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**Theme**

**Perpetuating the Orientalist Discourse in Arundhati Roy 's *The God of Small Things* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter***

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of the Requirement For a **Master Degree in English Language, Literature, and Civilization**

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## **Dedication**

To my beloved parents, the source of tenderness, help and support.

To my mother who taught me to trust Allah, believe in hard work, and that so much is done with little. I wish that I had realized one of your dreams.

To my siblings Ryad and Razika, my partner Samir and all my friends.



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## Abstract

The present research work investigates the theme of the perpetuation of the Orientalist discourse in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1989). It analyzes the two works in the light of Edward's Said theory of Orientalism and Gayatri Spivak's notion of subalternity, focusing mainly on the oppression worked out on the two novels' subaltern figures and the Orientalist images of backwardness, cultural inferiority as well as religious tyranny the two novels let slip. The research foregrounds the Orientalist stereotypical images the two authors deploy in their representation and criticism of the socio-cultural ethos and religious values of their cultures, focusing on the notion of caste and social stratification typical to the Indian society in Arundhati Roy's text, and on the notion of religious totalitarianism characteristic of Senegalese Islam in Mariama Ba's narrative. The research work reads both texts as examples of Orientalism and identifies the two authors as perpetuating Western Orientalist clichés in third world cultural and religious context.

**Key Words:** Arundhati Roy, Mariama Ba, Subalternity, Orientalism, East, West, Caste, Islam.

# *General Introduction*

## Introduction

“They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented”(Karl Marx, the *Eighteenth Brumaire* of Louis Bonaparte, 1852).

The subject of the present research work is the perpetuation of the Orientalist discourse in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter*. It looks into the ways the Indian Arundhati Roy and the Senegalese Mariama Ba represent third world cultural habits and religious practices to lay bare the deficiency at the heart of the socio-cultural values and religious ethos of their cultures, described in Western Orientalism with debased clichés and images. Accordingly, one point of focus in this analysis is to associate the two authors with Orientalism and to read some third world feminist texts with an Orientalist vision in their attempt to criticize the religious despotism, social injustices and oppressive cultural practices representative of third world cultures.

Literature and history have always been intertwined, knotted and depended upon each other. Evidences show that many historical documents import and trade in literary and rhetorical elements in the representation of history and literature depends heavily on the historical substance to breed and weave its content (Tom Bragg). That is to say, historical contexts influence the production of social meanings and literature contextualizes texts in history and historicizes major social phenomena and cultural practices .In this sense then, both history and literary productions are venues and windows into people’s and society’s cultural and social forms of life.

In the context of the historical periods of colonization and post-colonization, two different literary traditions have been weaved; colonial and postcolonial literature. Based on power politics and center-periphery relationships, Colonial literature

privileges European modes of life and cultures and represents the East with sullied images and stereotypes. Yet, charged with the burden of deconstructing the Eastern and Western hierarchical divide and correcting the misrepresented past, postcolonial literature strives towards a genuine self representation and reclaims the social values and cultural heritage being sullied and belittled.

Post-colonial literature encompasses a body of writings that trade in with the processes of de-colonization, the logistics of political and cultural independence of the formerly colonial nations and the legacy of the colonial rule. It also reacts to and answers back the racist stereotypes established in the colonial discourse by trying to authentically represent and correct the past spoiled by the colonial institution, and giving voice to the human terrors and figures silenced by the colonial regime. In doing so, Postcolonial writers criticize the essentialism at the heart of Western representation of non-Western cultures and people, and deconstruct the hierarchical representation of the East and the West.

Accordingly, Postcolonial Eastern literature encourages and attests to an authentic and genuine representation of one's culture, identity, cultural heritage and history. Nevertheless, the task of representation is such a tough endeavor since an already structure of meaning and thought about the East has been engrained into the internal workings of its cultures and absorbed by the masses. This is the case of many third world Women novelists carrying the baton of post-colonial writing in English, who in trying to come to terms with social ills ,political and religious totalitarianism typical of their nations, endorse and consent to the Western Orientalist discourse.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* amount to the Eastern cultures' gender practices, social stratification, religious



oppression and cultural authoritarianism. In their speculation and insights into the realities of the world they draw and represent, the Indian Arudhati Roy and the Senegalese Mariam Ba, as may be assumed, perpetuate the Orientalist discourse, creating in the process an undeniable mark in the annals of the contemporary third world feminist writing. The two authors associate Indian and Senegalese socio-cultural systems with tyranny and represent third world women as being subjected to the whims of patriarchy, society and religion. They also show the two cultures assimilation of Western values and modes of life, rejecting in the process aboriginal culture, language and manners.

### **Review of the Related Literature**

The *God of Small Things* and *So Long a Letter* have received a considerable amount of criticism. The critics involved embody various positions on the critical spectrum. In his article entitled “Tradition and Modernities in conflict: An Analysis of *The God of Small Things*,” Sikhamoni Gogoi describes the Indian Society vacillating between two extremities, modernity and tradition after the process of decolonization in *The God of Small Things*. The author emphasizes the hybrid character of post independence India shown in its oscillation between traditional Indian values representing primitive social and cultural ethos and modern Western beliefs about democracy, progress and modernization. He writes:

Roy’s novel can be read as an account of Indian cultural transformation from colonial to postcolonial period and to contemporary era of Globalization. It centers on the complexity in Indian culture. It is a culture; or rather a set of cultures, which bring every rational act in confrontation with an incredibly humane transcendence, every act of escape from tradition comes

face-to-face with surprising discoveries of modernity in the backwaters .India's modernization can be talked about only in polemical context. The dense fabric of the novel examines the contradictions implicit in colonial modernity in India including the tension between religion and rationality ,progress and poverty ,nation and region, superimposed unity and grounded diversities ,democracy and feudalism, class and caste.(364)

As the quotation shows, Gogoi's opinion, though implicitly, brings to focus the Indian and Western divide in associating the former with tradition, poverty and superstitious beliefs and referring to the latter's rational tenor and progress, it seems to make no direct reference to the Orientalist discourse and the notion of Subalternity, which are the focus of the present work.

Still, in another article entitled "Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*; An Epitome of Gender, Class and Caste Inequalities," Dr. C. Raghavendra describes the Indian various aspects of life including Gender, class and caste stratification through the representative voice and characterization of the major social figures imaged in the novel, including women, children and the untouchables. He writes:

Arundhati Roy's debut novel portrays the theme that everything in nature has its own identity and significance yet they are interdependent. This theory resembles that the characters are united against their individual point of view. Every character has its own significance but none is protagonist. In the novel the feel, sensitivity, bitterness and humanism are clearly visible to the reader's eyes. The hopeless

struggle of human beings is vividly depicted through all the characters. (382)

Raghavendra's ideas in the article are very important as a preamble into Roy's major themes in *The God of Small Things* but it seems to fall short of any reference to the Orientalist discourse theme undertaken in this research study.

In another article entitled "The Subaltern and the Text: Reading Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*," O.P. Dwivedi speculates into the notion of Subalternity in *The God of Small Things* by brooding on the condition of women, children, the untouchables as subaltern figures. As the article shows, the author's focus is to widen and "unconsciously extend the views of the [Subaltern Studies Collective] group by highlighting the pathetic condition of these subalterns in India" (393). Even though the critic refers to Subalternity, the same issue is discussed in reference to the Orientalist discourse in this work.

Furthermore, in her thesis entitled "Speaking Voices in Postcolonial Indian Novels from Orientalism to Outsourcing" Barbara J. Gardner describes an Orientalist pessimistic representation of the characters, culture and environment in *The God of Small things*. She writes:

Unfortunately, although Roy's Velutha joins the children in play, most of Roy's novel is far from fun and games. There is narrative resisting the stasis of an Orientalist text, a postcolonial revision of a Western canonical tradition, stories of individual lives, but, when readers get to the end of Roy's novel, they are ultimately left with a sad, depressing narrative of failed human

beings. In Roy's novel, there are no "happily ever afters" for the characters, the culture, or even for the environment. (10)

Though the critic aligns and associates Roy's critique of her nation's figures, culture and environment with an Orientalist perspective, the present work differs in the way it uses the two theoretical approaches of Orientalism and Subalternity in the analysis of the novel's Orientalist themes and characterization.

Like *The God of Small Things*, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* has received a wide range of critical responses and has been analyzed from different perspectives. In his article entitled "A feminist just like us? Teaching Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*," John Champagne introduces his first experience of teaching Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* in a course entitled "The Theme of Identity in World Literature: Race, Gender, and Other Issues of Diversity," where each student was required to present orally a brief research report on the topic. Champagne's analysis of *So Long a Letter* concentrates on Ba's representation of feminist and postcolonial issues. He even capitalizes the connection between African feminism represented in Ba's text and Western version of feminism and accounts for the affinity by the author's endorsement and support of the French assimilation policy. He writes:

So Long a Letter; winner of the prestigious Noma Prize; is one of the most frequently taught novels by an African woman. Its accessibility and brevity make it ideal for an introductory class in postcolonial literature-particularly one that attempts to achieve some kind of "balance" between male and female writers. This apparent accessibility, however, is also a drawback, for a certain reading of the novel threatens to rewrite the female postcolonial subject in a relation of pure specularly to the West. Specifically, Ramatoulaye often strikes both critics and students as remarkably "like us." While the impetus behind this reading is almost always a benevolent one, theorists like

Spivak and Wallerstein remind us that imperialism has operated historically in both violent and benevolent guises. Particularly problematic is the fact that areading of Ramatoulaye as "like us" is perhaps encouraged by the text itself, with its unselfconscious praise of Western feminism, its willing capitulation to the values of French culture, and its deployment of what Wallestein has characterized as the ideology of universalism. (26-27)

In the line with John Champagne's ideas on Ba's feminism in *So Long a Letter*, Rizwana Habib Latha's article entitled "Feminisms in an African context: Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*" assumes that :

Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* contains a strong message, not only about the disempowerment of women, but also about how women can empower themselves effectively. Likewise, it provides a vital insight into the interconnections between feminisms and multifaceted identities in societies which are becoming increasingly diverse, and this makes it meaningful to readers across all racial, cultural, class and religious boundaries. (37)

Clearly, the article points out women's strategies of disempowerment and empowerment as Ba's *So Long a Letter*'s strong message. In this sense, Ba's representation of women's disempowerment is directly related to the oppression exercised upon third world women under patriarchal and social norms, and her representation of empowerment calls attention to the necessity of seeking a change through self representation. The critic also emphasizes Ba's text engagement in multifaced and multicultural issues recognizable in a wide range of different racial, religious and cultural communities.

John Champagne's and Rizwana Habib Latha's discussion of feminism in *So Long Letter* is very important in understanding Ba' feminism and third world feminist burden. Yet, both articles seem to fall short of any reference to Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Gayatri Spivak's Subalternity while discussing an important element in both theories.

Moreover, in her review entitled "Une si longue letter by Bâ; *So Long a Letter* by Bâ," Barbara Celarent writes:

In the new readings, the novel concerns the rediscovery of Islam, of surrender to God's will. They move from feminist politics of a somewhat traditional sort—how to advance the interests of women—to the different question of how humans live religious lives that are simultaneously social and personally fulfilling. The privatization of religion in the Christian West surrendered to Islam the lead in imagining such patterns for religious living in social worlds. Little surprise then that the Muslim Ba captures this performative quality of religion. Ramatoulaye has always "been religious." But to "be" a Muslim (or any other religion) is not to be something, but to be aware that one is in the process of becoming something. Religion is thus a particular form of performative articulation between the becoming person, the social process, and the natural world in which both person and process find themselves. It is from novels and other such biographical works that this insight has come—the rooting of what we used to call "institutions" in particular kinds of articulations of selves and groups. But one need not know the detailed turns of sociological theory to know the greatness of this book. One needs only an open mind and an inquiring heart. So short a novel. So long a message. (1396)

The author emphasizes the intertwined link between religion and self representation, emphasizing the rooting of some institutionalized religious forms in the

articulations of selves and groups. In this sense, the critic underlines some Ba's *So Long a Letter*'s characters leading social and communal fulfilling lives endorsing religious values. Despite its references to religion, the article barely deals with the issues discussed in the present thesis.

Finally, in a doctorate thesis entitled "The Limits of the Literary: Senegalese Writers Between French, Wolof and World Literature," (2012), Warner Tobias Dodge quotes Bâ's discussing the political function of African literatures saying:

The [African] writer must echo the aspirations of all social classes, especially the most disadvantaged ones. He must denounce the ills and pains that afflict our society and hold back its full blossoming; he must strike out at the archaic practices, customs and mores that have nothing to do with our precious cultural heritage. This is his sacred mission, to be accomplished against all odds, with faith and tenacity. (60)

Warner Tobias Dodge explains that the objective of Ba's novel is to strike out at the archaic practices and values of African societies that are at odds with modernity and progress. Still, the author reads *So Long a Letter* as a denunciation of the institution of polygamy which ensue women's isolation and denigration. Dodge writes:

[Une si longue lettre] portrays the isolation of married women who reject polygamy in a society where it is taken for granted, and the plight of articulate women living in a social milieu dominated by attitudes and values that tend to deny women a proper social personality. (61)

Considering the critic's view on polygamy, our task in this dissertation is to read Ba's representation of polygamy in *So Long a Letter* as one instance of an Orientalist discourse. This orientation shows how Ba's rejection of polygamy serves the theme discussed in this thesis.

Despite the fact that Arundhati Roy's *The God of small things* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* are studied and looked at from the subaltern, feminist and religious standpoints, up to our knowledge, none of the studies mentioned above have reviewed the Orientalist Discourse in the novels in an independent single study. The originality of the work resides in reading, first, the two authors' representation of social and cultural realities such as polygamy, gender, center-periphery class relations as a characteristic trait typical of many third world contexts, and secondly, interpreting these socio-cultural practices as different facets of the Orientalist discourse. The choice of the topic is stemmed from a personal interest in feminist literature and, in particular, African and third world writers introduced in African Studies course, but also postcolonial theory and Oriental and Subaltern studies introduced in Theories of Literature course. So fascinated by many third world feminist writings and ideas, my choice falls upon Mariama Ba and Arundhati Roy.

In terms of structure, the thesis is divided into an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The introduction reads as preamble into the world of literature and the notion of representation and misrepresentation in literary texts, specifically in postcolonial literature. The first chapter entitled "*The God of Small Things* and *So Long a Letter*: Texts in Context," deals with the historical and literary contexts that inform both texts and includes short synopses of both novels and short biographies of both writers. The second chapter entitled "Gayatri Spivak's Subaltern theory and Edward Said's Orientalist theory" summarizes the major ideas represented in Said's



*Orientalism* and Spivak's "*Can the Subaltern Speak*," The third chapter entitled "Reading the Orientalist Discourse in *The God of small things* and *So Long a Letter*," investigates the major Orientalist aspects in Roy's and Ba's texts, focusing mainly on the authors' representation and denunciation of archaic traditions, oppressive gender practices and religious dictatorship. The conclusion retraces the major elements discussed in the thesis and sums up the major findings of the research work.

## **Chapter one**

*The God of Small Things and So  
Long a Letter: Texts in Context*

# Chapter One

## *The God of Small Things and So Long a Letter: Texts in Contexts*

### Introduction

Literary works mirror the consciousness, experiences and lives of individuals and societies. They have some aims to achieve, some thoughts to express and some plans to carry out. Generally, literary works are born from the author's or poet's watercourse of imagination, sheltered in the beauty of his/her language and engendered by the socio-political or socio-cultural conditions of their times and nations. As a consequence, it is helpful to the reader to relate texts to their contexts in order to understand the conditions and circumstances that beget them.

The following chapter studies the historical and literary contexts of the two texts under study; Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. It also provides short synopses of the texts and short biographies of the two authors, Roy and Ba. As it will be revealed, the first section of this chapter which concerns Roy's *The God of Small Things* provides a brief history of India, its politics, but importantly, it capitalizes upon the caste system and the place of women in it. Similarly, Ba's *So long a Letter* leafs through the cultural norms engraved in the Senegalese society and in particular highlights the role of religion in it. It also emphasizes, as in Roy's text, the denigration women experience in the light of strict societal and religious norms characteristic of this society. As far as the literary context is concerned, both authors seem to align with or have an affinity with the works and techniques of postmodernism as the publication of their works coincide with the emergence of postmodernism and they also use extra techniques to structure their ideas

and themes in the texts. While Roy's opts for the female bildungsroman, Ba uses an epistolary form.

## **I. Contextual Study**

### ***1. The God of Small Things***

#### **1.1 .A brief history of India**

Indian history is often divided into several broad periods. First, the ancient period, from about 1200 B.C. to about A.D.100, witnessed the birth of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. Second, the classical period, from about A.D. 100 to 1200, characterized by the pre-eminence of the Hindu civilization. Third, the middle period, from about 1200 to 1757, during which Muslim conquerors and settlers (mostly from Persia, Turkey and Central Asia, and Arabia) and their descendents governed large parts of the Indian sub-continent. Still, the colonial period, from 1757 to 1947, when India fell prey to the British Empire. Last but not least, the postcolonial period, from 1947 onward, when the sub-continent , India as a large landmass part of the continent geographically and politically independent, was partitioned into several new nations including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.( Walsh )

Around 1526, in the middle period, the Mughal dynasty established its dominance over most of the Indian subcontinent, ruling from Delhi and Agra (home of the Taj Mahal). Europe's interventions in the land began earlier, in 1498, when the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama discovered the sea-route from the Atlantic to India, traveling around Africa and across the Indian Ocean, landing in the port of Cochin, in Kerala, in order to start a trade in spices (pepper, cinnamon), textiles and handicrafts. Thereafter, the Portuguese conquered and settled in Goa, the first European colony in

India. The very first pages of Roy's novel contain several general references to the importance of Kerala and Cochin in Da Gama introduced to Europe Indian spices and luxury goods unknown to them. Later on, British, Dutch, and French trading companies repeatedly attempted to establish posts, factories, and forts on the subcontinent, often in conflict with each other, with the Portuguese, and with Indian rulers (especially the Mughals). The British East India Company finally won in 1757, and established its rule in Bengal, with its capital at Calcutta. A century later, Indians waged their first "war of independence" against the Company in the "Mutiny" of 1857. At the end of that conflict, the British Crown and Parliament dissolved the East India Company and took over direct rule of India. In 1885, the Indian National Congress launched a peaceful political movement for independence from Britain, which culminated in the "freedom movement" led by Mahatma Gandhi, and the subcontinent's decolonization in 1947.

## **1.2 Politics in India**

Politically speaking, since the 1920s and 1930s, Kerala has developed a strong regional and local culture of peasant movements, labor unions, and populist politics; this has provided the grass-roots support for the Communist Party, which has been elected to state office frequently since the 1950s. For most of the past six decades, Kerala is a socialist, democratic welfare state within the Indian republic. When not in power, the state's Communist Party has formed the principal opposition party in the legislature (Rudolph et al ). In *The God of Small Things*, Comrade Pillai, a member of Communist Party, organizes the party's activities in the Ayemenem-Kottayam area in Kerala. In the 1950s and 1960s, two distinct factions, called the Communist Party (Marxist) (known as the CP(M)) and the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) known as the CP(ML),

respectively, broke away from the older Communist Party of India (the CPI), and emerged as separate, more radical political organization.

### **1.3. Society in India**

#### **1.3.1. The Caste System**

Modern Indian society is often divided in several overlapping ways that take into account language, ethnicity, regional origin, tribe, gender, religion, socio-economic class, and most importantly the caste system. The Hindu society is a caste-ridden society. That is to say, caste is an inseparable aspect of the society. When transgressing the aforementioned forms of differentiation, caste becomes the most influential basis that encourages the unequal systematic division between members of the Hindu society.

It is hard to give an exact definition to the word “caste” in itself. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines Caste as “a Hindu hereditary class of socially equal persons, united in religion and usually following similar occupations, distinguished from other castes in the hierarchy by its relative degree of purity or pollution.” That is to say, it is an old form of social stratification that divides the Hindu society into classes measured in terms of highness and lowness criteria. Herbert Hope Risley, a British ethnographer and colonial administrator and member of the Indian Civil Service who conducted extensive studies on the tribes and castes, defines it as “a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name; claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same hereditary calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community” (qtd. in Hutton, 47 ).

The Hindus are split into four main categories, who are originated from Brahma, the Hindu God of creation. First, the Brahmins are at the top of the hierarchy and are

believed to come from Brahma's head; as a result they are mainly the teachers, the priests, the intellectuals and scholars.

In *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste*, Brian K. Smith, explains the Brahman caste and says:

The Brahmin class is essentially defined by its supposed priority (as the class created first by the creator god), by knowledge of the Veda, and by the monopoly this class holds on the operation of sacrifice. These traits justify the social position of the class vis-à-vis others: they are predominant because they are prior, and they claim to stand outside of the power relations that govern social life for others because of their superior knowledge and sole possession of the ultimate "weapons," sacrificial techniques. (48)

Following the Brahmins are the Kshatriyas, political rulers and soldiers, supposedly created from Brahma's arm and consist of warriors and rulers. These are the ruling class and often collaborated with the Brahmins as they reigned over their kingdom. Brian K. Smith adds that A Kshatriya is characterized by physical and martial strength (48). As a result, "the Kshatriya is charged with the protection of the higher Brahmin class which rule over (and unrestricted exploitation of) the lower Vaishyas" (48-9).

The third caste are called the Vaishyas , they were created from Brahma's thighs. They are merchants, traders, bankers. Among the duties a Vaishyas has to perform was agriculture, cattle rearing and trade in order to ensure the prosperity of the community. The Shudras, the last category, however, were at the bottom of the pyramid, as they came from Brahma's feet and did all the menial jobs. They are usually artisans, servants, peasants, and laborers. Shudras only task is to serve the upper three classes as it was thought to be the only thing they are capable to do.

The four caste-groups coexist with a fifth large category : the Asprishya or “untouchables” .They are members of “impure” and “polluted” communities at the bottom of the caste hierarchy in orthodox Hindu society, which means that they exist outside the caste divisions. They are referred to as Untouchables because they perform unclean tasks , being garbage removers, cremators, barbers, tanners and cobblers. They are permanently polluted by their occupations and their association with dead and rotting things such as tanning, the cremation of dead bodies, and the disposal of night soil.In Velutha’s description, the novel’s main Untouchable character, Roy appears to incorporate the Western meaning of untouchable as someone inferior or irreproachable, and offers a moving portrait of a lovable, intelligent man doomed by the forces of history.

In some cases, the untouchables could face criminal charges if they polluted certain things with their presence. For example, the presence of an outcast (member of an excluded cast) in a temple was considered a criminal offense (polluting). They were also forbidden to enter the streets in which the houses of the upper castes were situated, and there were many customs and laws that kept them beyond the villages and towns. Since they were rated outside the caste system, they were destined to only in the outskirts of the village and were never an integral part of village community. Their services, however, were still essential to the health of the community and therefore still had to be part of the system in order to serve the upper castes.

This enormous system of castes and caste-groups is traditionally maintained by an arranged number of restrictions. The most pertinent to our texts are the Marriage restrictions, that is, caste system is based on endogamy. The members of caste or sub-caste are forced to marry within the group. If anybody violates the rule of endogamy he gets punishment such as excommunication from the caste this example is found in both *The God of Small Things* and *So Long a Letter*.



Another pertinent characteristic is the definition of caste-membership by birth which divides the society into small groups based on birth. Each group is well developed and is bound to follow common norms and values. The caste mobility is restricted. Under no circumstance one can change one's caste. A restriction on Occupational Choice that is Society has selected some of the occupations as 'pure' and some other as 'impure'. Accordingly, 'pure' occupations are allotted to the higher caste groups and 'impure' or inferior occupations to the lower caste groups. For example, shoe-making, sweeping, barbering .The example of Velutha in *The God of Small Things* illustrates the hereditary occupations of carpentry. Moreover, the caste system imposes restrictions in the field of social relations. While interacting with others, each caste group and/or individual has to follow certain rules and regulations. Different sets of principles are prescribed for different caste groups. For example, the higher caste people do not touch lower caste people. In the caste system the higher caste people enjoy all the privileges such as wealth, power and prestige. The impure castes suffer from certain civil and religious restrictions.

### **1.3.2 Syrian Christians**

The Syrian Christians (or, more precisely, the Syriac Christians), the most notable members of the Christian community in Kerala, are descendents of the "high caste" Hindus believed to have been converted by Saint Thomas the Apostle around A.D. 52. The Syrian Christians are also known as St Thomas Christians, Malabar Christians, or Nasrins (Nazarenes).The Christians who broke away from them to form separate churches (especially in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and later), are broadly distinguished from two other types of Christians, who appeared much later in Kerala's history as converts mostly from among "low caste" Hindus and "untouchables". These include Roman Catholics converted initially by the Jesuit, St Francis Xavier, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and later by other Catholic missionaries in Kerala; and

Protestants, such as those converted to the Anglican Church by English missionaries in the British colonial period. (Dharwadker)

Historically, the discrimination against low castes and untouchables in Hinduism has been reproduced against these converts within Christianity, so that caste reappears in the Catholic and Protestant churches in Kerala and elsewhere in India. Roy's *The God of Small Things* refers to this phenomenon right at the beginning of the novel. Kottayam and the region around it have the largest concentration of Syrian Christians, who are relatively prosperous, well-educated and own land and property. The principal family depicted in Roy's novel like her mother's family in real life is an extended Syrian Christian family that owns and operates a pickle factory in Ayemenem in the 1960s.

### **1.3.3 Women in India**

As far as women are concerned in India, it is said that they must first obey their father, then their husband, and then their sons. The opinion of the male head of the household is especially supreme and important, especially in the arrangement of marriages. In this sense, romantic preferences get little consideration. Since it is the male head that typically controls the family's finances, it is he who pays or receives a dowry at the time of a child's marriage. Although older women may be very influential behind the scenes, they wield little legal authority in property and marriage matters. Marriages that are not arranged by the couple's parents, often termed "love marriages," are looked down on as impulsive acts of passion. The more usual style of marriage unites a couple who have barely met beforehand. It is through the institution of arranged marriage and its correlate, caste endogamy, that parents exercise control not only over their adult children but also over the social structure and the caste system. In addition to this, the country has two main types of marriage: a north Indian one in which the man must not

marry a closely related cousin and a south Indian one in which a cross-cousin, whether the mother's brother's daughter or the father's sister's daughter, is the ideal spouse. Many south Indian castes also permit uncle-niece marriage. Maharashtra state has intermediate forms. (Clark et al)

## **2. Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter***

### **2.1 A brief history of Senegal**

The West African country of Senegal, in which *So Long a Letter* is set, has a long and rich history, much of which roils beneath the novel's surface. Before the colonial period, Senegal was a part of the powerful Ghana and Wolof empires. Today most Senegalese identify themselves as Wolof, an ethnic group marked by its strictly defined caste system and widespread practice of Sufi Islam (Islam was first introduced to the region in the 11th century). Bordered on three sides by the Sahara, the Atlantic, and the jungles of sub-Saharan Africa, Senegal, in particular its capital, Dakar, was once an important trade hub and, for that reason, a contentious region among the colonial powers. France eventually assumed control in the late 19th century. Under the French system, colonial subjects were theoretically offered a path to French citizenship, but such an approach forced them to receive a French education and assimilate French culture.

### **2.2. Political Life**

Senegal is a moderately decentralized republic dominated by a strong presidency. The president is elected by popular vote for a seven-year term and appoints a prime minister. The 1963 constitution provides for a civilian government composed of a dominant executive branch, a National Assembly, and an independent judiciary. A second legislative chamber, the Senate, was established in 1999. (Harold )

Called the "Poet President," Léopold Sédar Senghor was elected in 1960. As a student during the Depression years in Paris, he wrote poetry that helped launch the concept of Négritude. Inspired by the romantic vision of Africa of Harlem Renaissance authors and European ethnographers, Senghor exalted African culture. During his reign, the arts were well funded; he organized the Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar in 1966. His contribution to the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) of Senegal and Gambia River Basin development associations won him respect as an elder statesman. Although a practicing Roman Catholic, Senghor developed strong ties with the Muslim brotherhoods, who supported him. Some Senegalese respected and revered him as the "Father of the Nation" even though they did not share his political views. Senghor's political legacy was mixed. He provided the nation with a level of peace, political stability, tolerance, and freedom of expression that was rare in Africa. Unlike most African leaders, he knew when and how to give up power. However, by establishing a de facto one-party system, he contributed to the decline of his party's dynamism and thwarted the development of an opposition that could openly challenge national policies that had failed to stem economic decline. (Dilley et al)

President Abdou Diouf, who held office from 1981 to 2000, was a handpicked successor who peacefully stepped down after two decades in power. In a presidential election held in the year 2000, the forty-year dominance of the Socialist Party and Diouf's nineteen-year reign ended. In a second round of elections, he was defeated by Abdoulaye Wade, the leader of the main opposition party, the Senegalese Democratic Party.

Mariama Bâ belonged to a slightly younger generation; she came into her literary powers just as Senegal achieved its independence. Bâ's Senegal was a young

country faced with an uncertain future, entering an increasingly global economy and saddled with the responsibility of reaffirming a national sense of self.

## **2. 3 Social Stratification**

Historically, Senegalese society was organized into a hierarchy of castes, a rigid structure in which descendants of royal lines and nobles ruled over artisan castes and slaves. Yet, after independence, Senegal new means for achieving wealth power, and status were emerging through the market economy and the development of the educational system. The modern elite among successful businessmen, managers , professionals in the private sector ,influential politicians as well a highly educated individuals have set new criteria of class in Senegal .

### **2.3.1. The Status of Women**

The position of women in most ethnic groups is one of dependence: husbands, fathers, brothers, and uncles all have rights over women and much of what they produce. Despite constitutional protections, women face extensive societal discrimination, especially in rural areas, where Islamic and traditional customs, including polygamy and Islamic rules of inheritance, are strong and women generally are confined to traditional roles. About half of all women live in polygamous unions. Due to the fact that men are legally considered heads of the household, women pay higher taxes than men and employers pay child allowances to men and not to women. In urban areas, several women's groups have formed to address violence against women, usually wife beating, which is a common problem. The police usually do not intervene in domestic disputes, and most people are reluctant to go outside the family for help.

Women usually do most of the household chores of cooking, cleaning, and child rearing. With the growing exodus of young men from the villages, rural women have

become increasingly involved in managing village forestry resources and operating millet and rice mills. The government has established a rural development agency designed to organize village women and involve them more actively in the development process. Women play a prominent role in village health committees and prenatal and postnatal programs. In urban areas, despite women's second-class status within Islam, change has proceeded rapidly in big cities, where women have entered the labor market as secretaries, typists, salesclerks, maids, and unskilled workers in textile mills and tuna-canning factories. (Trillo et al)

Marriage in rural areas is arranged by parents. A young man may want a young woman, but his father decides whether she is suitable. A go-between often is appointed to investigate the woman's family background. If the father finds the family satisfactory, he sends the go-between to deliver kola nuts (the fruit of the *kola* tree ) to the woman's parents as a symbol of the young man father's acceptance . The parents accept the fruit, if they approve of the young man. In matrilineal ethnic groups such as the Wolof, the mother's brother is sent on behalf of the groom to ask for the bride's hand. Along with kola nuts, money is given. Gifts such as a television set, a sewing machine, jewelry, and fashionable clothes are required from the groom. In Muslim families, most marriages are conducted at the mosque by the imam, or religious leader. Then a civil marriage takes place at city hall or the family court. The bride moves to the groom's house with great ceremony in which relatives and friends participate. In rural areas, young women sing ribald songs to provoke and entertain. Usually many days of festivities follow. (Trillo, Richard, and Jim Hudgens)

## 2.4 Religious Beliefs

Almost Ninety percent of people identify themselves as Muslims in Senegal. In her article entitled “The Impact of Islam on Women in Senegal,” Lucy .E Creevy identifies Islam and its impact on Seneglese women she writes:

Senegal , is a country with 85 to 90 percent of its population adhering to Islam, although it is not officially an Islamic state since it is not governed by Islamic law. There are, in fact, no Islamic states in West Africa other than Mauritania, which by the ethnicity and culture of its population may be more truly grouped with North African states. But, Senegal has had a long exposure to Islam, which has been an important element in politics in the colonial and postcolonial period despite Senegal's secular government. (347)

The way Islam is practiced in Senegal is significantly different from most other Islamic countries. Islam in Senegal is partially derived from mystical Sufi traditions. As it is shown in Creevy’s article Islam has an old exposure to Islam .Islam in Senegal has deep long roots affiliated with one of the three principal brotherhoods: the *Mourides*, the *Tijaniyya*, or the *Qadiriyya*. Each brotherhood is distinguished by slight differences in rituals and codes of conduct. Each year, wealthy and middle-class people make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Despite the small size of the Catholic communit approximately almost five percent of the population .Aspects of traditional religion are fused with Christianity as a result of colonialism “Senegal has had a long exposure to Islam, which has been an important element in politics in the colonial and postcolonial period despite Senegal's secular government” (Creevy 347). Many urbanized people still regard their ancestors as important spiritual leaders of everyday life, although Allah or God is worshiped formally. In the same article Lucy.E Creevy identifies how Islam and the

holy Quran is taken as a restrictive teaching in regards to third women as ,usually seen as a direct cause of the relative status of Muslim women .others argue that Islam is no more to be blamed than many other factors such as traditional pre-Islamic norms and influences from the West.(creevy 347-348) Creevy belives that the the teachings of ” the Qu'ran and the Sharia “assume a subordinate position for women as they remain in a second-class position in terms of their rights and privileges in society they are seen as being under the protection and direction of their fathers, husbands, or brothers even after the the birth of a modern Senegal and women’s education ,still traditions customs maintain the superiority of men at home ,in the work place.( Creevy 364-365)

## **II. Literary Context**

### **1. Arundhati Roy’s *the God of Small Things***

#### **1.1 Arundhati Roy’s biography**

Arundhati Roy, originally known as Suzanna Arundhati Roy, is an Indian author, actress, and political activist, born in November 24, 1961, Shillong, Meghalaya, India to a Hindu tea plantation manager and a Syrian Christian women’s rights activist. Her parents divorced when she was two, and Roy moved with her mother and brother (who was only a few months older than she was) to Kerala, the setting of *The God of Small Things*. Roy studied architecture in Delhi, India, and later married a filmmaker Pradip Krishen.

Despite the fact that she was trained as an architect, Roy had little interest in design. She dreamed instead of a writing career. After a series of odd jobs, including artist and aerobics instructor, she wrote and costarred in the film *In Which Annie Gives It to Those Ones* (1989) and later penned scripts for the film *Electric Moon* (1992) and several television dramas. The films earned Roy a devoted following, but her literary



career was interrupted by controversy. In 1995, she wrote two newspaper articles claiming that Shekar Kapur's *Bandit Queen* exploited *Phoolan Devi*, one of India's most wanted criminals in the early 1980s and a heroine of the oppressed. The columns caused uproar, including a court case, and Roy retreated from the public and returned to the novel she had begun to write.

Roy was best known for the award-winning novel *The God of Small Things* and for her involvement in environmental and human rights causes. In 1997, Roy published her debut novel, *The God of Small Things*. The semiautobiographical work departed from the conventional plots and light prose that had been typical among best-sellers. Composed in a lyrical language about South Asian themes and characters in a narrative that wandered through time, Roy's novel became the biggest-selling book and won the 1998 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Roy's subsequent literary output consisted of politically oriented nonfiction, much of it aimed at addressing the problems faced by her homeland in the age of global capitalism. Among her publications are *Power Politics* (2001), *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002), *War Talk* (2003), *Public Power in the Age of Empire* (2004), *Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers* (2009), *Broken Republic: Three Essays* (2011), and *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (2014).

Arundhati Roy has concentrated her writings on political issues. She has written on varied topics such as Narmada Dam project, India's nuclear weapons and American power giant Enron's activities in India. She strongly associated with anti-globalization movement and is a staunch critic of neo-imperialism. She has become an outspoken critic of the Indian government, the United States, and global policies of imperialism, capitalism, and nuclear war. Because of her activity in various environmental and human rights causes, she was put at odds with Indian legal authorities and the country's

middle-class establishment. She drew criticism for her vocal support of Maoist-supported Naxalite insurgency groups, views she summarized in the volume *walking with the Comrades* (2011). While Roy was leading efforts to prevent the construction of dams in Narmada, supporters of the project accused her of attacking them at a protest in 2001. Though the charges were dropped, she was convicted of contempt of court the next year after her petition for dismissal of the charges offended Supreme Court judges with its vituperative tone. She was fined and sentenced to a day of imprisonment. The incident was chronicled in the documentary *DAM/AGE* (2002). Roy narrowly avoided sedition charges in 2010 after making remarks in support of Kashmiri independence. In December 2015 she was issued a contempt of court notice after she had published an article earlier that year defending a professor who had been arrested for alleged Maoist links.

## **1.2 Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* Plot Overview**

*The God of Small Things* tells the story of a Syrian Christian family, the Ipe family, in the Southern province of Kerala, India. The novel opens with the introduction of the Ipe family, whose members belong to the old colonial order. These include Pappachi Kochamma, the father of the family, Mammachi Kochamma, the mother, and their children Ammu and Chacko and ultimately Baby Kochamma, Pappachi's sister. Upon retiring from his job in Delhi, Pappachi returns back to his hometown Ayemenem with Mammachi and his two children Ammu and Chacko. We learn that Pappachi violently abuses his wife, Khoshamma Ipe (Mammachi). One day, however, he is stopped from beating up Mammachi by his son Chacko and forbade him to ever beat her again. From then on, Pappachi ignores his wife altogether. Mammachi, enjoying her new 'freedom',

starts a small pickles business that operates from her own kitchen. Chacko studied at Oxford University scholar and came back to Ayemenem after divorcing his English wife Margaret Kochamma with whom he had a daughter, Sophie Mol. While Chacko is allowed to study at a university, his sister Ammu is denied any education because she is a girl. To escape the oppressive atmosphere at home, Ammu spends the summer with an Aunt in Calcutta where she meets her future husband Baba. Several years after her unhappy marriage with a Hindu man, she divorces him. Ammu takes the two children, the twins Estha and Rahel, and moves back to her parents' home. However, unlike her brother, she is not very welcome in the family house because of her status as a divorced woman. Her children, too, are constantly reminded of the fact that they are not wanted in the house. According to the rules of society, they should have been living with their father. Meanwhile, Pappachi has died and Chacko has taken over his mother's successful business, calling it "Paradise Pickles & Preserves". Baby Kochamma, Pappachi's sister is hateful towards Estha and Rahel. As a girl, she fell in love with the Irish Father Mulligan, for whom she converted to Roman Catholicism and joined a convent in the hope of being closer to him. Unfortunately, he could not return her love and she became depressed. Her father pulled her out of the convent and sent her to the United States for an education since nobody would ever accept her as a wife anyway.

The novel's major events are narrated through the eyes of the two twins, Estha and Rahel, and circles around two tragic events happened in their lives. Firstly, the tragic death of their cousin Sophie Mol, who accidentally drowns when the three children try to cross a river in a small boat; and secondly, the death of the beloved Velutha, their mother's lover. Since both children are held responsible for the death of Sophie Mol, they are subsequently separated from their mother. The family's suffering becomes greater when Ammu experiences a love affair with Velutha with a member of a lower

caste, a man from the “untouchable” and thus their love is considered forbidden according to the caste system in India . Risking to interact with one of these untouchables, Ammu violates the caste system, which also causes the family to fall apart and also, Ammu’s twins, Estha and Rahel to be separated from each other.

Accordingly, Roy interweaves past and present experiences by constantly switching between the events that happened back in the late 1960s and their repercussions that are still felt well into the 1990s. That is, though Sophie Mol’s unfortunate drowning, took place in 1969, Roy’s story begins twenty three years later, when Ammu got divorced and Rahel returns to India as an adult and she is reunited with her twin brother for the first time since they were separated at the age of seven. By that time, Estha had “stopped talking altogether” (Roy 10) as a result of his childhood traumas. In their shared grief, Rahel and Estha turn to each other for comfort, committing another sinful transgression of the social order: incest. The novel ends with a flashback to the love affair of Ammu and Velutha, a flashback to what could have been a hopeful future for both lovers.

## **2. Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter***

### **2.1 Mariama Bâ’s biography**

Mariama Bâ is a Senegalese feminist novelist, born in Dakar, Senegal, in 1929, into a well-to-do and educated Senegalese family. Her father was a career civil servant who became one of the first ministers of state, while her grandfather was an interpreter in the French occupation regime. After her mother’s death, Bâ was largely raised in the traditional manner by her maternal grandparents. She received her early education in French, while at the same time attending Koranic school. During the colonial revolution

period and later, girls faced numerous obstacles when they wanted to have a higher education. Bâ's grandparents did not plan to educate her beyond primary school. Against their wishes and with her father's insistence on giving her an opportunity to continue her studies eventually persuaded them. As a result, Ba attended college, where she became a prominent law student. In a teacher training college located in Rufisque (a suburb in Dakar), Ba won the first prize in the entrance examination and joined the École Normale. In this institution, she was prepared for later career as a school teacher. The school's principal began to prepare her for the 1943 entrance examination to a teaching career after he noticed Bâ's intellect and capacity. She taught from 1947 to 1959, before becoming a Regional educational inspector.

Bâ was a politically outspoken and active feminist who endeavored from 1979 to 1981 in Senegal, West Africa. Her source of determination and commitment to the feminist cause stemmed from her background, her parents' life and her schooling. Indeed, her contribution is of great importance in modern African studies since she was among the first to illustrate the disadvantaged position of women in African society. Bâ's work focused on the grandmother, the mother, the sister, the daughter, the cousin and the friend, how they all deserve the title "mother of Africa", and how important they are for and in society.

Ba's first work, which in its wholeness essays she wrote at Ecole Normale, constitutes essentially a useful method of rejection of the "so-called French assimilationist policy". Bâ advocated urgent consideration and reinvigoration of African life. This former is essentially founded on the social construct of the relationship between man and woman. Indeed, there is an unequal and unbalanced power in the male/female relationship. Ba had nine children whom she raised more or less single-

handedly after divorcing her husband. As a divorcee and "a modern Muslim woman" as she characterized herself, Ba joined a number of women's rights advocacy groups and was active in women's associations. Ba also ardently promoted education. She defended women's rights, delivered speeches, and penned newspaper articles on education, genital mutilation, and the unequal treatment of women in Senegalese society. Thus, her contribution is significant because she explained and described the disadvantaged position of women in general and especially married women.

Bâ wrote many books openly sharing her thoughts and feelings, including her first novel *une si longue lettre* (1979) written in French, it was published to immediate literary acclaim. In 1981 *So Long a Letter* won the first ever Noma Award for Publishing in Africa, and it went on to become one of the first novels by an African woman to gain international attention, besides *La Fonction Politique des Littératures Africaines Ecrites (The Political Function of African Written Literatures)* (1981). Bâ, whose health had been declining for years, died later that year. Her second novel, *A Scarlet Song* (1986), was published posthumously.

## **2.2 Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* Plot Overview**

*So Long a Letter* recounts the story of two women from Senegal, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou. The two are childhood friends, but their paths diverge in adulthood, as Aissatou immigrates to America, leaving Ramatoulaye behind in Senegal. The novel is told through the epistolary style, that is, it is structured as a very long letter, written by Ramatoulaye to her friend, recounting the latest events of her life while reminiscing on their shared childhood and adolescence.

The novel begins with Ramatoulaye composing her letter as she sits through her Tenge which means the isolation period required in Muslim Senegal after the death

of one's husband. Modou, Ramatoulaye's husband, has recently died of a heart attack, and she describes the funeral rituals to Aissatou, who has been divorced for many years. Rama is irked that equal status has been given to her and her husband's new, second wife, who gave him only five children to Rama's twelve. The family gathers to divide the estate, and Modou's wives learn that he was heavily in debt. Rama reflects on the pain she felt when Modou took another wife after 25 years of happy marriage.

In the next chapters, through a series of flashbacks, Rama recalls her years at the teachers' training college with Aissatou, where she met Modou and chooses to marry him over a wealthier suitor her parents prefer, eschewing the traditional lavish wedding and customary dowry for a simple ceremony. Aissatou, meanwhile, dates Modou's friend, Mawdo. Though Mawdo is the son of a princess and of a higher class than Aissatou, the two marry in defiance of caste traditions.

After marriage, the two friends experience the joys and discomforts of married life. Rama and Aissatou work as teachers, fulfilled by their careers and their youthful love. Meanwhile, Aissatou's mother-in-law, Aunt Nabou, devises a plan to take revenge on Aissatou. She adopts a little girl whom she renames Nabou. After years of patience, young Nabou grows into a beautiful young woman. Aunt Nabou offers her adopted daughter to her son, Mawdo, and declares she will never recover if he refuses the proposal. Mawdo agrees despite Aissatou's objections. Feeling betrayed, Aissatou divorces Mawdo and pursues her education with a vengeance, ultimately being appointed to the Senegalese Embassy in the U.S. and permanently immigrating.

Three years later, Rama's husband decides to take a second wife of his own free will. He chooses Binetou, a poor girl whose entire family will benefit from the match.

Modou cared to keep the marriage secret until the day of the wedding, when he sends his best friend, his brother, and the local Imam to break the news. Rama's heart breaks, but outwardly, she maintains composure and grace towards her husband. Rama debates whether to leave Modou, but ultimately stays, to the horror of her children. Now married, Modou indifferent towards his first family, focuses his attentions on Binetou. Despite the deep loneliness she experiences, Rama takes on the work of running a household by herself, learning to fix leaks and pay bills. She learnt to live by focusing on bringing up her twelve children and entertaining herself by talking with them and going to see shows and movies. She wonders if she will ever meet another man, but fears her many children and her lack of a true divorce would be impediments. At Aissatou's encouragement, she also learns to drive, opening up a newfound sense of independence as a modern woman.

Back in the present, Rama continues her ritual isolation after Modou's death. She has forgiven him and now prays for him every day. Modou's brother, Tasmir, arrives at Rama's house and tells her she will now marry him. Enraged, Rama yells at Tasmir, accusing him of trying to steal his brother's wife. Tasmir has three wives already, she reminds him, none of whom he can financially support. She refuses to marry him and Tasmir leaves, defeated.

Next, Rama is visited by Daouda Dieng, the suitor from her youth, now a married man. They discuss politics and the lack of female representation in Senegal's government. Daouda proposes marriage. After days of careful consideration, Rama concludes that she respects and admires Daouda, but does not love him. She writes a letter of explanation, telling Daouda that she also feels uncomfortable coming between him and her first wife, a pain she knows firsthand.



After having heard of Aissatou's visit to Senegal, Rama tells her friend about her children, some now adults themselves. Rama discusses the perils of modern parenting, how she has allowed her girls to wear pants, travel freely, and have male friends. Yet, her oldest girls have taken up smoking and partying, and she wonders if she should have been less permissive. Her daughter, named Aissatou, has just revealed her pregnancy with a young law student. Though horrified at this incident, she supports her daughter. The baby's father, Iba, seeks Rama's permission to marry young Aissatou, which she grants. Aissatou is expelled from school for getting pregnant; Rama questions the fact that boys never suffer such consequences. Rama takes the path on sexual protection education in order not to let the same thing happen to her younger daughters.

As she prepares for her friend Aissatou's arrival the next day, Rama, full of questions, wonders what her friend will look like, after so many years in America. Will she be wearing pants? Will she insist on American furniture and utensils, like chairs and forks? Rama, for her part, will insist on keeping with tradition. She will spread out a traditional mat, and the two friends will sit and talk, just as they once did.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has traced the historical and literary backgrounds that informed both texts under study, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Mariam Ba's *So Long a Letter*. It has looked into the different socio-political and religious structures that characterize India and Senegal, looking into the different historical periods that form their history from ancient times to the present and showing the different aspects of life that prevail in them, including politics, culture and social life. As far as the literary context is concerned, the chapter has provided comprehensive summaries of the two

texts, short biographies of the two authors and referred to some literary techniques they make use of and the literary tradition into which they belong. The following chapter will look into the role of some of the ideas shown in this chapter such as the Indian tradition of caste and the Islamic religion in Senegal in the perpetuation of the Orientalist discourse.

## *Chapter Two*

**Gayatri Spivak's Subaltern  
theory and Edward Said's  
Orientalist theory**

## Chapter Two

### Gayatri Spivak's the Subaltern and Edward's Said's Orientalism

“The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony“(Said 5)

#### Introduction

The present chapter introduces the major ideas discussed in Edward's Said theory of Orientalism and Gayatri Spivak's inquiries in Subaltern studies. As the chapter shows, Spivak's theory of Subalternity is grounded in the theoretical framework of Othering and objectifying some social categories and figures on the basis of race, gender and ethnicity, while Said 's Orientalism broods upon the cultural , intellectual and religious boundaries erected in studies and speculation on Oriental cultures and people.

#### 1. The Subaltern theory

##### 1.1. Background to the theory of the Subaltern: Antonio Gramsci

Subaltern theory is a post-colonial literary and theoretical approach that brings into the foreground the oppressed categories of a society. Originally accredited in the writing of Italian Marxist political activist Antonio Gramsci's, Subalternity highlights the phenomenon of Otherness justified and accounted for by caste, class, gender, race and culture. In his article entitled “*Notes on Italian History*” which appeared as part of the widely known book *Prison Notebooks* written between 1929 and 1935, Antonio Gramsci's used the concept, the subaltern, to refer to any “low rank” person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation. At that time Gramsci targeted the

workers and peasants who were oppressed and discriminated by the leader of the National Fascist Party, Benito Mussolini and his agents. In his definition of the subaltern, Gramsci emphasizes the oppression and control worked out on lower categories of the social order and on the inability of these groups to voice their own narratives' in the light of the dominant hegemonic narratives of the state. He writes that The subaltern classes by definition are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State": their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States (qtd.in Loui 5-6).

Influenced by Gramsci's studies on the subaltern, many other subsequent twentieth century scholars made a breakthrough and extended the scope of research on the issue, developing it into a field of study known as the Subaltern Studies Group or Subaltern Studies Collective back in the early 1980s. The group, founded by Ranajit Guha, comprises a number of South Asian historians, social critics and scholars including Shahid Amin, Dipesh Chakrabarty, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Gyan Pandey and Sumit Sarkar. Their elaborate and systematic strategies of reading the Indian and south Asian histories are in principle inspired by Gramsci's views expressed in his "*The Prison Notebooks*," but further developed in Ranajit Guha's *Subaltern Studies I* (1982) where the Subaltern Studies defined as , "a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (qtd. in Green 387), and later in *The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1999), which examines the interplay of domination and subjugation power relationships and seeks to do justice to the Indian insurgencies against the colonial rule between 1783 and 1900.

## 1.2. The Subaltern According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Gayatri Spivak is an Indian-American critic and theorist who has become an authoritative voice of the post-colonial period since the publication of her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), considered as a groundbreaking text of post-colonial studies. In her discussion of Subalternity, Spivak carried out a series of historical studies and literary critiques of imperialism and touched upon a large variety of topics such as Marxism, feminism and Deconstruction. Through her cultural and critical theories, Spivak tried to question as well as challenge the legacy of the colonial institution imposed on third world countries by great imperial powers; the United State of America and Britain. Her critical discourse raises the issues of marginal subjects and the place of the subaltern women in the whole affair.

Like the Subaltern Studies group, Spivak was influenced by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci from whom she borrows the term subaltern to refer to the ‘unrepresented’ group of people in the society (55). She prefers the term subaltern as it encompasses the exact picture of the lower class people:

I like the word subaltern for one reason. It is totally situational. Subaltern began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was under censorship by Gramsci: he called Marxism monism, and was obliged to call the proletarian subaltern. That word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn’t fall under strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical rigor. (qtd in Morton 46)

In her essay “*Can the subaltern speak?*,” Spivak vindicates the limitations and silence exercised on the subalterns , wondering and putting into question the ability of these groups to speak in the light of the dominant voice. For Spivak, the subaltern

refers to the colonized and oppressed subjects or more generally those “of inferior rank” (283) including the colonized, the working class, blacks and women and whose voice has been silenced by major Foreign and national powers. Her breakthrough in Subaltern studies lies in her deep insights into the struggles and experiences of women from the ‘Third World’, emphasizing in the process sex and location in her understanding of subalternity.

Seeking an answer to the question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (283) Spivak argues that there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak , simply because the voice and the agency of subaltern women are so embedded in third world Patriarchal codes of moral conduct and the Colonial representation of subaltern women as victims of a barbaric culture. In this understanding, the feminist burden in third world has struggled with the archaic patriarchal hegemony invented prior to colonialism and has coped too with the ghost of colonialism after its initiation. Accordingly, under the whims of these two dominant political systems of representation, patriarchy and colonialism, the sexed subalterns cannot speak and when they make an effort to the death to speak, their speech acts are not heard or recognized.

## **2. Subaltern relationship with Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Gender.**

### **2. 1. Colonialism and Racial Subalternity**

Racial Subalternity “is so central to the growing power of imperial discourse” (Ashcroft 207) which sanctions European intervention in third world countries under the doctrine of the “white’s man burden, ” meant to enlighten and bring the light of civilization to underdeveloped brown and black races of third world countries. The colonized

subalterns are made to believe that they belonged to an inferior race and European colonials are believed to belong a superior race. Still, Colonial subalternity involves, in Franz Fanon's explanation, the dispossession of the aboriginal inhabitants and the disruption of their culture. He writes:

In the colonies, the foreigner coming from another country imposed his rule by means of guns and machines. In defiance of his successful transplantation, in spite of his appropriation, the settler still remains a foreigner ... The governing race is first and foremost those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original inhabitants, the others.

(31)

Here in the above quotation, Fanon draws attention to the settler-native relationship during the colonial period, which he compared to that of a master and a slave; the colonial subject is transplanted into the colonized land to settle, misappropriate and govern, while the colonized subject transforms into a stranger and a slave.

In *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Bill Ashcroft takes the same position as Franz Fanon and tries to distinguish between colonialism and post-colonialism. Colonialism denotes, as he suggests, a "period before independence" and post-colonialism "covers all the culture affected by from the moment of colonization to the present day" (2). Racial subalternity continues to thrive after the dissolution of the colonial regime and it is used, Ashcroft suggests, to account for "the dominant category of daily discriminations and prejudice as well as human variation in terms of culture, traditions, social patterns and ancestry (207).



## 2.2. Post-colonialism and Subaltern Identity

Post-colonialism marks the end of the colonial period and the beginning of a new era. The post-colonial period is significant when analyzing the subaltern identity in the nation being relieved from the chains of the colonial rule. Many writers have tried a hand to reproduce the colonial experience of the subalterns and the subaltern character became, thus, a hot topic of discussion in the postcolonial literature. This is clearly in evidence in a set of literary as well as theoretical writings, including Gayatri Spivack's *In Other Worlds* (1987), *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) and Edward's Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

In his *Beginning Theory* (1995), Peter Barry sums up Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) views on post colonialism. He explains that postcolonial writings, in Fanon understands, bother about postcolonial identity and strives to reclaim the past and correct stereotypical images elaborated on the colonized countries and subjects by Western colonial powers. Indeed, for centuries the European colonizing power have devalued the colonized nations' past, seeing their pre-colonial era as a pre-civilized or ahistorical times, and that true history, culture and progress in third world countries people have started with colonialism. Therefore, "the first step", Barry writes, "towards a post-colonial perspective is to reclaim one's own past" and "the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued" (192). Here then, Peter Barry's explanation targets the postcolonial subaltern identity that have been stained and disfigured by white imperial powers, and which should be corrected, voiced and made wide known by eroding the colonial ideology.

### 2.3. Third World Women and the notion of the ‘Other’

Otherness haunts individuals, communities, whole cultures and races. It has to do with associating inferior qualities with certain categories of society on the basis of race, sex, color and class. The phenomenon manifests itself in a form of bigotry which excludes these categories from standard definition, prevents them from economic and social privileges and denigrates them as fully human beings. In her article entitled “ The Representation of the Indigene”, Terry Goldie (1995) suggests that "since Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), it has been a commonplace to use 'Other' and 'non-self' for the white view of blacks and for the resulting black view of themselves" (233) and "presumably the first instance in which one human perceived another as Other in racial terms came when the first recognized the second as different in color, facial features and language' ( 235). In this understanding, Otherness is defined in relationship to the individual's imperfectability, deficiency and lack of certain qualities and values. Besides, it touches upon his ethnical bearing as well as his social and gender affiliation, but more importantly, considers the individual as an object rather than a subject.

Within gender politics, the supremacy of male domination has been achieved through historical forces. From ancient time, the male-folk went for work and they were the bread-earners of the family, while women were confined to the four walls of their houses, Child's bearing and household chores. This historical factor has paved the way for the treatment of women as the Other. Still, studies on gender stereotypes have often emphasized the differences between male and female spheres. Barbara and Castellano Turner affirm that men and women are seen as different "in personality traits, in physical characteristics, in interests, in occupational roles and status levels, and in many other ways" (95). In this view then, women are not innately inferior but society, with its dividing rules, amounts to their inferiority. In this view then, women are not innately

inferior but society, with its dividing rules, amounts to their inferiority. In line with this idea, Simone De Beauvoir writes:

One is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman. No biological, or economical fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilisation as whole that produces this creature...only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an other... the child would hardly think of himself as sexually differentiate. (*The Second Sex* 267)

The condition of the third world women is even more pathetic as they suffered the double blow of patriarchy and colonialism. On this issue Chandra Talpade writes:

The point is that factors other than gender figure integrally in the oppression of third world women and that, even regarding patriarchy, many third world women labor under indigenous inequitable gender relationships exacerbated by Western patriarchy, racism, and exploitation. For third world women resident in the West, race and class, along with gender, have been invisible elements in their oppression. (321)

In line with Chandra Talpade's viewpoint, Gayatri Spivack addresses the representation of third world women as the marginalized "Other", not only in Eastern societies and cultures, but also in the Western discourse. She describes as "epistemic violence" the subjugation and disqualification of third world woman's situated knowledge under colonialism because of race and class oppression as well as indigenous and colonial patriarchy, which deny her access to education, the law, and a voice of authority.

### 3. Edward Said's Orientalism

Orientalism is a sub-discipline in post-colonial criticism, which has been developed in the second half of the twentieth century by the Palestinian cultural critic, Edward Said. As its title suggests, Orientalism is concerned with the Orient or the East, that part of the world that includes the Middle East, North Africa and Asia. Orientalism is a term used by art historians and cultural studies scholars in their study, description and the portrayal of the Eastern world and its peoples. More accurately, Orientalism is defined as the Western representation of the Eastern world and the depiction of its cultures, languages, history, life, religion, and traditions through travelers, scholars, writers and artists. Indeed, in this case, the West generally refers to the United States of America and Europe, while the East includes the African and Asian countries.

Etymologically, Orientalism derives from the Latin word "Oriens" meaning "East", the opposite of the term "Occident" which refers to the West. The term usually separates the two hemispheres of the globe, the Eastern and the Western, in terms of religion, into the Islamic cultures in the East and the Christian cultures of the West. As a matter of fact, the religious historical clash between the Muslims and Christians over the Holy Land through the crusades, which went back to seventh century, opened the routes between the East and the West and laid opportunities for cultural exchange, contact and intermarriages. Indeed, returning crusaders to Europe brought with them stories about the daily life of Easterners which both impressed and astonished the westerners and later created a great contact and familiarity with the Orient. As a result, the East became an intriguing destination for travelers who were among them writers, artists, painters, novelists, who being impressed by the charm and magnificence of the Oriental world, begun painting and writing about the East and its peoples and their experiences there.

The beginning of Orientalism perception was marked by the Western scholarship written on the East as well as the translation of some Eastern works and writings into English. Scholars counted that there were approximately seventy travel books written between 1775 and 1825, and one of the most renowned work were the letters of Lady Mary Montagu , a British gifted and insightful author of the 18thcentury , who travelled with her husband to the Ottoman Empire , and published her letters that described the habits , manners and beliefs of Turkish women and her experience among them which later on became an important and favorite source of information for many writers and novelists (Phillips 26 ).In addition to travelogues, there was a prolific Western scholarship and insights on Eastern history, literature and religion which culminated in the translation of the Holy Quran as well as classical Arabian Nights that informed oriental life, culture and beliefs. However , these oriental studies became in a close relationship with racial attitude and stereotypes , through which the West begun to see the Oriental culture, literature and art as exotic , inferior and underdeveloped compared to their civilizations and cultures.

Obviously, Westerners have a terrible racial attitude towards the East, their cultures and religion. Indeed, Western scholars, writers, artists, philosophers, novelists and painters shaped Orientalism by elaborating theories, writing novels, epics and plays denigrating the East and their culture. In his *Othello* (1604) , William Shakespeare reveals his East-phobia by choosing a black character to represent the Eastern man and emphasizes his Otherness and inferiority . Similarly, in his *The Heart of Darkness* (1899), Joseph Conrad associates Africans with inferiority, exteriority and backwardness. Accordingly, such Western representations reflect perfectly the association of the East with Otherness.

Western stereotypes on the East are studied in depth in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Given his Arabian-Palestinian roots, Edward tried a hand on Oriental issues and bothered about Eastern cultures and religions in Western discourses. In his *Orientalism* (1978), Said scrutinizes and delves into the origin and logistics of the Oriental discourse. He defines Orientalism as everything that concerns the East and Orientalists as scholars who engage in the study of the Eastern culture and people. More important than this, he focused on the way Western scholars, writers, painters and artists saw, viewed, portrayed, described and represented the Eastern culture, religions, and lifestyles through denigrated clichés to foster hierarchy and difference between the two hemispheres and cultures.

Edward Said defines Orientalism as a style of thought based upon "an ontological and epistemological distinction" made between "the Orient" and "the Occident" (2). Said's definition foregrounds, ontologically, the difference between the East and the West through the different geographies the two poles (East & West) occupy, and also, epistemologically, through the series of stereotypical accounts and ideas weaved on the East. The Ontological and epistemological erudition on the East emphasizes the exteriority of the Orient, describing it as primitive, uncivilized "other", and contrasting it to the advanced and civilized West (Said 21). Indeed, Orientalist scholarship creates a "contrasting image to the West through which certain clichés and stereotypes of Oriental world and its people"(1) have been developed, and according to which Europe representing the notion of the 'self' is seen as being essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, virtuous, normal and masculine, while the Orient considered as the opposite of the self, a sort of surrogate version of 'self', is seen as being irrational, backward, despotic, inferior, depraved, aberrant and feminine (Macfie 8). That is, Said viewed the East and the West in two different directions, being

oppositional dichotomies, represented and defined differently, associating progress, voice and light with the West, and confining the East to silence, subjection and clichés. As such, for Said, the terms “Other “ and “self “ can be translated to the “ Us” versus “Them” , “the West “ and “ the rest “, the “centre” and the “margin” , the “rational West “and “irrational East, ” writing “the self is the familiar Europe , the West , “us ” and the other is the strange , East , The Orient , “ them “ (43 ) .

An important element is Said’s Orientalism is the notion of discourse. The Orientalist discourse, according to Said, speaks and justifies Western colonialism. Based on a hierarchy of dichotomies, binary oppositions between the Self and the Other, the Oriental discourse makes it possible to look at other people in a completely inferior way, already confirmed in Kipling’s ‘White Man’s burden’ to bring the light of civilization to the ‘uncivilized’ East. Indeed, during the time of colonialism, indigenous people suffered from oppression and were unable to speak for themselves, and were considered as the marginal population, who needed to be taught Western standards, thoughts and education.

There are three distinct, Said believes, interdependent theses regarding the nature of the Oriental discourse (2), with each one of them informing a specific view of it. The first accepted description of Orientalism, Said suggests, is an academic one, and it refers to “Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects...” (10). Broadly speaking, Said, here, suggests that Orientalism is an academic discipline characterized by the location of the subject of study regardless of how it is approached. The second designation describes Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological

distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident' (4). Thus, a very large mass of Western writers including poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators have used the basic divide between the East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," and destiny ( 2-3). Contrary to the academic definition of Orientalism, the second clearly transcends the academic sphere by giving another dimension to Orientalism as a style of thought from which a binary ontology is constructed between the two hemispheres. Said's third designation defines Orientalism under the politics discourse as a corporate institution, dealing with the Orient by making "statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (3). Here, Orientalism is described as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.

Another important aspect of Orientalism is Fear of Islamic culture. The East, according to Said, categorizes the Near Orient and the Far Orient (58) and defining factor for the Near Orient is its religion; Islam. Said argues that since the Islamic conquests of the Middle Ages, Westerners associate Islam with "terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians" (59). In an article entitled "*Islam Through Western Eyes*" published two years after *Orientalism*, Said emphasizes his ideas of the distorted image of Islam in the West's texts and media, shedding light on how Islam is seen as a threat of a return to the Middle Ages and a danger to the democratic order in the West as well as threat and a means of promoting subalternization especially when discussing the issues related to Muslim Oriental women.

Although Edward Said concentrated mainly on European Orientalism focusing on Arab Middle East, the Saidian approach is thought to be validly



applicable to other parts of the non-Western world, and various scholars influenced by Said have expanded his theories to include India, as Said himself only occasionally refers to Orientalist discourse on India. For example, he mentions William Jones (1746–1794), the founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, who, according to Said, with his vast knowledge of Oriental peoples was the undisputed founder of scholarly Orientalism. Jones wanted to know India better than anyone in Europe, and his aim was to rule, learn and compare the Orient with the Occident. Said finds it interesting that many of the early Orientalists concentrating on India were jurists like Jones or doctors of medicine with strong involvement with missionary work. Most Orientalists had a kind of dual purpose of improving the quality of life of Indian peoples and advancing arts and knowledge back in the heart of the Empire. (78–79.)

Said's *Orientalism* was accused of binary thinking. The view is shared by the Pakistani-British Islam scholar Ibn Warraq, who in his book *Defending The West* (2007) takes a radically opposite view on Orientalism. Warraq's central argument is that the West is superior to the East, and thus the Orientalist negative depiction of the East and Islam is therefore justified. He accuses Said of teaching "an entire generation of Arabs the art of self-pity," with a book that has an "aggressive tone" (18). Warraq argues that Said falsely depicts the Orient as "a victim of Western imperialism, dominance and aggression," for the Orient is not able to control its own destiny (28). Still, Warraq points out that not only Western scholars, but also Arab, Iranian, and Asian intellectuals have refuted Said's book. (qtd.in Hamdi 131)

Still in another critique entitled *Shades of Orientalism: Paradoxes and Problems in Indian Historiography*, Peter Heehs views Said's interpretation of Orientalism and the Orient is itself as a part of the Orientalist discourse inside the history of Orientalism.

Heehs notices that Saidian treatments of Indian history and culture began to appear within a decade after the publication of *Orientalism*. One of the first ones was Ronald Inden (1990) whose stated aim was to "make possible studies of 'ancient' India that would restore the agency that those [Eurocentric] histories have stripped from its people and institutions." But there is a lamentable aspect to Inden's endeavor, claims Heehs concurring Doniger, because by claiming that European Orientalists constructed Hinduism, the caste system and so forth, Inden tends to take away the much sought after "Indian agency," and gives new life to Eurocentrism (175).

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has studied the notion of Subalternity as explored in Gayatri Spivak's essay's *Can the Subaltern Speak* and have summed up Edward's Said's major ideas on the Orientalist discourse. It has also elaborated a rich framework on some of the topical themes in the postcolonial theory and subaltern studies relevant in the discussion of the Orientalist discourse in the two texts under study, including racial Subalternity, postcolonial Subalternity and third world gendered Subalternity. As the chapter has shown, Spivack groundbreaking breakthrough in the subaltern studies was her articulation of the subaltern third world gendered identities, shaped within the historically determinate dominant systems of representation, patriarchy and colonialism. As far as Said's *Orientalism* is concerned, the chapter has leafed through Said's major ideas in *Orientalism*, including Western scholarship and speculations into the Oriental cultures through the translation of major Eastern works including the Holy Quran, the binary oppositions between the East and the West, the notion of discourse and Islamic religion in *Orientalism*. The chapter has closed by providing insights and criticism on

Said's Orientalism. The following chapter implements these theoretical views in the analysis and discussion of the Orientalist Discourse in Arundhati Roy's and Mariama Ba's texts.

## *Chapter Three*

**Reading the Orientalist Discourse  
in Arundhati Roy's *The God of  
Small Things* and Mariama Ba's  
*So Long a Letter***

## Chapter Three

### Reading the Orientalist Discourse in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

#### Introduction

This chapter analyses the theme of the perpetuation the Orientalist discourse in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. The chapter looks into the way the two feminist writers, Ba and Roy, uphold and maintain the Orientalist discourse in their depiction of the political, social and religious phenomena characteristic of third world countries, Senegal and India. As in Said's *Orientalism*, *The God of Small Things* and *So Long a Letter* deploy debased stereotypical images in the description of the socio-cultural ethos and religious practices in third world countries, reinforcing the Orientalist discourse. That is, Roy and Ba associate India and Senegal with inferiority and backwardness, and show that their cultures are oppressive of women and dismissive of modern Western values of progress, libertarianism and equality.

weighed down and hampered by the burden of the cultural legacy of colonialism but also the unrelenting autocracy of patriarchy ,and the biased practices in the socio-cultural spheres, many third world women writers in Nigeria, Senegal, Algeria, India, China, Egypt and even in the Diaspora, dared to strike a blow at the socio-cultural forms of representation that cleave the world "into male world and female spheres, and never the twain shall meet" (Hooper 21), interrogating the systems' failure to live up to the modern liberation ethos preached by human rights movements and feminist activism. A great deal of third world female voices including Fadia Fakir in Jordan , Nawal el-

Saadawi in Egypt , Assia Djebar in Algeria, Zaynab Alkali in Nigeria, and Mariama Ba ,Aminata So Fall in Senegal, Bharati Mukhardji and Arundhati Roy in India, among others reverberate to articulate what Betty Friedan calls "the problem that has no name"(15), seeking to see into the set of historically dominant phenomena at the heart of women's oppression in third world context. Nevertheless, in the attempt to come to terms with the heavy weight of feminism and criticism of the socio-cultural value system of their countries, many of these writers reveal the third world to occupy the quagmire of cultural backwardness and religious despotism, perpetuating in the process the Orientalist Discourse.

As third world women writers, the Indian Arundhati Roy and the Senegalese Mariama Ba brood on the plight of women trodden down the big feet of patriarchy and speculate into their society's forms of representations characterized by essentialist hierarchical division and center periphery relations such as race, class and gender. Their works *The God of Small Things* and *So Long a Letter* attest to the two nations 's cultural and social norms and religious practices. The representation of the third world in the two authors' texts is of significance as it works within the Orientalist discourse, reiterating the image of alienated groups in society as oppressed subhuman who live in the state of wretched slavery imposed by allegedly traditions and Islamic rules. Muslim Senegalese women in particular are represented as the oppressed in African Senegalese society, and the untouchables in India suffer the injustice and inequality of the essentialist Indian social order. The representation of the tradition and religion by the two feminist writers reinforce the deed-seated stereotypes and clichés Orientalists framed in their study and investigation in third world cultures, detailed in Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

*In Orientalism*, Said discusses and calls into question and revision the West-East binary opposition established in the Western theoretical frameworks to maintain hierarchy and to foster division between the two parts of the world and their relating cultures. He investigates the Western institutionalization of Orientalism as a discourse associating backwardness and inferiority with the Orient and identifying authority and civilization with the West. Said leafs through a set of Western literary and no literary writing corpuses that served Orientalism and made it a subject of study ,which sanctioned the West's imperialist ideology in the continent. Said writes:

My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage-and even produce-the Orient politically , sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the-whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved) any occasion when that peculiar entity 'the Orient' is in question.(3)

Here in Said's understanding, the Orientalist discourse is a West-made reality, manifested "through a set of imagination , values, ideas" attempting to account for the "self-identity of making the Orient (4-5). In the process of deploying large generalization in the Orientalist discourse, as Said argues, Oriental cultures are shown to represent archaic patriarchy, referred to as Oriental manhood, rigid socio-cultural practices, and fundamental religious values.

*The God of Small Things* and *So Long a Letter* unfold the tragic story of the subaltern in the context of political, cultural and religious issues typical of third world countries. Arundhati Roy and Mariama Ba set their works in third world modern societies recently freed from the shackles of European colonialism and leaf through these societies' religious and cultural norms that uphold class relations, race issues and gender practices. Roy's text is set in an Indian society and is concerned with the Indian center-periphery relationships. It criticizes the Indian caste tradition and the politics of class stratification, revealed in the miserable lives the untouchable caste and the gendered subaltern lead. Ba's text is set in an African Senegalese context and records the strict cultural and religious norms subjugating women to the background of society. In addition to Senegalese archaic patriarchy, Ba discerns polygamy, one of the social practices authorized in the Senegalese Islamic version, as a threat the Oriental women as their identity are imbedded in the religious values and norms. In short, the two author's concern with archaic systems of representations, subaltern categories, gendered sexism and religious totalitarianism bring into focus the Orientalist discourse.

In Said's *Orientalism*, the Orientalist discourse is built first of all upon an "ontological distinction" (2) between the West and the East. The West, in Said's explanation, represents the civilized part of the globe and encompasses major European and American imperial powers, while the East refers to third world countries ,and in Said's words, it designates the "Near Orient and the Far Orient"(58) . The divide between the two poles is further solidified through epistemological accounts written by Western scholars.The conceptualization of the geographical divide between the Western and Eastern worlds haunt Roy's and Ba's texts right from the beginning. In the opening of



*The God of Small Things*, Roy describes India's hot weather, vegetation and landscape by emphasizing the landscape's aridity, exoticism as well as remoteness. In Roy's description, India is juxtaposed to the grassy lands and mild climates of the West. She writes:

May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dust green trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. (1)<sup>1</sup>

The quotation reveals the author's detailed and meticulous scrutiny into the Ayemenem landscape and geography. India is objectified and rendered "Other" through the author's use of such words as mangoes, bananas, Jackfruits that thrive in sunny climate of Asia. Similarly, in *So Long a Letter*, Ba introduces the African Senegalese setting by pinpointing to some cultural habits and religious practices that emphasize the places remoteness and distinction from the Western world, establishing right from the beginning the division between the East and the West. Ba writes:

Our mothers used to argue over who look after our uncles and aunts. As for us, we wore out wrappers and sandals on the same stony road to the Koranic school; we buried our milk teeth in the same holes and begged our godmothers to restore them to us, more splendid than before. (1)<sup>2</sup>

The use of Koranic school in the quotation introduces Senegal as a Muslim country, thus, separates it from Western Christian settings and location. The division is further exemplified through the use of the expression "we buried our milk teeth in the

same holes and begged our godmothers to restore them to us”, a practice that is specifically typical of the country.

Apart from the geographical divide between the East and the West, *The God of Small Things* and *So Long a Letter* reveal other several layers of distinction between the Western and Eastern worlds in relation to attitudes toward women and people of minority, religious and cultural practices or structures at work in these societies. The two texts portrays the Oriental bitter life and the drama of daily life the novels’ subaltern characters experience, be them women , children or the socially disadvantaged figures in the light of harsh despotic socio-cultural norms and unjust religious practices that suffocate lives and tread human freedom under feet.

As in Spivak’s theoretical framework on Subalternity in “*Can the Subaltern Speak*”, *The God of Small Things* and *So Long a Letter* are set in a subaltern context and look into the subaltern figures and categories being oppressed by dominant national and international voices. Spivak subaltern situates in the third world context and takes into analysis the impact of colonialism, gender and patriarchy in the makeup of third world gendered identities. Similarly, Roy’s and Ba’s texts takes into analysis the colonial, patriarchal, and “epistemic violence ,” inflected upon the “gendered subaltern” (306) in Indian and Senegal and they , thus , show that “ the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (287 ) in third world countries.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy populates her novel with a group of marginalized Indian women, including Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu and Rahel , relegated to the background of society and denied voice, authority and freedom of choice. Opting for Ammu as her protagonist, Roy reveals the suffering the Indian woman endures and the oppression exercised upon her, in the vanguard, in the family

before marriage , through marriage institution as well through Indian caste norms that object intermarriages with the lower caste, the untouchable . The text follows the love affair between Ammu, an Indian Christian woman and Velutha, an untouchable caste. After the failure of her first arranged marriage, Ammu returns to her parents' home with the company of her two children, Estha and Rahel. Ammu, as a divorced woman was rejected in the family and condemned by society. Fleeing the familial and social scolding, Ammu finds security and refuge in her secret love for velutha, only to be condemned by her brother, chacko, her mother, Mammachi and Velutha's father. In the course of the events' action, the text makes references to the obnoxious maltreatment of the untouchable, the cultural heritage of the colonial institution and forms of women's disempowerment in the Indian society.

In the “male chauvinist “(44) world of *The God of Small Things*, women are conferred lower status of society; they are abused at homes by their sibling brothers, intimidated through the marriage institution by their husbands as is the case with Mammachi and Ammu, and, still, denigrated by the social and cultural laws that denied them the least right to own a property. The text reveals a sexist world that make “all conceptual organizations”, to use Helene Cixous words, “subject to man” (38) and confine women to the narrow function of domesticity. Indeed, the novel's female figures including Ammu, Rahel, Baby Kochmma, Mammachi play the roles of the caring mothers, the submissive brides and lovers, while their male counterparts including Papachi, Shack, Ammu's Husband, Larry McCaslin , among others intimidate them under social dealings like marriage, and extra-marital relationships.

Mammachi, Ammu's mother, is a Syrian Christian woman whose husband , pappachi, belittles her and keeps beating her "Every night with a brass flower vase, the beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took

place" (47). Still, believing in the inferiority of the gendered sex, Pappachi refuses to hand a helping hand to Mammachi upon creating a pickle factory, simply because "he did not consider pickle-making a suitable job for a high-ranking ex-Government official. He had always been a jealous man, so he greatly resented the attention his wife was getting "( 47). After the death of Pappachi, the patriarchal authority is transferred to his son, Chacko, who takes over his mother's factory because , according to the Indian law, "Legally ,this was the case (as )Ammu as a daughter ,had no claim to the property"(57) and "what's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine" (57) .

Another subaltern female figure *The God of Small Things* reveals is Baby Kochamma, Pappahi's sister. From a very young age, Baby Kochamma has loved Father Mulligan, an Irish monk studying Hinduism in India. Defying the Indian traditional "laws of love" which forbid falling in love with "the Other" , Baby Kochamma enters a nunnery and converts to the Roman Catholic faith to attract the monk's attention toward her , but only to be rejected et repudiated by him and even in her family for her rebellious spirit and breaking tradition. Later in her life, she becomes more conservative, and accepts her hard fate , while condemning others as she handed a helping hand to the police to intervene in Ammu's affair with Velutha. She even , out of sexual jealousy and frustration in love , does not spare a means or a chance to make Ammu and her twins understand that a divorced daughter does not have the right to live in her parents' house.

Ammu, in the world of *The God of Small Things*, had her share of oppression as a subaltern Indian woman. Ammu grows up in an oppressive family life and has been subject to "cold, calculating cruelty" and has always been "bullied ...by Someone Big" (181-82). In the hopes of escaping her abusive father at home, Ammu accepts a marriage proposal from a Bengali Hindu man who works as a tea estate assistant

manager. Through marriage, Ammu finds herself facing an alcoholic man who never cease beating and mistreating her. After years of a horrified marriage ,“Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed to her parents in Ayemenem to everything that she had fled from only a few years ago”(42 ) with the company of her two children; Estha and Rahel.

Ammu’s divorce is not pleasant and Ammu herself was not welcomed by her family members. Mammachi is discontent with Ammu’s rebellious daughter, and Baby Kochamma despises her more than anyone else because she feels that Ammu is “quarrelling with a fate that she had graciously accepted” ( 44). In addition to this, her father refuses to believe her former’s husband intention to sell Ammu as a prostitute to an English man “ not because he thought well of her husband ,but simply because he didn’t believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (42 ).

Furthermore, Ammu’s brother, Chacko, reminds her children that their mother has no ‘Locus stand I’, that is no legal rights to inherit the factory or the house for instance. Intentionally or not, Shack pronounces the word ‘Locust Stand I’, making it sound like Locust, implying that their mother is more or less a kind of parasite in the Ayemenem house. The repeated rejections of Ammu by her own kith and kin led her to seek emotional refuge in Velutha – a low caste who works as a carpenter in the pickle factory. Believing that her life has been lived and that she really has not much to lose, Ammu enters into a secret love affair with Velutha, and thus, breaking the traditional norms of the Syrian Christian society.

If Ammu is on the margin, her children are even more so. They are, in the eyes of Baby Kochamma, “Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian

Christian would even marry” (44). Rahel , Ammu’s daughter, endured all kinds of assaults from all corners in her life and struggled against all kinds of adversities; she is the offspring of divorced parents and thus deprived of conventional parental love. Being the victim of a dysfunctional family, she fails to develop sane relationships with the people around her. After school education, she takes admission into a mediocre College of Architecture in Delhi without any thought or interest. There she meets Larry McCaslin, a PhD researcher , marries him and travels to the U.S.A. But soon they divorced. In USA, she works as a waitress in an Indian restaurant in New York for a few months. Then Baby Kochamma informs her about Estha’s return to Ayemenem House. She immediately gives up her job and returns to Ayemenem, India. Here she is again disowned and rejected by the society. In a relationship with her brother, Rahel transgresses the traditional boundaries of a defined social relationship. While Ammu has an illicit relationship with Velutha, Rahel indulges in a sexual relationship with her own brother and in a way, both transgress the social norms of the society. Their transgression is perhaps a deliberate act to defy and to challenge the society where in, they have to survive as the oppressed victims. The author's exposure of social ills through the sexuality of the subaltern is culminated in this final sexual act.

In *Orientalism*, Said highlights the Orientalists’ ideology of the Western hegemony and the superiority of the Western mind and civilization when compared with non-European peoples and cultures. For him, Orientalism rave about the dividing lines between the Eastern and Western worlds and their succeeding values and cultural practices, writing:

Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe ,a collective notion of identifying “us” Europeans as against all

“those” non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: The idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is an addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter. (7)

Roys' *The God of Small Things* reveals a world that denigrates local values and culture and completely fond of the Western values, language and ideals, deeming them superior and aspiring to adopt and integrate them in their everyday practices. Little children are promised and given love and praise provided that they behave in English manners and cling to English values. In the novel, Baby Kochamma forces the twins, Rahel and Esthal, to use English in their daily conversation and makes it sure they form and pronounce words properly and correct them where necessary :

That whole week Baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twins' private conversations, and whenever she caught them speaking in Malayam, she levied a small fine which was deducted at source. From their pocket money. She made them write lines – ‘impositions’ she called them - I will always speak in English, I will always speak in English. A hundred times each. When they were done, she scored them with her pen to make sure that old lines were not recycled for new punishments. She had made them practice an English car song for the way back. They had to form the words properly, and be particularly careful about their pronunciation. (36)

As in the Oriental discourse, the quotation prioritizes the English language over Hindu and apotheosizes it as the most suitable form of communication in an Indian setting. Reiterating an Orientalist discourse of binary oppositions between the West and the East, Baby Kochamma belittles local language and culture in pursuit of an assimilation policy of Western language and Western manners. In doing so, Baby Kochamma transforms into a colonial subject herself and a perpetrator of the Oriental discourse.

The reverence of the English cultural values and linguistic phenomenon further widens the divide between the West and the East and appeals for more comparisons between the two poles. One striking example *The God of Small Things* shows is the difference between the Indian twins, Rahel and Estha, and the English girl Sophie Mol. As an English girl, Sophie Mol is associated with an angelic worth, described as a “little angel” while Estha and Rahel are attributed diabolic traits, described as “little demons” who are “mud brown..with forehead that might turn into horns with fountains in love-in-Tokyos... And if you cared to look, you could see Satan in their eyes”(179). The comparison emphasizes mainly the difference in skin epidermal signs; whiteness connotes virtuous qualities and civilized manners, while brownness refers to savagery, coarse conduct and stubbornness. Still, in another striking comparison, Baby Kochamma speculates that Sophie is “so beautiful that she reminded her of a wood- sprite. Of Ariel in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*” (144), While the twins, she says, “are sly, uncouth and deceitful. They are growing wild you can’t manage them” (149).

Pappachi Kochamma is another figure who venerates English culture and makes it sure to resemble the English in manner and appearance. Pappachi has worked for many years in an Imperial Entomologist Government service in Delhi and after retiring; he



comes to live in Ayemenem with his wife, Mammachi, his son Chacko and his daughter Ammu till death. Pappach, as Shacko says, is a “Person well disposed to the English” and “the correct word to describe people like him is anglophile” as “his mind had been brought into a state which made him like the English” (52). Throughout his whole life, Pappachi declines in wearing the traditional mumundu and khaki Judhpurs” (51) and “until the day he died, he wore a well prepared three-piece suit and his gold pocket watch” (49).

In comparing the English Sophie Moll to the Indian Esthal and Rahel , Roy draws attention to the twins’ brown epidermal signs which distinguish them as Exotic Others. She also emphasizes the twins’ ‘uncivilized manners believed , in Baby Kochamma’s view, to be scaffolded and bettered through learning English and English manners. By underlying the superiority of the English manners, language, cultural habits and clothing style, Roy brings into focus Said’s distinction between the ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’. Indeed, fundamental to the Oriental discourse , as Said shows, is the “habit of deploying large generalizations such as race and language, and underneath “these categories” is the “rigidly binomial position of ‘ours’ and ‘theirs” (227).

Caste is another feature through which Arudhati Roy perpetuates the Orientalist discourse. Caste is a characteristic trait of the Indian social order, and to be born or belong to the caste is to be rejected, repudiated and even considered as untouchable. More important than this, the notion of caste deprives the individual from enjoying upward mobility, possibilities for success and vocational scaffolding, as well as the respect of others. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy criticizes the caste tradition at work in the Indian society in her representation of the deprivation and oppression the Subaltern untouchable characters such as Velutha, Vellya Paapen, and kuttapen experience. Indeed,

in reference to the notion of caste, the narrative voice in *The God of Small Things* set up a divide between "Caste Christians" labeled as the "Touchable" (73), and "Rice-Christians" (74), categorically considered as *Untouchable*. Still, the two categories of Christians are made to "have separate churches, with separate services, and separate priests"(74), emphasizing the firm and unrelenting repetition of the adjective "separate" which evokes racism and bigotry.

In *The God of Small Things*, Velutha represents the scapegoat of the Indian caste order and a victim of center-periphery relationships. The figure is hereditarily born to a lower caste and thus socially deprived of any access to a loft social mobility or chances to change destiny and class. He himself acknowledges the fact that belonging to a lower caste reduced his chances for self-development, fruition and progress. Reasoning "Mammachi (with impenetrable touchable logic) often said that if only he hadn't been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer" (75). Still velutha and Ammu cross the class line entering into a forbidden love relationship, State apparatuses and representatives from the two classes, the touchables and the Untouchables, including Velutha's father, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and Shacko did their best to separate the couple. Believing in his class inferiority and the divide set up between the two classes, the Chritians and Vice Chritians, Velutha's Father, Vellya Paapen , felt the urgency to immediately inform the Kochamma's family of Velutha and Ammu's illegal relationship. Mammachi, on the other hand, upon hearing Velutha's father announcing her the secret love relationship between Velutha and Ammu, enraged by the outcast' s breaking the Indian norms of class and caste, pushes Vellya Paapen off the steps of her house into the mud and spits at him, "blind venom, crass, (and )insufferable insults" (268), telling "If I find you on my property tomorrow I'll have you castrated like

the pariah dog that you are! I'll have you killed!"(269). Moreover, Chacko threatens her to oust her from the house and to break all her bones.

Roy's description of caste and gendered Subalternity in the Indian social order brings to light the Orientalist view of the "unchanging Orient" (96). Like the Orientalist assumption on the Oriental fixation on archaic structures of thought and actions dismissive of progress and change, the Indian socio-cultural practices read as forms of essentialism subjected to eternal fixity and rigidity. Gender discrimination, subalternity and casteism are deeply ingrained in the Indian cultural mindset a, therefore, any attempt to alter the logical working of this system breed social rejection and isolation. Still, Roy also shows Indian feminism to be rooted in the narrative of power relations, dominated by highly caste male, and images its cultural tradition trading in archaic practices and fixed essences.

As in Arudhati Roy' *The God of Small Things*, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* criticizes the Senegalese socio-cultural norms and Islamic religious practices which foster social hierarchy and gender inequality in society. Like Roy, Ba sees into the oppression exercised upon the disadvantaged and subaltern Senegalese social categories in light of caste, gender and patriarchy. More importantly, Ba brings attention to the ways through which religion disempowers women and how patriarchy uses religious excuses to widen gender differences.

The plotline of *So Long a Letter* follows the life experiences of two Muslim Senegalese women, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, from adulthood, to married life and ultimately back to celibacy, after the separation from their husbands. The novel brings into articulation the socio-cultural realities and religious practices of post-independence sub-Saharan African societies, taking Senegal as a prototype example. The authorial

narrative voice in the text tries a hand on a wide range of issues such as gender practices, polygamy, sisterhood, class and caste politics. The story of the novel opens with Ramatoulaye, being widowed, writing a long letter to her friend Aissatou, informing her of the death of her husband, Modou, and of her duty to carry out the forty day mourning period prescribed by Islam. Ramatoulaye writes the letter in a state of despair and isolation in conventionality with the Islamic custom of seclusion called Mirasse. Importantly, the novel raises the issue of polygamy, a Senegalese social practice sanctioned by Islam, supported and certified by patriarchy.

Women, throughout history have been considered as second-class citizens and have assumed lower positions. They have, as the London feminist group puts it, “not just been hidden from history” but, deliberately oppressed” (qtd. in Rose 10). Within African context, the issue becomes tough in so far tradition, religion, and patriarchy intervene in women’s choices and lives. Third world moral and religious structures, as Nawal el-Sadaawi argues, work out absolute control upon third women’s voices whenever and wherever heard . She writes:

Almost every step might touch an electrified wire, a sanctified and sacred spot which is meant to be untouchable, a value that is not to be questioned because it is a part of the religious and moral structures that rear themselves up like heavy iron bars whenever questions related to women are raised and hands stretched out to set her free. Religion, in particular, is a weapon often used in traditionalist societies to cut short, or even cut down, the efforts of researchers, and seekers after truth. I have come to see more and more clearly that religion is most often used in our day as an instrument in the hands of economic and political forces, as an institution utilized by those who rule to keep down those who are ruled. In this it serves the same purpose as juridical, educational,

police and even psychiatric systems used to perpetuate the patriarchal family, historically born, reinforced, and maintained by the oppression of women, children and slaves (qtd.in Hawley 28)

Here then, Saadawi makes it clear that third world political, cultural and religious structures of thought and action are at the heart of women's oppression. In addition to unfair educational and judicial constraints that perpetuate patriarchal hegemony, el-Saadawi emphasizes the establishment of religion as an authorized institution to keep down women and thwart their liberty.

As in el-Saadawi quotation, Ba's *So Long a Letter* reveals an African Senegalese context oppressive of women. The "internal ordering" of this society, as Aissatou explains to Mawdou, consent to socio-cultural norms to be carried out with full duty by women, saying "Mawdo, Princes master their feelings to fulfill their duties. 'Others' bend their heads and, in silence, accept a destiny that oppresses them. That, briefly put, is the internal ordering of our society" (32). The author's capitalization of 'Other' in the quotation is suggestive of Spivak third world's gendered subaltern, rendered Other and objectified by society's norms and patriarchy's oppression.

Ramatolaye's and Aissatou's life in an Eastern Islamic context and their experience of polygamy is indicative of the Orientalist discourse in the text. As products of French colonial education, Ramatolaye and Aissatou can be both described as modern educated women, fixated on monogamy and romantic love imported from Western French culture. Based on romantic love, Ramatolaye goes against her mother's apprehension about Modou, while Aissatou and Mawdo defy their families and marry outside their respective social castes. The two women's understanding and definition of love is that of a complete surrender of oneself to a

man. Speaking to Tamsir, Modou's older brother who wanted to marry her after the latter's death, Ramatoulaye writes "You forgot that I have a heart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don't know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you" (56). Both Ramatoulaye and Aissatou see their husbands' polygamous choices as an annulment of a contract sealed through romantic love.

Nevertheless, unlike Aissatou, who soon divorces her husband upon taking a second wife, Ramatoulaye refuses to divorce as she does not perceive happiness out of marriage "I am one of those who can realize themselves fully and bloom only when they form part of a couple. Even though I understand your stand, even though I respect the choice of liberated woman, I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage (56). As explained in the quotation, Ramato's refusal to divorce Modou is accounted for by her inability to fathom life outside the marital life, makes difficult for her to cope with his betrayal. Ba's characterization of Ramatoulaye confirms the Orientalist discourse's association the of Oriental woman with sensuality and passivity. Said writes that female Orientals "express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing and submissive" (207).

Besides Ramatoulaye's and Aissatou's personal experiences with divorce and polygamy, the narrative of *So Long a Letter* exposes the traumatic story of Jacqueline under the institution of marriage. Ramato narrates that Jacqueline is an Ivorian girl who is married to Samba Diack, a graduate of the African School of Medicine and Pharmacy. Jacqueline disobeyed her parents and goes ahead to marry Samba Diack whom Jacqueline parents reject for the mere reason that he is of an

Islamic faith and they are Protestants. However, Jacqueline does marry Samba and move to Senegal with him. When she gets to Senegal, she finds herself in a world very different from the one she accustomed to , and in an environment with practices different from the ones she has grown up in. Still, her husband's relatives did not welcome her because "she refused to adopt the Muslim religion and went instead to the Protestant church every Sunday" (42). Added to all these, after marriage Samba Diack's behavior alters and his love for Jacqueline changes . He keeps chasing slim Senegalese women and does it openly, neither respecting his wife nor children. Jacqueline tries to persuade him to abstain from such behavior, but to no avail, she becomes psychologically depressed. Ba's characterization of Samba Diack bears resemblance to the Orientalist vision of the oriental man, described in Said's words, as being "sensual and has an undifferentiated sexual drive (78).Therefore, Ba's portrayal of Ramatolaye's passivity and Samba's uncontrolled sexual drive seem to fuse together to produce a concrete image of sensuality and despotism and thus inferiority discussed in the Orientalist discourse of Said.

Religion plays an important role in the Oriental discourse and Ba is aware of the impact of the Islamic religion upon the oppression of women in the novel. The Islam version in Senegal, as in many parts of the Islamic world, approves the institution of polygamy, which represent, as shown in *So Long a Letter*, dread to all women. Surely, Islam does not authorize polygamy in a way to set up gender roles and lay racism between the two parts, but Muslim men's misuse, misinterpretation and manipulation of the teachings and practices of the Holy Quran to their advantage represent oppression itself. In one of Quranic verses, God Almighty makes it clear that Muslim woman's role is to devout herself to the marital life and man's role is to protect her. He says:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in husband's absence what Allah would have them Guard . . ." (4:34)

In another verse God Almighty sanctions polygamy to Muslim men in Sura 4:3 saying:

And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. (4:3)

On the basis of authority granted by Islam on polygamy, Modou and Mawdo in *So Long a Letter* break marriage vows and destroy their families to remarry younger girls in the age of their daughters. Mawdou and Modou "burnt their past, both morally and materially. They dare to commit such an act of disavowal" (12) after years of life together. The men's account for polygamy is explained in religious terms and fate. When breaking the news to Ramatoulaye on Modou's remarriage, the Imam says that "Modou . . . says it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife; there is nothing he can do about it" (37). This statement reveals the manipulative nature of Modou, who uses religion to his own benefit. Still, after the forty days of Ramatoulaye's husband's death, Tamsir along with Imam and others visited Ramatoulaye for a marriage proposal, which she firmly rejects. The reaction of Imam is significant in terms of women's subjugation as he directly prayed to God to be his witness.

Among the archetypal customs associated with the Wolof-Islamic funerals shown in Ba's text is the iddat. The widow secludes herself in her house away from



her relatives and other people for a period of four months and ten days after the death of her husband. During this whole period, the widow dresses in rags and takes off all fancy clothes or ornamental jewels in respect to her deceased husband. In the world of *So Long a Letter*, after the death of Modou, Ramata follows the Islamic practice of the incarcerated seclusion which turns into a period of grief and mental depression. [M]y seclusion has withered me. Worries have given me wrinkles; my fat has melted away. I often tap against bone where before there was rounded flesh. (72)

In her article entitled “Mariama Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre*: the Vocation of Memory and the Space of Writing,” Irlam Shaun describes “a visible manifestation of the widespread “social constraints” that hem women in and circumscribe their prospects in a male dominated society,” (82). He argues that as exchange is blocked in Islamic custom of confinement of Idda, Ramatoulaye creates an artificial exchange, through letter corresponding to externalize her tormented self.

*So Long a Letter* also stages the practice of mirasse as another customary religious rite in Wolof culture, which had its share in oppressing women. The mirasse has to do with a ceremony held following a death event, where a meeting is staged to discuss the deceased person’s life and revelation about his past deeds as well as the sharing and division of his property. The Mirasse involves revelations and disclosure about the dead person’s past secrets and deeds and it is meant to measure, to use Ramata’s words, the extent of the dead person’s betrayal (9). For Senegalese women, as shown in Ba’s text:

This is the moment dreaded by every Senegalese woman, the moment when she sacrifices her possessions as gifts to her family-in-law; and worse still, beyond her possessions she gives up her personality, her dignity, becoming a thing in the service of the man

who has married her ,his grandfather, his grandmother ,his father, his mother, his brother ,his sister, his uncle, his aunt, his male and female cousins, his friends. Her behavior is conditioned :no sister-in-law will touch the head of any wife who has been stingy, unfaithful or inhospitable.(4)

Through the practice of mirasse , Ramatolaye is revealed to represent the concept of Mother Africa through her faithfulness to her husband, in life and death, and her respect of the Senegalese cultural traditions. Yet, she also nurtures a special esteem and gratitude to Western civilization and culture which she thought lifted them 'out of the bog of tradition' and brought them light and ethical ideals. Thanks to Western ideals and values, the Senegalese culture have been improved and bettered. She says:

Aissatou, I will never forget the white woman who was first to desire for us an 'uncommon' destiny. To lift us out of the bog of tradition, superstition and custom, to make us appreciate a multitude of civilizations without renouncing our own, to raise our vision of the world, cultivate our personalities, strengthen our qualities, to make up for our inadequacies, to develop universal moral values in us: these were the aims of our admirable headmistress. (15-16)

Here, Ba seems to be in favor of European culture and its universal moral values which stand in stark contrast to the African Senegalese traditional practices. She can be seen as an assimilated subject as she embraces many aspects of French culture, adopting a nuclear family , and defining herself in relation to Modou,

excluding other places where most Senegalese women find their worth such as in their roles as aunts, cousins, nieces, surrogate mothers, sisters, and much more.

As has been shown through this analysis, *So Long a Letter* has shed light on the various ways through which women in Senegal are oppressed. Ba depicts Muslim women living within a patriarchal culture whose social conventions and religious tenets serve to maintain and keep the gendered subaltern under the authority of the male figure. In her portrayal of the gendered subaltern, Ba emphasizes the Senegalese women's passivity and inability to break free from the socially and religiously entrenched conventions that rear them up to the background of the political, social and economic life. Still, probing into the Islamic customs of polygamy, the iddat and the mirasse, Ba pins down a sea of injustices and wrongdoings inflicted upon Oriental women in the name of religion. In particular, Ba is critical and derisive of Oriental hypocrite manhood which operates, in the name of religion, to stretch out gender differences. Though the novel has been written in the 21st, Ba uses the same clichés and stereotypes about Muslims which have existed since the Middle Ages her representation of Muslim society, Oriental manhood and Oriental women in the text meet the Orientalist representation of Islam since the middle ages in the Orientalist discourse.

## **Conclusion**

In a socially committed and zealous devoutness to the political and social predicaments of their cultures and countries, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a letter* bear out many references to socio-cultural

indiscretions and religious despotism that suffocate many third world countries. Vacillating between the cultural legacy of the colonial institution which bequeathed modern educational, civilisational and linguistic heritage and the archaic cultural , social and religious practices grounded in power relationships, sex discrimination, class stratification, the two authors show third world context to be a vortex that take in individual liberties and identities. As representatives of the East / the Orient, India and Senegal fixate upon an Orientalist mindset typified by religious dogmatism, archaic forms of life, wide social and racial segregation and passive feminism— characteristics that articulate the nation's trade in backwardness, inflexibility and passivity. Through their insights into the above mentioned issues and others, the two feminist authors Roy and Ba assume an Orientalist position and perpetuates Orientalism in their texts.

# *General Conclusion*

## General Conclusion

This research endeavor has looked into the Orientalist discourse represented in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. It has shown that these two feminist third world writers perpetuate the Orientalist discourse while probing into the socio-cultural ills their countries experience. The thesis has analyzed the two works in the light of Edward's Said theory of Orientalism and Gayatri Spivak's notion of Subalternity. It has been applied Spivack's notion of Subalternity in the understanding of third world's social stratification, and used Said's *Orientalism* in the analysis of its socio-cultural structures of thought and action.

The work is divided into an introduction, three chapters and conclusion .The introduction has given a general insight into the world of literature and concentrated on the interrelatedness between literature and the literary context that engendered it. The first chapter entitled "*The God of Small Things and So Long a Letter: Texts in Context*," has related the two literary texts into the historical and literary that helped in their makeup. It has also provided short synopses of the works under study and short biographies of the two authors. The second chapter entitled "Gayatri Spivak's Subaltern theory and Edward Said's Orientalist theory," has exposed the theoretical frameworks of the Indian Gayatri Spivack and the Palestinian Edwards Said. As the chapter has shown, both theories fall within postcolonial criticism, a field of study thrived in the second half of the twentieth century and emerged to answer back Western colonization and empire. Ultimately, the third chapter entitled "*Orientalist clichés in The God of small things and So Long a Letter*," has delved into the Orientalist representative images the two authors reiterate about the East and Eastern

culture, directly revealed in archaic forms of representation, oppressive gender practices and religious dictatorship.

Through an Orientalist perspective, both Roy and Ba have delved into the social ills contemporary Senegal and India live. The two authors texts have given an understanding of societies located in the Eastern hemisphere of the globe; while Roy has criticized the Indian caste tradition, Ba has focused on Senegal's Islamic religious totalitarianism. Still, as feminist activists, the two authors have bothered most about the plight of third world gendered subaltern. The female subaltern in Indian and Senegal , and one may even generalize to include all third world countries, 'cannot speak, to use Gayatri Spivack expression, and whenever they attempt to speak, their voices not are not heard under the loud voice of patriarchy and society. Still, the two authors have also pointed out the cultural legacy of the colonial institution in the third world context. The two nations' inability to break free from the Western value system of thoughts and practices demonstrate the entrenched Western assimilation policy, which relegated the cultural and linguistic values in the third world to the background.

As postcolonial texts, Roys' *The God of Small Things* and Ba's *So long a Letter write* back to address the colonial institution, by correcting the pre-colonial past annihilated by colonialism and by deconstructing the oppositional hierarchy erected to set up a divide between the East and the West. Nevertheless, it has revealed through these texts, the two authors have shown third world countries in need of Western civilization to transform their archaic structures of thought and behavior. Therefore, *The God of Small Things* and *So Long a Letter* have perpetuate the Orientalist discourse and have become Orientalist texts in their own rights.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Roy, Arundhati (*The God of Small Things*, London: Fulham Palace Road, 1997)1.

All the subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup>Ba, Mariama (*So Long a Letter*, London-Nairobi: 1989)1. All the subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.



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