

You're the Millstones Around my Neck: Women Negotiating Patriarchal Domestic Spaces and Identities in *Nada* and *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

A post-Covid world calls for a thorough reevaluation of our lives and our 'self's, which is incomplete without a discussion of privilege (or lack of it) and social locations. This comparative study looks at the characters of two noted novels: Andrea in *Nada* by Carmen Laforet (1945) and Ammu, the mother of the twins Estha and Rahel in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy (1996). Within the framework of the concept of agency as advanced by Bronwyn Davies and the Foucauldian concept of discourse, this paper examines how the two women negotiate their family relations and how, in an attempt of self-determination, try to forge their own identities while rejecting the archetype of an "ideal woman". Upon examination, the lives of both reveal some similarities: they are both women of precarious social standing with Andrea, who is a young orphan who comes to Barcelona to study and Ammu, who is a single mother and divorcee; they both belong to repressive and conservative families, and they both ultimately wish to liberate themselves from their domestic setups. I primarily consider two questions: how similar are their struggles in negotiating their patriarchal domestic spaces, and how can one understand and contextualize their will to self-determination. I conclude with an assessment of the commonalities in their experiences, though they both belong to different epochs and worlds, while proposing that the condition of women in both colonizing and post-colonial societies are not vastly different.

Keywords: women, domestic spaces, identities, patriarchy

Introduction

At a time when India is undergoing major upheaval in the wake of the Covid 19 epidemic and the resultant socio-economic crises, there is a need for a discussion on the idea of privilege. Consider the fact that between March 25th to May 31st 2020 the National Commission of Women received 1477 calls about domestic violence, which is more than it has received in the past ten years during this period (Chandra, 2020). On the other hand, stepping out of the closed physical spaces of intimate partner violence, the images of migrant workers remain fresh in one's mind as they made their way home carrying their children and their possessions during the national lockdown. The recent Hathras violence has also shaken the conscience of the country. Looking at these cases, it becomes clear that privilege is intrinsically connected to one's gender, class and caste identities. They form an inescapable web of structures which in turn are very much a part of the larger structures of patriarchy and capitalism across the world today. It is in this context that this comparative study is being undertaken to look at the positioning of two women protagonists Ammu and Andrea of novels set in 20th century Spain and India, respectively. These are novels that are set in patriarchal societies where the protagonists are struggling to create their own destinies by rejecting the community expectations imposed on them. I will try to examine how the discourse and structure of patriarchy mold their lives and how the women try to liberate themselves from it, which I argue as their having agency. The two characters this study looks at are Andrea of *Nada* (1945), written by Carmen Laforet and Ammu from Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997)¹. While the former is a novel set in the post-Civil war years during the Francoist regime of Spain, the latter is set in the neoliberalist era of India, in the state of Kerala. One is a novel belonging to an erstwhile colonial power and the other to the "third" world. Despite these differences, the study seeks to find what the two women share since their backgrounds and their social locations are comparable. First, they are both individuals of poor social standing. Andrea is an orphan who comes to Barcelona to study in the university and live in her grandmother's house on Aribau street. Here, her aunt Angustias becomes her self-appointed chaperone who inducts her into the repressive moral codes upheld during this epoch. She instructs her to behave as a young, unmarried, catholic woman of an honorable family should and strictly forbidding her from roaming around and talking to boys. In this way, Andrea sees herself trapped between her dreams of being an independent young woman and what her family expects from her. She seeks to break away from these moral codes by forging friendships with like-minded people, the most important of them being Ena. In the second novel, Ammu is a divorced mother of two. She goes against her family's wishes and their religious traditions to marry a Hindu man from outside her Syrian Christian community. She later divorces her husband, much to the shock of her family, as divorces are frowned upon because of religious reasons. After her divorce, her family reluctantly takes her and her twin children Estha and Rahel back to their home in Aymanam, Kerala. Once at home Ammu, as an unemployed woman, is dependent on the charity of other family members. She is made to feel unwelcome and is seen as a

burden along with her two children. Ammu yearns to break away from the fetters that her mother and Aunt impose on her. She falls in love with Velutha a lower caste man who works for her family and in her union with him, she finds the escape she seeks which can be read as her way of resisting against her family's moral and patriarchal expectations from her.

Having briefly talked about the two characters, this paper will focus particularly on how they negotiate their patriarchal domestic spaces and strive towards self-determination. Towards this, the ideas and discussions on agency advanced by Bronwyn Davies in her essay '*Concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructural Analysis*' (1991) have aided in analyzing the two women as individuals with agency. For Davies a poststructural understanding of agency should conceive it as an awareness of the discourses and the positioning within these discourses that a subject inhabits and a sense of self that one can go beyond the meanings inscribed to them (p. 51). Towards the end of her essay, she defines the state of agency as being speaking subjects aware of the different ways in which they are made subject, who take up the act of authorship, of speaking and writing in ways that are disruptive of current discourses, that invert, invent and break old bonds, that create new subject positions that do not take their meaning from the genitalia (and what they have come to signify) of the incumbent (p. 50). The concept of agency is connected to the main questions being looked at in this paper, as this condition of being agentic (or having agency) directly means the power to challenge the structures that the individual occupies. She notes that women (along with children, the indigenous population and the specially-abled, p. 42) are not considered as agentic because the existing structure of patriarchy privileges the men over them. This study is also being informed by the Foucauldian concept of discourse. For Michel Foucault, discourse cannot be seen alienated from power. In his 'Truth and Power' (1980), he states that each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is, the types of discourses that it accepts and makes function as true (p. 131). His main enquiry has been into what is this 'truth/s' and whom does it serve. He contends that the truths that are sanctioned and upheld in society are created or passed by those who have power, and to be sure, it is done so that they can continue to be in power. It becomes clear then that the 'subject' who possesses this power creates discourses that in turn form the 'knowledge' accepted in the society. As the discourses or structures being considered by the paper is patriarchy and its influence on the imagination of society, family and women's lives, it will be pertinent to examine patriarchy as a discourse within the Foucauldian framework and to identify not only who is benefitting from it but also how Andrea and Ammu challenge it in their own ways. Using these two concepts, I argue that although Andrea and Ammu are both women who belong to conservative and patriarchal spaces, they act as individuals with agency who are determined to break away from the roles they are chained to. They are aware of their positions in their families and societies; that is they are aware of their positioning within the discourse of patriarchy and are attempting to imagine a different future, rather than the one that dominant structures dictate for them. The first section of the paper establishes the repressive environments

of their households, and the second section looks at the two characters' attempts to self-determination within the framework of the concepts of agency as submitted by Davies and uses Foucault's concept of discourse to guide the analysis.

Literature Review

Much critical study has been carried out on Roy's *God of Small Things*. Brinda Bose's (2006) 'In Desire and in Death' is insightful for her treatment of pleasure as political. The essay deals extensively with the various angles that come into play within the romance of Ammu and Velutha's romance. John Lutz's (2009) 'Commodity Fetishism, Patriarchal Repression, and Psychic Deprivation' is useful to understand the characters and symbols of the novel within the framework of capitalist alienation. He submits that the themes of greed and individualism have everything to do with the intrinsic nature of capitalism and its brutal world of which Ammu is a victim. As for *Nada*, Del Mastro's (1997) 'Cheating Fate' carries an exacting treatment of Andrea's psyche as a young adolescent woman, which helps understand better her various relationships with her family members and friends. Mariana Petrea's (1994) 'Dialectics of Feminine Emancipation' throws light on how Laforet captures Andrea's subjectivity well, leading to a deeper analysis of social life especially her relationship with Ena. Celita Morris' (1975) '*Nada* as Women's Self Determination' offers a primary orientation as it submits that for Andrea, simply going against social expectations is in itself an expression of her self-determination and can be seen as a resistance to a deeply patriarchal and conservative society.

Families as Patriarchal Spaces

Patriarchy as a system has been discussed in both academic work and otherwise as a system that upholds the heterosexual male as the most important figure in all ambits, including the social, the economic and the political and is in place across borders.² To briefly describe the societies to which the two women belong, *Nada* is set in Spain in the 40s when the country was reeling from the effects of the Civil War (1936-1939). The war resulted in the dictator Francisco Franco seizing power and ruling Spain till 1975. His dictatorship was marked by a repealing of all the progressive laws that the Second Republic preceded it had introduced, such as divorce laws, suffrage and abortion rights if one specifically considers some laws that impacted women. As a consequence, during the dictatorship, a woman was strictly expected to adhere to Christian and conservative codes of behavior such as marrying early, bearing children, being a good wife and managing a home well. The women's wing of the then ruling fascist party *La Falange Española de las JONS* (English: Spanish Phalanx of the Councils of the National Syndicalist Offensive) undertook the project of 'educating' women on how they should behave and specifically advised women against reading because it would make them "intellectuals and feminists". The driving philosophy of Women's Wing was the idea that women should be perfect angels of the home and should be a fundamental pillar of the family and the traditional values that distanced

women from the political life of the country*. This can be understood as what Davies calls the “existing discourse” or the “socially available repertoire” (p.42). The Catholic church and the fascist party led by Franco form a powerful nexus that dictates what constitutes as acceptable behavior of women and what lies clearly outside of it. The discourse created and perpetuated by them identifies women who are educated and participate in political organizations as ‘bad women’ as the Falange firmly believed that the place of a woman was at her home. This dualism between a good and a bad woman thus becomes necessary and as Davies points out, such dualisms are “consistent features of all discourses” (p. 49). This particular dualism will be examined in the following sections as well.

In the case of Ammu as well understandably, one can see that such a discourse is prevalent in the Syrian Christian society she belongs to. Ammu moves back to her parents’ home as a divorced single mother after leaving her alcoholic husband in Shillong and moves back to her parents’ home in Kerala once again. She belongs to the Syrian Christian community who then and even today continue to be wealthy and deeply conservative in which women are expected to settle for arranged marriages, and the idea of divorce is deeply frowned upon. (Rajan, 2019) In this way, Aymanam is presented as a microcosm of Kerala and India both by virtue of the shared systems of patriarchy, as Lutz observes (2009). He elaborates that both the state and the country are shown to share a rigid and conservative authoritarianism. With respect to the dualism of good and bad women discussed earlier, Ammu finds herself in the latter due to her status as a divorced and single mother. Mammachi (Ammu’s mother), Baby Kochamma and Chacko consider Ammu as a burden because of the choices she has made. Their conversations and behavior are designed to exclude her and her twins and “to inform them of their place in the scheme of things” (p.329). When Ammu was young, she was not allowed to receive a college education because her father insisted that it was unnecessary for a girl to do so (p.38). In stark contrast, her brother Chacko went to Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship, while Ammu was forced to stay back in Aymanam and consider prospective grooms. This is in keeping with what was expected of good women in Kerala during that epoch. Similar was the case with Andrea as seen above and Davies notes that this concept of “being a good woman” is fundamental to the cultural narratives through which ‘femaleness’³ is constituted (p. 45). This is to say the condition of being a woman is deeply connected with being a good woman, so much so that they cannot be told apart. One needs to contemplate why is it so important for women to be good and behave in the ways that they are expected to. Though Davies suggests that this is a “classist and racist” construct (p. 45), these gender roles go much beyond the labels of class, race and caste. They can be considered universal in nature because, in all the regions that patriarchy exists, these notions have also been established there as clear from the examples from India and Spain.

*Please see: *Sección Femenina. La mujer dentro del franquismo*. (2014, March 13th). Los Ojos de Hipatia. <https://losojosdehipatia.com.es/cultura/historia/seccion-femenina-la-mujer-dentro-del-franquismo/>

The two protagonists this paper examines the attempt to reject these societal expectations. Andrea goes against these expectations of being a 'good Christian woman' under the Francoist regime by deciding to study in a university and not settling for a marriage. She shifts to Barcelona with dreams of becoming a free and confident young woman. Thus, she is unpleasantly surprised when her Aunt Angustias instructs her that she is not to make a single step outside her home without her permission (p.10) because she is a "good and pure" Christian woman from an honorable family. She is told that there is no reason for her to roam around as freely as a man does (p.22). Her aunt adds that there are only two honorable paths that can be chosen by a good woman: to either get married or enter a convent as a nun (p. 36). As discussed above, the archetype of a "good woman" is presented to Andrea at the outset by Angustias. She attempts to educate her on how to behave properly in opposition to a "bad woman" who has the qualities of Gloria (Andrea's aunt) because she is a somewhat more liberated woman who stands up for herself against her husband when he beats and berates her. Here, her Aunt can be read as an ideologue of the conservative values during Franco's era. Andrea goes against Angustias' instructions and strikes up a friendship with Gloria who she naturally relates with by virtue of a shared poor social status. She further decides after a spell of fever that she should not allow her Aunt's expectations to curb her free movement and to dictate her life (p. 22). As Morris (1975) aptly puts it, she understands that in 'vagabundear' (English: 'Freely roaming around') lies her freedom. These decisions result in a final act of her decrying by Angustias saying "You have deceived me; you have cheated me. I expected to see a little orphaned girl wanting my affection but instead I have seen a rebellious demon!" (p.38). When Andrea refuses to obey her Aunt, it can be read as an act of freedom although an illusory one as she is not able to liberate herself completely from the patriarchal discourse completely by merely resisting one of its proponents. Reading it through Davies' discussion, it becomes apparent that even though it is not the best choice she can make, it is the only choice she can make. According to Davies,

Choices are understood as more akin to "forced choices", since the subject's positioning within particular discourses makes the "chosen" line of action the only possible action, not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively constituted through one's placement within that discourse to want that line of action. (p. 46)

In the second novel, Ammu goes against the wishes of her family in four distinct ways. Jani (2009) explains that Ammu breaks away from the Syrian Christian traditions when she chose her husband instead of an arranged marriage. Moreover, her husband was of a different religion and caste and ultimately divorced her. Her husband was an alcoholic man with little respect for his wife. When he was asked by his employer to let his wife sleep with him, he agreed without taking Ammu's opinion into

consideration because he thought it would be beneficial for both of them (p. 41). These choices of 'love marriage' and divorce are all decisions that good Catholic women are not expected to make. In her act of standing up for herself, Ammu becomes an 'agentic' woman as she makes her decision to divorce him while knowing the little means available to her. By which what is meant is that one can imagine that she could have stayed in her abusive marriage for her children's sake as she had no financial means to support them and she could have continued to accept the dehumanizing behavior her husband gave her. She still chooses to leave and as Davies theorizes, this is what the condition of being agentic means. While having an awareness of the existing models available to her and 'understandings' that are available to her, she rejects them (p. 50). She takes responsibility of herself, in other words. These decisions made by Ammu lead to what her Aunt calls her "unsafe edge". If it is argued that no agentic decision can truly be made outside of existing discourses which are unavailable to women especially to someone like Ammu who has "not had that kind of education, nor met that sort of people, nor read that sort of books" (p. 180), how does one understand Ammu's choices then. Roy herself seems to provide an answer when she writes (p. 181) that as Ammu grew up watching her parents' physically abusive marriage and experiencing her father's violent attacks firsthand, she developed a "sense of deep injustice that only someone who has been bullied all their life develops" (p. 180). This "unsafe edge" that her Aunt thinks Ammu as possessing can be seen as a consequence of her childhood experiences. The fourth decision that Ammu makes, which goes against her family's expectations of her, is when she falls in love with Velutha, a Dalit man. This will be examined in more detail in the next section because all the other decisions discussed that Ammu made (i.e. her marriage and divorce) are in the past, and her relationship with Velutha is a choice made in the present time that the novel is set in. I am reading it as her attempt to create a different future for herself.

The instances of domestic violence in Ammu and Andrea's families aids in further understanding the degree of dysfunctionality and the oppressive environments of both households. This violence can be understood as acts to establish the superiority of men in both the households and were intended to show the women their place. Ammu, while growing up, saw her father beat up her mother regularly with a brass vase. He flogged Ammu as well and destroyed her prized possessions- a pair of gum boots in front of her (p.181). While Andrea, after coming to live on Aribau Street, became used to regular verbal and physical abuse of Gloria by her husband Juan, often in the presence of their baby. After one such incident, her uncle Román in order to calm Andrea asked her to not be alarmed as this violence happened regularly at their home (p.12). As Avantika Tewari (2020) writes, physical and sexual violence against women is not because of their gender but also because of their weak socio-structural location.

Studying the global patterns of domestic violence, a WHO report of 2013[†] reveals that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at some point in their lives and it is estimated that of the 87,000 women who were intentionally killed in 2017 globally, more than half (50,000- 58 per cent) were killed by intimate partners or family members, meaning that 137 women across the world are killed by a member of their own family every day. Specifically about the countries this paper examines, 9% of women in Spain and 35% in India have faced intimate partner violence, according to another report by UN Women published in the year 2011[‡]. This means that if the two novels are assumed to be representative of the epochs they are set in, not much has changed in the decades that have followed. In the case of Ammu's family, a lack of discourse about domestic violence in then Syrian Christian society means that neither Ammu nor Mammachi could escape this cruel family setup, as clearly the discourse of patriarchy seeks to protect the interests of men. Years later, when Ammu's own marriage becomes violent/dysfunctional, it is a familiar situation for her as she has experienced the violence of her parents' abusive marriage and the psychological (and physical) scars it left on her. This contributes to her resolution to leave, which can be read as an assertion of her agency.

The financial standing of a woman comes into play when one discusses her socio-structural location because the present hegemonic discourse privileges men owing to their capacity to earn. The labor power of working-class men and the means of production owned by bourgeois men ensure that they are capable of earning money which goes towards sustaining their wives and their children. The women are in turn engaged the whole day doing unpaid labor taking care of the children, carrying out various chores and running the household. Because of this, both Andrea and Ammu realize the importance of being able to earn and manage their own money. As examined earlier, this can be understood as what Davies discusses as 'socially available repertoire' (p. 49). She describes that agented individuals become aware of this pre-existing and available social vocabulary that form a part of the prevailing discourse; in this case, it is the ability to earn and manage money. Interestingly, both Ammu and Andrea belong to middle-class families. Andrea's uncles fought during the Civil war and later worked as a trader and an artist. Ammu's family, on the other hand, owns a successful pickle factory, and her father was an entomologist. Despite these facts, the two women's weak financial standing is highlighted by their families. Ammu cannot make any claims to the family-owned 'Paradise Pickles' because she has no

*Please see: Global and regional estimates of violence against women. (2013). World Health Organization.

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85241/WHO_RHR_HRP_13.06_eng.pdf?sequence=1

‡Please see: Violence against Women Prevalence Data: Surveys by Country. (March 2011).

UN Women.

https://www.endvawnow.org/uploads/browser/files/vaw_prevalence_matrix_15april_2011.pdf

“Locusts Stand I” which is Roy’s wordplay for *Locus Standi*. This further reduced her social standing and was made clear to her by her brother’s repeated reference to the factory and its products as “his” (p.57). As a result, Ammu imagines herself as being financially independent someday and tells her children that she will open a school someday. In the case of Andrea, she is not allowed to spend the measly scholarship that she receives by herself and is usurped by Angustias. After Angustias leaves the home, Juan chides her and she decides to avoid meals at home. She plans to eat whatever her scholarship could buy to not impose on the family’s financial strains in the aftermath of the civil war. This means that many days, she skips meals because she cannot afford to eat at cafes everyday (p. 47). Mariana Petrea (1994, p. 80) in her article ‘Dialéctica de la emancipación femenina en *Nada*’ observes that this event can be read as her desire for financial independence.

Lastly in this section, it is important to talk about how the two women handled their interpersonal relationships within the families. One gets a sense that both Ammu and Andrea navigate their family relationships with a sense of resignation. Ammu owing to her childhood exposure to violence, became used to this “cold and calculating cruelty” (p. 181) of real life. She is aware of her unwantedness in the family and her secondary position to her highly educated, factory managing brother. Roy writes that because Ammu was so deeply used to violence, she found comfort in their familiarity. She invests more in her relationship with her children. She makes for a good mother to both of them, always protective but also lovingly disciplining them when needed. When she falls in love with Velutha, it can be seen as the only true connection and intimacy she experienced. In the case of Andrea, she too refuses to engage too much with her other family members though she indulges Aunt Angustias and does what she is asked to till a certain point in the novel. She thinks of her time spent with her family before she begins university as ‘long and unimportant days’ and describes that the smell of their home made her nauseous (p. 17). She does not bond deeply with any of them- her uncles or her grandmother- and is alarmed when her friend Ena starts becoming too close to her uncle Román because she has known his true nature as a womanizer and a manipulative person. As she leaves Barcelona, she describes that she is leaving without having experienced fulfillment, joy, happiness and love that she had hoped to experience in this home (p. 112) which is a direct commentary on her relationship with her family.

In this section the two women have been attempted to be shown as agented individuals who made decisions that went against what was expected from them by the dominant structures that surround them. It is possible to understand the agency that Ammu and Andrea exhibit better in contrast with their other female family members. In the case of Ammu, one can look at her mother. Mammachi suffered years of domestic abuse at the hands of her husband because she did not have the privilege to leave such a violent marriage. In *Nada*, it is Gloria who can be seen as a woman with little agency. She is disliked by Angustias, and being in a vulnerable position in the family, she is regularly beaten by her husband. She continues to bear it till the end

of the novel. Both Mammachi and Gloria were unemployed as well. They can be understood as women who never became conscious about the existence of a discourse that systematically disadvantages them and privileged their husbands and sons over them. They suffered at the hands of an oppressive structure that instructs women that a good woman tolerates abuse and it is a bad woman who leaves an abusive marriage. On the contrary, Angustias also being a woman, is someone who holds a position of power within this structure. She is unmarried but that becomes socially acceptable because she is about to join a convent. She reproduces these very patriarchal values that cause suffering to Gloria and Andrea. In the next section, the paper will look at how the two women Ammu and Andrea attempt self-determination as agented women.

Striving towards Self-Determination

Davies suggests that dualisms form an integral structure of discourses that give and strip the agency of individuals, and the dualism of good and bad women was considered in the previous section. Another one of the important dualisms is that of the masculine and feminine which is intrinsically connected to the rationality-irrationality dualism. She suggests that women have been associated with the latter owing to their “otherness” to masculinity i.e. they are considered “other to” or outside of conscious and rational thought (p. 44). The term ‘hysteria’ itself derives from the Greek word *hysteria*, which means “uterus” and has attained a pejorative sense after the rise of feminist movements⁴So, in this context, one understands why Ammu has what her family considers an “unsafe edge”. For those around her, it is an unconscious tendency that Ammu has towards “irrational” things, which is how they perceive her love affair with Velutha, among the other “reckless” choices she has made in the past like her ‘love marriage’ and eventual divorce. When one considers her childhood experiences, one understands that they have contributed to this “edge”, which the author describes as the tenderness of motherhood mixed with “the reckless rage of a suicide bomber” (p. 44). In the case of Andrea, she is also a part of the rational-irrational duality. She, as a young adolescent, is vulnerable to making “irrational” choices, and her aunt feels the need to lecture and correct her behavior because she may tend towards doing things that are not prescribed within the conservative Christian codes of conduct, such as “roaming around” and “talking to boys” (p. 77).

Further, the duality of good and bad women means that within the present hegemonic system, what Ammu and Andrea desire and what they are expected to desire are contradictory ideas. That is their positioning within the present dominant discourse and their imagination of themselves conflict with each other. Davies writes that an awareness of this central contradiction is an essential condition to being agentic because it can give access to “powerful ways of being” (p.45). Thus, for Davies self-determination is achieved by individuals when they become aware of the hegemonic apparatus that they form a part of and choose to reject what this discourse dictates them. This awareness and the subsequent rejection facilitate them to gain what she

terms “authority” and allows them to be “the author of their own multiple meanings and desires”(p. 51) which can be understood as having agency which is not prescribed by the individuals who hold power within the dominant discourse. In the case of Ammu and Andrea, such individuals are the men in their lives and their aunts (Angustias and BabyKochamma respectively). In this section, the paper will attempt to show Ammu’s relationship with Velutha and Andrea’s friendships with Ena and Pons were steps they took towards eventually freeing themselves from their suffocating domestic setups and were acts of self-determination, as theorized by Davies.

Roy utilizes foreshadowing throughout the novel. A key moment between Ammu and Velutha when they look at each other before they begin a relationship is described fittingly as “History was wrong-footed, caught off-guard” (p. 176). This is because Ammu belongs to a well-to-do upper caste⁵ family, Veluthabelongs to theParavan caste and is an ‘untouchable’ Dalit. It is important to note here that he was an employee at the family pickle factory and was a member of the local communist party. This means that with respect to Ammu’s family, he is triply subjugated: because of his caste, his vulnerable position as their employee and because of the fact that due to their economic interests they are wary of Marxists. Further, one gets the sense that Ammu and Velutha’s love was doomed from the beginning because of lines such as “If he touched her, he couldn’t leave. If he fought, he couldn’t win” (p. 33).The reader notices that Mammachi toleratesher son’s sexual needs andeven constructs a separate entrance forChacko’s female companions⁶so that they can enter the home easily(p. 169). On the other hand, Mammachi cannot imagine Ammu having sexual desires as she “nearly vomits” (p. 257) thinking of Ammu and Velutha’s lovemaking. There is a caste along with a morality angle to her reaction. Velutha being a Dalit is described by Mammachi as having a particular unbearable stench (“That Paravan smell, like animals” p. 257) and this is exacerbated by the fact that he is involved in an affair with her daughter. This is also a manifestation of male-female dualism because the sexuality of men is accepted as moral, and that of women is considered shameful.

Jani(2009)observes that Ammu and Velutha’s coming together is a natural event because they are both people who have suffered dueto the systems of patriarchy and caste. Their rage is a shared one against the brutal social order that has deprived both of them in every sense, and their union is their ultimate resistance. He adds that Velutha can be read as an “antithesis” of society as a Dalit and a communist, and this is why Ammu is drawn to himbecause he actively resists the repressive structures of society that have caused her suffering as well. Their love can be understood as both Ammu’s and Velutha’s way to reject the systems of patriarchy and caste. Bose (2006) points out that their love was a rejection of the existing discourse on romance as well because instead of being the one who is courted, Ammu takes the lead role and initiates the relationship with Velutha. Though it is a short-lived relationship, Lutz (2009) is of the opinion that only the twoof them experience true intimacy in the whole novel. Their relationship is a manifestation of human desire and is more

“natural” than the other relationships in the novel that are ruled by the forces of patriarchy, religion, caste and capitalism. It becomes obvious then that experiencing intimacy can, in several ways, be seen as resistance to the oppressive social structures that surround the individuals. Ammu and Velutha's relationship ends after thirteen days, with Velutha's death in police custody and Ammu being kicked out of the family for “defiling generations of breeding”(p. 257) for having a sexual relationship with Velutha. The discovery of their relationship can be read as a ‘point of no return’ in the novel. When Ammu is made to leave her home (which can be described as a suffocating but a familiar space for her where at the very least, her material needs were being met), she is forced to make several choices. First, she is forced to send Estha back to his father as she has no means of keeping him and sends Rahel to a convent boarding school. While sending her son back, she tells him that she will bring him home when she earns enough money. She promises him and Rahel that she will start a school someday with all the money she has earned, and they will have their own home (p. 324). As she makes these choices, she realizes that this temporary separation from her children is a price she has to pay for her desires that transgressed the powers to be. While her aunt and her mother get Velutha arrested by framing him in a false rape complaint, Ammu decides to go and record her statement contradicting the rape claim and wishes to see Velutha once again (p. 8). This decision alarms her family members and it is possible to read this as another way in which she is attempting to assert her agency during this traumatic episode. She while loving a Dalit man, begins to think of a fresh start with her children. She is made to move out of her home and starts looking for jobs. In the end, she dies in a lodge alone while waiting to give an interview. It becomes clear that whatever choices Ammu made to create a different life for herself amount to nothing. She fails miserably when she tries to escape the oppressive and regressive structures of patriarchy and caste that dictate not only what the author calls “love laws” but also society itself.

Examining Andrea's attempts to carve out a better life for herself, one observes a similar pattern as with Ammu but with a vastly different outcome. The novel *Nadacan* can be divided into two parts, from Andrea's point of view: the first is where she spends all of her time at home, and the second is when she begins her university. It is evident that the time she spends at home is when she feels most repressed and suffocated because of the ambience of violence at their home. She narrates that while she waited for her university to begin, she felt so overwhelmed by the petty arguments, stories and Angustias' attempts of disciplining her that she begins to “forget herself, including her dreams” (p. 17). She describes that she needs to interact with other people of her age to be able to tolerate and protect herself against her family (p. 22). When her classes begin, there is a positive shift in her mood and her self-confidence which is perceivable in the narrative. She makes many friends and her most central friendship in the novel is with Ena. Ena is a wealthy classmate who quickly befriends Andrea. The two study together, get coffees and help each other with Ena sometimes lending books to Andrea as she doesn't have the money to buy them. Ena often invites her home where they spend a good time chatting with Ena's family (p. 43).

Petrea(1994)underlines that for Andrea, Ena’s family directly contrast her own.Ena’s parents interact pleasantly with her and treat her with respect, often asking her to stay for tea and dinner. They are starkly different from her own dysfunctional relatives, who are usually fighting among each other and often chide Andrea as well. Moreover,she is taken in awe of Ena and her self-assuredness. She appreciates her kindness towards her and notices how confident she is when she deals with others, especially her suitors, and admires her warm relationship with her parents. Andrea regards Ena with fondness and respect and gifts her one of her prized possessions- her first communion handkerchief (p. 26). She thinks of their trips to the beach together as “rays of light” (p. 52) in her otherwise dull life at Aribaustreet. Andrea wishes to be more like Enabut she realizes that as long as she remains in her current domestic setup, she would not be able to become who she truly wants to be. This is once again pointing towards what Davies theorized as the “contradiction” of being an agentic individual. Andrea sees that what she is expected to be at home- a subservient woman, directly contradictswho she truly wants to be- a confident young woman with meaningful friendships and perhaps a like-minded partner. She knows that as long as she lives with her family, it means living within the confines of their social and religious expectations from her. She sees her time spent with Ena as one way of escaping the dread that her home fills in her, albeit temporarily (p. 17).

Her other friendships include what she calls the *pandilla*(Eng.: gang), a group of bohemian thinkers who she is introduced to by her classmate, Pons (p. 57). Through these people, Andrea gets a glimpse of a completely different, intellectually stimulating and an artistic world. Though they are a bit chauvinistic and from a wealthier class than her own humble background, Andrea spends a good time with them. Pons plays the most important role of them all in Andrea's life. He finds her attractive and thinks of confessing his feelings to her and asking her to spend the summer with his family. A central episode in this novel is that of Pons’ party to which he invites Andrea (p. 78).She wants to look beautiful for him that day and feel desired. This feeling of desiring and being desired by a partner is something so alien for her, not because she has not had suitors but because she is used to spending time surrounded by her bitter relatives and their complicated lives. She thinks to herself that ideally, life should consist of “enjoying every feeling and sensation fully, one’s own despair and joy” (p. 83) rather than listening to other’s arguments and instructions. When she goes to the party, she, unfortunately, feels embarrassed about her dress and leaves without even a proper goodbye to Pons. (p. 86). Andrea realized that she and Pons belonged to different social strata and she knows that she could never be the kind of sophisticated woman Pons would expect her to be. Del Maestro (1997) identifies that Ena was tempted by the life that Pons could have offered her but she realizes that she cannot attempt to create a new life for herself merely as his romantic partner. This episode helps her realize that any attempt at self-determination has to be driven by and centered on her. Before leaving for his party, Andrea fantasized that she would be like a princess who would catch the eye of her prince

Charming, but this episode makes her conscious of the fact that her fairytale cannot depend on a Prince who would rescue her at all.

Ena is the one who ultimately helps her liberate herself from her unhappy home. Ena's father offers Andrea a position in his company which requires her to relocate to Madrid (p. 111). Andrea accepts because she feels that this will be the fresh start that she never got in Barcelona. As she leaves, she remembers the "terrible optimism and the longing for a good life" (p. 112) that she had when she arrived in Barcelona, which are some things that she never got to experience here. Since Davies suggests that agency is having the authorship of "multiple desires" and as a sense of "imagining not what *is* but what *might* be" (p. 51), Andrea's actions can also be read as agentic actions. Although the possibility of a fresh start in Madrid was made possible due to her friendship with Ena, it is Andrea who in accepting her offer, is attempting a reimagination of her future. She chooses to not stay on in the dismal environment of her home in Aribaustreet. Further, Ena's father was offering her a position that would not interrupt with her university classes. So, this means that everything that Andrea had hoped to receive in Barcelona could possibly be fulfilled in Madrid. She would live independently, study and work to support herself. As noted in the previous section, the aspect of her financial independence becomes crucial in any discussion of a woman's independence within a patriarchal society and that too would effectively be taken care of for Andrea. As Davies submits that "agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognize that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted" (p. 51), Andrea's actions are testament to it. She is aware that as a young woman living in a patriarchal and conservative society, she cannot expect to be as free as a man but she is willing to change what is in her control i.e. a resistance in some way to the hegemonic discourses the life that she lived in Aribaustreet.

Conclusion

Modern stories are about individuals writ large and are examples of we might each become as we struggle towards our individual personhood, Davies suggests (p. 42). It seems like an optimistic lens to look at Ammu and Andrea's life stories and their circumstances. There is a certain feel-good factor in hoping that these women's stories are indicative of many more such isolated resistances against dominant structures such as patriarchy. However in my opinion, it would be naïve to assume so. Davies too, puts forward that agency is fundamentally illusory (p. 46). There cannot be emancipation for all women without a systematic dismantling of patriarchy and all the other oppressive systems. In the same vein, it should be added that it doesn't mean the same as saying that these alienated instances of resistance, be it in literature or in real life should not be considered important. This study looked at how Andrea and Ammu negotiated and attempted to reimagine their lives outside of these powerful structures. Andrea firstly resisted the suffocating codes of behaviour imposed on her and moved

away eventually from her home in Barcelona to begin a new life for herself. By leaving her home on Aribaustreet behind, she was bidding goodbye to the conservative values enforced on her by her Aunt and an atmosphere of disrespect and distrust that hung in the air within its four walls. Ammu attempted to reimagine a new life for herself by loving an untouchable man, the price for which was her life. She tried to earn money somehow so that she could keep both her children, but she couldn't. Both women's lives prove how difficult it becomes for women to challenge or modify the status quo. This paper has attempted to look at the decisions that they made in which the two women can be understood as having agency. It further examined the discourse of patriarchy and the locations of both women within these discourses that have rendered them less agentic than men. Both found it difficult to change the structures that were making their existence difficult. Further looking at the reports on domestic and sexual violence, it becomes clear that from the "first" world to the "third", women have had to suffer disproportionately more. Another aspect that should be discussed is how patriarchy affects women and other identities across sections. This paper looked at two women who belonged to well-to-do families (though they personally were not financially independent) and who were heterosexual, how would patriarchy have affected them if their sexual, caste or class identities were different? What becomes clear when we ask such questions is that any attempt to dismantle these powerful structures cannot be successful unless there are allies across identities standing along with heterosexual and privileged women.

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Endnotes

¹ The title of the paper draws from a quote in *The God of Small Things*. I am using the word ‘millstones’ to show how the women of both novels are seen as liabilities in the spaces they inhabit.

² Silvia Federici, the revolutionary activist and writer, attributes this gender inequality to the patriarchal nature of the wage in her *Caliban and The Witch*(1990).

³Davies distinguishes "femaleness", which for her is a biological condition of possessing female genitalia, from "femininity", which is linked to sexual appeal and as a quality perceived by others

⁴*Hysteria Beyond Freud* (Univ. of California Press, 1993) by Sandra Gilman and others makes for a primary orientation in this discussion.

⁵ The Syrian Christians are called forward caste here because they unofficially adopted the Hindu caste system when Dalit Hindus converted to Christianity to escape the very system.

⁶Here I use “companions” for the lack of a better word. The women are in reality his employees at the family factory and who are solicited by Chacko. The women are of little means who allow themselves to be solicited by him so that they can earn some more money (p. 168).