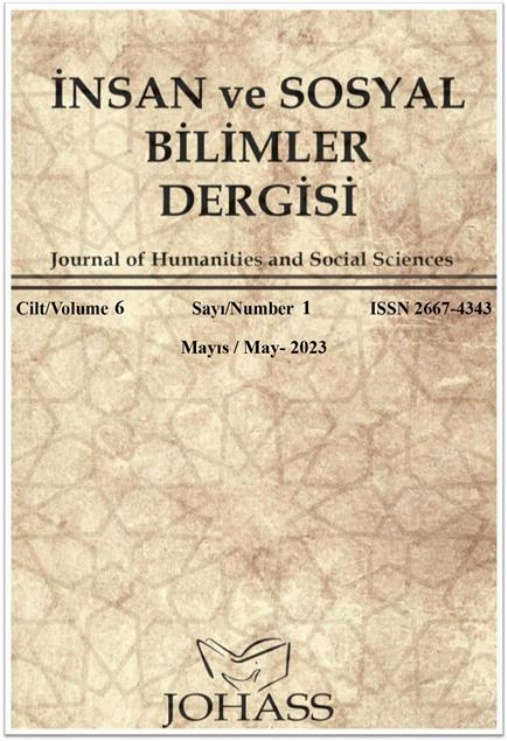
JOURNAL OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (JOHASS)



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Deconstructing the Language Laws: Arundhati Roy's Linguistic Strategies in *The God of Small Things*

Nesrin KOÇ [1]
Mudanya University, Rectorate, Common Courses Coordination Unit
nesrin.koc@mudanya.edu.tr
Orcid ID: 0000-0001-6906-4641

Artichle Type: Research Artichle
Received: 3.03.2023
Revision received: 16.05.2023
Accepted: 26. 05. 2023
Published online: 27. 05. 2023

Citation: Koç, N. (2023). Deconstructing the language laws: Arundhati Roy's linguistic strategies in the God of Small Things. *Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, *6*(1), 126-143.

Deconstructing the Language Laws: Arundhati Roy's Linguistic Strategies in *The God of Small Things*

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Mudanya University, Rectorate, Common Courses Coordination Unit

Abstract

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) is a story which portrays how things deemed to be the smallest are connected to, shaped, and constructed by the bigger discourses of history, colonialism, gender, caste, and religion which define the subject. With her linguistic strategies aiming at deconstruction of the language, Roy unveils how the voice of the subaltern is located on the margins of the dominant discourses, and therefore, listening to the subaltern's voice requires dwelling on the alternative spaces of existence constructed by the subaltern. Estha's refusal to speak, Ammu, Velutha and Rahel's resistance to the laws that determine interpersonal relations and their use of the language of the body are among the significant examples of the mechanisms used by the subaltern to resist domination. By exploring Roy's linguistic strategies through close reading and textual analysis of the silences and alternative linguistic positions of the postcolonial subject, who is further marginalised by gender, caste and religion, from a position that combines postcolonial theory with a Lacanian perspective, this study aims to highlight how Roy creates a unique linguistic expression through the subversive strategies she utilizes to disrupt hegemonic power structures and challenge the established norms of society, culture and language. Designing, constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing, as in the architectural profession in which she was trained, Roy transforms standard English into an effective tool of communicating the postcolonial subject's experiences of subalternity.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, language, subaltern, mimicry

Research Article

Received: 3.03.2023
Revision received: 16.05.2023
Accepted: 26.05. 2023
Published online: 27.05.2023

[1] Corresponding author:
Assist. Prof. Dr.
nesrin.koc@mudanya.edu.tr
Orcid ID: 0000-0001-6906-4641

Introduction

Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) is the story of two dizygotic twins, Estha and Rahel, who return to their grandmother's house in Ayemenem in Kerala, India, after their parents have a divorce. In parallel with Arundhati Roy's interest in how to connect "the very smallest things to the very biggest" as she expresses in an interview with David Barsamiam (2007), her novel *The God of Small Things* (hereafter *TGST*) depicts *small* people living *small* lives in *small* worlds. Accordingly, *TGST* is a novel that avows the idea that it is the "[l]ittle events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted" (Roy, 1997, p.32) that have an impact on the daily lives of individuals. As Spivak (2010) quoting from Deleuze reminds, "[r]eality is what actually happens in a factory, in a school, in barracks, in a prison, in a police station" (p.241), and in most parts, *TGST* portrays "reality" in these small places in juxtaposition to the *reality* of bigger places.

The reality Roy presents in *TGST* is weaved as a story of returns. Chacko, Oxford-educated son of the family returns to Kerala, and he is waiting for his ex-wife Margaret and their daughter Sophie Mol to visit. Following her divorce, the family's daughter Ammu returns with her twins Estha and Rahel, and years later Estha and Rahel re-return to the city. However, none of the returning subjects are welcome there. Each confronts the prison house of History, where separation, loss, disapproval, isolation, and confinement await them.

Roy complains about how "[f]ifty years after independence, India is still struggling with the legacy of colonialism, still flinching from the cultural insult (and ....) we are still caught up in the business of 'disproving' the white world's definition of us" (Dwivedi, 2010, p.389). In *TGST*, the fact that climactic points in the plot structure of the novel revolve around Sophie Mol's visit, for which twins are made to prepare meticulously, conveys Roy's sarcastic treatment of the significance Indians attach to how they are perceived by the English. The pressure the adults exert on the twins about how to behave, speak and act in the presence of Aunt Margaret and Sophie Mol reflects how deeply rooted colonial history is. In addition, this struggle is also portrayed through characters who are trapped in the same prison of thought and have no choice other than being Anglophiles. Severed from their indigenous roots, they are stuck between two cultures and two worldviews about identity. Their education makes it easier to identify with the colonial elite, the English, as they are educated and brought up to believe that England, the dreamland, supposedly offers prospects of a better life. Under these circumstances, Ammu, Estha, Rahel, and all other members of the Ayemenem household are alienated subjects who are outsiders to their own histories/stories as Chacko argues:

> Chacko told the twins that, though he hated to admit it, they were all Anglophiles. 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 smell the smells.' (Roy, 1997, p.52, emphasis in the original).

They might reunite with their lost subjectivity in the History House, where the traces of the subaltern can be found. However, this old house is not easy to reach. Chacko continues desperately to explain the reasons as to why they cannot enter the History House: because we've been locked out. And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost.

The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and despise ourselves (Roy, 1997, p.53).

The postcolonial subject whose subjectivity is divided by war, by colonial experience, cannot easily restore his/her unified self from which s/he has been locked out and alienated, because the language of the colonizer, "the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (Ashcroft et all., 1989, p.7) disrupt the unity of the self. The hierarchical power the language of the colonizer exerts on the colonized, is actually inherent in the language itself since according to Lacan, any subject is a linguistic being, constructed by and in the language, encoded by the Law. Lacan's castrated subject is confined by the language, and does not have autonomy; however, in *TGST*, through twins Esthappen and Rahel, who like Roy herself are *architects*, striving to make out their own meanings in life by twirling words, inverting sentences, and challenging the very laws that decide the proper place of things in life, Roy proposes alternative accounts of subjecthood. For example, Estha's identity is forged not through speech but through silence. Ammu, Velutha and Rahel defy the "Love Laws" that determine who should be loved and how much by resisting the Law, and authorizing language of the body in its place. Roy as an author chooses to write in the language of the colonizer, pickling memories from her own interpretation of *decolonized, free* India in British syrup. Roy's multi-faceted use of language and speech as well as silences, gaps and extra-linguistic means in *TGST* both lays bare the boundaries that confine the individuals within the categories of class, race, caste, and gender, and also proposes alternative modes of existence by challenging, subverting and appropriating the established norms.

In view of this, analysing Roy's linguistic strategies in *TGST* enables us to explore how language is among those small things causing the dissolution of subjectivity. The experience of subalterns like the twins, Ammu and Velutha cannot be represented with full speech as they do not have access to it. Most of the time, small voices go unheard as the big voices speak for it. As she tests the limits, flexibility and potential of English language in conveying the traumatic experience of the subaltern, Roy emphasises the crucial significance of writing from a position where the aspiration to *speak for* the subaltern is replaced with a genuine attempt to *speak with* them.

In the years following its publication, the novel was banned, its author's political personality was often brought fore and particular criticism was directed at the novel's ending with a scene where an incestuous union between the twins Rahel and Estha is suggested. In terms of scholarly criticism, the novel was mostly approached from a postcolonial perspective. Patchay (2001) studied how the novel rewrites traditional history. Tickell (2003) draws attention to the postcolonial cosmopolitanism of the novel. Needham (2005) reads the novel alongside Ranajit Guha's "The small voice of history" and juxtaposes Guha's and Roy's uses of "small" and explores the ways of reaching out to these small voices. Nandi (2010) conducts a psychoanalytic reading of the postcolonial ambivalences in the novel by analysing how India is represented as a lost m(other). In a more recent study, Okuroğlu- Özün & İren (2020) studied subalternity with a detailed analysis of various subaltern groups such as the untouchables, women and the inhabitants of Ayemenem.

The novel's subversive use of language and was also noted by scholars. Cynthia van den Driesen (1999) concentrates on recurring motifs and patterns that create a unique rhythm in the novel and thus align it with écriture feminine. Similarly, Vogt-William (2003) examines the language relations in Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promise* and Roy's *The God of Small Things* and questions whether their female protagonists have access to the language or not. Vogt-William also discusses the use of English by postcolonial writers in order to reach international audiences. Torres (2017) studies the linguistic features of the novel to display

how Roy creates her own "Inglish" to reassert her Indian identity and how through the appropriation of language, the Western reader is distanced from the narrative. In his analysis, Çelikel (2018) focuses on how language is refashioned in the aftermath of colonialism in a manner that carries the burden of the imperial past. In the light of these studies, it can be argued that the novel was studied from many diverse standpoints. Setting off from Lacan's aligning the formation of subjectivity with acquisition of language, the present study attempted here aims to contribute to scholarship on Roy's novel by merging postcolonial theory with a Lacanian outlook to demonstrate how the subject is formed in the language and analyse the strategies Roy uses to deconstruct, subvert and appropriate the language. Through a meticulous analysis of overall themes and motifs supported with the analysis of the selected passages from the novel, this study shows how Roy's writing defies categorization. Her deployment of appropriated and hybridized English points towards the ambivalence immanent to the colonial subject.

Method

Elleke Boehmer (1995) posits that postcolonial literature is imbued with the experiences of cultural exclusion and division under imperial rule. Consequently, in the wake of colonial history, the postcolonial writer is left to grapple with the challenge of reclaiming his/her subjectivity, which had been denied by the colonial project (p.5). The present study endeavors to explore this process through a detailed analysis of Arundhati Roy's acclaimed novel, *The God of Small Things*. Drawing upon Spivak's theories of subalternity and Bhabha's concepts of mimicry, and employing a critical framework that unites postcolonial theory with Lacanian view of subjectivity, this study scrutinizes the ways Roy uses language in the representation and narration of the subaltern.

Using qualitative research methods, such as close reading, content analysis, and discourse analysis, the study examines the instances of code-switching, use of neologisms, and deviations from standard English in the novel, and interprets them from a postcolonial and Lacanian perspective. Detailed readings of the selected passages from the novel lay bare how Roy creates a language of her own to narrate the experiences of doubly marginalized, traumatized subaltern, which cannot be narrated through standard language of the Law, which privileges the rational over irrational, patriarchal over feminine and colonial over postcolonial.

Speaking with the Subaltern in *The God of Small Things*

In *The Language of Negotiation*, Mulholland (1991) notes that "our understanding of the world is not merely expressed in words; it actually comes into existence, is realised through them" (p.3). As a system, language acts selectively, where through a complicated network of relations, one interpretation overcomes the other and becomes the currency; thus creating the community's sense of self, and institutionalizing the frequently spoken versions while omitting or disregarding other alternatives. With this feature, the language dictates; it says:

> 'You will go here, and when you see this, you will turn off there'. In other words, it refers to discourse about the other *[discours de Vautre]*. It is enveloped as such in the highest function of speech, in as much as speech commits its author by investing its addressee with a new reality, as for example, when a subject seals his fate as a married man by saying 'You are my wife'. (Lacan, 1996, p.246)

Functioning in such an authoritarian manner, in Mulholland's view "language (a) creates meaning from the world, and (b) offers up that meaning for social understanding and acceptance" (p.4), thus freezing the meaning in the name of common sense, and establishing

the *small* laws that determine *proper* place of people and things. Given this selectivity of language, it can easily be seen that by choosing one phenomenon, idea, or thought to be articulated while eliminating others; language establishes itself as the very first territory with a centre and a periphery. Phallogocentric worldview is at the centre, whereas extra-linguistic means such as silence, smell, music, and painting are pushed to the periphery along with the voice of the subaltern.

The first of these small laws is *the primordial Law*. According to Lacan (1966) the primordial Law is "the Law which, in regulating marriage ties, superimposes the reign of culture over the reign of nature, the latter being subject to the law of mating. The prohibition of incest is merely the subjective pivot of that Law" (p.229). In *TGST*, the story unfolds by referring to this law. The narrator suggests that the story began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem (Roy, 1997, p.32), and adds that this suggestion would be "only one way of looking at it" (Roy, 1997, p.33), as actually the History took its course way earlier.

> … [l]ong before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendency, […] long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag.
>
> That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how.
>
> And how much. (Roy, 1997, p.33).

Lacan (1966) proposes that this primordial Law, which occurs as the Love Laws in *TGST*, is structured as identical to a language order because "without names for kinship relations, no power can institute the order of preferences and taboos that knot and braid the thread of lineage through the generations" (p.229-30). Pointing to the Love Laws as the rules upon which civilizations are built, Roy refers to power relations from which similar hierarchies of kinship, gender and caste spring and are reflected in language and culture.

In Lacan's three registers of human reality, the Real corresponds to the state before birth where the subject is connected to nature. The subject can experience complete unity only in the Real, and later suspends the illusion for some time in the Imaginary, and this illusion is shattered following the linguistic castration. The subject communicates with the world and takes part in its social sphere through entry into the Symbolic. One is born into a certain position that is assigned by a discourse (the Law) that pre-existed his or her birth. Constructed as such, the subject is encoded and situated within an order "whose mass supports him and welcomes him in the form of language" (Lacan, 1966, p.35). Hence, "[m]an thus speaks, but it is because the symbol has made him man" (Lacan, 1966, p.229).

Language, even one's mother tongue, confines one's subjectivity, yet the language of the colonizer is even more oppressive in that sense; the postcolonial author experiences marginalization at a more profound level. The postcolonial author finds herself/himself divided in both languages, both worlds, as "a direct result of colonialist subjugation" (Fanon, 2008, p. 8). This sense of dividedness was addressed by many scholars and writers. On the one hand, writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argue that colonial language and education further alienate man from his true identity, therefore they propose that writers should use their native language for literary production. On the other hand, writers such as Salman Rushdie, in parallel with his idea of writing back to the centre, believe in the necessity of writing in the language of the Law, English in this case, to be read globally, to have access to the mainstream discourse and have a say in it. Like the castrated child, who has to function within the Symbolic realm where language, culture and laws are located, ex-colonized, now postcolonial subject has no alternative but to operate within the Law if s/he wants to challenge it, which is the way Roy prefers.

Language in its standard form remains inadequate in conveying the feelings, the desires, experiences of subalternity as seen in the above examples. Under these conditions, the

postcolonial subject like Roy, who sets out to narrate such experiences, has to decide between staying outside the Law by refusing to communicate with it, or locating herself within the Law, and carving a territory for herself, as Estha and Rahel do through their experiments with the language: A territory that is located somewhere closer to the periphery, at an appropriate distance to the centre, so that she can write back in a manner similar to the one expressed by Salman Rushdie in the following extract:

> What seems to me to be happening is that those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it- assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers (Rushdie, 1992, p. 64).

Perhaps like any postcolonial author, Roy too, confronts the suffocating prison house of *authenticity*. As Rushdie (1992) argues, this term ironically only applies to works of commonwealth literature, and demands that "sources, forms, style, language, and symbol all derive from a supposedly homogenous and unbroken tradition" (p.67). By choosing to write in English, by breaking the sentences in half, joining or twisting words, and blending oral tradition with the novel genre, Roy challenges the norms that aim to confine her writing in the category of the *authentic*; there is no unbroken tradition except for the history of oppression. In this regard, Roy displays the features of Bhabha's mimic man, whose ambivalence, "almost the same, *but not quite*" status, not only *ruptures* the discourse, but also "becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence" of whose authenticity we can never be sure, and therefore never contain in hegemonic discourses (Bhabha, 1994, p.86). With her appropriated, hybrid English, Roy resists categorization as Indian and/or English, authentic and/or mimic.

The difference between Ngũgĩ's and Roy's attitudes towards the use of English language to write fiction is worth mentioning as the dissimilarity between their views might also be explained through their involvements with subalternity: "Both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak, 2010, p.257). To illustrate, Ammu, is not given the chance to higher education whereas the family's son Chacko has all the means at his service to continue his studies in England. Chacko deems himself to be the rightful owner of Ammu's property as manifested in his words "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine' " (Roy, 1997, p.57). Without feeling any guilt, Chacko tells Rahel and Estha that Ammu has no Locust Stand I, to which Ammu protests saying: "Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society" (Roy, 1997, p.57). Chacko, a product and representative of male chauvinist society Ammu is referring to, blames Ammu for her failure to speak for herself, to have a legal standing. Her upbringing in the same family, in the same society with him did not allow her to form an identity position for herself while Chacko, as the male member of the family, had all the privileges. Later the narrator also describes Ammu using the same words, reflecting society's view of her:

> Little Ammu.
>
> Who never completed *her* corrections.
>
> Who had to pack her bags and leave. Because she had no Locusts Stand I. Because Chacko said she had destroyed enough already.
>
> Who came back to Ayemenem with asthma and a rattle in her chest that sounded like a faraway man shouting (Roy, 1997, p.159, original emphasis).

Subaltern who was muted by patriarchy cannot speak from an empowered position. Therefore, gender should be taken into consideration in the discussion of Roy's and Ngũgĩ's distinct relations to subalternity and their decision regarding writing in the language of the

colonizer. While Ngũgĩ is the colonial subaltern, Roy, as a female postcolonial author is doubly marginalized by imperialism and patriarchy. Thus, when Ngũgĩ chooses to write in his mother tongue, he can feel more at home compared to a female author. Confronted with the English language, acting as the Name- of- the- Father, that breaks the illusion of oneness between the mother (Kenya, Kenyan languages) and Ngũgĩ (the child), as a man, having greater access to the phallocentric discourse, Ngũgĩ can still find comfort in retreating to the motherly space, the Real, his native tongue offers. Roy however is exposed to marginalization twice as a postcolonial and a female author. The language of the colonizer confines the colonial subject, and the language spoken in India is not much different from English in that sense; as the female subaltern finds herself alienated in both. As a result, instead of limiting her discussion of subalternity just to the colonial, Roy traces the small voices in the territories usually overlooked, at the intersections of colonialism, class, caste and gender.

Ammu by never completing her corrections, twins by playing with the established order of things, Velutha by walking inappropriately, all of them by breaking the "Love Laws" offer alternative modes of existence by defying the Law. Referring to Guha's *The Small Voice of History*, Needham (2005) suggests that "while history's story is one of unrelenting oppressiveness and closure, focusing on 'traces of subaltern life in its passage through time' can counteract, operate in resistance" (p.373). Resistance in *TGST* is achieved by listening to the faint voices of the subaltern across time and space.

TGST also portrays the discrepancy between appearance and reality. While theoretically India is decolonized, and it is the age of progress, this is not what takes place in everyday *reality*. For instance, while Velutha is very skillful and could easily become an engineer if he had the opportunity, he cannot, since caste is still a deeply-rooted problem in their community and stands in the way of climbing the social ladder. The police are not the force that protect people. Their behaviour exhibits corruption and abuse of power. They cause Velutha's death, harass Ammu when she goes to defend Velutha, and encourage false testimonies from the children. The discrepancy between appearance and reality is portrayed in the novel through disassociating the signifier from the signified. For example, the police station has a sign with the following words printed: "Politeness. Obedience. Loyalty. Intelligence. Courtesy. Efficiency" (Roy, 1997, p.8). Next time these words are encountered, the following fragments hinting at the corruption as police as an institution are listed as defining qualities of the police:

> The Kottayam Police. A Cartoonplatoon. New-Age princes in funny pointed helmets. Cardboard lined with cotton. Hairoil stained. Their shabby khaki crowns. Dark of Heart.
>
> Deadlypurposed (Roy, 1997, p.304).

Eventually, when Estha is taken to police station to testify against Velutha, he reads aloud from the sign:

> 'ssenetilo**P**,' he said. 'ssenetilo**P**, ecneideb***O***,'
> 'ytlayo**L**, ecnegilletn**I**,' Rahel said.
> 'ysetruo**C.**'
> 'ycneiciff**E**.' (Roy, 1997, p.313, original emphasis).

By reversing the words, Estha disrupts the unity, disassociates the signifier from the signified, and hence negates the positive qualities attributed to the police. This subversive gesture affirms the corruption of the state apparatuses (Kunhi, 2013, p.148). Contrary to the image painted in the sign, the police Estha encounters, fail to ensure safety and justice, and participate in the oppression of disadvantaged groups.

In *TGST,* the reader encounters the twins Estha and Rahel in the process of *becoming*, which is never completed. When this aspect is considered, *TGST* can be identified as an anti-

bildungsroman in many ways. Ammu, along with Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, tries to make twins almost into Macaulay's colonial elite, "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, opinions, in morals and in intellect" (as cited in Spivak, 2010, p. 250), because even though India is decolonized, and supposed to be freed from occupation, English is still "the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom" (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p.2537). It is also the measure of success as it "became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences, and all other branches of learning with English became the main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education" (Ngũgĩ, 2006, p.2537). The novel highlights this issue by sarcastically portraying the importance attached to Sophie Mol's homecoming. It stands as an important symbol around which the events unfold, hinting at the inevitable centrality of the colonial experience to the subjectivity of the postcolonial subject. Before Sophie Mol's arrival, the twins spend a lot of time preparing for "Indo-British Behavior Competition", involving smoothing the twins' English, making them accustomed to *proper* way of things by controlling how they speak the language (Roy, 1997, p.145). Ngũgĩ mentions how in his experience of colonial education, children caught speaking in their native tongues were punished whereas those speaking in English were rewarded. In *TGST*, Baby Kochamma takes it upon herself to educate the twins to be colonial elites, ready to meet their British aunt Margaret, who is visiting with her daughter Sophie Mol and she applies the same punishment on them: "That whole week Baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twins' private conversations, and whenever she caught them speaking Malayalam, she levied a small fine which was deducted at source. From their pocket money" (Roy, 1997, p.36).

Ngũgĩ (2006) claims that "to control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others" (p.2538). The attempts by Baby Kommacha and Ammu to control the way children speak therefore mean controlling their tools for self-definition. The adults want the twins to come into being in a discourse that seems progressive in comparison to Indian reality, yet equally, perhaps even more, phallocentric and oppressive. Even still, in the view of the adults, castrated subjects who cannot imagine any other modes of existence, the entrance of the twins into the order of language is a must-do, and they must prove their competence with proper speech because: "[e]ven if it communicates nothing, discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the obvious, it affirms that speech constitutes truth; even if it is destined to deceive, it relies on faith in testimony" (Lacan, 1966, p.209).

One of the most demonstrative examples of the incompatibility between speech and truth takes place at the police station when Estha and Rahel in order to "Save Ammu" have to testify that Velutha abducted them (Roy, 1997, p. 318). Estha's silence is not trusted in the police station, it is the make-believe stories, or lies that the officers choose to believe, exemplifying how language "betrays the truth insofar as it is an expression of … the culture and history that constitute his humanity, in the semantic system that formed him as a child" (Lacan, 1966, p.136). In the culture and history that formed Estha as a child, that constituted his humanity, people are separated by caste, religion, social status; and the language follows the same rules. Estha cannot possess nor deploy words that do not comply with these rules, his attempts to do so are abruptly disregarded. Power circulates in and through networks (Foucault, 1980, p.98), and in the novel the reader witnesses how fabricated truth triumphs over reality, as a direct consequence of such networks of power which came together to testify against Velutha (Sharma, 2004, p.131). Lacking the means of opposition, Estha has to answer in the affirmative to the questions posed by the Inspector. At the moment Estha succumbs to this linguistic pact and participates in the world of lies, he realizes he is now a castrated subject:

> The Inspector asked his questions. Estha's *mouth* said Yes.
> *Chilhood* tiptoed out.

> *Silence* slid in like a bolt.
>
> Someone switched off the light and Velutha disappeared (Roy, 1997, p.320, emphasis added).

Estha's final decision as he reckons on this event, is to stop betraying himself, following which he ceases to speak. He refuses to participate in the forms in which language expresses itself and defines his subjectivity. "'Disidentification' with one's given social location [which] must be read as a crucial first step in the production of a new and alternative identity" (Ismail, as cited in Needham, 2005, p.375). Estha forms his new alternative identity through his choice to remain silent.

Lacan holds that true speech occurs in the breakdown of language, and full speech comes only through extra-linguistic means; therefore, lending an ear to the subaltern should necessarily involve the act of "measuring silences" (Spivak, 2005, p.256). When measured, the silences in *TGST* are seen to be assorted. Like the pickles and jams Mammachi places on the shelves at Paradise Pickles&Preserves, each has a distinct flavour. There is a "pickle-smelling silence that lay between the twins like a bruise" in the first place (Roy, 1997, p.198). Next, in the line is "an old river silence": "[i]n the factory the silence swooped down once more and tightened around the twins. But this time it was a different kind of silence. An old river silence. The silence of Fisher People and waxy mermaids" (Roy, 1997, p.200), and later twins study silence: "Here they studied Silence (like the children of the Fisher People), and learned the bright language of dragonflies. Here they learned to Wait. To Watch. To think thoughts and not voice them. To move like lightning when the bendy yellow bamboo arced downwards" (Roy, 1997, p.203). Finally, there is the little, silent man, Estha:

> Estha had always been a quiet child, so no one could pinpoint with any degree of accuracy exactly when (the year, if not the month or day) he had stopped talking. Stopped talking altogether, that is. The fact is that there wasn't an "exactly when." It had been a gradual winding down and closing shop. A barely noticeable quietening. As though he had simply run out of conversation and had nothing left to say. Yet Estha's silence was never awkward. Never intrusive. Never noisy. It wasn't an accusing, protesting silence as much as a sort of estivation, a dormancy, the psychological equivalent of what lungfish do to get themselves through the dry season, except that in Estha's case the dry season looked as though it would last forever (Roy, 1997, p.10).

The narrator starts by saying that Estha had always been a quiet child, but as readers we shall approach it with doubt. Perhaps his being quiet is the result of the fact that his speech was never heard by others. When he is re-returned to the city, he stops talking altogether. Silence is often associated with accusing protests, but the narrator strictly underlines Estha's silence is not a protesting silence. What is its nature then? The narrator visualizes this silence as follows:

> Over time he had acquired the ability to blend into the background of wherever he was–into bookshelves, gardens, curtains, doorways, streets–to appear inanimate, almost invisible to the untrained eye. It usually took strangers a while to notice him even when they were in the same room with him. It took them even longer to notice that he never spoke. Some never noticed at all. Estha occupied very little space in the world (Roy, 1997, p.10).

A silent man like Estha, silence, subalterns, all occupy very little space in the world. First of all, he is "Esthappen Unknown" (Roy, 1997, p.156). As indicated by his age, he is the small voice of the history that unfortunately often goes unheard. His silence speaks only to those who can notice and *measure* it, and when carefully attended, his silence reveals Estha's uneasiness with the patriarchal metaphor. He does not want to conform to the Law, and

retreats to the Real, as can be seen in the following extract, which is both poignant and archaic:

> Once the quietness arrived, it stayed and spread in Estha. It reached out of his head and enfolded him in its swampy arms. It rocked him to the rhythm of an ancient, fetal heartbeat. It sent its stealthy, suckered tentacles inching along the insides of his skull, hoovering the knolls and dells of his memory; dislodging old sentences, whisking them off the tip of his tongue (Roy, 1997, p.11).

Life before the birth, the comfort of the womb is evoked by the imagery conveyed through words such as ancient, fetal, swampy. Retreating to the Real, the narrator says:

> stripped his thoughts of the words that described them and left them pared and naked. Unspeakable. Numb. And to an observer therefore, perhaps barely there. Slowly, over the years, Estha withdrew from the world. He grew accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside him and squirted its inky tranquilizer on his past. Gradually the reason for his silence was hidden away, entombed somewhere deep in the soothing folds of the fact of it (Roy, 1997, p.11).

Estha chooses to remain in the Real rather than entering into the Law through writing as well. His reluctance for speech evinces itself in the way he writes the banana jam recipe: "The rest of the recipe was in Estha's new best handwriting. Angular, spiky. It leaned backwards as though the letters were reluctant to form words, and the words reluctant to be in sentences" (Roy, 1997, p.196).

While the narrator says that Estha's silence was hidden away, the novel on the whole is an attempt to retrieve such silences by measuring them. Before silences can be spotted and measured against the history, the intellectual, attempting to *speak with* the subaltern, shall arm himself/herself with the tools Spivak terms as *unlearning*. Spivak states that "systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized" (Spivak, 2010, p.267). Ammu, Velutha and twins gain their identity as the nonconformists exactly for this reason, as they consciously or unconsciously engage in unlearning and resist the authority. They are not at home with the Law, where culture, history and civilization are located, and they challenge the Love Laws by transgressing the boundaries. Estha and Rahel have to cancel and negate what the common sense tells about hybridity. For instance, here is an example of Baby Kochamma's opinions on the subject, who is the voice of common sense:

> In the way that the unfortunate sometimes dislike the co-unfortunate, Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless wail. Worse still, they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry. She was keen for them to realize that they (like herself) lived on sufferance in the Ayemenem House, their maternal grandmother's house, where they really had no right to be. (Roy, 1997, p.45).

Twins, who, do not even have a surname since their mother needs to choose between her ex-husband's name or her father's name, which does not give a woman much chance, are in-between subjects. Baby Kochamma's dislike of their ambivalence extends to Ammu, who endeavours to live the alternative life, the denial of which Baby Kochamma accepted without any objection unlike rebellious Ammu. Like her twins, Ammu cannot be contained, and therefore she is an isolated outsider in this society. The home she returns to is not welcoming in any sense as can be seen in the below extract where Baby Kochamma is the focalizer:

> Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma herself, felt she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman. The sad, Father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma. She had managed to persuade herself over the years that her unconsummated love for Father

> Mulligan had been entirely due to *her* restraint and *her* determination to do the right thing.
>
> She subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for a *divorced* daughter-according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a *divorced* daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a *divorced* daughter from a *intercommunity love* marriage –Baby Kochamma chose to remain quaveringly silent on the subject (Roy, 1997, pp. 45-6, original emphasis).

Hybrids are not loved in this society. Hybrids transgressing all the established rules of society are disliked and othered even more. Not being able to contain the ambivalence of the hybrid subject, the Law usually refuses to acknowledge its existence, leaving no room for survival. The laws can be resisted and transgressed, though, as Paradise Pickles & Preserves does: "They used to make pickles, squashes, jams, curry powders and canned pineapples. And banana jam (illegally) after the FPO (Food Products Organization) banned it because according to their specifications it was neither jam nor jelly. Too thin for jelly and too thick for jam. An ambiguous, unclassifiable consistency, they said" (Roy, 1997, p.30). Such "ambiguous, unclassifiable", part- objects of the Law, are not welcomed as their "almost the same, *but not quite*" (Bhabha, 1994, p.86) kind of ambivalence is perceived as a threat to the assumed uniformity of the totalitarian authority. Just like Paradise Pickles & Preserves transgresses the law by producing banana jam, other transgressors break the laws:

> Perhaps Ammu, Estha and she [Rahel] were the worst transgressors. But it wasn't just them. It was the others too. They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. The laws that make grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam, and jelly jelly.
>
> It was a time when uncles became fathers, mothers lovers, and cousins died and had funerals.
>
> It was a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened (Roy, 1997, p.31).

The unthinkable becomes thinkable as a result of the transgression of the boundaries by the nonconformists, at instances when history is caught off guard. The encounter between Ammu and Velutha is depicted as a harbinger of a moment of historical change: "History was wrong-footed, caught off guard. Sloughed off like an old snakeskin. Its marks, its scars, its wounds from old wars and the walking-backwards days all fell away" (Roy, 1997, p.176). Velutha, the god of the small things, and little Ammu, who is referred to as "The Unmixable Mix- the infinite tenderness of motherhood, the reckless rage of a suicide bomber", are finally ready to do their own corrections to their stories through employing the language of the body and desire (Roy, 1997, p.321). Mammachi disapproves her daughter as the words uttered in a moment of extreme rage reveal: "The Lovers. Sprung from his [Vellya Paapen] loins and hers. His son and her daughter. They had made the unthinkable thinkable and the impossible really happen" (Roy, 1997, p.256). Ammu with her nonconformist nature is the unmixable mix incarnate in the eyes of her community, of a mother and a child, sexual and sensible, body and mind, victim and criminal. Her sense of self is shattered, and divided between her roles. At times she desires to free her body from the restraints of motherhood:

> Ammu grew tired of their proprietary handling of her. She wanted her body back. It was hers. She shrugged her children off the way a bitch shrugs off her pups when she's had enough of them. She sat up and twisted her hair into a knot at the nape of her neck. Then she swung her legs off the bed, walked to the window and drew back the curtains" (Roy, 1997, p.222).

It is this "Unsafe Edge" that took its course and "eventually led her to love by night the man her children loved by day. To use by night the boat that her children used by day. The boat that Estha sat on, and Rahel found" (Roy, 1997, p.44). Thanks to this "Unsafe Edge", Velutha sees in Ammu:

> things that he hadn't seen before. Things that had been out of bounds so far, obscured by history's blinkers.
>
> Simple things.
>
> For instance, he saw that Rahel's mother was a woman.
>
> […]
>
> He saw too that he was not necessarily the only giver of gifts. That she had gifts to give him, too.
>
> [...]
>
> Ammu saw that he saw. She looked away. He did too. History's fiends returned to claim them. To rewrap them in its old, scarred pelt and drag them back to where they really lived. Where the Love Laws lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much (Roy, 1997, pp.176-7).

Ammu defies the boundaries of caste and gender, and together with Velutha, they manifest their disobedience to the Law mainly through the language of the body. Initially, the hierarchical relation between the colonizer and colonized is replayed in their sexual attraction to each other. Velutha is an object of Ammu's desire. Her gaze is forever on him. Velutha, is very conscious of the gaze, his given identity, but by resisting it, he is able to dislocate the gaze, as can be observed from the following extract:

> Vellya Paapen feared for his younger son. He couldn't say what it was that frightened him. It was nothing that he had said. Or done. It was not *what* he said, but the *way* he said it. Not *what* he did, but the *way* he did it.
>
> Perhaps it was just a lack of hesitation. An unwarranted assurance. In the way he walked. The way he held his head. The quiet way he offered suggestions without being asked. Or the quiet way in which he disregarded suggestions without appearing to rebel.
>
> While these were qualities that were perfectly acceptable, perhaps even desirable, in Touchables, Vellya Paapen thought that in a Paravan they could (and would, and indeed, *should*) be construed as insolence (Roy, 1997, p.76, original emphasis).

What Velutha does by disidentifying with his given identity, without appearing to rebel is in parallel with Homi Bhabha's mimicry. With the *way* Velutha does things, he exists in a space between mimicry and mockery, "where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" (Bhabha, 1994, p.86). Unlike Velutha, his older brother, Kuttaphen was a "good, safe Paravan" as he was not able to read or write (Roy, 1997, p.207). However, the inhabitants of Ayemenem House, workers in Paradise Pickles& Preserve fear the ambivalence in the way Velutha does things. For instance, Comrade Pillai tells Chacko: "That Paravan is going to cause trouble for you," and argues that he shall be sent away (Roy, 1997, p.278). Chacko is puzzled to overhear intriguing schemes, and informs Comrade Pillai that he does not have any intention of doing so, only to receive the following answer: "He may be very well okay as a person. But other workers are not happy with him. Already they are coming to me with complaints. You see, comrade, from local standpoint, these caste issues are very deep-rooted" (Roy, 1997, p.278). Workers are not happy with Velutha because his "appropriation of the Other as [he] visualizes power" is judged to be a menace by the people around him since mimicry being "the sign of the inappropriate", "poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (Bhabha, 1994, p.86). His ambivalence, "almost the same, *but not quite*" (Bhabha,

1994, p.86) position threatens both the members of his own caste and those in positions of assumed superiority as they cannot contain him.

Bhabha (1994) asserts that "[w]hat emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing***,** a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable. Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*" (pp.87-8, original emphasis). In fact, Velutha is not the only one to employ mimicry. Nonconformists, Ammu, the twins, and Roy herself employ mimicry to various extents, as well. Twins deploy mimicry in their use of language, too. Language is a substitute for absence as Lacan states by referring to Freud's *fort-da game*. He articulates that "through the word—which is already a presence made of absence— absence itself comes to be named in an original moment… And from this articulated couple of presence and absence ... a language's *[langue]* world of meaning is born, in which the world of things will situate itself" (Lacan, 1966, p.228). English is alien to the twins, in the absence of proper identification with the written and spoken English, they fulfil the void by rewriting it, by playing with syntax and grammar. When Baby Kochamma executes a fine on them for speaking in Malayalam, she also makes them memorize an English song and warns them to "be particularly careful about their pronunciation. Prer *NUN* sea ayshun" (Roy, 1997, p.36). Twins rewrite, reformulate the words by adopting their sounds and reproducing them in a hybrid language, which is part English, part Indian.

In this new form, where sound replaces the word, perfection of "Prer *NUN* sea ayshun" is crucial to impress the English (Roy, 1997, p.36). Ammu is "Die-vorced" according to Comrade Pillai (Roy, 1997, p.130). No one knows "eggzackly" when Ammu will come back for Estha (Roy, 1997, p. 324). Depicting Baby Kochamma as she fights with a baby bat perching on her sari, the narrator notes that "The singing stopped for a 'Whatsit? Whathappened?' and for a furrywhirring and a sariflapping"(Roy, 1997, p.6). In addition to compounding words, Roy sometimes uses runovers and repetitions to create rhythm in the narrative. As they listen the prayers at Sophie Mol's funeral, the twins murmur *Dus to dus to dus to dus to dus* (Roy, 1997, p.7), a train rumbling choofs in consent, *Yesyesyesyesyes* , until these words lose their meaning and syntax (Roy, 1997, p.86). By imposing Indian rhythm on English language, twins establish a connection with the mother tongue, which provides them with the neonatal unity in the Real. Rhythm soothes and calms them just like a lullaby sung by the m(other).

Imaginative and performative play becomes a tool of resistance through which children can resist being dominated by adults (Hopkins, 2013, p.164), the world outside, the Law as can be seen in the ways the twins play with the language. In the beginning, until they indulge in reading backward repeatedly, they do not have a conscious attempt to subvert it, all they do is to repeat a word until it loses its power to be a model, as the following example demonstrates:

> *Nictitating membrane,* she remembered she and Estha once spent a whole day saying. She and Estha and Sophie Mol.
>
> Nictitating
> ictitating
> ctitating
> itating
> tating
> ating
> ting
> ing.
>
> (Roy, 1997, pp.188-9, original emphasis)

They let the words drip, exchange their safe shells for the freedom from rules. Words in *TGST* are freed from the bondage of syntax and grammar. Roy's language is not subjected to the *grammar laws* that determine which word should be followed by which. Words can be read backwards after all, as they discover with frustration over being forced to read The Adventures of Susie Squirrel. "ehT serutnevdA fo eisuS lerriuqS. enO gnirps gninrom eisuS lerriuqS ekow pu" (Roy, 1997, p.60). By this subversive act of mimicry, twins create a language of their own, and using proper language, but with a difference, they create a space outside the Law. Just like they were united in their mother's wombs, twins are reunited in this linguistic space. They easily spot and reply to backwards readings; whereas adults find them meaningless. Drained of syntax and reversed, the reader is left with free-floating words in a mist of void where the signified and the signifier do not correspond to each other. Like the Untouchables who had to crawl backward with a broom to erase their footprints, Estha and Rahel erase their words either by speaking and writing backwards, or filtrating them, in either case creating a linguistic- at times even extra-linguistic realm to communicate with each other. They create a space where they can stay "curled together like fetuses in a shallow steel womb" (Roy, 1997, p.188), until the illusion of unity is shattered as the twins are separated after Sophie Mol's death.

When they reunite at the end of the novel, it is difficult to delineate what exactly happens, and the narrator puts particular emphasis on this difficulty: "There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi's book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings (Roy, 1997, p.328). The novel ends with two chapters having two parallel plots depicting the transgression of boundaries. In the first one, the sexual relationship between Estha and Rahel is portrayed. The reader encounters the "strangers who had met in a chance encounter, [who] had known each other before Life began" as they are re-united (Roy, 1997, p.327). As the twins join each other not in "happiness, but hideous grief," the narrative completes its circular plot with transgression of Love Laws, with which it had started, once again (Roy, 1997, p.328).

> TWENTY –THREE YEARS LATER, Rahel, dark woman in a yellow T-shirt, turns to Estha in the dark. 'Esthapappychachen Kuttappen Peter Mon,' she says. She whispers. She moves her mouth. Their beautiful mother's mouth. Estha, sitting very straight, waiting to be arrested, takes his fingers to it. To touch the words it makes. To keep the whisper. His fingers follow the shape of it. The touch of teeth. His hand is held and kissed. (Roy, 1997, p.327)

Estha sees the (m)other in his twin Rahel. In order to enter to the Symbolic register of the social sphere the child must be castrated, and Rahel with her alikeness to Ammu, but with a difference of course, assumes a role oscillating between the phallic mother and a hybrid substitute m(other), who will nurture the child and fill the lack while at the same time introduce him to the Symbolic.

The closing chapter returns to the past, where the reader witnesses the depiction of the sexual relationship between Ammu and Velutha which was only referred to in previous parts. This lengthy portrayal joins love and loss, pleasure and pain, transgression and redemption, with "a Small Price to Pay" (Roy, 1997, p.336). This small price is "Two lives. Two children's childhoods. And a history lesson for future offenders" (Roy, 1997, p.336). As she leaves her lover, Ammu wishes good night to him and promises to return tomorrow, which never happens, as soon after, Velutha, charged with the murder of Sophie Mol dies at the police station. In many ways, the choice of "tomorrow" to be the word that ends the novel, wraps up the discussion of subalternity carried out in the novel. The subaltern still exists at the margins of the history, and the day heralding emancipation has not arrived yet. *Tomorrow* hence contains and embodies gloom and hope which exist side by side in *The God of Small Things*.

Discussion and Results

Twenty-five years after its publication, *The God of Small Things* retains its importance as its voicing of oppression still resonates strongly with many of us. Accordingly, the novel has received great interest and substantial critical acclaim as proven by the great number of studies focusing on various aspects of the novel. The novel's panoramic representation of oppression as resting at the intersections of gender, race, caste and religion enabled the critics across the world to approach the novel from various perspectives and conduct postcolonial, feminist, Marxist, psychoanalytic and structural readings , some of which were referred to in literature review section of this study, such as Tickell, 2003; Needham, 2005; Nandi, 2010; Okuroğlu- Özün & İren, 2020; Driesen, 1999; Vogt-William, 2003; Torres, 2017; Çelikel, 2018. While the issues of subalternity, postcolonialism, use of language have all been addressed before in above mentioned studies, the present study can be discerned by its attempt at a more comprehensive analysis. Adopting a Lacanian perspective, this study has set off from the premise that the subject is formed in the language. Accordingly, it began by referring to Lacan to discuss how subject is constructed in and through the language. By bringing the primordial Law forward, and portraying Roy's use of it as a motif of transgression, this study pointed to how Roy highlights the power dynamics embedded in all sorts of hierarchies, including caste, gender, kinship and the language. Following this, Roy's own position as a female postcolonial writer was juxtaposed with that of Ngũgĩ, a male writer, who believed in the necessity of writing in one's mother tongue to fight colonial oppression. This juxtaposition proved Spivak's claim that while the subaltern cannot speak, the female subaltern is doubly marginalized as her 'mother tongue' also is a construct of patriarchy.

Alienated subjects may employ different mechanisms to cope with the traumatic experience of oppression. This study explored, how subversive acts of mimicry and transgression are represented in language that is imbued with the task of bearing such traumas. Lacan argued that complete expression is only possible through extra-linguistic means. Therefore, listening to the subaltern requires the practice of "measuring silences" (Spivak, 2005, p. 256). As the exploration of such instances of silences revealed, *TGST* has many diverse forms of silence, which wait to be heard. However, attending to such silences necessitates utilization of different tools, which Spivak refers to as unlearning.

By portraying characters who resist and challenge the norms, Roy invites the reader to participate in unlearning traditional forms of being and becoming. Estha, Ammu, Velutha, and Rahel employ the language of the body as a tool of resistance, and participate in the social sphere only partially, they are not at home with the patriarchal metaphor. With their *almost the same, but not quite* status they exist on the margins of the discourse. Their participation in it is in the form of the mimic man, who through his ambivalence "does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire", but also "raises the question of the authorization of colonial representation" (Bhabha, 1994, p.90, original emphasis). Just as Velutha defies the gaze that confines him as a member of a lower caste, Roy challenges the colonial language by negating its authority. As she reverses the words, capitalizes and/or breaks or joins, she constructs narratives made up of unmixable mixtures.

To conclude, this study explored the profound role of language as a potent means of resisting oppression and marginalization, with the ubiquitous question Spivak asked "Can the Subaltern Speak?" resonating at the back of our minds. Roy's deconstruction of language lays bare the failure and inadequacy of standard language in conveying the lived experience of the subaltern. Speaking with the subaltern requires a private language that can convey the fragmented narratives that are imbued with loss and alienation. Hence, she invites the reader to unlearn the rules of grammar, the laws of love, the rules that constitute us as subject. The

subaltern exists on the margins of history, consequently his/her voice is suppressed by the dominant discourses. The small voice with which the subaltern speaks can only be heard through stories such as Roy's, unfolding in non-linear plots, written in fragments, and read backwards.

Recommendations

This study provided an analysis of the linguistic strategies employed by Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* to deconstruct the language and reformulate it in ways that allow Roy and the reader to speak *with* the subaltern rather than to speak *for* them, the significance of which was underlined by Spivak. The study contributes to developing an understanding of how language is used to subvert power relations and create alternative discourses in a postcolonial setting. The adoption of a Lacanian theoretical framework broadens our comprehension of this alternative domain from a psychoanalytic perspective. Further research can expand on the theoretical framework provided by this study, explore the use of these strategies in other contexts and conduct comparative analysis of different literary works. Roy's later works, including her political essays, which were left out due to space limitations here, could also prove fruitful for further research.

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