



## Voices of Resistance: Ecofeminist and Subaltern Narratives in the Works of Atwood, Walker, and Roy

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### Abstract

This research paper examines the intersection of ecofeminism and subaltern narratives in the works of three prominent authors – Margaret Atwood, Alice Walker, and Arundhati Roy. By exploring how these writers address the dual oppression of women and nature through their literary works, the study underscores the authors' critiques of patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and environmental degradation. The paper analyses specific texts from each author to reveal how they intertwine the struggle for gender equality with the fight for environmental justice, while also amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, particularly women, indigenous peoples, and lower classes. Atwood's speculative fiction, Walker's portrayal of African American women, and Roy's focus on political activism and environmental destruction offer rich, complex narratives that resonate with global movements for environmental and social justice. Through an ecofeminist lens, this paper demonstrates how these authors use their works to challenge power structures, critique capitalist exploitation, and propose alternative ways of living that are more harmonious with nature and equitable for all.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Subaltern Studies, Margaret Atwood, Alice Walker, Arundhati Roy, Gender, Environment, Colonialism, Patriarchy, Resistance, Marginalized Voices

### Introduction

Ecofeminism, an intellectual and activist movement that connects the exploitation of women and nature, has become increasingly significant in contemporary literary studies. It challenges traditional power hierarchies and draws attention to the ways in which environmental destruction is often intertwined

with gender-based oppression. At the same time, subaltern studies focus on the marginalization of oppressed groups, particularly those excluded from dominant cultural, political, and economic discourses. In the literary works of Margaret Atwood, Alice Walker, and Arundhati Roy, both ecofeminist concerns and subaltern perspectives converge,

creating powerful narratives of resistance against patriarchal and colonial oppression.

This research paper delves into the ecofeminist and subaltern narratives present in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Walker's *The Color Purple*, and Roy's *The God of Small Things*. These texts provide a critique of the power dynamics that lead to the oppression of women and nature, while also emphasizing the resilience and agency of marginalized communities. By analysing the intersections between gender, ecology, and subalternity, this study explores how each author uses literature to advocate for justice and resistance against systems of exploitation. The works of Atwood, Walker, and Roy serve as vital texts that not only expose the injustices perpetuated by dominant powers but also imagine alternative futures built on equality and environmental sustainability.

### Ecofeminism and the Patriarchal Exploitation of Nature

Ecofeminism critiques the patriarchal structures that dominate both women and nature, arguing that the exploitation of natural resources is closely tied to the oppression of women. These structures often reduce both women and the environment to mere resources, commodifying and exploiting them for profit and power. Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction, particularly *The Handmaid's Tale*, presents a dystopian society where women's bodies and reproductive capacities are controlled by a theocratic regime, drawing a parallel between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the environment. In Atwood's narrative, the fertility of women is commodified in much the same way that nature is exploited for its resources. Her work raises critical questions about autonomy, environmental degradation, and the commodification of life itself.

Similarly, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* reflects on the exploitation of the environment through the lens of caste

oppression in Kerala, India. Roy highlights how industrialization and environmental degradation disproportionately affect marginalized communities, particularly women and lower-caste individuals. The novel critiques the colonial legacy of resource extraction and environmental destruction, while also depicting the intimate relationships that exist between women and their natural environments.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, although primarily a feminist text, also incorporates ecofeminist concerns. Walker's characters, particularly Celie, find solace and empowerment in nature. The act of nurturing gardens becomes symbolic of reclaiming agency and autonomy. The novel suggests that the healing of women and the environment are interconnected and that liberation from patriarchal oppression must include both the restoration of women's rights and the protection of the earth.

### Subaltern Voices and Marginalization

Subaltern studies emphasize the perspectives of marginalized groups who have been excluded from dominant narratives of history and culture. The term "subaltern" refers to those who are subordinated within social hierarchies—often women, lower classes, and colonized peoples. In the works of Atwood, Walker, and Roy, subaltern voices are given prominence, with each author focusing on the lived experiences of marginalized individuals, particularly women.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood critiques the silencing of women's voices under a totalitarian regime. The handmaids, whose bodies are controlled by the state, represent the ultimate subaltern figure: voiceless, powerless, and reduced to their reproductive function. Through the protagonist, Offred, Atwood explores how women resist subjugation, reclaim their narratives, and find ways to resist even within oppressive systems. The novel illustrates the power of storytelling as a form of resistance against patriarchal control.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is a seminal work in subaltern studies, as it highlights the experiences of African American women in the early 20th century. The protagonist, Celie, initially voiceless and oppressed, gradually reclaims her identity through writing letters and building supportive relationships with other women. The novel underscores the importance of community and solidarity in resisting both racial and gender oppression. Walker's work brings to light the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in the experiences of subaltern women.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy brings attention to the subaltern voices within the caste system of India, focusing on the marginalized position of lower-caste individuals and women. The novel critiques the caste system's dehumanization of the "untouchables" and reveals how colonialism perpetuated this system of oppression. Roy's portrayal of Ammu and Velutha, two characters who transgress caste boundaries, serves as a powerful commentary on the interconnections between caste, gender, and colonial exploitation. Through their tragic fates, Roy underscores the dangers faced by subaltern figures who challenge the status quo.

### Resistance and Alternative Narratives

While the works of Atwood, Walker, and Roy depict the harsh realities of patriarchal, colonial, and environmental oppression, they also offer narratives of resistance. These authors challenge dominant power structures by presenting alternative ways of being that emphasize solidarity, care for the environment, and a rejection of capitalist exploitation.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, resistance takes many forms, from subtle acts of defiance to organized rebellion. The novel's epilogue, which situates the dystopian regime as a historical footnote, suggests that resistance is not only possible but inevitable. Atwood's vision of resistance is one that acknowledges the resilience of women and their ability to reclaim

agency even in the most oppressive circumstances.

Walker's *The Color Purple* emphasizes the transformative power of self-love, solidarity, and community. Celie's journey from a voiceless victim to an empowered woman is a testament to the strength of women's resilience. By the end of the novel, Celie has reclaimed her identity, her voice, and her relationship with nature. The novel proposes an alternative way of living that values community, creativity, and a deep connection with the natural world.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy critiques both the caste system and the environmental degradation brought about by industrialization, but she also presents alternative ways of living. The close relationships between Ammu, Velutha, and their natural environment suggest a harmonious way of life that contrasts sharply with the oppressive social and economic systems that surround them. While the novel ends tragically, it also points to the possibility of resistance through small acts of defiance and the preservation of cultural and ecological diversity.

### Conclusion

The ecofeminist and subaltern narratives presented in the works of Margaret Atwood, Alice Walker, and Arundhati Roy offer powerful critiques of the interconnections between patriarchal oppression, environmental degradation, and the marginalization of subaltern voices. These authors challenge dominant power structures by highlighting the resilience and agency of marginalized individuals, particularly women and those excluded from dominant narratives of history and culture. Atwood's portrayal of a dystopian society, Walker's exploration of African American women's experiences, and Roy's critique of the caste system and colonialism all emphasize the importance of resistance against systems of exploitation. Through their works, these authors advocate for justice, environmental sustainability, and the empowerment of marginalized communities.

Ultimately, the ecofeminist and subaltern perspectives in these texts provide valuable insights into the ways in which literature can serve as a tool for resistance and social change. By amplifying the voices of the voiceless and offering alternative narratives, Atwood, Walker, and Roy remind us of the power of storytelling to challenge oppression and imagine more just and equitable futures.

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