



## The intersection of Existentialism and Post-Colonialism: Traces of Identity Crisis in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy

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<b>Article Information</b> Received: March 22, 2022 Revised: June 24, 2022 Accepted: June 24, 2022 Available Online: July 30, 2022	<b>Abstract</b> <i>The present study is based on an exploratory analysis of <i>The God of Small Things</i> (1997). The novel exposes 1960s Indian politics and social life. Roy has presented strong images. It urges readers to distillate into the standards and mythologies of Indian contemporary emerging racial discrimination and struggles for class, enclosed in the direction of the time in Ayemenem. The story revolves around families which are still under the influence of colonization. The text of the novel has been interpreted under the lens of post-colonialism from the perspective of existentialism and colonialism to explore the identity crisis in post-colonial literature. The present research depicts that after the period of colonization, existentialism' has been intersected with post-colonial philosophy due to the emergence of identity crisis in the masses. People of the post-colonial era have badly suffered from the self-adjusting process due to their hybrid identity and chaos. They have been in a continuous struggle to adapt to the colonizer's identity and to maintain it as well. They are made to feel that their language, culture, and way of living do not befit the standards. This is why the decolonized nations are still struggling to maintain their own native identity and to get modernized as per western standards.</i>
<b>Keywords</b> Colonization Post-colonialism Existentialism Identity crisis	
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## 1.1 Introduction

*The God of Small Things* exposes 1960s India. It enforces the reader to tincture into the standard and legends of Indian existing politics and societal existence. Being an Indian fictionist writer, social activist, and campaigner for human rights, Arundhati Roy offers sturdy descriptions of racial discrimination and struggle for class, enclosed in the direction of the time in Ayemenem. She got the book prize for her well-known fiction work and top-vending novel by a non-colonial Indian author (Abraham, 1998). Arundhati Roy has taken the position of a demonstrative author for the violated, oppressed isolated and relegated people, and has provided sustenance due to her literary writings. She portrays Indian political, economic and social life in such a way that her writing can never be drastic rather it makes the reader distressed and motivated.

*The God of Small Things* is a debut novel. It is a story about the experience of the childhood of fraternal twins whose lives are destroyed by the 'Love Laws'; the central concern of the novel lay down gender discrimination, and the struggle for class and race. Tickell, (2003) states that Roy has started the story with a single image in her mind: the sky blue Plymouth (car) with two fraternal twins inside it, surrounding a Marxist demonstration. The novel reveals a domestic crisis in which they all break the rules. All the characters correspond to a prohibited territory. They all are in a chaotic state of mind regarding the laws of love. The present political and historical union that uncovers the motors of disciplinary and epistemological revolution is innately impervious characteristics of violated marginalized subjects of India (Dingwaney, 2005)

According to Young (2020), post-colonialism is a historical time that represents the consequences of colonization. This can also be defined in the terms of rethinking the past and the subordination of the people under various forms of power. Post-colonialism is a philosophical study that investigates the influence of colonization on victimized societies and cultures. It reflects the power of European nations, their control of 'third world' societies, and the response of the colonized nations (Mishra, 1991).

Existentialism and post-colonialism are two different terminologies but both share the same dogma which is an identity crisis. These post-colonial terms identify the chaotic state of mind of the colonized nation (Bailey & Leonard, 2015). In the present study, the researcher aims to investigate the traces of Existentialism and post-colonialism in *The God of Small Things*.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

1. To explore the consequences of post-colonialism caused by the hybrid native identity.
2. To examine the intersection of Existentialism and post-colonialism sharing the dogma of identity crisis.

## 1.3 Statement of Problem

It is asserted that after a long process of colonization, people are still under the influence of British power. The colonized nations were in a state of chaos due to crisis of their identity and existence as colonizers attacked their native socio-cultural values. The post-colonial literature

depicts an intersection of Existentialism and post-colonialism by portraying identity crisis in various literary discourses.

### 1.4 Delimitation of Study

The present research is delimited to a post-colonial novel, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy and the perspective of post-colonialism is selected for exploring identity crisis in the novel.

### 1.5 Literature Review

Bose (1998) claims that *The God of Small Things* presents a protagonist who is in the struggle to break communal laws and die for the sake of love. In such a circumstance, the novel gives a chance of raising the question of whether there is sustainable politics in her literary work. The protagonists of the novel violate the vital 'Love Laws'. This novel can be defined as a link between political and historical situations. It reflects the motors of disciplinary, communal, and epistemological revolution in the inherently existing resistant features of the subaltern and overloaded masses in the Indian Subcontinent. The story provides strong images which reflect anglophile, and racial and gender discrimination. These subjects can be easily compared with reality to expose Indian society's fragility in colonial dominancy (Dingwaney, 2005).

Existentialism and post-colonialism are post-colonial terminologies through which critiques affirm the empowerment of black people and the creation of counter-courses concerned with the existential crisis. (Vereen, 2017). In Sothole's (2015) point of view, Existentialism and Post-colonialism come under the umbrella of Black existentialism. Black existentialism is used by Frantz Fanon in 1967 in his book 'Black Skin, White Masks'. He has argued that the present world bears no model of a black adult as a normal being. Black souls are white constructions. And this problem put the black masses in a state of identity crisis, alienation, a crisis with language, and even their existence. Eegunlusi (2017) argues that the colonized nations suffer an identity crisis and consider themselves looking for white recognition that permits the white's role as the standard through which they are judged.

### 1.6 Theoretical Framework

Oxford Dictionary defines 'post colonialism' as a period or approach related to the era after the subordination of one country by the other. It is an academic discipline that focuses to explain, analyze and give response to the cultural inheritances of colonialism and domination.

Postcolonialism as a philosophical and historical thought is concerned to explain the political, social and economic impact of European rule throughout the world from 18<sup>th</sup> till 20<sup>th</sup> century. This theory has many objectives and shapes but all share a common claim that the world which is inhabited by the colonized is impossible to understand except in relationship to colonial rule and imperial history (Young, 2020).

McLeod(2020) claims that Post-colonialism started to emerge in the 1980s in UK and US as a part of the humanistic inquiry and it emerged in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in south

Asia as an anti-colonial thought. It aimed at the difficulty in understanding European literature, philosophy and history existing in the absence of European domination and their colonial encounters in the world.

Post-colonialism is a critical theory that explains the history, culture, literature and discourses of European imperial power. Epistemologically Post-colonialism explores the problems that built the post-colonial identity of decolonized nations. The matters which are addressed by post-colonialism are;

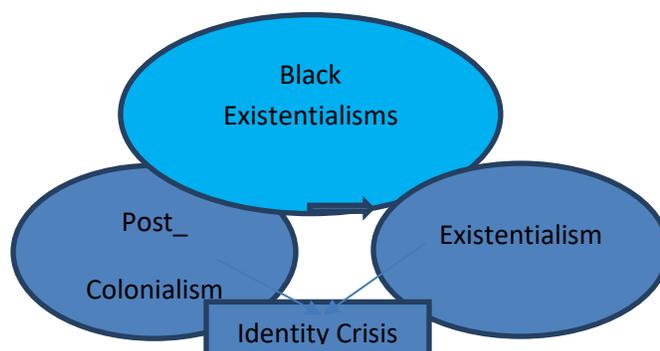
1. The cultural knowledge of the colonized people was generated by colonizers.
2. How the European knowledge of culture was smeared to suppress a non-European country into a colony of the Western mother country, which was affected by the cultural identities of colonized nations and colonizers.

Post-colonialism aims at disempowering such philosophies, through which colonialists know, perceive, and understand the world and thus it gives a chance to subalterns to speak for themselves.

## 1.7 Analytical Framework

Post-colonialism is a broad term and it undergoes several perspectives. The analytical framework is based on the terms of post-colonialism, which are used to analyze the identity crisis in the novel. Ingram (2014) claims that colonizers have put the colonized world in a state of chaos. Black people have no reason to think of themselves as black. The black existential crisis brings three problematic thoughts to the colonizer's mind; what does it mean to be a human, what is the meaning of freedom and what are the reasons for the marginalization of the natives. Gordon (2020) states about existentialism and post-colonialism that the African perspective is treated as the derivative of whites, the original, normative, and the real are securely inhabited in white faces of which all have no substitution but their imitations.

The data has been analyzed under the framework of "Black Existentialism" which is followed by;



## 1.8 Research Methodology

In the present study, the researcher has used a qualitative mode of inquiry based on the textual analysis of identity crisis in the selected text. The tools of analysis are characters, lines, and different situations presented in the novel.

### 1.8.1 Research Design

In qualitative research design, the researcher has conducted an analytical study that involves the textual analysis of 'Existentialism and post-colonialism in Roy's *The God of Small Things*. As Vanderstoep and Johnston(2009) state that the qualitative mode of an inquiry describes the text, facts and events under study.

### 1.9. Critical Analysis

*The God of Small Things* is a debut novel written by Indian social activist and writer Arundhati Roy in 1997. The novel depicts narrative of childhood practice of genealogical twins who are devastated by the love laws which are laid down by confusion that who should be loved, how and how much. This novel exposes that how small things are responsible for influencing the lives of people, morally and mentally.

The identity of any nation and society is a social construct and it is determined by the interaction between self and others in a social framework. In terms of identity, an individual identifies himself in a community and it gives him a sense of belongingness. In the thematic framework of the post-colonial world, identity crisis always has a crucial role. In this decolonized era, identity crisis has become a disruption in a common man's life because of the cultural diversities and hybrid culture of colonizers and colonized. English has received a very superior attitude in the post-colonized world which is one of the main causes of identity crisis in the whole area specifically in the field of literature. Identity crisis arose due to the impact of colonization. After the period of colonization, in contemporary society, the national and international identity lost its importance due to the spread of English as a language of the high and civilized class.

In *The God of Small Things*, the intersection of Existentialism and post-colonialism can be observed due to the identity crisis in the characters of Estha, Rahel and Baby Kochamma caused by the admiring attitudes toward English. As baby Kochamma, the grand-aunt of Estha and Rahel is always in struggle to learn and speak English as well as behave as English people do, "she felt she spoke much better English than everybody else. This made her lonelier than ever" (p. 13). Baby Kochamma joins Catholic Convent and lives there. She wanted to read Bible there just to have knowledge about English people and to learn English. Baby Kochamma's stirring attitude towards English is interpreted. She forgets her own identity and yearns for the identity of English. She leaves reading her holy book and rather wishes to read Bible for which she admits to Catholic Convent. In Madras, she struggles to speak English, but she still speaks it just to feel superior among the others and this complex made her lonesome. Soon after some time she gets fed up there due to her lonely state and returns home in a very disturbed condition. "My dearest Papa, your Koh-I-Noor is upset because her family seems to neither understand nor care about her wellbeing" (p.13). Baby Kochamma suffers from an identity crisis due to her submissive attitude towards English. She wants to adopt the identity of English. Owing to the prestigious value of English, she imposes herself to leave her own identity and learn English instead of Hindi. She senses having a high class in the convent which made her lonely, but she is

not rational in English identity and soon she decides to go back home. Baby Kochamma is in an irrational condition due to the shift of identities. At home, she does not resist her attraction to English. She starts to watch English movies, games, and news. She is not interested in English movies and games for entertainment rather she watches them just because of the language. “Baby Kochamma followed American NBA league games. On the weekend, she watched *The Bold and Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara*” (p.14). Baby Kochamma is so impressed with English that she watches English programs and shows all the time, just to adopt their way of communication, behavior and action. She wishes to present herself as English, not Hindu. Her attitude towards English caused her to forget her own cultural and national identity.

On an occasion, Margret Kochamma (Rahel and Estha’s aunt) and their cousin, Sophie Mol, arrived from London to spend Christmas at Ayemenem. Baby Kochamma started to speak English in front of them. “Whenever she caught them speaking in Malayalam, she levied a small fine which was deducted as a source. She made them write line impositions’ she called them\_ I will speak English; I will always speak English’sh” (p. 18). In these lines the aspect of Identity crisis is interpreted that Baby Kochamma is not only suffering from identity crisis herself, but she also made children disregard their own language and identity. She strictly forces children to speak English to be represented as modern in front of the guests coming from London. Baby Kochamma further forces children to sing an English song to welcome the guests. “She made them practice an English car song for the way back. They have to make the words properly, Rejoice in the Lo-Ord-Orhvays. And again I say rejoice; rejoice, rejoice, and again I say rejoice” (p. 18). In the above lines, the issue of identity crisis due to the dominant attitude toward English in the Indian subcontinent is noticeable. Baby Kochamma forces little children to sing a song in English with proper pronunciation to make the superior image in front of guests. Since guests are coming to Ayemenem, she should present her own cultural and national identity but she tries to forget and hide it in front of them. They are reproducing English as their native identity and struggling to forget their own cultural identity just to present themselves as modernized and superior. Due to an extremely dominant attitude towards English in Subcontinent (India), people are stuck between two identities which is the cause of identity crisis among them in post-colonial time period.

The afore mentioned textual analysis presents the intersection of Existentialism and post-colonialism which has a common objective ‘identity crisis’, noticeable in *The God of Small Things*. Identity crisis has emerged in post-colonial times due to the amalgamation of two different identities in colonized nations. The subordinated are in continuous struggle to justify their culture and positioned in order to be recognized as English people but in this race they have forgotten their own culture and language.

## 1.10. Conclusion

In this selected novel, the intersection of Existentialism and post-colonialism has been analyzed. Estha, Rahel, and Baby Kochamma are the characters who are the real portrayal of post-colonial period because they are stuck between two identities owing to hybridization which caused disorder and irrationality in their life. They try to forget their own cultural identity and adapt the colonizer’s identity so as to be in spotlight.

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