



*Language and Indigenous Cultural Identity in Arundhati  
Roy's The God of Small Things.*

اللغة وإشكالية الهوية الثقافية الإفريقية للاندجينا في كتاب أروندهااتي روي إله الأشياء الصغيرة.

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**Article abstract:** Out of a desire to resurrect the pre-colonial culture, some postcolonial writers consciously use elements of their native culture. It is one way to rediscover native identity and declare its worth. The current research paper aims to unveil the several problems laying in this approach, especially the language of writing. The current research attempts to highlight how Postcolonial writers of Indian, Caribbean, and African descent such as Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*, skillfully use a hybridized forms and structures of English as a means to convey their voices and cultures to the global readership. Thus the study aims to deconstruct the English language and its usage by infusing the markers of the indigenous culture and vernacular language. The exploration of these works urges broader questions about the role of literary translation in preserving and securing the cultural heritage of a nation.

**Key words:** Hybridized Structures- Indigenous Languages- Native Culture- Postcolonial writers- Resistance- Translation

ملخص المقال :

انطلاقاً من رغبة جامحة لإحياء ثقافة ما قبل الاستعمار، يستخدم بعض كتاب ما بعد الاستعمار عن وعي عناصر من ثقافتهم الأصلية حيث تعتبر من أهم الوسائل لاسترجاع الهوية الأصلية وإعلان قيمتها. تهدف هاته الورقة البحثية إلى تسليط الضوء عن المشاكل التي تعرقل لغة الكتابة. كما تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى إبراز دور وكيفية استخدام كتاب ما بعد الاستعمار من أصول هندية وكاريبية وأفريقية مثل أرونداتي روي في "إله الأشياء الصغيرة" وتشينوا أشيبي في "أشياء تتداعى" بمهارة في استخدام أشكال وتراكيب مهجنة للغة الإنجليزية كوسيلة لإيصال أصواتهم وثقافتهم إلى جمهور القراء العالمي وأيضاً لتفكيك اللغة الإنجليزية واستخدامها من خلال إرساء معالم ثقافتهم ولغتهم الأصلية. مما يحمل على طرح أسئلة أوسع حول دور الترجمة الأدبية في الحفاظ على التراث الثقافي للأمة وتأمينه كلمات مفتاحية: الهياكل المهيجنة - لغات السكان الأصليين - اللغة الأم - ثقافة السكان الأصليين - كتاب ما بعد الاستعمار - المقاومة - البحث

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## Introduction

Efforts to safeguard African cultural heritage have largely concentrated on conserving its most palpable manifestations, particularly sacred sites and linguistic traditions. Arundhati Roy's advocacy for indigenous rights underscores the perilous decline of native tongues, emphasizing their fundamental role in cultural identity. Consequently, she has called for a global initiative to revitalize, sustain, and advance these languages to counteract their erosion.

As a leading figure in this movement, Roy has championed the preservation of endangered indigenous languages, drawing attention to the diverse cultural wealth and how this contribute to global society. Intergenerational transmission of ancestral wisdom occurs through narratives, music, dance, visual arts, and dramatic expressions. However, the enduring legacies of imperialism, subjugation, and dispossession continue to diminish and devalue these cultural pillars. In numerous regions, young indigenous populations are deprived of instruction in their ancestral tongues, further severing their linguistic and cultural lineage.

Urging both governmental and intergovernmental entities to allocate financial and technical resources, Roy has stressed the necessity of ensuring that younger generations remain rooted in their indigenous heritage, which is inherently linked to ancestral lands, traditional territories, and natural ecosystems.

### The Interconnection Between Vernacular Language and Religious Identity

Roy posits that the initiative to safeguard indigenous languages should integrate religious communities as pivotal stakeholders in the effort to conserve the intangible cultural fabric of linguistic heritage. Indigenous languages have flourished within religious contexts for centuries, with efforts to sustain them, being a priority among cultural elites. A collaborative approach that engages religious institutions is essential to achieving meaningful progress in preserving these languages, as spiritual traditions have long served as custodians of linguistic and cultural continuity.

### Significance and Interpretative Layers of the Title

*The God of Small Things* illuminate's narratives systematically marginalized and expunged from collective historical consciousness, often due to entrenched power dynamics. The thematic core of the title resides in its juxtaposition of the grand and the minuscule, as Roy articulates: *The God of Small Things, is a book where you can connect the very smallest things to the very largest* (Barsamian, 2001). This intricate interplay underscores the novel's structural pattern; wherein micro-level experiences mirror broader societal constructs. The novel critiques the dominance of hegemonic structures by affirming the transformative potential of resistance (Tickell, 2005, p.10).



Moreover, *The God of Small Things* metaphorically alludes to institutional authority and dogma, reflecting the ideological frameworks disseminated by Christian missionaries, Marxist doctrines, and political factions. Within the novel's discourse, these forces exert influence while remaining embedded in peripheral, seemingly inconspicuous elements, thereby marginalizing the lived experiences of those relegated to historical obscurity.

### **The Symbiotic Relationship Between Indigenous Language and Spiritual Practice**

Cultural narratives and belief systems are often enshrined in oral traditions and religious customs, underscoring the necessity of engaging with faith-based communities beyond their physical domains. However, indigenous populations across the globe have historically faced systematic suppression aimed at dismantling both their linguistic heritage and spiritual traditions. Language preservation functions as a vital mechanism for fostering intergenerational continuity while simultaneously safeguarding religious identity.

The intrinsic overlap between vernacular language and spiritual expression necessitates deeper engagement with religious stakeholders in linguistic revitalization endeavors. Oral transmission is central to all major faith traditions, with much of what is classified as intangible heritage possessing spiritual dimensions. In several cultural contexts, language itself is perceived as a sacred conduit of divine inspiration, while in others, it serves as a repository for distinctive rituals and esoteric symbols that might otherwise vanish. Given the prevalence of religion as a sociopolitical force worldwide, Roy suggests that analyzing how religious institutions have historically contributed to both conflict and reconciliation can inform strategies to effectively involve faith-based organizations in language preservation (Roy, 1997, p.171).

### **The Caste System in Post-Independence India and Its Linguistic Implications**

The term *eponymous phrase* serves as a symbolic reference to Velutha, an untouchable carpenter ensnared in the perpetual tension between the hierarchical and the marginalized. His quiet defiance of the caste hierarchy is embodied in his rejection of subjugation and his embrace of the inherent dignity found in the seemingly insignificant (p. 57). Within Hindu cosmology, caste stratification is deeply embedded in the foundational myth of creation, where the primeval being was fragmented into distinct social orders, relegating labor-intensive and stigmatized tasks to the lowest tier (Tickell, 2005, p. 22). Those positioned at the periphery of this rigid structure—classified as *outcastes*—are consigned to professions perceived as spiritually defiling, including leatherwork, sanitation, and mortuary services (ibid., p. 23).

Despite the formal dissolution of colonial rule, Roy's narrative illustrates that caste-based discrimination remained entrenched. Mamachi reminisces about an era when Paravans were compelled to erase their footprints to prevent the perceived contamination of upper-caste individuals: "Pappachi would not allow Paravans into



the house. No one would. They were not allowed to touch anything touchable” (p. 71). Mamachi, despite her self-perception as a benefactor, embodies this internalized bias when she encourages *Vellya Pappen to send his son to an institution designated for untouchables*, rationalizing that Velutha, through an *unfathomable logic of touchability*, possessed talents that could have positioned him as an engineer—had he not been born into the Paravan caste (Roy, 1997, p. 72).

Amidst this landscape of systemic oppression, Velutha defies imposed archetypes (Fanon, 1982, p. 34). Excelling in craftsmanship, electronics, and mechanical repair, he attains a quasi-divine stature—the *god of small things*—a tragic figure who ultimately transforms into the god of loss, bearing the consequences of his assertion of humanity and equality. His pivotal realization of shared human experience occurs when his gaze meets Ammu’s as he cradles Rahel, momentarily disrupting the linear progression of history: “In that brief moment, Velutha looked up and saw things he hadn’t seen before: things that had been out of bounds, obscured by history’s blinkers. Simple things. For example, he saw that Rahel’s mother was a woman” (Roy, 1997, p. 168). This epiphany emboldens him to challenge the caste divide through his clandestine relationship with Ammu. Analyzing this transgression through Fanon’s framework, Velutha surmounts the dual burden of an *inferiority complex*, shaped both by economic subjugation and the internalization of colonial mechanisms designed to dehumanize and subdue him (Fanon, 1982, p. 43). However, his fate is sealed when his own father, an enforcer of inherited structures, betrays him, branding him an aberration: “Vellya Paapen told Mamachi what he had seen. He begged God’s forgiveness for creating a monster. He offered to kill his son with his bare hands. To destroy what he had created” (*The God of Small Things*, p. 75).

### Caste-Based Marginalization and Linguistic Suppression

Trapped within the constraints of ingrained social hierarchies, Vellya Paapen personifies the *internalized submission* Fanon describes—a condition wherein the oppressed assimilates and perpetuates the very structures designed to subjugate them (Fanon, 1963, p. 40). Roy’s novel exposes the hollowness of postcolonial promises, demonstrating that the pledges of national leaders to dismantle discriminatory frameworks proved illusory. Although anti-colonial struggles—driven by grassroots movements, indigenous resistance, and later, the adoption of Marxist ideology by segments of the colonized middle class—succeeded in dismantling imperial control, the newly independent state failed to grant true political agency to subaltern communities. Instead, governance was structured around the prerogatives of *bourgeois nationalists*, who consolidated power as the dominant ruling elite (Morton, 2003, p. 50).

As a result, systemic disenfranchisement persisted, silencing the lived realities of lower-caste and indigenous groups. Spivak argues that this form of erasure operates



through hegemonic narratives—master discourses that obscure and overwrite subaltern identities (ibid., p. 35). *The God of Small Things* reflects an acute awareness of this dynamic, portraying how certain marginalized figures are reduced to mere instruments within Marxist rhetoric, deployed in service of class-driven agendas while remaining politically disenfranchised.

The novel's nonlinear narrative—anchored in the fragmented recollections of the twins—functions as an exposé of silenced histories, aligning with Gittins' (1998) concept of narrative *gaps*, which emerge through the deliberate omission or erosion of memory (p. 46). As Gopal notes, "*The living silence*" within the text "*prompts the telling of the story*" (2009, p. 157). This silence is epitomized in Estha's trauma, a psychological rupture tied to the betrayal of Velutha. This moment, laden with both personal and historical weight, signifies not only Velutha's final suffering but also Estha's irreversible estrangement from innocence. The novel, through its intricate structure and layered symbolism, critiques not only caste hegemony but also the mechanisms through which language itself is wielded as an instrument of oppression and erasure.

### **Linguistic Struggle and the Enduring Structures of Neo-Colonialism**

In her capacity as Chair of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Arundhati Roy delineates the present moment as an inflection point—an opportunity to illuminate the resilience and ingenuity embedded in indigenous epistemologies, meticulously cultivated over successive generations. She accentuates the indispensable role of oral traditions, melodic compositions, performative arts, and visual iconography as conduits of intergenerational knowledge transmission. These cultural manifestations, integral to the ontological identity and epistemic sovereignty of indigenous communities, necessitate rigorous protection. Yet, despite their intrinsic value, these dimensions of indigenous life remain persistently subjected to epistemological erasure, economic disenfranchisement, and systematic disenchantment—legacies entrenched through imperial dominion, extractives' paradigms, and territorial usurpation.

Roy underscores the imperative for an epistemic decolonization that extends beyond mere governmental endorsement; rather, it necessitates a paradigm shift in societal consciousness—one that accords due recognition to indigenous pedagogical frameworks, linguistic heterogeneity, and environmental custodianship. She affirms that indigenous polities must retain their prerogative to self-determination across political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres, ensuring their sovereignty remains inviolable. The *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* codifies this principle, reaffirming their inalienable entitlement to collective existence within a framework of autonomy, equity, and cultural continuity.



The discourse on territoriality has assumed centrality in contemporary geopolitical tensions, with indigenous homelands increasingly besieged by encroaching forces. Climatic perturbations, migratory fluxes, ecocidal industrial activities, and illicit economies have exacerbated conflicts, rendering indigenous communities susceptible to marginalization and systemic aggression. Roy articulates how the intensification of these pressures has precipitated escalations in hostilities against advocates of indigenous sovereignty. As global consciousness pivots toward the indispensability of indigenous ecological knowledge in fostering sustainability, she underscores the urgency of instituting robust mechanisms for the preservation, restitution, and juridical fortification of indigenous epistemic assets, as enshrined within the Declaration.

### **Vernacular Linguistic Continuity: Generational Transmission and Structural Preservation**

Roy articulates a prescriptive framework that foregrounds the centrality of linguistic reclamation in fostering equitable access to epistemic enfranchisement. She underscores the pivotal necessity of mother-tongue education in cultivating an inclusive intellectual landscape, asserting that “it is through the dissemination of indigenous expertise that collective epistemological advancement and substantive action can be realized.” She expounds on the interwoven fabric of storytelling, ritualistic performances, and artistic expressions as primary vectors for safeguarding indigenous knowledge reservoirs across generational fault lines.

Yet, despite this inherent resilience, the colonial project—anchored in epistemicide, ontological suppression, and sociopolitical disenfranchisement—continues to exact an existential toll on these traditions. Roy postulates that linguistic integrity is not merely a question of cultural expression but an existential prerogative that underpins self-determined governance. She thus demands the institutionalization of legislative and infrastructural reforms that facilitate the reclamation and public reintegration of indigenous languages, ensuring their unfettered articulation within all sociopolitical domains.

At the core of this initiative lies an exigency for granular sociolinguistic analyses, enabling state entities to ascertain the precise conditions under which indigenous languages exist. Such empirical rigor should inform the enactment of policies designed to counteract linguistic attrition, safeguard public discourse in indigenous tongues, and impede the structural dislocation of native speakers. As Bhabha (1984, p. 126) delineates, the disarticulation of indigenous subjectivity is a product of neocolonial governance, where institutional mechanisms render subaltern vernaculars increasingly peripheral. Roy critiques this framework, advocating for a recalibrated constitutional apparatus wherein indigenous languages assume a legitimate institutional presence, ensuring communicative parity across all societal echelons.

Her intervention is further animated by the imperative to deconstruct hegemonic linguistic paradigms that homogenize indigenous voices into an undifferentiated monolith. She accentuates the critical distinction between voluntary linguistic hybridity and coerced assimilation, particularly in postcolonial states where indigenous populations contend with systemic exclusion. The obliteration of indigenous languages is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but an extension of epistemological violence, necessitating an urgent recalibration of state policies to fortify linguistic plurality. She concludes with an unequivocal imperative: the preservation of linguistic diversity is a non-negotiable exigency, demanding synchronized efforts across civil society, political institutions, and international governance structures.

### Historical Erasure and the Dialectics of Neo-Imperial Narrativization

Roy's literary intervention operates as a counter-discursive endeavor that challenges the colonial historiographic apparatus—a mechanism designed to fabricate historical legitimacy for imperial conquests. Echoing Fanon's critique in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963, p. 51), she exposes the colonial endeavor as one wherein historical production is monopolized by the colonizers, written with deliberate intent to fortify metropolitan dominance rather than to preserve the narratives of the subjugated. *The God of Small Things* situates itself within this historiographical rupture, amplifying the silenced voices of those rendered peripheral by history's hegemonic architects.

The thematic fulcrum of the novel pivots on the dialectical tension between the macro and the micro—between systemic oppression and individual agency. The narrative's meticulous documentation of Velutha's persecution underscores this interplay. His transgression, an affront to caste orthodoxy, precipitates a punitive reckoning emblematic of entrenched socio-political hierarchies. His tragic fate is symptomatic of a broader systemic pathology—one wherein marginalized bodies are subjected to cyclical subjugation under the guise of historical inevitability.

Roy's vehement critique of neocolonial power structures manifests through her unrelenting denunciation of imperialist continuity. The *Booker Prize*-winning novel functions as both an aesthetic artifact and an ideological intervention, employing narrative polyphony to dismantle dominant ideological constructs. As the novel's prefatory remarks suggest, its structural complexity embodies a polyphonic rebellion—a textual insurgency that articulates itself through whispers, outcries, lamentations, and irreverent laughter.

Within this discursive terrain, *The God of Small Things* interrogates the mechanics of nationalist mythology, dissecting the notion of the nation-state as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983). Roy's portrayal of India's postcolonial identity oscillates between nostalgia and disillusionment, demonstrating how personal



histories of dislocation and exile are embedded within, and often in opposition to, the national historiographic framework. The novel foregrounds the affective dimensions of displacement, elucidating how competing recollections generate conflicting national narratives—each vying for legitimacy within the contested domain of historical consciousness.

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