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Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri as the Interpreters of ‘The Small Things’**P. Bindhu**Assistant Professor of English
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Bharathidasan Govt College for Women, Pondicherry.**Abstract:**

Postcolonial writers through their riveting work explore the society they belong, their experience, hybridity and role of language. This article focuses on the disparities and analogies of identity issues encountered by the children’s in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*. Their theme and settings evinces repercussion of post colonialism, suffering of it, cultural shift, suppression, migration and fragmentation. Being an Indian writer and Diasporic Indian writer, Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri incandescently registered the role of children in a post colonial facet. The writers have bestowed their voice to these *small things* who have been caught in the vortex of identity crisis.

Keywords: Hybridity, Small Things, repercussion, fragmentation, Postcolonial and identity crisis

The problematic tangled in the formation of one’s identity is one of the most disputed issue in post colonial writing in English. The Post colonial writing deals with the problem of colonized people’s identity, nationality and ethnicity. Sleman enunciates post colonialism as, “A cultural marker of non-residency of a third world intellectual cadre, as the inevitable wider side of a fractured ambivalent discourse of colonist power” (45). One of the main characteristics of post colonial writing is emphasis on issue of identity or hybrid or uncertain or dichotomy. Post colonial writers through their riveting work explore the society they belong, their experience, hybridity and role of language. ‘The nomenclature of post colonialism is used to refer ‘to all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day’ (qtd in Nagarajan 185).

This article focuses on the disparities and analogies of identity issues encountered by the children’s in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*. Both Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri’s writing stands in the post colonial arena. Their theme and settings evinces repercussion of post colonialism, suffering of it, cultural shift, suppression, migration and fragmentation. Arundhati Roy writes from within her homeland and Lahiri writes with multiple identities. Both these women writers capture the tribulation of indigenous and non-indigenous children and how these children after grown up with fragmented identity willingly or reluctantly set themselves to accept their Kismet. Mc Gills states that “Children remain the most colonized persons on the globe” (7).

The question of identity is indispensable to the children’s in both the novels, especially to Rahel and Estha in *The God of Small Things* and to Gogol in ‘*The Namesake*’. The children in both the novels diverge in multitudinous ways, like from their brought up, education, family structure, culture, society and language. With all these disparities they join at one particular point

which is the Question of identity 'who am I'. In *The God of Small things* Rahel and Estha labeled as 'Half-Hindu and half Christian' without their surname. In 'The Namesake' Gogol dissonant with his name, because it is neither Indian nor American but Russian.

The paradigms adopted in this article are studies on children and repercussion of post colonialism on child. Being an Indian writer and Diasporic Indian writer, Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri incandescently registered the role of children in a post colonial facet. Both Roy and Lahiri unfold the complexity faced by children with fragmented identity. Mc Gills and Khorana states that 'the post colonial voice is a voice speaking its own authority and identity in confidence of that authority and identity, then children only expresses post colonial voice after they have ceased to be children'(8). In both the novels the children encounter the identity crisis and alienation where they belong. In *The God of Small things* Rahel and Estha are not much aware about their importance of name but in the novel *The Namesake* Gogol fights with his name which alienates him from his imaginary homeland.

.Expounders of small things

Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri through their enthralling works, the writers elucidate the suffering and problem of children those who encounter in their homeland and host land. Here the 'small things' refers to children in 'The God of Small things' and 'The Namesake'. The writers have bestowed their voice to these small things who have been caught in the vortex of identity crisis. The traits of autobiographical elements are present in both the novels. In an Interview Roy has states "... a lot of atmosphere of *The God of Small things* is based on my experiences of what it was like there" (HarperCollins). Roy was born in Shilong, to a keralite Syrian Christian mother and a Bengali Hindu Father, a tea planter by Profession. She has imbibed this into her characters Rahel and Estha .

Gogol in *The Namesake* hates his name because; it is "both absurd and obscure, that it has nothing to do with who he is, that it is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian. He hates having to live with it, with a pet name turned good name, day after day, second after second" (76) this is actually, Lahiri's own experience, her good name is Nilanjana Sudeshna but her pet name turned to be her good name. Lahiri recalled in an interview about her name, "I always felt so embarrassed by my name.. You feel like you're carrying someone pain just by being who you are."(Wikipedia). Lahiri's own experience over dichotomy of her identities was the brainwave for the creation of Gogol the protagonist of her first novel.

Irksome world of Estha and Rahel

Arundhati Roy's cogent juncture lies in the depiction of fraternal twin children's life and their view of world. They were two egg twins. 'Dizygotic' doctors called them. Born from separate but simultaneously fertilized eggs, (Roy 2). The story is told from Rahel's point of view. There are some similitudes between Rahel and Roy in this novel. They born in the same year, studied architecture, but both of them not practiced, setting of story is also Roy's childhood place. It is also reviewed as semi auto-biographical novel.

Rahel and Estha throughout the novel starved for affection and care from their maternal relatives and even envious their cousin Sophie Mol, because she is celebrated by Rahel and Estha's grandma, Baby Kochamma and their maternal uncle Chacko. Sophie Mol is secured in all facets. The elders in the house maintain double standard in showing their love towards Rahel, Estha and Sophie Mol. Even the presence of Sophie Mol at Ayemmen makes Rahel to feel inferior. The young twins starved for unconditional love and security.

Rahel and Estha are neglected by their relatives because of Ammu's shattered marriage with Bengali Hindu. Baby Kochamma always stress that Rahel and Estha "really have no right to be (there)" (44). Their real identity is always questionable. Baby Kochamma plays sturdy role in scourging and separating the fraternal twins from each other. Rahel and Estha's relationship is so brawny and they even thought themselves as 'Me' and individually as 'We' or 'Us'. They never mentioned them as 'I'. They loved each other selflessly. (Quotation) 1.9

After separation from his fraternal twin Estha's world has been crammed with silence. He stops verbal communication, no one aware of when, how and why the silence surrounds him. 'Silence hung in the air of like secret loss' (91).

Indigenous and non indigenous children

The second generation immigrants' life ambient with dichotomy and bifurcation of different culture, language and identity. After matriculated the children in the west feel independent and they are not compelled by their parents either to abide by them or lead their life as their parents wish. But in India, it's quite contrary. By willingly or coerced parents interfere in every circumstances of their children's life, it starts from their primary education and sometimes it extends to their grandchildren.

Gogol in 'The Namesake has caught between East and West. His parents always in some way or other insist him to retain his Indian culture. In India parents decides their children's higher education. In this novel, Gogol's parents also anticipate that he will select MIT, but he decides to chose Columbia University to do Architectural programme, he even avoids going home on weekends " He didn't want to go home on the weekends, to go with them to pujos and Bengali parties, to remain unquestionably in their world"(126). Just like western child he too wants to be independent and lead a westernized life. His parents perturb about Gogol's relationship with American girls. He too to some extent hides his relationship with American girls from his parents. The children characters like Gogol and Sonia, though they adopt westernized lifestyle, their identity remains arguable especially in the case of Gogol of, everything is disputable. Gogol tries to establish his identity as an American, but he fails to a greater extent. His 'ABCD' identity excruciates him. His double identity made him to feel estranged and isolated from where he belongs.

Rahel and Estha in 'The God of Small things' also stumble upon the same issues like isolation and disaffection unlike Gogol, they encounter these issues in their homeland by their maternal relatives. Because of this, they never want to mislay Ammu and Velutha's affection towards them. The children cling to it. They received fatherly affection and felt safe and sound when they are with Velutha. They do not have slightest idea about Ammu and Velutha's relationship. Baby Kochamma's verdict to send Estha to his father brings despondency in the life of fraternal twins to a larger extent. Here I quote the words of Brain, 'they were abruptly ripped apart and live in painful isolation from each other ever since' (175). There is no one for Rahel and Estha in the world to guide and protect them throughout their life. They themselves wrought their world. This long separation and love for each other made Rahel to transgress the edict.

The children in the novels 'The God of Small things' and 'The Namesake' encounter seclusion and identity crisis in the land where they belong. It does not matter whether they are indigenous or non-indigenous. The quandary like identity crisis, cultural conflict and hybridity are main characteristics of post colonial writings.

Repercussion of Name

In both the novels the Name plays an imperative role in defining a person's identity. A person's name tells his/her identity where and who they belong to. Jonathan Culler states on, "The self is constituted by the mother and by others in social relations generally. Identity is the product of a series of partial identification, never completed". (116)

Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri registered the importance of Name through their enduring characters. In 'The God of Small things' Roy hinges the significance of name through Estha. In Baby Kochamma's view, they are 'Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would even marry' (45). Even Ammu never decides her children's Surname. She is confused either to choose her Syrian Christian name or her husband's religion. So she just left Rahel and Estha's name without surname, "For the Time Being they had no surname because Ammu was considering reverting to her maiden name, though she said that choosing between her husband's name and her father's name didn't give a woman much of a choice"(37). Estha in his front of the book has written his name as 'Esthappen Unknown' his surname has been deferred for time being by his mother Ammu.

In 'The Namesake' Lahiri roots it through 'Gogol' the protagonist of the novel. Gogol's foremost issue is his name because his name is neither Indian nor American but Russian. Gogol's pet name turns to be his good name, this is because when his parents decided to give him a new name as a child he never wants a new name. "He is afraid to be Nikhil, some he doesn't know. Who doesn't know him (57) because till that time he was called as 'Gogol'. The issue of name always haunts him and he says that there is no such perfect name and even he has a notion that human beings should be allowed to change their name as their wish when they turn eighteen. Even after changing his name as Nikhil he never feels content. He feels like 'he's cast himself in a play, acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different. At times he still feels his old name painfully and without warning, the way his front tooth had unbearably throbbed in recent weeks after a filling, threatening for an instant to sever from his gums when he drank coffee or ice water....(105). At the end of the novel Gogol accepts his unique name with the sense of realization towards the certainty that surrounds the life of immigrants. Acceptance is the only solution to survive in an imaginary homeland.

Conclusion

The tribulation of estrangement, yearning for affection and identity crisis all these issues are encountered by both indigenous and non indigenous children where they belong. Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri throughout their novel brought out the conflict of children out and in: India. Indians at some stage feel inferior in their land as well as in their host land. This is because on one level they are treated badly by the colour of their skin and caste system that prevails in India. On the other level Indians as an immigrant treated as 'other' both in their alien land and home land. All these issues at great level affect them psychologically, this also sometimes made them to transgress the existing law which has been formulated by human. Roy and Lahiri depicted the idiosyncrasies and struggles of the small thing – children where they belong and yearning for their individual identity in their own land.

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