacanian and subaltern perspectives provides a critical framework for analyzing how desire, power, and colonial legacies shape feminine subjectivity in postcolonial contexts.*

Keywords: *Transference, Subaltern Identity, the Other, A Thousand Splendid Suns, The God of Small Things*

¹ Asst. Prof. Dr. Zeliha IŞIK, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Karabuk University, Türkiye, ORCID 0000-0001-5150-0601, i.zeliha@karabuk.edu.tr.

Introduction

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* present poignant narratives of female subalternity shaped through intimate familial relationships and the broader sociopolitical hierarchies operating within postcolonial India and war-torn Afghanistan. This paper offers a comparative analysis of the characters Mariam and Rahel, focusing on how their identities are formed through the psychological process of transference from their mothers, who themselves occupy subaltern positions within patriarchal and colonial structures. In response to Gayatri Spivak's seminal question, 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1988), I argue that the subaltern's subservient position is constituted through a transfer from the parental Other, where it is established as a normative position within the symbolic order. Within the family structure, the subaltern is systematically conditioned socially, psychologically, and physically not to speak. That is, this paper argues that Mariam and Rahel do not simply inherit subalternity as a social category but psychically internalize it through a process of Lacanian transference. In this dynamic, the traumatized maternal figure functions as a distorted 'subject-supposed-to-know,' offering a Symbolic Order already saturated with powerlessness, which the daughters are compelled to repeat. Both Ammu and Nana function as the first significant figures of authority, repression, and desire in their daughters' lives. They shape the daughters' earliest understandings of identity, silence, and limitation. The transmission of the mother's emotional world, comprising shame, desire, and resistance, becomes foundational in the construction of Mariam's and Rahel's subjectivities.

Khaled Hosseini depicts Mariam as a child raised in a rural and patriarchal Afghan society, where she inherits her mother Nana's bitterness, shame, and feelings of abandonment. This emotional legacy becomes more deeply entrenched after Mariam's failed encounter with her father, Jalil. Her later experiences with Rasheed and Laila are marked by a deep internalization of guilt and submission that reflect the mental universe she inherited from her mother. In a parallel narrative, Rahel in *The God of Small Things* absorbs the marginality and voicelessness of her mother, Ammu, who is socially stigmatized as a divorced woman living within a rigid caste and gender system. Rahel's fractured selfhood and emotional detachment in adulthood echo the psychological trauma and social alienation passed on by Ammu.

This study applies a critical close reading methodology grounded in the theories of Jacques Lacan and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Through Lacan's theory of transference, particularly his concepts of the Other and transference, the analysis explores how early interpersonal dynamics are inscribed onto the subject's unconscious. At the same time, Spivak's reading of subalternity interrogates the silences imposed on women who are positioned as marginalized, passive, and subservient. These theoretical frameworks together illuminate how Mariam and Rahel, as daughters, model themselves on their mothers' internal worlds, adopting patterns of self-perception and emotional response shaped by gendered oppression and cultural exclusion.

Reading *The God of Small Things* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* through the perspective of Lacanian transference offer a new critical perspective to the existing literature combining

postcolonial theory and Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. It reshapes the relationship between the reader, the text, and its characters. This approach moves beyond surface-level reading and prompts readers to engage with the unconscious forces that shape identity, desire, and narrative, both within the characters and within themselves. In doing so, it brings a largely unexplored psychoanalytic perspective to postcolonial literature and broadens the methodological approaches available in contemporary literary studies.

Agustina and Budiman argue that “various types of violence and atrocities, both physical and psychological, are experienced by the female characters, revealing hegemony and domination” in the Afghan social context (2024, p. 237). Actually, in Indian social settings, Rahel goes through similar experiences too. Mariam and Rahel grow up within distinct yet comparably restrictive environments, shaped by the historical consequences of colonialism and the deeply entrenched structures of patriarchy. The differences between rural and urban life, the separation of ethnic and racial affiliations, and the various cultural codes that regulate women’s roles all contribute to the formation of unique but comparable subaltern identities. I argue that the transference of the mental universe from mother to daughter reflects not only private familial dynamics but also larger ideological and structural forces. The familial relationship emerges as the most powerful site of transference, assigning each daughter a social, emotional, and intellectual position within the world. In tracing these intergenerational projections, this article contributes to an understanding of postcolonial subjectivity through the perspectives of psychoanalysis and subaltern theory.

Lacanian Transference in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini

Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* illustrates a complicated connection between a father and his daughter. This fragile relationship compels Mariam to rely on her mother's perceptions regarding the world and to embrace her mother's conception of the Other as her own. In light of the protagonist's conflicted and complicated relationships, this article investigates how Khaled Hosseini portrays the transference that occurred when Mariam modeled the Other of her mother, or, in other words, how Mariam transferred the mental universe of her mother, whom she perceived as omniscient in a colonial and patriarchal social setting. Raised within the intersecting dynamics of Afghan patriarchy and enduring colonial power, Mariam's subjectivity is shaped by a transference that illuminates both her intimate relationships and the broader sociohistorical context. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, “male misogyny is largely drawn from the character of Rasheed, who violently abuses Miriam and later Laila for his interpretations of household disobedience” (Lam, 2009, p. 258). While Rasheed represents the most overt form of patriarchal violence, this analysis posits that the foundational structuration of Mariam's subaltern identity occurs not through this direct abuse, but through the earlier, more subtle transference of the maternal Other.

I unravel the internalized image of subjugated and objectified Afghan women through Mariam's transference experience. The theories of transference by Jacques Lacan and subaltern theory have overlapping areas of concern and can be mutually reinforcing when examining the effects of “the strongly gendered structures in Afghanistan” on Afghan subjectivity, desire, and

identity, as well as the experience of transference between mothers and daughters (Von der Lipe, 2012, p. 28). For this reason, I employed an analytical approach and used postcolonial psychoanalysis to figure out how interpersonal power positions influence Nana's and hence Mariam's intrapersonal qualities. This paper concludes that familial relationships have the highest relevance for the construction of the ego and assigning a social, emotional, and intellectual place in life.

The concept of the Other in Afghanistan—encompassing social structures, law, language, social norms, and ethics—must be understood within the context of the country's deeply fragmented sociopolitical landscape, which has been profoundly shaped by historical conflicts, ethnic divisions, and enduring colonial and foreign interventions. The disassociation between social groups and the rigid adherence to ethnic and tribal norms emerged in part due to prolonged foreign involvement in the Middle East, notably the intervention of Western powers, including the United States. These tensions, which can be traced back to the early 19th century, gave rise to layers of regional, ethnic, and cultural distinctions that continue to influence Afghan society.

Multiple historical processes, including internal conflict, imperial disruption, and shifting power dynamics, have contributed to the formation and reconstruction of distinct ethnic, social, and gender identities throughout Afghanistan. During the internal conflicts, Mujahidin groups who demanded the control of the country “used rape as a strategy to frighten people and keep the soldiers happy,” which played a significant role in shaping sociocultural structures of the Afghanistan (Asif, 2024, p. 2). Muhammad Asif discusses the reasons for the subjugation of women within the context of internal conflict:

Men killed their wives, sisters, and daughters to protect their honour from being disgraced by the enemy. During the reign of the Mujahidin (1992–1996) and Taliban (1996–2001), female education was prohibited, and women were not allowed to hold any job. They were restricted to their houses and could only leave the house in the company of a male near relative. (Asif, 2024, p. 2).

As a result, the country's diverse ethnic groups not only occupy different geographical regions but also sustain unique cultural practices, languages, folklore, and ethical systems. For instance, the majority of Pashtuns inhabit the plains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while Tajiks are predominantly located in northern provinces such as Badakhshan, Parwan, Takhar, and Baghlan. These geographic and cultural distances have reinforced social divisions, with each group maintaining its own norms to regulate social life.

Regarding the Other that shapes Mariam's identity, her upbringing in an isolated mud hut in rural Herat situates her worldview firmly within a conservative and patriarchal framework of religion, ethics, and law, deeply embedded in the traditional cultural codes of her ethnic and regional context. Fitzpatrick (2009) argues that “characters in the books reject values that are characterized as ‘Western,’ such as the education of women, intellectual freedom, self-determination (of women), and all types of Western culture (movies, books, etc.)” (p. 246). However, Laila, Mariam's co-wife, raised in the more urban and comparatively progressive

environment of Kabul, is exposed to a more liberal, educated, and cosmopolitan perspective, which significantly informs her sense of agency and capacity for resistance. This is because Mariam and Laila belong to distinct ethnic and cultural groups from different regions and therefore inherit unique cultural codes shaped by Afghanistan's diverse ethnic landscape. While Mariam has Hazara culture in Herat, Laila belongs to Pashtuns in Kabul.

These divergent upbringings mean that Mariam and Laila internalize different versions of the symbolic order, what Lacan refers to as the Other. According to Lacanian theory, the Other encompasses the social structure, the law, religion, and ethical codes that precede and shape individual subjectivity. In this sense, Mariam and Laila acquire and transmit different manifestations of the Other based on their distinct social positions and cultural conditioning. The disjunction in their internalized values and identities is not simply personal but reflects broader sociopolitical dynamics, namely, the fragmentation of Afghan society along ethnic, regional, and ideological lines. Therefore, the mental and emotional landscapes of Mariam and Laila are products of historically embedded social structures, shaped by war, occupation, ethnic segregation, and cultural divergence. These factors not only define their individual experiences but also illuminate the broader mechanisms by which identity is constructed and contested in times of national upheaval.

I argue that Mariam internalizes her mother's subaltern position within Afghan society in Herat and carries this marginalized and silenced identity into adulthood, where it shapes her responses to abuse, love, and self-worth. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly the concepts of the Mirror Stage and the Other, this analysis demonstrates how Mariam's internal world is shaped through the internalization of Nana's perceived the Other.

Mariam is the harami (illegitimate child) of Jalil, a wealthy businessman, and Nana, Jalil's former servant. From birth, she occupies a marginalized position, reflecting how Afghan society devalues women, especially those born outside the confines of a socially accepted family structure. Nana, having been cast out by Jalil and forced to raise Mariam in isolation, embodies the consequences women face when they are no longer useful to men. She constantly warns Mariam about the world's cruelty toward women, insisting that a woman's fate is to endure suffering. Nana, a socially ostracized and psychologically broken woman, becomes the child's first mirror and voice of the law. Her contempt, self-hatred, and resignation are absorbed by Mariam, who later reproduces this inherited sense of shame and inferiority in her relationships with Rasheed and Laila.

Lacan's Mirror Stage explains how the infant first identifies with an image of wholeness in the mirror, mediated by Nana's, that is, the caregiver's gaze. As Bailly (2023) states, "The mother's gaze is the child's first mirror; the child's identity or notion of itself as a whole being is first formed in that gaze" (p. 37). Accordingly, Mariam's perception of the image is influenced by Nana's, the caregiver's, gaze. Nana serves as Mariam's primary mirror, shaping and framing her ego. Nana pushes Mariam to identify with herself and conform to gender and societal roles in Afghanistan, claiming that "there is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don't teach it in school. Look at me (Hosseini, 2007, p. 17). In

this way, Nana instils in Mariam her own internalized the Other that is shaped by social structures, legal constraints, and prescribed gender roles, urging her to accept the serving, silent, and submissive subaltern position to which Nana herself has long conformed.

For Bailly (2023), if the caregiver says encouraging words during the experience of seeing the image of itself as a whole, the baby will have a favourable self-perception. Otherwise, the occurs. That is, the baby's sense of self and ego are formed through interactions with the caregiver, who is typically an omnipotent mother with knowledge of society standards, regulations, and laws (Lacan, 1938). In this way, Lacan explains the existence and influence of the caregiver who helps the baby encounter the objectified image and posits the baby in the realm of the symbolic order through the concept of the Other. In Mariam's case, Nana communicates her knowledge and experiences with the stereotyped image of women and an illegitimate child produced in a long-established society that praises the patriarchal system while devaluing women. "Mariam was five years old the first time she heard the word *harami*," which means that Nana ingrains the object image of an inferior and unwanted image of an illegitimate child in Mariam's mirror stage (Hosseini, 2007, p. 3). Nana has internalized the inferiority of being a woman and mother of misfortune in Afghanistan, and she imprinted her own sense of worthlessness and helplessness in Mariam. Through the discourse of Nana (the Other), Mariam acquires her mother's language, norms, social and religious precepts, and ideals for women.

Mothers transmit the Other to the child, and "as the child's language develops, it begins to attach ideas to the objectified self, which is to become ego" (Bailly, 2023, p. 35). Mariam wishes to identify with the image of a schoolgirl, but Nana destroys Mariam's ideal self-image and relegates Mariam's ego to the socially established subject position of Afghan women, affixing signifiers such as "ugly, lowly" girl like Nana herself (Hosseini, 2007, p. 18). Mariam daydreams of what life would be like if she could attend school.

Thoughts of classrooms and teachers had rattled around Mariam's head—images of notebooks with lined pages, columns of numbers, and pens that made dark, heavy marks. She pictured herself in a classroom with other girls her age. Mariam longed to place a ruler on a page and draw important-looking lines (Hosseini, 2007, p. 17).

She imagines what life would be like if she could live with her father in his home in the city, and Nana reproaches her and reminds her that women, like herself, are expected to adopt a subordinate role in life. She readily accepts oppression, as she believes it is their duty to endure all the suffering inside a culture dominated by men. This is nothing unusual to her. Therefore, Nana forces Mariam to yield to the object-image of the oppressed and degraded Afghan woman, which is created by the sociopolitical and religious doctrines of Afghan society. Nana advises Mariam to adopt the object-image of Afghan women and "tahamul, endure" for all the torment and contempt towards women, especially in the case of being a bastard in Afghan society (Hosseini, 2007, p. 21).

For Mariam, Nana's gaze is profoundly ambivalent—her love is entangled with contempt, and her words of affection are undercut by fatalism and rejection. Nana functions as

the primary Other, the voice of social law and maternal knowledge, impressing upon Mariam an object-image that is deformed, degraded, and fixed in passivity. Nana positions herself as a model for Mariam, urging her to internalize endurance in the face of degradation and suffering, just as she has.

As Lacan (1938) explains, the mother helps usher the child into the Symbolic Order—language, norms, law—through her own place within that order. Nana, having internalized Afghan patriarchy's devaluation of women, offers Mariam a symbolic world that is already contaminated with powerlessness and submission. Accordingly, Nana continuously dissuades Mariam from dreaming of school, self-worth, or recognition by her father, Jalil. However, Mariam continues to “[picture] herself sitting in the private balcony seats,...[eating] ice cream, alongside her siblings and Jalil” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 27). In contrast to Nana's isolated and constrained existence, Mariam aspires to a life of freedom, symbolized by her fascination with birds. She envies their ability to transcend boundaries and imagines herself in their place, free to explore the world beyond her confined reality: “She was envious of these birds. They had been to Herat. They had flown over its mosques and its bazaars. Maybe they had landed on the walls of Jalil's home, on the front steps of his cinema” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 27). When Mariam expresses a desire for agency and seeks her father's love, recognition, and acceptance, Nana responds with bitterness and reproach, saying:

What a stupid girl you are! You think you matter to him, that you're wanted in his house? You think you're a daughter to him? That he's going to take you in? Let me tell you something: a man's heart is a wretched, wretched thing, Mariam. It isn't like a mother's womb. It won't bleed; it won't stretch to make room for you. I'm the only one who loves you. I'm all you have in this world, Mariam, and when I'm gone, you'll have nothing. You'll have nothing. You *are* nothing! (Hosseini, 2007, p. 26).

Mariam is denied value, inheritance, legitimacy, and love in the eyes of the father in the male dominated world, by extension of symbolic language and the Law of the society. Her symbolic position is marked as absence—lack. Through harsh language, the mother inscribes Mariam's subjectivity as deficient, preparing her for a life shaped by exclusion and silence. In Lacanian terms, it is not just a scene of emotional abuse—it is a scene of symbolic violence, of entry into a world where the subject is fundamentally split and gendered through language.

Despite Nana's warnings, young Mariam idolizes Jalil, believing he loves her. However, when she seeks his acceptance by visiting his home, she is humiliated and abandoned, left outside like an unwanted burden. Instead of being welcomed into her father's home, as she dreamed, she would be, she remains an outsider. Later, she tries to sneak onto Jalil's home grounds, but he rejects her attempt.

Their gaze skimmed over all of these things before they found a face across the garden in an upstairs window. The face was there for only an instant, a flash, but long enough. Long enough for Mariam to see the eyes widen, the mouth open. Then it snapped away from view. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 32).

The ‘face’ that Mariam refers to is Jalil’s face, as readers later find out; this image of her father as the ‘face’ reiterates how disillusioned by reality she is the moment she spots him in his home. This pivotal moment shatters her illusions and reinforces the brutal reality that women, particularly illegitimate daughters, have no power in a patriarchal system. After Nana’s tragic suicide, Mariam is married off to Rasheed, a much older man, emphasizing how women are transactional objects with little agency over their futures.

Following her disillusionment with her father, Mariam undergoes a psychological transformation shaped not only by her strained relationship with Jalil but also by the broader oppressive forces of patriarchal and colonial structures that define her social reality. Therefore, Mariam internalizes the subaltern position, internalizing the repeated teachings of Nana: “She understood then what Nana meant, that a *harami* was an unwanted thing; that she, Mariam, was an illegitimate person who would never have legitimate claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 4). Jalil neither listens to Mariam nor permits her to articulate her desires or assert her needs. Instead, she is relegated back to the margins, both socially and spatially, to the outskirts where she is kept out of sight. As Spivak (1988) argues, the subaltern cannot speak because dominant discourse predefines what can be expressed and acknowledged. In Mariam’s case, her status as a *harami* (bastard) renders her unreadable within the dominant symbolic order. Her mother, exiled to a rural existence after being cast out by Jalil, embodies the lowest strata of the social hierarchy, a position she internalizes and subsequently imposes upon Mariam.

When Jalil rejects Mariam for fear of losing his reputation and avoids being seen with an illegitimate daughter, Mariam confronts her own abject object-image, as perceived by others in society. Mariam has to face up to the negative perception of herself held by others in society. Mariam is driven to reunite with her mother due to her recognition of her mother's inherent virtue. However, when she returns home, she discovers her mother, Nana, has died, and her hopes of being loved are dashed. Nana’s desperate plea, “I’ll die if you go,” is tragically fulfilled when she takes her own life, thereby reinforcing the validity of her earlier assertions (Hosseini, 2007, p. 36). The suicide consolidates Nana’s claim that she is Mariam’s sole source of love and protection while simultaneously underscoring Mariam’s harsh reality as a worthless and unwanted *harami* in the eyes of society.

Consequently, Mariam—having internalized and mirrored Nana’s embodiment of the Other—submits to patriarchal authority and gender-based oppression through her coerced marriage to Rasheed. By replicating her mother’s subaltern position, Mariam undergoes a form of psychological and social transference. Mariam submits to the arranged marriage, thereby internalizing and succumbing to a subaltern identity—as symbolized by her being “sent away because she was the walking, breathing embodiment of their shame” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 45).

Mariam comes to embody the quintessential figure of the submissive and silenced woman, assuming a subaltern role through her endurance of Rasheed’s violence and abuse. Although Rasheed insults or curses Mariam, saying, “You know nothing, do you? You’re like a child. Your brain is empty.” Mariam never resists or talks back, but she “[bears] his scorn,

his ridicule, his insults, his walking past her like she was nothing but a house cat” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 89). Her silence reflects the internalization of patriarchal norms and her acceptance of a subaltern position within an abusive domestic sphere. Her acceptance of this position is deeply informed by the internalized gendered discourse imparted by her mother, as reflected in Nana’s teaching, “Only one skill: And it is this: tahamul. Endure” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 17). Mariam’s relation to the patriarchal order is mediated by her subaltern mother, who inscribes in her a sense of duty that naturalizes endurance as an expected mode of being; and, so does she.

Rasheed constantly finds trivial excuses to blame Mariam and beats her. Regarding this, Nana had once warned Mariam, saying, “Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: like a compass needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman. Always” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 7). Rasheed blames Mariam for not cooking the rice properly and subjects her to a cruel punishment, and Mariam complies with his orders and endures the suffering of domestic violence.

He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it. Mariam struggled against him, mumbling, but he kept pushing the pebbles in, his upper lip curled in a sneer. “Now chew,” he said. Through the mouthful of grit and pebbles, Mariam mumbled a plea. Tears were leaking out of the corners of her eyes. “CHEW!” he bellowed. A gust of his smoky breath slammed against her face. Mariam chewed. Something in the back of her mouth cracked. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 94).

Throughout her miserable life, Mariam repeats whatever has been dictated by her mother and inherited the traditional subaltern woman identity Nana exemplified to her. Throughout her life of suffering, Mariam internalizes and reproduces the values instilled by her mother, ultimately inheriting the traditional subaltern female identity that Nana embodied and imparted to her. Like her life, Mariam’s death also mirrors Nana’s way of expressing love. Just as Nana took her own life to demonstrate that a life without Mariam held no meaning for her, Mariam accepts responsibility for Rasheed’s death and sacrifices herself, choosing execution in Laila’s place to save Laila and Aziza and to express her deep love for them. In doing so, Mariam transcends the silence and invisibility that once defined her subaltern existence. Much like her mother, she reclaims agency through sacrifice. As the narrative affirms, Mariam ultimately leaves “the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, and a guardian. A mother. A person of consequence at last” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 329). Thus, her death becomes not only an act of love but also a moment of existential affirmation and moral significance.

Lacanian Transference in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy

Maninder Kapoor states that “*The God of Small Things* displays just such a marked inclination to resort to “inversion” as a subversive narrative strategy that allows the woman writer frequent occasion to disrupt the hegemony of patriarchal structures” (Kapoor, 2021, p. 47). Through the portrayal of Ammu and her Untouchable lover Velutha, Arundhati Roy amplifies subaltern voices and critiques the rigid hierarchies of caste and gender. In this sense,

Kapoor characterizes *The God of Small Things* as an “explicit articulation of those absent and invisible histories that are generally overlooked in the larger narratives of history and politics” (Kapoor, 2021, p. 48). In this article I argue that Rahel in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* mirrors her mother’s silenced, subaltern existence, gradually embodying the same introversion and marginalization. As a result of Ammu’s transgressive love affair with Velutha, who is lower than the lowest caste in India, Rahel witnesses firsthand how rigid social and gender norms erase Velutha’s existence and render Ammu invisible. These observations deeply shape Rahel’s understanding of relationships, leading her to internalize passivity and emotional restraint as a response to the bitter consequences of defying societal boundaries.

As Shing Yi (2003) notes, “the novel is ultimately concerned with marginality, absence, and loss: in other words, the invisible narratives that are consumed by power, politics, or imperialism” (p. 1). Building this perspective, I examine how Rahel, the daughter of the marginalized Ammu, transfers and reenacts patterns of subaltern identity. Like her mother, Rahel becomes increasingly invisible and silent, embodying the generational transmission of marginalization. Ammu herself is represented as a silenced and marginalized subaltern figure within the deeply patriarchal structure of Indian society. As a divorced woman, she is stripped of social legitimacy and denied a voice, even by her own father, Pappachi. His admiration for British colonial values leads him to dismiss Ammu’s report of abuse and sexual coercion by her British husband. This internalized colonial mindset is made explicit in his statement, “an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (Roy, 2002, p. 42), a remark that not only invalidates Ammu’s lived experience but also underscores the familial and cultural forces that reinforce her subjugation.

In addition to being marginalized as a divorced woman, a status that is largely stigmatized in Indian society, Ammu further violates social conventions by engaging in a relationship with Velutha, a man from a caste traditionally referred to as “Untouchable.” As a Dalit, Velutha belongs to a community systematically excluded from social and physical contact with members of the upper castes. Due to the rigid social rules and systemic exclusion imposed by the caste system, Velutha, as an Untouchable, is “not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched” (Roy, 2002, p. 73). Ammu’s romantic involvement with him, however, defies these deeply entrenched boundaries, resulting in severe consequences for both individuals. As an upper-caste woman, Ammu’s transgression challenges the established caste and social hierarchies, leading to her expulsion from the family home, her social ostracization, and eventual separation from her children. Velutha, in turn, faces the ultimate punishment: he is brutally murdered for crossing caste lines and engaging in a relationship deemed unacceptable by the dominant social order. In other words, Baby Kochamma ensures Velutha’s erasure from both the social and physical world.

In the novel, “Baby Kochamma, who misuses and (fearfully) enforces the status quo,” represents the authority figure within the symbolic order of Kerala, India (Tickell, 2007, p. 28). Therefore, I interpret Baby Kochamma as a figure of the Other, exerting control over Ammu’s forbidden love, “an act that denies the dehumanizing, exploitative separations of caste, class, or ethnic difference and becomes, in the process, a symbol of future change” (Tickell, 2007, p.

31). Baby Kochamma perceives the love affair as a transgression and swiftly moves to put both Ammu and Velutha in their place. Upon discovering their socially unacceptable relationship, which makes “the unthinkable thinkable,” she emphasizes the act's intolerability by framing it as something beyond both imagination and symbolization within Kerala's prevailing symbolic order (Roy, 2002, p. 256). In response to this perceived violation, Baby Kochamma orchestrates the erasure of the stigma, and as a result, “death came for” Velutha (Roy, 2002, p. 320). When it comes to Ammu, who crosses the boundaries set by the class and caste system, Baby Kochamma scapegoats her, takes her children away, and banishes her from the family, thereby casting her out of the symbolic order, saying that “a married daughter had no position in her parents' home.” As for a divorced daughter—according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all” (Roy, 2002, p. 45).

Alongside personal emotions and thoughts, long-established social structures and cultural norms are equally crucial in Lacanian psychoanalysis. In line with the Lacanian approach, Joanne Lipson Freed highlights Roy's treatment of the intertwined relationship between personal trauma and the symbolic order, stating that Roy does not depict a “psychological healing that divorces[s] individual suffering from the social and political structures that cause it: the complex interactions among colonialism, class, caste, and religion that define the rural town in southern India where her novel is set” (Freed, 2011, p. 222). In this context, Rajeshwar Mittapalli (2018) offers an account of the Other, that is, social rules, class, caste systems, and law in Kerala, India:

An unsettling fact about India is that more than seventy years of democracy have made no real difference to the exploitative social and economic structures of the country. Basic institutions continue to be as feudal, hierarchical, hidebound, obscurantist, and casteist as they have always been. In fact, the ruling elites have never even tried to democratize them. They have never sincerely striven for collective good, social justice, and poverty alleviation. (pp. 45-46)

Baby Kochamma exercises authoritative power to erase subversive identities such as Ammu and Velutha, rendering them silent and invisible within the dominant symbolic order. In doing so, she upholds and perpetuates the existing social hierarchy. Her complicity in Velutha's death and Ammu's subsequent ostracization inflicts profound trauma on Rahel, who internalizes and replicates her mother's worldview. Arundhati Roy underscores Velutha's invisibility through the evocative description that he “leaves no footprints in the sand, no ripples in the water, no reflections in mirrors,” symbolizing the erasure of marginalized identities. Yet, the trauma of witnessing Velutha's brutal death, following his false accusation of kidnapping the twins and raping Ammu, casts a long shadow over both Ammu and Rahel. Ammu's experience of systemic marginalization, humiliation, and silencing within the patriarchal and caste-bound society of Kerala leads Rahel to co-identify with her mother and internalize Ammu's perceived symbolic order, or in other words, the Other.

Confronted with the tragic consequences of violating the class and caste boundaries rooted in Kerala's social order, most clearly illustrated through the cross-caste love between

Velutha and Ammu, Rahel witnesses her mother's impoverishment and silencing. She internalizes the gendered expectations and oppressive norms of the symbolic order, which "imprints itself on those who lived in it" (Roy, 2002, p. 309). As a result, Rahel mirrors Ammu's reclusive and silenced demeanour and ultimately submits to the rigid social hierarchy and gender roles enforced by their community. "Estha's muteness, like Rahel's vacant gaze, is a legacy of Ammu's helplessness in the face of rigid caste and gender constraints" (Freed, 2011, p. 225). Sharing the burden of guilt with Ammu for violating social norms by loving someone deemed unlovable and ultimately contributing to his death, Rahel never recovers from the trauma of her involvement in Velutha's tragic end. She feels emotionally distant from her husband, burdened by a sense of sinfulness even during their moments of intimacy. Figures such as Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, and Pappachi, who represent the dominant social structure, legal authority, and moral code, offer no comfort or absolution. No one tells Rahel or Ammu, "You're not the Sinners. You're the Sinned Against. You were only children. You had no control. You are the victims, not the perpetrators" (Roy, 2002, p. 191). As a result, the absence of guidance from authority figures leads Rahel to internalize her mother's shame and trauma, which later affects her ability to form healthy relationships.

Ammu's marginalization and condemnation as a result of her relationship with Velutha leave a profound psychological imprint on Rahel, instilling in her a deep caution toward romantic and intimate relationships. Fearing similar punishment and exclusion, Rahel internalizes her mother's fate, recognizing that Ammu's expulsion from the symbolic order was not merely personal but a consequence of transgressing rigid caste and gender norms. This inherited trauma shapes Rahel's adult identity, rendering her emotionally distant and disconnected from intimacy, both sexual and emotional. In this way, Rahel not only inherits her mother's shame but also continues her unresolved struggle against patriarchy and the deeply entrenched class and caste structures that perpetuate inequality, even though India has been governed by a parliamentary democracy since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1947.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The God of Small Things* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* reveal how female subalternity is not only socially constructed but also psychologically transferred through maternal Other within patriarchal and postcolonial systems. By examining Mariam and Rahel through the combined frameworks of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Spivakian subaltern theory, this paper has demonstrated how the internalized subject positions of the mothers, Nana and Ammu, are transferred to their daughters, shaping the daughters' perception of self, their place in society, and their capacity, or incapacity, to speak. Both Mariam and Rahel are situated within different geopolitical landscapes, war-torn Afghanistan and postcolonial India; however, their psychological and emotional trajectories echo one another. Their experiences reflect the deeply gendered and intergenerational legacies of marginalization and voicelessness. Their family becomes a primary site for the reproduction of subaltern consciousness. Their maternal bond functions not just as a source of care or abandonment, but as a formative mirror through which their identity and desire are formed. These daughters,

Mariam and Rahel born into systems of entrenched inequality, come to embody the inherited traumas and repressions of their mothers. As a result, Mariam and Rahel's subaltern voice, as Spivak argues, is not merely silenced by external structures of dominance but is also internalized through familial affect, where silence, shame, and submission become normalized within the symbolic order. Ultimately, reading these novels through the lens of transference reveals that the political project of giving voice to the subaltern must also contend with the profound and often unconscious ways in which powerlessness is psychically inherited, repeated, and embodied within the most intimate of human bonds.

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