

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

## IDENTITY AND HYBRIDITY ISSUES IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S NOVEL "THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS"

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### Article info

Article Received:22/08/2023

Article Accepted:28/09/2023

Published online:30/09/2023

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.11.3.283](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.11.3.283)

### Abstract

Arundhati Roy's *"The God of Small Things"* is a narrative about post-independence Indian society. The characters in the novel depict social issues and cultural identity problems that are closely related to postcolonial discourse. The historical legacy and social conditions of postcolonial society serve as a bridge to the development of an ambiguous identity crisis. The characters must devise a strategy to deal with their identity crisis, resulting in the novel's hybrid characters. Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory is used to examine the hybridity of characters formed by observing those who represent hybridity. The characters then use hybridity as a negotiating tool to respond to the existence of the "third space" they inhabit. Furthermore, in her moving story, Arundhati Roy demonstrates, through simple details and beautiful images, how the imposing weight of history and conventions is the most determining factor in Indian life, which can be extrapolated to the lives of many other societies. *"The God of Small Things"* is a work full of comparisons between different cultures, including our own, no matter how distant it may appear.

**Keywords:** postcolonial, identity, third space, hybridity,

### INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial discourse is the result of interactions between imperialist culture and all the complexity of local cultural practices. Postcolonial studies in the world of literature usually include the writings of native writers from countries that were once colonized. These studies are generally related to the concepts of diaspora, hybridity, mimicry and ambiguity. The influence of colonial countries on the colonized has long been an interesting thing to discuss. Relics that were integrated into aspects of the lives of colonized people can still be observed today. India is a part of postcolonial society that still carries on the culture left behind by the colonialists (British).

The journey of Indian culture, from the Indus Valley civilization to today's technological race, retains much of its characteristic spirit. Indeed, this entire path, whose passage is confusing over the centuries, has brought with it multiple manifestations that describe the life and development of the country. In this way, Indian authors managed to find a way to continue this mysticism through their letters, which are difficult to compare with other literary expressions.

Thus, the great epics, the love poems, Hindi and English, the voices of the countryside, the eighteen puranas and collective despair were mixed with the fire that carries away the dead and leaves the spirits wandering and whispering in the ear. of

the troubadours of Indian life. Among these new voices, that of Arundhati Roy, in her first literary work *The God of Small Things* (1997), illustrates part of life in South India through the story of the Ipe family, whose female members leave see the weight of women on their own subordination.

A journey through the problem of gender, social history and women in India reveals interesting points: conflicts and female subordination are part of Indian tradition and do not stop with borders. The evidence of gender conflict in the novel, seen through its female characters and some theoretical postulates that will serve as a basis, will be the points on which the following article will be developed.

The social role of women and their role at the center of family thought and the origin of the education of future members of the community is described in *The God of Small Things*. In this sense, Stryckman refers: "many women, we know, are ready to perpetuate the most extreme slavery in order to avoid [...] being rejected or segregated" (1996:7).

Describing the role of women in the family as primary does not cover their importance satisfactorily. It is the mother who has in her hands the possibility of shaping the future personality of her children. Until today, the common thing is that she transmits to them the teachings that were given to her and thus keeps the path traveled by her social group as unchanged as possible, so that they fit in and develop in it; and although this will always depend on her education, we know that opportunities for improvement are limited for women. The situation within certain cultures is especially difficult, given that the responsibility of perpetuating the status quo falls on the female gender.

As evidenced by Moreno (1995), the subordination in principle exercised by the male group is reinforced by women. As seen in most of the female characters in the novel, whether through their role as mother, sister or even sister-in-law, the relationship with their peers will, for the most part, be the same as that seen between rivals. For this reason, we will come across cases in which some women are segregated more strongly by their peers.

It is evident that a mother with common sense will make differences between what she teaches her son and her daughter; but in many cases they make such a difference that they promote male dominance without much awareness. For example, many mothers who are abandoned or not satisfied by their partner, concentrate all the force of their passion on the male child and teach him to put his mother above anything. In this way, an attitude is adopted that disadvantages daughters, who in the future will suffer the weight of these events and will probably take it out on their own children, making these relationships an eternal return that is rarely broken and that if it happens, it will probably mean a lot of pain for those who try to do it. In *The God of Small Things*, Mammachi, mother of Ammu - one of the central characters - and Chacko, almost obsessively favors the male child as a release for the violence that her husband inflicts on her.

*The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, an Indian woman writer, is also rich in postcolonialism narratives which are presented nicely. Since its appearance, *The God of Small Things* has stolen a lot of readers' attention. This novel describes postcolonial conditions which are associated with the history of India during the post-British colonial period. In general, this novel depicts the life of post-independence Indian society. *The God of Small Things* tells the story of a family in the town of Ayemenem in Kerala, India. This novel tells the story of a Syrian Christian family in the southern province of Kerala, India. Pappachi Kochamma is a retired scientist in Delhi who returns to his hometown of Ayemenem with his wife, Mammachi Kochamma, and two children Ammu and Chacko. After her divorce from a Hindu man, Ammu comes back to her parents' house with her twin children, Estha and Rahel. Chacko was sent by his parents to Oxford to continue his education. He then met and married Margaret, but their marriage ended in divorce. Chacko left Margaret and her daughter, Sophie Mol, and returned to India. One day, Margaret and Sophie Mol came to visit Ayemenem. *The God of Small Things* also depicts a sad love story between Ammu, who comes from a respectable family, and Velutha, a young man from a low caste.

Colonialism has created alienation and inferiority in the self-identity of postcolonial society. Everything related to colonial identity is considered superior and encourages the desire to continue to focus on colonial identity, which ultimately fragments the identity formation of postcolonial society (Fanon, 1952). The history of colonial occupation influenced several aspects of Indian society as a postcolonial society. One of the British colonial legacies that is still adapted by Indian society is the use of English. According to Kulper (2011), one of the colonial legacies in India is the British rule to use English in formal settings. This makes India one of the largest countries that uses English, which shows how strong colonial control was in being able to dominate the country with language. In the world of education, Western educational styles have not failed to be adopted into the curriculum. Indian postcolonial society also imitates or adopts colonial identities in many aspects of life.

In *The God of Small Things*, the situation of the characters who represent postcolonial society is characterized, among other things, by the desire of Papachi Kochama's family to adopt a colonial identity (as Indians who are similar or almost the same as British people). One of the ways this can be seen is Papachi Kochama's efforts to send Chacko to study at Oxford with the aim of raising his family's standing to be equal to that of the British. In the process, the desire to resemble colonial (British) identity encountered many upheavals and clashes which then resulted in an identity crisis. This situation triggers various gaps and disconnections with their own identity, in this case the traditional Indian identity of the characters in the novel. The inferior Indian identity was unacceptable in the face of the British colonial identity. This situation gave birth to a process towards a new identity that was "similar but not the same" as British identity (Bhabha, 1984).

Previous research on *The God of Small Things* has not yet explored identity issues, especially the identity crises of the characters which encourage the formation of hybrid identities as 'new' identities. Suciati (2014) examined the representation of West and East in *The God of Small Things* as a space that

has boundaries that control human life, giving rise to transgression and chaos. Meanwhile, other research on *The God of Small Things* emphasizes the issue of identity as merely a representation or symbol (Mohamed Ali, 2018), the role of hybridity in postmodern society (Gomathi, 2020), hybridity associated with the role of women in postcolonial Indian society (Birgani and Moosavinia, 2019), and the challenges of postcolonial society in a globalized world in political narratives (Laskey and Reid, 2017). Thus, this research will focus on discussing identity crisis as the most prominent identity issue in the novel and the hybridity that emerges in the process of this identity crisis.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method. The data collection method used is the library study method, which employs close reading techniques. The novel "*The God of Small Things*" published in 1996 serves as the primary dataset. In addition to primary data, this study uses secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, and other relevant research to back up its findings. Following the completion of the novel, this research began by collecting data, which was then interpreted and analysed based on the narrative, actions, and thoughts of the novel's characters. At this point, the research focused on the identity crisis that specific characters faced. This analysis was expanded by applying hybridity theory to reveal the characters' hybrid identities. Instead of discussing all of the characters, this study focuses on the most prominent ones in the novel and those who are going through a significant identity crisis. The final stage of this investigation involves drawing conclusions from the research findings..

## DISCUSSION

### Identity Crisis in Characters in *The God of Small Things*

The twin characters Rahel and Estha are used to speaking Malayam and English on a daily basis. Both worlds are influenced by various Western references. This can be seen from the story when Rachel expresses her love for Ammu, her mother, by writing a quote from Kipling's book: "We

are of one blood, ye and I" (Roy: 329). Even though they are of Indian descent, the twins, who are still children, are used to coming into contact with all things Western. This is inseparable from the demands of Mammachi Kochamma (the twins' grandmother) who requires them to be familiar with various Westernized things, especially speaking English. Everything related to the West became familiar to Rahel and Estha, including reading books and tastes in music. Rahel and Estha are used to internalizing themselves with identities that are 'foreign' to themselves. Clearly, the twins represent a strong effort to resemble or be as similar as possible to British people by imitating various aspects of Western identity. However, the role of another character, in this case Mammachi Kochamma, is very strong because she tries hard to make the twins resemble Westerners. The cult of English is also a strong sign of this imitation process in the twins' house. Mammachi Kochamma was very worried about her grandson's English skills. He was afraid that Rahel and Estha would not be able to speak English fluently. He secretly listened to the twins talking and punished them if they spoke in Malayam or if they made mistakes while speaking in English. Mammachi Kochamma's obsession with the twins to use and master English is not only interpreted as a characteristic of a postcolonial society that feels inferior to the West but also indicates a conflict within them to try to transcend their original identity and align themselves with the West.

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 production. (Roy: 36)

The quote above is a portrait of how efforts to imitate the West through language media will automatically clash India's original identity with these efforts. No matter how hard the twins are forced to speak English, they will find it difficult to stop speaking Malayam. The punishment given by Mammachi Kochamma when she found the twins speaking Malayam emphasizes the existence of a barrier in attempts to impersonate Westerners. The punishment may apply when the twins are under Mammachi Kochamma's supervision, but it will not take effect when the twins are not with Mammachi Kochamma. Therefore, the process of imitating colonial identity by speaking English actually creates new problems in the form of an identity crisis. The twins themselves will not be able to escape their 'mother tongue' in their daily lives. Therefore, they often unconsciously use Malayam when no one is watching. On the contrary, they will try hard to use English when other family members are around. This situation reflects the paradox that makes the twins' identity oscillate between the Indian identity of their ancestors and the colonial identity they are trying to emulate.

Not only the twins, Estha and Rahel, Pappachi Kochamma, their grandfather, also represents the same problem. Pappachi Kochamma had a very strong ambition to resemble or even be the same as the British even until her death. Not only did he try hard to send Chacko to study at Oxford, but he also tried to imitate the colonial identity in himself. This can be seen from the way he dresses like an Englishman as depicted in the quote below:

Pappachi Ammu's father is a man who after retiring from Government service in Delhi had worked for many years as an Imperial Entomologist at the Pusa Institute, and who came to live in Ayemenem with his wife, Mammachi, his son Chacko and his daughter Ammu till he dies. Pappachi tries always to imitate the English way of clothing and as Roy illustrates "until the day he died, even in the stifling Ayemenem heat, even a single day, Pappachi wore a

well prepared three-piece suit and his gold pocket watch" (Roy : 49).

Even though Pappachi Kochamma tried to dress and live like an Englishman, he could not truly be like a Westerner. Even though he tries to look the same as Westerners in physical appearance, his character and behavior towards his wife, Mammachi Kochamma, is the exact opposite of the Western values he cherishes.

Pappachi Kochamma did not like his wife's success as a businessman which made her have greater financial independence than him. This was the trigger for Pappachi Kochamma to often commit physical violence against his wife. Instead of being proud of his wife's success, which in a Western perspective being a financially independent woman is normal, Pappachi Kochamma considers it a threat because he feels rivaled by his own wife. This indicates the stereotypical patriarchal nature of traditional Indian people who feel they always have to be superior or superior to women. He was unable to fully internalize the Western values he had been trying to do from the start.

The process of tug-of-war between identities in the character Pappachi Kochamma further emphasizes the identity crisis faced by characters who try to adopt a colonial identity, either voluntarily, like Pappachi Kochamma or by force, like the twins Estha and Rahel. They are in a space that allows their identity to move flexibly. On the one hand, they can resemble British people by speaking English or having a physical appearance like British people. However, on the other hand, at certain times they will also return to their Indian identity, such as when the twins unknowingly spoke Malayam or when Pappachi Kochamma physically abused his wife because he did not accept that she was financially independent. This space is the third space that Bhabha (1984) calls spaces where intercultural contact occurs or 'in-between' spaces.

#### **Hybridity of Characters in *The God of Small Things***

The identity crisis in the previous discussion requires the characters to carry out strategies, either directly or indirectly, so as not to be trapped in identity uncertainty. One of the figures who is aware

of the identity crisis within himself and tries to implement a strategy to get out of this crisis is Chacko. This can be seen through Chacko's statement in the following quote:

Chacko told the twins though he hated to admit it, they were all anglophile. They were a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away. He explained to them that history was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside. 'To understand history, 'Chacko said, we have to go inside and listen to what they're saying. And look at the books and the pictures on the wall. And smells the smells.' (52)

Chacko explains to the twins Estha and Rahel that they are an Anglophile family (who worship and are obsessed with imitating everything British). Chacko is aware of the efforts to internalize foreign (colonial) things in his family, but he also realizes the difficulty of avoiding this. Even though he had lived in Oxford and had direct experience of living among British people, Chacko realized that he was not part of Westerners. He did speak English like them, studied at an English university like them, but he was still an Indian and not one of them. This realization made Chacko understand very well that he could not be completely like Westerners even though he tried to resemble them in every way. However, as someone with an Indian identity, he also realized that he felt foreign to his Indianness. He prefers to speak English rather than Hindi. He feels more comfortable and closer to English than the language of his ancestors. At this point, Chacko represents a hybrid identity, namely that he cannot be completely just an ordinary Indian man who he thinks is conservative and not progressive but also cannot be completely the same as Westerners because he feels foreign when he is among them. In Chacko's character, hybridity is used as a strategy so that he is no longer trapped in identity struggles.

In another quote, Chacko reiterates hybridity as a strategy built to fight colonial

domination that has been embedded in postcolonial society. Chacko interprets hybridity as a form of awareness of seeing colonialism through its world perspective.

"We are prisoners of war. Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. "Our sorrows will never be sad enough, our joys never happy enough, our dreams never big enough, our lives never important enough to matter" (Roy: 53).

Chacko realizes he is in a third space where he can constantly rearticulate his identity, forming a hybrid identity within himself. According to Bhabha, the third space is constantly re-articulating, re-interpreting, and defining itself as a result of the friction between intersecting cultures. As a result, the hybridity that emerges in this third space is constantly rearticulated in response to changes in the environment that shapes it. Hybridity does not end with an identity, but rather continues to evolve (Bhabha, 1994).

The hybridity of other characters can also be seen in the characterizations of the twins Estha and Rahel. The twins are in a "third space" when they cannot be in their original Indian identity and cannot fully have the Western identity that in practice they are imitating. Even though Estha and Rahel are used to speaking English, they often have difficulty interpreting some words in English. They still rely on dictionaries to find out the meaning of difficult English words. The twins show the vacillation of those who try to be the same as the colonial identity but are trapped in a third space that makes them unable to be completely Indian and British at the same time. Even though Estha and Rahel speak English every day, they still feel unfamiliar with using it. They may speak like English people, but they are not English.

In the following quote, the twins Estha and Rahel, describe their hybridity which they have not yet realized considering that they are still small. However, Arundhati Roy displays the hybridity of the twins by comparing the twins with their cousin, Sophie Mol.

She describes Sophie Mol as one of the "little angles" who "were beach colored and wore bell bottoms", while Rahel and Estha are depicted as two evil where we are told: "Little demons" were mudbrown in Airport fairy frocks with forehead bumps that might turn into horns with fountains in love-in-Tokyos. And backward-reading habits. And if you care to look, you could see Satan in their eyes. (Roy: 179)

When Sophie Mol comes from London to India to visit her father, Chacko, she is presented as an ideal daughter in colonial eyes. Sophie Mol, a little girl born to an English woman, inherited a perfect physical appearance with pure white skin and blonde hair. She also became a perfect English speaking icon for the Chacko family, especially Mammachi Kochamma. The very unequal physical comparison between Sophie Mol and the twins Estha and Rahel can be analyzed as part of the twins' hybridity. The twins, who are described as Indian children who are no strangers to Western things, in fact, do not make them look Western. In the quote above, the description of Kemar's appearance is contrasted with that of Sophie Mol. While Sophie Mol is said to be like an angel with a beautiful and graceful face, the twins, on the other hand, are called dirty and are considered more like "little devils."

On the one hand, the twins are shown as characters who have internalized various colonial aspects, such as language, music, and reading books, but on the other hand, they are also shown as Indian children from a small area who are physically unattractive; dirty; unsightly; and far from the image of the Western figure represented by Sophie Mol. Instead of feeling inferior to Sophie Mol, who is considered a representative of the West, the twins Estha and Rahel, on the contrary, become Sophie Mol's close friends. Thus, the twins Estha and Rahel unconsciously have a hybrid identity which gives them an advantage. The twins' hybrid identities emerge in a contradictory and ambivalent space that makes the identity discourse continue to be tug-of-war.

**AMMU: PAST Vs. PRESENT OF INDIAN WOMEN**

Ammu is the mother of Estha and Rahel, daughter of Mammachi and Pappachi. She is a strong and deep character, whose greatest misfortune was being born a woman. Ammu, she went through a childhood marked by a violent and abusive father. For this reason, she decided to do everything possible to escape from her maternal home and the small town that stagnated her in a small and desperate universe. Her only way out was to get a husband, a very old Indian custom:

Ammu finished his secondary education the same year her father retired from his job in Delhi and she moved to Ayemenem. Pappachi insisted that university studies represented an unnecessary expense for a girl, so Ammu doesn't she had no choice but to leave Delhi and go with them. There wasn't much a girl could do in Ayemenem, apart from waiting for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework. Since her father did not have enough money to offer a good dowry, no one interested in her (p.55).

Time passed and Ammu saw the exit from her paternal house further and further away. Because of this, Ammu manages to travel to Calcutta to visit certain relatives of hers. It is there where she meets a Bengali boy (Baba, the father of the twins) and she accepts him as the only way out of the abyss that awaited her back in Ayemenem. Baba is a Hindu, so the marriage will be mixed. Ammu tells her parents, but her displeasure is such that they don't even respond. She married for practical reasons, "she didn't mean to love him. She simply considered the possibilities and she accepted. She thought that anything, or anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem" (p. 39).

A few years later and unfortunately, although not surprisingly, the marriage fell into crisis. Baba soon became a self-destructive alcoholic and a pushover who was offered the chance to save his position if he agreed to lend his wife to the man pattern. Alcohol followed violence and Ammu, with no better way out, decides to return to Ayemenem

with her twins to her parents' house, defeated and not welcome.

On the other hand, Ammu and Velutha's romance ultimately breaks everything. She before enduring public ridicule for being part, although remote, of a loving relationship between different castes, the family prefers to expel Ammu, who, trying to earn a living that would allow her to take her children with her, dies, as we have noted, alone and abandoned a few years later in Calcutta.

The character of Ammu sees up close the tragedy of transgressing the limits imposed by society in India. This was the situation centuries ago and this is largely illustrated within the India of *The God of Small Things*: an India that took away its independence from the United Kingdom and that opened itself to socialist doctrines and modern changes without leaving behind the past. We say that in Ammu the past and present of the Indian woman fight for supremacy because, despite being a victim of all the disadvantages that history has imposed on the Indian woman and not knowing higher education because of her father, He has enough judgment not to continue with the yoke that women put on their own necks.

For the family, the source of her strong personality and independence of thought was an intrigue because "Ammu did not have the kind of education, nor had she read the books or met the kind of people who could influence her to think the way she did." (p. 171).

It is pertinent to emphasize that in addition to the problems that this character had to endure, there are also those caused by Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, who in a way avenged their personal frustrations and opened the door to all the circumstances surrounding the tragedy. It could be said that Ammu considers the possibility of evolving her environment, while her mother and her great-aunt are jealous guardians of the misogynistic traditions that take place in Indian society.

Rahel had a fate perhaps luckier than that of her mother, although there were certain common characteristics. Like Ammu, "Rahel headed toward

marriage like a passenger heads toward an empty seat in an airport waiting room" (p.33). However, unlike Ammu, who was supposed to have had only one chance in life (get married) and it didn't turn out well, Rahel married a foreigner the moment she decided, without worrying about dowry, and then divorced without create more scandal around him.

In her early youth, Rahel, due to lack of dowry (another element of the past in the present), does not participate in the traditional concern of finding a husband. This, far from causing him anguish, allows him to continue with his objective of remaining, peacefully, outside the normal flow of the community. "Rahel grew up without anyone to set guidelines for her. With no one to arrange a marriage for him. Without anyone being forced to pay her dowry and, therefore, without a forced husband looming on the horizon" (p. 31).

Unlike her mother, she continues her studies at an Architecture school in Delhi, where she also tries to go unnoticed, something that puzzled her. "Even her teachers were suspicious of her: of her strange and impractical architectural projects, presented on cheap brown paper, and of her indifference to her furious criticism" (p. 32). Despite all of her indifference and insistence on staying out of sight that she was left in Rahel because of the tragedy of her childhood and the death of her mother, she in some ways could be seen as a compensation for Ammu. Perhaps Rahel, by the mere fact of remaining alive at thirty-one years old, represents the hopes that her mother could not achieve and perhaps that is what she finds in her return to Ayemenem, her reunion with her twin brother and with her past. , a reunion that may allow you to make peace with the events that have marked your life and face the future.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout *The God of Small Things*, the author seeks to express, on the one hand, that there are no absolute truths, and on the other, how many principles, situations and feelings, such as gender conflicts, surpass the individual. Thus, just as in Hindu mysticism, these truths seem to be part of a whole that comes and goes, that evolves and devolves and that constantly moves in many

directions to finally arrive at the same place from which it once started. The identity crisis represented by the characters in *The God of Small Things* is a point of upheaval for the characters in the process of interacting with two different identities, Indian and Western, at the same time. Hybridity is the result of various negotiations carried out in the third space that emerges in the identity crisis. The identity crisis of the characters becomes an opening for hybridity to flourish which allows these characters to internalize the various advantages of their respective cultural identities. It has been proven that the interaction between two cultural identities simultaneously cannot unite the two, but will only form one new identity, namely a hybrid identity.

In this research, various shortcomings were still found which could become ideas for future research topics. The discussion of characters, which is still limited to certain characters, can be further developed in the future and open up opportunities for further research on this novel.

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